DOUBLE BURDEN: AFRICAN WOMEN UNDER APARTHEID*

by

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Introduction

Over the last decade, one of the notable features of research on the study of the social and economic history of South Africa has been the steady emergence of a body of writing focusing on issues related to women. Much of the renewed interest owes to the critical scholarship that emerged during the late 1960s which focused on delineating the international and national structures of domination and subordination. In addition, increased interest in marxist works has added to a greater understanding of the sexual division of labor and the subordination of women.

In the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State Engels sketched the development of private property, the economic unit of which became the family, and the transformation of the role of women to a subordinated and dependent position. Engels attempted to show how the transformation of the role of women from the position of equality to subordination brought about the "world historical defeat of the femal sex." His project, although sketchy was to draw an explicit connection between the changes in the form of the family (and women's role within it) on the one hand and changes in property and class relations on the other. In fact, the intent of The Origin of the Family is to identify the stages and substages in the development of increasingly advanced labor techniques and the effect of these advances on kinship relations.

Engels suggested that in "primitive societies" property was collectively owned and both sexes made equal contributions to the larger group which was identified by kinship relations and common territorial residence. The material bases of production in such societies was production for use value and the division of labor between the sexes was a "pure and simple outgrowth of nature."

> ...it existed only between the two sexes. The men went to war, hunted, fished, provided the raw material for food and the tools necessary for these pursuits. The women cared for the houses, and prepared food, clothing;

*This is a shorter version of a long paper.

> they cooked, weaved and sewed. Each was master in his or her own field of activity: the men in the forest, the women in the houses. Each owned tools he or she made or used; the men, the weapons and the hunting and fishing tackle; the women, the household goods and utensils. The household was communistic, comprising several, and often many families. Whatever was produced was used in common and was common property: the house, the garden, the long boat."[1]

This equality between the sexes and the role of women underwent a fundamental transformation with the privatization and ownership of the productive forces which in its earliest form began with the domestication of animals.[2] This shift in property relations marked the development of private property and its economic unit, i.e., the family which brought about an end of woman's control over the environment and herself.

Engels' analysis of the subordination of women and his emphasis on the determining character of the mode of production did not allow for a thoroughgoing analysis of the problem. To begin with, the division of labor based on sex as a process in itself coupled with patriarchal control over reproduction had no significance other than its role in the augmentation of private property. The division of labor according to Eisenstein,

> ...has no specific quality of its own, and property arising from a division of labor in the act of procreation is not differentiated from property arising from the relations of capital. Reproduction and production are seen as one, as they came to be analysed in relation to the capitalist division of labor in society.[3]

In capitalist societies, the relationship of domination and subordination originates not only from the control of the means of production but also from the power relations prevalent in the society. One may ask then on what basis do men within the family retain control and dominate both materially or otherwise if not on the basis of power that may emanate from sexual differences between men and women in their relationship to reproduction? It is this power relation within the family arising from the sexual division of labor that Engles failed to grasp. On the basis of this logic, the abolition of private property would be a far cry for the emancipation of women as it would merely do away with the relations of production and the power relations thereof, not the relations of reproduction themselves.

In recognition of this hiatus in analysis, an increasing amount of emphasis is now given to the role of patriarchy in

the domination and subordination of women.[4] Many radical feminists argue that the patriarchal organization of society ensures male domination. Manifested through male force and control, the patriarchal system is preserved and reproduced through marriage and the family. Patriarchy then, is a sexual system of power relations in society rooted in biology, i.e., in women's reproductive role than in economics or history.

Despite the attractiveness of this concept, much of the argument advanced by this perspective suffers from a number of problems. In explaining the domination of men over women, the position of women is reduced to that of a biological reproductive unit. Patriarchy as a system of power and control comes to be defined in terms of sexual control of women by men. Thus, instead of benefiting from and understanding the historical formation of women's oppression, we are presented with biological determinism. It is not possible to subsume a complex, socially and historically constructed phenomenon under a simple category of biological differences. In addition, if the subordination of women is conceived as natural (biologically determined), then there is no possibility of change in relationships between men and women. Such a reductionist approach also makes men the natural enemies of women.

The subordination of women, therefore, cannot entirely be explained by the problematic of patriarchy. To the extent that patriarchy intensifies subordination, understanding the material determinats of women's oppression requires excursion into theory and history. General and sweeping theoretical discourse often obscures the conditions and structures of their oppression.

Women and Society in South Africa: The Structure of Domination

The extension of critical analysis on the material determinants of women's oppression in South Africa is a recent origin. Much of the early pioneering works about women in South Africa concentrated on the notion that the sexual division of labor and female domestic labor was accepted to be natural, and biological rather than the result of historically developed social relations. The intellectual foundation for much of the earlier works was rooted within the modernization school. Much of the political economy of South Africa and the position of women was conceived as an outcome of cooperative/competitive group interaction among the major groups. It was also believed that as rapid industrialization of South Africa would in the long run undermine the structures of apartheid, dissolve the racial divisions of the society,

and accelerate the improvement of the women's position in South Africa.[5]

In response to the failure of this school to provide a coherent and systematic analysis of the dynamic of class and racial factors shaping South Africa, an alternative framework emerged in the late 1960s that emphasized historical and structural determinants of the political economy of South Africa.[6] Emphasis was placed on the concept of the mode of production and the articulation of modes of production to gain an understanding of the changes and transformation of South Africa since its early incorporation in the world economy. Despite the attractiveness of this framework along with its limitations, a paucity of studies on women in the development of capitalism in South Africa continues to exist.

Pre-Colonial Division of Labor

The pre-colonial socio-economic structure of the African people, now circumscribed by the territorial boundaries of the colonial state were based upon an agricultural system in which the right of ownership was separated from the right of usefruct. While the right of ownership belonged to the local community as a whole, the right of usefruct was allocated on an individual basis. Under such an ownership pattern all married African women were guaranteed equal access to land.

Despite regional variations, the male head of household divided the land allocated to him into small portions for each wife which they used to cultivate vegetables and grains, and keep small animals such as goats and chickens. The rest of the land was put under cultivation in family plots to which members contributed their labor. A portion was set aside for the homestead granaries, cattle and sheep grazing.

The division of labor between men and women, although unequal reflected the customs of the society which engendered each role and the accompanying responsibilities with respect and status. Male household members were responsible for a number of activities such as animal husbandry, clearing of land and the removal of brush and tress. In addition, they engaged in the production of agricultural and hunting tools. Women performed the greater part of agricultural production in general and provided for the family food supply in particular.

Women were also involved in manufacturing activities by making household goods such as baskets, brooms, pots and mats. Although the African women were confined to a rigidly defined domestic sphere, it was a sphere that included their children's as well as their own subsistence. In addition to agricultural production and the responsibility of family food

supply which required intensive and demanding labor, African women were also burdened with additional tasks of fetching water and firewood as well as washing, food preparation, house cleaning and childcare.

The productive capacity of the household gradually underwent significant restructuring, particularly by the 1880s when a great portion of the land belonging to indigenous Africans was expropriated through brutal colonial conquest. Africans became alienated from their land. In particular, the productive activities of men were reduced as it became more and more difficult to undertake extensive cattle grazing and hunting. As a consequence, men became more and more confined to the homestead; they found it more and more difficult to make a living given their reduced access to the land -- a direct consequence of colonial conquest. A similar pattern also emerged in the traditional activities of African women. Their alienation from the land reduced the productivity of the African women and increased the intensity of work they had to perform on common household land as well as on individual garden plots. While both men and women in the household participated in reciprocal labor activity, the distribution of the product from the wife's labor was not directly appropriated by the husband. Although households were able to appropriate all goods socially produced, control over the products undertaken by the African family for use values were left under the control of women. In addition to this system of distribution of the products of male and female labor, productive resources of the household were passed through the male line. However, in cases where the wife had accumulated some property, she was able to "will" it to her offspring. Although African women were confined to what by western standards appears to be a subordinate role, it is important to understand the context of this subordination. Within the custom and culture of the African society, age is an important factor in power relationships. For example, a woman could and did have control over the household in the absence of her husband or his patrikin. A son could not be superior to or in domination over his mother. Consequently, older women had power in the distribution of the estate of the old patriarch.

Effects of Colonialism

The impact of settle colonialism and the expropriation of land had profound consequences on the African population in general and women in particular -- namely the destruction of the independent economic position of women. Although the alienation from the land was carried out unevenly, African women had entered the wage labor sector as early as 1854 in the Orange Free State and the Cape, mainly as domestic servants.

The rapid process of proletarianizing the African people and the steady movement of people to rural towns precipitated the passing of legislation to control both the migration of people from rural to urban centers as well as the expansion of urban centers. In the Orange Free State, regulations were passed in 1893 requiring the African population, both male and female, to carry residential passes which enabled them to live in urban areas. The legislation which included women to carry passes was the source of great discontent. It appears that initially those regulations were not seriously enforced until much later. However, the massive expropriation of land in the Ciskei and the Transkei had reduced the Africans to landless people. Under these conditions, colonial taxation mechanisms to force labor migration intensified the problems of African women. According to the tax system, every household was taxed for every wife a head acquired (marriage tax) and for every hut constructed (hut tax). The colonial authorities imposed cash as a basis of tax payments. Households which could not comply were forced to send some of their members off into wage employment. The economic rationale for migrant labor was clearly stated by the South African Native Affairs Department Report which stated:

> That the provision of subsistence for the family of the worker, which is left behind on the reserve, forms a vital subsidy to wages which the worker receives in those industries and without which, those industries (the gold mines, for instance) could not be carried out.[8]

As male members of the household became increasingly drawn into the wage labor system, women who then had to assume tasks previously performed by the men, were now doubly burdened with additional obligations.

> Rural production...is now virtually exclusively undertaken by women -- the burden having fallen heavily on the old (first generation women)... Thus the number of tasks performed by women in effect at least doubled. Women, and more particularly, older women, now had to perform tasks previously performed by men for generations.[9]

As male household members and other able-bodied members of the family have been forced into the migrant labor system, women have been forced into a position in which they are single handedly responsible for the family welfare. Without the benefit of husbands, these women must eke out a living, rear their children and care for the elderly. The loss of the male labor's contribution to food production has had more social and emotional effects. It has had ecological effects as well. It has meant that the cultivation cycle of the land

had been prolonged; hence, reducing the fertlity of the soil. The absence of fertile land and the sheer weight of their burdens has induced women to substitute higher yielding crops for other more nutritious and palatable staples. Consequently, there has been a steady erosion of the dietary standards of African women and children. Poor health and malnutrition prevail in many of the Black townships as a result.

Left to fend for themselves, African women were burdened with additional time consuming tasks of cattle raising, preparation of mud for walls of houses -- all above and beyond their domestic chores. Because the contribution of migrants was far from sufficient to meet the needs of the family, the African women had to attempt to make ends meet under extremely harsh circumstances. As Lapchick and Urdang noted:

> Supplements are generally eratic and of varying amounts; others simply never arrived. Countless families are forced to subsist without extra income, and no rural community is exempt from hardships caused by lack of financial support from male relatives working on contract.[10]

The migrant labor system entails prolonged family separation which has serious physical and psychological repercussions for all concerned. Most of the migrant laborers are men living in intolerable, insecure and depressing conditions and lacking the benefit of family life or other customary support. The misery of the material, social and environmental deprivation caused by this fragmentary existence takes various forms among them in a high incidence of alcoholism, "mental disorders" and widespread resort to prostitution. In addition, venereal disease remains a major problem. In this context the growth of prostitution is usually a matter of sheer economic necessity.

As Van Onselen makes clear, the role of prostitution is no less a product of the economic relationship created by capitalist development than the demand created for it.

> Basically, prostitutes -- just like male African labor were a product of the process of proletarianization. Once the redistributive traditional economy was undermined it offered little security to the young, the old, the powerless or those without kin, and when the standard of living of the rural areas dropped, women who were not part of a family production unit were increasingly vulnerable. Those who lost access to land were forced to the urban areas to seek cash and fend for themselves.[11]

As for the men, the absence of wives was compounded by the fact that their new environment was most exclusively masculine. This unequal sex ratio makes it difficult for men to establish stable liaisons with women and thus their condition encourages prostitution.

The separation of migrant workers from their immediate families was carried out to its extreme with the introduction of the new contract law in 1968. Prior to 1968 those migrant workers who had access to land in the rural areas could work in the urban area for a while and spend some months with his family before entering the labor market again. The new system required every male African to register with the labor office from the age of 15 and within one month of becoming unemployed. Women are not legally forced to register, but they must do so if they wish to seek employment. The new labor contract has further disrupted and put additional pressures on the fragmented life of the African family.

The disruption of family life is one of the cruelest features of the inhumane apartheid laws. As a Transkei woman spoke out bitterly in an interview about the life she had to lead as a married women...

> "Marriage is not worthwhile for us black women. It traps us. Men are having it all right in town with their girl friends and money, while we must keep home on empty pockets and empty promises. We feel lonely in this desolate place. Where so many of our husbands must leave to find work and stay away all year, sometimes many years."[12]

African Women in Urban Areas

The movement of African women into the urban areas since 1920 occurred under new economic and political conditions -- namely, the process of industrialization which changed the demand for labor in general and the urbanization of Africans, especially the influx of women.

Table 1
Africans in Urban Areas

	Men	Women	Total
1911	410,161	97,981	508,142
1921	439,707	174,293	587,000
1936	784,769	356,874	1,141,643
1946	1,152,022	642,190	1,794,212

Source: Race Relations Handbook. Chapter XI as taken from Report of the Social Security Committee U.G. November 14, 1946.

The rapid influx of African women into urban areas did not materialize in expanding employment opportunities. The laws and regulations governing their movement in the urban areas as well as the technical and social division of labor reinforced by government policy effectively kept the African woman in certain very limited job categories. The composition of the industrial workforce as a whole has undergone considerable changes during the last 30 years. Women's employment in the manufacturing sector expanded from almost 10,000 jobs in 1915 to 400,000 by 1980. By far, the most dramatic period of expansion occurred since 1945 and more specifically post-1950. The workforce was initially made up of white women who constituted the major component of the work force. The so-called "civilized labor" policy and the government encouragement to employ "civilized labor" rather than low wage African workers reflected the early proletarianization experience of the white, largely Afrikaans women. Since 1960, African women comprised overwhelmingly the bulk of women industrial workers. The rapid infusion of the African woman into the industrial workforce is reflected in the growth from 1,000 in 1934 to 160,000 in 1980 and thus constituting more than 40% of all female industrial labor.

The sectorial distribution of African workers is concentrated in clothing, textiles and food production. Thses three industries combined employ 73.1% of all African women production workers. A further 13.8% are employed in wood, cork, non-metallic minerals and metal manufacturing industries. African women enter these manufacturing sectors usually at wage rates well below those women (white and colored) who have occupied the same jobs before, and of African men who were or are in the same work. While minimum wage differentials on the basis of race has been outlawed, discriminatory minimum wages on the basis of sex prevails as permitted by the Industrial Conciliation and Wage Act. In most cases, women's wages are fixed at 75% to 85% of men's wages. While the gap between African male and female workers may be marked, the contrast between white and black is even sharper. The salary of the former is on an entirely different scale. Whites who constitute only 16% of the population absorb 70% of the total income. However, the average earnings of an African female worker is 8% of that of a white male worker.

Unlike the manufacturing sector, African women outnumber men by a substantial margin in the professional category. The

following table illustrates the increase in the numbers of African men and women in professional jobs.

Table 2
African Professional Workers

Year	Women	Men
1946	10,135	15,109
1960	25,487	23,000
1970	55,431	36,557
1980*	97,300	79,800

Source: Mariotti. Incorporation of the African Women, page 238.
*Population Census 1980.

The category of professional workers includes almost solely -- in the case of women -- nurses and teachers. The high proportion of women teachers is the result of a conscious official state policy in the words of Verwood, apartheid's architect, "to save money in teacher-training and salaries, and also because women are generally better than men in handling small children."[13] As the table below indicates, the proportion of African women teachers is almost twice that of the male teachers. The male/female ratio of African teachers has declined consistently since 1946.

Table 3
African Teachers by Sex

	1946	%	1960	%	1970	%
Female	6,465	46.1	11,587	49.4	26,505	62.5
Male	7,545	53.9	11,871	50.6	15,882	37.5
Total	14,010	100.0	23,458	100.0	42,378	100.0

Source: Mariotti, Incorporation of African Women, p. 239.

The Bantu Educational Policy introduced together with the new policy was designed to inculcate a servile attitude in African people under condition of apartheid.[14] According to the new measures the state will only employ unmarried African

women to teach in the schools. As a result, a large number of married women lost their jobs and the small "security" that came with it. One immediate consequence of this policy has led many African women teachers to postpone marriage or resort to secret marriages. As Matsepe has indicated:

> "The timing of the announcement of marriage and pregnancy was a ground for dismissal from teaching service. Concealment of pregnancy became common among married and unmarried women. A woman in the latter group would have to resign from her job before her pregnancy was discovered."[15]

Even though the teaching profession provides relatively better pay than other categories (excluding nursing and some factory work) the insecurity and low wage structure imposed by the state reinforces the asymmetrical power relations of race and gender subordination of the African women.

The movement of the African women into the professional category of teaching and nursing is of a recent origin. The bulk of the African women, however, has remained in the service and agricultural sectors. The table below illustrates the occupation of African women between 1960-1970.

Table 4
African Women by Occupational Category

Occupation	1960	1970
Teachers	11,490	26,505
Nurses	12,953	24,677
Managers	280	40
Clerks, Typists	924	7,018
Hawkers	3,280	17,661
Agricultural Workers	149,893	871,968
Production Workers	22,345	82,556
Service and Domestic Workers	506,134	730,345

Source: Mariotti, The Incorporation of African Women, tables 42, 53 and 54, and Appendix 1 p. 286.

Much of the increase in African women's participation in production work in factories occurred between 1960 and 1970, a period which corresponds to the rapid industrial expansion of South Africa. As Table 4 suggests, the economically active female population falls into four categories: domestic workers; agricultural workers; industrial workers and professional workers (teachers and nurses). The first two categories account for approximately 91% of the economically

active population and about 81% of the total paid female labor force. Several factors account for the change in African women's participation which include: 1) the rapid growth of enterprises that tend to employ women; 2) and the swelling number of domestic workers which enable white women to enter administrative services and professional jobs. These developments in part explain the preservation of a color bar in certain areas of employment that might otherwise have been threatened by a shortage of skilled labor.

The majority of African women enter wage employment under a myriad of regulations that discriminate against them. For those African women fortunate enough to be legally employed, the sex differential in pay condemns them to permanent poverty. They earn their meager income under conditions which are clearly detrimental to their health, the double shift which involves the combination of paid industrial employment and unpaid domestic labor. In addition to the exploitation of their labor at the point of production, the African woman is additionally burdened with the day-to-day and inter-generational reproduction of labor power: cleaning the house, washing and ironing clothes, fetching water, buying provisions and general childcare. The African woman is also subjected to a life in which she must often be the sole provider of affection, emotional and psychological support without the benefit of male companionship.

The number of hours devoted by the African woman to domestic house chores is extremely variable depending on a number of factors: the size and type of family group and the (non-) availability of assistance from inside or outside the family including the income sent by migrant male workers and the type of housing occupied.

The oscillation between domestic house and wage labor by the African women illustrate their capacity to simultaneously exercise several economic and domestic activities. The inception of African women's entrance into the sphere of wage employment, their multiple occupation and the articulation between unpaid domestic work and wage labor has been the manifestation of the source of "additional benefit" or "subsidy" to capital.

Thus, part of the total cost of maintaining and reproducing labor power is transfered from the sphere of responsibility of the employer of the African family itself.

Women Against Apartheid

Ever since the turn of the century, African women have been in the forefront in challenging apartheid and its

horrifying brutality exacted upon Africans in general and women in particular.

As early as 1913, the state had attempted to make women carry passes. Although Orange Free State was the only province to have regulations which required African women to carry passes, the anti-pass campaign in the Orange Free State in 1913 was one of the earliest expressions of discontent by the African women in South Africa. As such, it came to assume a symbolic importance in the history of African women's resistance to apartheid. At the same time, it forced the South African Native Congress (later the African National Congress, ANC), which was formed a year earlier, to pay greater attention to women and provided the momentum for the establishment, in 1913/14 a Bantu Women's League within the ANC.

The Bantu Women's League successfully mobilized African women to the campaign against the pass laws in the Orange Free State. Similar campaigns of passive resistance and civil disobedience were carried, which forced the state to abandon its plan to force African women to carry passes. The demonstration and agitation by the African women in the Orange Free State introduced a new and uncertain dimension for the state with regard to pass laws. For years, the memory of the unrest was to temper its approach to African women. However, the passage of Native Abolition of Passes and Coordination Documents in 1952 dramatically changed the situation. The law required all African men and women to carry passes to enter urban areas and by 1956, the stage was set by the state requiring African women to carry passes.

Throughout the 1950's the African women's anti-pass campaign continued to generate an enormous response. While passes had become an issue of major concern to the African women, the fight against them was not a sectarian one: it was a struggle that embraced the whole liberation movement.

The anti-pass campaign was never a highly centralized political campaign. Rather it was carried along on the huge groundswell of popular feeling against passes among African women, a current that frequently brought women in the forefront of the struggle to end apartheid.

With the repressive campaign by the state, following the Sharpeville Massacre and the declaration of the state of emergency, many of the African women's activities were arrested, detained and banned. The struggle for their emancipation has assumed a new phase. The campaign to end peacefully the dehumanizing system of apartheid led to violent repression by the state of women and their organizations. Left with no alternative, the African women and their

organizations became part of the underground movement. They are key to its strength and capacity to undermine apartheid.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Fredrick Engels, The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State, Selected Works, Vol. III, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 233.

[2]Anthropologists have questioned Engels' assertion that private property began with the domestication of animals and that men were producers of subsistence. For example Lattimore's study (1957) has shown that there is no general law which determines the primacy of domestication of animals over domestication of plants. In addition Lee and Devore's work (1968) clearly demonstrates that the first division of labor was not between procuring/producing raw materials (man's work) and manufacturing these materials (women's work). In fact the reverse was closer to historical reality and women were responsible for the larger share of production.

[3]Zillah R. Eisenstein (ed.), Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism. Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979, p. 14.

[4]For the first major attempts to provide a thorough theoretical examination of the oppression of women using the concept of patriarchy see, Millett, K. Sexual Politics, Hart-Davis, London, 1971.

[5]H.D. Hughton, The South African Economy. Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1973.

[6]Though various propositions have been provided by this school, the literature covers various aspects of the economy and society of South Africa. See Legassick, M., "South Africa Capital Accumulation and Violence." Economy and Society, 3(3) 1974: 253-291; Magubane, B., The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa. Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979; Walpe, H. "Capitalism and Cheap Labor Power in South Africa." Economy and Society, 1, 1972.

[7]Beinart, W.J. The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1970. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982.

[8]South African Native Affairs Department Reports 1911-26. 1931, p. 13.

[9]Duncan Innes and Dan O'Meara, "Class Formation and Ideology: The Transkei Region." Review of the African Political Economy, London, 1977, pp. 69-86.

[10]Richard E. Lapchick and Stephanie Urdang, Oppression and Resistance: The Struggle of Women in South Africa. Greenwood Press, Westport, 1982, p. 20.

[11]C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, African Mine Labor in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933. Pluto Press, p. 178.

[12]Cited in Richard E. Lapchick and Stephanie Urdang, p. 22.

[13]Quoted in Freda Troup, Forbidden Pastures: Education Under Apartheid, International Reference and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, London, 1976.

[14]The racist ideology behind the Bantu education was formulated by Verwoerd - the architect of apartheid when he stated that, "there is no place for him (African) in the European Community above the level of certain forms of labor... For that reason it is no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aims absorption in the European community... Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European Society in which he is not allowed to graze." For an excellent treatment of education under apartheid see Freda Troup, ibid.

[15]Matsepe, I. Florence, African Women's Labor in the "Political Economy of South Africa 1880-1970." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, New Jersey, 1984, p. 227.