

CHAPTER SIX

Occupation

The Women's Forum

Chapter Six discusses the programme for the project, that of a Women's Forum, and it explores the real-world conditions that have led to the fractured nature of women's representation on South Africa. In order for architecture to address notions of the 'Other' at a deeper level, it is essential that the programme of the building engages with the daily experiences and activities of 'Other' groups of people in society.

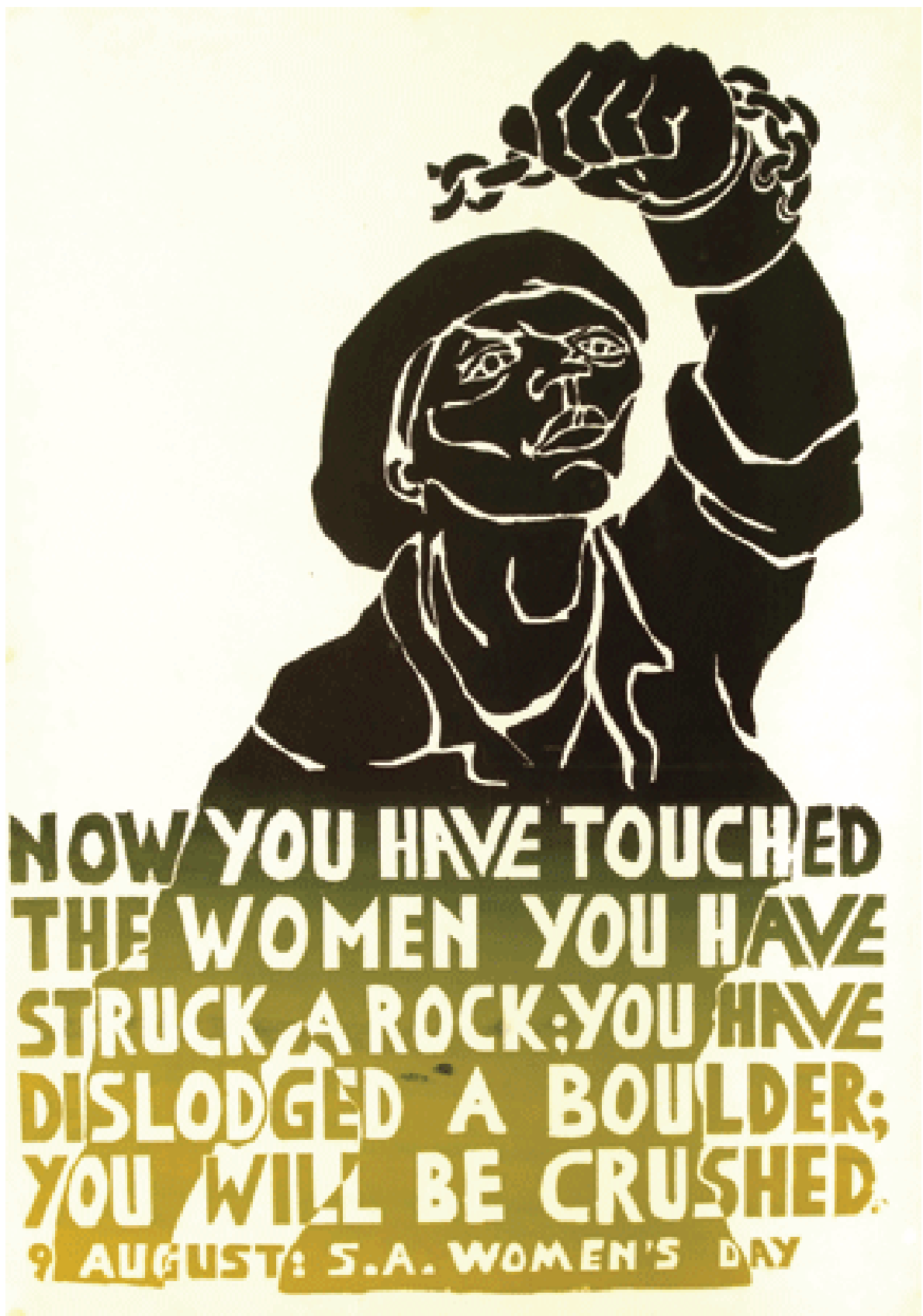


Figure 6.1 A print displaying the slogan used during the woman's March of 1956.

INTRODUCTION

[T]he women's movement [in South Africa] is currently too weak to ensure that constitutional commitments are acted upon in ways that will remove gender inequalities.'
 (Hassim 2004:2)

In a political climate where many of the issues concerning women are not being addressed by the government, space is needed where the current needs of women can be prioritised. As has been discussed, women in South Africa, especially black women, are still excluded and forgotten in contemporary South African society due to continued practise of many of the paralysing social conditions implemented by the Apartheid government (Van der Westhuizen, 2015). Migrant labour is still a reality for many black people in South Africa, creating broken families that rely on women and grandparents for financial and emotional support. The availability of adult educational institutions leaves much to be desired (Van der Westhuizen, 2015), making it difficult for women to mobilise themselves out of their current situations. Shireen Hassim's paper entitled *Voices, Hierarchies and Spaces*, discusses the women's social movements that occurred in South Africa during Apartheid and compares them to the state of the women's organisations today. During Apartheid, the Women's Movement had a unified goal of fighting the oppressive powers of the current government. But

since the fall of the Apartheid government, this movement has been fractured and has not been able to mobilise to address needs as a unified group. In Hassim's article, she states that 'the [current] South African women's movement must be understood as made up of heterogeneous organisations, rather than being viewed through the lens of a single organisation.' (Hassim, 2004:1). This indicates that the fundamental concern with women's organisations is their isolation from one another is making it difficult to implement valid and sustained change in society.

In a controversial newspaper article, Xolela Mangu, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Cape Town, claims that South Africans need to develop organisations that address the common concerns of the people in South Africa (Mancu, 2014). Using the Afriforum as an example but putting aside its negative connotations, Mancu (2014) discusses how South Africans with similar concerns need to create organisations that pool together money, articulate common concerns and work together towards achieving common goals.

PROGRAMMATIC INTENTION

'[T]he leadership of the women's movement has tended to operate with an overly narrow conception of the 'political', being focused on the public sphere of the state, while ignoring, for the most part, the spheres of economy and society.'
 (Hassim 2004:p22).

In response to these difficulties, it is proposed that a Women's Forum is established that will accommodate the women's social movement of South Africa in the post-apartheid context. From an understanding of the programmatic intention of the Women's Living Memorial as addressing the past of South African women, the building facilitates the current and future development of women in South Africa.

An interview with Christi van der Westhuizen was conducted in order to discuss the viability of the programme for the building (van der Westhuizen, 2015). Christi received her PhD in Sociology from the University of Cape Town and a Masters in Political Economy and South African Politics and she currently heads the centre for Gender and Sexuality Studies in South Africa at the University of Pretoria. She explained that the implementation

of a Women's Forum in South Africa has been attempted twice since the founding of the new constitution of South Africa but was never successful. She attributes this failure to the isolation of the the organisations involved in the founding of the forum (van der Westhuizen, 2015). The closest organisation that can be compared to a unified women's forum in South Africa is the Progressive Women's Movement who is backed by the ANC and the Women's League. Their mission statement states that they are comprised of a broad group of 'organisations, feminist groups, researchers and women involved in policy formation' (Background Information, 2015) but when the potential of this organisation was discussed with van der Westhuizen, she expressed that 'they don't represent women across political lines but rather just ANC aligned women' (van der Westhuizen, 2015).

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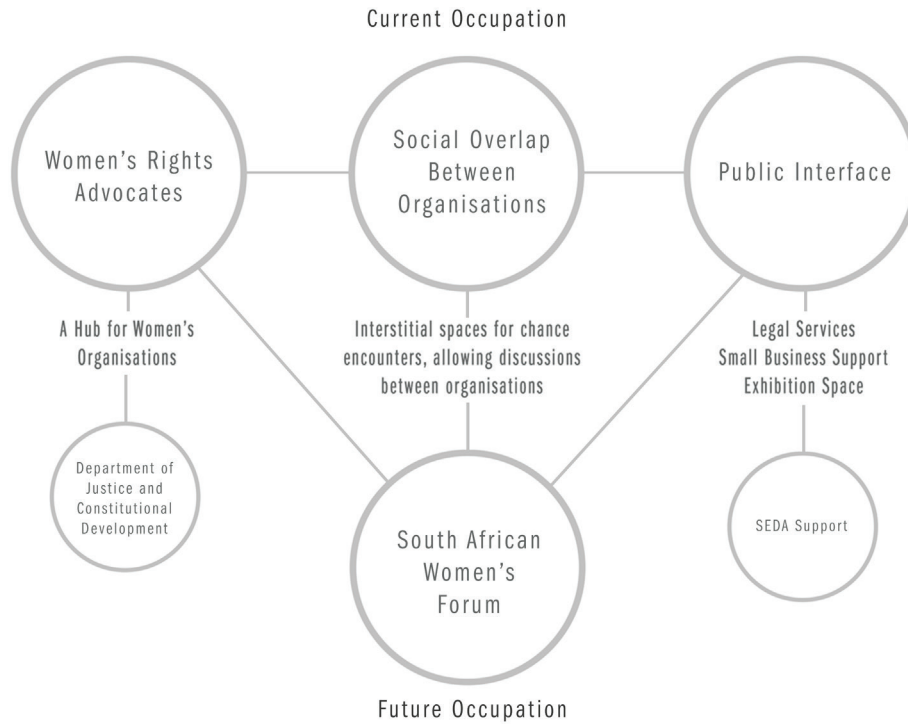


Figure 6.2 The programmatic components of the building. (Source: Author, 2015)

The building will provide accommodation for offices for a variety of existing women's organisations in South Africa and allow in-between spaces that operate as social devices for the dialogue and interaction between organisations, allowing for the development of a cohesive women's forum. In order to create a building that effectively serves the everyday woman as well as those who work within the organisations, it is

important to provide a component to the building that addresses not only the political aspects of women's empowerment in South Africa but also programmes that address women's empowerment through economic means. The public component of the building therefore provides educational services such as a legal advice centre and small business support centre that can be freely accessed by the public.

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Figure 6.3 Forums and marches addressing advocacy for women's rights in South Africa.
(Source: <http://awdf.org/rural-womens-movement-rwm/>)

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Future life/long term life of the building

The building is intended to accommodate a short term and long term programme:

Firstly as a home-base for various women's organisations, with the provision of interstitial social spaces that allow dialogue and interaction to occur which allows a more cohesive movement to develop.

Secondly, the building will accommodate the establishment of a Women's Forum of South Africa. Office spaces can be re-purposed as needed, while social spaces now provide space for meetings, forums and lectures to take place.

Client:

The African Women's Development Fund describes their mission as follows:

'To mobilise financial, human and material resources to support African women.' (ref)

They believe that if women and women's organisations are empowered with skills, information, sustainable livelihoods and the opportunities to fill their potential, then vibrant, healthy, inclusive communities can be built.' (ref)

This organisation will be tasked with the overall management of the building for the first phase of occupation.

Funding:

The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA).

The government levies money from the formal economic sector and channels it through the SETAs who allocate it for training and development. Each organisation will use their private funding for day to day running of the individual branches within the building.

Schedule of Accommodation

- Office space for 5 women's organisations
- Ground Floor:
 - Reception, Coffee Shop, Exhibition Space, Public Arcade
- Forum Space
- Interstitial Spaces between offices containing meeting spaces, kitchenettes and social spaces of various privacy levels
- Offices and appropriate facilities for a Small Business Support Centre, run by LAMOSA
- Offices and appropriate facilities for a Legal support Centre, run by the Women's Legal Centre.

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The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development

The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development occupies the two buildings on either side of the site. It states its duties as... (website ref). Here, the new building will literally be enveloped by the governmental branch that deals with constitutional issues affecting women in South Africa. The organisations will benefit from the close proximity to this department because many of the organisations in South Africa who are lobbying for change are doing so through the Department of Justice.

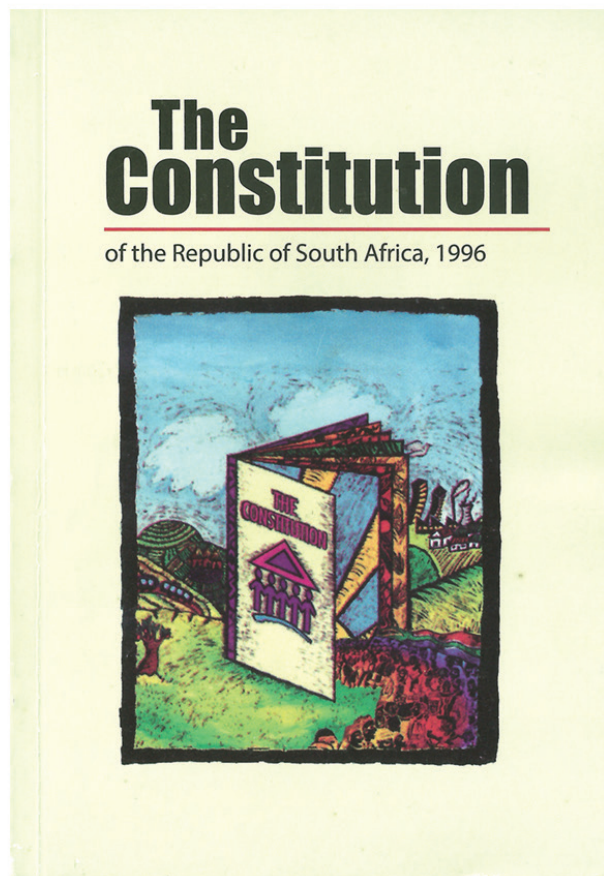


Figure 6.4 The South African Constitution. Free booklet available from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. (Source: Author, 2015)

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Organisations to be accommodated in the building:



- Rural Women's Movement

The Rural Women's Movement (RWM) is based in KwaZulu Natal and is an independent non-profit rural women's land and property rights organization. They seek to eliminate poverty through programs designed to provide training on women's land and property rights and enhance women's participation in local governance. They have rallied against parliamentary plans such as the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 which allows traditional leaders to revoke land rights of women in traditional communities (RWMSA, 2015).



- LAMOSA

The Land Access Movement of South Africa (LAMOSA) was formed to collectively fight discriminatory colonial and apartheid forced removals, racial and gender discrimination, and to play an active role in contributing towards the redress, dismantling and eradicating apartheid poverty and its manifestations. LAMOSA was established in 1991 to mobilize disposed communities to collectively fight discriminatory colonial and apartheid land laws, racial and gender discrimination and poverty (LAMOSA, 2015).

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WOMEN'S LEGAL CENTRE

- Women's Legal Centre

The Women's Legal Centre (WLC) litigates cases which advance women's rights and are in the public interest, particularly constitutional cases. They also produce briefs to assist courts in constitutional cases which concern women's rights and gender equality. In addition, where resources permit, the WLC aims to provide women's organisations with technical legal assistance in making submissions to parliament and other institutions (Women's Legal Centre, 2015).

18twenty8

- 18twenty8

18twenty8 is a women-led No-Profit Organisation that empowers young women between the ages of 18 and 28 by developing strategies for their educational and personal development. Their activities include:

- Facilitating life-skills workshops for girls in Grade 11 and Grade 12 at high schools in marginalised communities
- Providing mentors for young women at tertiary-level through their Big Sister Network
- Providing financial assistance for the higher educational needs of deserving young women (18twenty8, 2015).



- Forum for the Empowerment of Women

The Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) is a national non profit organisation based in Johannesburg dealing with issues of discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalization against people in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community. The focus is placed on social space and service provision, including counselling, information, education and communication on key issues, health and related realities of life in the LGBT community (FEW, 2015).

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Figure 6.5 An architectural programme that addresses the everyday experiences of women.
(Source: <http://www.msafropolitan.com/>)

Pretoria as the location for a National Women's Forum

The question of whether Pretoria is appropriate as the location for a Women's Forum was raised during the proposal crit.

There is significance in locating a hub for organisations in Pretoria, South Africa's administrative and executive capital. It is here where bills are initially drafted and after being passed by parliament in Cape Town, they are finally signed through by the president. Many of the organisations have offices in Cape Town where they are able to access parliament. Pretoria would provide an alternative approach to constitutional issues as it is close to the seat of the president, providing the opportunity for direct interaction should they not have success with parliament. A significant proportion of poor households in South Africa, many headed by women, are located in Mpumalanga, Limpopo and the North West Province (Government Report, March 2014). These women would greatly benefit from the public services offered in the building. While Johannesburg is currently the location for more women's organisations than Pretoria, Pretoria's northern location gives it better placement in relation to these three northern provinces of South Africa.

In response to the notion of 'othering'

During the first design crit, it was questioned whether the creation of a facility that caters for a marginalised group of people is only furthering their difference or 'Otherness'. It could be argued that by creating a space that addresses highly specific concerns, the separation between the mainstream and its 'Other' is reinforced. This presents two arguments common to feminist theory: One perspective proposes that the very act of discussing women as the 'other' reinforces the notion of difference that women have been fighting against, while another group is of the belief that the difference between male and female is fundamental and cannot be equalised to one generic playing field. To this notion, van der Westhuizen (2015) remarked: 'Women are a subjugated group in South Africa and are still presented with many inequalities in comparison to men. Due to this, it is entirely justified to create a space that is aimed at furthering their specific issues. Power concedes nothing without demand. No one will give it to them.' (van der Westhuizen, 2015) .