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On the Question of Women in South Africa*

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INTRODUCTION

There have been several approaches to the "woman question" even among Marxists and radical analysts. These have tended to define the parameters of the debate on the woman question. Each approach has a different focus or places analytical emphasis on different aspects of women's oppression or subordination.

Radical feminists believe that the position of women is primarily determined by a partriarchal sex system and that the division of labor by class and race stems from that system. The elimination of gender oppression, it is assumed, would also remove all other forms of oppression. Consequently, women are the most revolutionary group and they must work (if possible separately from men) to achieve sexual equality. The inadequacy of this theory for South Africa (as well

*The race terms used to denote social groups within the South African social formation conform to a large extent to the categories used within the social formation. However, I do not accept the racist categorization of apartheid ideology imbedded in them. They are used merely as a label denoting a social group.

as for other countries in the world) is rather obvious as will be shown later.

Some Marxist feminists, sticking close to the classics, see the condition of women as deriving from their class position. They use Marxist categories of the labor process, namely in production and reproduction, to define the role of women. According to such feminists the struggle of women is basically against capital in conjunction with other workers.

With the growth of the feminist movement, more subtle positions have been taken among socialist feminists, incorporating elements from both of the above. Primarily, it is now argued that there are two systems of oppression facing women—patriarchy and class. the former system oppresses all women. The latter system oppresses all.

Black feminists however criticized these approaches on the basis of their lack of consideration of the "race question." It was argued that even within the different classes black men and women were oppressed and that blacks form (in most countries) the majority of the working class, or the greater proportion of blacks are working class. Strategically, therefore, the struggle of black working class women is the essence of what all women's struggle is all about. It is argued that this struggle is one against all forms of oppression: class, race, and gender.

Though the above theoretical debates have developed mainly in the advanced Western economies, especially the United States, they may have some implications for South Africa as it is confronted by similar questions. However, we have to be careful not to impose debates or categories developed in different cultural contexts and under different historical conditions and in highly advanced economies on South Africa. The specificity of the South African social formation is paramount in analyzing the woman question in that country.

A number of commentators have remarked unfavorably about the lack of development of a feminist movement in South Africa especially among African women who are seen as the "most exploited" of social groups in the country. Few analysts of South Africa had until fairly recently paid serious attention to the woman question. But these analysts have also differed in their approach to the question. There have been those that focus on the structure of society, specifically Wolpe's theories,[1] to explain women's position and those that have emphasized the notion of class struggle—a notable proponent being Bizzoli (1983).[2] Both approaches have been criticized however for neglecting culture as an important dimension in the analysis of women in South Africa.

The approach followed here recognizes a constant interaction between political, economic, ideological, and cultural factors as well as between structures and social actors because they are bound in a dialectical relationship. This approach allows for different levels of investigation and analysis—at the abstract level of theory as well as at the concrete level at which social agents act to make history. It allows us to analyze women as members of the dominant as well as the subordinate groups along different dimensions.

The position of women in South Africa and their experience of oppression is structurally determined by economic, political, ideological, and cultural factors. However, this is not the only determinant. Class struggle or the conscious struggle to change that position also helps to shape their oppression. While structural factors tend to dominate, we also recognize that classes, races, and other social groups may indeed act to bring about changes in those structures. This approach is true to the analytical tradition that asserts that people make history, but do not do so under the conditions of their own choosing.

It has correctly been pointed out that to understand the subordination and exploitation of women we must look to the specificity of the process of the formation of the labor force. The tendency has been to treat this as a mere function of the requirements of capital. A cautionary note must also be struck in this connection because as Tilly (1980)[3] points out, labor force formation is also a consequence of the strategy households employ in response or reaction to demands of capital.

It has often been stated that in South Africa women suffer different forms of oppression as women, as oppressed workers, as oppressed blacks, all of the above, or combinations of these forms of oppressions. African women, it is generally stated, suffer all three. The starting point of this brief analysis of the South African society aims to not only make us think through the dynamics of race, class, and gender but of culture as well. The recognition of and respect for real differences of class, race, and culture of women in South Africa enables us to deal with the different ways the different women—African, colored, Asian, and white—experience their subordination and the different implications of that subordination.[4] These are not merely academic issues but are important for political mobilization of women, especially of those groups that have previously been perceived to be marginal to the struggle for national liberation but whose importance has now been recognized.

But the specificity of South Africa's historical development and the development of racial capitalism presents us with yet another set of

factors within which to contextualize this analysis. Therefore an understanding of the historical, material, and attendant ideological conditions which structure different women's positions and consciousness of their oppression is also necessary.

However these are complex issues and this paper does not intend to be an exhaustive analysis, but attempts merely to raise questions and issues that are important in determining future directions for a democratic South Africa on the question of women. We assume this question to involve "an awareness of woman's oppression and exploitation [in society, at work, and within the family] and conscious action by women and men to change this situation."[5]

My intention in this paper is not to provide all the answers to the complex question but to provoke discussion on a subject that affects such a large part of our population and which touches upon key aspects of mobilization that confront the liberation movement—a movement often accused of paying only lip-service to the oppressive conditions of women.

Historical Considerations

We argue that historically the oppression and exploitation of African women is in the first instance due to the economic and political interests of international capital as well as that of the white ruling class. In the second instance it is in the interest of all allies of the ruling class who benefit from the perpetuation of the socioeconomic privileges of whites and ideological and cultural subordination of all Africans by those who control the state.

While we recognize that not all African women experience their oppression in exactly the same way, a large proportion of African women have had their position structured by the integration of African economies into the world market and by such phenomena as land and agricultural policies and especially the migrant labor system. Colonial history and administrative reports are replete with concrete evidence of the visions white colonialist administrators and mining capital had of the role of African women in the political economy of South Africa—that of subsidizing the low levels of remuneration of migrant laborers and thus efficiently exploiting the labor of all Africans in those regions that supplied such migrant labor.[6] Different policies were pursued in the different areas but they were based on the same rationale. The economic rationale of the policies that had been pursued for quite some time were clearly expressed by the following

extract from the South African Native Affairs Department Report, which states

> that the provision of subsistence for the family of the worker, which is left behind in the reserves, forms a vital subsidy to wages which the worker receives in those industries without which those industries (the goldmines, for instance) could not be carried on.[7]

The modes of labor control devised, the reproduction of these modes, and their ideological and cultural support systems necessitated a restructuring of African kinship, family, and cultural traditions. One of the mechanisms used to achieve this was changes in the law affecting women and marriage so well documented by H.J. Simons.[8]

Numerous changes were made in the restructuring of these African societies. Some were grafted onto aspects of culture and/or traditions which were unfavorable to women and entrenched their subordination, for example the institutionalization of the junior status of African women. A good example of this are the changes that matrilineal societies of northern Namibia have undergone. In their case much of the laws, traditions, and kinship patterns that gave women a relatively strong position have been completely eroded and replaced by patriarchal structures.

Although the subsistence base upon which African women could initially produce to augment low wages of male migrant labor has been totally eroded, the system itself has not changed. Consequently, women have had to be drawn into new forms of productive activity themselves, for example seasonal migrant labor and/or participation in informal sector activities, or else be driven to greater levels of poverty. The increased poverty level of the Bantustans is clear proof of this trend.[9]

It has been argued that capitalism is being blamed for the oppression of women when in actual fact such oppression preceded the development of capitalist relations. It cannot be denied that asymmetrical gender relations were antecedent, but other asymmetrical relations also eisted which mediated this gender asymmetry. For example, in African culture, age was an important aspect of hierarchical relations among Africans. The role of "gerontocracy" remains unexplored in the analysis of these hierarchical, asymmetrical relations across gender lines.

For example, Bizzoli has argued that it is the ability of African

societies to control the labor of women that resulted in women remaining behind when the men went on migrant labor contracts. But is was the young men who were sent out initially—not all men. The ability to control the labor of young men was couched in numerous cultural traditions. Today, under totally different historical and economic conditions, women continue to be prohibited from leaving reserves or Bantustans by a myriad of legal and administrative measures that have nothing to do with African men's oppression of women, but have everything to do with racial, political domination of Africans. We should however also see the initial "youthful maleness" of migrant labor as a strategy African households employed for survival—both economic and cultural. That it was detrimental to women however cannot be denied.

In other areas of South Africa the position of African women was not structured via the migrant labor system but through the exploitation of family labor via the land tenancy system—in the Free State and Transvaal especially but also in some parts of Natal.[10] Unlike their other counterparts, these women did not experience their exploitation indirectly but very directly from very early in the process of integration into the world market economy. The effective expropriation of land and the changing structure of tenancy relations resulted, for example, in the early proletarianization of African women in the Free State as compared for example with Natal. This explains the difference in the early composition of the domestic service sector (an early step in the proletarianization of women) between two provinces—namely predominantly African female in the former and initially male-dominated in the latter.

A third group of women were those that belonged to the strata of small landed peasantry and traditional elite among the different ethnic groups. Different traditions and property relations regarding gender affected the women but generally for all these women their rights in land and property became severely circumscribed or totally eliminated. It is from this stratum that most of the early professionally trained women came. Today most of the middle class professional and commercial petty bourgeois women have their roots in this strata but some of them are women from other socially mobile families whose urban residence was able to allow them access to education, employment, and some commercial activities.[11]

Women, thus differently constituted historically, are today located in different positions in the labor structure and are affected differentially by residential laws (e.g., those allowed to live in "white" areas by Section 10 laws) and by 'citizenship' to Bantustans. Each of these

conditions structure African women's consciousness of their oppression in present day South Africa.

The "Colored "population group has it historical origins in the intermarriages of various population groups in the Cape—Africans, Khoi, Malays, of both slave and non-slave origins, and whites. Landless and greatly disadvantaged economically relative to the other groups, they entered wage labor very early in the history of capitalist development, mainly in the agricultural sector of the Cape. Their geographic distribution is pertinent to the analysis of women. Approximately 86% of the population is located in the Cape; 77% is urban, mainly concentrated in Cape Town and in towns stretching along the eastern Cape to Port Elizabeth with smaller concentrations in the Transvaal cities and Durban. The rural population among them is found mainly in the agricultural areas of the Cape province. Mostly Christian (only 6.3% Muslim) and 90% Afrikaans speaking, the women were drawn very early into domestic service and later into the early manufacturing industries.

These women's historical experience in the process of South Africa's industrialization has many similarities to those of many African women but their predominantly urban characteristics, cultural mixture, and slightly better social position in the racial hierarchy of the racist system mediates the manner in which they experience apartheid and gender oppression.

Indian women on the other hand have experienced their subordination/oppression and exploitation in a very different manner. Their historical background differs; their position is mediated by not only membership in a special "racial category" that appears to be culturally exclusionary, but also by their position in the political economy of the geographic areas in which they are predominant.

Although the majority of Indians in South Africa are born there, they have roots that tie them to areas or origin in India. Their cultural, linguistic, economic, and religious origins as well as class positions and geographic distribution present us with several issues to take into consideration when dealing with the question of women. In other words, the structural position of these women in the society is further mediated by religious culture and ethnicity.

Ninety percent (90%) of Indians are descendents of indentured laborers; of these, approximately 70% are Hindu and 20% are Muslim. The latter group have their historical base in South Africa, not in indentured labor but in being what is called "Passenger Indians." These were Indians who paid their passages and were mainly traders from Western India. Because of the latter's class position, they were

able to maintain contact with their country and areas of origin and thus reproduce their culture, especially at the domestic level but at the societal level as well.

The geographic distribution of these groups provides an added dimension: 91% of Indians are urban; of these, 82% to 85% are in Natal, the majority living in the Durban–Pine–Pietermaritzburg, vicinity and within a 150-kilometer radius. About 10% live in the industrial Witwatersrand–Pretoria complex.

Moslem Indians are concentrated in Durban and along the rail line from Durban to Johannesburg where they are mainly in the commercial sector. Approximately 90% of the Transvaal Indians are in the commercial sector.

Although Hindus form the largest group, they have different class backgrounds. The later arrivals among them did not come indentured. They were drawn from northern India and linguistically were Hindi and came from the higher castes. The ex-indentured among the Indians mainly entered wage employment as waiters, traders, hawkers, and initially also as domestics. Though many of them became upwardly mobile and moved up into other classes or strata, it is from this segment that the Indian working class is drawn.

Among both of these broad groups, religious–cultural practices continue to be reproduced especially at the household level but also to some extent at the societal level, though some of these practices may be on the decline. For example, arranged marriages—usually along religious and/or linguistic lines—occur and these may be important influences on the manner in which the women experience their oppression under a racial capitalist system.

Other social conditions may throw light on the condition of women. In Natal in1963, 64% of Indians lived below the poverty line; in 1970, 34% still lived in abject poverty. Approximately 20% of industrial workers in Natal were employed by Indians.[12] It is not certain how many of the workers are female. Should a large proportion be female, further issues are raised regarding how women experience their oppression. There is a need to investigate the concrete level and explore the implication of all the results.

The historical roots of white women are not uniform either. Ethnicity and class played crucial roles. The origins of white Afrikaner women were based on land, most of which was violently expropriated from Africans. Their differential class positions developed when the Afrikaners lost land and became impoverished and it was the younger women who were first sent into wage employment. This is yet a further example of survival strategies familes employed.[13] Those

Afrikaners able to hold on to land became eventually the agricultural bourgeoisie, and a significant force in the ruling class. However, to achieve this position they sought and obtained the alliance of the Afrikaner working class.[14–16] To obtain this alliance, the ideology of white supremacy became very necessary in order to divide the working class. Today, that racist ideology has a relative autonomy and is reproduced at both the household and the societal level.

Some white women, mainly of English background, arrived in the country as domestic servants.[17] But as the economy expanded and marriage opportunities became plentiful, these women quickly moved out of this employment,[18] as the changing structure of the domestic service sector illustrates.[19] Many working class white women at first augmented low wages of husbands by engaging in "productive" activities such as sewing, beadwork, cakemaking, etc with the help of domestic servants. But as job reservation ensured higher levels of remuneration for white men, many white working class women became full-time housewives; many entered the commercial and tertiary sectors, as our tables and J. Yawitch's findings[20] illustrate.

English-speaking women of the growing commercial, mining, and manufacturing bourgeoisie, from very early in the development of capitalism, held a privileged position and were later joined by the Afrikaner and immigrant women who moved into this class and other priveleged strata. The ideology of racism as well as that sexist ideology that enshrined their "pedestal" position, served the interest of these women very well. It is within their households especially that those racist, sexist, and class ideologies that oppressed African women were reproduced on a daily basis as well as generationally (in the rearing of white children). Of course these ideologies were reproduced at the social level through the massive ideological apparatus of the state, via schools, the media, and the church.

Women's Participation In The Economy

Agriculture and Service Sectors

Women's position in the structure of the economy, as has been shown in numerous studies, has implications for them. The participation of African women in the economy reveals several characteristics. The largest proportion (+37%) are employed in the service sector, constituting between 60% and 79% of the total labor force in that sector and about 90% of Africans in that sector. The next largest proportion of women were engaged in agriculture. Although women's incorporation

took place in large numbers from the mid-1940s, the structure has not remained static as Tables I and II indicate.

Table I indicates the concentration of African women in particular sectors over time. The concentration of African women in domestic service and agriculture presents them with several problems. The domestic service sector, which employs mainly women (see Table II), isolates the individual worker, intensifies their vulnerability vis-a-vis their employers, and makes exploitation absolute. It is only in recent years that attempts have been made to organize this sector, but the very emergence of different organizations such as the Dometic Workers' and Employers' Project (DWEP), the South African Domestic Workers' Association (SADWA), and the Domestic Workers' Association (DWA) illustrates the difficulties involved. The conditions that confront these workers and the manner in which they experience their oppression were documented by J. Cock in 1980.[21] But by 1982 it became evident that this is a shrinking employment sector—partly due to the effects of recession.[22] African women's employment in the rest of the service sector increased significantly between 1973 and 1981. This was because white women moved out of some of the employment sectors such as sales, commercial clerks, etc.; "colored" and Asian women moved out of service areas such as drycleaning, shop assistants, etc., and they were replaced by African women.

Although African women increasingly entered farm wage labor in their own right, they did so mainly as irregular or casual agricultural workers. But this sector too has been shrinking due to increased mechanization of previously labor-intensive activities.[23]

The process of Africanization and feminization of these sectors of the economy was not accidental but was a result of a conscious search for the cheapest labor as well as a result of household survival needs that demanded more and more wage earners. The labor laws that had excluded these two main sectors of African women's activity from legal organization and bargaining, protective legislation, workmen's compensation, etc., reinforced women's vulnerability and powerlessness. This in turn increased the dependence of women on males—kin as well as non-kin. The residential and citizenship measures that control their movement[24] exacerbate these women's vulnerability, powerlessness, and dependence–which all help to shape their consciousness/awareness of the oppression and exploitation.

Domestic service and farm labor are also employing significant numbers of "colored" women in the Cape. Table II indicates their proportion in selected urban areas in the domestic service sector. In Cape Town in 1970 they constituted almost 70%; that same year they formed between 10.2% and 11.2% of this total sector in the country.

TABLE I. ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE AFRICAN FEMALES BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY.

	1921		1936		1946		1960		1970	
Occupation	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Professional/Tech.	2,312	0.1	4,261	0.2	10,135	0.9	25,487	3.0	55,431	2.7
Administrative	—	—	10	—	21	—	258	—	40	—
Clerical	44	—	16	—	100	—	1,000	0.1	5,379	0.3
Sales	425	—	226	—	567	—	3,372	0.4	17,661	0.9
Service	163,009	10.2	243,852	12.7	445,401	37.7	495,167	59.1	730,345	36.8
Agricultural	1,412,289	88.4	1,659,350	86.5	667,618	56.6	192,560	23.0	871,968	43.9
Mines	531	—	—	—	—	—	12	—	1,399	0.1
Transport/Communication	3,234	0.2	146	—	385	—	424	0.1	3,024	0.2
Production	12,191	0.8	3,373	0.2	8,345	0.7	22,296	2.7	82,556	4.2
Unclassifiable	2,942	0.2	8,085	0.4	47,607	4.0	97,713	11.7	218,144	11.0
Total	1,596,977	100.0	1,919,319	100.0	1,180,179	100.0	838,289	100.0	1,985,947	100.0

Source: South African Department of Statistics, Population Census Report No. 02–05–04.

TABLE II. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DOMESTIC SERVANTS BY RACE AND SEX IN ELEVEN PRINCIPAL URBAN AREAS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

	African		White		Colored		Asian	
Urban Area	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Cape Town	20.3	4.2	—	—	68.5	4.2	—	—
Port Elizabeth	72.8	5.3	—	—	20.9	0.8	—	—
East London	89.0	8.3	—	—	2.5	0.3	—	—
Kimberley	70.4	12.4	—	—	14.9	2.3	—	—
Natal								
Pietermaritzburg	65.8	33.0	—	—	0.3	0.3	—	—
Durban	59.5	38.8	—	—	0.7	0.1	—	—
Transvaal								
Pretoria	77.1	20.3	—	—	2.3	0.3	—	—
Witwatersrand	75.9	22.6	0.1	0.1	—	—	—	—
Free State								
Bloemfontein	80.8	14.8	—	—	3.7	0.7	—	—
Vaal Triangle	84.3	13.5	—	—	2.2	—	—	—
OFS Goldfields	85.6	11.7	—	—	1.8	0.9	—	—

Source: South African Department of Statistics.

Because these women have "urban rights," they do not suffer the residential insecurities of African women. The racial attitudes of employers are perhaps less discriminatory. But conditions of service were found to be extremely poor and wages extremely low, and in some cases lower than those of African women (UCT Wages and Economics Commission, 1973). The same structures of domination/subordination and racial, class, and sexist ideologies that affect African women also affect them. But employers and/or the system have often used measures to divide the two groups. The employers may use the dichotomies of rural (illegal)/urban, African/colored, in their deliberate choices of domestic workers as a strategy to divide and rule and hence control these workers at the individual level—a tactic that is especially helpful to the dominant classes. The difficulties experienced in organizing these domestic workers nationally (besides those that derive from the isolated conditions of services) are partly due to all the above factors.

"Coloured" women's employment in the farming sector increased as their men moved out of this sector. Their conditions of service have been some of the most abhorrent. Besides extreme exploitation, they have been subjected to gross sexual harrassment by employers.

Although it is illegal to use the old "tot" system of payment, these women continue to be paid in this manner. Consequently there has been a tremendous increase in the rate of alcoholism among women in this sector.

Industrial Production Sector

A sector that employs large numbers of women is the manufacturing industry. The changing racial composition of the female labor force is a result of several factors, among which are a changing structure of the economy and racial and sexist ideologies regarding female labor. The major employers of women are the apparel, textile, food, leather, and electronics industries.

As Table III shows, female employment in manufacturing remained constant at 15–16% between 1946 and 1960. By 1970 it had increased to 19% and by 1976 to 21%. Clearly evident however is the decline in the proportion of white females and the relative constancy of colored females. This sector has been and continues to be a major source of wage labor for colored women. The decline in white females was compensated for by the increase of African and Asian women. This pattern is indicative of the following facts:

A. These small sectors are labor intensive and are in constant search of ever cheaper labor, especially the clothing, food, textile, and electronics sectors.

B. Some of these industries relocated to the border area and hence increased employment of African women (whose labor is even "cheaper").

TABLE III. % FEMALE WAGE EMPLOYEES IN MANUFACTURING.

Year	1946		1951		1960		1970		1976	
Population Group	%	%*	%	%*	%	%*	%	%*	%	%*
Asian	1	(0)	2	(0)	3	(1)	7	(1)	10	(2)
African	5	(1)	8	(1)	17	(2)	29	(6)	36	(8)
Colored	36	(1)	39	(6)	40	(6)	39	(5)	34	(4)
White	58	(9)	51	(8)	40	(6)	25	(5)	20	(4)
Total	100	16	100	15	100	15	100	19	100	21

*Figures in parentheses indicate female employement as a % of total manufacturing.

C. The proletarianization of Indian women (who had hitherto not worked outside the home in any significant numbers) is a result of increasing levels of poverty in the group as well as the increasing participation of the Indian petit bourgeoisie in manufacturing.

The clothing industry is the only industry in which women make up the majority of the work force. The feminization of this sector is closely related to the low wages paid, but it is often rationalized by sexist ideologies that refer to women's "nimble fingers" and "working for pocket money." Both rationalizations have no base in reality. All these women work because they have to, especially African women.

Though these workers' conditions of service, wages, and their organization in the labor process are much better than those of their counterparts in the domestic service and agricultural sectors, they face numerous problems. The general working conditions are poor, pay is low, health conditions are at best poor. Though the social nature of the labor activity may facilitate organization, they are confronted with such problems as:

1. Trade unions are illegal in Bantustans (border areas).
2. Employers use discriminatory measures in the employment of different racial groups.
3. Employers pit men against women; for example, in cases where trade unions have pushed for equal pay for men and women, women have been dismissed.[25]

Moreover, women's participation in trade union activity has been curtailed by the household activities women must perform in daily and generational reproduction (social as well as biological) of the family. This gender subordination at the household level presents serious constraints for the necessary participation of women in class struggle as well as in the struggle for national liberation.

Professional and Petit Bourgeois Strata

The position of women within this strata in each racial category is illustrated at different historical points by Tables IV and V.

African men and women in the professional category are located mainly in three areas: teaching, medicine, and religion. Women outnumber men in the former two. Salaries, conditions of service, and taxation are biased in favor of men but the differentials are relatively

TABLE IV. OCCUPATIONAL CENSUS.

	White		African		Coloured		Asian	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Managers & Proprietors	18,561	1,509	818	16	380	71	5,889	166
Bookkeepers	4,764	3,062	6	1	26	18	196	3
Clerks	36,040	11,183	1,756	1	310	40	1,094	15
Typists	71	14,497	8	15	1	15	4	1
Shop Assistants	14,932	15,427	1,950	126	1,067	251	5,232	181
Hawkers	992	33	1,636	83	2,065	172	3,137	339

Based on: Occupational Census 1936, in U.G. November 12, 1942.

TABLE V. SOUTH AFRICAN FEMALE NURSES BY RACIAL CATEGORY 1946-1970.

	1946		1960		1970	
Racial Category	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
African	3,013	19.1	12,789	35.5	24,677	43.9
White	12,086	76.5	20,249	56.2	25,075	44.6
Coloured	626	4.0	2,660	7.4	5,569	9.9
Indian	73	0.5	351	1.0	887	1.6

narow. The differentials along racial lines are very significant, echoing the arguments by black feminists as explained before. Among Asians, significant gender differences in participation in professional and in the commercial petit bourgeois sectors may reflect class position as well as religious culture that may constrain women's work outside the home and/or the intensity of their subordination at the household level. There is need for investigation of this.

Although women of all racial categories are located predominately within certain sectors, the changing composition of these gender-specific sectors along racial lines are also telling, as Table V shows.

As the proportion of white nurses drastically declined, that of African nurses significantly increased, while that of the other groups rose steadily. While we are not certain why this was the case, it is possible that the increasing privatization of health services may be a plausible explanation. The conditions of work are not the most pleasant and salaries are not attractive for some members of those groups higher on the racial hierarchy.

But one crucial variable in the employment in these gender–specific sector is that government is the main employer. The implications of this for all black women are obvious As government employees are prohibited from engaging in labor and political organizations and can more easily be victimized by a repressive government bureaucracy, this can severely constrain women. Their vulnerability and powerlessness is real. But under the right political conditions these women may indeed be a force that helps to undermine the regime, as the Baragwanath nurses' strike or the positions taken by many teachers during the school boycotts in 1985 seem to suggest.

WOMEN'S STRUGGLES

The preceding discussion focused on historically tracing different

women's positions and the structural determinants of their oppression. However, the struggles of women have also helped to shape their experiences. Women have often acted on their own behalf, separately as well as in conjunction with men. These struggles indicate the different ways women view the intensity of their oppression.

The early struggles of women against the pass laws (1913), resulted in a more than thirty-year delay in control of their labor via this system. The revolts of rural women against the culling of cattle in Natal, against the carrying of passes in the Anti-Pass campaign of the 1950s, in the Potato and Bus boycotts, and in the Defiance Campaign are indicative of issues around which women seem to organize. These issues affected the daily lives of women and their families. Women's participation in the broader issues was smaller, partly due to the dominant ideologies defining politics as a male arena. But there is need to concretely analyze the nature and extent of women's participation in resistance against the background described earlier.

Victories won in these struggles have not improved the position of women per se, as these were later eroded by new and more repressive measures. However we may assume that the historical precedents of women's struggles have an effect on later struggles.. There is need to investigate at the concrete level if there are correlations between areas of intense political resistance by women and by men in the earlier period and those of widespread women's involvement today.

The participation of women in the broader liberation struggle has definitely increased since 1970. But even as women's participation increases, and even as consciousness of women's strategic interests rises, the main focus of attention continues to be the struggle for national liberation.

Several factors contribute to this, among them:

A. Mass removals that affected more than 3½ million people of all races between 1960 and 1982 and which have disrupted the lives of men and women in an unprecedented fashion (e.g., the Surplus Peoples Project).

B. Bantustan policies and the crystallization of class interests as well as increasing inpoverization in these areas which necessitated the forging of a united domestic/household strategy to meet the onslaught on household and community survival (despite household conflict).

C. The decline of real income for all households and the recent inflation has threatened survival, for example, in the clothing

industry in 1984, earnings were 22% less in real terms than in 1948.

D. Increased unemployment among all the groups is another factor. Employment in the clothing sector went down by a high of 7.5% for Africans and a low of 0.6% for Colored.

These deteriorating economic conditions have had serious implications at the household level. The various administrative measures that make women dependent on men—for example, access to urban residency, housing, credit, land, etc., all of which are crucial to women—have exacerbated that dependence, and hence the intensity of asymmetrical gender relations at the household level. This is reflected an increase in abuse of women among all races (to which increased alcoholism is a contributory factor), the appropriation of women's property via reimposed inheritance laws that do not favor women, etc.

Women's Oppression Within the Household

The oppression of women within the household is not homogeneous. There are wide variations within and across class, race, and ethnic group depending on geographic residence, religion, and the like. The intensity with which women experience their oppression at this level is affected by various factors, such as the extent to which:

(a) the sexual division of labor within the household[26] has often laid undue burden on women for the reproduction and maintenance of the household on a daily basis as well as generationally;

(b) cultural traditions and oppressive gender ideologies that support and enforce women's oppression and exploitation are reproduced at the household level (the intensity of this oppression might be greater if these traditions and ideologies had their bases under different social and production relations and were inconsistent with the new relations);

(c) women's access (both at the level of society and of the household) to those aspects of life that may help to improve their quality of life and their power is denied or circumscribed; (productive base, knowledge, education, health, or income); and

(d) women have the ability to make or participate in decisions about themselves and their families in essential matters.

There has as yet been no thorough investigation made of how these

different groups of women experience gender oppression within the household. Sweeping statements and generalizations prevail but there is need to investigate the exact nature and extent of female subordination and/or exploitation at the household level. For example, the role that dowry payment or "lobola" may play in the subordination of women may vary greatly according to whether the women are urban or rural. Pronouncements on women's subordination in the household have often reflected class and cultural biases. It is often assumed that, for example, African women or poor women are more oppressed at the household level. We cannot make such assumptions. We need to establish these by investigation. This is necessary so that we avoid imposing on the poor, the weaker, and the marginalized women new forms of oppressions. This investigation is necessary to assist in restructuring gender relations within the society and within the household for all groups of women.

Soweto and Its Aftermath

The Soweto uprising touched all classes and social groupings. It transformed people's general perceptions of the different groups, crystallizing more clearly where alliances should be forged. Students among the oppressed groups built bridges across the racist population categories. Women, in fulfillment of their reproductive responsibility, became heavily involved in protection of their children. What may be a weakness was translated into "relative strength" as women sought alliances and support, material as well as emotional, across class and ethnicity as well as race.

As political resistance against the regime intensified, the identification of apartheid as a source of women's oppression and therefore focus of attack, also intensified. Because petit bourgeois and some professional women have become beneficiaries of some of the ensuing mass struggles, women's gender subordination has become even more obfuscated. The high visibility of some women leaders in the political arena, notably women like Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Mandela and the late Victoria Mxenge, has not made matters easier.

When the UDF was formed in 1983, that broad affiliation included numerous women's organizations. These organizations reflect the responses of women to the manner in which they experienced their position and oppression. While many organizations were started to improve their conditions of life/survival, many others were started to meet the various class, professional, ethnic, and cultural needs of the various women. Trade union organizations increased female membership and appear to be paying more attention to the issues affecting

women. As the UDF became more of a vehicle for forging alliances across class, race, culture, and ethnicity nationally, and the African National Congress (ANC) and its Freedom Charter became more generally acceptable to the masses of the people, the reactionary opposition to these developments has not however lacked its share of women supporters.

A case in point is the growth of the Inkatha Women's Brigade. While Inkatha Women's membership is unclear (due to the extreme pressure put on workers and professional Zulu women to take out party cards), the active involvement of Brigade members in violent acts against nonmembers reflects class and ethnic contradictions.

As these contradictions develop and mature, and fractions and strata become more defined, the lack of homogeneity among women within race is likely to surface more clearly. But possibilities for building enduring alliances in support of or in defense of "people's" interests among women are likely to increase. Whether these can be translated to serve women's strategic gender interests, however, is another matter.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has attempted to show that women's position, their oppression, and their exploitation is not only historically specific but is specific also in terms of class, race, culture, and ethnicity. Therefore in dealing with the question of women, an assumption of homogeneity especially within racial categories is fallacious. We must acknowledge differences that derive from the multi-causal nature and extreme variability of existence across class, race, nationality, etc..[27]

This paper has also attempted to show that structural factors have been the main determinants of women's oppression but that women indeed struggle against that oppression. It speaks directly to some of the issues raised by Makamure about parallel "struggles of women workers, peasants . . . and middle class women"[28] and the ambivalence toward the struggle for women's emancipation by women themselves in Zimbabwe. It also raises important implications for Namibia where there has also been differential incorporation of women into the market economy as well as differential experience of the prosecution of the national liberation struggle.

What these suggest is that under racial hegemony, where capitalist social and production relations dominate, and where women's position within the family and in society is weak and/or insecure, the struggle for women's emancipation tends to assume a secondary role.

This raises specific questions about the role of liberation movements in restructuring asymmetrical and exploitative relations in general and women's oppression in particular. National liberation movements by their very nature of course draw upon a broad spectrum of the masses. The ANC is multi-class, race, ethnic, and culture. It does and must draw upon the broad interests and struggles of the majority of people even if it does not initiate them. But it would be safe to presume that struggle around the woman question, as defined here, should be a necessary constituent of the prosecution of the struggle for national liberation. The very mechanisms by which racial capitalism and white hegemonic classes have achieved national domination demands that this be a necessary focus if true national liberation is to become a reality.

The experiences of some societies indicate that such development is not automatic, nor is it easy. It is instructive to compare differences between revolutionary societies such as Cuba and Nicaragua. In the former, Fidel Castro in 1959 remarked about racial discrimination and "silence" about sexual discrimination. But it was not until the 1970s that the Cuban government took specific measures to address gender inequality. In Nicaragua on the other hand, it was only weeks after the Sandinista victory that the government addressed the question of sexual exploitation in the media and female representation in the army cadre and at different levels of the party in the regions and in the Sandinista leadership.[29]

Today it is no longer "taboo" to talk about the subordination of women, but it is not opportune either. It is imperative that men and women within the liberation movements—ANC and SWAPO—talk about it and spearhead that struggle. It is in particular the women in these movements, as well as those less insecure and less powerless outside of them, who must "take the knife by the sharp edge" in the fight for the liberation of women.

There will be need for the consolidation and defence of newly-won freedoms. Those forces that oppose the restructuring of the new societies will waste no time in seeking out and utilizing weaknesses. Fears and insecurity can be preyed upon and manipulated. Those of women are no exception, and the left in Chile so painfully learned when Allende was overthrown.

NOTES

1. Wolpe, H. "Capitalism and Cheap Labor Power in South Africa." *Economy and Society* 1 (1972).
2. Bizzoli, L. "Marxism, Feminism, and Southern African Studies," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 4 (1983).
3. Tilly, L.A. and Scott, J.W. *Women, Work and Family.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978.
4. This is not intended to emphasize differences and/or cleavages between groups but to assess the commonalities as well as the differences in order to understand and work in future cooperation.
5. Reddock, Rhonda (ed.) *National Liberation and Women's Liberation.* The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1984.
6. Native Economic Reports 1903 to 1948.
7. South African Native Affairs Department Report, 1931, p. 13.
8. Simons, H.J. *African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
9. Yawitch, Joanne. "Tightening the Noose: African Women and Influx Control in South Africa 1950–1980." Carnegie Conference Paper 82 (April 1984).
10. For a more detailed analysis, see W. Bernart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860–1930,* Cambridge University Press, 1982; C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry,* London: Heinemann, 1979; T. Keegan, *Peasants, Capitalists and Farm Labour: Class Formation in the Orange River Colony 1902–1910.*
11. For a discussion of the African Petit Bourgeoisie, see Z. Pallo Jordan, "The African Petty Bourgeoisie: A case study of NAFOC 1964-1984," ANC Occasional Research Paper, May 1984.
12. This clearly raises questions of class tensions within the Indian population that may need investigation, especially as to whether ethnicity does or does not mitigate these tensions.
13. This speaks directly to some of the issues raised by Bizzoli.
14. Morris, M.L, 1982. . . .
15. Legassick 1977. . . .
16. Legassick, M. "Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post 1948 South Africa," in *South African Capitalism and Black Political Opposition,* Ed. by M.J. Murray. Cambridge, MA: Scheukman Publishing Co., 1982.
17. Gaistkell, D. "Christina Compounds For Girls': Church Hostels for African Women in Johannesburg," *Journal of South African Studies* 6:1 (October 1979).
18. The tensions that existed in this sector employment of time—predominantly black male and white female—and the ideological battles it raised are very well described by the historiographer Charles Van Qnselen in his works on the Witwatersrand and explain, in part, the shift out of this sector by white women.

19. Gaitskell, *op. cit.*
20. Yawitch, Joanne. "Women in Wage Labor." *South African Labour Bulletin* 9:3 (December 1983).
21. Cock, J. *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation,* Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1980.
22. Yawitch, *op. cit.*
23. De Klerk, Mike. "Maize Farm Employment," *South African Labour Buletin* 9:2 (November 1983):19-46.
24. Yawtich, "Tightening the Noose" *op. cit.*
25. Bird, Adrienne, "Organizing Women Workers," *South African Labour Bulletin* 10:8 (July-August 1985):76-91.
26. This aspect is often seized upon (especially by males) to trivialize the struggle of women. More and more work is being done in this regard by African women researchers and the United Nations. Comparative work with Latin American and Asian scholars is beginning to reveal the importance of the analysis and the necessity for a serious consideration of this aspect for policy.
27. Molyneaux 1985. . . .
28. Makamure, N. "The Women's Movement in Zimbabwe," *Journal of African Marxists* 6 (October 1984):74-86.
29. Cole, Jo B. "Women's Collective Actions in Cuba: Struggles that Continue," Paper presented at Wenner-Gren Foundation Symposium No. 99, Mijas, Spain, November 1985.