

CROSSROADS

Mr. Patrick Makhura
Cape Town City Council



PART 6 OF
A SERIES

CROSSROADS

The Women's Power Group



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FOUNDED IN 1997 THE WOMEN'S POWER GROUP WAS INITIATED BY WOMEN IN CROSSROADS WHEN NEW SERVICE FEES WERE ANNOUNCED AND WHEN THE SHOW HOUSES OF THE FIRST POST-1994 UNITS WERE COMPLETE.

ON DISPLAY WERE TINY ONE-ROOM HOUSES THAT FELL SHORT OF THE KINDS OF SPACES WOMEN NEEDED TO CREATE HOMES.

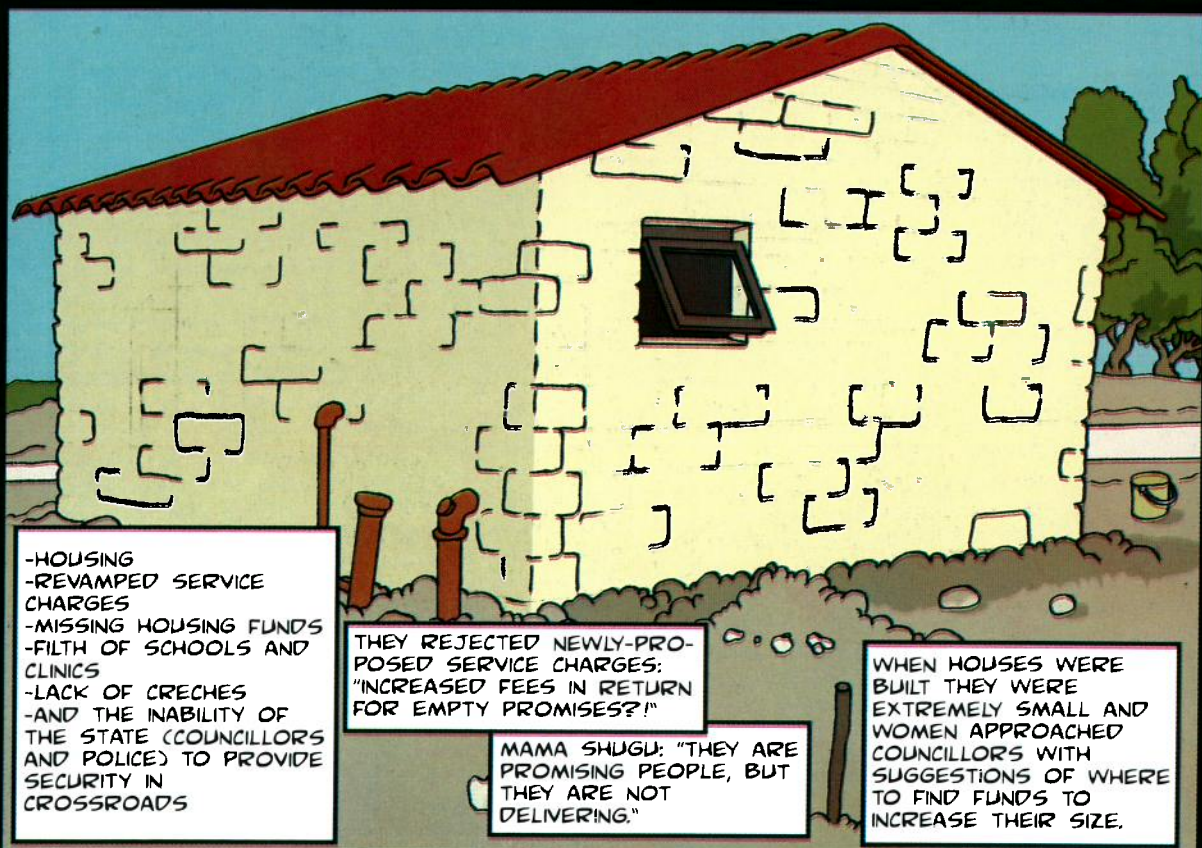
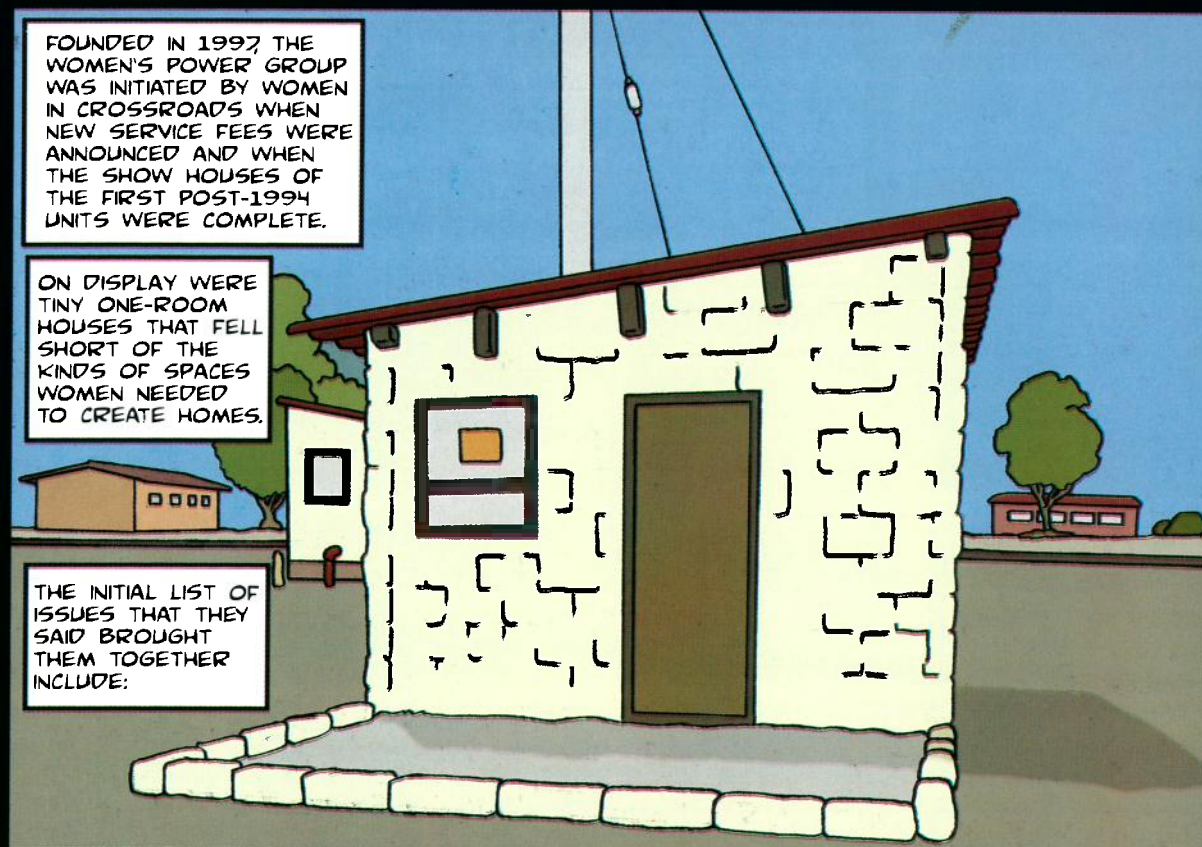
THE INITIAL LIST OF ISSUES THAT THEY SAID BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER INCLUDE:

- HOUSING
- REVAMPED SERVICE CHARGES
- MISSING HOUSING FUNDS
- FILTH OF SCHOOLS AND CLINICS
- LACK OF CRECHES
- AND THE INABILITY OF THE STATE (COUNCILLORS AND POLICE) TO PROVIDE SECURITY IN CROSSROADS

THEY REJECTED NEWLY-PROPOSED SERVICE CHARGES: "INCREASED FEES IN RETURN FOR EMPTY PROMISES?!"

MAMA SHUGU: "THEY ARE PROMISING PEOPLE, BUT THEY ARE NOT DELIVERING."

WHEN HOUSES WERE BUILT THEY WERE EXTREMELY SMALL AND WOMEN APPROACHED COUNCILLORS WITH SUGGESTIONS OF WHERE TO FIND FUNDS TO INCREASE THEIR SIZE.



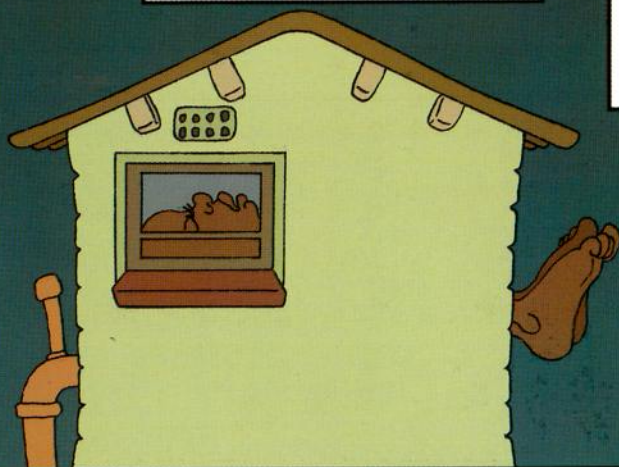
NEW CROSSROADS AND UNATHI HOUSES, BUILT IN 1980/1 AND 1987, WERE AT LEAST 45 SQ. METERS, THE NEW SHOW HOUSES WERE 35 SQ. METERS.

THE SIZE OF HOUSING WAS OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE TO WOMEN, WHO REFERRED TO THE PROPOSED HOUSES AS 'VEZA', WHICH MEANS 'SHOW' IN XHOSA; AS IN VEZA INYAWO, 'SHOWING YOUR FEET'. THE HOUSES WERE SO SMALL THAT WHEN YOU LIE DOWN TO SLEEP YOUR FEET STICK OUT.

NOT ONLY WERE THESE HOUSES TINY BUT THEY WERE OF INFERIOR WORKMANSHIP.

WOMEN HAD BEEN STRUGGLING FOR URBAN SECURITY FOR DECADES AND THE SUBSIDY HOUSES WOULD BE THEIR FIRST AND ONLY HOPE OF DECENT SHELTER.

THE LOCAL RDP FORUM WAS ELECTED IN 1996. IT CLAIMED THAT THEY DEDUCTED SITE AND SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENSES FROM THE SUBSIDY WHICH CAME TO R17000-AND THIS LEFT ONLY R8500 TO SPEND ON THE ACTUAL BUILDING OF EACH HOUSE.



HOWEVER SOME WOMEN HAD BEEN KEEPING TRACK OF HOUSING MONEY USED IN PREVIOUS DEVELOPMENT PHASES OF CROSSROADS AND CAME FORWARD TO SUGGEST THAT THE RDP SUBSIDY BE INCREASED BY USING DEVELOPMENT MONEY LEFTOVER FROM PREVIOUS BUILDING IN UNATHI, OR FROM MONEY DONATED TO CROSSROADS OVER THE YEARS.



THERE WERE MANY SERIOUS QUESTIONS RAISED BY MANY PEOPLE IN CROSSROADS ABOUT THE DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS OF THE RDP FORUM.

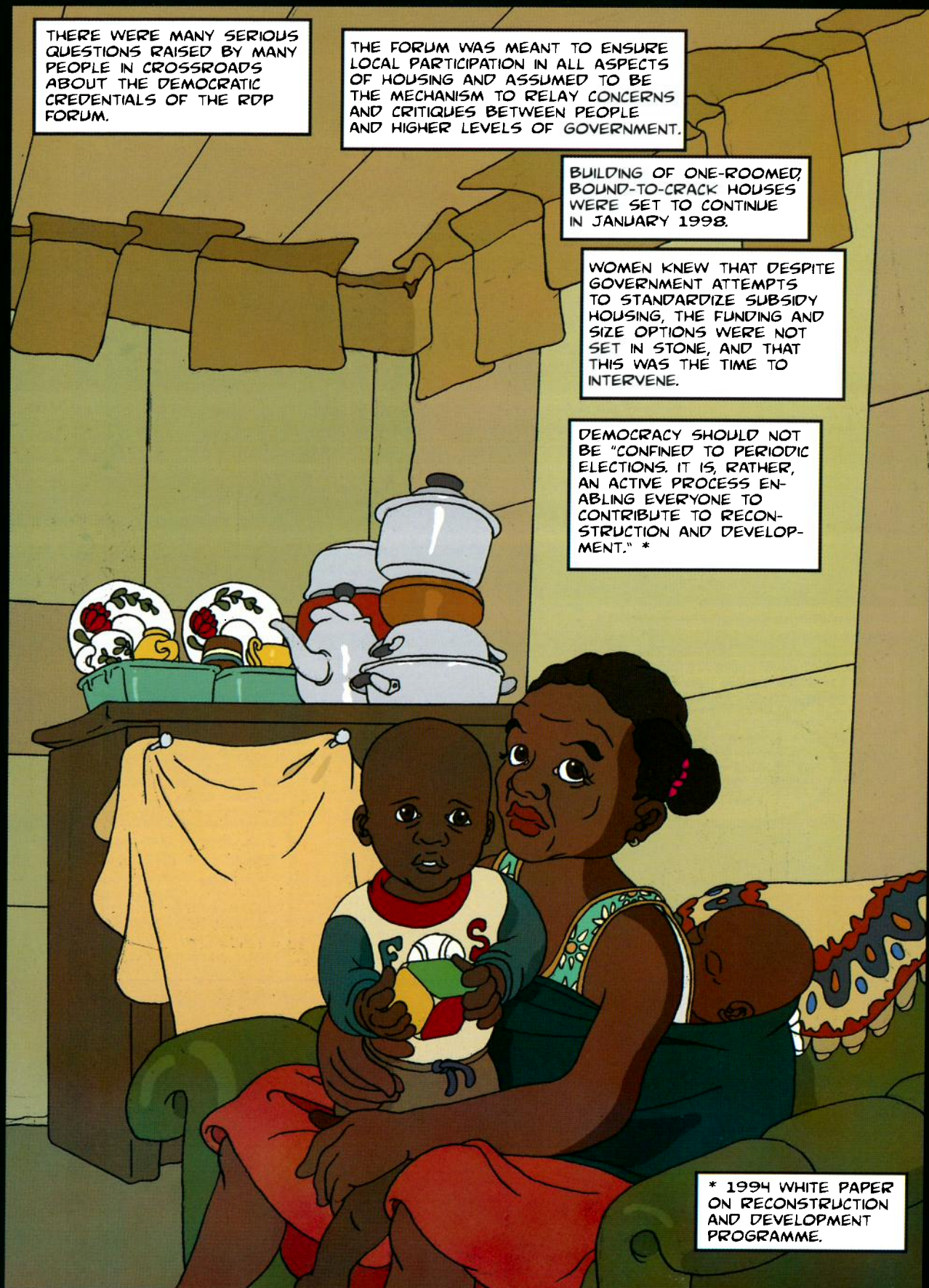
THE FORUM WAS MEANT TO ENSURE LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN ALL ASPECTS OF HOUSING AND ASSUMED TO BE THE MECHANISM TO RELAY CONCERNS AND CRITIQUES BETWEEN PEOPLE AND HIGHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT.

BUILDING OF ONE-ROOMED, BOUND-TO-CRACK HOUSES WERE SET TO CONTINUE IN JANUARY 1998.

WOMEN KNEW THAT DESPITE GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO STANDARDIZE SUBSIDY HOUSING, THE FUNDING AND SIZE OPTIONS WERE NOT SET IN STONE, AND THAT THIS WAS THE TIME TO INTERVENE.

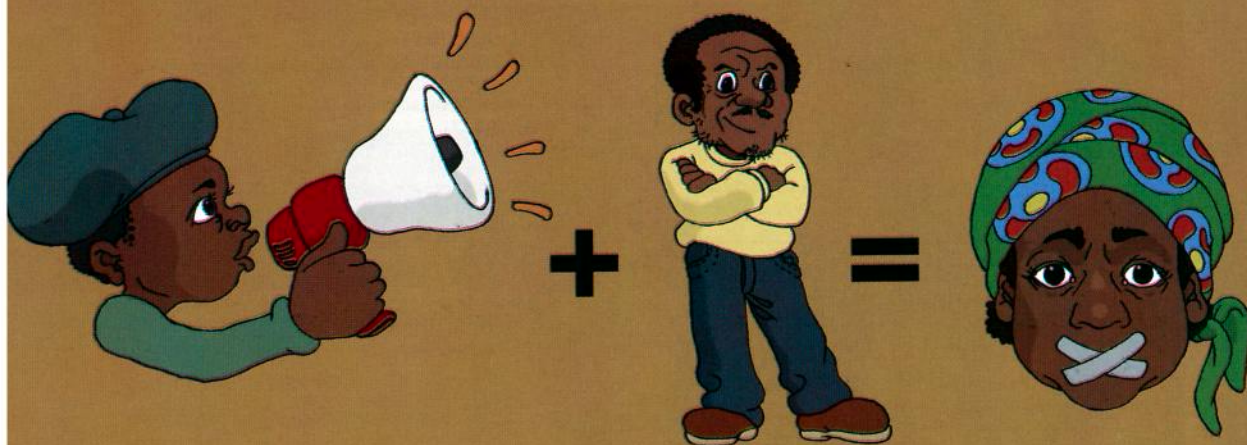
DEMOCRACY SHOULD NOT BE "CONFINED TO PERIODIC ELECTIONS. IT IS, RATHER, AN ACTIVE PROCESS ENABLING EVERYONE TO CONTRIBUTE TO RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT." *

* 1994 WHITE PAPER ON RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.



WOMEN IN CROSSROADS WERE KEENLY AWARE OF THE DANGERS INVOLVED IN INTERFERING IN HOUSING POLITICS. THEY HAD LIVED THROUGH DECADES OF HOUSING ALLOCATION VIOLENCE AND FULLY GRASPED THE POTENTIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF 'DOING THE MATH'.

THEY ORGANIZED STRATEGICALLY, ALONG GENDER LINES, FORMING A WOMEN-ONLY PROTEST GROUP, BYPASSING THE PARTY POLITICS THAT HAD COME TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN CROSSROADS.



MAMA NGOZI, DESCRIBING HOW "WOMEN'S POWER" LAY IN THEIR GENDERED AND GENERATIONAL POSITIONS AS FOILS TO MALE AGGRESSION AND YOUTH IMPATIENCE:

UNLIKE MEN, WOMEN ARE SLOW TO ANGER AND THEY DON'T RUSH INTO FIGHTS.

THE WOMEN'S POWER GROUP (WPG) ORGANIZED WITHOUT MEN BECAUSE IN THEIR VIEW MEN WERE QUICK TO PULL THE TRIGGER WHEN THEY FELT THEIR POSITIONS THREATENED BY OTHER MEN.

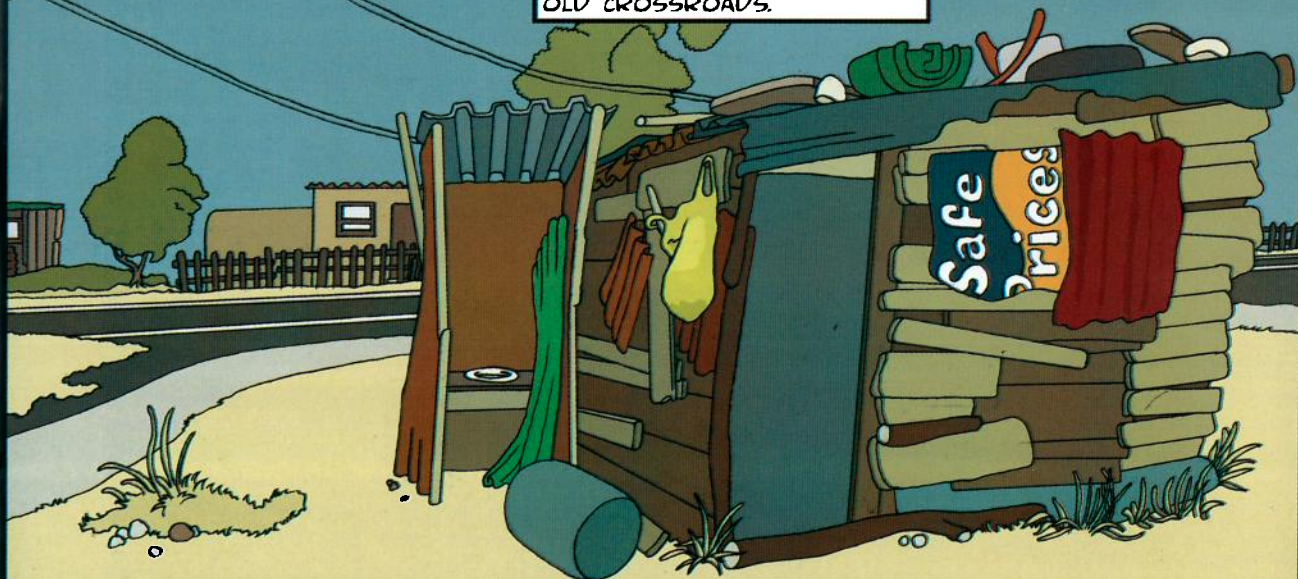
THIS STRATEGY WAS NOT BASED ON OVERSIMPLIFIED POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MEN-ARE-VIOLENT AND WOMEN-ARE-PEACEFUL VARIETY, BUT RATHER WAS ROOTED IN THEIR FRAMING OF WOMEN'S PARTICULAR CONCERNS.

THEY WERE SPEAKING TO THE ENDURING NEGLECT OF THE STATE AND TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE THAT SURROUNDED HOUSING POLITICS IN THE RECENT PAST.

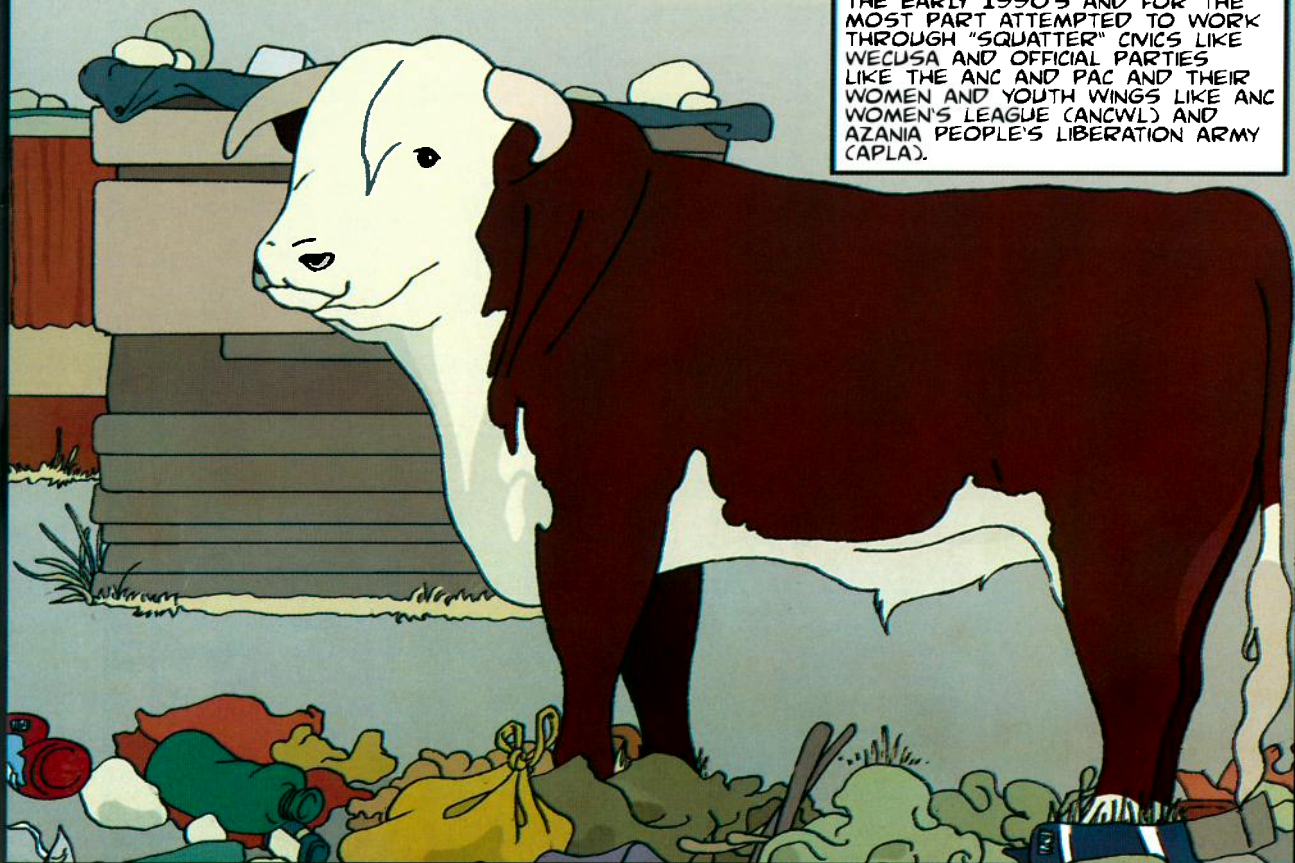


WHILE SOME WOMEN WHO JOINED THE WPG HAD BEEN POLITICALLY ACTIVE IN THE 1970'S, FOR THE MOST PART THESE WERE NOT IMPUDUSO WOMEN. THEY WERE WOMEN WHO HAD BEEN EXCLUDED FROM THE NEW CROSSROADS OPTION IN THE 1980'S.

THEY HAD LIVED THROUGH NGXOBONGWANA, LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT AND THE POST-WITDOEKE CIVIL WAR OF OLD CROSSROADS.



THEY WERE WOMEN WHO MOSTLY BECAME POLITICALLY ACTIVE DURING THE EARLY 1990'S AND FOR THE MOST PART ATTEMPTED TO WORK THROUGH "SQUATTER" CIVICS LIKE WECUSA AND OFFICIAL PARTIES LIKE THE ANC AND PAC AND THEIR WOMEN AND YOUTH WINGS LIKE ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE (ANCWL) AND AZANIA PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY (APLA).



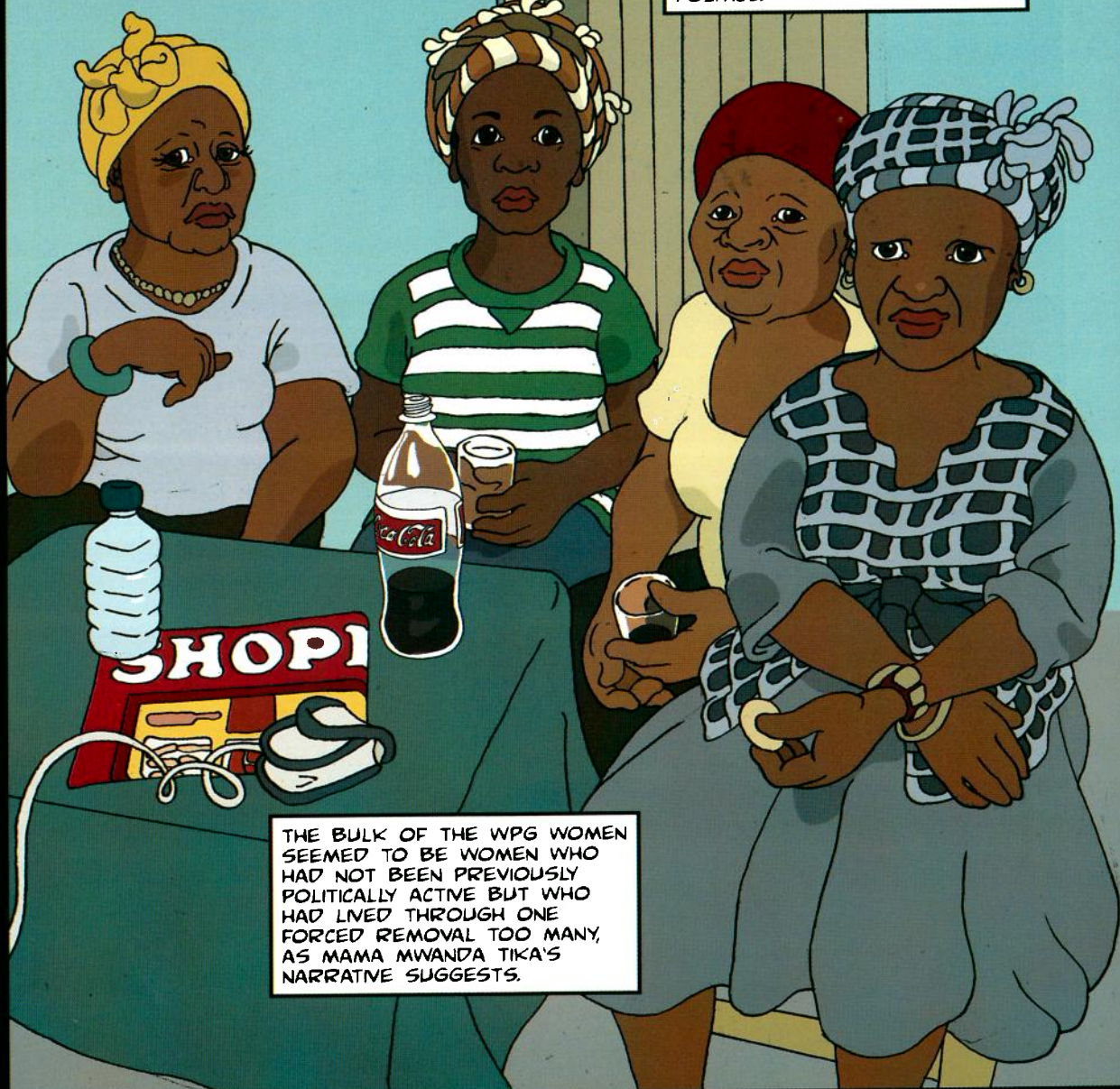
THERE WERE THREE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE WOMEN'S POWER GROUP:



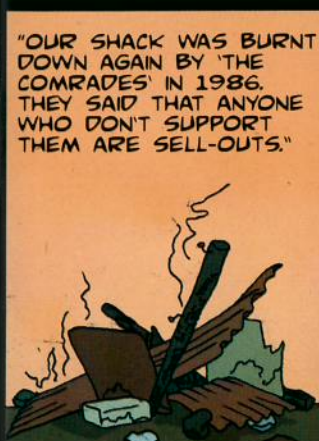
FIRST, MEMBERSHIP OF WPG CAME FROM ALL SECTIONS OF CROSSROADS, WHICH DEFIED BOTH A HISTORY OF TERRITORIAL CONFLICT, AS WELL AS DECADES OF OPEN WARFARE BETWEEN THOSE STILL IN SHACKS AND THOSE WHO HAD RECEIVED HOUSES. PARTICIPANTS CAME FROM SECTION 2, AND 4, PHASE 1 AND 2, GQOBHASI, BOYS TOWN AND LOWER CROSSROADS.

THE SECOND DEFINING FEATURE OF THE WPG WAS THAT ITS MEMBERSHIP CROSSED THE CONTENTIOUS BOUNDARIES OF POLITICAL PARTIES, DRAWING MEMBERS FROM RIVALS PAC AND ANC, AND OTHER PARTIES.

THIRD, THE WOMEN COMPRISING MUCH OF THE MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP OF WPG ALSO SHARED LONG-TERM RESIDENCE IN CROSSROADS AND WERE IMPACTED BY TWO DECADES OF CROSSROADS HISTORY AND POLITICS.



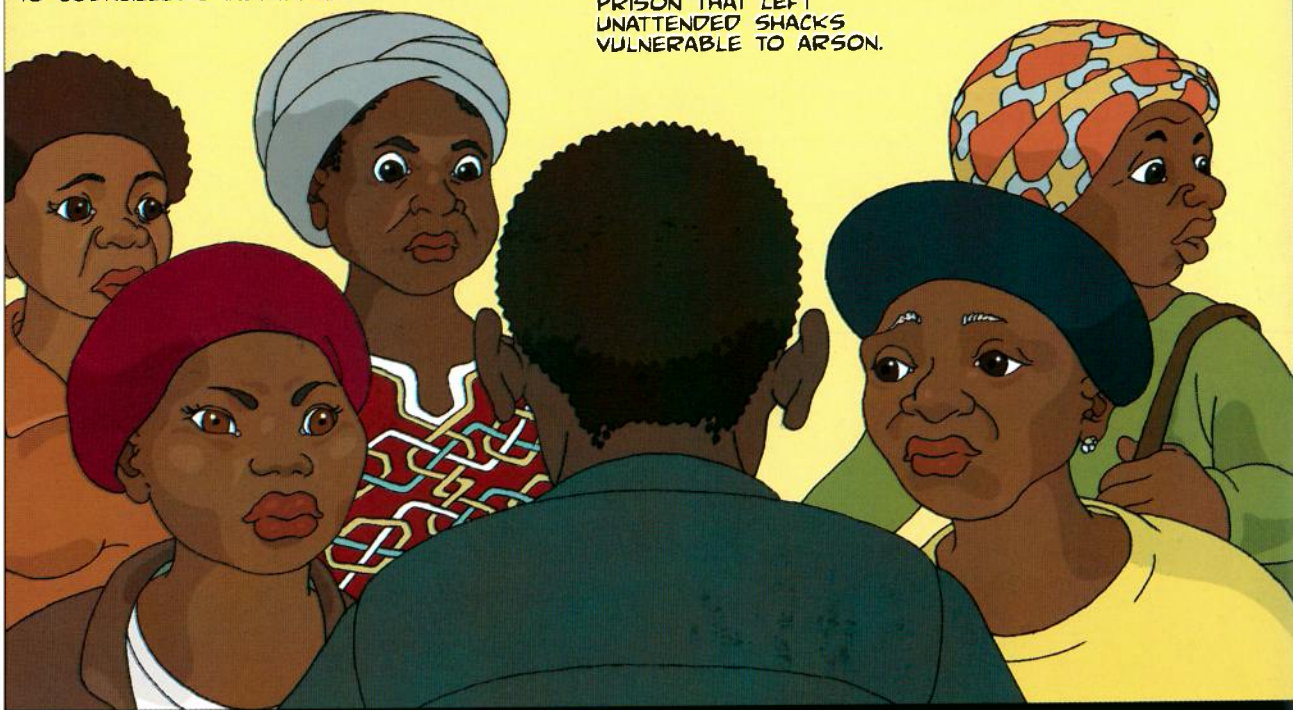
THE BULK OF THE WPG WOMEN SEEMED TO BE WOMEN WHO HAD NOT BEEN PREVIOUSLY POLITICALLY ACTIVE BUT WHO HAD LIVED THROUGH ONE FORCED REMOVAL TOO MANY, AS MAMA MWANDA TIKA'S NARRATIVE SUGGESTS.



THE FIRST ACTION OF THE WPG WAS TO ADDRESS THE COUNCIL MEMBERS DEEMED RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR CONCERNS BY NOMINATING REPRESENTATIVES TO SPEAK TO COUNCILLORS INDIVIDUALLY.

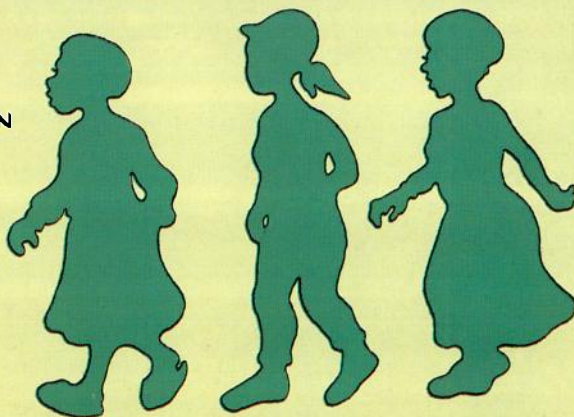
MASS ACTION, ACCORDING TO MAMA SHUGU, WAS INITIALLY AVOIDED BECAUSE IT WAS ASSOCIATED WITH PRISON THAT LEFT UNATTENDED SHACKS VULNERABLE TO ARSON.

THUS THEY APPROACHED COUNCILLOR GWAYI, AS THE PRESS REPORTED.



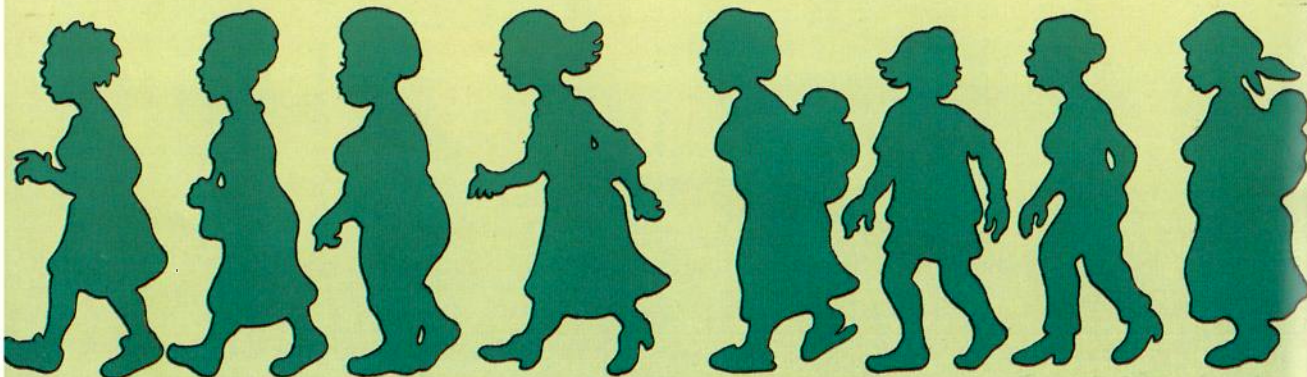
CAPE ARGUS, AUGUST 3, 1998:

"MR. GWAYI SAID THAT WHEN THE WOMEN'S GROUP WAS FORMED THEY DEMANDED TO KNOW FROM HIM WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO R35 MILLION SET ASIDE BY THE FORMER IKAPA TOWN COUNCIL FOR THE UPGRADE OF THE AREA. THE WOMEN ALSO DEMANDED THAT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSES BE STOPPED BECAUSE THEY WERE TOO SMALL."



WHEN NOT IGNORED WPG MEMBERS WERE PASSED FROM ONE DEPARTMENT AND LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT TO ANOTHER; NEITHER COUNCILLOR'S GWAYI NOR NCATE FOLLOWED THROUGH ON THEIR ASSURANCES THAT THEY WOULD TAKE THE WOMEN'S ISSUES FORWARD AND REPORT BACK RESPONSES. THE THIRD CROSSROADS COUNCILLOR, ELESÉ DEPOUTCH, HAD REFUSED TO MEET AT ALL.

AS THE WOMEN ATTEMPTED TO MEET WITH COUNCILLORS, THE GROUP GREW.



AT THE END OF NOVEMBER 1997 THE WOMEN'S POWER GROUP APPROACHED A LONG-STANDING NGO WORKER IN THE AREA WHO ARRANGED A SET OF MEETINGS FOR JANUARY 1998.

TWICE THESE MEETINGS WERE SUSPENDED WHEN COUNCILLORS REFUSED TO ATTEND AND HAD THE COMMUNITY HALL LOCKED.

FRUSTRATED, THE WPG DECIDED TO GO AND SIT AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES UNTIL THEY RECEIVED SOME SATISFACTORY RESPONSE.

THUS BEGAN THE WPG SIT-IN ON JANUARY 21ST, 1998.

A CONSISTENT CORE OF ABOUT 10 WOMEN COORDINATED THE SIT-IN WITH A ROTATING SCHEDULE, SO THAT AT ANY ONE TIME THERE WOULD BE UP TO 50 WOMEN SITTING AT THE ADMINISTRATION OFFICE.

THE SIT-IN CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF THE ANC WHO IMMEDIATELY HELD AN EXECUTIVE MEETING TO QUESTION COUNCILLOR ELEASE DEPOUTCH ABOUT WPG ALLEGATIONS. THE ANC EXECUTIVE DECIDED THAT 'THE WOMEN WHO WERE MEMBERS OF THE ANC SHOULD EXCUSE THEMSELVES FROM THE WPG.'



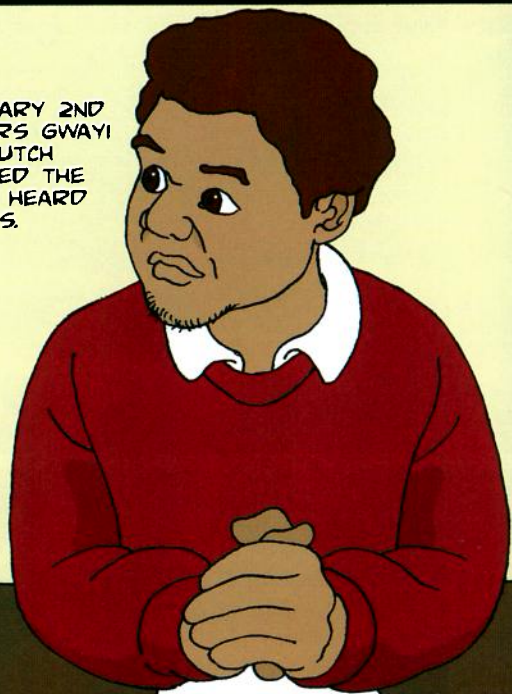
ON JANUARY 25TH ELESE DEPOUTCH MET WITH THE WOMEN WHERE HE DECLARED ALL ALLEGATIONS AGAINST HIM INVALID.

THREE DAYS LATER THE ANC CHAIR OF THE WESTERN CAPE AND THE ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE REPRESENTATIVE WENT TO "TALK TO THE WOMEN." THE ANC THEN WENT AND OFFICIALLY TOLD THE ANC WOMEN TO STEP DOWN.



IT TOOK THE CITY COUNCIL SOME TWO WEEKS TO REALIZE THAT THE WOMEN WERE SERIOUS ABOUT GETTING ANSWERS.

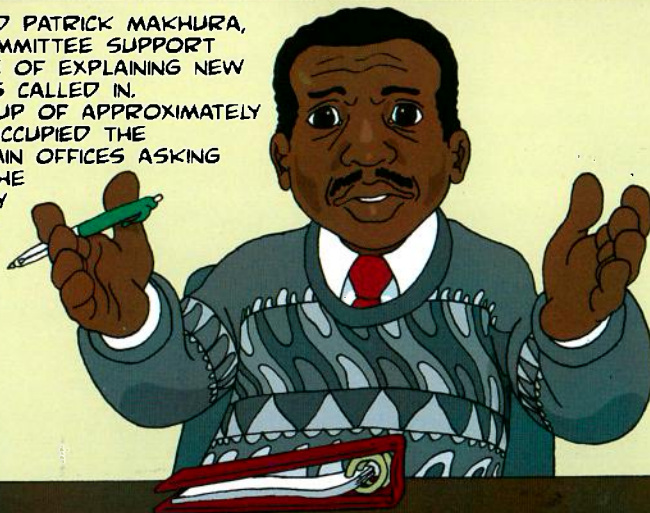
ON FEBRUARY 2ND COUNCILLORS GWAYI AND DEPOUTCH APPROACHED THE SIT-IN AND HEARD COMPLAINTS.

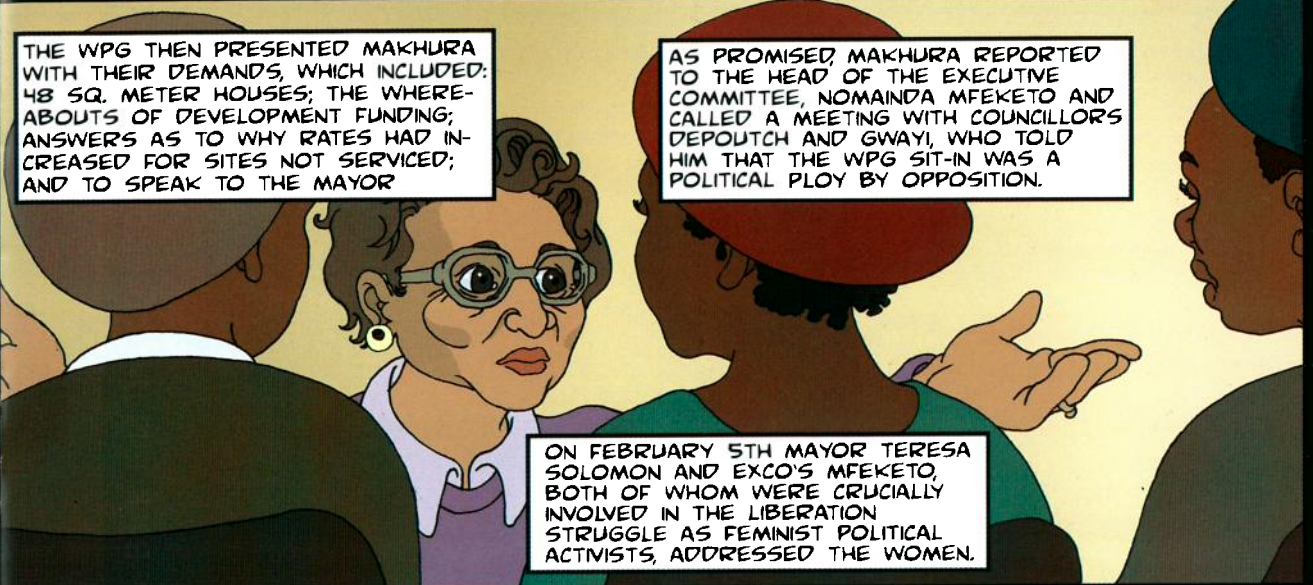


ON FEBRUARY 3RD PATRICK MAKHURA, THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER IN CHARGE OF EXPLAINING NEW SERVICE FEES, WAS CALLED IN. MAKHURA: "A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 20 WOMEN HAD OCCUPIED THE CROSSROADS ADMIN OFFICES ASKING FOR CLARITY ON THE INTERIM COMMUNITY SERVICE CHARGES."

AFTER HIS 20-MINUTE PRESENTATION HE RECALLED THAT MRS. MBEKA THANKED HIM AND SAID THAT THE WOMEN WERE CLEARER ON THE POSITION BUT THEY HAD ALSO COME TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FUNDING DONATED TO THE CROSSROADS COMMUNITY.

REPORTS BY MRS. MBEKA SHOWED NO CONFUSION OVER SERVICE FEE INCREASES, BUT RATHER AN OUTRIGHT REJECTION OF MAKHURA'S RESPONSE.

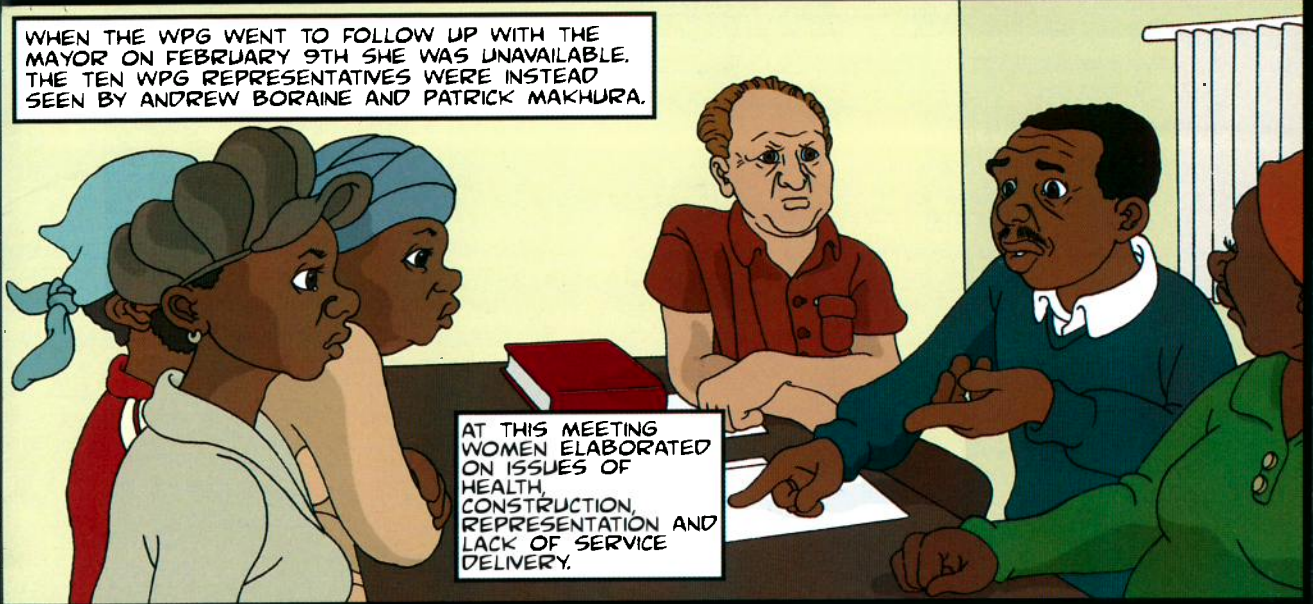




THE WPG THEN PRESENTED MAKHURA WITH THEIR DEMANDS, WHICH INCLUDED: 48 SQ. METER HOUSES; THE WHEREABOUTS OF DEVELOPMENT FUNDING; ANSWERS AS TO WHY RATES HAD INCREASED FOR SITES NOT SERVICED; AND TO SPEAK TO THE MAYOR

AS PROMISED, MAKHURA REPORTED TO THE HEAD OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, NOMAINDA MFEKETO AND CALLED A MEETING WITH COUNCILLORS DEPOUTCH AND GWAYI, WHO TOLD HIM THAT THE WPG SIT-IN WAS A POLITICAL PLOY BY OPPOSITION.

ON FEBRUARY 5TH MAYOR TERESA SOLOMON AND EXCO'S MFEKETO, BOTH OF WHOM WERE CRUCIALLY INVOLVED IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE AS FEMINIST POLITICAL ACTIVISTS, ADDRESSED THE WOMEN.



WHEN THE WPG WENT TO FOLLOW UP WITH THE MAYOR ON FEBRUARY 9TH SHE WAS UNAVAILABLE. THE TEN WPG REPRESENTATIVES WERE INSTEAD SEEN BY ANDREW BORAINÉ AND PATRICK MAKHURA.

AT THIS MEETING WOMEN ELABORATED ON ISSUES OF HEALTH, CONSTRUCTION, REPRESENTATION AND LACK OF SERVICE DELIVERY.

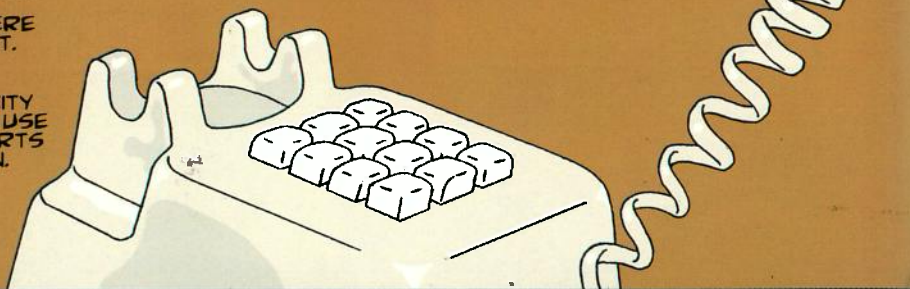


BY FEBRUARY 9TH THE CITY HAD CATEGORIZED THE WOMEN'S CONCERNS INTO "POLITICAL ISSUES" (WHICH WERE SAID TO BE BEYOND THE COUNCIL'S JURISDICTION), AS WELL AS FINANCE, COMMUNITY AND ENGINEERING SERVICES- "EACH AND EVERY ONE OF WHICH," COUNCIL ARGUED, "HAD BEEN RESOLVED."

COUNCIL THUS REQUESTED THAT THE WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIVES REPORT BACK TO THE REST OF THE GROUP AND VACATE THE CITY COUNCIL OFFICES.

ON FEBRUARY 12TH MRS CHUKU, OF THE WPG, PHONED MAKHURA TO SAY THAT THE WOMEN WOULD NOT MOVE UNTIL THEIR "POLITICAL DEMANDS" AS THEY WERE NOW CALLED, WERE MET.

CONSEQUENTLY THE CITY COUNCIL DECIDED TO USE THE POLICE AND COURTS TO EVICT THE WOMEN.



INDIVIDUAL ARRESTS AND CHARGES FOR TRESPASSING BEGAN ON FRIDAY 12TH. WOMEN WERE "PEACEFULLY EVICTED" BY POLICE- THE WPG STRATEGY AT THIS POINT WAS TO COOPERATE WITH POLICE AND REPLACE ARRESTED MEMBERS.

THE RESULTS OF THE ARRESTS WERE THREEFOLD:

-FIRST, THEY BROUGHT MEDIA ATTENTION WHICH IN TURN CAST A SPOTLIGHT ON THE ISSUES OF THE WPG.

-SECOND, THEY INCREASED WOMEN'S DEMANDS AND METHODS OF PROTEST. INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR THE COUNCILLORS' RESPONSE, THEY WERE NOW WAITING FOR THEIR DEMANDS TO BE MET.



AT THIS POINT SOME WOMEN, LIKE MAMA ELSIE MKHUMBUZI, FELT THE WPG HAD LOST ITS FOCUS AND WHILE THEY HAD STARTED OUT FIGHTING AGAINST "MATCHBOX-SIZED" HOUSES, BUT NOW THEY WERE "JUST OPPOSING EVERYTHING THE GOVERNMENT IS PUTTING ON THE TABLE."

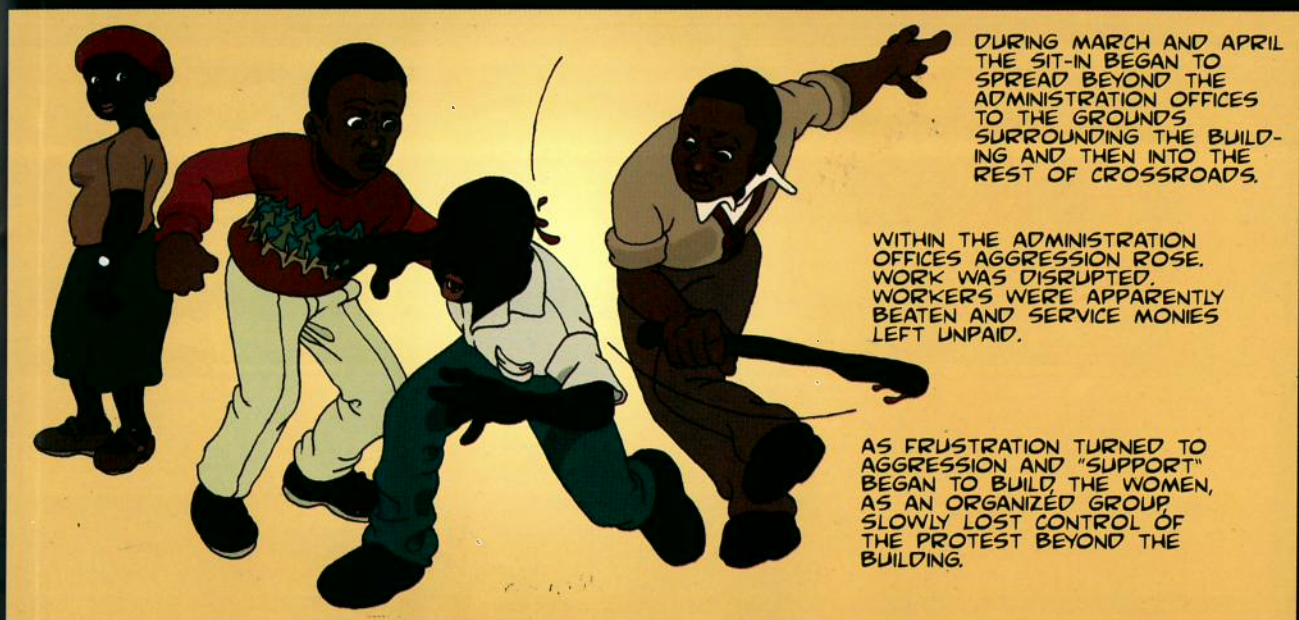
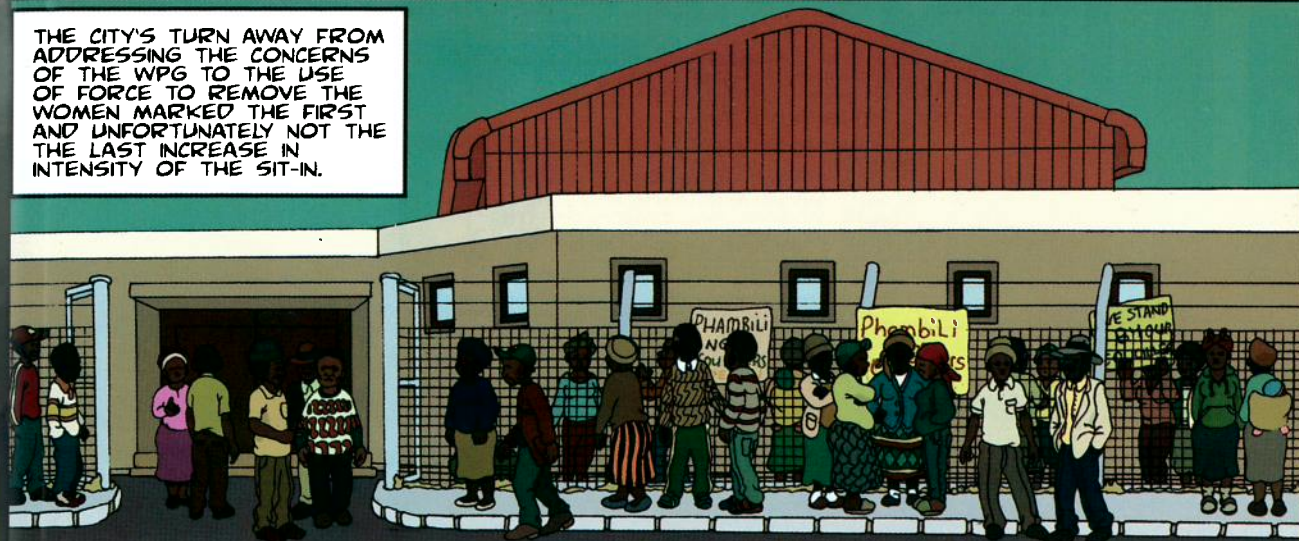
WHILE THE WPG LOST SOME MEMBERS AS ITS STANCE HARDENED, IT CERTAINLY GAINED OTHERS, WITH OVER 300 WOMEN OCCUPYING THE ADMINISTRATION OFFICES AT ITS PEAK.

SO THE THIRD SHIFT MARKED BY THE ARRESTS WAS THE WIDESPREAD AND DIVERSELY MOTIVATED "SUPPORT", WHICH INCREASED TENSIONS IN CROSS-ROADS AS IT BROUGHT IN THE TYPE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE THAT THE WPG HAD SET OUT TO AVOID.

MAMA ELSIE
MKHUMBUZI



THE CITY'S TURN AWAY FROM ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS OF THE WPG TO THE USE OF FORCE TO REMOVE THE WOMEN MARKED THE FIRST AND UNFORTUNATELY NOT THE LAST INCREASE IN INTENSITY OF THE SIT-IN.



DURING MARCH AND APRIL THE SIT-IN BEGAN TO SPREAD BEYOND THE ADMINISTRATION OFFICES TO THE GROUNDS SURROUNDING THE BUILDING AND THEN INTO THE REST OF CROSSROADS.

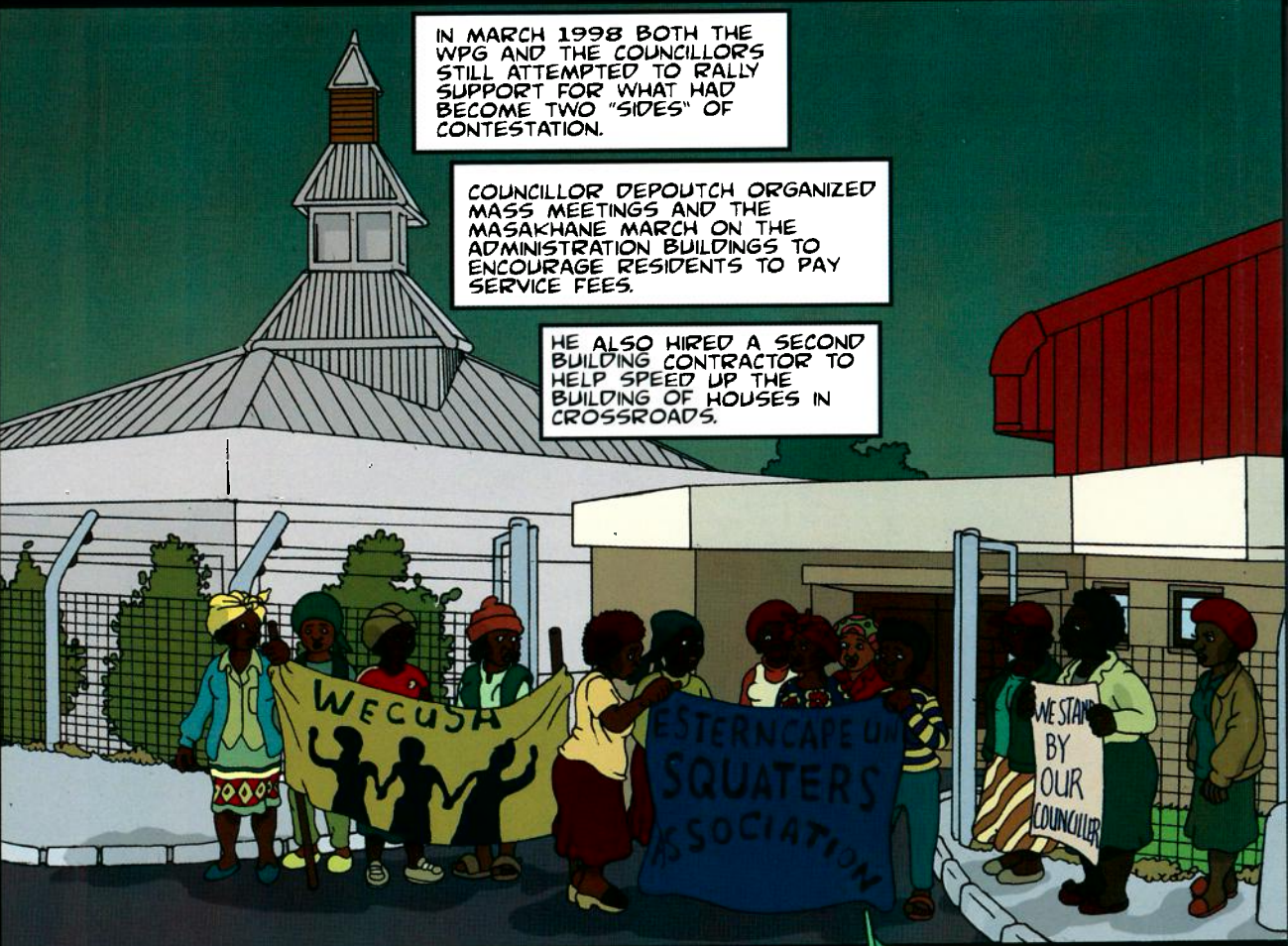
WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION OFFICES AGGRESSION ROSE. WORK WAS DISRUPTED. WORKERS WERE APPARENTLY BEATEN AND SERVICE MONIES LEFT UNPAID.

AS FRUSTRATION TURNED TO AGGRESSION AND "SUPPORT" BEGAN TO BUILD THE WOMEN, AS AN ORGANIZED GROUP SLOWLY LOST CONTROL OF THE PROTEST BEYOND THE BUILDING.

THE SIT-IN, HOWEVER, REMAINED A WOMEN'S INITIATIVE AND SPACE.



WHILE MEN HELPED THEM TO GET BACK INTO THE BUILDING AND WERE OUTSIDE "PROTECTING" THE WOMEN, THEY DID NOT JOIN THE OCCUPATION.

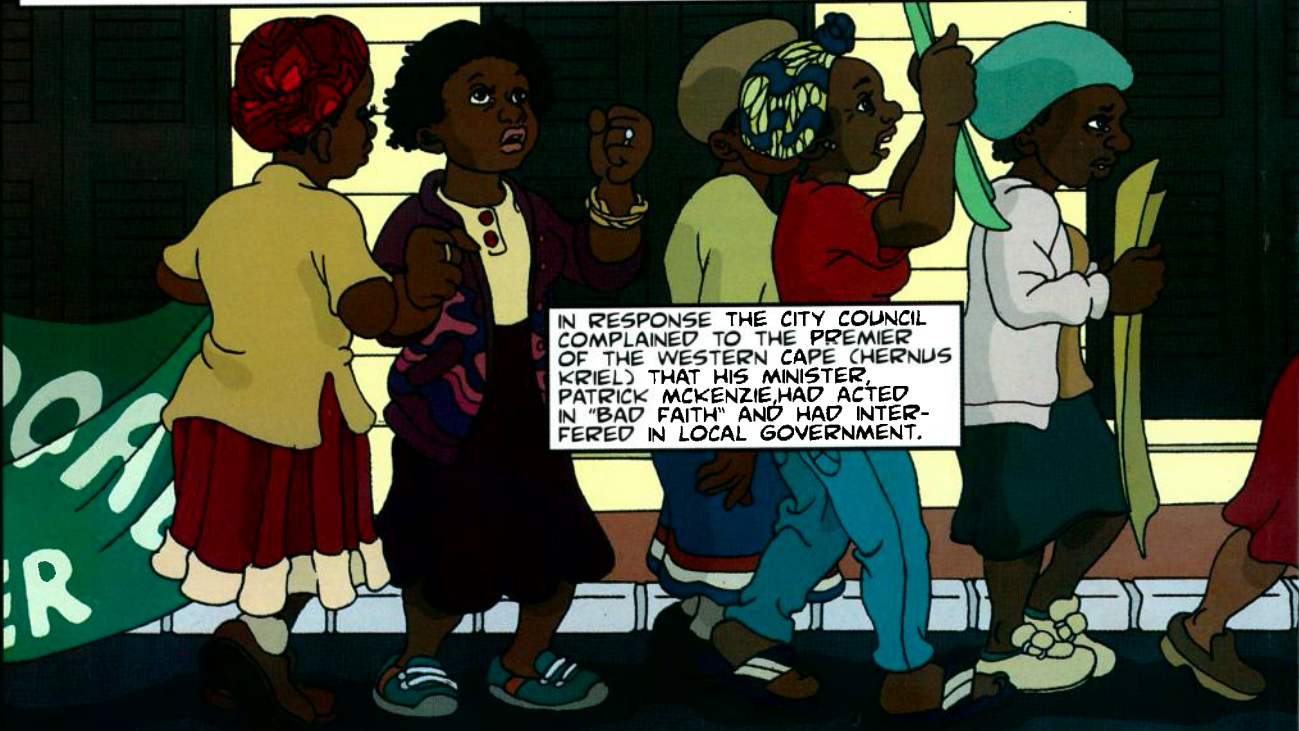


IN MARCH 1998 BOTH THE WPG AND THE COUNCILLORS STILL ATTEMPTED TO RALLY SUPPORT FOR WHAT HAD BECOME TWO "SIDES" OF CONTESTATION.

COUNCILLOR DEPOUTCH ORGANIZED MASS MEETINGS AND THE MASAKHANE MARCH ON THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDINGS TO ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO PAY SERVICE FEES.

HE ALSO HIRED A SECOND BUILDING CONTRACTOR TO HELP SPEED UP THE BUILDING OF HOUSES IN CROSSROADS.

THE WPG ALSO STAGED A MARCH TO PARLIAMENT TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS AND APPEALED TO THE PROVINCE, WHOSE MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, PATRICK MCKENZIE, WAS QUOTED IN THE NEWS-PAPER SAYING THAT HE WOULD "INSTRUCT THE IKAPA COUNCIL TO SUSPEND BUILDING HOUSES, WHICH RESIDENTS CLAIM ARE TOO SMALL, IN OLD CROSSROADS" AND HE SAID HE WOULD COMMUNICATE WITH THE POLICE TO STOP HARASSING THE WOMEN AND EVICTING THEM FROM THE COUNCIL PREMISES.



IN RESPONSE THE CITY COUNCIL COMPLAINED TO THE PREMIER OF THE WESTERN CAPE (CHERNUS KRIEL) THAT HIS MINISTER, PATRICK MCKENZIE, HAD ACTED IN "BAD FAITH" AND HAD INTERFERED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

ON APRIL 15TH THE S.A. POLICE RECEIVED INSTRUCTION FROM THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR THAT THE WPG WOMEN COULD BE ARRESTED AND PROSECUTED.

THE FOLLOWING DAY SIX WOMEN WERE DETAINED AND THE REST OF THE WOMEN WERE FORCED OUT OF THE COMPLEX, ONLY TO PUSH BACK THROUGH THE GATES AND "SIT" INSIDE THE GATES.



ARRESTS WERE PERCEIVED TO BE AD HOC, "WHOMEVER RAN FAST GOT AWAY."

THE MITCHELL'S PLAIN MAGISTRATE'S COURT ISSUED AN INTERDICT RESTRAINING THE WPG MEMBERS FROM INTERFERING WITH THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.



THE CROSSROADS COMMUNITY POLICE FORUM DESCRIBED THE INTENSIFICATION OF SHACK BURNINGS AND SHOOTINGS WHICH THEY SAID RESULTED FROM WPG MEMBERS BLOCKADING CONTRACTORS ON APRIL 16TH AND 17TH 1998.





MAMA BEME SAID THAT ON THE NIGHT WPG MEMBERS WERE RELEASED FROM PRISON, MAMA NOYETKE'S SHACK WAS BURNT DOWN AND GUNSHOTS WERE HEARD. WPG FELT THEY WERE "ASSAULTED FOR REPORTING MATTERS TO HOME AFFAIRS FOR INVESTIGATION."

THEY ARGUED THAT MEN'S SHACKS WERE SET ALIGHT "BECAUSE THEIR WIVES WERE IN THE WOMEN'S POWER."

WPG MEMBERS REMEMBER THIS AS A LAST PUSH TO RESIST THE ONE-ROOMED HOUSES WHICH THEY ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR OWN HOMES BEING BURNT, DEATHS OF IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBERS AND EVENTUALLY BEING ON THE RUN FOR THEIR LIVES.

BY APRIL, WHEN MURDERS BEGAN, THE FOCUS OF CONFLICT HAD SHIFTED TO THE SETTLING OF INDIVIDUAL OLD SCORES IN AN ARENA OF MALE-DOMINATED POLITICAL VIOLENCE. IN MAY THE PRESS REPORTED:

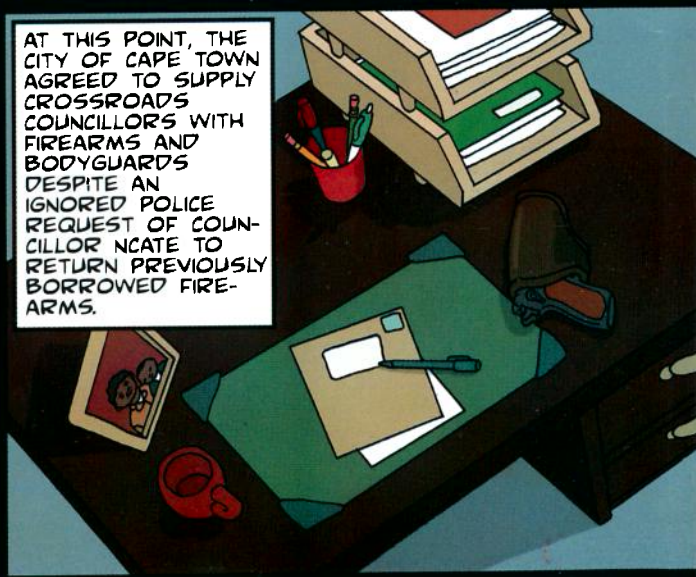


"LAST NIGHT TWO SHACKS WERE BURNT DOWN AND GUNFIRE WAS EXCHANGED BY FACTIONS EMBROILED IN THE CONFLICT INVOLVING THE CROSSROADS WOMEN'S POWER GROUP."

"A FORTNIGHT AGO THREE PEOPLE WERE SHOT AND INJURED AND 10 SHACKS BURNT. SOME WOMEN FROM THE GROUP HAVE LOST THEIR HOMES AND ALL THEIR BELONGINGS AND SOME HAVE BEEN WOUNDED IN THE ATTACKS, WHICH THEY BLAMED ON SUPPORTERS OF COUNCILLORS IN THE AREA."



AT THIS POINT, THE CITY OF CAPE TOWN AGREED TO SUPPLY CROSSROADS COUNCILLORS WITH FIREARMS AND BODYGUARDS DESPITE AN IGNORED POLICE REQUEST OF COUNCILLOR NCATE TO RETURN PREVIOUSLY BORROWED FIREARMS.



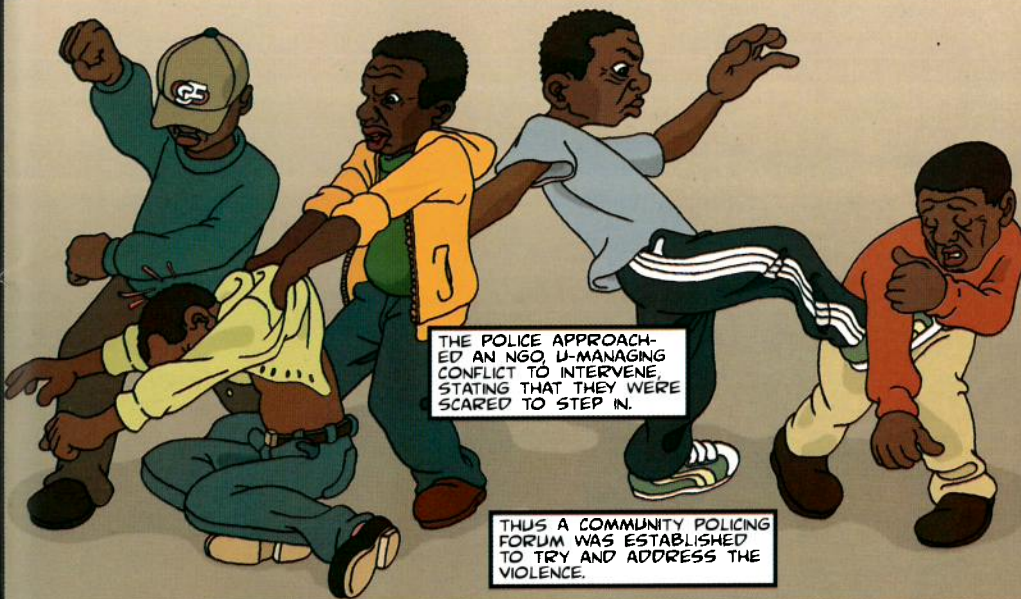
LATER THE CITY COUNCIL ALSO SUPPLIED THE CROSSROADS COUNCILLORS WITH BAIL MONEY WHEN CHARGED WITH MURDER, WHICH WAS ALSO A PRACTICE OFFICIALLY BEING CONDEMNED BY THE ANC AT THE TIME.

BY MAY, TEN PEOPLE HAD DIED AND AT LEAST FORTY FAMILIES (200-400 PEOPLE) HAD LOST THEIR HOMES.



THE POLICE APPROACHED AN NGO, U-MANAGING, TO INTERVENE, STATING THAT THEY WERE SCARED TO STEP IN.

THUS A COMMUNITY POLICING FORUM WAS ESTABLISHED TO TRY AND ADDRESS THE VIOLENCE.

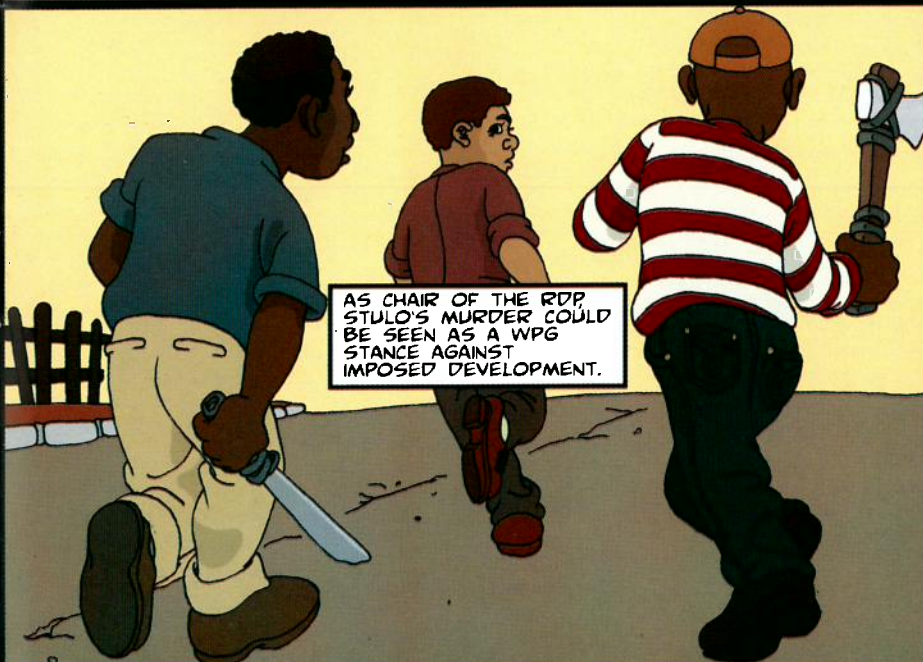


ON APRIL 17TH, MR. STULO AND MR. SIDINANA WERE ATTACKED. SIDINANA, ACCORDING TO THE PAC, HAD BEEN THREATENING THE HOUSES AND LIVES OF THE WPG.

A WEEK LATER STULO WAS MURDERED AND ATTEMPTS WERE MADE ON DEPOUTCH'S LIFE.

WPG MEMBERS WERE VAGUE ON THE MATTER:

AS CHAIR OF THE RDP STULO'S MURDER COULD BE SEEN AS A WPG STANCE AGAINST IMPOSED DEVELOPMENT.



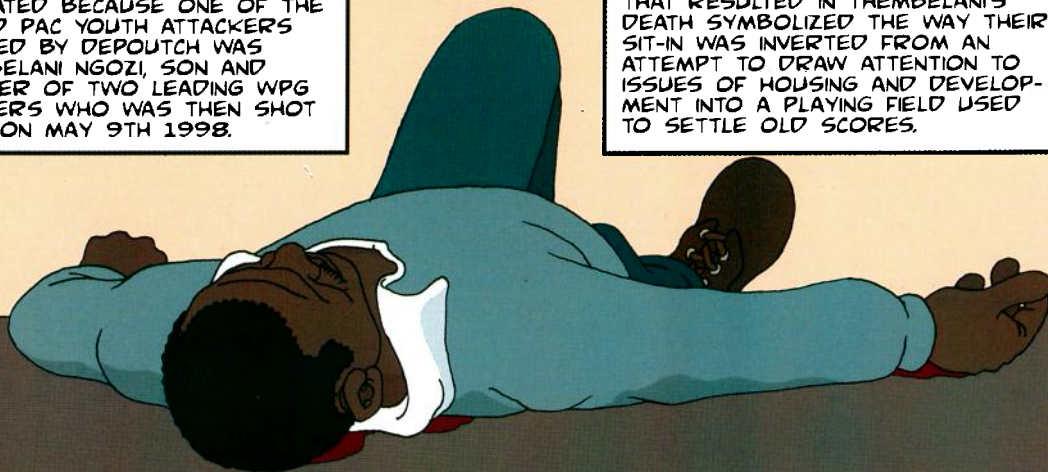
NO ONE KNOWS WHO KILLED HIM BECAUSE OUR CHILDREN AND BROTHERS HELPED US WHEN WE WERE ATTACKED.

DEPOUTCH DID NOT BLAME THE WPG FOR ATTACKS ON HIS LIFE.



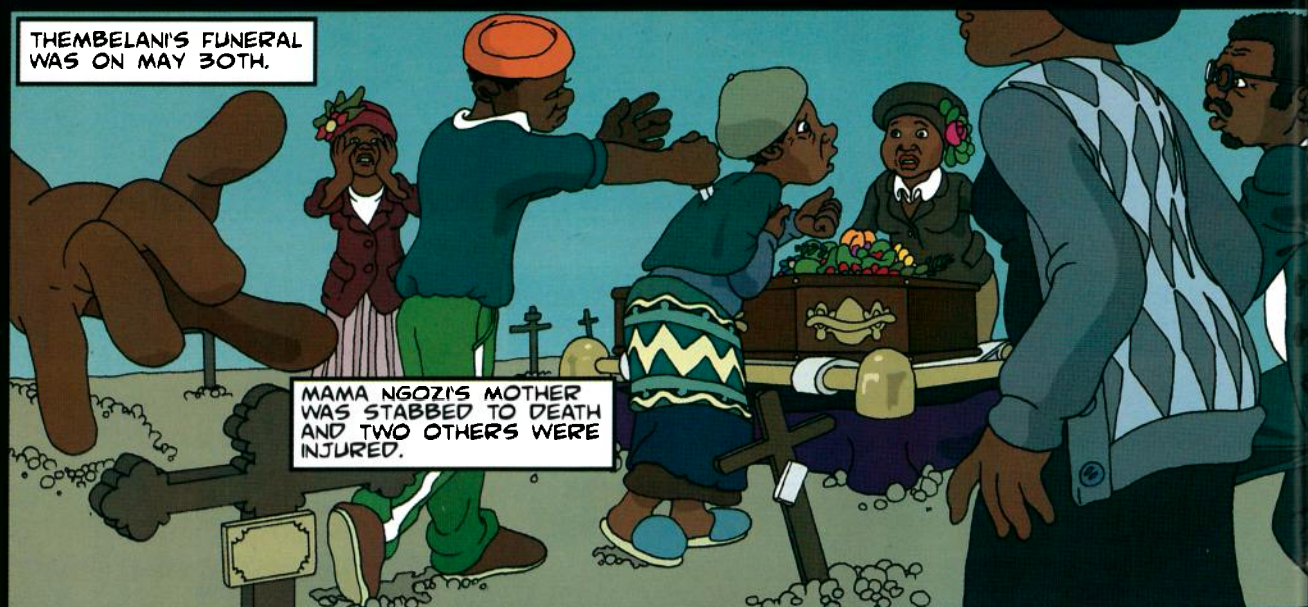
YET THE WPG WERE STILL IMPLICATED BECAUSE ONE OF THE ARMED PAC YOUTH ATTACKERS ACCUSED BY DEPOUTCH WAS THEMBELANI NGOZI, SON AND PARTNER OF TWO LEADING WPG MEMBERS WHO WAS THEN SHOT DEAD ON MAY 9TH 1998.

TO THE WPG, TARGETED SHOOTINGS THAT RESULTED IN THEMBELANI'S DEATH SYMBOLIZED THE WAY THEIR SIT-IN WAS INVERTED FROM AN ATTEMPT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO ISSUES OF HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT INTO A PLAYING FIELD USED TO SETTLE OLD SCORES.



THEMBELANI'S FUNERAL WAS ON MAY 30TH.

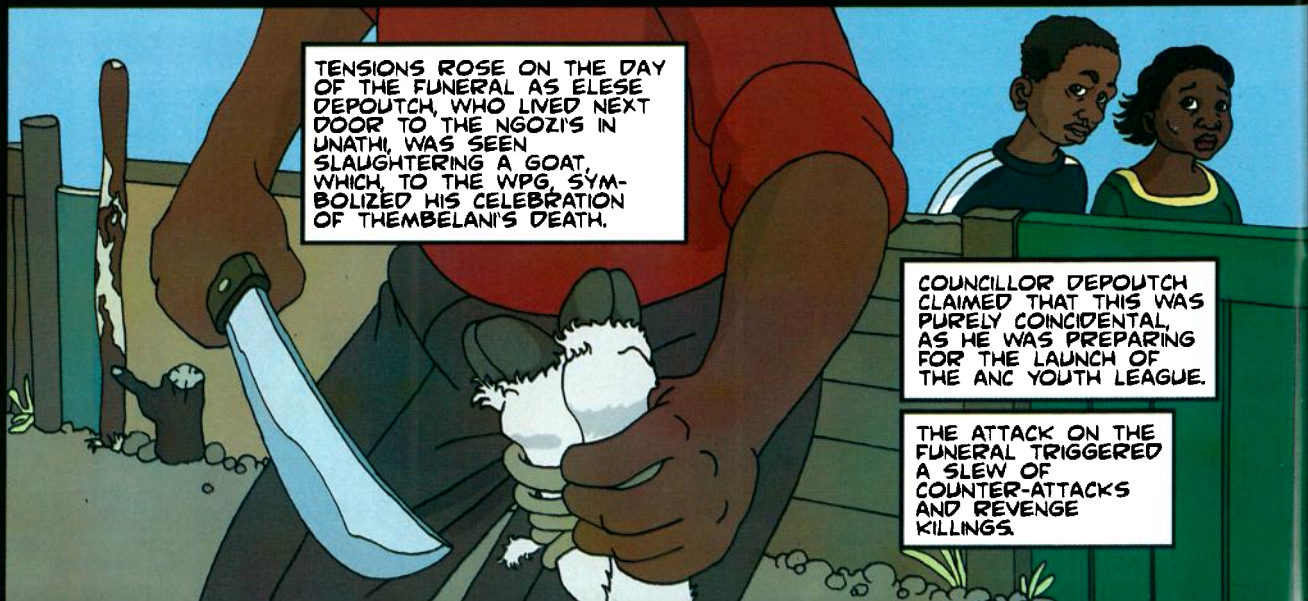
MAMA NGOZI'S MOTHER WAS STABBED TO DEATH AND TWO OTHERS WERE INJURED.



TENSIONS ROSE ON THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL AS ESESE DEPOUTCH, WHO LIVED NEXT DOOR TO THE NGOZI'S IN UNATHI, WAS SEEN SLAUGHTERING A GOAT, WHICH, TO THE WPG, SYMBOLIZED HIS CELEBRATION OF THEMBELANI'S DEATH.

COUNCILLOR DEPOUTCH CLAIMED THAT THIS WAS PURELY COINCIDENTAL, AS HE WAS PREPARING FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE ANC YOUTH LEAGUE.

THE ATTACK ON THE FUNERAL TRIGGERED A SLEW OF COUNTER-ATTACKS AND REVENGE KILLINGS.





A SPATE OF SHACK/HOUSE BURNING AFTER THE FUNERAL CAUSED WPG MEMBERS, ALONG WITH ABOUT 100 OTHERS, TO SEEK REFUGE AT THE PAC HEADQUARTERS, KNOWN AS THE "WHITE HOUSE/OFFICE". THE PRESS REPORTED AS FOLLOWS:

"LAST MONTH THE WOMEN WERE EVICTED FROM THE OFFICES AND HAVE OCCUPIED THE 'WHITE OFFICE' OF THE PAN AFRICANIST CONGRESS. THE WOMEN CLAIM THAT THE ATTACKS ARE BY A PRIVATE ARMY OF COUNCILLORS' SUPPORTERS WHO ARE TRYING TO FORCE THEM OFF THE LAND THEY OCCUPY."

VIRGINIA DYANTYI OF THE WPG DESCRIBED HER HOUSE BURNING AND THE FIRE SPREADING TO OTHER SHACKS:

WE TOOK THE CLOTHES OF THE PEOPLE WHOSE HOUSES WENT ABLAZE TO THE WHITE HOUSE. THE OFFICE WAS FULL TO THE BRIM. A GROUP OF MEN ENTERED THE OFFICE AND FIRED GUNSHOTS AT PEOPLE.

DEPOUTCH ARGUED IN CONTRAST THAT THE FIRST SHOT WAS FIRED BY THOSE IN THE WHITE HOUSE.

REFUGE AT THE PAC OFFICES WAS SHORT-LIVED AS THE COUNCIL EVACUATED PEOPLE, STATING THE PAC WERE BEHIND IN RENT.



WPG MEMBER,
UNIS KULA:

FAMILIES WHO HAVE NOTHING TOOK REFUGE AT A CRECHE AND BY AUGUST REMAINED THERE HAVING LOST THEIR HOMES AND ARE AFRAID BECAUSE THEY ARE BEING SHOT AT.



THE PRESS REPORTED A MONTH OF ABSENTEEISM AT SCHOOLS:

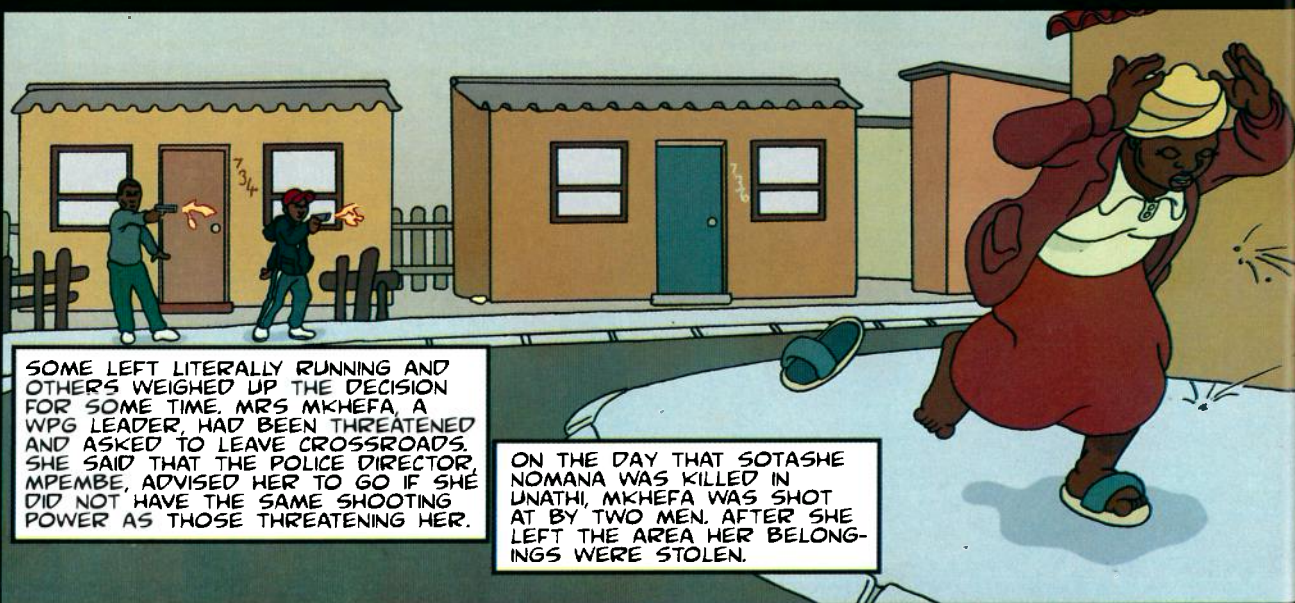
'CHILDREN OF MEMBERS OF WOMEN'S POWER HAVE HAD THEIR LIVES THREATENED AND ARE AFRAID TO ATTEND SCHOOL'

CROSSROADS-WIDE POLICE RAIDS CONTINUED VIRGINIA DYANTYI: 'THE DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL ATTACKS THE POLICE BROKE DOWN DOORS OF HOUSES LOOKING FOR GUNS AND THE NEXT DAY FIVE TAXIS ARRIVED AND STARTED SHOOTING INDISCRIMINATELY.'

QUEEN SHUGU HAD TO LEAVE HER CHILDREN BEHIND AND RUN FOR HER LIFE:

SOME PEOPLE RAN AWAY FROM CROSSROADS. I REMEMBER RUNNING AWAY FOR SAFETY AND LEAVING MY CHILDREN HERE...

MRS. NGOZI, MRS. STYODANA AND I RAN FOR SAFETY...I ESCAPED FROM THE 1ST OF JULY TILL THE 1ST OF NOVEMBER, WHEN I CAME BACK.



SOME LEFT LITERALLY RUNNING AND OTHERS WEIGHED UP THE DECISION FOR SOME TIME. MRS. MKHEFA, A WPG LEADER, HAD BEEN THREATENED AND ASKED TO LEAVE CROSSROADS. SHE SAID THAT THE POLICE DIRECTOR, MPembe, ADVISED HER TO GO IF SHE DID NOT HAVE THE SAME SHOOTING POWER AS THOSE THREATENING HER.

ON THE DAY THAT SOTASHE NOMANA WAS KILLED IN UNATHI, MKHEFA WAS SHOT AT BY TWO MEN. AFTER SHE LEFT THE AREA HER BELONGINGS WERE STOLEN.

MOUNTING TENSION, ARSON
ATTACKS AND SEVERAL FATAL
SHOOTINGS CONTINUED INTO
JUNE AND JULY.

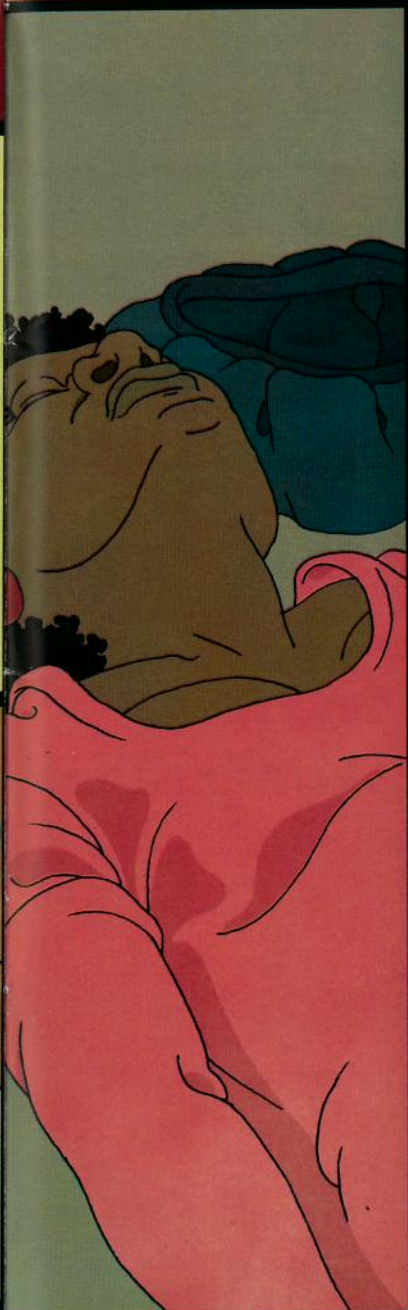
DURING THIS TIME NONGWE WAS
PERMANENTLY CHASED OUT OF
CROSSROADS BY YOUTH FROM
SECTION 4, MAMA LUKE'S HOUSE
WAS BURN'T TO THE GROUND
AND SHUGU'S SISTER WAS
KILLED.

ON JULY 21ST MORE THAN 20
SHACKS, INCLUDING A HOUSE OF
COUNCILLOR GWAYI, WERE SET
ALIGHT.

MAMA HAMSE'S CRECHE WAS
BURN'T TO THE GROUND.

WHILE DEPOUTCH CLAIMED THAT IN
OCTOBER THE WPG WERE "STILL
IN EVIDENCE" AND NONGWE AND
NGXOBONGWANA HAD BEEN SEEN
IN CROSSROADS, THE WPG HAD
BY DECEMBER, BEEN DISBANDED.

AS A GROUP THE WPG MADE
THEIR LAST STAND IN THE
REFUSAL TO VACATE THE LAST
13 REMAINING SHACKS THAT IM-
PEDED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN
PHASE 3. BETWEEN MARCH AND
JULY WPG HAD BEEN CHASED
AWAY FROM THE DEVELOPMENT
SITE BUT THEY REFUSED TO TAKE
DOWN THEIR SHACKS.



FOR PHASE 3 DEVELOPMENT THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY OF SECTION 2 HAD BEEN RELOCATED TO A SCHOOL SITE IN PHASE 4.

THE WPG OBSTRUCTION OF THE COMPLETION OF PHASE 3 WAS COSTLY. NEGOTIATIONS HAD PROVEN UNSUCCESSFUL AND THE PROVINCIAL AUTHORITY WAS RELUCTANT TO INITIATE YET ANOTHER DRAWN OUT REQUEST FOR A COURT ORDER.

NO COURT ORDER WAS EVER OBTAINED AND A STATE COMMISSION REPRIMANDED ELESÉ DEPOUTCH FOR ILLEGALLY AND PERSONALLY DEMOLISHING THOSE SHACKS WITH THE USE OF HIS OWN SECURITY PERSONNEL IN SEPTEMBER.

THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT TERMINATED THE DISPUTED CONTRACT, AGREEING WITH THE WOMEN THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO BUILD BIGGER HOUSES WITH THIS SUBSIDY.

HOWEVER, INHERENT IN THIS "WIN" WAS ALSO THE RELEGITIMIZATION OF THE COUNCILLORS IN CROSSROADS WHOM THE WOMEN FELT WERE A HINDRANCE TO DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION.



FURTHERMORE, THE OLD CONTRACTS WERE CANCELLED BUT NO ALTERNATIVE HOUSING PROPOSALS WERE FORTHCOMING.

THE PROJECT WAS SOON RESTARTED WITH FEW CHANGES MADE TO THE ORIGINAL PLANS.

BY AUGUST PEOPLE WERE MOVING INTO THE NEW, ONE-ROOMED HOUSES, BUT THE CONFLICT CONTINUED.

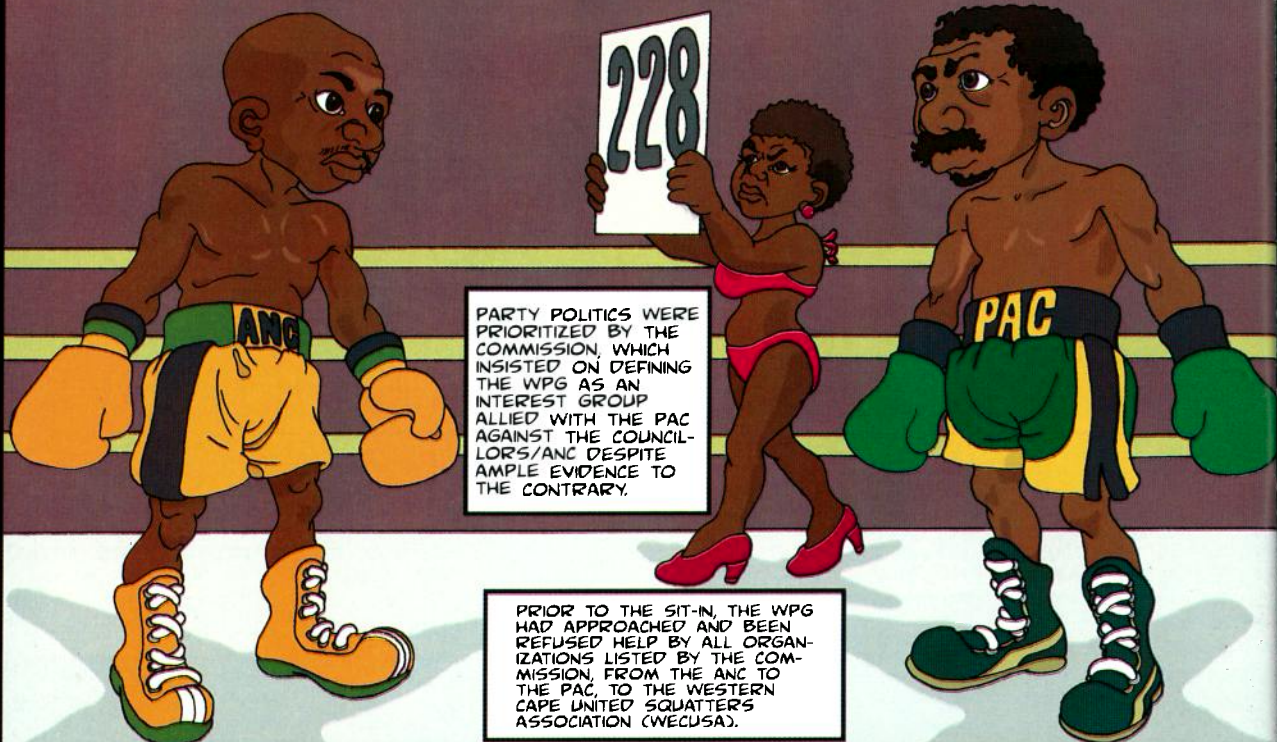
FOLLOWING THE SIT-IN THE WPG'S ACTION ACTION WERE IMMEDIATELY RESCRIPTED INTO AN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT OF POLITICAL DIVISIONS AND TENSIONS: AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE WHICH MISREPRESENTED THEIR CAMPAIGN AND WORKED TO UNDERMINE THEM FURTHER.

SUGGESTED IN MARCH, THE COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY WAS INITIALLY INTENDED TO FOCUS ON THE WPG, BUT BY THE TIME THE ENQUIRY TOOK PLACE IN JULY, ATTENTION WAS RE-CENTRED ON MALE LEADERSHIP BATTLES.

AFTER HEARING 39 TESTIMONIES (SEVEN OF WHICH WERE FROM THE WPG) THE COMMISSION'S ANALYSIS FOCUSED ON FIVE SOURCES OF WHAT IT DEEMED TO BE "GENUINE VIOLENT RIVALRY" THAT HIGHLIGHTED MALE-DOMINATED LEADERSHIP TENSIONS.

WPG WOMEN WERE ASCRIBED TO POLITICAL CAMPS, REGARDLESS OF HOW THEIR ACTIONS AND THE EVIDENCE THEY GAVE TO THE COMMISSION BLATANTLY CONTRADICTED SUCH ASCRIPTION.





PARTY POLITICS WERE PRIORITIZED BY THE COMMISSION, WHICH INSISTED ON DEFINING THE WPG AS AN INTEREST GROUP ALLIED WITH THE PAC AGAINST THE COUNCILLORS/ANC DESPITE AMPLE EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY.

PRIOR TO THE SIT-IN, THE WPG HAD APPROACHED AND BEEN REFUSED HELP BY ALL ORGANIZATIONS LISTED BY THE COMMISSION, FROM THE ANC TO THE PAC, TO THE WESTERN CAPE UNITED SQUATTERS ASSOCIATION (WECUSA).

THE WPG SIT-IN CAN BE SEEN AS A WINDOW INTO WHAT WOMEN'S ACTIVISM WAS UP AGAINST IN POST-APARTHEID CROSSROADS. THE RESPONSE TO THEIR ATTEMPTS TO POLITICIZE THEIR HOUSING STRUGGLES EXPOSE HOW THE NEGOTIATED TRANSITION FROM "LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT" TO "LOW-INTENSITY DEMOCRACY" PLAYED OUT ACROSS THEIR LIVES.

THE SIT-IN BECAME PART OF A STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN AND 'NORMALIZE' DIVIDE-AND-RULE ASPECTS OF THE POLITICS OF ALLOCATING SCARCE RESOURCES.

THE INSISTENCE THAT 1994 WAS A MILESTONE, WHICH SIGNIFIED A BREAK FROM PAST SUFFERING, ALSO SERVED TO CHALLENGE THE LEGITIMACY OF THE WPG'S CONCERNS. BOTH THE PRE AND POST 1994 STATES HAVE DEFENDED THEMSELVES AGAINST THE IMPERATIVE OF PROVIDING BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES BY PUSHING THIS RESPONSIBILITY BACK INTO THE PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD SPHERE, AND ON TO THE SHOULDERS OF BLACK WOMEN.

NOSISI
MBEKA



A DECADE INTO DEMOCRACY, NOSISI MBEKA SPEAKS ABOUT ONGOING STRUGGLES FOR WOMEN IN CROSS-ROADS THAT CONTINUED AFTER THE WOMEN'S POWER GROUP.

"US PEOPLE IN BOYS TOWN, WE ARE STILL IN THE APARTHEID TIME."

"I CAN'T SAY I'M IN TEN YEARS OF FREEDOM. I'M IN TEN YEARS OF STRUGGLE."





crossroads

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If only capitalism feeding off of racism and sexism to determine who has shelter and water and food and all the basics was **history**. Watch this space and find out what happens in the struggle to survive and thrive in Cape Town over the course of twenty years.



Check <http://crossroads-project.eu.pn/>
for further reading and references