



# **WOMEN IN BLACK**

## **For Justice. Against War.**



### **XVII INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF**

### **WOMEN IN BLACK (WIB)**

***“Displaced Lives”***

**6-8 MARCH 2018**

**The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, South Africa**

## **Acknowledgements**

**We feel grateful and thankful that Women In Black South Africa (WIB-SA) was given the opportunity to host the Women in Black seventeenth annual international gathering. It was indeed a rich experience for the women to be able to network and build sustainable relationships. The gathering provided enriching conversations and support to local and international networks. The feedback that we received from students, activists, women in leadership, and various other organisations was very positive and empowering.**

### **Special thanks to:**

- **WIB Members**
- **Gei Heis Collective**
- **Basque Agency for Development Cooperation**
- **Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape**
- **Women and Gender Studies, University of the Western Cape**
- **Gender Equity Unit, University of the Western Cape**
- **District Six Community: Gairo Issacs, Annie Bam, Fairuz Basardien and Susan Lewis**
- **Community House, Salt River**
- **Iziko Museums**
- **Castle of Good Hope: Faith Mtambati**
- **Tshisimani Centre for Activists Education**
- **About thyme Caterers**
- **Heinrich Boll Foundation**
- **Human Rights Media Centre**
- **University of Cape Town**
- **University of Stellenbosch**
- **BDS Movement**
- **Cosatu: Lumka Tamboer**
- **Glenise Levendal**
- **Session rapporteurs: Emma Minkley, Medina Moosa, Sibongile Khumalo, Shanel Johannes and Saba Williams**

## About the XVII International Women in Black Gathering

More than a hundred women from all across the globe – India, Zimbabwe, Belgium, Spain, Uruguay, Britain, Switzerland, United States of America, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Israel, Western Sahara, Austria, Armenia and South Africa - participated in the 17<sup>th</sup> Women In Black (WIB) International Gathering at the Castle of Good Hope, in Cape Town from 6-8 March 2018, to have deep discussions and sharing around the event theme: **“Displaced Lives”**. Women In Black South Africa hosted the 17<sup>th</sup> WIB international annual gathering.

Gathering and the objectives were:

- To break the isolation between activists imposed by state borders, through the exchange of strategies, tactics, concepts, methodologies and practices, and with the aim of tackling the multiple challenges of forced displacement, as well as maintaining the network by means of supporting women activists of different generations; and
- To promote dialogue between feminist activists, both local and the International Network of Women in Black, to reflect on the multiple forms of displacement between women belonging to diverse social classes, ethnicities, religious beliefs and ideological positions, with the aim of confronting the inheritance of racism, hatred and class/power interests which are at the base of current forms of systematic violence in South Africa and at global level

The gathering was preceded by a day-trip on 5 March for WIB members coming from outside of South Africa; to uncover and reveal the layers of displacement and resistance, which have shaped and are still shaping Cape Town as a global city. The daylong excursion took members across historical times from the spaces of the earliest colonial displacements through to engagements with current struggles and modes of collective resistance.

It started with an immersion into histories of displacement, slavery and resistance that provided insight into the significance of the Castle of Good Hope as the site of the first colonial/military/settlement/prison in the 17th century. Members continued to nearby District 6 – the site of forced removals at the beginning of the 20th century and again in the 1960s. There they met with a group of women returnees to District 6 following a very limited and gruelling land restitution process begun after

1994. The returnees who spoke with us were Gairo Issacs, Annie Bam, Fairuz Basardien and Susan Lewis. The women moved through the expanding peripheral spaces of the city visiting more recent sites of resistance and displacement in Athlone and Gugulethu, visiting public memorial sites that provide a glimpse into the civic activism, political mobilisations and state response of repression and extra-judicial assassinations which culminated in the early 1990s in the defeat of legal apartheid.

Finally, they returned to the city, to Community House in Salt River, an area that survived the displacements of colonial and apartheid's racialised spatial planning laws, but that faces current displacements of working classes, the poor and Black residents in the face of rapid gentrification. Members could meet local activists who aim to undo and reshape contemporary, neoliberal post-apartheid urban space through legal and civic activism, popular educational and direct-action tactics. Shirley Gunn and Cindy Scwenghisa (Human Rights Media centre) and Lumka Tamboer (COSATU). We then gathered to share a meal and continue conversations informally.

The difference sites and engagements were facilitated by Yvette Abrahams and Heidi Grunebaum with translation by Ana Valdes.



**Declaration** – some impressions that participants got from the 3 days of gathering: we are talking about displaced lives, but we are being displaced as a consequence of what we do to Mother Earth; no human refugee charter

- Right of all human (women, men and children) to have space to live and call home
- Mother Earth has rights and we must protect her
- Support BDS
- Oppose militarism and patriarchy and support peace and justice
- The importance of lesbian and queer women's activism and safe
- Lesbian activism and visibility
- For refugee lesbians to have more right and protection
- Return of refugees, but no forced repatriation
- Oppose occupations – Palestine & West-Sahara, etc.)
- Opposing Violence against women and Girls (gender-based violence)
- Right to self-determination in the context of occupation
- Oppose Nationalism and Facism
- Imagining new concepts of justice and human dignity and equality for the future
- Occupation of Sub-Saharan by Morocco
- Everyone has the right to self-determination
- Look at new concept of justice, equality... is there something else like dignity to start to re-imagine
- Pull down the borders/No borders
- Freedom of movement
- Support for children with disabilities/impairment and as they grow up to be adults, with equal resources
- Education for peace
- Peace and also education for peace are Rights
- No one is illegal... no one should be put in camps
- Recognising our own mental slavery
- Oppose and prevent weapons production use and arms trade
- Support 2017 Nuclear Prohibition Treaty
- Right to practice civil disobedience against unjust laws
- Support all migrants
- Support and enable migrants caused by climate change
- Recognising your own privileges and mental enslavement, oppressive behaviour – past and present.
- Space to develop all our diversities and creativities
- Rights and responsibility to resist unjust laws and oppressive politics
- Solidarity and connectedness
- Support women's Courts
- How does the feminist alternative look? Feminist, active, revolutionary, non-violence... personal is political,
- The importance to share our stories in our own way
- What are rights for people who do not have rights? To acknowledge that many people in the world do not have rights



## DAY ONE: 6 March 2018

### Opening and welcome



Lameez Lalkhen (coordinator of Women In Black South Africa) welcomed everyone to the country and the gathering by giving an outline of the history of the Women in Black South Africa and its role in supporting and normalising relationships of the catastrophe of apartheid. This made clear why “displaced lives” was the focus of our enquiry.

Nadia Khan Kimmie and Lindiwe Dlamini guided us to remember that the venue holds bitter and sad history but that we are here to reclaim this space as a place of remembrance and honouring of the ancestors, the indigenous people of the land, who were slaves here, and call on them to connect. They opened the gathering with a ritual with the burning of imphepho and allowed the four elements to be present: earth to ground us, air to teach us, fire to empower us, and the water to uplift and cleanse us.



Liz Khan (Women in Black - London) shared the background of the WIB Gathering and stated that this gathering is indeed a special time as it is exactly 30 years ago that the first protest against occupation took place. Three decades later and the Women in Black is now a global network in over 20 countries, and at its 17<sup>th</sup> International Gathering.

These gatherings remain important spaces for *connecting and sharing* – about the struggles, specifically face by women, in places of conflict and war, violence against women, injustices and struggles - and reimagining a world that is free of violence, exploitation and degradation.



Messages from WIB members who could not be at the gathering was read.

Leigh Ann Naidoo (University of Cape Town) reflected on partaking in the Women's Boat to Gaza in 2016, together with women from 30 other countries, which aim is to highlight the undeniable contributions and indomitable spirit of Palestinian women who have been central within the Palestinian struggle in Gaza, the West Bank, inside the Green Line and in the diaspora. She shared two points from her reflection that she thought were important to remember and be mindful of during the 2 ½ days of the WIB Gathering. These were: (1) solidarity is not about having one hegemonic position that all follow, but recognising that difference exist and that we have to take this into consideration and align strategies to be in line with the multiple voices and diverse experiences and realities of those who are part of the movement. "The privilege women in the room need to stop and listen"... this is what solidarity is about; and (2) Not to save people, but to say "put me there too, because I am in solidarity". It is imperative that internal to our movement space that we are here to do good, we have to explicitly think about how power and violence are operating now and then and if we have a conversation with each other we can forge solidarity.







This was followed by a touching reading of two poems<sup>1</sup> bringing us back to the theme of the Gathering – *Displacement* - by Diana Ferrus, a South African writer, poet and storyteller of mixed Khoisan and slave ancestry.

### **“A Poem For Sarah Baartman”**

*“I’ve come to take you home –home, remember the veld?  
the lush green grass beneath the big oak trees*

*the air is cool there and the sun does not burn.*

*I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,  
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,  
the proteas stand in yellow and white  
and the water in the stream chuckle sing-songs  
as it hobbles along over little stones.  
I have come to wretch you away –  
away from the poking eyes  
of the man-made monster  
who lives in the dark*

*with his clutches of imperialism  
who dissects your body bit by bit  
who likens your soul to that of Satan  
and declares himself the ultimate god!  
I have come to soothe your heavy heart  
I offer my bosom to your weary soul  
I will cover your face with the palms of my hands  
I will run my lips over lines in your neck  
I will feast my eyes on the beauty of you  
and I will sing for you  
for I have come to bring you peace.  
I have come to take you home  
where the ancient mountains shout your name.  
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,  
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,  
the proteas stand in yellow and white –  
I have come to take you home  
where I will sing for you  
for you have brought me peace.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Visit YouTube for Diana Ferrus' reading of: *I have come to take you home*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pCmu4uyj5c>;  
and *Peace Song*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmEX6uXf4ew>

Lynn Abrahams from Iziko Museums spoke about the Slave Lodge Museum where slaves were inhumanly treated. She smiles as she says, “I prefer to be known as a heritage activist”. Lynn’s passion is to ensure that the museums are spaces of rebuilding human dignity, remembrance and healing.



Vanessa Ludwig, Programme Coordinator of Gei Heis Collective, and a founder member of WIB-SA also welcomed all to the Gathering and her thoughts on the theme – *Displacement* - were that feminists have moved from movements to organisations, and this move comes with a feeling of displacements; even if we find ourselves in women’s organisation, we get pushed to the margins in favour of the gender agenda. Thus, the wish and call that the 17<sup>th</sup> WIB Gathering is a space about reimagining justice and peace in a feminist way across the borders (whatever the borders may be - geographic or other; a space of coming together, of collating our ideas, of individual and collective survival and liberation.



Edurne Gallo Santamaria of the Basque Agency Development Cooperation – who provided funding for the 17<sup>th</sup> WIB Gathering to take place, welcomed all the women, provided background to Agency and that is a privilege to have supported the 17<sup>th</sup> International Gathering of Women in Black.

**A closing performance of the welcome session was performed by Zulfa Abrahams & Simone Momple.**

These two activist artist showed that art can be used as a method of healing. Both artists started performing at the same time with the start of the music by Grace Jones the title of the song “This is Life”. Zulfa painted and Simone danced. The performance was an interpretation of the music and lyrics with the visual artist and performance artist responding to each other and to the lyrics at the same time. The performance explored social perceptions of women’s bodies.



## **Sessions**

### **1. Activities from Women in Black in Valencian community and Colombia Presented by: Vita A Arrufat Gallen**

Women participated in this session, that shared and examined the activities between Women in Black from Castellion, Women in Black from Valencia and Colombian (Latin America) women organisations since the 1990s. Much gratitude was given for this work that was made possible through sharing the same language, despite not being on the same continent.



It was emphasised that violence against women and the challenge and hardships of refugees is still prevalent. The experiences of displacement and violence in Europe have not changed. In Colombia narco-trafficking, violence against women, torture and kidnap is ongoing. There it is important to: get to truth, justice, reparation (not repetition); to keep the memory for all those who have been displaced alive; to help in and support the peace process and arrive at an agreement between the guerrillas (narco-traffickers), armed forces, paramilitary and the government – a victory is a peace agreement that was passed in parliament; the first agreement that has a gender component. WIB was part of this process together with RUTA PACIFICA and OFP-popular feminist organisation.

What came out of the workshop was that:

- All the work done by Women in Black to date should be documented;
- Document similarities that were found between the various women's courts held to date;
- Violence against women has not gotten less over the years; and
- At the beginning WIB from Castellion worked mostly around the issue of health, then moved to working on peace beyond the masculinist definition and understanding of war- not about the absence of war but about home, health, food, dignity. This should be written about.

#### **Thought from the session:**

*Everyone has to know that the Mediterranean Sea is a cemetery of unmarked graves of Refugees, mostly from Africa.*

## **2. South Africa, Zimbabwe, USA: Lesbian voices in a Patriarchal world**

**Presented by: Janice Gutman, Sue Hodes, Phindi Malaza & Fadzai Muparutsa**

Participants deliberated on the following points:

- Impact of capitalism on the practice of queerness in developing countries;
- Militant states and the exclusion of queer bodies from the practice of active citizenry;
- Ageism within the lesbian community;
- The contradiction of legislature and treatment of queer bodies;
- Political existence of queer bodies;
- The division between academia and on the ground-queer activism;
- Trans women's fight for identity and its implications, namely the silencing of female born women;
- Disparities within the movement toward the ultimate liberation of LGBTQI; and
- Gender as a social construct and the problematics of the power politics that arise from it;

Questions were raised:

- Is it only patriarchal systems that silence us? Or are we silencing each other in our movements?
- How do you transfer resistance from generation to generation?
- Is there any intergenerational conversation taking place?
- How are we experiencing our identities in different spaces? How are we experiencing solidarity?
- What is the role of white woman in peace movements? What are the problems of intersectionality
- Can we *make* solidarity?
- What does an anti-patriarchal world *look* like? What does it *sound* like? What does it *taste* like?
- Is being woman synonymous with being feminist? Is feminism synonymous with lesbianism?



Several points were raised that should be taken forward:

- Qazi-feminism as a construct to develop;
- There is need for a lesbian inter-generational conversation;
- The need to deconstruct the political existence of lesbians;
- Solidarity is needed among lesbians; and
- Deeply consider and strategise around the question of land and ownership for lesbians.

It was agreed that a collective vision will bring lesbians closer to solidarity, even with the apparent conflicts and disparities in the group. This vision will be an anti-patriarchal one and it will be focused on equality across people and structures.

### Thoughts from the session:

*“Intersectionality has become about the hierarchies of oppression”*

*“Yes, we have to have diverse voices, but we must have a common vision to end patriarchy”*

*“People [young people] seem like they know everything”*

*On inter-generational conversations:  
“there is no conversation”*

*“We are not making the same effort that the older generation has made”*

*“Lesbians have a political existence”*

*“It’s now more difficult to be a lesbian than it is to be a feminist and a peace keeping activist” – (in Armenia)*

*“Our feminism isn’t where the new queer is”*

*“There is a competition of who is more oppressed”*

*“Everything you say is violent”*

*“Land must be there for lesbians too”*

*“It’s one struggle”*



### **3. This workshop session was shared.**

#### **3.1. “Homing displaces lives”, presented by Shirley Gunn (Human Rights Media Centre) together with colleagues Epiphane Mokasawu (Rwanda), Ayanda Josie and Cindy Sowenghisa (South Africa).**

The facilitators started by saying that colonial history brings with it a conflicting history and emotions. In South Africa in 1998, the then president Nelson Mandela set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which were able to “nicely contain the past in seven volumes”, but this is incomplete. Mandela welcomed refugees from Rwanda, DRC, Burundi, etc. who sought asylum from power hungry leaders in Africa – core theme of displacement. The Mantra of the new South Africa: “I am because of you” – encouraged teamwork. However, after apartheid ended, things didn’t change – a great amount of disappointment prevailed.

Shirley shared her experience of working at TRC, and how she was hunted down and interviewed by media and academics who wanted to understand how the TRC was managed. Media/academics studying the TRC did not understand trauma and practiced unethical interviewing techniques. This prompted Shirley to wonder: How do you do things differently – how do you work with people who have experienced severe trauma? With these questions in mind she started the NGO the Human Rights Media Centre. Most importantly, their work is “memory work”, which is not necessarily profitable. Because of this, the NGO started a craft cooperative to showcase indigenous skills, those passed on from one generation to the next. Working around capitalist market economy, they looked at how to inspire different economic models. (operatives/cooperatives). Another area of their work looked at how trauma is passed on from one generation to the next - inter-generational and trans-generational. The Centre has worked to publish various books including “Torn Apart” which documents refugee’s stories – first told in 2002 and then re-told in 2011. A striking image amongst these stories in the early 2000s was the horror of fleeing. 9 years later it was a sense of displacement within the country of asylum – the maroon ID book. Also published a book documenting mothers and daughters in the struggle in South Africa. Significance of children and how the NGO could reach them. Created documentary “In Our Shoes” and literary reader “Where I belong” for primary school learners.

She sees the TRC as an important bridge but incomplete – not a model to be copied. Redress measures have seldom been delivered by unwilling governments.



**Key statements from the group conversation:**

*In daily life, apartheid can still be felt, particularly through gender and race. South Africa may have stopped apartheid legislation but not lived apartheid.*

*Many South Africans haven't made personal transition as individuals.*

*As a society we need to stand together and attack the current oppressive government, aiming to live as trade economy as opposed to Capitalism. Encouraging South African women to take a stand.*

*Inter-generational dialogue. Work in trauma centre – one participant, as a coloured woman, could relate to refugees being moved out of a place with the promise of a better future which does not come.*

**Key questions raised:**

*What would a different economic order look like in SA?*

*The question of how to unravel trauma and the legacy of trauma through conversations with parents, grandparents and other family in the homes/safe spaces.*

*Why is the South African TRC not a good model – what suggestions are there to better it?*

*Any recommended techniques on how Israeli activists should continue their struggle – using South Africa as an example.*

### 3.2. “Women tell their story”, presented by: Fatimetou Moustapha Saleh (Western Sahara)

Fatimetou outlined relation between Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria and Spanish- and Morocco-colonised Western Sahara. She is one of many victims of the occupation. Many of her family members were separated, missing or disappeared. She cannot tell any stories about her father as she didn't know anything about him. Her mother was very strongly affected by his absence and did not want to talk about him. At 18, Fatimetou's neighbours told her that her father was arrested by Moroccan authorities and was missing – unsure if dead or alive. She didn't know where to start looking for information on him, but eventually found an organisation which helped her to look for him and find out his fate. She was later informed of his death via email which was cruel and hard. She shared of her getting used to living in a camp as opposed to a permanent structure. She has learnt Spanish and English to communicate. Houses and possessions, and even trees and the sea become foreign entities in the camps. Women's struggles play a big role in the camps. Organisation of the Sahara Women invites people to camps to show others the situation, and create external awareness. They are fighting for a free country, struggling for independence. A recent positive development was that Morocco was not renewed as part of Western Sahara. The Western Sahara Campaign in London had significant impact in court. The Basque nation had also been of great assistance, taking Western Sahara as a part of itself and launching investigations over the dead and missing.



Participants raised the following points:

- Similarities between Western Sahara and Palestinian refugees were observed;
- Everyone has a responsibility to raise awareness – it's not enough to just be heard;
- Are there any connections with refugee organisations to put pressure on the United Nations?

#### Thoughts from the session:

*Western Sahara the “last colony in Africa” (as stated by the United Nations)*

*It was noted that South Africans do not hear or come across Western Saharan voices/stories very often, and it would be helpful to find similarities between these two nations.*

#### **4. The urgency to isolate Israel: Why boycotts, divestments and sanctions, presented by: Kwara Kekana (Boycott, Divestment And Sanctions Against Israel In South Africa (BDS South Africa))**

Kwara Kekana gave a background to BDS, which is a non-violent resistance movement called for by the Palestinian civil society organizations. The Movement started in 2005 as a way to engage the international community in the effort to bring justice to the Palestinian people. It opposes Israel's policies towards the Palestinians in the region. BDS does not focus on Jewishness or the Jewish people, and a number of Jewish people are supporters of BDS.

Kwara brought up the increasing urgency for BDS today and highlighted the similarities between apartheid South Africa and Israel, and also between the occupation in the Western Sahara. The boycott against Israel in South Africa is carried out on 3 fronts: *economic, academic and cultural*. Its purpose is to isolate and economically impact Israel - to coerce Israel to bring an end to their "apartheid" policies and rampant violations of international law.



Since 2013 Israel has been carrying out a deliberate policy of isolating Palestinians into 'Bantustans'<sup>2</sup> where they have no real rights. The ever-expanding colonial settlements continue to confiscate land belonging to Palestinians and that is designated by international law to be a part of the State of Palestine. Israel's policies towards African immigrants are also a violation of human rights and were brought up in the discussion.

Kwara stated that the victories of BDS can be seen in the way Israel is reacting. In 2014, Israel set up a ministry and allotted considerable funds to fight BDS which is seen as a strategic threat. Although Israel is trying to criminalize BDS, they are losing friends in many countries, even among young Jews in the USA (Jewish Voice for Peace). Large pension funds and a number of churches have divested from Israel.

#### **Thoughts from the session:**

*WIB must take a stand together for BDF - Pronounces itself on the BDS cause; especially in light of Israeli lobby & support groups who are very strong in Europe. In Austria, for example, because of its history, there is reluctance to criticize Israel and pro-Palestinian activists are often suspected of being Anti-Semitic. WIB Vienna as well as other groups that support Palestine are no longer permitted to hold events in public rooms.*

*We not yet at the point of really hurting Israel where it hurts most which is in the pocket but we're conscientizing people. Many artists not going to Israel. G4S. Companies recognise BDS movement.*

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<sup>2</sup> Bantustans is a partially self-governing area that was set aside during the period of apartheid for a particular indigenous African people; a so-called homeland.



*Do we actively go ahead and call Israel an Apartheid state? South Africans don't have an issue generally with this label due to our legacy of engrained generational discrimination – some people do.*

## **5. South Africa: Women, gentrification and displacement in Cape Town: Lessons from Reclaim the City, presented by: Greer Vally – Tshisimani Centre; Sarita Pillay – Reclaim The City Movement**



This session took the form of a walking tour.

Race and class has always entrenched in the city of Cape Town, like the rest of South Africa, that divided many people. Participants visited the District 6 Homecoming Centre, a previous warehouse, that is now a site used for returning to remember, dynamic educational purposes, memory of activism, emphasis on human rights for change. The centre also works with the memory of similar displacement nationally and internationally. Importantly, the centre looks at the memories of the past and

also look at the ways in which people can learn from the past.

The inhabitants of the Cape were many indigenous peoples who lived there before the settlers – the Dutch marked Cape Town a rest and supply stop on route for the travel to the East. This invasion was the first monopoly industry. They also brought along Malaysian and Indonesian slaves to the Cape. The Cape already had slaves from Angola and Mozambique. Thus, under the apartheid governance, there was racial diversity. However, many “Coloured” and African black families were forced out of District 6 due to racist apartheid legislation that preserved the area for whites only. Land dispossession since 1913 had detrimental impacts on the livelihoods of many indigenous peoples. Under apartheid, the law made sure that Black people were kept out of the area and that Coloured and Indians were relocated to the Cape Flats.

A critical question remains post-democratic South Africa democracy: “who should get restituted and who should return?”.

The contemporary fight in the city is still informed by racially divided identities. This is a similar situation to Palestine with the question on “who returns?”. In the South African context, the site of the University indicates the presence of many students from other provinces; also, the city continues to be shaped by rich white people who have the means for developments that continuously constructs the city in their image and excludes the majority citizens.

Peninsula maternity hospital in District 6 is a site of great memory for many individuals. The mural painted on the wall was designed in a way that tells the stories of the community (essence of community life: communal space, process of return, care and medical care, for the community, space of the diverse arts, place of the faith, diverse markets, trauma and evictions, displacement and relocation, and belonging and return. Its reflects the diverse memories. Thus, the act of site marking becomes part of an important process of making new history by shaping of memory.

The property market in the CBD is an expensive industry that continues to exclude people on basis of race and class. Hence, the CBD is maintained for rich wealthy white people. Ironically, there are many sites of government owned land that can be used for affordable housing. However, these spaces are used for parking lots for the trendy hipster markets – a result of gentrification.

Erasure of food culture of the working class is also prevalent in the District 6 area. Now, the food joints are preserved for rich people. A disrespect exists with the existence of Dutch company that moved in the area, and started selling “gourmet Gatsby”.



It is extremely expensive for the working-class people to continue to live in the CBD area. If they cannot maintain the expenses of the inner city because of gentrification, they then relocate away from the City to relocation camps which are +30km out of the city. A strong relation exists between women and displacement in historic and contemporary Cape Town has always been there. Reclaim the City shared that they worked with a domestic worker who lived and worked in Sea Point – a very expensive area within the city. She was evicted and then attained a position at the Castle of Good Hope and was provided with temporary accommodation for her, her daughter, and her grandchild. However, in 2017 she was evicted from the castle.

The powerful gestures of this session were the interactive site visits: Castle of Good Hope; District 6 Homecoming Centre; Peninsula Hospital; Memory Mural; Government owned land (parking lot); Trendy spaces, gentrification, and erasure of history District 6 Museum

### **Thoughts from the session:**

*“There is a history of displacement hidden in the narratives of slavery and it is prevailing”*

*“Land for People, Not for Profit”*

*“Displacement occurs in different forms”*

*“Memory of place and sites have been destroyed in peoples’ bodies”*

*“Rituals of walking and reclaiming is a revolutionary act”*

**Day 1 ended with the screening and discussion facilitated by WIBSA member – Heidi Grunebaum - of the movie: The Village under the Forest. The film looks at a village called Lubyra that is buried under an Israeli forest called South Africa Forest. The forest was planted through the donations of many South Africans. The film provides images and footage of the suffering of the Palestinian people together with Israeli activists and historians.**



## DAY TWO: 7 March 2018

### Morning Session

#### **1. Quadruple Jeopardy: displacement of black working-class mothers of children with disabilities, presented by: Basheera Surty & Doreen Moloke, Diketo Inclusive Education**

This workshop discussed the issue of disability in the African culture, specifically as having a child with a disability as an African woman. Before Colonialization there was inclusivity – Ubuntu. Western medical model concentrates on a perspective where a person is who is differently abled is seen as “special” - not seen as normal and to be separated from others.



There is a vicious cycle between poverty and disability. Societal environmental settings impact on disabled children. People are scared and not sure of how to care for disabled children. We have to break attitudinal, institutional barriers and policies, physical barriers etc., and transform educational and play spaces to be more inclusive.

There are no special needs schools in townships and on the Cape Flats, and as a woman with a child with a disability you have to be an activist, as even professionals treat disabled children badly. Mothers of disabled children carry a daily burden of transportation – going to clinic or school. People in taxis complain; you stand for hours waiting for a taxi, you don't have enough money to buy a car; and taxis embarrass you in front of everyone. An awareness campaign is needed. Furthermore, when it comes to formal work employers need to understand the needs of one as a parent of a child with a disability. “I as dismissed... my boss said: “You think this is your grannies house?” Most impoverished mothers with disabled children are forced to stay home or lock children up alone in a room.



When it comes to care facilities, there are language barriers between practitioners and mothers, translators are a third party. Clinics require direct and specific information related to the child so third parties cannot take children to the clinic.

But there is a positive movement - a powerful community driven initiative has commenced. The painting of purple murals with messages on

peoples' homes about children with disabilities. Doreen painted on her house, and found out that there were four people in the street where children with disabilities are hidden in their home. The initiative has united the community of those who have disabled children who were previously hidden and suffering in silence.

Key questions from this session were:

- We have to put pressure on local and national government to do something?
- We must not tolerate segregation on the terms of identity, do special schools assist or further discriminate?
- How do you protect young disabled teenagers going into puberty? Do you put your children on contraception?
- Is sex work a right for differently abled women?
- Are we empowering women and children with disability, for their safety as they are being raped and abused, for their right to quality education?
- Differently abled often are the target of sexual predators. It was shared that a taxi driver impregnated three young disabled girls when dropping them at home.
- Employment for differently abled is not easy, they are called for an assessment and most cannot reach Grade 10 and 12.
- Wheel chair replacement expensive in a system that promotes inclusion.
- Can't survive on R1600 child doesn't eat what you do. They will wear nappies for a lifetime.
- African refugee mothers living with children with disabilities also experiencing difficulties.
- Mothers especially in rural areas might not even have data to Google information. Info not easy to access. Barriers.

#### **Thoughts from the session:**

*"I am currently fighting a case in court. Even the courts are not clued up with regards to handling the reality of disability. I had to go into court to the judge, kept him accountable and told him: This is the law, go home and read it and come back to making a ruling."*

*"Our homes are not disability friendly."*

*"Her family has evicted her because of the child they don't want her there. She was dumped in the informal settlement. Every week she needs to carry her child on her back from the road from the settlement towards the main road because she can't push the wheel chair there unless on an even surface."*

*It's not a charity model working with handicapped children. People always say 'Oh you have such a good heart'.*

*"We didn't apply for these children, when we are pregnant we didn't expect to receive these children."*

*"I used to hide my son away, people used to laugh at him/us on the street."*

*"Being all alone in this thing is confusing."*

*"Human Rights: our children have the right to live and education."*



## 2. UK-London: Disarming patriarchy: Feminist Peace activism, #metoo and non-violent resistance, presented by: Rebecca Johnson and Heena Thompson



Participants of this session discussed the #Metoo movement and non-violent resistance.

It was acknowledged that there is controversy surrounding this movement: there are a whole set of issues around women in activism (about women choosing halting the weapons, etc.); the Female body is commodified in the system of patriarchy (power relations and controls, injustice,

militarism, racism) - all aspects that are part of the patriarchy that needs disarming. All the aspects that sustain patriarchy need to be tackled.

We have to take on sexual violence directly in what we do; we ourselves have to challenge what non-violence resistance should be and could be for ourselves. The notion of non-violence is not clear and should not be clear, it is different for us all, i.e. to think of various other forms of non-violent resistance that works for people as it is different for everyone.

There was acknowledgement that the #Metoo movement allows women who feel alone to realise and understand that they are not alone in their experiences and the things that they are going through.

However, it was raised that the UN cannot protect the women under occupation, not as women or as a society because their condition under human rights is not included under the things to look at for the UN. How can we actively show solidarity to these women?

### Key questions from the workshop:

*Out of the #Metoo movement, will what women have shared blow over?*

*How genuine is the #Metoo?*

*Do we perceive risks in such forms of protest if they are not carried through?*

*How do we connect with the #Metoo movement?*

*How can we as Women in Black protect the women under occupation? (e.g. Fatima-Western Sahara)*

*South American violence against women has gone beyond violence and rape, it has now become an issue of women being killed. So how does the #Metoo movement benefit one in a position where it is a matter of being killed?*



### **Thoughts:**

*How we can use technology and social media as a form of non-violent activism to help those women under occupation and bring awareness to their plight which many have ignored?*

*An open invitation has been extended by Fatima to all Women in Black to come to the refugee camps of Western Sahara and be witness to the atrocities. She is happy to see the logo of WIB as being Black because her people have been living in Black, in darkness for so long.*

*To have a non-violent movement is for women to become economically independent from men.  
A form of non-violent resistance from a personal perspective is to become economically independent from a man.*

*The personal form of non-violent resistance is probably the most difficult one*

*There can be an upsurge, but we need to think about the backlash, where it might come from and who it be directed to, we need to think through this in mobilising our movements and protect the vulnerable in the follow up of the movements.*

*How do we protect ourselves in non-violent activism from the violence we face when taking on such endeavours?*

*As much as some men claim to be feminists, how far does that go? What does that mean?*

### **3. Creation of the Enemy, presented by: Maria Luz Gonzalez & Almudena Izquierdo**

This session discussed how society creates the image of the enemy. For example, immigrants who seek place in Europe; the wars in the Middle East; displacement of people of the basis of gender, environment, repressive regimes, etc. These are the people who society often perceive as the enemy. Yet, refugees are the people who seek to get away from inequalities, but people in Europe often spread fear to European societies, and this is how they create the enemy.



The purpose of the discussion was to identify the mechanisms that makes societies, reject displaced peoples. These were what was explored through conversation:

#### Communication Information

Manipulation; problem of forgetting the past that we all were migrants; isolation resulted in refugees to the outskirts; same like in South Africa. Emotional conflict people centred with the different. Different, value give to person in front. Example, Foreign Black people from the USA are more welcomed than Black people from Africa who are viewed as immigrants. Hence, race is not the only issue, class is as well.

Alternatives to the creation of the enemy and reverse the image creation of enemy: Need more empathy; need to share silence of connectiveness, do not always need words; historical practices are needed to be acknowledged.



#### Fear and Hate

People need to explore personal fear and also refugee fear; fear is a tool of control, e.g. fear of Islam, fear of taking of social services; people think that their national culture is superior; fear can demobilise people; false information on refugees creates fear.

Alternatives to the creation of the enemy and reverse the image creation of enemy.

Need to listen to refugees; welcome all refugee movements; consciousness of practices is needed; importance of dance; women to connect and reflect, and create the joyful spaces.

### Language and Symbols

Media shows women as victims, not subjects of wrongs; speak about migrants when they are not seen; make migrants more welcomed if they adapt to Western culture, language, etc. – easily accept the Latin American women, more than the Islamic women.

Alternatives to the creation of the enemy and reverse the image creation of enemy: Body language can be negative, but it can also be positive; need to show empathy.

### Hierarchy of differences – prejudices and stereotypes

Depersonalising of migrants as criminals, not as mothers or fathers etc.; often use class, gender, sex, etc as tools for bureaucratisation of migrants; various negative stereotypes

Alternatives to the creation of the enemy and reverse the image creation of enemy: Importance of education; need to create alternative space and organisations to get stronger to prevent violent processes of assimilation and integration; women also tend to victimise other migrant women, but they do not criticise how they too are victims in their own country; do not speak up in the name of other women, women must speak for themselves; companionship, no clarity, respect the process and let the refugees decide the process, just be there.

### **Key questions\_in the workshop:**

Why do we see displaced people as enemies?

How should we behave?

What are our alternatives?

Participants were divided into two groups and engaged in the activity discussions on how the following creates the enemy and to provide alternatives to these unjust creations of the enemy:

- Communication Information
- Fear and Hate
- Language and Symbols
- Hierarchy of differences – prejudices and stereotypes

### **Thoughts from the session:**

*“Women in Black needs to build bridges between people”*

*Countries cannot just send refugees back to their oppressive countries, refugees came to look for a better life, but they are often confronted with more oppression etc. Laws which embed such repression and oppressions need to be eradicated.*

**The double bind: the novel as peace negotiation. Sharing of the writing of an essay collection on women writing in conflict, by Elisabeth Hjorth & Empire: Woke People Talk Back (theory-practice-poetry), by Bernedette Muthien**



Women participated in this session that was an exploration of all kinds of writing and art that explores the right to be. Most of the work shared was through poetry and dance. The two facilitators; Bernadette Muthien and Elisabeth Hjorth shared both original work and the works of others to open the discussion<sup>3</sup>

A central point was: What is the state of being for women as it is understood by women?

Some points surfaced were:

- The power of feminist writing and its reflection of the daily strengths of women
- The feminine under attack of patriarchy – Women as the venerated and the despised
- The Madonna- Whore complex
- Shame and feeling – the potential of these to transform the current structure of the world
- The right to be
- Unconditional love – the potential of this to actualise as a strategy to fight patriarchy and create a new world order
- A re-imagination of women's political existence

**Key points from the group conversation:**

- The contradicting message of patriarchy “women can be everything and nothing at all”
- Women feel shame to be “in a room of one's own” – this was a brief reflection on Virginia Woolf's writing
- The power of shame to change systems: Shaming the world into a state of peace (this involves speaking out about personal shame that women are “obligated” to feel for wanting to be themselves. This also involves giving this shame back to the patriarchy who demands it of women. It is to speak out and up about injustice and transform the world to a state that prioritizes justice for all.
- The power of unconditional love to change systems
- The need for women to reimagine their political state of existence and move into the new

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1: poems read during the session



**Reflections:**

*"Demon Patriarchy, how do I love you to death?"*

*"We are good at love, so we love" – From Elisabeth Hjorth's reading of her poem regret*

*"If you are not outraged, you are not paying attention"*

*"If you are not outraged, another's rage will be celebrated"*

*"We are fighting for a space to be everything and nothing"*

*"It is the love without condition that really makes us come here"*

#### **4. The rise of neo-liberal feminism: our new global feminist challenges, presented by Desiree Lewis (UWC – South Africa)**

The main quest of this workshop was to know more about feminism in South Africa – both individual feminism and organisations. It was shared that this consists of a wide range of positions, and different work spaces/areas.



It was stated that neo-liberalism is displacing feminism, unsettling it; it is a weird shift in feminism. Neo-liberalism is so difficult to identify as it has become naturalised, normalised. The idea of the marginalised subject being recognised a goal, but recognition in a particular way can be troubling. In the global south neo-liberalism in relation to feminism is largely seen as an economic phenomenon – to do with structural adjustment, free flows of capitalism, oppression of black women. Here it is easy to explain – easy enemies – global capitalism, local structures, etc. In this sense it is not seen as psychological or to do with the subject.

Neo-liberalism has economically exploitative effects – persuasive and powerful messages which are exploitative. Women put themselves second and work for others –reinforcing gendered conditioning. It is also an important a system of governance which often involves us governing ourselves. An example – market principles – feminist NGOS mimicking structure of big business. Many don't see a contradiction between being a feminist and working in very authoritarian corporate structures, with the aim to produce efficient functioning bodies. This confuses people being functioning units.

Neo-liberalism – commodities, ideas, knowledge, even social identities – all become commodities. Thus, there is a need to fight for limited resources – even possessing emotions, feelings to be fulfilled as a human being. Encourages one to own things as objects, even owning identity. Winners (empowered) or failures (disempowered). “Cognitive capitalism” – thinking about the world in terms of capitalist objective.



We are not necessarily being brainwashed/duped by neo-liberalism – it is very overwhelming, difficult to resist. E.g. Taking shortcuts to acquiring knowledge is part of neo-liberal system of knowledge; disturbing our sense of agency in the form of individual empowerment has been gaining ground. – feminism using social media. It was said that social media provide enormous scope for progressive moments. Establishing a sense of perspective and what ultimately do we believe in now. However, the #metoo campaign shows that “it” can become a race to lay claim to victimisation – an idea of clamouring for the space, for the label. On one hand a terrific confidence, but also a danger. Run the risk of being taken out by the right wing and being anti-feminist.

We are all complicit in this – inspired by #metoo, but also need to ask “what is it for?” – we can become so fixated on personal discrimination but forget about structures of power – need to deal critically with the next level, confronting patriarchy.

Paradoxically we also must go to personal experience as it is also always political. Encourage making sense of what it means to be a body in certain ways amongst other bodies. One can simply target one aspect of your being as it is comprised of so many different parts – nationality, class, race, religion, etc. which also overlap and can be used manipulatively. Problems with identity politics – claiming definitively victimised status – “the most downtrodden” in order to receive something.

The vagina continues to be symbolised, pathologized in a particular way. Need to be able to take it away from this space to discuss as a means of unsettling patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism, etc.

### **Key points from the group conversation:**

- Impact of #metoo social media campaign – mixed feelings about it as it raised awareness of normalised sexual harassment, but on the other hand certain groups of feminists had been fighting battles in universities for the longest time – putting in procedures and structured support for a long time and it was felt that anonymous claims of the campaign undid this. This was seen as a form of neo-liberal feminism. A progressive campaign, but progressiveness also gets undermined. Neo-liberalism draws us in but is doing something which we can’t necessarily claim substance to.
- Notion of celebrity activists (eg. Emma Watson) who are seen to set the benchmark for feminism – young white woman who produce a particular face to feminism – constantly

seeking celebrity credibility and doing work to get recognition vs. doing work for the sake of it.

- The angle of neo-liberalism that hits closest to home is the privatisation of government services and the impact neo-lib. has had on our social ideals. We built this state to serve us – feminists have to deal with this.
- Growing up with one foot in apartheid and one out - parents taught children to be focussed on buying – the right to a decent job, salary, accumulate what the apartheid gov. took away from their parents.
- Question around the way feminism has become a commodity in a neo-liberal world. You cannot buy feminism, but people seem to think that you can.
- Struggling with LGBTI people and how we tell our stories - ways that we want to talk our oppression as opposed to successes. A desire to not put victimhood to a narrative of life, avoiding an “olympics of being downtrodden”/hierarchy of oppression or “a laundry list” of intersectionality. Why is there need for it?
- Can use the internet as a productive and secure space amongst a source of distraction, violence, sexual harassment – movements do happen in this space.

### **Thoughts from the workshop:**

*What kind of spectacle does the #metoo campaign produce, both in terms of the victim and those identified as perpetrators?*

*What should be the state's function in relation to taking care of its citizens?*

*How do you explain to young girls about feminism – there are so many different definitions.*

*How do we create a desire for feminism within girl children?*

*How do we use the internet/cyberspace productively – developing feminist movements in this way – from discussion to cyberspace.*

## Afternoon Session

This workshop session was shared

### **5. Political Violence in India and South Africa – A Feminist View, presented by: Ruchi Chaturvedi and Corinne Kumar**



The women's discussion was about violence in India and South Africa (SA), with the aim of learning from both places.

The notion of justice needs reconsideration. We need to think more critically about democratic model that we have in SA/India – often called electoral liberal democracy - through the lens of political violence. The starting point is something else however – in recent past there has been a

huge growth of religious right wing movements in India – fascism, nationalism. Targeted poorer Moslems, women. We have to remind ourselves about how for several decades we have seen different groups of marginalised groups or collectives (one region, ethnicity – one group, community) protesting, raising voices in public, and attacking private property, individuals – in both SA and India. Making demands on the state for affirmative action, better housing, roads, electricity or sanitation – service delivery protests in the wake of which there is often violence.

In SA in the late 2000s – this turned into xenophobic violence. This violence – “a smoke that rises” – the dark side of the demand for citizenship. What is it about this democracy that we have inherited that is actually producing/generating this violence? This form of democracy is seen as a trivialised/hollow form of democracy, and a democracy based on a masculine mode of defeating others.

What kind of democracy did Africa get? Hollow democracy vs. Popular power/people's power – and American model which shifted from direct individual participation to rule by representatives of the people. Citizens must participate directly in democracy otherwise there is no democracy. Now democracy only means that people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who rule them.

Along with hollow mode of democracy also comes market form/principle, marketised, property rights and self-interest become very prominent. Egoism, narrow self-interest, each person only a means of gaining self-interest over the other. Politics itself stops being something collective – becomes a competition to rule, selfish interests, narrowing down of idea of what politics is.



In Africa, SA and India the competition to rule has become bloody, generated violence. The entire process where politics has become only about victory and defeat vs. people who are trying to do collective action. It is no longer about collective interests. Mode of victory and defeat – masculine way of doing politics. If democracy is about



victory and defeat, relinquishing/vanquishing the other – becoming dominant, defeating - then there are different ways people mobilise ways to become dominant.

### **Corinne Kumar:**

Hindutwa – extremist Hindu/Hindu nationalism – enemy is Moslem. It is an unkind, violent place.

Courts of Women – brings out challenges to democracy system, justice system (a juridical discourse that works in a way that privileges the man. Things in legislation that denies legislation)/ The system today so immersed in masculine, patriarchal mode – distanced, objective research. Rationality vs. Feeling. We must break this patriarchal way of doing things – we have to imagine this place.

Courts of Women – brought another way of seeing things, another way to analyse, another way to listen – a means of women celebrating themselves.

It is foolish and painful to continue the way we are going. We need to re-imagine – re-imagine justice.

### **Key questions\_in the workshop:**

- How do we understand the participation of young men from marginalised areas/slums in this form of right wing religious violence?
- Why is it that democracy has become only a competition to rule/a competition between individuals who gain state access?
- In what ways does this form of democracy affect people from marginalised communities?
- Why is politics about victory and defeat? How can it not be about these things?
- Why is it that violence is the mode that must be resorted to if violence is people's power?
- How is it that we have democracy, but the individual has no say over what happens – no popular power in any significant way?
- What should the community form of democracy be? (That we have real say in what happens?)
- SA – Truth and Reconciliation Commission – brought to the fore structural violence, everyday deprivation, life subtracted and violated. – what would a court which thinks about these violences entail – who gets held accountable?
- What would a different kind of justice system look like – for those at the bottom? A justice without punishment. Can we talk of justice with healing, teaching?
- How do we change institutions, structures that perpetuate this? Need to change concepts, environment – poverty, unemployment contribute to this.
- What about basic needs, dignity – what is the strategy to better these?

### **Thoughts from the session:**

*We must be the “dancer but also the dance.” (subjective testimony and objective context)*

*We need to give ourselves freedom in our minds to imagine a society where there is no patriarchy*

## **6. Displaced but still standing: A look at how displaced Zimbabwean women have taken displacement as an opportunity, presented by: Rutendo Hadebe**

The session was organised as an exploration of the personal experience of the facilitator,



Rutendo Hadebe, from Zimbabwe to South Africa. Her migration was an economic migration. She woke up one day and received a phone call from the bank that informed her that she had to collect her 350 USD from the bank. This was an unexpected amount since she had been putting money toward her daughter's education for 15 years. Zimbabwe's economic condition at the time was weakening and so after 15 years of saving, 350 USD was the hand

she was dealt with. She was then put in the condition to migrate to South Africa, to secure a better future for her family. Rutendo migrated on a spousal visa which had its own difficulties. On a spousal visa she could not work formally, despite the many qualifications she had obtained in her lifetime. But she persisted and obtained a new permit which allowed her to become a scholar and so is currently completing her PhD. She expresses that she would not have been able to do this without the people she had come to know in this country. Having learned from that kind of love she continues to help women in her condition and they to go on to help other women daily.

Rutendo highlighted that coming from Zimbabwe she experienced a bit of a shock in the ways of being human. She revealed that she learned about the LGBTQI community, how to live with and love them as people. She learned about mental illness, spirituality, economic communities (stokvels) and language; their importance in connecting people, knowing people and building people. She also expressed that her migration has taught her how to question the politics of home.

There are many challenges that migrants face in South Africa, many have been written about, but very little work has been done on the opportunities that South Africa offers migrants. Zimbabwe has naturalised Judaist religion while South Africa has revealed how varying beliefs can co-exist. South Africa has offered opportunity for Zimbabwean migrants to question the political organisation of their home – an opportunity not offered in Zimbabwe. There is progress taking place under Zimbabwe's new dispensation. South Africa offers the gift of language which invites people into the families of others. The displaced people are the ones asking questions.

### **Main threads of the presentation**

- Zimbabwe – South Africa migration statistics
- South African responses to Zimbabwean migrants – a Zimbabwean perspective
- South African visa issues – the spousal visa and its meaning for the participation of women in society
- Approaches to Mental health – Zimbabwe and South Africa
- Approaches to LGBTQI rights – Zimbabwe and South Africa
- Approaches to language and identity – Zimbabwe and South Africa
- Economic communities in South Africa
- Love as resistance to displacement

**Thoughts:**

*"South Africa has opened our eyes"*

*"South Africa offers almost all of us an opportunity to go back to school"*

*"We still have the whips at our backs"*

*"Not knowing or learning the languages of others was how I built my own setters wall"*

**This session was unrecorded and undocumented in order to honour the request of the facilitator and participants.**

### **7.1. Gender based violence and scriptures: the missing narratives among Congolese women, presented by: Philomene Luyindula**

This presentation explored the origins of the facilitator and the participants. The facilitator provided us with her parental origins and put forth the question “whose daughter are you?” to the group who took turns to explore their own histories.

Philomene explained her methodology as follows: This is a thread of 4 sections question-stories and thoughts of Congo to be interpreted into one’s context. Each of these are linked to a story from WoW (The Widening of the Womb and Other Stories) to help look into scriptures with imagination and create new narratives. These 4 readings from WoW can be used in workshops or shared freely as long as I am quoted as the author and informed by email of each sharing. I wrote the book using some of the sermons I preached when I still intended to candidate for the ministry in the Methodist church of Southern Africa and wrote from a space of ambiguous love for scriptures, African cultures and society’s issues. The texts are intended for gendered conversations and are here set for talk in the context of the struggle of Congolese women.

**Addressing trauma, memories, women’s experience of gender-based violence and other forms of pain TOGETHER rather than against each other**

#### **1. Question-story 1**

##### **Whose daughter are you? Sharing in circle**

In Congo (DRC. Democratic Republic of Congo) we would be called by our first-born name, as a sign of respect but with the unfortunate consequence of reinforcing the place of woman as wife and mother only, thus being limiting and not easily making place for all our aspirations + excluding lesbians, single women, anyone not able or willing to bear children and not adopting... Once we start sharing from the heart after a non-threatening question, we see that in our parents’ narratives, we naturally include ourselves, identify with other women’s stories and each connect to how the past affects the present. Finding ways to open the door to deeper conversations is essential in societies with many taboos.

#### **2. Thoughts**

A woman’s context in Congo could include several taboos such as:

- discussing her marriage relationship thus having to keep quiet about domestic violence
- openly discussing past hurts and therefore not being able to access care
- taboos about sex and desire

Rape as a weapon of war is no longer a taboo discussion in the sense that this is one aspect of life in the East of the country that we have come to be known for all over the world. This situation takes the blame for all gender violence and is repeatedly mentioned in government’s documents relating to gender-based violence as though rape culture did not exist in Congo before the mid-90s. As we all know our own countries’ bad narratives –

one of Congo's one is 'how can this child sleep with this man'; in our general talks, we do not expect men to be responsible. One must not pretend that without the conflict with Rwanda (which has included several militia backed by various African countries thus being a reverse situation as in Mobutu's era the Zaïrean-Congolese army caused disruption across our 9 border countries as part of the cold-war allegiance with the US) we did not have rape and sexual abuse. It is dangerous to blame a people/nation/the other even if the image of Rwanda can be terrifying since it is now so hard to think of this country without a terrible image of the genocide. Also, one has to look at all aspects of healing as African peoples and Congolese women's healing processes and planning for gender justice to be at the core of our politics, could and should include hearing the experiences of other women on Congolese territory and across the borders.

### 3. Salt Hard Solid Tears – Lot's eldest daughter

This story is written from the various verses that refer to Sodom and Gomora. The verses themselves are usually spoken in DRC to justify homophobia and most discourse usually refer to the Genesis 18, 19 account. Being a country that has mass graves, having seen devastations brought upon the bodies of women by the official army and local rebel groups as well as armed groups within the refugee population that came after Rwanda's 94 genocide and knowing of the single identity stories shared before ethnic cleansing takes place, we cannot say that the events of Sodom & Gomora relate to a community prepared to commit a gang-rape without some build-up. My text gives voice to a woman who escaped and touches on various aspects of life in a pre-genocide community.

Other verses in scriptures about Sodom & Gomora refer to what went wrong there as a self-focused arrogance rising among people who abandoned God. Jesus does not mention homosexuality but speaks of Sodom & Gomora as a place that would have fared better than some of the areas where his message is being rejected.

The story is narrated by Lot's eldest daughter so she can be a human being with a name. In the reports of the numbers of Congolese women who are raped, we can get overwhelmed and stop feeling.

Among the many Congolese women I have asked to name stories of violence towards women in the bible, not one has mentioned Sodom and Gomora and Lot offering his daughters instead of the men whereas there cannot possibly be worse betrayal than that for a daughter.

Points for discussions after reading the story could be:

- Have the stories of rape during violent events in your country/community been recorded? If not, why do you think that is so (as tortures inflicted on men and non-sexual tortures on women may be part of countries' historical records). Saying that no rapes happened isn't an option. Rwandese women in Congo were targeted by Congolese soldiers during their 1991 & 1993 protests against Mobutu when they ransacked the main cities. Other women were raped too. (In other contexts one can look at political upheavals in Zimbabwe and zanu-PF targeting NMC female activists or events in the elections in Kenya,...)
- Who are the local or foreign people who are most vulnerable in your country/community? This may be reached by looking at common stereotypes and dehumanising words and stories shared about people. In Congo, Rwandese women

have been said to bring bad luck and to be proud and West Africans have been called dingari, a derogatory word. It seems that the safest in DRC is to pass as Congolese which seems to have been the experience of many Angolans who lived in Congo and started speaking the languages perfectly and did not stand out physically.

- In which way do men stand with women against abuse in your country? Do you know of any actual story of a man like Lot who saved himself or those he values more by giving his daughters?

Please note that the story is acknowledging that in a pre-genocide/genocide context there are sometimes only bad options.

Many of the participants became emotional as they were sharing the stories of who and where they come from.



**This workshop session was shared**

**8.1. Ethiopia “No, I am South African” – Children of Ethiopian Migrants: (Personal Reflection), presented by: Tigist Shewarega Hussen, UWC**



Ethiopia is an imaginary land for children, from Ethiopian descent, living in South Africa as members of a family that migrated – this is very concerning for their parents. Parents are concerned about identity and feelings of belongingness with regards to their children but majority of migrant families' priority is survival. Displacement affects the relationship between parents and children.

Although a permanent resident in South Africa and the country having become a second home the nightmare of renewing visas at the Department of Home Affairs has been terrible; but is not as traumatizing as the bureaucratic and xenophobic daily experiences endured by African migrants who have come into Cape Town and country.

There exist diverse migrant families in Cape Town. They are from Ethiopia, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Nigeria, and Malawi etc. and: “African languages, cultural practices, spirituality (Islam, Protestantism, “Traditional” healers, and Orthodox Ethiopian church), food and eating culture at restaurants, music (one corner you hear Swahili, the next Amharic, next Quran, next gospel, next Arabic, next Somali, next Nigerian pop music, Kwaito South African music, are all part of this reality. Reggae seems to be a uniting rhythm as oppose to mainstream hip-hop music.” Then for Ethiopians there are also differences between the Western and Ethiopian calendar.

The reality of women refugees are that women working in shopping malls take turns to look after each other's children. Migrant children can often be found playing around these malls and on balconies surrounding them.

The difficulty is often balancing the pain and longing of nostalgia and cultural identity. It is also about the need to expose one's children as an African migrant mother in a foreign country to better facilities for survival is empowering for one's children on one hand but also disempowering for them on another – increasing realities of displacement. That is:

- Your child still has a part of herself in Ethiopia but doesn't own up to it.
- "Received so many blessings from South Africa but economic issues are difficult."

#### **Reflections and sharings from the facilitator:**

"Children, especially those who are between 3 and 5 ages speak a language combination of Xhosa, Afrikaans, English, and very few Amharic. Gradually, we witness that they are not only learning the language but they are also creating friendships. I see my daughter wanting to know more about Ethiopian language and culture. I see her practicing to learn how to dance, singing spiritual songs in Amharic."

"When you leave home your village is gone."

"I am her Mum, I am her sister, I am her everything, I wish she could see what we have over there. Being a mother outside the country is very difficult."

"The richness of what we are is stuck with me and I don't know how to process it and this is where I get my politics, my heart..."

"I can see the future in her"

"I learned that the country Ethiopia I knew 8 years ago drastically changed in its social, economic and cultural aspects. I learned that I don't belong there as I imagined it over the years while living here. This realisation, forced me to think a different approach to my sense of everyday practices of belongingness. As much as I want my daughter to "belong to" Ethiopia, my attention is now focused on "process of home making". My visit back home, reminded me that everything is in a constant movement and shifts, and knowing whatever we are nostalgic about might not necessarily be there statically provided a unique turn."

#### **Any other information:**

- Children do struggle communicating with their parents.
- Parents want their children to have access to resources, e.g. Education so and therefore choose migration strategically.
- Language connected to culture and identity. She teaches Amharic to children at the Ethiopian church in Bellville. They are learning the language and traditional dance after church. She recently realised however that it is not a sustainable language in the country although nationalised back home.

## **8.2. Shutting down the old and the young: how social grants are becoming less social, presented by: Natasha Thandiwe Vally – UWC**

In 1994 the State promised healthcare, housing etc but years' later people are needing to pay for it themselves.

Unemployment is closer to 45% of the general South African population and access to a grant is often the only income for most families. As minimal as the grant monies are they usually look after the needs of both immediate and extended family members. Social grants are paid to 12 million people, quarter of population.

A brief history was given on the implementation of the social grant system in South Africa and how dependant the poor and vulnerable have become on it; money which the government pays to its citizens: Child support grant (under 18) - R350, 00 and old age pension R1500. 00

Social grants are the most important redistribution of money in South Africa. In 2012 the South African government outsourced paying out grants increasing a collective sense of displacement.

Faulty, unexplainable fraudulent activities occurred where vulnerable and in particular elderly, disabled and the poor have money deducted from their accounts mysteriously and without any governmental accountability. Companies that sell electricity, airtime, funeral companies, companies who lend money wait for people outside venues where they collect their grant money and offer them debt which is automatically deducted from their accounts before they receive the balance.

### **Key questions and responses in the workshop:**

- When entering the system finger prints digitized etc, elders have had no choice if they want the money.
- We don't know how or to whom this confidential information is shared.
- How does Social assistance work in other parts of the world?
- Full amount not given to recipients every month and they are being billed for buying airtime etc, people not getting full amount.
- It is especially our elders who are experiencing unexplained or justified deductions.
- It is up to you to cancel grant or accept mysterious fraudulent practices – this is what is told to you when trying to follow up with enquiries or complaints.
- People use grants as a way for basic survival.
- In Spain – private agency gets you a job takes 30% of your salary? Deep economic crisis in Spain -15 years.
- Via this model in South Africa - men don't work and don't do care work. How do we ensure that men take on their role of care and benefit from social grants?
- In Sweden there is child support – everything rather good. Differences between rich and poor. Pension lower if you don't save.
- There are perceptions that African migrants have many children on purpose in Europe to being able to access social services in surplus.
- African migrants are not allowed to work and need to wait for never ending immigration delays, they are desperate and innovative.

- This perception of using state resources by increasing the birth rate of immigrants is not the motivating factor in South Africa, as R350.00 a month per child is nothing. There is no evidence to prove here that people fall pregnant for money and this is quite a racist comment.
- In Italy many unemployed people – migrants are contracted. Top down methodologies need to be more bottoms - up approach.
- There are international experiences of loan sharking and evictions of vulnerable peoples too including gentrification.

### **Thoughts from the session:**

*“If we allow private companies to control what government should be doing it perpetuates poverty in the country.”*

*“The government is your second father.”*

*“Grants are used in a politically contaminated way.”*

*“My grandmother stopped making my grandfather tea three times a day after receiving her grant – allows a woman space at home, to go and look for work, find independence.”*

*“It costs money to prove that you’re poor enough.”*

*“Migrants in Germany and Sweden. Because of lack of jobs and security. People get women to give birth to children to get grants. The immigrants have to wait and to wait no other way to make money they can’t work.”*

*African migrants in Israel. Ongoing deportation of African migrants. Migrants deported to their country or go to Rwanda. Forced to leave the country of Israel.*



## **9. Climate Change and LGBTI+ migrancy, presented by: Yvette Abrahams**

It was recognised that there is a strong relation between climate change and gender movement. Eco-feminism has been around for a long time.

The violence against the planet is the same violence against women. The feminist movement is starting to make these connections more powerfully now.



The planet heats up and results in extreme weather conditions. This results in the loss of livelihoods. For example, in Bangladesh there was a drought for three years, farming practices started slowing down, and three years later, farmers gave up on farming. This is an example of the major impact of climate change and the resultant migrancy and the loss of livelihoods, and the negative impact on women, who through their gender-constructed roles carry this burden – of ensuring that food is available and that everything/everyone is clean and living spaces are hygienic.

Also, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, etc are hit the worse by the climate change. Climate change results in mass movements that cannot be stopped. Moreover, women also bear the brunt of the consequences and dealing with the militarisation of the state. It is in the worse civil conflict countries where climate change is occurring. The government uses fear tactics and commodification of natural resources like water. There is the monopoly of Multi-National Corporations over the commons. For example, in Cape Town, South Africa, the provincial government stated that because of the drought within the Western Cape, the city will be reaching “Day Zero”. The municipality together with private businesses, started to force illegal water management devices on the poor. Peoples water would be switched off, and many got sick and some died due to curable diseases.

Migrants have no protection, and there are no thoughts on climate change in the US. In Europe, the state decides when lesbians are no longer in danger and when they are safe from rape. This is very concerning. Hence, the state constantly uses securitisation, militarisation, policing, and are patronising. In Europe, migrants from Africa are treated very badly – they are being locked up and lesbian women are sent back home (to countries who already has multifaceted systems of oppressions).



Even in solidarity, there are divisions. Migrants have no social identities with service provisions, there are many silences around sexuality.

*A personal sharing from the workshop: Shamsa shared her personal lived reality as a Somali Lesbian woman who faced difficult losses and hostile experiences in her life – loss of family ties, gender and sexuality discrimination. Her father wanted her to get married and tried using patriarchal pressures for her to marry an unknown man, she refused to and stated that she is interested in women. Being Muslim, her father said that it is a sin and she was threatened to be killed and then decided to run away, relocation to unknown territory - South Africa – she was in need of help, but did not trust the local Somali men because of the patriarchal tendency to inflict violence on basis of her sexuality – homosexuality was illegal and the laws against homosexuality are extreme. A “Coloured” woman saw that she was unfamiliar with the area and offered her a place to stay in her house in Belhar for 2 weeks. She assisted with the selling of fruit and vegetables at the taxi rank. However, she still was in search to gain her freedom and find a LGBTI centre – which she later found. The man who she then interacted with, was a gay man who was arrested, but he assisted with her move to Observatory. Luckily, Shamsa had all her needed paper work and found herself working at an organisation called Pasop in a LGBTI violence programme. Sadly, these projects are often highly under-funded, especially the various migrancy streams are absent of funding in South Africa. What was even more concerning, is the fact that there are many migrants who do not have any needed documentation with them in the countries where they relocated to. Thus, having access to shelter, health, education, employment, etc. becomes extremely difficult.*

We need to reconnect and re-imagine; nature is freedom; we need more love and empathy

We need to stop emitting CO2; people need to be safe when identifying themselves and need to be protected; we need for transformative justice to look at inequities and inequalities of both the past and the present in order to eradicate diverse inequities



### **Key questions in the workshop:**

Do we all know what climate change is?

Climate change is produced by hetero-patriarchal-white-supremacist system.

What happens if one is displaced because one is queer and where are the feminists in solidarity?

We have to do more feminism. Due to the impacts of climate change, many girls do not return to school, boys often return; increase in child marriage; unemployment; displacement that weakens women and the economy; What about lesbian and Transwomen if straight women are so affected by climate change? Climate change brings about disaster and loss. Borders need to be opened to people who relocate due to climate change.

### **Thoughts from the session:**

*“The field of climate change is male-dominated”*

*“Climate destruction across the world”*

*“Climate change and capitalism are interlinked”*

*Any other information:*

**Day 2 ended with the screening and discussion with Nomaliphathwe Gwele (featured in the film) & Pablo (director) of the Movie: Noma – a documentary about the **Marikana** Settlement evictions in 2014. **Noma** follows a young, single mother of two along her journey to find a home for herself. The documentary displays the day to day challenges of homeless people in South Africa.**



## DAY THREE: 8 March 2018

### Morning Session

#### 1. “Peace Dance”, by : Mieke de Vreede and Jeannette Rene de Vreede (Belgium)

Forms of dance are not so different from country to country in terms of the way you use your body to express happiness, sadness, etc: Bosnian children in war needed something fun to do – to play – used dance and song; that they could dance in a circle – all different but equal. Using dance and music from Africa - Gumbo dancing - working in mines men would communicate through dance and could not talk to each other. Clapping, stamping.

Joy Williams – “Oh Mama” - strong songs about women. Singing an African song – Lyrics changed from “Bella mama” to “Amandla”/”Women in Black.” Umama Uyjabula (mother is happy) – women are happy.

*“I don’t do words.” – uses dance to communicate.*

Dancing is a way to show friendship – step to the middle to form a tight circle – twisting with arms to ‘knot’ each other together. Do stamping – shout out “amandla” – turn back all at the same time – unknotting themselves. The friendship circle – usually do it with young boys and girls. Dancing hip-hop – a form of dancing coming from the street or people in the group – individual forms of dance – using the forms that you naturally make – shrugging, wiping sweat, etc.

Dancing in a circle is a form of unity, equality and friendship. In dancing you are all equal but all different. You use only the instrument of your body and can dance in all different kinds of ways.

An enthusiasm to dance, move, and to teach each other dance moves and songs.



## **2. Resisting displacement: Group conversation**

The session was meant to be facilitated by Thozama April and Shifra, but one of the facilitators, Thozama, was not present and the other facilitator, Shifra, was not able to partake in the conversation as she felt unprepared to facilitate a session on displacement. Shifra was under the impression that she was meant to facilitate a session on self-care and how to use the body as a form of resistance.

The women who were part of this session gathered and had a conversation on 'resisting displacement'.

The conversation dealt with gentrification. This was followed by a conversation on identity and displacement which was guided by a participant from Somali, Shamza's, experience of migration. Her narrative revealed the difficulties faced by asylum seekers first hand. She reflected on her experience in shelters and how the LGBTQI community in South Africa pulled together to help her rebuild her life. From this, many of the group members reflected on how they have personally been involved in improving the lives of many displaced people. These revelations by group members offered strategies on how to go about resisting the displacement that many people are experiencing in different areas of the world.

- Gentrification - Business owners working with government to remove home owners from residential areas that offer opportunity for political gain
- 
- Seeking asylum – displaced because of identity
- Political displacement
- Resisting displacement
- Communities acting against the rule of law to resist being displaced
- Dispersal displacement
- The conditions of displaced people in refugee home
- The role of support workers in the conditions of displaced people
- Health concerns of displaced people
- Governments sweeping of refugee people
- International law as an advantage for displaced people
- Privilege of language in navigating new spaces
- The importance of ally's in resisting displacement
- How communities can resist displacement by pulling together

### **Thoughts from the session:**

*"it is very difficult, unless you have support, to know what they are entitled to"*

*"we are starting to know each other, which is a strong form of resistance"*

### **3. Civil Activism in the Palestinian Struggle: From militarism to feminism, presented by: Martie Momberg (University of Stellenbosch)**

Women participated in the workshop that covered information on Jewish Israelis and South Africans on the Palestinian struggle. The workshop drew on Martie's work where Jewish Israeli and SA activists were interviewed as to why they were in this struggle, and why they were involved in the struggle for support of the Palestinians and anti-occupation.

Sharing from the interviews were: The need to overcome a collective consciousness and not limited to the Israeli situation; Israel is an apartheid state based on what international law defines as apartheid; It is not only about power, politics and religion, but it has to do with economic power as well; 'Fear' was a common response from Israelis as to the reason Israel does most of what it does - "people are spoon-fed fear from the time that they are born" [this correlates with whites in apartheid SA]; this situation is not going to be resolved by just signing some piece of paper, the activism must go on as we have come to learn in SA.; we need to point out that the BDS is a very efficient non-violent initiative; the need here is not to change from one kind of enforcement to another kind of enforcement, but to change the entire system to feminism. (Respect, care, dignity); religion, any of them is not a part of this, it has nothing to do with any of the religions, this is political!

Feminism is an ideology that offers an opportunity for commitment that would be a solution to this problem, because women do not have a country. Understandable that the presenter is gathering the help of reformed churches but one needs to take into consideration that majority of Palestinians are Muslims so should Muslims not be given a chance to participate in this support process? However, feminism is a very good ideology, but how? How do we mobilise our feminism? How do we make it a reality?

#### **Thoughts from the session:**

*If people really want to help the refugees anywhere, you have to be a part of us, we do not want your money, we want your support, fight with us, come to us, become aware of us!*



#### **4. Self-care Session as resistance; honouring and remembering what was...and what is to come, by Nadia Khan Kimmie & Lindiwe Dlamini**



The workshop for the women was a very personal experience that comprised of movement, talking, singing, and dancing. Central to this session was to dig deep within to understanding the deepened inward genesis of trauma and displacement. We centred great conversations about the ways in which our Ancestors were taken from their land, and how their land was taken. Therefore, now, we are disconnected. However, we need to reconnect, if trauma is not healed, feelings become difficult to heal, and that results in

the disconnectedness that many feel.

It is important to understand that the Ancestors were traumatised, and that resulted in the shifts in the DNA which changed. Therefore, DNA holds memory of disconnect, fear, and feelings of being ashamed of displacement, feelings of not belonging, and these were genetically passed on in the DNA. However, the only way to heal is to go back to trauma and feelings of connection.

A beautiful poem written by Nadia, was shared, which was entitled: "Finding My Voice". The poem was powerful and extremely liberating. There is a great need for loyalty to the ancestors, not within the system of capitalism. There is a constant quest to find that sense of belonging. Yet, home is within oneself. We engaged the poem to do some personal reflections. There is a great need to "Heal Our Lineages".

"This continent [Africa] can take anything... and can still take it all with open arms... all nervousness, fear, anxiety, efforts to connect the dots, colours we see, belonging, deep reflections, exhaustion, trauma, determination, empathy, fullness, and the philosophy of Ubuntu (I Am because They Are, because We Are)."

The session concluded on very high notes, after our inner reflections of healing. Thus, it was socially agreed that we need to stay in our hearts to grief, shed tears that our mothers did not have to give. Hence, it became important to Honour the Self and all of the emotions.



## Day 3 ended with a march to Parliament

The culmination of these rich conversations was a march to the South African parliament for social justice and against the violence of displacement. Here we as local and international women had the opportunity for a peaceful protest. It also demonstrated a collective of the women of the world to support one another in the advancement of a better future for the next generation.





**Appendix 1:** Poems read during session: The double bind: the novel as peace negotiation. Sharing of the writing of an essay collection on women writing in conflict, by Elisabeth Hjorth & Empire: Woke People Talk Back (theory-practice-poetry), by Bernedette Muthien

## **If You're Not Outraged**

If you're not outraged your rage is somewhere else  
If you're not outraged someone else's rage will speak  
If you're not outraged another rage is ready to be celebrated

### *Do You Remember*

Do you remember the names of the dead  
Do you remember the ones who mourn

Do you remember the ones who survived  
Do you remember that it is impossible to know who you are afterwards

Do you remember the marches  
the crisp cut of white shirts through the cities  
Do you remember the pot calling the kettle black

Do you remember the apartments the warehouses and barracks that  
were burned down  
before anyone could move in  
Do you remember a dream about not making it out

Do you remember the boots knives and bottles used  
Do you remember the abandoned police investigations

Do you remember the shadows on the path the empty cans hitting  
the back of your head  
the spit you wipe off your cheek  
Do you remember the words boyish pranks and games

Do you remember the bonus for quickly dropped asylum cases  
Do you remember when you asked for a glass of milk at your shelter and they replied that  
people like you have never drunk milk

Do you remember when your kid came home and no one on the bus  
had done anything in his defense  
Do you remember what you said to him

Do you remember a headline that isn't white  
Do you remember the ones you do not cry for here

Do you remember that rage is sorrow that never forgets  
Do you remember that rage is despair at work

If you do not pay attention someone else will think for you  
If you do not pay attention someone else will use of your wounds  
If you do not pay attention someone else will build the house you live in

Do you remember the political scientist who extolled the benefits of colonialism  
Do you remember his sweater vest and calm logic

Do you remember the innovations calibrated to track bodies' movements at the border  
Do you remember giving the nation some breathing room  
by suspending immigration

Do you remember eyes rolling at inclusive classrooms for the disabled  
in the university faculty lounge  
Do you remember the theory of the uneducable

Do you remember that intelligence never saved anyone

Do you remember when language erased the traces of you  
Do you remember that muteness felt like a home you would never leave

Do you remember that attention is to read the face of the world  
Do you remember that attention is another word for love

*Say that You Remember*

Do you remember the heat that rose from our bodies  
as we stood side by side in the squares

Do you remember the first time we could speak in something other than gestures

And the torchlight processions  
their glowing seam through the cities  
And the objects  
passed from hand to hand  
as if everything we owned we had borrowed from each other

Do you remember that the house we are building is larger than our fear  
That our friends and allies were not who we thought  
That we do not choose which part of us is worth our while

Do you remember the dream we have always been approaching  
and that we do not walk in the same shoes

Do you remember someone who does more than speak  
and the voices which rend the room

*Read to Me*

Read Gayatri Spivak who wrote that our pattern is not one of triumph but  
of justice  
Read Adrienne Rich who wrote that our wounds come from the same source  
as our power  
Read Sara Ahmed who wrote that we must participate in each other's  
survival

Sing the same songs as that night when everything was a beginning

Crack that joke again, about making a mole hill out of a mountain

Set a limit for our patience  
for everything we need to know

That there are women who transcend our understanding  
That there are children who still make plans

Say that you remember what has not been in vain

Dance with me in the living room again

Since we can call each other at any moment  
Since the fatigue lessens the more of us there are

Save me from the silence that has never been our home

Give me the time it takes to continue hoping

Say that the fever of our rage will never wane  
Say that the need for our attention will not make us ill

Do you remember why we do not forget

Do you remember that our letters are to those who are not yet born

Do you remember that a language of lost words

the breaths of our beloved in the dark

will tell us what rage is

will tell us what attention is

*Dedicated to the memory of Heather Heyer and her final Facebook post, "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention," before she was killed [by white supremacists] in Charlottesville in 2017.*

## **Sooner or Later All Women Become Depressed**

We are good at love  
So we love

We are good at falling in love  
So we do

We are good at reassurance

We reassure ourselves about everything  
except  
What we are good at  
We reassure  
That we love

We are good at taking responsibility  
We reject betrayal  
because we love

We are good at laboring  
Love is labor  
So we labor on

We are the best at bearing children  
So we do

We are good at not lying down to die  
We get up in the morning

As if nothing happened

We are good at not failing  
We stay quiet about it

We are good at explaining  
That we love inexplicably  
And without mercy

We are good at hating  
That our love is never enough

We place our heart in a bag  
Our gathered belongings  
And take out the trash

We are too tired  
To overthrow patriarchy  
So we love  
in the Atarax haze

We are good at negotiating  
We choose the battles  
We have never asked for

We are good at smiling  
So we shove our smile  
Up our ass and return home

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## Regret

You can say  
I regret nothing

You can say  
I am so sick of women  
Who always feel regret

You can say  
I hate society  
More than myself

And you write a poem  
Hung over

And you buy a  
Fake fur coat  
To lie down with

And you buy  
The Collected Works  
Of Heidegger

You sharpen your knives  
You prepare your attack  
You ready yourself for your entrance

Morning is already dawning  
Like stomach acid  
It rises

While you sit with your back  
To the front door  
And erase

*Translation: Jennifer Hayashida*

## Poems from Bernedette Muthien

### Hymn to Isis

For I am the first and the last  
I am the venerated and the despised  
I am the prostitute and the saint  
I am the wife and the virgin  
I am the mother and the daughter  
I am the arms of my mother  
I am barren and my children are many  
I am the married woman and the spinster  
I am the woman who gives birth and she

who never procreated  
I am the consolation for the pain of birth  
I am the wife and the husband  
And it was my man who created me  
I am the mother of my father  
I am the sister of my husband  
And he is my rejected son  
Always respect me  
For I am the shameful and the magnificent one

- 3rd or 4th century BCE, discovered in Nag Hammadi

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## gendercide

it took a full week  
of straitjacketing generations  
of genocidal femicidal trauma  
for the clay dam wall to explode  
and flood me in torrents  
of collective grief  
a poet with no words  
a lifelong activist struck dumb  
i choke on love for the dead

thousands of beautiful women and children a  
year  
i puke for my incested cancerous country  
and gag grappling for compassion of  
perpetrators and the morally blind  
in this breathtaking country  
so brutally drenched in the blood  
of ordinary women and children  
i discover anew  
that i fail to  
swim

my spiritual cadaver  
is dragged under by the concrete limbs  
of victims perpetrators witnesses  
majority blinkered burdens  
too busy scrabbling for survival  
to fight for justice  
as i contemplate the imminent refreshment  
of my childhood starvation  
my hunger for food agency adventure

leads me to stare the dragon in its ambered  
eyes  
like a mirror of my ever-present shadows  
Demon! Patriarchy...  
how can I love you to death...?

- *Bernedette Muthien* (15 feb 2013)  
*for the billion women martyrs around the  
world...*

## Fragile

in your eyes  
that shift with the anxieties  
of these times  
i see the deepest compassion  
imaginable  
for the perpetrators in all we are  
the survivor-victims we're forced to be  
in your wide open gaze  
i see reflected  
my very own  
soul  
and for your single act of kindness  
i offer you  
my fragile heart

- *Bernedette Muthien*

## no title

After a million years of shining  
The sun never says to the earth -  
'You owe me.'  
Imagine a love like this,  
It lights up the Whole Sky.

- *Hafiz* (A 14th century Sufi poet)