Good morning to all. Once again, I wish to express my grateful thanks to Zengie Mangaliso over here, and Elise Young, the college fathers and mothers, supporters, donors, the students, and the community of this city without which, perhaps, the college might have had a different flavor. I'm going to share; I'm trying to lure you into my workshop. I'm going to brief and say, as a starter, two things. To follow Brenda Stokely is something of an anomaly. But you know, 'when you are on you are in Rome', etc., etc., etc. In my culture, you send a little person ahead of the queen. And to refer to what someone said yesterday in the delivery—someone who shall remain nameless, she's from South Africa--"Women who enslave other women so that they themselves can live drudgery-free lives, it's okay". (laughter)

You know who that is if you were here yesterday. But I am trying to protect her, she shall remain nameless (laughter). I'm going to talk about very much what my sister Brenda just spoke about: the plight of workers. But a special kind of worker, a special type of worker: the domestic worker. I am highly qualified to speak about this, having worked as a domestic worker myself in South Africa for four long years. Today, I boast a Masters' Degree from the Columbia University School of Social Work and School of Business. I have written five published books, two books of autobiography. This is where you take notes. Later on, you don't.

"To My Children's Children", that about my growing up in South Africa; "Forced to Grow", that's about my other kind of growing up, after I thought I was grown. And two books of short stories, "Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night"; you live, you will love, you wish only to lie awake at night. And then the other one is called, "'Push, Push' and Other Stories"; and then I have a new novel, a new book that's just put out, was published in September, and it's called "Mother to Mother". It's from the point of view of the mother of a killer to the mother of the victim, "Mother to Mother". It's fiction; unfortunately, it's based on something that happened in South Africa, the mob murder of Amy Biehl, a Fulbright scholar, a wise, young American woman, in (?), which is what I call home when I'm in South Africa. So, the fictionalized version of that is the outpouring of the sentiment of the mother of the killer to Amy's mother. But today's topic is--this is where you stop taking notes--my personal struggle, clawing my way out of domestic work.

And this is how the second book of autobiography, "Forced to Grow" starts. I was a has-been at the age of 23. Now, a has-been is someone whom, or about whom society has very little regard or hope of anything coming out of that person. You are a social reject, something to discard. Can you imagine what you as a mother would feel, or as a sister, or a brother or a father, if your son or brother came home all goo-goo eyed, and said, "Oh, I've found the ideal woman. She is all of 23. I'm going to marry her. She has three children." You wouldn't be exactly delighted. That was my plight at age 23. I was expecting my third child when my then-husband, who was all of 25, decided that this was hard-going, and walked out on us. This is South Africa in the mid-60's, a country that does not regard me as a citizen, and therefore, I have no hope of getting assistance from any government office. If you're not a citizen in the country, you have no benefits coming your way. This was the bleakest moment, or time in my life, because although, looking back, I know now that we were poor when I was growing up, I had no clue we were poor when I was growing up, because everybody around me was similarly situated. But it is in my early and mid-twenties that I tasted dire destitution.

When Brenda was talking about making choices, I remember times when I would have ten lousy cents to my
You have three children, all under five, you are 23, 24, and you begin to think, "Is it going to be half a loaf of bread, or am I going to get corn meal? Which will stretch more, which will do more for us?" My first book of autobiography has outside it a woman carrying a tray, with (?) That's where you learn what happened there. I ended up in domestic work. Mostly we think people who do domestic work are brain-dummies. I wasn't. Mostly we believe that people get to be domestic workers because they are not educated. I wasn't.

Even then, I already had something I clinged to in education. I had finished half my high school, what you call in South Africa the junior certificate, which would be the equivalent of tenth grade here. I had a teacher's qualification that was mine, and people like me in South Africa at that time with a tenth grade education, you could go and have two years of training as a teacher and go out and teach. Of course, this was only for Africans. Other race groups had to have the whole high school education before they even thought they could begin to undergo training to be anything. But we have always been special in the eyes of the apartheid government! Therefore, I ended up in domestic service because I could not get a teaching job because--guess why--I was a married woman, therefore, I had a husband. The fact that he had left didn't matter. I had a husband, therefore, the husband had maintain me. To this day, in countries such as Lesotho, do you know that even if you are a civil servant, even if you work for the government, if you are a woman, you do not have a pension because you have a husband!

Even a civil servant in Lesotho does not have a pension if she's a woman because she has a husband. I couldn't get a teaching job. I couldn't get a job in restaurants. I didn't want to be a waitress; I knew my place in that society by then. You don't get to be a waitress if you look like me. This is a job for white teens who are in school or college and who feel like working. This is a time in which South Africa had no qualms in putting in job advertisements, in employment, you go through the paper, and they say: 'This is someone who is looking for a maid, not a brain surgeon.' 'Looking for, maid wanted; Cape colored.' That means she doesn't want anybody looking like me. I mean, that was the law of the land then. So, I knew I couldn't get a job waitressing. I wanted to wash the dishes; I didn't get that job, which is why I ended up in domestic work. This is a qualified teacher. Okay? So, looking at my history, knowing that I was qualified to do other jobs, I couldn't do this job, I couldn't get the job. Because of one reason or another, I end up in domestic work. Do you think I should have stayed there? Do you thing it would have helped me, helped my children if I had languished in domestic service, till death and till now?

Do you think I would have written one book if I had stayed a domestic worker? No. My life would have been very, very different. I am 66 years old. I have three children. Those three children, each one of them (?) in South Africa, where the government didn't pay for the education of South African children, each one of these children has at least one college degree. That would not have been possible had I stayed in domestic service. I wish I could say the women and men I worked for in South Africa for those four long years helped me become the woman I am today. They didn't. They didn't and they couldn't, Brenda, because when people work for you in your home, you fail to see yourself in them. You look at them, you do not see a human being as you are. You look at them, you take away their humaneness and humanity; you dehumanize them.

This used to be a very comfortable topic not so long ago in South Africa, because I could rave and rant and rave against the white woman. The complexion of the employer of the domestic worker in South Africa is changing. I have been in homes, black homes, African homes, where I had one woman constantly refer to her worker, to her help, when calling this woman, she wouldn't use the woman's name. She wouldn't use the woman's clan name. In my culture, you do not call me, if you are thirty years and younger, by my name. It's disrespectful. But you can say, (?)--that's my clan name. And you don't have to put a prefix before a clan name.

You can (?) as they say to Mandela, "(?)"--that's his clan name. So, it's perfectly okay to call anybody any age by this. No--this woman who is Xhosa called another Xhosa woman not by her name, not by her clan name. And not so long ago, we were very (?) of black women and black people in South Africa, because
white South Africans refused to call us by names. As you are introduced, even when you are not working for people, (?) [several sentences that cannot be understood] And, even if you are making an approximation, I would be, even if my name was (?), and you say (?), we would be gratified you are making the attempt. It is this denial of the other person's being (?) that makes it possible for those people who employ domestic workers to go on enslaving other women, and never thinking they could be (?) You are given such an opportunity to help a woman on her journey. How would you employ an eighteen-year-old person and believe they have no dreams, they have no problems? They are completely without merit? 'She is part of my family'--how dare you?

While she is busy being part of your family, what has happened to her family? We leave other children every day to become other people's family. We have families already! You go to work so that your family will not perish. You do not go to work to divorce your family. (APPLAUSE) I haven't had the courage to employ a maid. (laughter) But I vow and I promise you, the day I employ anybody, I will remember she is not brain dead. I will remember she has potential. I will remember she is just as good or better than I am. And I will make this woman know she is getting the privilege of being my employee because I am getting the privilege of having her freeing me from drudgery so I can do other things.

And therefore, I will make sure she does not tarry in my house for twenty years. This is going to be a very interesting period for both of us. You come and be with me and work for me, help me keep a clean house, if that's what she is doing, while I help you become whatever it is you want to do. (APPLAUSE) I believe it is a fair exchange. Nobody should be condemned by me or you or anybody else to servitude for the rest of their lives. People should do domestic work as a stepping stone to something better. Nobody aspires to becoming a domestic worker. Don't condemn them that. I have had in South Africa white women tell me, "If we didn't employ them, if we didn't give them this job, what would happen to them?" Let it happen to them! Let it happen to them; perhaps that will open their eyes. There is something very wrong with a system that enslaves you and your daughter and your daughter's daughter. One of the reasons I left domestic work was when I realized there were grandmothers there, still working and being domestic workers. Their daughters were domestic workers. Their daughter's daughters were domestic workers. I am the mother of two daughters and a son. I have said, "My girls, I am not going to do this. It stops here." God has given me a brain; I must think of a way out. I owe it to those children. I stopped becoming a domestic worker the Sunday I went to the bus stop, and found an elderly lady there.

"Good morning, (?)" "Good morning, (?)" It was at the edge of the township. The bus has one more stop before it leaves the township to go to the white world. Gradually, on Sundays--in South African transportation is appalling. It's worse on Sundays because the large majority of people do not go to work. Gradually, other people came and there was a little group of people there. The bus comes, and people, of course, you see everybody jumps in because this is the end of their, they know now if there is one seat and there are ten of you, everybody is jumping for that one seat. There was some vestige of my upbringing, so I say to the old lady I had found there, "Go in." She says "You go in." And I thought to myself (?). But I went in. You know why she was letting everybody get into that bus before she went?

Because she had a job to do getting on that bus. The bus is there. She had to hold on and then physically pick up her one leg and put it on the step before she grabs the rail and goes on; goes back to lift her other leg, and..."God," I said, "I am not going to stay here until that happens to me." She should not have been working like that. But because she was domestic worker, she had no security, she had slaved all her life, washing people's shirts and laundry, and mending and god knows what, and ironing and scrubbing clothes and doing everything, and (?) the children...and she has no pension.

She has no pension. ...We do these things because we are not making it. I vowed I would never give any white woman the satisfaction of driving me out of her home when I was just and in and (?). I would leave domestic work while I could still work. And I did. The conditions of service, how do these differ from our
own conditions of service, and why is that? As I said, what's in a name? It's from when you will refuse to call a person by name, and call her Jane or Serafina, that spreads to other ways of dealing with her. The woman I was telling you about, an aunt of a friend of mine, a distant relative, I was married to this guy. So I go, he takes me to his aunt. This is a qualified nurse, who has a husband who has businesses. They have two homes in (?) in the Transvaal. Each time this nurse called her help "Idiot!"

And the woman answers to this! Each time the domestic worker is out of site and she wants her. "!". And the woman knows she is calling her. I went there once. The second time I said to this husband of mine, "I'm not going to your aunt's house again because I will not be able to not say something." I will not be able to not say something," and he knew I meant it, because when the woman was preparing a meal, I said, "I can't, I've already had lunch." The first time, you know, you get confused, you get bewildered. The second time, I knew I could not take the food from this woman, the hands of this woman without crying. And I refused to go there again. How can I listen to somebody call another person, "Idiot! Idiot!" And we had condemned white women for calling us 'Jane'?" Now, suddenly, 'Jane' became very attractive to me! (laughter) We must ask ourselves, what does the domestic worker mean to me, mean to me in my life? What is it that this woman is giving me? Is it a privilege for her or for me that she is here, in my house? That is the only way we will break the vicious cycle of "she is a domestic worker, her daughter is a domestic worker, her daughter's daughter is a domestic worker." Why should it be like that? Everybody should aspire to something better for the next generation. That's how we should go. Domestic work wouldn't be so evil if the domestic worker earned enough to at least, if not free, herself free daughter. But if you earn so little, you can't even send your children to school, what is the point of this? What is the point of all this utility, only so that you can feel that you fill up your belly? This shouldn't be the goal of work, only so that I do not die because there is something in my tummy. Not necessarily nutritious. I might not be able to make that grade, but there is something in my belly. Why should people work for that, just to save themselves from being the pictures we see of the people of Ethiopia? It shouldn't be the goal of work. We should work to advance ourselves, to have a good life. You don't leave your children only so that you can fill their tummies. No, we should work for a standard of living that is acceptable. We should be able to afford the bare necessities; a roof over your head, a roof over your head. Health services, we should be able to pay for health services.

We should be able to pay, if this is necessary, the education of your children. You should be able to have a vacation once in a while. That's why we work. You shouldn't work so that you do not die. No. You shouldn't work so that you do not die. This is not the purpose of work. But, if you forget that when you look at the other person, it doesn't matter what they're wearing. Doesn't matter what language they speak, the color of their skin doesn't matter. The texture of their hair doesn't matter. If you forget, if you do not pay attention, to the good in the other person, you are likely to forget the other person is a human being, and therefore, you are likely to make these errors of judgement whereby you treat the other person in ways that are actually despicable. You give them, you mete out treatment you wouldn't give to your dog. And you call yourself (?) South Africa has a 50% illiteracy rate.

Illiteracy rate. Most of those people, of course, end up in domestic work. The vague definition of democracy I remember from my education, we shall call it that, is that democracy is a government of the people, by the people, for the people. It does not say, "...and the people can to sleep." For democracy to be sustainable, for democracy to flourish, to be meaningful, you need to be eternally vigilant. Without this, there is no democracy. We know South Africa gained its' independence for free, apartheid is dead, with 50% of the nation not able to read or write. I doubt, I doubt very much we can have a democracy. Governments are not good or bad because of the color of their skin--remember that. Governments are not good or bad because of the race of the majority of the people in government. We have had black governments in Africa, even pure black governments, where there isn't one white soul, and I doubt anyone in here could say those governments have been very, very, very, very good. And if they have been good, it is not because they are black governments. Governments are good only when they do the will of the people. They can only do the will of the people when the people make them do their will. (APPLAUSE)
A domestic worker in South Africa is far away from home until such time that those of us who have at least, at least one eye open can help all the eyes of the people of South Africa, any way we can, to be open to what their role is in a democracy. Not voting, that's the littlest, the least of the things that you have to do, the least of your duty as a citizen in a democracy. What do you do during the fallow, during the years between one vote and the other vote, the five years? That's what is crucial in a democracy. Those eyes need to be opened. You need to remember, you didn't send kings and queens to Parliament. No--you sent some of us; people like you and me. You looked amongst yourselves, and said, "She is better; she has integrity; he has integrity; he is an (?)." I would never send to Parliament a man who has forgotten his own children, and didn't maintain those children.

(APPLAUSE) How do you think he's going to care for your children when he doesn't care for his own? How do you think anybody can care for children when he has dumped his wife and his children, and never looked back? We need to be careful that we open our eyes and remember that those people we sent there are our servants, not our masters. That's the only way the domestic worker in South Africa shall be free. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)