# AFRICAN WOMEN

## A Political Economy

*Edited by Meredeth Turshen*

# African Women

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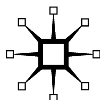

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# Preface

*Jan Burgess*

Ideas for this collection of articles/writings began as an embryonic glimmer in the mid-1960s when Kwame Nkrumah became president of Ghana. He gave hope to the rest of Africa. Yes, while the 1960s brought euphoria to the streets of some newly independent African countries, many of us in the West were more preoccupied with the Vietnam War and its ensuing revelations. But it was in Africa that the (neo-conservative) templates of the years to follow began with the overthrow of Nkrumah and continued with the ongoing destabilization of the Congo (DRC) and the rape of Africa. Now, the "scramble for Africa" continues to rage with the multinational corporation of the U.S. squaring off with China for the battle over Africa's wealth: oil, gas, diamonds, and minerals such as coltan, and now land. But it is not simply these external forces that are playing such a crucial role; what about Africa's own gatekeepers who continue to defy the voices of their people?

If the 1960s was a time of passionate political debate(s), struggle, and optimism, it was also an age of revolution with the spirit of defiance in the air. By the time we reached the 1990s there were some who were asking: is there still a role for the intellectual? Or were the elite clubs of scholars synonymous with the intellectual? Did academic fence-sitting or aloofness allow outside forces access to scholars or were we also guilty of exploitation?

There was the "Obama moment" in 2009 when the clenched fist opened to reveal hope. Not just for the fraction of one percent who thought of profits, but for the rest of us who thought of a more equitable coexistence within communities. Yet within the global communities, for those who talk to one another through the Social Forum connection, there exists a well-spring of humanity rising out of despair. One wonders at the spirit of resistance for instance in the Niger Delta, the camps of Rwanda and Congo, the "stans" of a "new South Africa." The joy of having a plot of land

to grow food, of sending your children to school, of having a house with a roof and even windows, of being safe.

We had demonstrated and marched against U.S. imperialism and apartheid. We had witnessed and participated in the election of Robert Mugabe (in Zimbabwe) and the liberation of the Frontline States. Some of us were even involved in the tragedy of Biafra. We felt joy when Nelson Mandela was released, yet saddened when comrades were killed by bombs in Mozambique, South Africa—and beyond. Do you remember *ujamaa* in Tanzania? And how we thought the end of the thirty-year war between Eritrea and Ethiopia was the beginning of a new Africa? Although we knew of the rich history and diversity of the continent, we underestimated the power of greed and corruption.

It is here, in this collection, that we attempt to pull together the threads of history, of memory, and the tragedy that continues to invade Africa: from that tempestuous period in the 1960s through to 2010. We have struggled together from the war zones of Eritrea to the townships of South Africa. The challenge and responsibility now is to not only learn the lessons of the past but continue to record accurately the present as it unfolds. Without exception, every contributor to this collection still feels the passion of injustice and betrayal. It is where the mindset of the activist meets the role of the scholar.

# Acknowledgments

In October 2007, over lunch at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association in New York, Jan Burgess, my long-time friend and editor of the *Review of African Political Economy*, suggested to me that I work on this volume: an anthology that would celebrate the contribution of African women's studies to political economy by showcasing work that is critical to the development of our understanding of how globalization has affected African women's work and political organizing. We decided that it could also present an opportunity to revisit African feminist debates with a critical eye and to take stock of where we are today. I thank Jan for her belief in the importance of this project and her mighty efforts to bring it to your hands. This collection could not have been published without her dedication to the idea of making known the work of and by African women.

I also want to thank Mark Major who gave valuable research assistance to this project. I am grateful to several institutions: the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University, which awarded me a sabbatical during which I worked on the volume; the Vermont Studio Center, which provided me all the essentials (nature, nurture, stimulation, and solitude) of a creative month at their retreat, and the New York and Johnson public libraries, which responded to my many requests for reference books. My editors at Palgrave Macmillan, Chris Chappell and Samantha Hasey, were unfailing supportive, and I highly value their encouragement and advice.

I want to express my deep appreciation to the contributors to this volume who responded so positively to the call for articles for the current publication. Many of them pioneered the field of African women's studies, giving voice to the concerns of millions of sisters on the continent.

La luta continua!

Meredeth Turshen
Hoboken, NJ
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# 1

# The Political Economy of Women in Africa

*Meredeth Turshen*

## Feminist Debates

An academic discipline first inspired by women activists, women's studies has grown dramatically around the world since the 1970s. This volume gathers together articles that present feminist thought in African studies and commentaries that reflect the state of women's thinking on economics and politics today. African women's economic activities range from farming and manufacturing to every sort of self-employment. Politics encompasses formal participation in governing institutions like parliaments to informal activism in community-based organizations.

Paradoxically, 1975, the United Nations International Year of the Woman, marked the beginning of our ghettoization. As women's studies became a separate academic discipline, we seemed to slide from Marxist-feminism to feminist-socialism, and we became distracted by the semantics of women in development, women and development, and gender and development. Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead (2007a, 3) call this transformation "the struggles for interpretive power that shape policy processes and politics," and they note the frustration of feminist activists who see their ideas simplified in the service of mainstreaming gender in development (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007b). Gender, they observe, too often slips into a focus on women, who are usually cast as a homogeneous group with undifferentiated interests.

This collection returns to the basics, to political economy, in an attempt to pinpoint what moves women toward liberation in Africa. From the

beginning, Western donor agencies drove much of the programming for women, and the lure of funding continues to tie the work of many women's groups to their agenda. No doubt feminists in Africa benefited from their support, but as Deborah Fahy Bryceson has lamented, "I can't help thinking that independent, original thought by Africanist and especially African women was to a large extent stifled" (personal communication, 11 January 2010). It is also true that the purpose of some of what passes for women's studies is to control women; it is not feminist in its politics or policy implications (Baylies, Burgess, and Roberts 1983). The donors' gender and development discourse, despite all of the attempts to connect gender to economic and social justice, smoothed away the links in its practice and language (Harcourt 2006). If gender is in the political picture it is because gender is not class and does not threaten the neoliberal agenda or the neoconservatives' "narcissistic vision of no pain, no suffering, and no limit to consumeristic enjoyment in the way that class does" (Caroline Ifeka, letter to Jan Burgess 27 January 2008).

It is startling to look back and see how little influence African and Africanist women had in the early 1970s. Socialist feminism did not have an international agenda, even though the specificity of women's oppression in particular interactions of culture, race, and class provided us with the grounds for international solidarity. Few African women served on the editorial boards of academic journals, for example, and those who did had little impact. Women's studies was a nascent discipline in the 1970s, and we were not yet separated from the dominant fields of economics, politics, political economy, and development studies. Our aim was to analyze common struggles over the meaning and content of development. Sex segregation could not have been the reason women's issues were absent from almost all of the major debates. In 1980 the editors of the *Review of African Political Economy* (ROAPE) admitted: "To say that the women's question is a central interest [of the *Review*] is hardly borne out by our previous record. Attempts to obtain a special Number made up of articles combining feminist and Marxist perspectives on Africa have proved fruitless" (Editorial 1980, 1). As Jean Hay (quoted in Hunt 1997) so astutely pointed out, the marginality of African women's history and Africanist women historians is evidenced in the kind of publication that ensued: interdisciplinary anthologies and special issues focused on women. From 1972 a handful of journals sporadically published single issues devoted to women.[1]

An example of the struggle for interpretive power is the confusion over the meaning of "women's empowerment," which has been discussed, analyzed, and promoted over most other approaches to the liberation of women. For Boyd (1988, 109), empowerment "is a process by which people acquire real powers and command real resources within their

locality"; that is, "recognized power over material resources and recognized power institutionalized within the political structures." At best "the state can facilitate empowerment by helping people in a limited way to realize their own aspirations (ibid.)." But how can the United Nations and non-governmental organizations claim to "empower" African women? Resistance may be a way of life for women (Seddon and Daines 1993), but with a legacy of brutalization, violence, and economic hardship, can women receive empowerment from even the most well-meaning of institutions?

In many places women's studies has expanded to include gender studies, understood to encompass men's studies and the relations between men and women. How did we come to accept the substitution of "gender" for "women," as we watched the rise of men's studies? What contribution did postmodernism and the fragmentation of "difference" make to feminism and solidarity struggles? Heidi Hudson (2005) notes that the insistence of differentiating women has allowed African feminists space to produce their own knowledge and recover their own identities; for them, postmodernism has been liberating. Despite the UN International Decade for Women (1976–1985), four world conferences on women, and uniform lip service paid to "gender mainstreaming" throughout the UN, women's studies is in decline as an academic discipline in the United Kingdom and Sweden (though not in the United States),[2] and the publication of articles about women in the pages of the major African studies journals is in parallel decline. Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead (2007a, 1) point to the intractability of gender inequality, the denaturing and depoliticization of feminist arguments, and the essentialization and simplification of concepts of gender as explanations of the gaps between "feminists' aspirations for social transformation and the limited, though important, gains that have been made."

When Pepe Roberts (1983) reflected on what feminists did for African women's studies she found their contribution was to pose the question of women's relationship to men and not merely of women's relationship to capital. Feminists' arguments, she wrote, clarified the relationship between capitalism and women's labor but tended to evade the question of women's subordination to men in both precapitalist and capitalist social formations. On the one hand, commodity relations provided the objective conditions by which some wives ultimately escaped their existence as unfree labor (that is, uncompensated work), but on the other hand, most women succumbed to the social forces of gender subordination. But what holds gender subordination in place if not exploitive relations of production and reproduction?

Roberts claimed that the socialist-feminist critique shifted debates on the process of proletarianization from positions that ignored the questions

of sexual division of labor and gender inequality to ones that represented women's subordination as the consequences of capitalism. Debaters came to recognize the specificity of gender relations, of women's subordination to men, and their interaction with modes of production. These relations affected the structure of capitalist intervention in Africa. But, she notes, "This shift has taken place long after African women themselves recognized that their subordination to men was not the effect of capitalism alone" (1983, 175).

Baylies and Bujra (1993) identify four debatable features of the decade between 1984 and 1993: misguided attempts to integrate women into development (as if women had made no contribution to the economy); the straightjacket of global capitalism on African development (the roles of the IMF and World Bank in imposing structural adjustment programs); the unrealized potential of the state to transform patriarchal gender relations; and deepening class divisions among women. Researchers seemed to pay more attention to patriarchy in gender relations than to the political economy. Another decade would elapse before women's studies tackled the distortions of neoliberalism and their destruction of African women's lives.

One exception is Patricia McFadden who has consistently linked political economy to gender relations. In her chapter for this volume, she adopts a radical feminist perspective, from which she sees an entrenched, privileged, white elite in collusion with an emerging black ruling class (in the state and the wider economy); together they mobilized neocolonialism and neoliberalism to the detriment of the claims and entitlements of working people, in particular black women in the southern African region. To illuminate the sociopolitical forces shaping contemporary southern African societies, in response to the dominance of neoliberal language and practice, McFadden uses the concepts of contextualization and exceptionalism.

A radical strategy, contextualization allows her to probe the realities of women (across class, race, and social location) over the past decade and a half of South African independence. This reassertion of history as a revolutionary experience encompasses the emancipatory project that black women have engaged in order to move from the private to the public sphere. The systematic suppression of history that has occurred since South African independence necessitated this strategy. For McFadden, contextualization is useful in engendering a radical understanding of the restructuring of the state (through a process of neocolonialism and neoliberalism) in the interests of both black and white ruling classes in South Africa. The discourses and strategies that accompany this process of renegotiating state power between racially marked social groups invariably excluded those social categories that were historically positioned outside

the state and the various sites of wealth accumulation and social privilege. For women, and for black women in particular, this consolidation of a historical status quo presents new and difficult challenges, which will not be resolved through affirmative action strategies that aim to improve women's chances in politics, or through gender mainstreaming approaches to planning.

Exceptionalism, McFadden argues, informs the unapologetic claims that white settlers make in relation to property rights and citizenship. Exceptionalism has facilitated the spread of South African capitalism in southern Africa and beyond. The concept of exceptionalism has permeated left-wing politics in a pernicious manner, weakening radical analysis in the academy and civil society in South Africa. What McFadden sees is a retrieval of the discourses and practices, which entrenched and defended white male classist privilege in southern African societies, from their momentary relegation to the margins. Old and new systems of privilege undermined women's energetic presence in the public sphere during the 1990s, following the ideological shifts that accompanied independence. The resurgence of supremacist views and the claims of privileged whites—and, concomitantly, the reassertion of feudal authentication of men's right to rule among black males of all classes—have assumed center stage in the daily struggles of black women in South Africa and the region.

The implications of these trends regarding citizenship, privilege, and property rights for women's struggles and entitlements are powerful. Not only are women experiencing serious reversals in the gains they thought they had made, but the orientation of women's politics and women's movements is shifting to the right. McFadden's stinging essay on radical black feminism in South Africa nails the essential transformation of their struggle: "From having been gendered colonial subjects whose agency was largely ignored even by radical male scholars of all races, women transformed the politics of their public presence to become active participants in the definition of the moment of transition to post-coloniality within their respective societies as well as in their personal relationships with men, families, communities, and the emerging nation-states (McFadden, this volume)."

## The World of Work

Why a political economy? Many volumes about African women emphasize the social and cultural aspects of African women's lives. This one seeks to re-root the debates in the principles of radical political economy. Anthropologists and sociologists produced most of the early twentieth

century studies of women in Africa, in part because these disciplines (unlike say, history or economics) focused on family and kinship (Gaitskell 1983). It is interesting to note that the tendency to view African women as independent of their husbands arose from the perceptions of these early chroniclers of African life whose insights were informed by women's experiences in Victorian England where they were the property of men and economically dependent upon fathers and husbands. Subsequent work, including contributions to this volume, led to reassessments of African women's autonomy under both precapitalist and capitalist economic regimes. Now, when the economic crisis of 2008 has led so many to doubt the viability and justice of neoliberal capitalism, it is time to review what we know of the political economy African women and their experience of the globalization of neoliberalism capitalism. It is also time to integrate that knowledge with the past decades of scholarship on the social and cultural aspects of African women's lives.

The central chapters of this volume trace the impact of the globalizing economy and neoliberal distortions of capitalism on women's work in Africa. The trajectory runs from domestic work in South Africa, through the proletarianization of women in Tanzania and contract tea farming in Kenya, to women waged workers in a textile factory in Nigeria, and finally the impact of structural adjustment programs on women in Zimbabwe that leads women into the informal economy. Reflecting the broad range of jobs and tasks undertaken by African women, the chapters explore women's work as paid domestic servants, in agricultural production, in wage labor in the formal sector, and in self-employment in the informal sector.

### *The Care Economy*

Domestic work remains one of the most important occupations for millions of women around the world. Paid domestic work is virtually invisible: it is undervalued and poorly regulated, and many domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid, and unprotected. In the past two decades demand for care work has been on the rise everywhere (UNRISD 2009). Underpinning this trend are the massive incorporation of women in the labor force, the rise of single-parent households, the aging of societies, the intensification of work, and the inadequacy of policies that would help reconcile work and family life. Today, domestic workers are an important segment of the workforce, especially in developing countries, and their number has been increasing. Such data as are available show that domestic workers represent a significant proportion of the labor force: in developing countries domestic work accounts for between 4 and 10 percent of total employment of women and men. Although in some countries a

significant number of men find employment in private homes as gardeners, guards, and chauffeurs, women invariably make up the overwhelming majority of domestic workers (ILO 2010).

Domestic work is an important source of employment for black women in South Africa, both historically and contemporaneously. Now numbering more than one million, domestic workers represent one of the largest sectors of the South African workforce. The post-apartheid South African state has launched one of the most extensive efforts anywhere in the world to formalize and regulate paid domestic work. To protect domestic workers, South Africa has given them for the first time in South African history a political status and the right to organize into trade unions (Ally 2008). Key pieces of labor legislation were extended to include domestic workers, and others were introduced to give domestic workers for the first time in South African history access to the same rights as all other workers, including the right to organize into trade unions, a much-publicized national minimum wage, mandatory contracts of employment, state-legislated annual increases, as well as a "world-first" inclusion into unemployment insurance benefits, and even state-sponsored training (Ally 2008).

Jacklyn Cock's well-known book (1980), article (1981), and film (1985) on women's paid domestic work in South Africa examined the conditions for the reproduction of labor power, focusing on the household as the site of important contradictions within South African society. Cock (1981) argued that the institution of black domestic labor socialized whites into the dominant ideological order of race and exposed servants to its most humiliating practices. Black servants were coerced into dependency upon their employers, but white women were also dependents within the patriarchal structures of capital. Her work made a significant contribution to the domestic labor debate, which arose from the impossibility of understanding gender divisions in social production from a Marxist viewpoint. The Marxist theory of capitalist wage could not account for the ways in which women's position in the wage labor force differed from men's. The domestic labor debate centered on women's core role in the household and argued that domestic labor performed two vital functions for capital. First, it produced new workers (the bearing and rearing of children) and secondly, it reproduced laborers on a daily basis (feeding and clothing the worker). Since the function of domestic labor was to keep the cost of the reproduction of labor power low, domestic labor, despite being privatized and outside capitalist relations of production, was a prerequisite of capital accumulation (Cohen, Roberts, and Szeftel 1981).

Deborah Gaitskell, Judy Kimble, Moira Maconachie, and Elaine Unterhalter (this volume) contribute a timely analysis of the value of domestic labor in capitalist economies, which is part of current debates on the

care economy (UNRISD 2009). In the last decade of apartheid roughly 89 percent of domestic servants in South Africa were black and of these about 88 percent were women. Domestic service accounted for the employment of 38 percent of black women whose conditions of work were the least protected within one of the most regimented labor forces in the world.

Picking up Cock's argument, Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie, and Unterhalter note that the initial conclusions of this debate failed to address several problems crucial to feminist struggle. Why did women and not men perform domestic labor: what was the reason for gender division and women's oppression in the family, and did not men, as well as capital, benefit from women's services and therefore from women's oppression? These critiques questioned the ideological and material functions of the family. In what way was women's subordinate position in the family part of the process of reproduction of capitalist relations of production including the acceptance of divisions within the working class? The conditions under which black women were employed as quasi-family labor, and the way their wages were paid—as if they were pocket money, not the mainstay of the family's survival—corresponds in many ways to women's subordination in the capitalist household.

From a historical perspective, it became apparent that the private character of domestic labor—and therefore its fixed value in relation to the reproduction of labor power—had not been constant (Cohen, Roberts, and Szeftel 1981). In periods of economic growth, for example, the socialization of domestic labor (crèches, convenience foods) financed by the state or capital was associated with the increased participation of women in wage labor, particularly in secondary industry, the expansion of which concerns the increased production of commodities for workers' consumption made possible by higher wages. This was true in the United States where after 1960 an expanding economy created opportunities for newly educated women (Collins 2009). In periods of recession, the socialization of domestic labor was arrested, domestic labor intensified, and women's participation in wage labor declined. The sexual division of labor in the household, therefore, also forms part of the process of reproduction of a reserve army of labor (those women who do unpaid work at home). Capitalists employ women on the assumption that part of their costs of reproduction are covered by the male wage, and therefore they pay women lower wages than men. Women are governed by poor working conditions and job insecurity characteristic of this major division in the working class.

It is the implication of these tendencies that Cock explored in a preliminary way when examining the relatively low level of socialization of domestic labor in South Africa (Cohen, Roberts, and Szeftel 1981). The existence of black women's domestic labor (in the Bantustans as well as in

the proletarian household) kept the costs of reproduction of black labor low even though the basic assumption that black women had access to a male wage was scarcely guaranteed. Their employment in white households released white women for wage labor and sustained the high level of subsistence of the white working class. Cook highlighted many of the contradictory tendencies present in the conditions of reproduction of wage labor, arguing that its characteristics could be understood only at the level of concrete class practices. She suggested that despite their lack of organization, black women servants were less prone to accept their subordinate position than were white women.

Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie, and Unterhalter amplify Cock's work in another way. They elaborate her argument about white women employers of black women domestic servants in South Africa by adding the political economy of relations between black men and women. They examine job segregation, social relations of domestic work in black households, and the gender subordination of black women to black men. Following Cock's questions about whether women's domestic work is productive or unproductive and whether paid domestic work as servants differs from unpaid domestic work by wives, Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie, and Unterhalter raise a difficult theoretical issue: since domestic labor is concrete privatized labor that is concerned with the production of use values for direct consumption in the household, does it not produce surplus value? They conclude that domestic work is unproductive work, leaving us with Cock's initial question, whether the same work becomes productive when it is no longer performed in a private household but socialized and performed in a restaurant, childcare center, or an office building.

### *Turning Women into Waged Workers*

When oppressive practices such as those of apartheid do not enforce the separation between husbands and wives, women regard wage labor or the petty commodity sector as a means of escape (Roberts 1983). More women might have taken this route had not the prior existence of gender subordination slowed women's transformation from peasants into waged workers. Female proletarianization, which released women's productive labor from the control of men to exploitation by capital, was qualitatively different from that of men. For women this process of proletarianization was incomplete. The historical reasons for this remain contested, even in Britain, where the "family wage debate" was always lively (Campbell 1982). Some aspects of the British argument appear to be relevant to the different historical experience of capitalist development and female proletarianization in Africa (Roberts 1983).

The first question concerns how and to what degree men retain control over individual women as unpaid domestic labor, sexual partners, and bearers and rearers of their children—that is, how do men regulate the relations of human reproduction? The second question concerns how capital organizes around the assumption that wives will provide domestic labor, sex, and children, a supposition that was evidently at work in Kenya (von Bülow and Sørensen, this volume) and Upper Volta (Conti 1979). The third question is, how does the state intervene to modify these conditions? When women do gain access to a living wage by selling their labor to capital (or by earning an income in petty commodity production), conjugal relations are necessarily restructured. Research shows that the state usually intervenes to help men retain control over women's reproductive services (and sometimes over their wages). Women may experience this restructuring as sudden and more contradictory and more oppressive than their subordination under precapitalist gender relations.

Deborah Fahy Bryceson (this volume) points out that laws giving husbands the right to control a wife's wages, or giving women fewer rights of custody over their own children in marriage than outside it, or condoning wife beating are some of the experiences of sexual oppression that lead to high rates of divorce, or women's rejection of marriage or remarriage. Inevitably, even when women escape from gender discrimination and sexual violence in the proletarianized household, they are exposed to sexual harassment and exploitation outside it.

Bryceson's chapter considerably advances our understanding of the process of proletarianization. Roughly 87 percent of all Tanzanian women live in the countryside,[3] and most of women's economic activity is related to peasant agricultural production and domestic rural household reproduction. Far from static, peasant women experienced and acted to effect profound changes in the nature of rural production and reproduction. One consequence of these changes was a slow but pronounced process of proletarianization. Bryceson argues that Tanzanian peasant women increasingly became directly involved in the process of proletarianization, which took a voluntary form representing a significant step in Tanzanian women's struggles. Unlike that of male peasants, female proletarianization in Tanzania does not involve separation or dispossession from the means of production since women never had possession or control as precapitalist producers or as peasant farmers. Nor does it involve giving up unpaid housework and caring responsibilities. Bryceson argues that "in the process of female proletarianization in Tanzania women have struggled against precapitalist male control over their labor." Bryceson's analyses inform the chapters that follow.

The chapter on gender and contract farming in Kerido, Kenya, by Dorthe von Bülow and Anne Sørensen (this volume) explores male/female relations on tea farms. This is peasant farming, not industrial agriculture, although tea is a cash crop. The Kenyan women are not wage laborers, yet as in the early agribusiness pilot schemes in Upper Volta in the 1970s (Conti 1979), women are critical to the success of the contracts their husbands sign with food corporations. Employers, as well as researchers, have often underestimated women's roles in cash crop production, even when they are a critical source of labor. Von Bülow and Sørensen emphasize the relation of productivity to the state of marital relations, showing how uncooperative wives can ruin a husband's chances of making money.

Von Bülow and Sørensen demonstrate the necessity of looking at gender as a major analytical category in the analysis of agricultural development. Contrary to other production systems like plantations and state farms, smallholder farming of cash crops for export, called "outgrower schemes," characteristically based their operation on the farmers' control over land and labor. Their study of smallholder tea production in Kericho District, Kenya, shows that men do not automatically control their wives' labor. In the survey area, one-third of all tea plots were partly or completely neglected largely because of conflicts between spouses. The problem of low productivity in smallholder tea production is thus intimately linked to the prevailing gender relations in a local community, a factor characteristically ignored by studies of smallholder contract farming, which tend to focus narrowly on technical, institutional, and economic factors.

Contract farming remains an important way for corporations to push the risks (of climate and crop failure) onto the producer; it is especially important to have studies like this one in an era of land grabs, often financed by financial groups with no experience of agribusiness. The situation described by Von Bülow and Sørensen is one of many where an appreciation of gender relations is critical to the success of policy intervention or to innovation within the production system (Baylies and Bujra 1993). Even though there is a pragmatic basis to including women in planning, corporations have shown little concern with inequality and disadvantage and the issues persist. Women have been marginalized within the political economy even as they exhausted themselves through their productive and reproductive contributions to society. Economic structures and relations dictate much of the hardship suffered by many African women, which follows from their disadvantaged material situation. But as Roberts (1983) writes the situation of women must be understood, not just in terms of the structures of capitalism, but also in terms of gender relations. The distinction between practical and strategic gender needs (Andersen, 1992; Molyneux 1985; Moser, 1989) advance analysis and practice by affirming

both the need to address the hardships women experience carrying out their gendered tasks, and the necessity of transforming gender relations.

In classic Marxist analysis, workers make progress in improving their working and living conditions by struggling directly with their employers: proletariat versus the bourgeoisie who represent capital. When peasant women working on contracted farms confront employers it is through the intermediary of their husbands; their struggle is deflected and their demands are blunted. So do women fare better in factory settings?

### *Industrial Work*

There is a serious dearth of current information on women in industrial production in Africa. Women's workforce participation rates are quite high in sub-Saharan Africa. Economic activity of adult women (fifteen years or older) ranged from a low of 41 percent in Mauritius (in 2001) to a high of 87 percent in Mozambique (in 1997) and Tanzania (in 2001) (thirteen countries reporting, latest available data, UN Statistics 2005). These figures include work in all economic sectors. Women's share of administrative and managerial work ranged from a low of 15 percent in Malawi (in 1998) to a high of 34 percent in Ghana (in 2000) (seven countries reporting). The obvious deduction is that most women are employed in unskilled work in the agricultural sector.

Reasons for the lag of women's entry into better paid positions include their lack of education, lack of opportunities for work related to overall low levels of industrialization in sub-Saharan Africa, competition with men for the few available jobs, and the continuing importance of women's labor in agriculture absent mechanization. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) retrenched public sector employment from the 1980s, just as some women were achieving high enough levels of education to qualify for white collar jobs, cutting off an important source of decent work for educated women. Women's share of secondary education ranged from a low of 22 percent in Chad (in 1999/2000) to a high of 56 percent in Lesotho (in 2001/2002). Women's share of tertiary education ranged from a low of 13 percent in Eritrea (in 2000/2001) and Tanzania (in 2001/2002) to a high of 58 percent in Lesotho (in 2001/2002) (UN Statistics 2005).

Carolyne Dennis's Nigerian case study of capitalist development and women's work (this volume) demonstrates that the provision of wage employment for women, in Nigeria as elsewhere, does not itself promise liberation to women. On the contrary, such jobs reproduce and reinforce gender subordination, as this study of women workers in a textile factory in Nigeria confirms. Dennis's fieldwork finds women's work segregated from men's work in the same factory. Although women and men start out

with comparable skills—if anything, the women are better educated than the men—women are stereotyped and assigned to low-paid unskilled jobs. Women consigned to dead-end jobs have no opportunity to move up the job ladder to higher wage skilled jobs or to supervisory positions. The result is that men can use the money and experience acquired to set up as self-employed informal workers, whereas women leave the factory with no funds and no new skills (Baylies, Burgess, and Roberts 1983).

Historical patterns and cultural attitudes concerning women's rights to work and women's aptitudes affect the pattern of integration of women in the industrial labor market. Also, in the absence of policy to address women's responsibilities for housework and caring for the family (or paid work arrangements that accommodate caring labor), labor markets are stacked against women who have difficulty maintaining an attachment to the labor force at levels equal to those of men (Berik, Rodgers, and Seguino 2009). The levels and forms of industrialization and the political and economic circumstances of this particular factory in Nigeria also play a role. Because this factory was state supported, it is a question whether the employment of women as cheap labor in Nigeria follows the same paths as those documented, for example, in Asian and Latin American factories that produce for the global market.

From 1980 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, with the support of donors, initiated structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in sub-Saharan Africa.[4] They prescribed cutbacks in the public sector and in the role of the state, reducing or removing various regulations and standards; liberalization of the economy, reducing protection of domestic industries and opening resource extraction and cash crop production to foreign investors; privatization of government-owned enterprises and services; currency devaluation and higher interest rates; fewer state protections of unions and the labor force; and the elimination of subsidies on staples such as food and fuel. Criticism was not slow in coming, and by 1987 UNICEF was already reporting on the devastating impact of SAPs on vulnerable populations (Cornia, Jolly, and Stewart 1987).

The dramatic tightening of the IMF stranglehold over African economies has complicated the capacity of the state to address women's practical and strategic needs (Baylies and Bujra 1993). Structural adjustment packages have gender implications, since their impact on women is characteristically more severe than on men (Afshar and Dennis 1992; Palmer 1991; Pearson 1992). Not only did women lose jobs in the public sector, but the burden of social responsibility was increasingly shifted from the state to women (Berik, Rodgers, and Seguino 2009). Nazneen Kanji and Niki Jazdowska illustrate this in their chapter on Zimbabwe. Their examination of the effects of structural adjustment on the population of a high

density settlement in Harare reveals an increase in both class and gender inequalities.

Kanji and Jazdowska initiated a research project on the impact of SAPs (called the Economic Structural Adjustment Program or ESAP) on women in Zimbabwe in 1991, ten years after the country signed its first SAP agreement with the World Bank. Their chapter is based on a research project that examined the gender-specific effects of ESAP in one low-income, high-density settlement in Harare. Their research shows clearly the extremely negative effects of the program on urban households, with women faring far worse than men. UN and donor aid policy tended to overemphasize the effectiveness of women's coping strategies and to overestimate women's ability to compensate for low wages, rising prices, and declining employment opportunities. Kanji and Jazdowska argue that ESAP further exacerbated existing class and gender inequalities, and that ESAP is a development strategy that serves only the interests of international and national capital.

Kanji and Jazdowska's account jibes with others in demonstrating that urban women tend to gain income largely from informal sector activities and that their work—invariably undervalued and underpaid (Baylies and Bujra 1993)—lacks basic legal and social protections since the informal sector is not subject to formal economic regulations. Women have to work harder when prices rise, when the state removes subsidies and price controls, and when the government no longer provides free services, forcing women to purchase them with cash. Poor urban men and women pay the price of structural adjustment, but the burden is greater for women, who must run their households and bring in money from work outside of it. The deterioration of the market for those commodities characteristically produced through women's income-generating activities such as trading in fruits and vegetables and knitting woolen garments adds to women's workloads.

One possible conclusion, drawn by Baylies and Bujra (1993), is that until African governments alter the basic structure of gender relations in the family and the division of labor in the home, women engage in community affairs and the larger economy only at the cost of doubling their workloads. Indeed the underestimation of the impact of SAPs on women is in part based on the delusion that poor women have time and energy to spare. Currently, the World Bank stance is that gender equity can be achieved by removing legal barriers to women's participation in labor markets and access to land rights (Elson 2009).

And what will microfinance do? If women's contributions have been neglected in the past, current policies overestimate women's ability to take up the slack, compensating for low wages and rising prices by undertaking

new income-generating activities, which take women away from household chores and pull daughters out of school to perform these tasks. Microfinance is social work: it puts women in petty commodity production to keep their heads above water, but denies them the opportunity of further education and training that might qualify them for waged work in the formal sector which, alone, can lift them out of poverty. Microcredit and its like "are various kinds of palliatives that are quite consistent with the basic neoliberal economic policies" (Kari Polanyi Levitt quoted in Simon 2009, 864). The assumptions underlying donors' focus on women as recipients of these loans are that women will make better use of them than men and will repay them more reliably; neither belief is borne out by research, which shows that women put family needs first, that women who know they cannot repay do not accept them, and that many women use other income sources (like remittances) to repay the loans (Duffy-Tumasz 2009).

So what works? What makes a difference to the lives of women and their daughters? If women are thwarted in the world of work, do they fare better in politics?

## Women in Politics

Reviewing the progress of African women's studies and reflecting on what we have learned from the Marxist-feminist debates of the 1970s, one appreciates the contributions of theoretical Marxist discussions to our understanding of the subordinate position of working women in every social class and of the role class analysis has played in dissecting the aftermath of African liberation movements. When we move from theoretical analysis of gender relations in liberation struggles to consider the record of socialist states that came to power after 1960 another story emerges. Women made many sacrifices in the independence struggles only to find themselves segregated in women's wings of national political parties, often the country's lone political party in the first decades after independence. Several socialist countries collapsed into one bloc the state, the unique political party, and trade unions, failing to provide alternative political spaces in which women could confront their daily experiences of subordination. In the absence of economic development, patriarchal policies supported a relapse into old constructions of gender relations.

Socialist nations sought unsuccessfully to rid themselves of gender inequality by abolishing private property, adopting legislation, and exhorting their citizens to change (Roberts 1983). Imperialists imposed oppressive laws in the colonial period, committed atrocities during liberation wars, and destroyed lives; newly liberated states had to prioritize national

reconstruction in order to ensure the people's survival. Women, children, and men depended upon the provision of basic amenities and the restoration of shattered economies. In the process of reconstruction, socialist countries abrogated many (but not all) discriminatory laws colonialists had imposed on women. In some places, new governments also succeeded in abolishing some of the forms of patriarchy embedded in precapitalist and peasant societies, such as bride price. Women's organizations in Mozambique, Angola, and other countries were able to articulate demands for reproductive rights, for the social conditions necessary to enter or return to productive labor, and for a more equal division of domestic labor (Tripp 2001).

Two reports in this volume have differing assessments of what was accomplished. Signe Arnfred's description of OMM (the Mozambique Women's Organization) and Marga Holness's account of OMA (the Angolan Women's Organization) are vivid portrayals of how African women articulated their demands for equality in the most explicit terms. Both countries won independence from Portugal in 1975. Holness points out that Angolan women achieved many of their original aspirations: equal pay for men and women, equal rights in common law and civil marriages, access to family planning and contraception, and punishment of domestic violence. Angolan women record the advances that have been made through women's struggles in the course of national liberation and of socialist reconstruction (Baylies, Burgess, and Roberts 1983). The report of the first congress stresses the necessity for struggles alongside men against imperialism and explains the context of women's demands within the revolution, describing their continuing daily experience of subordination to men.

Holness describes the First Congress of the Organization of Angolan Women, held in Luanda in 1983, with the theme "Unity, Organization, Development." Ruth Neto addressed 365 women delegates—peasants, workers, intellectuals, and professionals—noting that "There are other problems women experience in their day-to-day lives which are a result not of external factors but of objective and subjective internal factors. It is up to us to give impetus to their solution because we experience and feel them more intensely." Socialist feminists argue that reconstructing the private domain of women's daily existence, which includes experiences of harassment and violence, is a precondition of freedom (Roberts 1983). Socialism does not recognize such preconditions as political issues, so it is easy to silence even the murmurings of women against men.

In contrast, Arnfred reports that Mozambican women who fought in the war very quickly felt betrayed. Support for women's struggles disappeared "whereas the men were able to take advantage of the new situation." Women were now in a defensive gender struggle, "aiming to maintain at

least their traditional rights and the sources of power they had had in the past" (Arnfred, this volume). In his speech on Independence Day, Samora Machel, President of Frelimo, attributed the cause of women's oppression to decadent tradition and capitalism. Mozambique's socialist path disregarded much socialist feminist tradition in favor of Engels. Women's liberation was to be achieved by the abolition of private property and women's entry into social production, both of which are inseparable from socialist strategy itself and therefore requiring no separate struggle. In his opening address to the first conference of the Mozambique Women's Organization in 1973, Machel stated:

> Let us be clear on this point: the antagonistic contradiction is not found between man and woman, but rather between women and the social order, between all exploited women and men, and the social order. It is her conditions of exploitation which explain her absence from all tasks of thought and decision in society…This is the main aspect of the contradiction: her exclusion from the decision making sphere of society. (quoted in Roberts 1983, 183)

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, Roberts (1983) writes, that if women have been previously devoid of all tasks of thought and decision, they will need male guidance in formulating their struggles. And this seems to be what Machel offered when he made it clear that women's oppression by men was a secondary issue in the task of liberating women, even though this experience of oppression included the marriage system, the frequent brutality of the husband, and his systematic refusal to consider women his equal. Machel also delegitimated struggles around women's issues in the very terms that threaten international feminist solidarity—that feminism is a bourgeois deviation and an aspect of cultural imperialism (Roberts 1983).

Two other country studies expand our understanding of the fate of women who fought in liberation movements. Dan Connell (this volume) examines the position of women in the process of democratization in Eritrea and South Africa after the success of their revolutions. Both countries made an ideological commitment to restructure gender relations, with South Africa adopting a constitution that reflected aspirations for a nonracist and nonsexist society (Bush and Szeftel 1998). Connell assesses the difficulties in translating declared government policy in support of gender issues into implemented strategy. He does so by tracing the position of women in different movements, the problems that women confronted in political and economic reconstruction, and the political struggles that women engaged in to ensure that gender issues remain at the core of democratic politics.

Many of the first participants in South Africa's women's movements came out of left-wing politics and political parties, as did early participants in Europe's women's movements. South Africans saw women in terms of class and national struggles (Gaitskell 1983). The priority of these struggles was national liberation and socialist transformation, not gender equality. In Africa there were always other more pressing concerns to deal with—war, failed states, internal conflict, economic crisis, restructuring, market liberalization, security, and trade agreements—all of which did not seem, in the end, to have much to do with women's demands. To some extent, different priorities relate to circumstances—struggles against imperialism and racism demand the solidarity of women and men that African women always provided and sometimes forced upon men (Roberts 1983). But "men's issues" have remained the hard macrodevelopment issues and women's issues are still considered mostly microlevel adjuncts (Harcourt 2006).

Unlike in any other African country, South African women emerged from decades of struggle to push for gender equality policies within their party and take advantage of the opportunity that the transition to majority rule presented (Geisler 2000). Militating thirty years after the first successful independence struggles in Africa, South Africans managed to avoid the mistakes of their sisters, and they were included in the decision-making processes in numbers too large to be easily reversed. The 1999 elections brought even more women into both parliament and cabinet posts. But their now close to equal participation in government came at the price of weakening the mass-based women's movement that was the driving force behind South African women's move into parliament. And the end result may be what McFadden describes—the undermining of women's energetic presence in the public sphere.

Is what we are seeing here the difference between women in political movements (liberation fronts) and women in political parties (relegated to the parties' women's auxiliaries)? Tripp (2001) believes that state responsiveness to pressure from women's movements in Africa has been limited. However, where inroads have been made, the autonomy of associations from the state and dominant party has proved critical. "The women's movement is one of the most coordinated and active social movements in Uganda, and one of the most effective women's movements in Africa more generally (Tripp 2001, 101)." Relative autonomy accounts for some of its success. Despite enormous pressures for co-optation, the women's movement has taken advantage of the political space afforded by the semi-authoritarian Museveni government, which promoted women's leadership to serve its own ends. Although leaders and organizations reflect varying degrees of autonomy and cooptation, the women's movement has had a

visible impact on policy as a result of its capacity to set its own far-reaching agenda and freely select its own leaders. But Uganda is not typical; most African women's movements have not been the autonomous political organizations that feminists demand in the West (Roberts 1983). The socialist path to women's liberation in Africa—like socialism in the West—has denied the historical contribution of feminism to socialist theory.

Two generations after independence, many African women's movements have come into their own, as the chapters by Bene Madunagu and Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng show in the evolution of women's organizations in Nigeria and Uganda, respectively. Women in Nigeria (WIN) originated from the enthusiasm and interest evoked by the First Annual Women in Nigeria Conference, held in 1982. At this conference a group of women and men from all over Nigeria committed themselves to the task of establishing an organization that would work unceasingly to improve the condition of Nigerian women. Although the founding group believed, and the organization still maintains, that the liberation of women cannot be fully achieved outside the context of the liberation of the oppressed and poor majority of the people of Nigeria, there are aspects of women's oppression that can be alleviated. Madunagu (this volume) recounts the bold move Nigerian women made in transforming that early group, WIN, into the Nigerian Feminist Forum. Her chapter shows the divisions among women along ideological lines, which underline the difficulties of uniting women and forging solidarity on the issues that touch women's lives. Cornwall (2007) calls the wish for solidarity one of the myths of feminism.

Taking a different route, the Ugandan women's group known as Isis-WICCE began with an international nongovernment organization, ISIS International, and transformed part of it into an African organization by adding cross-cultural exchange (Ochieng, this volume). Isis was founded in 1974 in Geneva, Switzerland; in 1993, a piece of it migrated to Uganda, adopting a new program, the Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange, to bring together women from many cultures who could share ideas and experiences in order to break women's isolation from the rest of the world. In Africa, Isis-WICCE became more familiar with the position and status of African women and more involved with women's networks and organizations on the continent. Their award-winning work on Ugandan women caught up in the civil conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s is grounded in extensive field studies. Recent work on cross-cultural exchange seems more dominated by the international women's agenda.

Asma Mohamed Abdel Halim traces yet another path that Sudanese women took into politics. By following their publications in politics and economics, Abdel Halim notes that the difficulties of appearing in print and the problems of translation accounted for the absence of Sudanese

women's writings in the international square. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, access to computers and especially the internet has transformed this situation. Sudanese women were quick to realize the potential of blogs and online discussion boards, websites for publishing and storing women's writing, and cheap self-publication of organizational materials. "The ability of Sudanese women to publish enhanced their ability to participate in the international women's and human rights movements", Abdel Halim (this volume) writes, "as well as address political and social issues even in the face of the existing dictatorship."

Sudanese women's groups distinguish between social science about women and social science for women, having been the subjects of many studies more often than the initiators or collaborators on such research. Abdel Halim argues that research on Sudan must adopt a historical perspective in order to understand the dynamics underlying women's oppressed position. This chapter is a unique piece of political economy, analyzing the political and economic reasons for the suppression of important voices. It is another take on the problems women face making their opinions known that is addressed by McFadden.

The final chapter in this volume returns to the theme of women's struggle, this time in a conflict that is modern rather than anticolonial. Ousseina Alidou's study of Tuareg women in Niger tries to find answers to questions about the interplay among power, gender, class, identity politics, and the contest for legitimacy in the postcolonial nation-state. She makes extensive use of excerpts from interviews she conducted with Nigerien women.

Identity formation and nationality are both currently big issues in feminist debates, having shifted from identity politics to questions of citizenship. Alidou introduces identity here as a way of clarifying the difficulties of constructing solidarity among women and to investigate the causes of ethnic conflict, too often portrayed in the Western press as the inevitable culmination of age-old hatreds. She notes that the differences that divide Nigerien women are ethnic identity, regional and political affiliation, and class allegiance—differences found in all countries of the African continent and prominent in the political studies in this volume. What is so interesting about her research is the revelation that many of these ethnic identities are imaginary, given the history of "blending" that resulted from intermarriage. Alidou (this volume) concludes that "warring parties use propaganda to manipulate the concept of collective identity and play it against women, giving them no space to make a choice during the war."

The question of identity brings us full circle back to McFadden who decries the skillfully managed process of historical erasure, which has silenced and vilified radical voices in South Africa. The ruling classes (both white and black), she writes, have successfully manipulated identity,

imposing neoliberal notions of nationhood. Like Alidou, McFadden points to political identity as a critical step in transforming consciousness.

Did national liberation and the transition to socialism fail to transform women's subordination? A great deal of work remains to be done at the level of ideology, in the analysis of the contradictions and congruences between gender and class and race consciousness. Researchers are only beginning to use the framework of intersectionality—the interactions of sexism, racism, and classism that constitute women's layered lives. Radhika Comaraswamy (2001), the UN Special Rapporteur on Women, discussed the concept at the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance. We are still in the first stages of understanding the structures that maintain women's everyday and lifelong experience of patriarchal culture. Feminists formulate their demands on the basis of different experiences of political struggle. Contemporary feminist movements have demanded autonomy in order to learn to organize around oppression and against male domination, to pursue specific demands, and to insist that feminism not be marginalized or put off. African women's organizations are formulating their programs in the light of their different experiences of patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism, hampered by the lousy deal they were dealt by globalization.

## Notes

1. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 6, No. 2, 1972, Special issue: The roles of African women: past, present and future; *African Studies Review* Vol. 18, No. 3, December 1975, Women in Africa; *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1981, African women in the development process; *ROAPE* Numbers 27/28, Jan. 1983, Women, oppression and liberation; *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 10, No. 1, Oct. 1983, Special issue on women in Southern Africa.
2. When the research scene at the Nordic Africa Institute was reorganized into "clusters" it soon became obvious that neither the culture research program nor the gender and sexuality program was going to have followers in the cluster setup (Mai Palmberg, personal communication 9 January 2010). On the other hand, Women's Studies has been thriving in the United States with about 1,200 degrees now granted annually (Pollitt 2010).
3. Urbanization remains a low 25 percent in Tanzania.
4. From 1980 SAPs were instituted in: Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda; from 1981 in: Côte d'Ivoire, Congo (DRC) Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Cornia, van der Hoeven, and Mkandawire 1992, 12).

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# 2

# Exceptionalism Is a Feminist Issue in Southern Africa

*Patricia McFadden*

Barely fifteen years into independence, South African society looks as much a neocolonial African socioeconomic and political formation as its counterparts across the Southern African region. The claims of exceptionalism, which characterized the earlier years after apartheid, have been steadily eroded by the undeniable realities of becoming more like the Africa that South Africa has always been part of, regardless of white settler efforts to "whiten" that space through rhetorical and structural systems of coercion and westernism (Lazarus 2004). Throughout the apartheid years, those at the helm of the racist regime in that country insisted—in the media and through reactionary international relations discourses and practices—that Africans living within the borders of South Africa were "better off" and "more civilized" than those black barbarians to the north of the Limpopo. These supremacist claims were backed up by military incursions that unleashed terror and destruction across the societies of the region for several decades (Mandaza 1987).

Exceptionalism is not a South African invention. As a discourse and as an essential element in the construction of a national identity, its origins are situated in the brutality and racism of slaving America. In this respect, it remains deeply entrenched in the white literary canon of U.S. academia. The work of radical historians Howard Zinn (2006) and Noam Chomsky (2008) reflects the more general critique of exceptionalism in the legitimation of U.S. capitalism in particular. Chomsky notes that among American citizens, "There is a deeply ingrained imperial mentality which almost has a compelling effect on accepting the nobility of the State, no matter what it's doing. There's even a name for it. It's called American Exceptionalism."

However, for the purposes of this article, it is the significance of a radical black feminist critique of American exceptionalism that gives the notion a particular value in terms of understanding women's politics in contemporary South African society. The idea of exceptionalism is brilliantly situated within U.S. racial history and the practices of supremacist exclusion within that society through the literary work of Toni Morrison (1998) and in the critical scholarship of Joyce Appleby (1992). Although the historic link of colonialism and slaving between the U.S. and South Africa is rarely considered in the scholarship of either country, there has emerged a corpus of radical black scholarship that is insisting upon this historicization. The work of Gerald Horne (2001) in particular elucidates and documents the deeply entrenched relationships of white supremacy, violence, and greed that continue to characterize U.S. capitalism and state policy toward South Africa and the region of Southern Africa.

I have prefaced my thoughts and arguments on the implications of South African exceptionalism for feminism as an ideological stance and a political vision within this historical contextualization because I think that the reclamation processes of collective African histories are crucial for our understanding of how we arrived at the current moment in Southern Africa. It is by situating my analysis in this radical historical tradition that I hope to show how exceptionalism as an ideological construct and a colonially inspired notion of identity within South Africa, not only reflects a series of contemporary contradictions for that country in relation to the rest of the continent, but that it has had a deleterious effect on the politics of the South African women's movement over the past fifteen years of independence.

I am also attempting to resituate the larger discourse about women's lives within a contextualized perspective of the social and historical forces that shape the everyday lived realities of women within their respective societies. Over the past three decades, as women's studies and gender analysis have taken root in the academy and the civil society spaces of the African continent, there has tended to be an intellectual ghettoization of the discourses that focus on women's lives. This intellectual exclusion takes the form of something that imitates a mirage. On the one hand, there has developed a substantive documentation and theorization of women's lives and agencies in the public and private domains in every country on the continent. On the other hand, however, women's politics is usually situated outside the more radically grounded discourses of political economy. Gender has not only been liberalized and mainstreamed, it has also facilitated a conceptual and intellectual displacement of women's politics from an intersectional relationship with economic, political, legal, and other

debates that are usually contextualized within the foundational assumptions about a particular society.

Therefore, by prefacing this brief analysis of women's politics in Southern Africa within a broader historical framework that interfaces women's political realities with exceptionalism as an ideological and practical element that continues to shape South African social reality, I am endeavoring to resituate women's political discourses and their lived realities in relation to what I consider to be a crucial ideological and identity marker within present day South African society. The hope is that the notion will better elucidate the impacts of neoliberalism on the lives of black women in working communities in particular. Black working class and rural women across the region have been most affected by the reinvention and persistence of exceptionalism as an ideological prop for continuing white and ruling class privilege.

## Reinventing Exceptionalism in the Moment of South African Independence

Interestingly, a decade and a half later, the new South Africa, which had insisted on presenting itself rhetorically and otherwise as the exception to the inevitable malaise associated with black rule (Lazarus 2004) across the region and continent, has in fact arrived at the crisis of neocolonialism even sooner than the countries that acquired independence prior to 1994. For the astute radical observer, this crisis of neocolonialism was not only inevitable, but the rapidity with which it has occurred was driven by the very claims that supposedly set South African society apart from Africa.

A long and bitter anticolonial struggle (the longest documented struggle on the continent) mainly by African people within South Africa and in the countries of the region, eventually ushered in a transition to neocolonialism in 1994, engineered in ways that bore uncanny similarities to the model of negotiated settlement that was applied in Kenya, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and to a lesser extent Mozambique and Angola. The latter two societies had been subjected to ruthless destabilization during their independence moments (1975–2005) through the deployment of U.S. and European-sponsored bandit regimes (led by Jonas Savimbi of UNITA and Afonso Dhlakama of Renamo respectively) and which prevented or ruthlessly destroyed any attempts at social progress made by either MPLA or Frelimo respectively (Davies, O'Meara, and Dlamini 1984; Hanlon 1984). African women and working people in general, particularly elderly people, children, and the disabled, endured unimaginable

terror and violation, all in the name of democratizing regimes said by the United States and its European allies to be communist-inspired.

However, by the time of the neocolonial transition in South Africa in 1994, both Mozambique and Angola had been taught the lessons of neoliberal imperialism, and they were ready for the picking by droves of white settler farmers (most of whom had been part of the apartheid military machinery) who fled black rule in South Africa and Zimbabwe, to resettle in Mozambique and Zambia, as part of the restructuring packages offered by the World Bank and the IMF in liberalizing those countries. Zimbabwe also suffered the effects of destabilization (Dzimba 1998), particularly in the eastern border area with Mozambique (along the Beira Corridor), although this is not often reflected in the recounting of apartheid-era state terrorism in the region. Thus the political history of white settler colonialism neatly (and bloodily) dovetailed into the economics of neoliberalism in the realities of early-twenty-first-century Southern Africa.

If one takes a closer look at what was supposed to make South Africa different from other African societies, one can clearly see the contradictions between what South African society really is—a deeply fractured and volatile social formation—and the invented, multicultural, nonracist illusion that was fabricated at the moment of independence to placate and mollify white angst and western anxiety about the future of white privilege in that country. In this sense, South Africa did become exceptional within the community of societies that had vigorously fought against racist colonial regimes on the continent because it willingly and enthusiastically gave up almost everything for which its people had struggled (Mabokela and Magubane 2005; Magubane 2004).

In countries like Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, which formed the core of the anti-apartheid/anti-imperialist coalition better known as the Front Line States and which are currently the key drivers of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the first two decades of independence witnessed the implementation of basic social democratic reforms through the provision of essential health care services, housing, education, transportation, and marketing infrastructure for subsistence communities (De Waal 1990; Mandaza 1987). These minimal dispensations transformed the lives of working people and of African women especially in truly astounding ways. Through their engagement in the liberation war and their acquisition of a political and public identity as Africans who recognized and valued freedom, black women repositioned themselves publicly and politically in relation to the colonial and neocolonial state.

Through this active political agency in the recrafting of independence politics—beyond nationalist masculinity and androcentricity—black

women in the region, including South Africa, transformed nationalist struggles into struggles for freedom; this notion was fundamentally anti-patriarchal and deeply radical in multiple ways. This radical consciousness, which Samora Machel (1985) and Amilcar Cabral (1973) so courageously acknowledged, and which Frantz Fanon (1967) is universally acclaimed for, caused a shift in the sensibilities of black women's consciousness and understanding of themselves as aspiring African citizens. From having been gendered colonial subjects whose agency was largely ignored even by radical male scholars of all races, women transformed the politics of their public presence to become active participants in the definition of the moment of transition to post-coloniality within their respective societies as well as in their personal relationships with men, families, communities, and the emerging nation-states (McFadden 1998; 1999).

In Zambia as in Zimbabwe, the first ten years were revolutionary years in the lives of working people, which not only produced a middle class that was highly skilled and sophisticated, but which shifted the relationship between women and the state in very crucial ways. Women entered the public largely through education and increasingly as entrepreneurs, lawyers, teachers, medical personnel, and state functionaries. Through the formation of organizations (which constituted a critical resource within the women's movement and wider civil society in both these countries), women positioned themselves as aspiring citizens, actively engaged in challenging the neocolonial state in legal, political, economic, and socio-cultural terms. For the first time in several hundred years, African women became visible in their societies, beyond the traditional statuses of mother and daughter, wife and child.

The imposition of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s respectively ruptured this vital relationship, pushing women and poor communities back to the margins (particularly in economic and cultural terms) and deepening the social and political exclusion of those situated outside the state. Nonetheless, the people had experienced a glimpse of themselves as citizens in new ways, and they had begun to acquire a national identity, which allowed them to imagine their presence in the society and in the region in direct relation to an emerging nation-state structure and discourse. This set the stage for a new raft of contestations in the postcolonial period, into which both Zambia and Zimbabwe have lurched, Zambia through the indirect imposition of economic and political warfare—via the manipulation of copper on the world market by the United States and the EU countries in the 1980s and 1990s; and Zimbabwe through the bitter struggle that continues to rage over land and the strategic mineral resources of that country. In both cases, SAPs served as the economic wedge that neoimperialist hegemons such as the United States

and the EU have used to pacify the people into submission, while they have systematically bludgeoned the ruling classes of both these countries into acceptance of the political arrangements that are intended to serve the key interests of the West.

For women in these countries, and across the SADC region (with the exception of South Africa), the experiences of having related directly to the state, and of having organized autonomously of the state, provide a critical resource in the recuperation and reorganization of their structures and ideas in this recently crafted contemporary moment.

However, in the case of South Africa, this moment of radical shift did not occur as significantly as it had in the other liberated societies of the region. Instead, the moment of independence was largely a truncated experience for black South African women in particular, and the crucial changes that accompanied the lives of black women in Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe did not occur in South Africa. South Africa became the exception to a regional experience, which I argue is bound to define the direction of women's politics in the coming decades and the ways in which women and their communities respond to the global crisis of capitalism and neoliberal postcolonial politics and policies.

The key argument made in this chapter regarding South African exceptionalism within the region is premised on this very point. The fact that post-apartheid South Africa did not even attempt to implement the mildest of social democratic reforms, in spite of having inherited the most fractured society on the entire continent, is a glaring expression of the internalization of exceptionalism among the neocolonial elites who assumed state power in 1994.

Accompanied by the reclamation of an African identity that had been systematically denigrated during colonialism, the discourses of nation-building were inscribed into the national psyche through the masquerade of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. This process ensured that the majority of South Africans—across race and class divides—would continue to believe and perform the myth that they were different from Africans on the rest of the continent.

Consequently class relations have been predicated on fluffy notions of a "Multicultural Rainbow" and an "African Renaissance"—both of which have shown themselves to be ridiculous. More significantly, the resistance to a basic program of national reconstruction by the new occupants of the apartheid state set the stage for the snowballing crisis that is rampaging across South African society today. The crisis is most dramatically manifested in deepening unemployment rates, horrific levels of sexualized violence against women and children, and the seemingly unstoppable collapse of the political integrity of the ANC as the governing party.

Instead of putting in place a system of minimal restitution for its people who had been brutally repressed and dispossessed by white setters for three centuries, the neocolonial elite of South Africa (composed of black and white middle class elements) ditched the social democratic program (the Reconstruction and Development Program, RDP). The RDP had been produced within the African National Congress (ANC) structures before 1994 and was enthusiastically embraced. By imposing the GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Redistribution) Program in the early years of independence, the elites reinforced an already existing structural adjustment program. Thus the new ruling class re-entrenched the apartheid systems and relationships of white control over the economy, with blacks now occupying the political terrain. Not much else changed.

The redistribution of critical resources in education, health, shelter, transportation, employment, and land—those basic necessities that constitute the core of a national democratic revolution and that were so succinctly spelt out in the Freedom Charter—remained firmly in the hands of the market and the private sector. The neocolonial elites frantically entered into alliances with all sorts of configurations of white and multinational capital and used the neocolonial state to ensure the emergence of a black ruling class that is still largely situated in the environs of state-based institutions.

This was the task that Thabo Mbeki was groomed for during the later years of the liberation struggle and for which he was deployed at the moment of independence. In spite of the largely undeserved vilification he has endured from the white media within South Africa and the Western world, he nonetheless excelled in meeting this challenge. Together with his team, situated in the state, he managed to open the doors of accumulation for a substantial chunk of the black middle classes and to create the consciousness of ruling class entitlement that is so essential to the emergence of a postcolonial nation-state in the near future.

In this regard, Thabo Mbeki learnt well from Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, and their respective dedication to the realization of a black ruling class project, as well as their incorrigible determination to succeed at all costs, is what binds them in historical as well as contemporary political terms within the region, a point that is clearly missed by the liberal and conservative commentators of the moment.

For black women, who constitute the majority of women as a social category within South African society, the absence of a program to facilitate their access to the most basic universal resources in terms of livelihood has meant that the impact of economic restructuring has been most directly and most dramatically felt in their lives and on their bodies. Of all the groups of black women in the region, South African women are faced

with the most deep-seated and most intractable challenges and obstacles to their freedoms and entitlements as women and as citizens. They have inherited the oldest and most vicious forms of capitalist exploitation and exclusion in terms of race, class, ethnicization, and misogyny. The unrelenting sexualized violence and brutality that has been unleashed by all categories of males across the class and race spectrum (even if mainly the violence of black men against black women and children has currency in the predominantly white media) are a glaring expression of the enormity of the social crisis that is playing out in and on the bodies and lives of black women in that society. Combined with the challenges presented by HIV and AIDS (which have been mined as rightwing reactionary social capital by the media, Western states, and religious fundamentalists as well as cultural nationalists) and a deepening economic capitalist crisis within the South African economy, working women in the urban and rural space of South Africa find themselves in the eye of the neocolonial crisis.

Unlike their sisters in the rest of the region, I think that South African women (or at least the leadership of the women's movement) unwittingly sabotaged themselves as they entered the moment of independence fifteen years ago. By accepting the ambiguous alliance of the Women's National Coalition as the vehicle through which they would position themselves in relation to the emerging neocolonial state, they did what was considered politically sensible within the context of South Africa at that conjuncture: they suppressed and sought to erase race as a fundamental differentiator between white and nonwhite women, something that is deeply embedded in their society and that cannot be wished away. The Women's Coalition also flattened the political and economic landscape of South African women's politics, thus enabling white women to continue with the kinds of privilege that had set them apart from black women in the first place.

However, more crucially, this race erasure robbed black women of the consciousness of entitlement that was necessary for them to resist existing systems of privilege that have continued to serve both white women and males from across the racial spectrum. Although there have been some conversations about the compromises that were made, so that women of all races could be included in the political dispensation of the independence moment (and this is very clear in the numbers of women of "all colors" who have made it up the political ladder from left to right wing political parties), the truth of the matter is that this so-called success by women has turned out to be a mere fluke. The events of the recent past—with Thabo Mbeki and most of his Cabinet resigning—have turned the tables on the statistical triumphalism of certain activists in South Africa, showing unambiguously that "getting women into the political system" is both risky and unsustainable, even in the short term.

Across the region, beginning in 2000, a new agenda began to emerge within the women's movements of the various countries; this agenda focused on more technicist formulations of issues, exemplified by extensive activity around gender-budgeting and "women in politics" programs. Reflective of a larger global women's movement in politics, these two elements in particular indicated a quiet but significant shift in women's politics toward a more institutionalized perspective and activism, one that leaned more toward developmentalism and statistical referencing to measure the progress that women were making within the system. Thus three decades of radical activism, performed and situated outside the state, which had led to reforms and in some cases transformations of the law, education, rights, and health in many countries within the region, were quietly replaced with new discourses that emphasized women in key patriarchal institutions like the Parliament, the Judiciary, and political parties.

In Botswana, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, the flavor of the early twenty-first century in terms of donor funding for gender themes became women in politics/women in Parliament—and new organizations emerged that advocate, campaign, lobby, and support individual women and groups of women who want to join political parties, or who need support within their existing political party bases and structures.

Additionally, new networks advocating for women's inclusion into regional and continental structures were established over the past decade. Most funding resources were directed into these networks to facilitate the further incorporation of women as individuals and as members of the black middle classes—to position themselves as the mediators of the majority of women in their respective societies in relation to the state in all its emerging formations (as a national, regional, and continental postcolonial state). Thus women's politics has become statist politics, and the daily lived realities of millions of women across the region have moved further from the center of women's movement attention than ever since the formation of women's organizations these past four decades of independence.

With hindsight, one soon realizes that this reorientation of women's political priorities—away from theorizing and acting on sexual violence, sexual and reproductive health rights, etc.—has encouraged a more conciliatory idea of women's political activism and engagement vis-à-vis the state and male-run political parties. None of these women's groups has formed a party led or defined by women, and the idea of coalition and women's absorption into male-dominated political structures was deliberate and well orchestrated across the region. In Zimbabwe, the Women's Coalition, formed in the early 2000s, became the Trojan horse that carried the women's movement into the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). Together with the Zimbabwe trade union movement, the NCA formed

the basis of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC is an openly neoliberal alliance between former trade unionists and former white settlers, all of whom are focused on getting a chunk of the national cake. Groups situated outside the ambit of the state are merely pawns in their game to capture and consolidate power within Zimbabwean society.

In South Africa, one sees a tremendous acceleration of strategies to reconstruct the trade union movement (COSATU) into a critical part of what seems to be a future version of the ANC as a people's party or maybe into a future opposition movement in the likeness of the MDC as a prototype that has been developed for several countries in the region (there is an MDC in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, all of which wear very similar traits; they call for change as the rallying theme). What configuration of alliances this will take over the course of the next months and years is still unclear. However, the determined direction toward a consolidation of black ruling class control over the state and deep struggles over land and mineral wealth in that country will be inevitable.

Jacob Zuma, an unabashed proto-nationalist, an accused rapist who was freed by a racist white judge and whose blatant feudalism publicly performed in traditional attire and in the public reinscription of black sexualized masculinity as culturally sanctioned hypersexual impunity, has positioned himself at the forefront of this moment of postcolonial transition within the South African political context. He is at once the most frightening representation of all things patriarchal and dangerous to women across the society and the continent, insatiably hungry for state power and economic gratification, while at the same time spewing the populist rhetoric of land reclamation and the restoration of black dignity—the very dreams and desires that were the stuff of anti-colonial struggles. Reinvented as a "man of the people" by those who control the key working class organizations of that society, his ideas and deeds leave no doubt, from a radical political perspective, that his inevitable "reign" as South Africa's new president will present the most challenging period for black women since the demise of apartheid a decade and a half ago.

As has been the case with all the societies of the region, the South African women's movement and the wider civil society movements find themselves ill equipped to respond to the emerging challenges posed by the restructuring of class and sociocultural relations in this transition to postcoloniality within South Africa. The future of neoliberalism is assured by Zuma and those who lead the Congress alliance, and capitalism is the preferred choice of socioeconomic formations for the immediate future. Even as the critique of the neocolonial state and its collusion with neoimperialism is growing more lively within communities and in some academic spaces in that country, the neoliberal agenda continues to trundle

on across the lives and bodies of black women with impunity and total disregard. References to the uniqueness of the South African constitution have become less triumphal and more cautious as various rightwing groups have either challenged the declarations made therein or, more importantly, as most black women have been unable to access the inclusiveness of that legal site fifteen years after independence. What began as an exceptional moment for the region—with neocolonial South Africa being touted as the final solution to Africa's development woes given that it had retained large numbers of white settlers who would invariably spread across the continent in a modern version of the colonial rescue mission and supported by NEPAD and the African Development Bank in particular (the so-called African Renaissance)—is ending abruptly and rather unceremoniously as an African failure of governance once again.

How the women's movement in South Africa, the region, and beyond will respond to the current impasse at the political and economic levels will determine not only the kinds of public vehicles that women will begin to craft as mechanisms for the representation of their interests and entitlements. It will also determine how women position themselves in relation to the newer features of the postcolonial state and those who are hastily restructuring their stances and power-bases in order to secure a stake in the current dispensation.

For middle class women based in the state and within the academy, radicalism will become an even greater threat to their class and gender interests, thus opening the way for future consolidation of reactionary, neofeudal identities and tropes through which women's identities and statuses will be redefined and hemmed in. In short, black South African women (and this includes Coloured women) will have to "behave themselves" and shut up about polygamy, sexual impunity, sexual freedoms, and all that "feminist stuff" as it is un-African and definitively western. One can hear the early sounds of this reactionary conservatism already making itself known through the kinds of statements that particular women, positioned within the dominant factions of the ANC are articulating on Zuma's personal and sexual behavior.

In a larger sense, the challenges that this moment of transition poses in terms of women's structural, ideological, relational, conceptual, and activist interventions promise to be both difficult and stimulating. The women's movement will have to change in all the most critical ways, and how this change is imagined and translated into engagement with the state will define the agenda and future of women's politics and lives in all the countries of the region.

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# Domestic Workers in South Africa: Class, Race, and Gender

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We often say in South Africa that African women are oppressed in three ways: oppressed as blacks, oppressed as women, and oppressed as workers. Domestic service is one of the major sources of wage employment for African women in South Africa, and it is an important nexus of this triple oppression. The meaning of triple oppression is complex. It does not simply represent a convergence or coalescence of three distinct types of oppression, seen as variables that can be analyzed in isolation from each other and then superimposed. Sexual subordination when one is racially subordinate is one thing. Sexual subordination when one is a wage laborer in a racist society is quite another.

Western feminists argued that the consideration of gender transforms the analysis of class, that the substance of class oppression is gender specific. South African socialists showed that an analysis of class transforms the analysis of race. In the same way, we argue, the substance of gender subordination varies according to racial and class specifics. Once one begins to consider the dynamic relations between gender, race, and class, it is necessary to link these categories in a way that avoids static analysis of variables or the temptation to collapse them into each other. Our starting point of analysis of South African society is to pose questions about gender that make us think again about the dynamics of race and class. In turn we find that any serious analysis of class and race tends to dissolve the unity of gender.

Once we recognize the cultural and political complexity of gender, it becomes necessary to examine the limits of some of the concepts that Western feminists have developed for a materialist analysis of the ideology of femininity in the Western world. As one black Western feminist recently argued, if, for example, material dependence of women within the nuclear family is seen as central to the construction of the ideology of femininity, this poses problems: "How then can we account for situations in which black women may be heads of households, or where, because of an economic system which structures high black male unemployment, they are not financially dependent upon a black man? This condition exists in both colonial and metropolitan situations" (Carby 2000, 180).

Although it could be argued that this ideology of dependence also bears little relation to the reality of many white women's experience, clearly the introduction of a racial or colonial factor here requires a more complex analysis. As Carby goes on to suggest, "Ideologies of black female domesticity and motherhood have been constructed, through their employment… as domestics and surrogate mothers to white families rather than in relation to their own families…"(ibid.).

Carby's comments clearly raise broader questions about whether there is any unity to the concept of gender and about the political boundaries of sisterhood that cannot be gone into here. However we suggest that these kinds of questions are very important in the context of South Africa. An understanding of the historical and material conditions of black women under the racial capitalism of apartheid shows that triple oppression is a very complex condition.

Our task is to think through some of these problems in the case of black female domestic service. The situation of workers in domestic service in South Africa, when analyzed in strictly economic terms, resembles that of unproductive workers elsewhere. In particular, it has a lot in common with many kinds of service work generally considered to be domestic (cleaning work especially) or performed by wage laborers for household-based employers. Domestic servants, as members of a service sector of the working class, tend to exhibit similar characteristics all over the world: isolation, dependence, invisibility, low level of union organization. Some of the reasons for this pattern are recognized: the particular character of the labor, usually labor intensive and unskilled; and the social relations between the employer and worker. Domestic service thus has a class character.

At the same time, domestic service tends to have a gender character: it is mostly done by women. This is so despite the fact that it has been, and continues to be, done in part by men. There are three reasons why domestic service is seen as women's work par excellence. First, the actual tasks associated with it—cooking, cleaning, washing, childcare—have

been almost universally assumed to be naturally part of woman's sphere. Second, it is assumed that such tasks are normally performed in the household. Third, the personal service aspect of such labor resonates with the ideology of woman as wife. It is thus striking that even when men perform such work, any apparent contradiction is generally absorbed. The most common examples of men performing this work occur in the colonial context or in a racially divided society where subordinate groups perform the task. In the case of South Africa, we note that in the early colonial period, from the point of view of African societies, any form of wage labor was considered to be a male occupation, domestic service included. Moreover, Van Onselen suggested in his study of houseboys on the Reef at the turn of the twentieth century, male domestic workers may have resorted to counteracting activities outside the workplace to reaffirm their own sense of gender (and social) identity. Changing from "saucepan" by day to *amalaita* (teddy-boys, a criminal gang) by night, they would compensate for their loss of masculinity by suitably aggressive and independent behavior. In contrast, when African women perform domestic work, it resonates completely with the kind of work they ought to be doing as women, something reinforced by both mission and traditional African education of young girls. Supervision of domestic servants by white madams also fulfils the expectation that domestic work is essentially part of the woman's sphere. Furthermore, it is clear that the actual tasks associated with domestic service are especially female when performed in the home. A male chef employed in a restaurant, or a male laundry worker, both working outside the home and for a wage, are not necessarily considered to be doing women's work.

Third, as has already become clear, domestic service, especially in colonial societies, has a racial character. Almost everywhere in the world it is performed by socially inferior groups: immigrants, blacks, and ethnic minorities. In South Africa, from the turn of the century, household-based domestic service was above all a black institution, whether performed by men or women. In white colonial society, the deepening of racial divisions made it more acceptable to have black men performing the role of servants than white women, although calculations of prestige, wages, and the sexual dimension implicit in the employment of black manservants could produce counter-tendencies. Under colonialism generally, servile status is the exclusive preserve of the colonized, and where masters are white, servants are black. In South Africa, in general, for the last fifty years, domestic service of the kind we are discussing was performed by black women for white households. The racist and colonial character of the relationship is very strong. Although some black women do employ domestic servants themselves, and although the relationship may manifest a servile or class

character, it does not resonate with the overall structures of racial domination in South African society. Rather, it may contribute to an awareness of class differentiation within the black population.

In sum, then, the social relations of domestic service employment in a colonial context are deeply implicated with class, gender, and racial structures: they are also shot through with contradictions. Domestic service is often the point of entry to wage employment by newcomers to the job market; but others remain in the job all their lives. The labor itself is generally looked upon in society as inferior, servile, low in status, badly paid; those who can escape up or out, do so where possible. Conversely, it is the weakest and most socially subordinate strata that end up in the job: women, immigrants, ethnic minorities. In South Africa, the people who end up in the job are African women.

In a major contribution to the analysis of domestic service in South Africa, Cock (1989) pointed to the importance of the South African white household as a site of reproduction of sexist, racist, and classist ideology. Drawing from Marxism and feminism, she argued that the household is a crucial and largely hidden site of inequality in the South African social formation. She also emphasizes the need to analyze the subordination of African women. Into the equation she puts the kaleidoscopic history of domestic service, the political economy of gender relations between white men and white women, and the history of racial subordination and capitalism in South Africa.

One important factor missing from this equation is what might be called the political economy of gender relations between black men and black women. In our view it is necessary to go back again, to go deeper into the history of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, taking a consciousness of gender categories. The economic and political struggles of the African peoples in the last ninety years have carried within them struggles over the position of women and relations between the sexes. Thus, for example, when considering how black women ended up filling the unskilled job of domestic service, it is vital to consider the differential way in which African men and women were proletarianized, and the way in which this process was structured by the sexual division of labor and gender relations in African society.

From this perspective, the analysis of domestic service touches on three much broader issues: job segregation, the social relations of household domestic work, and the gender subordination of black women. To begin with the question of job segregation: how and why do certain jobs come to be seen as particular to certain racial, sexual, and social groups in any given society? It is now generally acknowledged that the allocation of jobs, all of which have particular skill connotations, within the working class is a

process subject to continuous struggle. This struggle goes on both between the working class and capital and within the working class as a whole. Increasingly, this kind of struggle is being shown to have taken place over sexual division, as much as over racial division. In South Africa historians have demonstrated that the racial division of labor within industry (where white came to mean skilled) was determined largely by the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different sections of the working class in relation to capital and the white state. Historians have not paid comparable attention to the way in which women of all races moved in and out of specific job categories. But an examination of the dynamics of this struggle could go some way toward explaining how black women ended up in domestic service.

At the most general level, we can point to two familiar dimensions of the process of primitive accumulation, which not only affected the racial division of labor in South African capitalism, but also the sexual division of labor. These include the separation of the direct laborers from the means of production, and the creation of a new productive enterprise apart from the household, the capitalist firm (sometimes rather loosely called the separation of the home from the workplace). To take the first point: the way in which African societies were only partially expropriated from their land at the turn of the twentieth century is central to the explanation of the emergence of a migrant workforce in the industry that provided the motor of capital accumulation in South Africa—mining. Equally importantly, the existing sexual division of labor in African societies, reinforced by missions and colonial legal codes, ensured that this was a male migrant force. The way African women were drawn into wage labor, both on white farms and in towns, was thus clearly linked to the subsequent development of the migrant labor system. Similarly, the differential way in which black and white men and women were displaced from the land as a result of the capitalization of settler agriculture could help to explain the way in which they were drawn into the labor markets of the subcontinent. On the second point, we note that the different ways in which African and settler households, both rural and urban, were transformed as sites of production under the impact of capitalist penetration dramatically affected the position of women within the different racial groups. There is too little work on the various patterns that emerged here. The very words domestic and service are used loosely and loaded with untested assumptions about the past. For example, it is often assumed that forms of labor organization that emerged within both settler and African households under capitalism had already been in existence in precapitalist societies. This may not be so.

The second major issue raised could be called the social relations of domestic service. Domestic work is a labor process that continuously

changed as the social relations of apartheid capitalism changed. The demand for servants among whites, for example, is determined by the degree of urbanization, the structure of the white household, and the racist assumption that one or more black servants formed an essential component of the standard of living of whites of all classes. The degree of drudgery, or labor intensity, of domestic service is related to levels of black unemployment and wages, the development of a consumer durables manufacturing industry, and possibly the squeeze on white household incomes under inflation. If there is an increase in part-time as opposed to full-time domestic service, what is its significance for workers and employers? Such questions must be related to broader trends in the South African economy.

The third question concerns the African women themselves. Given that this is one of the bottom rungs of employment, what other forces are pushing African women to the bottom of the heap? What is the actual content of gender subordination of black women? Working in white households is one of many sites of oppression for black women. Ossified legal structures purportedly based on traditional law, education for domesticity, influx laws tied into backward juridical and political structures in the so-called Bantustans, racist and sexist controls on movement and residence, and on property rights—some of these structures and processes have a direct bearing on the oppressive and exploitative experience of working as a domestic servant.

In this chapter we do not try to discuss all these questions. Raising them merely serves to expand the arena for debate, and to point to the overlaps and connections between gender, race, and class. It also points to the need to situate domestic service within a broader discussion of the South African social formation. Domestic service is a deeply oppressive feature in the lives of thousands of African women, for many of whom it is the only possibility of wage labor. These women have much in common with domestic servants elsewhere in the world, in both neocolonial and advanced capitalist societies. But the context of apartheid capitalism gives domestic service a special dimension which we have tried to confront in this paper.

## Conceptualizing Domestic Service

This section draws on some of the debate surrounding the nature of domestic labor under capitalism in order to provide a framework within which we can conceptualize domestic service. It is not, however, our intention to review the debate itself, but only to draw out from certain of its assumptions and analyses useful lines of argument for a discussion of domestic service.

The domestic labor debate represented an attempt by Marxist feminists in the United States and Europe to provide a materialist analysis of the subordinate position of women under capitalism. The theoretical questions posed within the debate centered on whether the value concepts developed by Marx in *Capital* are applicable for an analysis of the domestic labor performed by women within the household. The debate marked an attempt to break with the orthodox assumption that the concepts developed by Marx are applicable only for an analysis of social production, and set out to situate domestic labor as part of the overall social division of labor under capitalism. The critical axis around which the debate revolved was the discussion of whether domestic labor could be conceptualized as productive or unproductive labor, or whether it was indeed private labor and therefore outside the scope of a Marxist economic analysis of capital accumulation. In this sense the debate can best be understood as a conceptual argument among Marxists over the scope and applicability of particular concepts.

The major divergence between our concern and that of the domestic labor debate is that we are interested in the position of domestic workers rather than in the position of housewives. The unit of analysis adopted by contributors to the domestic labor debate was that of the family, seen as consisting fundamentally of the dependent housewife and the breadwinning husband. In drawing a distinction between the position of the domestic worker and the housewife we retain the definition of the housewife as the woman who is, not only responsible for the performance of the domestic labor within the home, but also performs this labor under familial or kin relations without direct remuneration. The domestic worker on the other hand is defined primarily as a worker, as a person who performs the domestic labor in exchange for a wage. Therefore, while it is possible that historically the actual household tasks performed by the domestic worker and the housewife may be the same or of a similar kind—childcare, cooking, cleaning, washing—the position and status of the housewife and the domestic worker are entirely different.

The position adopted in this chapter with respect to the domestic labor debate is that domestic labor itself is essentially concrete privatized labor that is concerned with the production of use values for direct consumption within the household. Although the performance of some form of domestic labor is necessary to ensure the daily and generational reproduction of individuals within the household, it is labor that is performed irrespective of whether those individuals sell their labor power on the market. Briefly, domestic labor is not exchanged directly against variable capital, it is not productive of commodities, it is not allocated according to the law of value, and it does not constitute a source of surplus value for the capitalist: it is not productive in the Marxist sense. Fee's (1976, 3) quotation from Marx

(1969, 152) makes this clear: "Productive labor, in its meaning for capitalist production, is wage labor which, exchanged against the variable part of capital (that part of capital that is spent on wages), reproduces not only this part of capital (or the value of its own labor power), but in addition produces surplus value for the capitalist."

Only wage labor that produces capital is productive. Thus it is clear that domestic labor, because it is not productively consumed within the capitalist production process, cannot be conceptualized as productive labor under capitalism, irrespective of whether it is performed by the housewife or by the domestic worker. Further, since domestic labor does not produce surplus value, neither the domestic servant nor the housewife can be conceptualized, in the narrow economic sense, as exploited by capital in their performance of it.

The essential difference between the position of the housewife and that of the domestic worker lies in the fact that the domestic worker provides a service that is directly paid for. The domestic worker works in exchange for a wage from the employer, is subject to control and supervision, and may be fired as well as hired. The housewife is not so governed. The social relations under which the domestic labor is performed are different and accord to the housewife and the domestic worker a different status.

The domestic worker can be conceptualized as an unproductive worker, as a worker who performs labor that is not exchanged with capital, but directly with revenue, that is wages or profits. The distinction between productive and unproductive labor under capitalism is important; for, although capitalists purchase productive labor, it is possible for wage laborers as well as for capitalists to purchase unproductive labor. As Gough (1972, 51) explains: "The capitalist *qua* capitalist purchases *labor power* with which to create surplus value. The capitalist, or worker for that matter, *qua* consumer purchases *labor services* for the direct use value they provide. The former is productive, the latter unproductive."

Unlike the domestic labor performed by the domestic worker, the labor of the housewife within the household is not covered by either of the concepts of productive or unproductive labor, since it is neither exchanged directly against capital nor against revenue. The housewife is often in a relationship of personal dependence on other household members for her means of subsistence.

Domestic workers may be employed in the households of capitalists, of the middle classes, and of the working classes. Their employment is however structurally dependent on the degree to which these different households can afford them. This dependency can be understood in terms of the customary level of wages paid to domestic workers, in terms of the fluctuating income of the household of the employer, and whether they have

sufficient income to pay for the services of a domestic worker, or possess the relative power to force down the level of wages paid. It is this element that highlights the relative powerlessness and vulnerability of domestic workers in comparison with other sectors of the labor force. The ability of workers to maintain an adequate wage has been linked historically to their organizational and union power when negotiating with employers, and backed by strike action. Because they work individually in isolated household units, often living at their place of work, domestic workers have found it difficult to organize.

These characteristics of domestic workers are in evidence in capitalist societies all over the world. From this perspective, the extremely low wages and lack of political organization among domestic workers represent more of an extreme case of a general phenomenon than a special case of its own. The racial character of apartheid capitalism in South Africa, premised on a specific system of exploitation designed to reproduce a supply of cheap black labor to all employers, created national conditions of oppression under which all black wage levels were depressed and all possibilities for union organization were extremely restricted. These conditions made black female domestic service, which is at the bottom of the ladder, extremely vulnerable. But, we suggest, their structural situation is not exclusive to South Africa.

Within the domestic labor debate there is an assumed identity between women and domestic labor; this is coupled to the assumption that it is housewives who perform the domestic labor within the household. Introducing domestic service into the discussion of domestic labor under capitalism, which we have attempted to do, challenges both of these premises. In the South African social formation the identity of women as housewives and domestic laborers cannot be sustained: both historically and in contemporary South Africa many women were relatively freed from certain wifely obligations to perform domestic labor by the employment of domestic workers. Neither is it true that domestic labor was always performed by women domestic workers: black men and black, as well as white, women were employed as domestic workers.

## The Importance of Domestic Service in African Women's Employment

In the context of a racially and sexually segregated job market, domestic service for African women above all meant access to a wage. They got a foothold in domestic service when women of other races were not available or had escaped its low wages and poor conditions, or when employers

found men more expensive to employ or hard to recruit, or when men were considered unsuitable. In the long run, African women stayed in domestic service because of a lack of alternative job opportunities. In 1936 (but bear in mind the omission of illicit earnings and the informal sector), around 90 percent of African women earning money in key urban areas were in domestic service. Although the centrality of domestic service to African and Coloured women's economic activity has diminished over time, the contrast with white and Indian women is stark. For neither of these latter groups did domestic service provide significant employment, whereas for both Coloured and African women, one in three was employed as a servant. Fifty years ago, three out of four African and Coloured women in wage employment were domestic workers.

Race and sex discrimination kept black women out of the clerical, sales, and factory jobs for which women in Britain, and white women in South Africa, deserted domestic service. The low wages and immobility of these servants made it possible for South Africa to retain an unusually large domestic service sector in a modern industrial society.

## Domestic Workers Today

The conditions of domestic workers in present-day South Africa have been vividly documented in Jacklyn Cock's book, *Maids & Madams,* which was published in South Africa in 1980 to the accompaniment of a storm of comment. The book was labeled "a shock sociological assessment" and extensively reviewed under such headlines as "Is there a slave in your kitchen?" It occasioned numerous letters to the press and columns of editorial comment. Partly this seems because the book made public the relation between maid and madam that was private and sensitive. But the response also seems part of white South Africa's reaction to increased pressure and exposure of the iniquities of apartheid. As such the response should be placed in the context of certain "reformist" trends in the South African state.

The post-1976 period in South Africa has been called by Judy Seidman an era of "facelift apartheid." Many of the petty restrictions of the Verwoerd and Vorster regimes disappeared, leaving the fundamental structures of political disenfranchisement, control, terrorization, and poverty unchanged. But in pointing to this appearance/reality dichotomy, the changes initiated by the Botha regime must not be overlooked.

A key group of changes derive from the findings of the Wiehahn Commission. This commission was set up to investigate labor legislation and made its first report in 1978, a time when worker militancy had reached

**Domestic Servants as Proportion of Economically Active Women 1936 and 1970**

| | *Women Economically Active* | | *Domestic Servants* | | *As Percent of Economically Active* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1936* | *1970* | *1936* | *1970* | *1936* | *1970* |
| European | 131,593 | 447,983 | 6,609 | 1,730 | 5.02 | .38 |
| African | 300,573 | 1,985,947 | 241,230 | 641,180 | 80.3 | 32.28 |
| Coloured | 72,784 | 252,412 | 55,113 | 82,828 | 75.7 | 32.8 |
| Asian | 3,710 | 34,654 | 1,024 | 1,771 | 27.6 | 5.1 |

*Note:* The 1,618,746 African women enumerated as "peasants" among the "gainfully occupied" in the 1936 Census have been omitted here. If they are included then domestic servants constitute 12.6 percent of the gainfully occupied. These figures are for all servants, both urban and rural.

*Source:* Derived from 1936 Census, VII, pars. 7, 29, 32, 37, 38, 43; IX, par. 7; 1970 Census, Report No.02–01-05, Table 1 and 02–05-11, Table 1.

a peak unknown since the 1950s and a large number of unregistered unions had formed among black workers. Unregistered unions existed in a twilight zone of semi-legality. They should not represent their members in terms of the act covering collective bargaining, but they were not in themselves illegal. From the early 1970s workers had taken strike action and demanded higher pay, often winning significant concessions. The Wiehahn Commission set out to investigate and regulate this situation. The major reform that derived from its report was the Labor Relations Act of 1981 which replaced the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956 and the Black Labor Relations Regulation Act of 1953. These laws had excluded black workers from the definition of a worker and so had prevented black unions from participating in collective bargaining, although not from organizing. The Labor Relations Act provided for the registration of unions with black or non-racial membership and their participation in statutory labor relations procedure. It also extended state control to unregistered unions and replaced liaison and works committees with plant-level works councils.

However, one significant area of labor legislation that the Wiehahn Commission report did not cover was domestic work. As a result, domestic workers are still not covered by the Labor Relations Act or the Wage Act, which stipulates a minimum wage for each industry. There is no legal provision for contracts of employment, negotiating procedure, sickness benefits, or pension rights. The domestic workers' only rights are in common law, which certain statutes may override; as most are women who, if married in community of property, are considered perpetual minors in South African law, many cannot bring actions in their own right. Some revision of this situation was contemplated. In August 1981 the Wiehahn

Commission tabled a report in parliament recommending an investigation of the possibility of extending trade union rights to farm workers and domestic servants (*Star* 29 August 1981). The Minister of Manpower announced in February 1982 that the National Manpower Commission would investigate methods of laying down minimum conditions of employment for workers in these sectors. However, he added that "there are in South Africa a variety of factors which militate against the institution of formalized or structured conditions. Factors which are peculiar to this sector and which must be taken into consideration are the intimate relationships between employers…and their domestic servants" (*Cape Times* 22 February 1982). This way of declaring grandiose schemes of reform that turn out to be very limited in practice typifies this so-called reformist period and has been a feature of the way the Wiehahn reforms have been effected. Although black unions have been registered and have won certain advantages for their members as a result, these gains have had to be weighed against increased state bureaucratic control of the unions, and distrust by the workers of involvement with state structures.

The suspicion of the Wiehahn reforms expressed by many industrial workers was echoed by the domestic workers' unions, though as in the industrial unions there is division as to how the new proposals should be regarded. This division accords with the major distinction between the domestic workers' unions, where two main trends have emerged. The first is associated with liberal and church bodies like DWEP (Domestic Workers and Employers Project), which have initiated projects among domestic workers; the second is a move toward forming unions that originated with the workers themselves. Some examples are the Domestic Workers' Association and the National Domestic Workers' Union.

DWEP was begun in 1972 by the liberal body, the South African Institute of Race Relations. Its aim was "to bring about an improvement in the position of domestic workers by helping to create a better understanding between a worker and an employer, by revising working and wage conditions of domestic workers, and trying to improve their status and personal image." The DWEP initiative is close to the viewpoint of the anthropologists Whisson and Weil, writing in the early 1970s in a study published by the South African Institute of Race Relations. In their book *Domestic Servants,* based on interviews with Cape Town employers, they concluded that the needs of both sides, employers and employees, were far more complex than the exchange of labor for cash and kind implied. They called for the problems of domestic service to be tackled with an acknowledgment of this complexity and for the needs of both sides to be met. In their analysis this amounted to higher wages, a less personal form of contract, and some improvement in the inferior status of the employee. Much of the

attention of DWEP focused on the same concerns and in its approach, which brought maids and madams together in joint centers of concern, it echoes the Whisson and Weil emphasis on interdependence. Thus DWEP established complaints offices and centers of concern on the Witwatersrand and in Natal, East London, and Cape Town. Their main work was taking up complaints about wages and teaching domestic workers to improve their skills and increase their earning power. DWEP's initiative was followed up by the South African Council of Churches Women's Desk, which set up a consultative service for domestic workers. This approach—involving advice and conscientization with employers and workers—seems typical of the church and liberal style of helping domestic workers.

Emerging from this standpoint, DWEP cannot perform any organizational role for domestic workers, nor can it articulate the specific interests of workers whose concerns cannot be identified with their employers beyond the point of the contract of employment. In practice, DWEP acknowledges this by the attention it gives to individual hardship cases, where employers may extend kindly patronage, rather than the articulation of organized demands in the common interest of all servants. A literacy worker for DWEP commented that the employers helping at centers of concern often seemed oblivious that their activity there was dependent on the assistance of their own servant at home.

The DWEP approach came under heavy criticism in October 1980 when some of its members supported the Cape Provincial Council (CPC) in drafting legislation to oblige householders to keep a register of all their domestic workers' personal documentation and to make duplicate keys to domestic workers' rooms available to police and government officials at all times. This legislation resulted from the findings of a CPC Commission and was recommended to the Commission by many employers associated with DWEP and similar projects. Some employers went as far as claiming that their servants worked as prostitutes and saw the legislation as a means to control their social life. In Sea Point, Cape Town, the more radical domestic workers' union, the Domestic Workers' Association, headed by Maggie Oewies, expressed the outrage of workers at this collaboration and refused to sit on the same platform as liberal bodies which, said Maggie Oewies, "provided tea and sympathy rather than treating the roots of the domestic workers' problems" (*Herald* 19 October 1980). The DWA distributed pamphlets protesting at the legislation, and its intervention on this issue increased its membership in the area.

Despite these limitations, DWEP attempted to form a union among live-in servants. This union remained closely associated with DWEP and reflected DWEP's conception of domestic workers. The union, SADWA (South African Domestic Workers' Association), was set up in February

1981. Domestic workers, who were members of DWEP, approved a constitution read to them by the director of DWEP, Mrs. Leah Tutu (wife of Archbishop Desmond Tutu), and elected a committee. SADWA's aims were similar to those of DWEP: protecting the domestic servant against hardship and abuse by employers, officials, and the state; setting up an office to receive complaints; and negotiating with employers on behalf of individual servants (*Sowetan* 27 February 1981). The officers of DWEP appeared to be the major force in SADWA, for when a branch of the union was established in the Cape, it was launched by Mrs. Tutu and not by the office bearers elected at the Johannesburg meeting (*Cape Herald* 18 July 1981).

By contrast, the second approach to the unionization of domestic workers developed from the initiatives of workers who acted without reference to employers. The Domestic Workers' Association represented a trend toward independent unions established by the workers themselves. A beginning in this direction was made in 1960 when the Domestic Workers' Union, one of the non-racial unions associated with SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions), tried to unionize domestic workers. In those days the union faced great obstacles because workers, isolated in the private homes of their employers, risked intimidation for attending union meetings. The repression of the 1960s greatly weakened the union but after the upsurge of worker militancy in the 1970s and 1980s, similar organizations emerged. The DWA was active both in unionizing domestic workers and in propagating a wage claim of R110 a month. In May 1981 the National Domestic Workers' Union held a meeting in Durban at which members of the committee spoke of organizing discussion groups in the townships and hostels. The general secretary of the union, Mr. M. Oliphant (it should be remembered that large numbers of domestic servants in Natal are men), addressed the meeting of workers, outlining their disabilities under present legislation, and concluded that the time was past for talking: workers wanted action. A similar tone was evident in Port Elizabeth earlier in 1981 when, under the auspices of the cultural association *Roots*, based in the township, a committee of domestic workers was set up which called for a minimum R100 per month cash wage plus bus fare. In August this committee constituted itself as the Domestic Workers and Sales Ladies Association, established links with the Domestic Workers Association in Cape Town, and stated that it would concentrate on fighting for higher salaries and better working conditions (*Cape Times* 5 May 1981; *Daily Despatch* 5 May 1981; *Herald* 15 August 1981; *Rand Daily Mail* 28 January 1981).

In general it appears that the independent unions with specific wage claims and action aimed at particular legislation emerged in areas where domestic workers ceased to be live-in servants. There was a broad trend in South Africa toward replacing live-in servants with daily chars who

commuted from adjacent townships. A major reason for this shift was the increasing stringency with which, following the Riekert Commission (1978), legislation on residence of Africans in the urban areas was administered. It became less easy for an employer to have an unregistered servant living-in by informal agreement with the authorities. At the same time some servants in certain areas calculated that working as a char and holding a number of jobs might yield higher wages than working as a full-time servant for one employer. Moreover, some employers, given the recession, cut down on the number of servants they employed and preferred a weekly char. An additional dimension that may have had a bearing on this trend was the increasing anxiety with which South African whites viewed the rising level of urban unrest and fears and suspicions they may have entertained about their servants, whom they might prefer not to have living in their homes.

Workers living in townships were involved more closely with the general upsurge of militancy in South Africa in the 1980s than were the isolated servants in private homes. In Port Elizabeth the domestic workers' union emerged from a general community association, and in Durban the union was based in the hostel and township and not in the white suburb. It appears that it was easier for workers to form unions when they were not closely tied to the relations of dependence and private exploitation in the relations of maids and madams. Domestic workers must have been inspired by the activities of whole communities uniting in actions like bus boycotts and the red meat boycott.[1]

The difference in the two approaches to organizing workers emerged clearly in the response to the Minister of Manpower's announcement of an investigation into domestic workers' conditions of employment. DWEP saw the investigation as very welcome because it would remedy the domestic workers' lack of legal rights. Maggie Oewies of the DWA, by contrast, was more guarded. She hoped that the investigation would not be "the beginning of a systematic attack on the development of independent domestic and farm workers' organizations" (*Argus* 8 November 1982). She saw how the government had interfered in the affairs of independent worker organizations by prescribing how they should operate and by laying down minimum wages that were below the average being paid. DWEP's comments echoed those of the English-language press, liberal academics, and white opposition parties, although the DWA observations were close to those of the unions that opposed registration under the Wiehahn legislation. DWEP articulated liberal white concern, while the independent unions are close to the aspirations of opposition movements based in the black townships.

The division between the organizations was apparent when a building society launched a pension plan for domestic workers. The plan, welcomed

and approved by DWEP, envisaged contributions being paid by workers alone. Maggie Oewies, on behalf of DWA, remarked that the whole point about a pension scheme was that employers should contribute. She asked, "Which domestic can afford to pay R20 a month into a pension scheme when they are already living on the breadline?" (*Argus,* 8 November 1982). Once again the link between DWEP and an establishment body like the Natal Building Society marked the organization off from the DWA, which speaks of the day-to-day hardships of domestic workers.

However, although there were clear areas of divergence between the domestic workers' unions associated with DWEP and those independent of it, the differences should not be overstated. There was an interchange of views on the approach to organizing domestic workers and considerable overlap in aims and activity among the two groups. SADWA was then a new union, and it evolved into SADWU (the South African Domestic Workers Union), by merging five unions in 1986.[2] By 2000 SADWA had morphed into SADSAWU (the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union) (Ally 2008). Overall the position of the domestic workers' unions had some common features with that of industrial workers' unions in South Africa. Even when their membership extended to only a minority of workers and their existence and survival remained precarious, the significance of the general unions and the domestic workers' unions reached far beyond the number of members involved. The very emergence of unions among workers, who for so long lacked any organization, indicated a new era.

## Conclusion

The trend toward unionization among South African domestic workers gave ground for cautious optimism. In analyzing some of the historical and structural aspects of the situation of these workers, we have questioned in this chapter the powerful ideological consensus that domestic service is naturally predetermined as women's work. Rather, the relegation of large numbers of African women workers to this sector of wage labor in South Africa is a product of the complex operation of class, race, and gender divisions over time. One serious implication of this analysis was that in order to challenge this particular pattern of job segregation, all three of these social divisions needed to be confronted. African domestic servants, when mobilized, tended to identify themselves primarily either as workers or as members of the oppressed black nation, or a combination of both. They did not necessarily see themselves as confronting their subordination as women. However, this mobilization was

an important step forward and helped ensure that South African women domestic workers could never return to that historical silence to which they were condemned for so long. It is foolish to speculate on the implications of the particular battles South African women fight as domestic workers without a closer look at the role they played in other struggles. But clearly the challenge they offered to the conventional image of black maids submissive to their white madams, or women subordinate to their men, gave an additional dimension to their fight.

## Notes

1. Boycotts were a common strategy of the anti-apartheid struggles, and boycotts of red meat—along with other products—were widely publicized (Editor's note).
2. The five were the South African Domestic Workers Association (SADWA), the Western Cape-based Domestic Workers Association (DWA), the Natal-based National Domestic Workers Association (NDWA), the Port Elizabeth Domestic Workers Union (PEDWU), and the East London Domestic Workers Union (ELDWU) (Ally 2008, Editor's note).

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# 4

# The Proletarianization of Women in Tanzania

*Deborah Fahy Bryceson*

Proletarianization of women in urban Tanzania is a relatively recent phenomenon. This chapter explores the implication for women, men, and the family unit. The first section reviews Marxist theory on modes of production and argues for the concept of modes of human reproduction, before turning to the Tanzanian case study.

## Outlining the Theoretical Context: Production and Human Reproduction

In Marxist literature the term "proletarianization" refers to producers' complete separation from land and other property, which allows them to produce independently their material needs. Dispossessed of the means of production, they are compelled to exchange their labor power for wages. Labor power then becomes a commodity. Ironically, although wage workers represent "free" labor, they no longer have the option of refraining from wage work. By selling their labor to capital, capital gains ownership and control of wage labor for the purpose of extracting surplus value in the form of profit.

Female proletarianization takes a form that defies the definition of proletarianization in its strict sense. Female proletarians have not undergone a process of separation or dispossession from the means of production because women never possessed or controlled the means of production as precapitalist producers and peasants. Like their male counterparts, female proletarians are separated from ownership and control of the capitalist means of production, but they have arrived in this state through a different

conditional path from that of men. Thus, the nature of female proletarianization is enigmatic, posing many theoretical questions with far-reaching practical implications.

Consideration of the position of women in any mode of production must be expanded to include, not only the mode of production in its strict sense, that is the forces and relations of production, but also the mode of human reproduction. This concept is still being defined and integrated into the body of historical materialist theory. McDonough and Harrison (1978, 34), in a noteworthy step in this direction, define the theoretical content of the mode of human reproduction in the following way:

> The social relations of human reproduction...are class specific relations. They comprise the form of control of the wife's labor in the family and also the form of control of the wife's sexual fidelity. Just as the labor process is always situated within a particular mode of production and its social relations, so is the procreative process. Historically, too, the procreative process has—like the labor process—been shaped by a relation of control, specifically in this instance by a relation of patriarchy. At marriage, the wife gives into the control of her husband both her labor power and her capacity to procreate in exchange for subsistence for a definite period, for life.

Common to all modes of human reproduction are first, the man or woman's relationship to biological nature, giving rise to the forces of human reproduction, which represent the man or woman's level of control of biological nature. This control is the extent to which birth and mortality can and are regulated in any specific mode; this regulation in turn affects the demographic configuration of the mode of production.

Second, the social relationships between men and women are conditioned by human reproduction, giving rise to relations of human reproduction, which refers to control or ownership of the forces of human reproduction, as well as access to and control of sexual union (marital or extramarital), procreation, and children. To the degree that men exercise structural control over these relations within any specific mode, women live in objective conditions of sexual oppression, although expressed in different forms in different classes. Whether individual men with whom women associate make full use of the control at their disposal or seek personal equality with women does not change these objective conditions, as long as the dynamic of the mode of production and its specific mode of human reproduction persist, unchallenged by collective struggle.

Thus the task of distinguishing between the position of proletarianized women as opposed to the position of female peasants must be related to the mode of production as well as to the mode of human reproduction.

### *Proletarianization as an Unfolding Historical Process*

Within the capitalist mode of production, the notion of free labor takes on new and very significant connotations, vis-à-vis proletarianized women. The capitalist mode is based on a highly developed level of the forces of production. The means of production are owned by capitalists. The producing classes work for wages, under the control of the capitalists. As workers represent free labor, this means a proletarianized woman can sell her labor power to any capitalist, whereas a precapitalist woman producer labors under a specific configuration of male power relationships over her in the family. Female proletarians' freedom is not merely a matter of deciding who they are going to work for; rather, it is premised on the objective fact that their labor power is exchangeable for a wage in the same manner as males' labor power. Structurally, the capitalist labor market is indifferent to the sex of the wage earner. Women exchange their labor power for a wage on the same basis as men. The sexual distinction comes in terms of the repercussions of the act of selling one's labor power on the family. Male wages belong to men. Female wages do not belong to men. Female wages can serve as an objective basis for female subsistence independent of familial male control.

Peasant women's labor, on the other hand, can be regarded as necessary for the social reproduction of family units or the generation of surplus. Women's labor is restricted within the family household, in its content, scope, and location. This is in marked contrast to the proletarianized women whose labor must be mobile, varying in content, scope, and location to suit the demands of the capitalist labor market.

Precapitalist female peasants' labor immobility is related to the strong assertion of male control over human reproduction. Precapitalist modes of human reproduction generally represent a fairly low level of control over mortality and birth. Precapitalist female peasants' child bearing is prolific relative to women in nuclear families under capitalism. Women are channeled into particular work that is conductive to their age-specific role as child bearers.

It appears that under capitalism, women's role as child bearers is deemphasized. Marx and Engels' writings expound the theory that capitalist production exerts dissolving effects on the family. They visualized the family's eventual destruction. The capitalist mode of production's operation had no built-in structural safeguards guaranteeing the family's continuation as a unit of human reproduction, or even as a unit reproducing labor power, although it was indeed in capital's interest to ensure the latter.

This possibility points to a profound contradiction, namely the assertion of the capitalist mode of production in the absence of any development

of a complementary mode of human reproduction. The family existed as a vestige of the precapitalist mode of human reproduction. The dynamic of surplus value extraction began to pulverize the family as a mode of human reproduction. Ironically, it was the organized struggle of the proletariat themselves in Europe that acted to alleviate this internal contradiction within capitalism. The organized working class struggle to gain a family wage to be paid to the head of household to cover the maintenance costs of all other members of the family as nonwage earners.

Eventually capitalists conceded the family wage to workers because of the intensity of the workers' struggle, as well as the intervention of the capitalist state capable of rising above the profit motive of individual capitalists. In the process of capital conceding a family wage, workers secured human survival as individuals and as a class, which in turn preserved the working class as repository of labor power for capitalist production.

The family wage was instituted as a male preserve. Women's labor was structured to be immobile, in the home directed at doing domestic labor. Domestic labor encompassed childcare and housework which was lightened by first, the provisioning of services by the state in the fields of health and education, and second, the increasing commoditization of housekeeping in the form of household appliances, restaurants, semi-prepared foods, and so on.

Women are free labor vis-à-vis the capitalist labor market to the extent that they abscond from capitalist relations of human reproduction. There are primarily three forms of absconding that represent different degrees to which husbands exercise control over their wives and various gradations of wives' relationship to domestic labor.

*Real subsumption to familial male control.* Women gain the consent of their husbands and male kin to work outside the home. Permission is often granted on the grounds of the family's economic need or that the children are in school. In certain cases, the wife may be so dutiful as to hand the wage over to her husband to control.

*Formal subsumption to familial male control.* Women enjoy a compromise relationship with their husbands and male kin. The male family members consciously accept women's equality with men. They are supportive of women household members attaining wage employment. The element of compromise, however, arises in apportioning domestic labor within the household and the degree to which the men not only are willing, but actually do, assume traditional female roles like housework, cooking, and childcare.

*Absence of real and formal subsumption to familial male control in a strict sense.* Women may extricate themselves from binding relationships with men by rejecting marriage or rejecting female filial roles within their

families. In this way they consciously achieve the freedom to seek wage labor on the capitalist labor market. In many cases, however, upon becoming female heads of households women often find that they do not have sufficient time to devote to domestic labor in their households. Very frequently they come to rely on the female labor of other members of the household, which ironically acts to restrict the entry of these females into the labor market.

Female proletarianization is problematic to the coherence of the capitalist mode of production and the capitalist mode of human reproduction. On the one hand, it objectively frees female labor from male control. On the other hand, familial male control over the conjugal union remains pronounced, although structural male control over females is only partial. These contradictory conditions provide a terrain for struggle between men and women over redefining the relations of human reproduction. Women proletarians are the key to this struggle. As wage earners, they have an objective base upon which their struggle can be sustained. In the wider sense of class struggle, the degree to which women proletarians succeed in defying capitalist relations of human reproduction contributes to the breakdown of the delicate articulation between the capitalist modes of production and human reproduction, thereby challenging the capitalist system at a root level. So, too, in the process of defying capitalist relations of human reproduction, they contribute to the consciousness of the working class.

## *Proletarianization in Tanzania*

In the process of female proletarianization in Tanzania women have struggled against precapitalist male control over their labor. For peasant women, proletarianization represents a vent or means of escape. They disengage themselves from the intricate web of precapitalist male control over their labor, and in doing so land themselves in a position compelling them to find jobs. The problem Tanzanian women face, however, is a lack of job opportunities. This is not surprising since the proletarianization of Tanzanian women took place after the family wage became an established fact in Europe and reverberated with lasting impact throughout the capitalist world economy. Tanganyikan colonial state policies toward labor reflected this, as well as present day state policies that give higher priority to male wage employment over that of females.

Proletarianized Tanzanian women have struggled against relations of human reproduction, which are characteristic of both the capitalist and precapitalist modes of human reproduction. The overt struggle has only

recently begun and one sees less compromise on the part of men than forbearance on the part of women. But when finally women cannot tolerate the intensity of their sexual subordination any more, militant disassociation from formal male control and a rejection of marriage occurs. The position of proletarianized women in Tanzania is basic in the struggle over relations of human reproduction. The struggle is objectively premised on women's independent sources of subsistence through wage labor rather than their peasant sisters. The following section gives some historical background to their struggle.

## Tanzanian Women's Struggles

### *Historical Context: Impact of Male Labor Migration on Women in Rural Areas under British Colonialism*

Hardly any official attention was paid to the effects of labor migration on the labor supply areas of the peasantry until the 1950s when colonial authorities became concerned that labor migration was leading to disruptions in peasant family life and was a source of marital instability. Gulliver (1955, 37), the government sociologist, attempted to apologize for the system in his study of the Ngoni:

> One of the most common objectives to labor migration which is made both by Government officials and by missionaries is that it leads to severe hardships for the wife and children who are left at home by the laborer. It may be clear however that a Ngoni wife is less dependent on her husband than her European counterpart, and, she is able with relatively little difficulty to maintain the food supply of her home in his temporary absence. She is able to continue her relations and mutual assistance with her feminine kin and neighbors and, by the nature of the economy, and low demand, she and her children can comfortably continue with little or no money income. She may suffer from a break in normal married, sexual relationships, but even this should not be over-emphasized for it is the custom that a man and wife do not cohabit for two or more years after a baby is born. If the man is away during that period (as many young husbands are) no special hardship is experienced.

Native Authorities, who were the embodiment of the colonial state's policy of indirect rule, were forced to adopt a more realistic view of the implications of labor migration. The colonial state constituted them for the purpose of revenue collection and ensuring some semblance of traditional tribal order. In actual fact, the Native Authorities ensured the

reproduction of the peasantry as a base for commodity production, and in the case of labor migration areas the Native Authorities acted to ensure the export of labor power as a commodity. While the Native Authorities recognized, on the one hand, that without labor migration tax collection would be impossible in their areas, on the other hand they understood that the marital instability caused by labor migration was a threat to the maintenance of the lineage organization. Thus we find Native Authorities addressing the problem much earlier than the higher echelons of the colonial state. For example, in 1931, the Makonde Council in Newala ruled that any man found guilty of enticing or seducing or stealing a married woman while her husband was away earning money to pay taxes may suffer imprisonment not exceeding three months (with hard labor) in addition to the customary adultery damages.

Traditionally, the marriage union was constantly reinforced by the social pressure of the extended family. Labor migration disrupted this. The man, removed from his extended family, was freed from their approbation, the woman was not. She remained with additional pressures on her to conform as a faithful wife. The problem of deserted wives, however, could not be ignored. Gulliver (1955, 40) admitted this:

> ...since a substantial number of wives are deserted for long periods or permanently (and without economic assistance from the absent men), and because both adultery and divorce have been increased to some extent by such desertion and with a concomitant reduction of moral standards, we must say that labor migration has a deleterious effect on marriage and family life and the well-being of some women and children.

The problem of desertion was dealt with again at the tribal level. Increasingly desertion became grounds for divorce in native courts. Ngoni courts generally ruled that a man's absence for three years was adequate grounds for his wife to divorce him, whereas Nyakyusa courts stipulated only eighteen months.

### *The Designation of Female Work in the Colonial Labor Force*

Women participated in the colonial labor force to a limited extent. Even in the migrant labor force they were not entirely unknown. Orde-Browne (1946, 51), the Labor Advisor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, recorded that the Makonde, who were migrating from Mozambique to work on coastal sisal plantations in Tanganyika, were "frequently accompanied by their wives and families and the unusual tribal custom exists of the women working for wages as well as the men." There was little official

attention or even recognition of the existence of women in the labor force prior to the 1930s. The subject came to the fore, however, at the insistence of the Secretary of State for the Colonies who was concerned with British colonial adherence to an International Labor Organization convention concerning restrictions on women's employment during night hours. In Tanganyika, the official response was smug, considering this convention superfluous:

> The application of this Convention to Tanganyika is not considered to be required by local conditions at the present time… it is contrary to native custom and to general practice for native women to be employed at all except on the transportation of domestic necessities and in employment in agricultural pursuits on tribal or on individual native lands…The native woman at her present stage of mental development is totally unsuitable for partaking in any industrial undertaking involving mechanical knowledge and will be so for a considerable time in the future. (TNA c. 1931)

However, colonial officials subsequently discovered that it was a noticeable though not predominate practice for white settlers to employ local peasant women on their farms and estates for peak season sorting and minor processing work on harvested crops. In 1938, the Secretary of State's pressure finally culminated in protective legislation banning women's employment during night hours. Already intractable notions of an industrial sexual division of labor were appearing as revealed in the Legislative Council debate over the consequences of this restrictive legislation for those coffee estate owners who were working with shipment deadlines and needed labor around the clock for coffee sorting. The Governor himself intervened asking if it were essential to employ women. The reply was, "Your Excellency, it would be very difficult to substitute men labor for women labor in many cases of grading work (TNA 1940)." The 1951 Labor Census revealed that women composed 5 percent of the total labor force, 80 percent employed in the agricultural sector, whereas only 47 percent of total male employment was in the agricultural sector.

### *Women's role in the Process of Proletarianization: Female Urban Migration*

After World War II more women began to follow their migrant husbands to their places of work because employers were beginning to offer free transport and amenities for wives as dependents in a bid to stabilize their labor force. The family wage entrenched this tendency for more female urban migration. In 1948 the ratio of men to women in Dar es Salaam

was 141:100, in 1957, 131:100 and in 1967, 123:100. The gap closed further during the 1970s.

In the 1971 National Urban, Mobility, Employment, and Income Survey (NUMEIST), women were interviewed in seven major towns in Tanzania; they were asked their main reason for coming to town. Sixty-six percent of the women said they followed their husbands, only 9 percent came directly to seek employment, whereas 70 percent of the men interviewed had had the latter purpose in mind. Nevertheless, Shields (1980, 24–27) argues that female migration cannot be simply seen as a result of male migration "since this leaves unexplained the large increase in recent years of women in the migration stream." The proportion of unmarried female migrants had increased from 13 percent of the female total in 1950–1952 to 33 percent in 1970–1971. Strong indications of personal economic motive in female migration are implied in Sabot's (1978) findings, which revealed that migration rates to Dar es Salaam for women with Standard 4 education were 2.3 times greater than their male counterparts. Likewise for Standard 5–8, the female rate exceeded that of the males by 1.6 times. Numerically, however, male migrants superseded female migrants because so many more men were educated to these levels.

On the balance sheet of women's calculations as to whether to migrate, the cons weighed heavily against staying in the village, especially for girls with some education. Young girls had far less security of livelihood in the village than boys, and therefore were a latent surplus population with a much lower threshold for conversion to a floating surplus population. Women's traditional access to land and means of production was basically limited to usufruct rights conditional on their marital status. Land control remained in the hands of the menfolk. Migration to the urban areas offered an alternative to women's traditional subordinate role in village production.

### *Women Workers and Sexual Discrimination in Wage Employment*

Although women's migration to the urban areas markedly increased in the first decade after independence, their presence in the wage labor force did not change markedly. In 1951 women constituted 5 percent of the total labor force, increasing to 7 percent in 1969 and 9 percent in 1974. Given these figures, it is not surprising that women of the urban working class were found primarily earning incomes outside wage employment in petty commodity production, for example keeping chickens and selling the eggs or cooking small snacks to sell on the streets. The nature of their work was significantly different from wage work because the site of their

commodity production was most often the home. The focus of this chapter remains solely on women workers, while bearing in mind that women workers were a minority who reflected a tendency rather than the overall general situation of urban Tanzanian women.

Women's job opportunities were very limited in the highly competitive urban job market. Between 1965 and 1971 the unemployment rate for women, excluding subsistence income earners, increased from 7 percent to 20 percent, whereas the unemployment rate for men decreased from 7 percent to 6 percent. There were no laws guaranteeing equal job opportunities, and employers were free to hire discriminately on any basis they saw fit. Studies by Meghji (1977) and Swantz and Bryceson (1976) indicate that sexual discrimination was rampant. The three immediate causes for this were:

*Sexual designation of industrial tasks*. Meghji (1977), in her study of three Tanzanian industries, found that factory managers generally viewed women workers as incapable of handling machinery of any complexity. Men took over formerly female designated tasks when mechanization was introduced. A striking example of this was the Kibo Match Corporation where women composed 90 percent of the labor force before 1969, under the prevailing labor-intensive production process. Then the company mechanized its production process and women's employment plummeted to 31 percent. By 1976, only 20 percent of the total labor force was female, although total employment had risen from 101 in 1969 to 224 in 1976.

The coffee curing factory in Moshi was another example. In 1972, automated machinery was introduced and all female workers (numbering 800) were promptly dismissed. Other factories such as the Moshi Textile Mill have confined women to the labor-intensive sections of the factory. Those factories that contrary to the general rule were labor-intensive, often predominantly employed women. The African Flower Industry, a backyard, labor-intensive industry producing pyrethrum mosquito coils, hired women because according to the manager the women were hard working, patient, and did not create any problems. At Tanita cashew nut factory, female employees (900 out of a total of 1,260 workers) vastly outnumbered men. This was attributable to the unskilled nature of the work in which lack of training or previous job experience was not a hindrance.

*Employers' notions of female labor productivity*. Meghji's interviews with managers revealed that they considered women workers far less productive than men due to absenteeism or reduced output caused by menstruation and childbirth. It is in the light of this that the 1975 Maternity Leave Act, which legally entitles women regardless of their marital status to a twelve-week paid maternity leave every three years (paid by the employer), has had adverse effects on women's employment. For example, the Moshi

Textile Mill stopped hiring women in 1975. At the Urafiki Textile Mill, the issue of women's employment was contested. Due to the inconvenience of maternity leave, the management decided to stop hiring women. The national party representatives at the factory intervened and the idea was abandoned. This was not the outcome in other places of work. While the Maternity Leave Act was a positive step forward, it could also represent two steps backward. Boserup (1970) suggested a way around this, namely that maternity leave should become a social responsibility whereby the government deducts funds from all employers whether or not they employ women, which can be used to reimburse those employers with women employees who incur maternity leave costs.

*Women's lack of education*. In 1977, a national universal primary education program was launched. Parents were compelled to send both boys and girls to school. Women's lack of education relative to men has placed them in a disadvantageous position in the highly competitive urban job market. More and more, unskilled jobs are being offered to those with education qualifications. Even at Urafiki where women's employment was defended, women were structurally discriminated against through Urafiki's policy of hiring only Standard 7 leavers.

Difficulty in securing wage employment led to women securing work in the informal sector as producers of petty commodity goods for sale. The consequences were outlined by Shields (1980, 35):

> The majority of the employed women in Tanzania are in that hazy boundary between employment and unemployment, not quite fully employed and yet not earning enough for the amount of time and effort devoted to work....in both self-employment and wage employment, women's earnings are less than men's although this tendency is much more pronounced for the self-employed.

### *Social Characteristics of Women Workers*

What then can we say about the female wage earners who in the face of sexual discrimination and high female unemployment manage to secure employment? The following information is drawn from a 1973/1974 sample survey of 295 women workers in Dar es Salaam (Swantz and Bryceson 1976), which is representative of urban Tanzanian women workers.

*Rural emigrants*. The vast majority of the women workers interviewed had migrated to Dar es Salaam and were daughters of peasants. Women from tribes in the area surrounding Dar es Salaam were not well-represented, owing to the traditional Muslim custom in the coastal areas of secluding women within the home. Women from tribes with a history of labor

migration were very numerous as were women from Kilimanjaro, an area of highly developed commodity production of coffee. In both cases, it is fairly safe to surmise that the penetration of the cash nexus in their home areas facilitated the dissolution of the precapitalist relations of productions, which would have bound them to the villages.

In the case histories of the women, it became evident that the migrant woman's departure from her home area could rarely be portrayed as the rebel's desire to flee the familiar and embark on an entirely new life. The importance of family ties readily assisting the emigrant cannot be underestimated. Members of the extended family were almost always present in the process of migration either accompanying or meeting the woman migrant on her arrival in Dar es Salaam. Housing was rarely a problem on arrival. Relatives invariably offered accommodations until the women could make arrangements for themselves. This was not peculiar to women. Sabot (1978) reported that 75 percent of all male migrants receive assistance from relatives or friends during the early stage of their sojourn in the city.

The majority of women came to Dar es Salaam between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. It is clear that social patterns in the home area conducive to migration were a necessary precondition. However, events experienced by the women as individuals reinforced by social pressures within the community provided the final impetus for the actual migration. Personal hardships requiring a reidentification of the woman's role in her village, such as the incidence of divorce or the death of a parent, were often cited as reasons for migrating.

In the case of the death of a parent, especially a father, responsibility was conferred on the adult offspring to ensure the economic well-being of the widowed parent. Filial duty was strong whether or not a death had occurred. Daughters as well as sons were solicited by their parents. In cases where women in rural areas were not in a position to provide for their widowed parent they were often compelled to try to find a job in town in order to send money home.

Divorce however was a far greater motivating factor for migration than a parent's death. Claeson and Egero (1972), in their analysis of 1967 census results, discovered that the proportion of divorced women in the urban areas was two times greater than in the rural areas, whereas for men there was no rural-urban difference. This suggests that selective urban migration of divorced women was taking place. A divorced woman's position in a village was precarious. After separating from her husband she would usually have the choice of remaining in her parental home, but particularly in a case where the father had died, the woman would be dependent on her brother's good will. In many areas the traditional responsibility toward

other members of the family no longer effectively operated to guarantee a divorced woman's share in the land or the proceeds of the land. In any case, a divorcee traditionally had to be satisfied with what was given to her. She did not hold legal rights to her father's property.

*Women without Husbands*

The most outstanding feature that distinguished the women workers interviewed from the general female population in Dar es Salaam was that 63 percent were without husbands, either single, divorced, or widowed, whereas the Dar es Salaam census figures show that only 24 percent of the female population between ages of fifteen and fifty-four fell into this category. There were two possible causes for this. First, women without their husbands' financial support had to find jobs. This was borne out by Sabot (1978) whose sample revealed that 62 percent of the married women were unemployed whereas only 27 percent and 11 percent respectively of the single and divorced women were jobless. This may infer that women without husbands were forced to secure jobs as soon as possible, often settling for a lower income than desired. Second, although there was no documentary evidence it was widely apparent that many married men forbade their wives to work if family economic circumstances allowed.

*Women heads of households*. Women workers were often not only without husbands but also were heads of households with children to support. In the Dar es Salaam survey, the mean number of children per woman worker compared with the average for Dar es Salaam women in each age group was only slightly depressed. Shields (1980) found no substantial difference in numbers of children between employed and nonemployed women and maintained that there were no signs of women withdrawing from the labor force during peak reproductive years, a discernable pattern in some countries.

## *Women Workers' Consciousness*

How do women workers perceive their position? How does their position as workers affect their relationship with men and with their children? In the interviews conducted with Dar es Salaam women workers some insight was gained into these questions.

*From village to town life: the recognition of new social contradictions*. The women workers had migrated to the city and had not been forcibly evicted from their rural homes. There were many factors, both objective and subjective, conditioning the women's decision to migrate. When asked about the differences between town and rural life, the change was conceptualized

primarily in material terms. The women were in general agreement that work pressure was reduced in the towns even though they had jobs. Village cultivation was described as very hard, sweaty work with long hours. The commoditization of city life was what they reacted against. Complaints were voiced about having to buy everything, even water, in the city. One woman bemoaned the pitfalls of consumerism. Dress competition caused her to go without enough food for many days until the end of the month when she received her salary. Nevertheless, almost all the women had no plans to return at a later date to their village to stay. The two women who expressed a strong preference for village life qualified their statements; one was too accustomed to city life to return, while the other confided much later that she only said she liked the village better for fear of being sent back. It appears that women had every intention of keeping their break with the rural areas permanent, although they were generally in the habit of visiting their home areas during their annual leave.

*Work: the awakening of political consciousness*. Almost all the women interviewed earned minimum wages, and it became evident through the interviews that many of them, especially the women heads of households, stretched their wage to the absolute limit to support themselves and their dependants. Similarly Meghji's (1977) survey of women workers, in which 74 percent of the women were not legally married but had children, revealed that the women had to resort to subsidizing their wage income through cultivation of small plots or sex work. Others had to depend on their extended family in the rural areas for help with food or taking care of their children.

The unskilled, routine nature of their jobs allowed women workers little enthusiasm for the work itself. No one had any suggestions for improving or systematizing their work. As one woman put it, "*Mimi ni bendera nafuata upepo*": she followed what her supervisors directed her to do "like a flag following the wind." Another woman cynically stated, "Why should I think of an impossibility? Do you think if I give an idea the boss will agree? After all we do not participate in any decision-making meetings. The top people do not expect any reasonable suggestions from a worker."

The wage differentials existing at their places of work further deepened an acute class consciousness among them. They did not indulge in fanciful dreams about material wealth unavailable to them, but many entertained feeble hopes of bettering their economic position through promotion. Learning to read and speak English was considered the most likely means to gain promotion. All viewed differences in education as the reason for a social gap between the *wakubwa* (big bosses) and themselves, the *kima cha chini* (the downtrodden). One old woman confessed, when asked why she ran away from school in her youth, "Ah, my friend, had I known education

would be of such use I would have gone very far." Others were resigned and recognized it was too late for them to benefit materially to any great degree from studying, yet they were eager to learn and embraced the workers' education classes at their places of work with enthusiasm.

The women workers had not begun to involve themselves in political activities to any great extent and did not seem to view the available political organs as channels through which their specific problems as women could be redressed. Many were party members registered at their places of work. When asked if they spoke at party meetings, all said they preferred to listen only. *Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania* (UWT), the national women's organization affiliated to the party, would seem to be the organ through which their voices could be heard. The question of what activities UWT engaged in at their place of work revealed an orientation toward domestic arts or entrepreneurship, which included sewing, knitting, cooking, and basket and clothes sales for fund raising.

*Changing family patterns*. Some of the women workers recognized the significance of wage employment for sexual equality. One observed, "When a woman gets a job she can have the same job as men if she has the qualifications; you see, both men and women are cleaners here at this Ministry." But she regretted that this is not enough to earn women social respect: "On the other side, the situation is not very good because men despise and ridicule women very much." It was when she was derided by men that she saw the "importance of having a husband because it was not often that a married woman is ridiculed."

The women's attitudes toward men seemed to be molded by their marital status. The married women were most often complacent. Feminine wiles oozed through the words of one of the older women who had been married to the same husband for many years.

> Being a woman is punishment because first of all, we are very weak physically compared to men. We cannot decide anything on our own unless we seek the advice of men. Men consider women as equal to children in thinking capacity. I cannot build my own house as a woman because men will ridicule me. It is not proper for a woman to have her own house. She has to be in either her husband's, her father's or her brother's house.

On the other hand, militant refusals to get married were voiced by some of the divorcees. Many had consciously rejected their socially ascribed role of legitimate dependence on men. One woman emphatically described a husband who consumed the family's funds in drink and beat his wife. The oldest woman interviewed very solemnly declared that she was "through with men." Many were of the opinion that the best thing to do was to

live with a man without marrying him, which avoided many problems because each could go their own way when they wanted. The man could pay the woman's house rent, while the woman in turn could cook for the man.

Single women were also cynical about marriage. From the perspective of women workers there would be definite advantages to being without a husband. They would be free to decide how their earnings would be spent. Second, women did not view the need for a father to their children as so critical given the very high incidence of children born out of wedlock. In fact, with the way the law was presently structured, women had more secure rights over their children if they were not married. The 1971 Marriage Act stipulated that in the case of divorce, women bore the responsibility for the care of their children under the age of seven. After seven years of age, the court decided the custody of the children. Clauses in the 1971 Marriage Act stipulated that custody should be awarded on the basis of the social customs of the community. Thus we find the magistrate courts commonly awarding custody to the father in adherence to prevailing patriarchal customs.

Whether or not women workers were legally married, combining wage employment with the care of preschool children posed a problem. Very few factories or places of work provided daycare facilities. The women workers generally had to work out their own solutions that depended on their family circumstances and financial position. In 40 percent of the cases an older relative, usually the grandmother, was left in charge of the preschool children. This seemed to be the best solution involving a mature person who could better ensure the safety of the children and was not a great drain on the family income, because either the person was fully independent and helping the woman worker or only semi-dependent; 30 percent of the workers hired an *ayah* (child minder) whose wages ranged between Sh.40/- to Sh.70/- per month, a considerable amount of money for women themselves receiving only minimum wages of barely Sh.300/-. Twenty percent of the women left their children in the care of a younger relative. This situation arose when no older relative was available and often entailed sending for the adolescent from upcountry, whose food and lodging became the entire expense of the recipient family. MacRae (1974) observed this practice amongst working graduate women, which entailed heavy social costs. Young girls, often no older than twelve or thirteen years, were deprived of primary and secondary schooling. This practice continued even after the launching of the universal primary education program. About 5 percent of the women used their own older children to look after the preschool ones. The remaining 5 percent of the women made arrangements with neighbors.

## Conclusion

During the 1970s, just a decade after national independence, wage labor objectively offered an alternative to the oppressed position of women in peasant commodity production if she could secure a job. Women were at a historical disadvantage in the acquisition of wage employment. Married working women's wages were subject to the male household head's control to the degree that the patriarchal ideologies of precapitalist modes of production continued to prevail. Her marriage entwined her in relationships that embodied multi-dimensional female subordination. Survey evidence cited above suggests that Tanzanian women's resistance was in many cases directed at a rejection of marriage and binding relationships with men. As a result, changing family patterns were arising around women workers.

Women workers could be generally characterized as independent women who perhaps relied on boyfriends to pay their rent and on members of the extended family to look after their children, but who ultimately depended on the sale of their own labor power to maintain themselves and their children, and thus to some degree they succeeded in overcoming the sexual subordination they would have suffered as peasant producers.

Finally, it is must be noted that the class struggle and struggle against sexual oppression can merge over the issue of the female wage and female job availability. Tanzanian women secured their jobs under conditions riddled with sexual discrimination and almost always were found receiving lower wages than men. Many who failed to find jobs were forced to become sex workers to make ends meet. Here was the other side of the capitalist mode of human reproduction: women overcoming a position of subordination to men within the family only to become subordinated to men in the market. Having escaped the objectification of their sexual fidelity to a husband, they then became subject to the exigencies of the sex worker's trade. The female sex worker represents the epitome of freedom under capitalism. She is free to sell her labor power and her sexuality, but in reality she is forced to do both to secure her subsistence.

# 5

# Gender and Contract Farming: Growing Tea in Kenya

*Dorthe von Bülow and Anne Sørensen*

In recent years, feminist scholars have tried to relate their theoretical understanding of gender relations to the concrete development efforts and urgent priorities of African societies in part because numerous studies confronting the specific problems of African women show how gender relations affect and are affected by development; such studies demonstrate that gender relations are not natural, but socially constructed and historically created. Nevertheless the majority of scholars and practitioners concerned with development in Africa and in other parts of the third world have continued to ignore or "ghettoize" gender issues in both socioeconomic studies and planning. This is the case, for example, in the 603-page book, *Strategies for African Development* (Berg and Whitaker 1986), which World Bank planners use as a reference source. It includes a separate chapter on women in development, written by Jane Guyer, but the rest of the book largely neglects gender issues (Stamp 1989). This is also symptomatic of national development plans, although there are also exceptions and recent signs of change.

This chapter contributes to the continuing efforts of feminist scholars to make gender visible in development research and planning, using our research in Kenya to demonstrate the close interrelation of gender with development problems in contract farming among tea producing smallholders in Kericho.[1] We suggest that the introduction of contract farming has exacerbated tensions in gender relations, which in turn have had a severe impact on the operation of tea-growing schemes.[2] Our central argument is that gender inequalities may act as a serious constraint to

production. The limited returns to women's labor in tea production and pervasive inequity in the distribution of the benefits from tea growing within the household are important factors in explaining the low level of productivity among certain groups of tea growers. The success of tea growing would appear to depend upon good cooperation between husband and wife within the household.

## Contract Farming

Contract-farming schemes for smallholders aim at developing export crops such as tea, sugar, tobacco, and coffee for national and international consumption. Contract farming is generally seen as a rational system for increasing the productivity of smallholder farming through the provision of credit, inputs, and technical information (Minot 1986). The general literature on contract farming shows a heavy bias toward system-oriented and technically oriented studies (Treville 1986). Studies addressing problems of productivity attribute these to technical and organizational problems outside the household, which arise at various levels in the organizational structure of contract farming and in the relationship between the scheme and the growers (CDC 1982; Lamb and Muller 1982).

Issues of labor and gender relations at the household level are generally neglected and few look at labor from an explicitly gender perspective. Yet it is particularly with regard to labor-intensive crops such as tea, coffee, and tobacco that the gender division of labor and gender relations of production play an essential role in the adoption of a new production system and its integration into the farming system. Exceptions are studies by Davison (1988), Mbilinyi (1988), and Odgard (1986) who have investigated women's role in contract farming in Eastern Africa, and the work of Glover (1987) and Buch Hansen (1980; 1982 with Kieler; 1982 with Secher Marcussen), which address the impact of contract farming on subsistence cropping, labor, and processes of socioeconomic differentiation.

Compared with other schemes for smallholders, tea schemes in Kenya are generally looked upon as a success story (Buch Hansen 1980; Buch Hansen and Secher Marcussen 1982; Lamb and Muller 1982). However, this production system exhibits problems of productivity at the level of the smallholders that have not yet been dealt with satisfactorily.

The British initiated tea production on plantations in the 1920s. From the late 1950s, the colonial administration's Special Crop Development Authority (SCDA) introduced tea-growing schemes for selected smallholders. In 1964, the independent government transformed SCDA into the Kenyan Tea Development Authority (KTDA), a parastatal organization

with its mandate restricted to tea. Since then, KTDA has supervised and promoted smallholder tea production by providing the growers with planting materials, fertilizer on credit, and technical assistance. The tea growers, primarily male household heads, are attached to a nucleus estate and a regional factory on a contract basis. Their products are subject to quality control, while they maintain control over land and labor.

In his studies of tea-growing schemes in Kericho District, Kenya, Buch Hansen (1980) reveals that there is a striking internal variation in productivity among smallholders. The productivity of a significant number is far below average, lowering the overall productivity of the smallholder sector. Using detailed information on production and income from a random sample of 200 tea growers covering the period 1972 to 1979, he demonstrates that almost one third of the growers produced less than half of the expected output. But even more astonishing, it turned out that 10 percent produced less than a tenth of the expected output and for some, output was virtually nil! At the other end of the scale, 5 percent of the sample produced more than twice the expected amount. Although the average income was Kshs 4,235, 25 percent of the growers had an income from tea of less than Kshs 1,000 a year (Buch Hansen 1980; Buch Hansen and Secher Marcussen 1982). Buch Hansen tries to explain variation in productivity by testing the relationship between productivity and various other factors, such as experience in tea growing and size of the tea farm, but he finds no significant positive correlation. In their analysis of KTDA, Lamb and Muller (1982) identified labor as a key area of concern, but they hesitate to investigate the underlying causes. Instead they focus on levels of fertilizer application, extension service, and inappropriate research as reasons for low productivity (Lamb and Muller 1982).

Our own survey of tea-growing schemes in Kericho District confirmed the huge variations in productivity found by Buch Hansen (1980). These differences could easily be attributed to such factors as ineffective extension service, nonavailability of fertilizer, or other extra-household factors like poor infrastructure and lack of credit schemes and incentives to farmers. A much more significant explanatory factor, however, was intrahousehold gender relations (von Bülow and Sørensen 1988).

## Gender Relations in Tea-Growing Schemes: Kericho

Kericho District is mainly inhabited by the Kipsigis, most of whom are smallholders who keep cattle and cultivate food and cash crops. Maize is the staple, but other food crops include millet, sorghum, and vegetables.[3] Tea is by far the most important cash crop in Kericho District. Others

of less significance are coffee, pyrethrum, and sugarcane. By contrast to the latter, tea has a very good yield potential in this area. In addition, tea prices on the world market have increased steadily since the mid-1970s. In the period 1979–1984, tea growers experienced a five-fold increase in producer prices. Real producer prices have been sustained over a period of twenty years (von Bülow and Sørensen 1988; Cohen 1986).

Approximately 25 percent of all smallholders in the district grow tea. Most farmers consider tea production a very profitable venture and many more would like to embark upon it, could they afford to do so; their problems usually relate to land and labor. On average tea farmers devote one acre of their land to the cultivation of tea. The average size of landholdings among tea farmers in Kericho District is seven acres, well above the average of 4.5 acres for the area as a whole (Ministry of Agriculture 1985). KTDA issues tea licenses to male household heads on the basis of their title deeds to land. Monthly payments and annual bonuses are paid directly into the license holder's bank account. Credit schemes and extension services are oriented toward the male farmers.

Women are generally not given any publicly recognized role in the system of contract farming.[4] Although KTDA may encourage and support young men to establish themselves as independent tea growers, this is not at all the case for women. If a married woman should want to start her own production of tea, this would be seen as a threat to the husband's dominant position in the household and to his control over family labor. An exception is a women's group in Buret Division that has a large tea farm worked entirely by hired laborers. Tea production organized within the framework of a women's group is less threatening to the women's husbands than if it had taken place within their own individual households. The husbands support the women's group in various ways in order to obtain influence in decisions regarding tea proceeds. The women also grow tea together with their husbands on their family farms, and the husbands completely control this tea.

Overall the introduction of tea-growing schemes has led to a further widening of the gap between the resources women and men control. In addition, it has reinforced the already ongoing process of social differentiation in the area. Poor farmers are rarely included in the schemes, while better-off farmers are provided with yet another economically important resource.[5]

Tea is a very labor-intensive crop. It is harvested every one or two weeks and relies on manual labor all year round. Weeding is crucial for young plants, while picking is the most labor-intensive job with mature plants. In the gender division of labor, both women and men can weed and pick tea, while pruning is usually relegated to men, with specialists being hired for

the task. Family labor, particularly wives' labor, is crucial to the majority of tea farmers. Three categories of tea growers can be roughly distinguished on the basis of their use of family or hired labor. The first, incorporating around half of the tea growers in our sample, relies almost exclusively on nuclear family labor in tea production. In the second category, around one-third of our sample, the tea growers regularly employ part-time laborers to supplement family labor. The third category (15 percent of the sample) employs fulltime permanent laborers, all of whom are men (von Bülow and Sørensen 1988). The latter group comprises the better-off farmers in terms of land, cattle holding, income from off-farm employment, education, and housing standards. The two other categories are less easily differentiated from one another in socioeconomic terms. They both consist of middle and less affluent farmers. Factors such as the household life cycle and off-farm employment play an important part in determining the availability of family labor and access to cash. Hence while middle-aged, relatively well-off tea growers are able to use only family labor in their tea production, younger and less affluent men often have to hire labor.

To women on less affluent and middle-income farms, involvement in tea-growing schemes means a heavy increase in their labor burden. In addition, pressure on wives' labor increases in peak labor periods (weeding and harvesting of maize) because few are willing to work as casual laborers during that time. Everybody concentrates on his or her own maize field. Problems of labor shortage are worsened by a general decline in the use of traditional labor groups in food crop production due to increased socioeconomic differentiation among farming households. These labor groups were essential to the precolonial Kipsigis farming system. Large groups of women and men within the neighborhood (*kokwet* labor) were mobilized along age-set lines for digging, weeding (which involved only women), and harvesting of finger millet and, later, maize. In addition, women worked together in smaller rotating labor groups (*morik* groups) based on reciprocity and piecework.

Today, *kokwet* labor groups are still used in relation to maize, but never in tea. They are, however, on the decline because maize plots are of very unequal sizes. In addition, many men are absent from the farm, engaged in some kind of employment, contract labor, or business. Women's *morik* groups are still widely used in both maize and finger millet, but are not common in kitchen gardens since women grow vegetables mainly for sale. Recently, women have also begun to hire out their *morik* group on a contractual basis to weed maize in neighboring farms. *Morik* labor groups are today one of women's few sources of additional labor. Children's labor contributions are generally decreasing due to enrolment in school, and women do not usually control enough money to employ hired labor.

Many women find it difficult to fulfill all labor tasks satisfactorily considering their many other responsibilities in relation to maize production, cattle care, domestic work, and childcare. Approximately half of the tea growers' wives claimed that they managed their labor responsibilities by putting in more effort, by working longer hours, or by getting assistance from family members, neighbors, and friends (through *morik* labor groups). However, 35 percent of these women said that tea production was affected negatively in peak labor periods because of their labor burden. Characteristically the households of which they were a part did not use any hired labor for maize or finger millet and only occasionally for tea (von Bülow and Sørensen 1988).

In general, women give priority to maize production above any other activity, and wives of tea growers are no different in this regard. Kipsigis women are considered the main providers of food (maize) and to be a good wife and mother one has to feed one's family properly. Tea production is given second priority after maize, often at the expense of women's own small-scale production of vegetables and other minor cash-generating activities. In poorer, less affluent tea-growing households with limited or no use of hired labor, women's labor burden in tea may be a strain on her other activities, including food crop production and domestic work, not only in peak periods but all year round. These households often have to buy maize to supplement their own production. The husband usually controls most household income and expenditure, and women have little say in decision making. Compared with other wives of tea growers, these women tend to have very few and limited sources of income. They simply do not have time to pursue their own activities.

By contrast, wives of better-off tea growers are distinguished by having more time for their own income-generating activities, as well as for participation in women's groups, domestic work, childcare, and relaxation, than do those in poorer households. Most work in tea and maize production in done by hired labor. To these women tea production means an improvement not only of living standards but also of their decision-making power vis-à-vis their husbands. While husbands control the household's major sources of income, including tea, dairy cattle, and off-farm employment, women have regained their former control over food production, including the sale of maize (von Bülow and Sørensen 1988; Roberts 1988).

Wives of better-off farmers, however, constitute only a relatively small group. The majority of women in tea-growing households have to work hard to improve the household's living standard. Our study showed that labor problems in tea production do not originate only from women's many competing labor tasks; rather, underproductive tea growers often turned out to be farmers whose wives had withdrawn their labor from

their husband's tea field as a protest against his use of the income from tea. Beneath the general assumption that men control household labor lie complex sets of negotiations and struggles between women and men over women's labor and over the product of women's and men's labor.

In the following section we show how women, on the one hand, accept the gender structuring[6] in Kipsigis society and, on the other hand, try to manipulate existing power hierarchies by negotiating cultural principles concerning gender roles and male and female control over critical resources. In this way women try to exert influence over decision making within tea production.

## Gender Structuring of Kipsigis Society

In precolonial Kipsigis society, men and women had fairly autonomous spheres of activity. Men were cattle holders and warriors, while women were the primary cultivators of the staple crop, finger millet. Women obtained access to the major means of production—land and cattle—through marriage. Polygamy was the dominant marriage pattern. By paying bride wealth, the suitor obtained rights to women's productive and reproductive services and custody over children. Wives were obliged to pay public deference to their husbands. Although men controlled cattle and land, the house property system provided the structural condition for women to exercise a certain economic autonomy vis-à-vis men (Gluckman 1950; Hakansson 1984). This system allocated land, cattle, and other property to the house of each wife to secure her livelihood and that of her children; her sons eventually inherited each wife's house property.

The principle of usufruct rights governed the cultivation of land. Land was plentiful, and prior to the arrival of the British colonizers, the Kipsigis had no conception of private and permanent ownership of land. Labor was largely divided by sex and age and was recruited within both the nuclear and the extended family as well as among neighbors. Women cultivated the fields of the house which were exclusively for household consumption. The harvest was stored in a woman's granary, to which men were denied access. Men assisted in clearing land and harvesting finger millet on fields of the house. In addition, they had their own smaller fields of the household head; paid helpers, who were mostly young unmarried men compensated in kind, helped men cultivate these fields. Men used finger millet grown in these fields to entertain their friends and in exchange for small stock. A wife's obligation to cultivate fields assigned to her for household consumption could not be extended to cover the field of the household (Peristiany 1939; von Bülow and Sørensen 1988).

This situation changed radically when maize was introduced in the Kipsigis farming system, first as a cash crop and later also as a food crop. Contrary to finger millet maize was cultivated in one large ploughed field and subsequently the distinction between women's and men's separate fields disappeared. The fact that maize was primarily a cash crop legitimized men's overall control of the total output from the maize harvest. Consequently, women lost much of their economic autonomy as food producers and their husbands appropriated their labor as free labor. The impact of commoditization on Kipsigis women's access to economically significant resources such as land, cattle, and labor has been deleterious. Similar to the situation in other parts of Kenya, Kipsigis women's rights in house property have increasingly given way to modern Western ideas of ownership and rules of inheritance (Davison 1988a; Oboler 1985; Pala 1980). Land and other property are now inherited equally among a man's sons, and women can be denied access to land. Commoditization of land and cattle also means that property is no longer easily distinguished as belonging to one or another house.

The Christian missions' condemnation of polygyny has furthered this process. Previously, polygyny worked to sustain and justify the rule of house property. The new emphasis on monogamous marriage has meant that property is thought of as belonging to the household under the authority of the male household head. As a result women have lost much of their economic autonomy as food producers and have been turned into unpaid family labor. The introduction of tea-growing schemes has increased tensions in gender relations of production and widened the gap between the resources women and men control. It is from this position of dependency that women now attempt to influence decision making within the household and to gain access to and control over resources by using their bargaining power (von Bülow 1992).

## Intra-household Negotiations and Struggles

As long as family labor, and in particular wives' labor, continues to be the basic labor source relied upon for tea-growing schemes, the main precondition for success in tea production is good cooperation between husband and wife. Women have a traditional obligation to produce food for their family. However, tea was introduced in the Kipsigis farming system as a male cash crop and as a man's private business. Therefore, men cannot automatically command their wives to work in the tea field by referring to their obligation to farm family plots. Moreover, women have the power to withdraw their labor from the husband's field in favor of work relating to food crop production by referring to their responsibilities as mothers

and food providers. However, this power does not usually extend to their own individual income-generating activities, but is intimately linked to their role in household production and their importance to the household welfare (Nypan 1991; Roberts 1988; Whitehead 1984).

In tea-growing schemes, women's labor is thus not a given, but rather the object of negotiation between women and men (Dennis 1988). And this negotiation is not only restricted to the household, but involves women and men of the community. This point is illustrated by the intervention of the elder (respected) women of a neighborhood in a case where a husband prohibited his wife from participating in her *morik* labor group and commanded her to pick tea instead. The wife in this case formerly worked once a week with the other women of her *morik* group, which provided collective labor in rotation on its members' fields. They also helped each other with daily tasks and lent each other milk and grain. In addition they assisted one another during childbirth, sickness, and such crises as might arise. Consequently, for a woman to be barred from participating in the activities of her group was a serious matter.

Hence, the older women felt it necessary to intervene. They went and talked with the husband, asking him teasingly if he would be he to collect water and firewood for his wife when she delivered her next baby. Was he also going to cook meals for her and bring her milk? This proved sufficient to persuade the husband to let his wife continue in her *morik* group. For a man to cook for his wife would be unthinkable and most undignified. In general, Kipsigis women accept that their labor obligation is enlarged to include work in their husband's tea field. They do so on the understanding that income from tea will be spent to benefit the entire family. Trouble arises when the husband neglects his responsibilities toward his family and spends all the income from tea on a second wife or on his personal needs. In such situations, a woman tries to influence her husband's behavior. As a last resort, she might put pressure on him by withdrawing her labor from his tea field for a shorter or longer period.

A typical case was Mary, who was in her fifties and the first wife of a polygynous man. She lived on his first farm and was its manager. After marrying a second wife, he stopped giving Mary any of the money from tea despite the fact that the tea field was situated on land which according to Kipsigis customs belonged to Mary's house. In consequence she refused to work in the tea field. At first, he hired some laborers to pluck the tea, but later found he could not afford it. The tea field became completely neglected and the plants grew into tall bushes.

Mary's behavior was not an attempt to challenge her husband's authority and power as head of household, but simply to make him understand that he was not fulfilling his responsibilities and to express her annoyance

with his behavior. She was able to do this without harming herself or her children or provoking sanctions from the community in the form of public condemnation. The same act, however, would have had quite different effects on the family and have caused negative reactions from the community if it involved withdrawal of labor from maize or milk production, which are so intimately connected with a woman's role as food provider (von Bülow 1991). A man's response to his wife's withdrawal of labor in tea may be to employ hired labor or to try to force her to work. But usually he will not dare to beat his wife on these grounds for fear that the neighbors might interfere.

In households where the husband cannot afford to hire laborers to compensate for the loss of family labor, the consequences are severe: the tea field quickly becomes full of weeds and under-plucked. In order to maintain a constant output, the tea bushes have to be plucked regularly and kept at a certain height (the so-called plucking table). Otherwise, they soon grow into irregular bushes or even trees, leading in the first instance to low productivity and eventually to no output at all.

In our sample of tea growers, 10 percent of the tea farms were completely neglected while another 20 percent were partly neglected (von Bülow and Sørensen 1988). Other factors may have played a role, but a major cause was bad cooperation between husband and wife, or less frequently between fathers and adult sons and daughters-in-law. These households were characteristically among the less affluent within the sample. They did not use hired labor at all in maize and finger millet and only very occasionally in tea. It is possible that other cases of conflict existed among the more affluent households which were not visible because they hired labor to compensate for the loss of a wife's labor, so the figures may underestimate the degree of withdrawal of wives' labor. But even as they stand the figures reveal a phenomenon of some significance.

In situations of conflicts between fathers and sons, KTDA often tries to mediate between the two partners and persuade the father to give his sons a license to at least part of the tea field. However, this solution is impossible in the case of conflicts between husbands and wives. First, it is against the policy of KTDA, and secondly, it is in direct opposition to customary norms. To encourage a wife to set up her own independent tea production could easily be interpreted as an encouragement to break up the family. Unless the husband can be persuaded to change his behavior in relation to income from tea such conflicts are generally insoluble.

Tea extension officers know when tea fields are neglected because of conflicts between spouses. However, such problems are regarded as private matters that extension officers can do little about save for trying to mediate between the partners. The problem is known to KTDA's headquarter

in Nairobi, as well. An officer told us that sometimes women travel all the way to Nairobi to claim part or all of the income from their husband's tea field, because they consider themselves to be the real managers of the tea field, while their husbands neglect them and their children. Nevertheless, since the husband is the tea license holder, the tea income belongs legally to him, and KTDA can do nothing to help the women.

These intra-household struggles represent individual women's resistance against men's exploitation of women's labor within the contract farming system. Other authors have reported on collective forms of resistance against male dominance within smallholder tea production. Mbilinyi (1988) describes how women and children in Rungwe District, Tanzania, successfully struggled to transform gender relations of production by refusing to pick tea on household farms because household heads did not pay them. Instead, the women hired out their labor to neighboring tea growers for wages, putting pressure on household heads that persuaded them to share the income with their wives.

Davison (1988) reports on Kikuyu women's successful collective protest and organized resistance against the unjust system of distribution of benefits from tea growing in Mutira, Central Province, Kenya. In this case a group of women went to the KTDA committee to complain that their husbands spent their annual bonus from tea on beer, meat, and other personal needs. The women demanded a share of this bonus commensurate with their labor contributions in picking the tea and succeeded in changing the tea bonus policy. Individual harvesters were subsequently allowed a percentage of the owner's bonus. Later, however, KTDA altered the system of both monthly payment and bonus on a national scale. While payments were previously paid out in the local buying centers, they were now transferred directly into the owners' bank accounts. Although launched in the face of a series of robberies in tea-buying centers, this policy change also meant a halt to the Kikuyu women's receipt of payment for labor.

There are several reasons why Kipsigis wives' reactions against male dominance within cash crop production seem to take less collective forms than in Rungwe and Mutira. First, the majority of wives in tea-growing households think that their families do benefit from tea growing under male control. They withdraw their labor from tea only in response to outright neglect on the part of their husbands. Secondly, tea growers are not a homogeneous category, and increasing differences between women belonging to various socioeconomic strata of tea growers prevent their joining together in collective action against male domination (Sørensen 1990). Finally, in Kericho, the pressure on land has not yet reached the same alarming heights as in Central Province, where the impact of contracting within tea and coffee production has been detrimental to food

production. Unlike Kipsigis women, who still spend the bulk of their time in food production, Kikuyu women in Mutira and Chwele use most of their time cultivating tea and coffee, increasingly depending upon cash to buy food they no longer produce themselves (Davison 1988).

## Conclusion

In contrast to other production systems such as plantations and state farms, it is characteristic of smallholder tea-growing schemes that their operation is based on the farmers' control over land and labor. It is therefore all the more astonishing to note that most studies on contract farming have focused only on the contracting firm or organization, almost totally neglecting the other partner to the contract, the growers. In this chapter, we have demonstrated that the gender structure may cause serious constraints in tea-growing schemes by virtue of affecting one of the most basic elements of contract farming, the farmer's control over labor. While tea is a particularly labor-intensive crop, labor is a critical factor as well in respect of most other crops produced within such growing schemes.

Over the last several decades, labor has become a binding constraint in agricultural production in Kericho District, with smallholder tea production being particularly vulnerable to changes in the labor force. Studies show how tensions in gender relations affect tea production negatively and lead to low productivity and neglected tea fields. Tensions arise, in particular, as a result of conflicts concerning control over the proceeds of tea sales. In pure cash crop production, the farmer controls the labor of the household members only to the extent that they also benefit from the production.

To the contracting firm or organization, this type of problem is very difficult to tackle because it is located in the private sphere. Usually, the contracting firm's policies toward the farmers are confined to such aspects as extension services, the accounting system, and various forms of incentives to the farmers, including growers' representation in the growing scheme, credit facilities, and a well-functioning infrastructure (KTDA Annual Reports 1983–1987).

Further research on gender and labor is central to a solution to some of the problems inherent in contract farming. As women make up a larger part of the labor force in smallholder growing schemes, gender must be considered in relation to extension service, transfer of skills, choice of technology, effects on subsistence crops, organization and unionization of growers, casual labor, and socioeconomic differentiation. The literature on contract farming raises all of these issues—without, however, giving direct

consideration to the influence of gender (Buch Hansen 1980; Buch Hansen and Kieler 1982; Glover 1984 and 1987; Lamb and Muller 1982). There is evidence of growing awareness among planners and policy-makers of problems of gender conflicts, but like most researchers they continue to attribute problems of productivity primarily to technical and organizational factors. They may regard tensions between husbands and wives as too sensitive an issue or one on which they have little expertise to draw. But it is evident that this is a matter of considerable significance which, unless properly addressed and the needs of women fully appreciated, may lead to more neglected tea fields and a frustration of efforts.

## Notes

1. The research project on which this chapter is based was funded by the Danish Council for Development Research. During the time it was carried out the authors were Research Fellows at the Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen, Denmark and were affiliated to the Department of Sociology, Nairobi, Kenya. The authors are grateful to Susan Whyte, Aud Talle, Fiona Wilson, Finn Kjaerby, Penelope Roberts, and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable and inspiring comments on earlier versions of the article. A special word of thanks is due to those women who became our friends and to our research assistants in Kericho District, Kenya.Field work was carried out between March 1985 and April 1986 in Mosop Location, Belgat Division, Kericho District, Kenya. A random sample of 128 households was drawn within the location, consisting of 63 tea growers and, for comparison, 57 farmers who did not grow tea. Baseline data on farming systems and gender relations were collected through a questionnaire survey in which both men and women were interviewed. A selected sample of 14 households was chosen for further, in depth interviews on gender roles, gender relations within the household, and inter-household relations.
2. In this article, the terms "contract farming" and "out-grower schemes" are used interchangeably, although the former is strictly a subset of the latter, since there may be out-grower schemes without written contracts (Glover 1984).
3. The Kipsigis are a patrilineal, traditionally agro-pastoral society. In precolonial times they had a nonhierarchical, leaderless political organization and a social organization that rested on territorial groupings of neighborhoods *(kotzvotinwek)* and men's age-sets and army groups (Peristiany, 1939).
4. Ten percent of our sample was female growers. However, except for one divorced woman, they were all widows managing the farm on behalf of their unmarried sons.
5. Compared with other farmers, tea growers on average have larger farms and livestock holdings, a larger percentage of improved cattle breeds, better paid off-farm employment, and use more hired labor. Introduction of tea-growing schemes has reinforced the ongoing process of social differentiation in the

area, which started in the 1920s with the introduction of private property and maize as a cash crop. However, the differentiation of farmers cuts across the divide between tea growers and non-tea-growers.

6. Our use of the term gender-structuring is influenced by Davison (1988), who uses it to analyze changing gender relations of production across time and through space. The term, gender relations of production, includes both social and economic relations of production and is used as an organizing construct in explaining the changes occurring in production relations in Africa. As used by Davison it refers to relations between women and men that may be characterized by differential assignment of labor tasks, control over decision making, and differential access to, and control over, the allocation of resources.

6

# Capitalist Development and Women's Work: A Nigerian Case Study

*Carolyne Dennis*

The relationship between women and men in capitalist societies is dependent upon the opportunities for economic independence available to women and the status of the occupations accessible to them. This chapter examines the very limited opportunities for women in industrial labor in Nigeria despite the historical fact of women's participation in productive labor and continuing expectations of women's significant contribution to household maintenance.

In many Asian and Latin American third world countries, a characteristic pattern of industrial employment for women has developed with industrialization, involving the use of women, especially the young and unmarried, as cheap labor in labor-intensive industries. In both old, established, and modern technologies, such as textile plants and electronics factories, young women provide cheap labor. In Nigeria and in West Africa generally, such use of women's labor in similar industries has not (yet) occurred, suggesting that women's employment in the third world is the result of particular configurations of family structure, ideological conceptions of women, and patterns of industrialization. This paper describes the historical participation of women in productive labor in Nigerian societies, the pattern of one kind of industrial development in Nigeria, and the origins of one factory in the Yoruba-speaking areas of Western Nigeria. This factory draws much of its male labor from the "non-formal" trading and artisan sector of the Nigerian economy in which women and men have both historically participated. The non-formal sector is seen as a preferred form of employment by both women and men. For men, industrial wage

labor represents a valued stage in a career toward a profitable trading or artisan enterprise. For women, however, the factory has offered few jobs which, in their turn, offer much less certainty; women's opportunities are limited in trade or artisan production in the non-formal sector and, for other reasons as well, women are becoming increasingly marginalized.

## Industrialization in Nigeria

Since independence, successive Nigerian governments have sought to encourage industrialization as a means of bringing about economic development and generating employment. The development of the oil industry handed the Nigerian Federal Government potential investment resources and gave private foreign investors the opportunity for profitable business ventures, accelerating the development process. The favored pattern of investment was between the federal or a state government and a technical partner, always a foreign firm. No Nigerian entrepreneur had the industrial capital or technical expertise for such ventures, preferring rather the higher and faster returns in property development and importing. Early industrial ventures were in import substitution enterprises such as drink bottling and textile manufacturing with a cooperative agreement between a government and a multinational company. The industrial structure has expanded to allow multinational investment in, for example, car assembly plants and tobacco production, and there are several industrial estates containing large and small factories producing cheap clothing, plastic goods, and so on.

The tendency is for all these types of enterprise to concentrate in Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt, which offer advantages of accessibility to raw materials, markets, and labor. Since the establishment of industry is seen as an indicator of economic development, however, governments at all administrative levels have tried to attract industrial investment. One of the most significant political developments in Nigeria since independence has been the articulation of demands for jobs and "development" as a demand for more states. The number of administrative units has increased from three regions to nineteen states, with continuing agitation for the creation of more states. The establishment of each new state entails the construction of new administrative facilities, creating clerical employment, more money for local capital projects, and more governments wishing to attract industrial investment as a sign of "development" and job opportunities. States without the advantages that multinational technical partners desire find it very difficult to establish viable industrial enterprises. One such venture was the Odu'Atex Textile Factory at Ado-Ekiti established in 1966, the subject of this chapter.

## Women in the Nigerian Economy

In precapitalist Nigerian economies, nearly all production was carried out within the household unit with women providing both productive and reproductive labor. Women looked after children, cooked, farmed, and processed and marketed food and other agricultural products. Younger women and children were more likely to be responsible for purely domestic tasks, leaving older women free to concentrate on more specialized occupations. The degree of specialization and the range of occupations open to women varied from one society to another; within societies they varied between communities according to size. Yoruba communities tended to be larger than some other Nigerian societies, and in urban centers it was less usual for women to devote their time to farming on their husbands' farms and more common for them to concentrate on trading. In larger towns these activities expanded into the trading of processed and cooked food, buying and bulking foodstuffs, and retailing in other goods such as cloth. Women's participation in production, trade, and marketing persisted throughout the colonial period.

Given the historical participation of women in productive labor in the urban and rural economies there is no tradition of excluding women from income-earning opportunities nor, in southern Nigeria, to confining such activities within the household. Women are expected to have a trade to provide them with an income that will enable them to meet a considerable proportion of household expenses. Today, this expectation has expanded to allow women not only to acquire a trade but also, if necessary, to enter salaried occupations or wage labor. Male concern about such matters, as expressed for example in the media, does not center on whether women should or should not work, but on whether a working woman might become so rich and successful that she ceases to be financially and domestically dependent upon a husband and will no longer convey an appropriately subordinate female role and status to her children. Acceptance of women in paid work is also related to the relatively high rate of polygyny in Yoruba society. In practice, many women carry a heavy burden of responsibility for meeting household expenses and bringing up their children, making it essential that they possess an independent source of income. In southern Nigeria men's widespread approval of polygyny requires that they accept women working outside the home.

The education of women has lagged behind that of men in Nigeria as in most other countries, excluding many from new types of employment. The majority of Yoruba women try to carry on the activities described above that have always provided them with an income. But the economic conditions under which such small-scale enterprises used to be performed

have now changed. The generation of a reasonable turnover requires the initial investment of more capital than most women can obtain. While men, as we shall see, wishing to enter similar small-scale enterprises as self-employed traders or artisans, have been able to accumulate savings for the initial capital investment from wage labor, women have been severely disadvantaged in the labor market. Amongst the professional and semi-skilled occupations, none is in theory closed to women; some, in Nigeria as elsewhere, are conventionally regarded as suitable for women—clerical work, primary school teaching, and nursing. Such jobs have been in short supply in Nigeria, and men have had more access to the initial qualifications than women. Meanwhile, the male labor market has provided the unskilled wage labor in the industrial sector, even for jobs that elsewhere in the world have become the domain of low-paid women workers.

The numbers of women working in the still relatively small industrial sector in Nigeria is unknown.[1] The large multinational firms making or assembling heavy goods do not appear to employ women on the shop floor. Most women find employment in small firms producing cheap consumer goods or in seasonal industrial employment such as food processing; yet not all these firms recruit any or all of their employees from the female labor market. Although there is public acknowledgment of the need to provide jobs for women as for men, and women are certainly seeking such jobs, employers have been resistant. Two factors are responsible. First, employers tend to believe that women do not work as hard as men and are more prone to absenteeism. In other words, employers in Nigeria do not perceive women as docile workers. Second, in conditions of an oversupply of cheap labor in the labor market, regulations concerning maternity benefits, maternity leave and shift work are disincentives to the employment of women, especially married women or women with children. In the following case study, management employed women for political rather than economic reasons and then segregated them into deadend jobs. In fact, women proved to be no less committed than men to wage labor, but gender stereotyping discriminated against women employees and prevented them from using their job experience of as a form of occupational investment that was an advantage men consciously sought.

## The Odu'Atex Factory

The Odu'Atex Textile Factory was established in Ado-Ekiti in what is now Ondo State in 1966. It was then known as the Westexinco Factory. The detailed circumstances behind its establishment have been described elsewhere (Afonja and Dennis 1973, 1976). There had been a

tradition of hand weaving in Ado and a co-operative was established in the 1950s using improved hand looms. Ekiti had been a relatively underdeveloped area of Yorubaland until the 1950s when cocoa cultivation increased very rapidly, and in the 1960s there was a rapid expansion of educational facilities. The Odu'Atex Factory was established in response to strong local pressure, articulated through an educated and dynamic traditional ruler and well-known figures from the area, to provide employment for those who had hitherto to migrate to find work and also to act as a focus for economic development in the town. It has been subject to changes of ownership and has had a somewhat erratic history of financial viability. At present, it is owned by the Odua Corporation, an investment holding company established by Ogun, Oyo, and Ondo state governments, which is trying to make the enterprise commercially viable.

For most of its existence, the Odu'Atex Factory has not been a viable enterprise and if it had been a privately owned factory, it would presumably have been closed down a long time ago. But if it had been a privately owned factory, it is extremely unlikely that it would have been established in Ado-Ekiti at all. The political pressure for industrial enterprises to be dispersed to relatively small rural communities such as Ado led to the signing of agreements between state governments and technical partners who were not multinational corporations and did not have either the technical expertise or the capital to match the potential opportunities. Such enterprises were rarely financially viable and constituted a continual drain on the resources of the state concerned, as has the Odu'Atex Factory. Thus the history of the factory is a function of the manner in which "regional development" was implemented in a political economy such as Nigeria. The desire of management to present the factory as of great benefit to Ado Ekiti, rather than any preference or need for women workers, led since its inception to a small proportion of jobs being reserved especially for women and, at various times such as when this study was being carried out, to considerable "over-manning."

### The Odu'Atex Workers

This study of the male and female workers at Odu'Atex began in 1972, not long after the factory was opened. Our concern is only with this period of its history. At that time the factory employed 1,300 men and 62 women. All the women and a random sample of 371 men were interviewed for information on their occupational experience and perceptions of factory employment.

Both men and women workers at Odu'Atex were young: 70 percent of the men and 95 percent of the women were below the age of 30. It is this age group, at least in the case of men, which has historically migrated in search of wage employment. The women workers were younger than the men: 75 percent were below the age of 25. Being young, the majority of the women (63 percent) were unmarried. There was no stated policy on the part of management to recruit single women. The evidence available, however, is that married women, with or without children, were and are, eager for stable, wage-earning employment at various stages in their working lives, if not as a permanent source of livelihood. It appears likely that management were attempting to avoid the necessity of providing for maternity leave by employing single women. The lack of childcare facilities, however, either in the factory or in the town, militated against women with children seeking work or remaining in employment once child-bearing.

The level of education of a given group of workers is an indicator both of the category of persons seeking that type of employment and of employers' requirements and preferences in relation to their labor force. The latter evidently vary according to the nature of the labor market available. The Ekiti area possessed a relatively large number of educational institutions since the expansion of education in the 1960s, and it was possible for employers to insist on a higher level of education amongst their employees than elsewhere in Nigeria. At Odu'Atex, all but 1 percent of the male workers, and all the women, had received some formal education; 43 percent of male employees had been to secondary modern schools which had been instituted to provide some form of cheaper secondary education to primary school–leavers when fee-paying secondary grammar schools were prohibitively expensive. The women workers overall had equal if not better education than the male workers; 33 percent of them had spent some years at secondary grammar schools. In most cases, their parents had been unable to find the fees to allow them to finish their education and obtain the West African School Certificate which can lead to further education or salaried employment. Thus, both men and women were recruited from amongst those whose education, even if uncompleted, led to expectations of wage-earning employment in Nigeria. In practice, there were few if any such employment opportunities available locally. Educational opportunities massively outstripped the availability of wage employment in Ekiti and employers were able to demand high levels of education. The fact that the educational levels of women exceeded those of male employees indicates the problems of such women seeking wage employment that the scanty quota of women's jobs at Odu'Atex scarcely resolved.

The majority (75 percent) of both women and men workers at Odu'Atex came from Ado-Ekiti or nearby. This was not an area to which people

would migrate in search of wage employment, and the employees from outside the area were mostly skilled, experienced workers recruited by management from textile factories in Lagos. A higher proportion (41 percent) of the women workers compared to the men (33 percent) came from the town of Ado-Ekiti itself. Young women were less likely to go far from home to find wage employment than young men. This factor, combined with the paucity of other wage or salaried employment in the town, contributed to the ease with which management was able to recruit a relatively well-educated female labor force.

## The Careers of Odu'Atex Workers

The fact has been well documented in Nigeria that male workers at least tend to be highly mobile between the formal and the non-formal sectors of the economy. Individuals move from wage employment to self-employment and *vice versa* as and when opportunity and relative advantage arise. Until recently, and especially as a result of the impact of oil revenues upon the economy, there were considerable opportunities within the private and non-formal sectors in such enterprises as construction and trading in imported goods. The model of success for the industrial workers and others in Nigeria has been that of the private businessman who appeared to have unlimited supplies of cash to distribute. Individuals, men at least, perceived their working life as a career involving a series of steps, the criterion of success being increasing wealth at each stage. The actual pattern by which the individual expected to achieve this progression varied according to the qualifications and financial resources with which he started. Mobility between one form of employment and another and indeed holding down a job as a wage earner while running a small business on the side formed a recognized part of this pattern. In such a situation, the former employment of workers, their perceptions of the utility of their current employment and their plans for the future indicates the kind of "career" that appears realistic to an industrial worker. Neither the mobility nor indeed the "careers" of women industrial workers have been as well documented. As this study shows, women are severely disadvantaged in attempting to pursue the male career pattern, however much they might find it a desirable one. The contrast reflects the differential processes of incorporation of women as part of the industrial labor force in Nigeria.

In 1972, few of the workers had been employed at Odu'Atex for more than two or three years. About 20 percent of women and men workers had never had any previous employment, either because they had been too

young or because they had been unable to find a job. The majority had had previous employment in a wide range of occupations. Of male workers, only 15 percent had been in non-manual/clerical jobs. The remainder had been employed in textile factories elsewhere or as employed or self-employed mechanics and construction workers such as bricklayers. By contrast, of the women 39 percent had had non-manual/clerical jobs while most of the remainder had been previously employed as weavers in the cooperative center or had been petty traders. Almost all women and men who had been in wage employment said that they had left their previous jobs because wages had been too low or paid irregularly, or both. The only exceptions were those textile workers who had returned to Ekiti from Lagos because of the high cost of living and urban problems. The non-manual/clerical workers had been either uncertificated teachers or unqualified clerical workers on low wages with limited career prospects in the face of competition from better qualified candidates then presenting themselves for employment since the expansion of the educational system in the 1960s. The independent craftsmen such as mechanics and traders, however, formed a different category. They had not rejected their previous work for industrial employment like the clerical workers. In most cases, their trading or business capital had been too small, or had been eroded by misadventure or social exigencies, to generate a living wage. They sought paid work to supplement their income from other sources, carrying on their business on a part-time basis after finishing their factory shifts. They intended to return to self-employment on a full-time basis once they had accumulated further savings from their wages.

By contrast, a far greater proportion of women workers than men had been previously employed in non-manual/clerical work and very few had been recruited from the non-formal sector. On the face of it, this was surprising given the large numbers of Yoruba women, including those with education, who derive their income from petty trade, seamstressing, and so on. However, the explanation lay in most cases in the non-married status of most women employees. Women usually obtain the capital for trading or for establishing themselves as self-employed artisans from their husbands. Unable yet to secure themselves in such enterprises, at least at a level that would provide an income comparable to even low-wage employment, such employment was preferable. The conditions of work in the factory were certainly preferable to being an irregularly paid uncertified teacher.

### Women's Work in the Odu'Atex Factory

A textile factory, even a relatively small one like this, offers a wide range of jobs, many of which, being low paid and classified as unskilled, are

commonly done by women in many industrial and industrializing countries. Given that in this particular factory, women had relatively high levels of education in comparison to other Nigerian factory workers, one might have expected to find them employed in larger numbers and on a variety of processes. This was not the case. Apart from cleaners and clerical workers, almost all the women shop floor workers were employed in the doffering department. This is the place in which the cotton thread is prepared for the looms and the relevant colors for each pattern are laid down. It is repetitive work, not very arduous as it can be done sitting down. In the Odu'Atex Factory, it was carried on in a room next to the weaving shed in which the women sat around in groups, working and talking as much as the supervisors would allow. The basic requirement was that during the morning and afternoon shift the women should have laid out enough thread to last the weavers for both these shifts and the night shift as women did not work on the night shift.

The manner in which the Odu'Atex Factory management had defined and segregated women's work appears to have derived from a combination of factors characteristic of the discrimination facing women seeking industrial work in Nigeria as a whole and of the particular circumstances of this factory. As we have explained above, in Nigeria it was and is accepted that women should have income earning opportunities even if these are not to exceed or compete with those of men. As a publicly financed factory, management had to accept that it should employ women. Indeed, its publicity usually advertised its public spiritedness in this respect and a female quota of jobs had been established. But, in fact, management had set aside an essential but repetitive, low paid job with little prospect of promotion as suitable for its women employees. From whatever source, management had acquired a stereotype of women workers which it proceeded to realize and reinforce. It provided the kind of work that did not require much concentration and that was unlikely to provoke high levels of interest among workers.

There was, indeed, a certain contradiction between the jobs offered and the educational standards of the women recruited who were certainly capable of more taxing work. Management appeared to be hoping to avoid the risk of having to provide maternity benefits and leave for the young female labor force that it had employed by guaranteeing that its women workers would not acquire any commitment to industrial labor or promotion within the plant. However, given that the factory at this particular time was scarcely being run as a profit-making venture, one should not exaggerate the purely economic motives for segregating women employees into this particular job.

The women workers appeared to be satisfied with their jobs. Wages were paid regularly, it was not too tiring, and it enabled them to talk to

their friends throughout the day. Like most industrial workers in Nigeria, women did not suppose that they would stay long in the factory. They intended at least to accumulate part of their wages to set up in business on their own. Their plans, similar to those of male industrial workers, reflected their knowledge of a vigorous informal sector with considerable opportunities for those with resources. Wage employment potentially offered women a source of income for establishing an enterprise independently of the husband usually required to provide the initial loan for entering trade or business. However, a comparison of the place occupied by factory work in the projected life careers of female and male workers at this factory showed significant differences in the advantages it offered to women and men.

Male workers operated with a model career in mind to which most strove to conform. The most desirable of these careers ran like this. A self-employed artisan, such as a mechanic or an electrician, did not have enough capital or experience to make a satisfactory living. He was working in his own small town in Ekiti where incomes, and therefore demand for products and services, were low and competition between under-capitalized artisans severe. He took a job at Odu'Atex, starting as a weaver but using his job as a stepping stone to becoming a mechanic or electrician in the factory. These jobs were highly sought after. They were relatively well paid and they involved moving around from one department to another without much supervision so that the work could be done at the individual's pace. Not only were the conditions of such work more congenial than those of other jobs in the factory, but the worker was acquiring valuable experience and was able to work on a part-time basis on his own account outside factory hours. He hoped that, after a number of years, he would be able to accumulate sufficient capital to establish himself as a prosperous, independent artisan. Such a perception of industrial labor differs from that of the Nigerian male worker in general only insofar as the Odu'Atex worker planned to become an independent craftsman rather than a trader. This was a more realistic ambition in Ado where commercial opportunities were more limited and capital scarcer than in, for example, Lagos.

For women workers, on the other hand, despite similar ambitions there was no equivalent model career to which they could strive to conform. The majority had been low-grade clerical workers, uncertificated teachers, or ward assistants in hospitals. Their skills acquired in such employment offered relatively few advantages in trade or small businesses. Moreover, they could not go back to these jobs since, as a result of expanding educational opportunities, they had become increasingly vulnerable to better educated applicants. The skills required for the artisan and business enterprises open to women were not in demand and were certainly not acquired

in the factory. Even the skills of those who had been hand-loom weavers were manifestly not being used in the work they were doing at Odu'Atex.

The repetitive and relatively unskilled work done by most women workers was not seen by management or women themselves as a step toward more skilled jobs. The only advantage it had over their previous employment was its relative security and the lack of hard physical labor which had been the conditions of their previous employment or of the types of non-capitalized petty trading which were otherwise open to them. Women did carry on other occupations in their spare time but these had no relationship to the work they did in the factory. They engaged in the marginal trading activity carried on by many Yoruba women, hoping to accumulate enough capital to break into a more profitable line. Their experience at Odu'Atex could not be perceived, and was not so perceived by the women themselves, as providing experience that would enable them directly to broaden their opportunities in trade or business. Insofar as it provided a wage, it did offer possibilities of accumulating savings for investment. But even this was an opportunity more available to men than to women. Women were not to be promoted to better paid work. Should eventually they marry or have children, even if management did not get rid of them, they were well aware of the increasing difficulty in Nigeria of finding an adequate means of caring for small children while in factory employment. Women, therefore, were less likely to be able to continue in wage employment as long as they might need, or return to it when they needed to, as men at least anticipated that they should be able to do. Women were less likely, therefore, to be able to use wage employment in this factory as a means of accumulating or restoring resources and skills for self-employment. They eventually enter or re-enter such enterprises not so much because they have attained sufficient resources to make a viable living out of them, but as a way of combining childcare with their financial obligations.

Thus, although male and female workers at this factory had similar qualifications and very similar ambitions, they were incorporated into industrial labor on different terms. The work done by the most skilled male workers, and to which most unskilled male workers could at least aspire, offered relevant experience and the possibilities of earnings that might allow them to end up as independent craftsmen with a higher income than before starting work at Odu'Atex. Women were disadvantaged in all these respects. The men workers may be divided into those skilled workers for whom factory employment could be incorporated as a stage in their model careers and those unskilled workers for whom this was less likely. The women workers all fell into the unskilled category and were, on the whole, aware of their disadvantages.

## Conclusion

A very small proportion of the Nigerian labor force works in industry at the present time,[2] but the industrial sector is growing and is subject to considerable effort to attract foreign and indigenous private and public investment. So far most enterprises are established by a combination of foreign private investment and Nigerian public capital in which the foreign partners who are usually also the technical partners have control over the organization of the workplace.

The prevailing ideology in Nigeria allows that women have the right to work for wages outside the home, although priority is placed on providing wage-earning employment for men. The recognition of the need to provide such employment for women is greater in the public sector than in private commercial enterprises. In the instance of Odu'Atex, a factory heavily dependent on public sector financing, this has led to the reservation of a limited number of places for women in jobs arbitrarily defined as women's work. The prevailing tendency for Nigerian industrial workers is to look forward to a prosperous future as traders or independent craft workers. The nature of the employment provided at Odu'Atex offers women a far lesser opportunity for so doing than men. Thus, the factory not only marginalized women as industrial employees but furthered their disadvantages in the increasingly capitalized non-formal sector to which most such women must resort in order to maintain their financial and domestic obligations for the caring and rearing of children. Such jobs in no way threatened gender inequality in Nigeria.

Thus, although the process of industrialization in Nigeria has not yet incorporated women as an important source of cheap labor as it has elsewhere in the third world, it is nevertheless in the process of reproducing and reinforcing gender subordination.

## Notes

1. There are no figures available on the numbers of women employed in industrial enterprises in Nigeria nor are there any reliable estimates of the ratio of women to men.
2. According to UNECA this figure dropped to 5.3 percent in 2005 from 10 percent in 1983. (Editor's note).

# 7

# Structural Adjustment and Women in Zimbabwe

*Nazneen Kanji and Niki Jazdowska*

## Structural Adjustment Policies

The Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) that the Government of Zimbabwe introduced in January 1991 is typical of those formulated and sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in many other developing countries over the last ten years. The hallmarks of these programs are: formal or de facto currency devaluation to discourage imports and encourage exports; trade liberalization through the abolition of price and import controls and more access for foreign and multinational companies; reduction of government expenditure in the social welfare sectors through privatization, introduction or raising of user charges, and withdrawal of subsidies, including those for food; retrenchment of workers and wage restraints; privatization of government enterprises and parastatals.

The emphasis is on export-led economic growth and further shifts the orientation of the economy toward the international market. The production of export crops is promoted, frequently at the expense of food crops. Loans from the IMF and the World Bank are tied to the implementation of ESAP, as is aid from bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. The relationship of the debt crisis to the imposition of adjustment policies as a means of maintaining unequal, capitalist relations between the industrialized countries and developing countries has been amply discussed elsewhere (for example, Kanji et al. 1991; Onimode et al. 1990). Export-oriented growth models only serve the interests of international and national elites and have little to do with concepts of development, which involve meeting

the basic needs of the majority for food, shelter, adequate income, education, and health care.

There is now a considerable body of research showing the negative impact of ESAPs on the lives of the majority of the population in countries where they have been implemented. A combination of rising prices, lower real incomes, and restricted government spending in the social sectors tends to lead to an alarming deterioration in living conditions of the poor majority in these countries. A UNICEF ten-country study, for example, showed that in countries in Africa and Latin America implementing adjustment, indicators such as infant mortality rates, children's nutritional status, levels of unemployment, and numbers living under the poverty line had all worsened during the adjustment period (Cornia et al. 1987). In sub-Saharan Africa, per capita incomes fell by over 25 percent in the 1980s, and there were widespread declines in literacy, school enrolment, and completion rates (Commonwealth Secretariat 1989). Various country studies have shown similar negative effects of SAPs on low-income groups and on social sectors (Loxley 1990 on Ghana and Zambia; Onimode 1989 on a range of African countries).

A more recent debate centers on how different members of the household have experienced the crisis, and in particular, whether the effects of ESAPs are gender specific with women being worse affected than men. Both neoclassical and Marxist economic approaches to the household have been criticized for treating the household as undifferentiated units, allowing economic self-interest to operate on households but not within them (Folbre 1986). The assumption that resources and income are evenly distributed has been questioned (Dwyer and Bruce 1988) on the basis that poor women will be most affected because of gender inequalities: women's productive activities are undervalued and underpaid, and the sexual division of labor assigns them primary responsibility for reproductive work. Price rises in food and basic goods and cut backs in social services affect women more because of their primary involvement in household consumption and welfare. With falling household incomes, women are under greater pressure to earn money but have fewer opportunities than men. Even within the informal sector, women tend to be involved in less lucrative activities than men (Batezat and Mwalo 1989; Moser 1984).

This article, based on research in Harare, Zimbabwe, argues that: although women's contribution to the economy has been underestimated in the past, there is now a risk of overestimating the extent to which women can compensate for low wages and rising prices by generating income; the use of the term "survival strategies," for a process of trying to cope with diminishing resources, runs the risk of romanticizing a very stressful process; for working class women, gender equality is an insufficient objective

since it results in employment, which is exploitative and alienating as it is for men of their class; there is little evidence to support the World Bank and government's claim that the negative effects of ESAP are transitional.

## Background: Gender and Employment in Zimbabwe

According to the 1986–1987 Labor Force Survey of Zimbabwe, only 22 percent of women are self-employed or working for wages, compared to 52 percent for men (Central Statistical Office 1989). In Harare, the figures are 29 percent for women and 69 percent for men. High unemployment rates for men, the colonial legacy of male, migrant labor and dominant gender ideology (man as breadwinner, woman as housewife), combine to diminish opportunities for women in the formal sector. Labor surveys do not take into account many informal sector activities in which women are heavily involved. There has been much debate about what exactly constitutes this sector and its relationship with the formal sector. For the present purpose, informal sector activities can be characterized as labor intensive with little dependence on overhead capital and small inventories of goods and raw materials. Women are often forced to choose these activities because they can be carried out at home or close to home and therefore facilitate carrying out childcare and domestic tasks (Moser 1989; Rakodi 1991).

In rural Zimbabwe, these activities include pottery, making of mats, gardening, and raising small livestock, while in urban areas they include crocheting, knitting, dressmaking, vegetable and fruit selling, and illegal activities such as beer brewing and prostitution. A study of 47 informal sector activities in 1984 found that women were mainly represented in food kiosks (50 percent), knitting (40 percent), vegetable growing (12 percent), firewood selling (16.7 percent), hairdressing (16.7 percent), selling of clothes (20 percent), and tailoring (14.3 percent). No women were represented in electrical repair, building, or tinsmithing, and such activities that were more in the line of small enterprises, with greater investment in capital stock and employment of labor. The study also showed that male informal sector operators had the advantage over women operators in that they were able to call on their wives' labor while women could not do likewise with their husband's labor (Batezat and Mwalo 1989).

## The Study in Kambuzuma, Harare[1]

In mid-1991, the first phase of the study was initiated with 120 randomly selected households in Kambuzuma.[2] Established in 1965 as

Harare's first site and service scheme for Africans, Kambuzuma is situated approximately ten kilometers from the city center. It is a high-density area, consisting of 26,000 brick houses of various sizes with a population of around 40,000. Half the houses are owned outright; the rest are occupied by rental purchasers. After independence better-off black families began to move out to lower-density suburbs, but given housing shortages some remain. Our sample therefore contained some professional and white collar workers. Almost all the households also contained lodgers.

A combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to provide both quantitative and qualitative information. The objective of the study is to collect gender-disaggregated information on paid and unpaid work, income, consumption, leisure, and social activities. A household has been defined as people living and eating together, who at least partially pool resources (income and unpaid work) to meet the physical needs of the group as a unit. Lodgers were therefore considered separate households, although single lodgers have been excluded since the focus of the study is on the intra-household division of labor and resources. The study is being carried out in two phases over a two-year period. The first phase provided the baseline data on the economic and social situation of the households with a follow-up study of a subsample of households after a period of six months. This chapter is based on the first phase.

## Women in Kambuzuma: Results of the Initial Survey

The picture that emerges so far is one of women working hard: to generate an income (a minority through waged work, the majority informally), to produce food for the family, to maintain relations with family in rural areas, and to carry out the myriad of domestic tasks that are essential for the maintenance and reproduction of the household. This is not to say that men do not work hard; a high proportion of men in Kambuzuma are employed in industry where working conditions are poor and where journeys to and from work entail long waits for buses or the scramble to use taxi services. However, gender inequalities are evident; the findings arising directly from the research can be summarized as follows.

First, women's work is in general undervalued and underpaid. Here we refer to paid and unpaid work since domestic tasks are rarely considered to be real work, either by men or most women, let alone by official bodies. Women were almost exclusively responsible for domestic work—cleaning,

cooking, and washing clothes. In the households where women went to rural areas for certain periods in the year, older children, usually girls, took on these tasks. Childcare was an exclusively female task. Elson (1989) has aptly described this male bias in economic accounting, with economies defined and measured in terms of marketed goods and services with no explicit consideration of the work and resources required for the maintenance and reproduction of the labor force.

Women who are formally employed are concentrated in sales and clerical work, health care, and teaching while men are concentrated in skilled and unskilled manual work in industry and construction. Gender differentials are also evident in self-employment. Men are involved in the more lucrative activities (for example, drivers of their own taxis) while women are seamstresses and knitters with their own machines. Men's income from waged work or self-employment averaged Z$760 a month while women's averaged Z$749. However, only 20 percent of 154 employed adults in the sample households were women, reflecting their lower formal labor participation rate. Gender differentials therefore lie in male domination of formal employment and the nature of the sectors that women and men work in, rather than in income levels.

Although 78 percent of respondents defined themselves as housewives, 91 percent of these women earned some income of their own. These income-generating activities, however, tended to be individually undertaken and in traditional areas of work, with low, unreliable, and irregular returns. The irregularity was linked to factors such as time or lack of capital and markets.

The average income that women received from their regular activities was Z$170 per month, but ranged from Z$10 to Z$973 with 60 percent earning under the average. The mean monthly income from the irregular sources was only Z$44 per month. Women's income is undoubtedly important; it is directed toward basic household needs such as food, kitchen utensils, children's clothing, savings for emergencies, and so on, but it is low in relation to income from waged employment.

Second, women have to cope with the pressure and burdens of their dual work: income-generating activities on the one hand and managing the family and household needs on the other. This is particularly severe for women who have large families or who are also formally employed. We found many women in waged work who employed female domestic workers although they remain responsible (as in most parts of the world) for overall household management.

The links between urban and rural kin are strong and women compensate for an inadequate social security system by assisting elderly relatives in agricultural work, or caring for the sick with little or no remuneration.

In the urban setting, networks of friends and neighbors with whom goods and services may be shared are not highly developed, as they are in many Latin American cities. According to Rakodi (1991), these do not seem to have developed in cities in Africa. In Harare, the urban-rural kinship network seems to counter the development of a completely urban identity. This in turn has implications for the cohesiveness of organizing activities aimed at resistance and change.

Third, women's heavy work load does not give them a commensurate say in decision making, for example, in how money is used. There was a difference, however, in the level of negotiation in households where women had a reasonable, independent income, with the couple discussing who would be responsible for different items of expenditure. In households where women had little income of their own, they felt they had to justify their spending on food and household items, and plead for money when it was insufficient.

In keeping with women's long working day and continuous focus on work of one kind or another, the concept of leisure seems alien to women. In response to the question "what do you do to relax and enjoy yourself?" 52 percent of the sample cited knitting and crocheting, usually for the children. For one third of the sample, this essentially productive activity was the only leisure activity cited. Men on the other hand, really did engage in leisure activities with sport and drinking being the most popular (45 percent and 35 percent of men respectively, as reported by women). Not surprisingly, most of the men's activities entailed spending money, with only 3 percent of men engaging in hobbies that might benefit the household, such as fixing cars and electrical appliances.

Only 29 percent of men attend church regularly compared to 63 percent of women. Church is extremely important; it seems to provide women, and to a lesser extent men, with an escape from harsh, daily realities. As one respondent put it, "it is a way to relax." One interpretation, based on a study in South Africa, is that religion raises the individual above his or her dependence on the material and social. When social structures fail to provide the necessary support, faith intervenes (Meer 1990, 21). As Meer points out, it is above all the underprivileged who live by religious faith and as a generality, women fall into this category more so than men. The church is a major advocate of women as homemakers, supporting dominant gender ideology. However, since women do fulfill this role (among others), they feel supported, particularly when the church calls for men to be more responsible for their families. The consequences of economic crisis for the struggle for equity between men and women will be discussed after examining the nature of the impact of ESAP at household level.

## Effects of Structural Adjustment: The Follow-up Study

Since the introduction of ESAP, prices of food and basic commodities have spiraled upwards. The removal of subsidies and the decontrolling of prices have resulted in a huge increase in the cost of living. This has been exacerbated by escalating costs of imported inputs for manufactured products, due to the devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar. The dollar depreciated by 97 percent during 1991 with 50 percent of this change taking place between August and November 1991 (Mumbengegwi 1991). The actual devaluation of 42 percent in 1992 moved Zimbabwe from a middle-income to a low-income country in the terms of the International Monetary Fund (*Zimbabwe Press Mirror* 10 February 1992). Inflation rose to at least 25 percent (*The Herald* 16 November 1991) although the Consumer Council estimates are much higher at 35 percent to 40 percent (*Zimbabwe Press Mirror* 10 February 1992).

In January 1992, a subsample of 21 households was selected for follow-up interviews to find out how households were coping with the escalating cost of living, one year after the introduction of ESAP and six months after the initial study. The subsample was designed to examine if and how income differentials and household structure influence the way in which ESAP affects men and women. The subsample consisted of eight poorer and three higher income households; five male-headed households where both spouses were formally employed; two women-headed households; and three households where women spent the greater part of the year in the countryside. The rest of the chapter describes gender-differentiated changes detected in this follow-up study.

## Changes in Food Consumption

In the first half of 1991, consumer prices rose by 24 percent with the trend pointing upwards (*Zimbabwe Press Mirror* 13 December 1991). As a result of these huge rises in food prices, almost all households have made changes to their diet. In most families, this has meant eating meat less frequently, substituting *lacto* (sour milk) or home-grown green vegetables to make the relish that accompanies the staple, maize meal. In the few higher income households, this has meant cutting out luxury foods such as sausages and ice cream. In contrast, in the poorest households, one meal a day has been cut out, which for some means eating just once a day. Two of these poorest families are using their savings for daily necessities, cutting these down to a minimum. In these households, savings for future security are being depleted.

The nutritional effects of these changes in diet can only be assessed at a later point, but the majority of households identified rising food prices as the main problem created by ESAP. It is a source of real and obvious anxiety, particularly for women who are given fixed sums for housekeeping and face the task of feeding the household. As Beneria (1991, 171) describes in her study in Mexico, "the depth of the crisis was felt in a way that escapes statistical and analytic quantification."

## Changes in Education

In January 1992, primary school fees were introduced and secondary school fees in urban areas were raised. This is in addition to levies that are set by individual schools and approved by the government. Primary school fees are Z$20 per term in high density areas and Z$70 in low density areas, with rural schools remaining free. Secondary school fees have been raised by 40 percent to Z$70 a term in high density areas and by 200 percent to Z$150 in low density areas. Schools in rural areas continue to charge Z$50. In addition, examination fees have been raised. Although the fee structure reflects a concern to alleviate the burden for low-income groups, the absolute amounts are still high, particularly at a time when everything is going up. Parents earning under Z$400 per month should have been exempted.

The Department for Social Welfare was given the responsibility for vetting families who claim they cannot afford to pay, using forms obtained at the school; Z$400 corresponds to the threshold for the payment of personal tax, but the figure is way below the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) of Z$593 for a family of six in July 1991 (updated from Loewenson et al. 1989). The follow-up study was carried out just before the school year began. All the poorer households with school-going children expressed difficulties in finding the money for fees. Households with a higher income but with three or four school-going children also expressed concern about fees. The six poorest households should have been eligible for exemption but none of them had been informed of this, despite the fact that they had been in touch with the school to register the children.

All respondents were determined not to withdraw their children from school and were willing to cut food consumption, use savings, and borrow money to pay the fees. Whether the poorer households will manage to educate all their children is highly debatable and if parents are forced to withdraw children, girls may lose out. The enrolment rate for secondary schools is already higher for boys (59.3 percent) than girls (40.7 percent) (Chung 1988, 127). Paternal uncles and older siblings are expected to help

with school fees but some respondents pointed out that this is going to become more difficult. This issue already seemed to be creating or exacerbating tensions between family members, sometimes along gender lines. For example, a widow with three school children is dependent upon two of her working sons to pay for fees. Both sons were threatening to withdraw support and as she saw it, they were not willing to cut down on "drinking, smoking, and girlfriends" to pay the fees. She said her daughter tried to help but had a lower income and a child to support on her own.

### Changes in Health Services

Health charges for curative services have not been raised but a small proportion of households in the initial survey (8 percent of those who used public services and were not covered by medical aid schemes) found it difficult to meet these costs. The income threshold for exemption from payment for health care services is extremely low at Z$150 per month. This threshold has not been raised since independence and only one respondent in the study sample earned less than this figure (three months after this subsample survey, the threshold was raised to Z$400 but had still not been implemented by November 1992). Maternity fees were raised in January 1992; the deposit to cover delivery charges, ward fees, anesthetics, and other things at the major hospital in Harare rose from Z$140 to Z$500.

Respondents' reactions to this rise of 257 percent ranged from angry indignation to depressed resignation; as one male respondent said, "I earn Z$300 a month, how can my wife go to the Maternity for Z$500?" An earlier increase in antenatal and maternity fees in Harare had already depressed use of these services (Loewenson et al. 1991). Women most at risk of having complicated births and who most require good antenatal care are those who are overworked and undernourished. These are obviously women from poorer households and are precisely those who cannot afford these higher charges. Maternal morbidity and mortality is therefore likely to increase for poor women (Kanji et al. 1991).

The price of other basic services has also risen. In November 1991, electricity charges rose by 15.5 percent, having already been increased by 20 percent in July 1991. This was justified in terms of the higher costs of imported inputs due to devaluation (*The Herald* 16 November 1991). Urban bus fares were increased in November 1991, a basic 55-cent bus fare rose by 45 percent to 80 cents. Two men who used to take the bus to work were now walking to save a few dollars a week. Payment for health services therefore becomes one more competing demand on low incomes.

## Changes in Employment and Income-Generating Activities

With ESAP, a system of collective bargaining for wages and conditions has replaced government intervention in wage setting except for farm workers and domestic workers. However, the 18 percent wage rise negotiated by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in 1991 was completely eroded by inflation. Amendments to the Labor Relations Act are designed to allow more "flexible hiring and firing of labor to improve firms' efficiency and competitiveness" (Government of Zimbabwe 1991, 7). It also strengthens employers' ability to undermine the already weak capacity of organized labor, to resist exploitation, and fight for better working conditions.

In January 1992, 4,000 employees of a parastatal organization, the National Railways of Zimbabwe, went on strike after management refused to grant equal (financial) recognition to the two trade unions operating within the organization, preferring to support the newer and smaller union which seems to be more sympathetic to government officials than the larger and longer established union. The management's response to the strike was swift: all 4,000 employees were fired. They were subsequently invited to reapply for their jobs with the same pay but loss of accumulated benefits, along with queues of other unemployed people; all but a small percentage of "trouble-makers" (active trade unionists) were re-employed on these unfavorable terms.

It is estimated that 35 percent of the current labor force is unemployed. The government also pledged to reduce civil service staff by 25 percent. Of the twenty-one households visited in January 1992, no formal employees had actually lost their jobs, but neither had anyone seeking employment found a job. Wage earners were extremely worried about future job security. All three male casual workers interviewed said it was becoming impossible to find regular work, while five of eighteen permanent employees said it was getting more difficult to ask for better wages and conditions. As one skilled manual worker put it, "if you complain, management says 'you know where the door is'."

Even more striking during this six-month period since July 1992, was the reduction in income from women's cash-generating activities. Both women in the subsample who had been involved in trading in fruit and vegetables had given this up because they could no longer make a profit. Higher buying prices from a central market and fewer local customers were given as the reasons. Three of the four women involved in crocheting doilies and knitting woolens for sale also confirmed that markedly fewer people were buying their products. One female respondent could no longer afford the initial outlay for wool and was reduced to offering only her labor to customers who would provide the wool, which was much less lucrative.

This picture of diminishing demand is corroborated by a higher-income respondent who explained that in her effort to cut expenses, she now buys only one woolen and not three for the cold season.

Although research in Latin America has found that women increased their participation in the labor force during economic crises (Chant 1993; Gonzales de la Gonzales de la Rocha 1988; Moser 1989; Rocha et al. 1987), Zimbabwe may be different in this context in that high unemployment rates for men seem to diminish opportunities for women at the present time. Women in Harare are undoubtedly feeling more pressure to earn money (for example, the ZANU-PF women's league urged women to start income-generating projects to offset the high cost of living, with no reference to the limited opportunities available for women or current workloads [*The Herald* 25 March 1991]), and some have begun to crochet for sale and two others are planning to sew and knit. However, it is difficult to see how, with falling demand, increasing competition and higher costs of inputs, this type of activity can generate even past levels of income. If it does, it will be at the cost of even longer hours of work, as Tibaijuka (1989) found in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

In both poorer households where women spent the major part of the year in rural areas, the length of absence was being cut down in order to save on transport costs for either spouse to visit each other, but also for women to try and earn hard cash in town. This also implies an increased workload since women would still return to the rural area when most agricultural work needs to be done (ploughing and harvest time).

## Changes in Leisure and Social Activities

As stated earlier, women did not have specific leisure activities, and practically none that involved spending any money. In the case of men however, in both lower and higher income households, they claim to have cut down on the amount of beer they drink as well as the number of soccer matches they go to. A few higher income women also reported reducing money on hairdressing (another income-generating activity for lower income women), films, and picnics for the family. For lower income women, church continues to be the major focus for social activity.

Where there is conflict in the household in relation to men's private spending on drink and girlfriends, ESAP has increased and exacerbated it. In other households, women have a resigned attitude towards men's behavior and do not expect any better from them. In one instance, the male wage earner, a builder, had been injured at work a few years ago and was laid off with a lump sum in compensation. After his retrenchment he took to

drinking heavily and the compensation money ran out before the end of 1991. Since then, his wife struggles to feed him and their seven children and runs the house on the rent from lodgers, home grown food, and her diminishing income from knitting. She has now persuaded her husband to look for casual work but her acceptance of a different and more individualistic code of conduct for men is common to many respondents.

## Conclusion

There is a highly visible process of impoverishment taking place in Kambuzuma, with decreasing food consumption, more intensive work by women with diminishing returns, diminishing savings, and more anxiety about the future.

In response to a direct question about whether women or men were worse affected by the increased cost of living, almost all the women thought that they themselves were in the worse position. The main reason given was that women were more concerned with household consumption and welfare. As one woman said, "I am the one who sees every day what the children need, I am the one who has to feed the whole family with a fixed amount of money, and I have to think what to do." Another woman felt that when things got really tough, men just walked out. A few women felt that men and women were equally affected unless the man was a drinker in which case the woman was worse affected. In contrast, most men thought that both men and women were equally affected, while one quite cheerfully admitted that his wife was worse affected because he continued to give her a monthly sum of Z$100 to meet food needs and she had to cope "by experimenting!" Another thought a woman would only be worse affected when she wasn't employed and her husband was a drinker, otherwise both were equally affected.

In households where both spouses are employed as white collar workers and professionals, there was a noticeably higher degree of negotiation about what kinds of changes both had to make to cope with the increased cost of living. As Meer (1990, 17) puts it, education and improved occupational and economic status moderates or modernizes patriarchy. In addition, these households usually employ female domestic workers. Although the women remain the principal managers of the household, this makes childcare and housework less of an issue.

In working class households, where women have little independent income and men are employed in low-paid manual jobs, women certainly seem to be worse affected by ESAP. Women are trying, within a limited range of options and with diminishing room for maneuver, to meet basic

needs of the household by growing food and intensifying work for cash. The analysis of evidence from Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico leads Rocha et al. (1987, 17–18) to state that, "the resolution of the basic problem of consumption has become the central concern around which women's activities turn." This comment mirrors what is now happening in Kambuzuma, Harare.

In women-headed households, access to income and resources tends to be lower, and the effects of ESAP severe, but for employed women, there is no conflict about directing income to basic household needs. Older women, usually widows, have the least resources and opportunities and are heavily dependent on adult offspring. Much therefore depends on their relationship, especially with sons, who tend to have more resources than daughters to support the family. Where sons do not meet their obligations, ESAP has exacerbated conflict, and where daughters are not in a position to help, the effect on the household is particularly severe.

Opportunities for gaining access to economic and social power would seem to be diminishing for all low-paid workers, with low-income women particularly affected. Not only are the women subordinated to men, with fewer resources, education, and skills, but they are also the least socially organized and able to make their voices heard. Cooperative strategies are not evident. If anything, the sphere of struggle has become further individualized and privatized. In this context, the use of the term "survival strategies" has the risk of romanticizing or at least elevating this process of trying to cope, with all the accompanying stress and anxiety, to a status that it does not warrant. Women's contribution to the economy, with both paid and unpaid work, has to date been underestimated, if not ignored, but there may now be a risk of overestimating the extent to which women can compensate for low wages, rising prices, and diminishing employment opportunities. Survival strategies cannot be a substitute for more equitable macroeconomic policies.

Finally, although the sharing of income and resources in most working class households is undoubtedly skewed towards men, it is still conditioned by low incomes. In the poorer households, getting an equal share to women may alleviate the problems of meeting basic consumption needs of the family, but it is insufficient for a reasonable standard of living, as perceived by the respondents of the study. Gender equality is therefore insufficient; equality with men who themselves suffer unemployment, low wages, and poor working conditions is hardly an adequate goal.

The Government of Zimbabwe states that by "1994 and 1995, the positive effects of the program are expected to predominate on the lower income groups" (Government of Zimbabwe 1991, 1). This view is not justified by the evidence from other countries that have adopted similar

policies (Loxley 1990; Onimode 1989). Additionally, the government's Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) Program to alleviate the transitional negative consequences of ESAP is unlikely to have the anticipated effect. The two components of the program cover social welfare (targeted supplementary food, fee exemption for health care and education) and training and employment.

Leaving aside the fact that employment creation has been relegated to an adjunct of the main economic program, one year into ESAP this component still remains a largely paper exercise. Smaller scale business is seen to be an important alternative to waged employment but by-laws hindering the operations of this sector have yet to be changed. Even more important, promotional measures will probably be seized by a few organized individuals and groups (unlikely to be women) resulting in greater differentiation within the sector (Moyo 1991, 11).

The government has declared that one overriding objective of the SDA program is to "fine tune the interventions to make sure only disadvantaged groups are targeted" (Government of Zimbabwe 1991, 1). Given the limited finance available and the fact that the majority of Zimbabweans live under the Poverty Datum Line, it is difficult to see how this targeting can be effective.

Access to health and education services has moved from being a basic social right to a kind of charity, with negotiation of a bureaucratic system necessary to convince officials that people cannot pay and therefore deserve exemption. These residual and highly targeted interventions do not even aim to improve living conditions but rather to meet the emergency needs of the very poorest, witnessed by the extremely low threshold levels for exemption. Post-independence, redistributive social policies have been abandoned, indicating that both class and gender inequalities will widen.

The UN Economic Commission for Africa Alternative has formulated more inward looking policies (Onimode et al. 1990). However, these are unlikely to be implemented by governments that now, more than ever, seem to owe their primary allegiance to international financial institutions and to the indigenous capitalist class (of which they are usually a part) rather than to the majority of their own people. The obviously undemocratic imposition of ESAP has only been possible because of the weakness of civic organizations. While ESAP is already well underway the timing and intensity of the measures, and their eventual outcome, will depend on the strength (or weakness) of the opposition from various groupings, and the level of government repression of these. Women are in many ways the least socially organized, which implies that the struggle for gender equality becomes more difficult. The special session of the UN General Assembly

on International Economic Cooperation on 23–28 April 1990 concluded that structural adjustment policies have in many instances exacerbated social inequality without restoring growth and development and with threats to political stability. With drought worsening the economic crisis, it is difficult to see how Zimbabwe can avoid being one of these instances where social inequalities, both class and gender based, are exacerbated.

## Notes

1. An expanded version of this research with more details of the context and technical findings appears as a chapter in Meer 1994.
2. The two-year research project in Kambuzuma, Harare was funded by the International Development Research Centre, Canada.

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# 8

# Women in Mozambique: Gender Struggles and Gender Politics

*Signe Arnfred*

## Women in the War: Toward a New Gender Identity

> The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, a guarantee of its continuity, and a condition for its success
>
> *(Machel 1973)*

In his opening address to the first conference of the Mozambique Women's Organization (OMM) in 1973, Samora Machel, president of Frelimo, affirmed that women's emancipation was an integral aspect of revolutionary struggle. In 1973 Frelimo (Front for the Liberation of *Mozambique*) was still a liberation front engaged in armed struggle against colonial rule. The northern part of Mozambique was a battleground and the first OMM conference had to be held in the Frelimo camp at Tunduru in southern Tanzania. In the OMM's present national secretariat in Maputo, a photograph of the participants of this first conference can be seen. Peasant women and women guerrillas are lined up outside the meeting hut, among them Samora Machel in battledress. The non-hierarchical atmosphere depicted in this photograph is in marked contrast to the more formal arrangements on similar later occasions.

The participation of women in the war was massive. In 1967, at the request of women themselves, a women's detachment of the guerilla army—*Destacamento Feminino*—had been formed. Part of its task was

to inform and mobilize the peasant population. To support this work, a broader non-military organization of women was needed. This was the origin of the foundation of the OMM in 1973.

Between 1981 and 1984 I worked as a sociological consultant of the OMM.[1] In 1982 I was sent to Cabo Delgado, the oldest war zone, to find out among other things how the experience of war had affected the lives of women. I was surprised how many of the women I interviewed had taken an active part in the war in one way or another. Most had grown food for the army or had transported goods and weapons. Viewed in isolation, as concrete tasks, these do not seem very different from what peasant women normally do in their every day lives: growing food and carrying burdens on their heads. But during the war it had been different: women were traveling long distances, staying away from home for many days, and they were doing so on equal footing with men! That was really new, corresponding to the equally new ideas of gender equality introduced by Frelimo.

New also was the structure of authority within which these tasks were carried out In their normal daily lives, women are subordinated to patriarchal family authority, whether it be of a father, an uncle, a husband, or a brother. Their lives are circumscribed and their gender role is defined by their position in the family. During the war, however, the family was not the ultimate source of authority. On the contrary, if there were conflicts between women and the male members of their families, if their husbands would not permit them to be absent to carry out their tasks of mobilization or transport, women could call in Frelimo. A new authority was at work, an authority which, when necessary and for the time being, supported women against men. This was described to me by Habiba (in Mueda, Cabo Delgado), an impressive woman now some fifty years old and formerly the provincial representative of the OMM:

> During the war we held meetings, we mobilized women to transport war materiel, to grow food and to cook for the soldiers. Women volunteered but sometimes husbands tried to prevent them from participating in the tasks of war. When that happened, we called in Frelimo. I remember a case of one man who was beating his wife. We tied his arms behind his back and took him to Frelimo. Frelimo told him that he shouldn't fight his wife for it was better to fight the Portuguese together. The man became a soldier and the woman continued her war work. During the war women were respected because we were organized. Men and women were equal. There was no division, no resentment. One week the woman was away, another the man. When the woman was away, it was the husband who did the housework and looked after the children. Men and women worked together for the same goal.

Before the war, men and women had led separate lives with a clear division of labor and different rules of conduct. During the war they came together on equal terms as Mozambicans in the struggle against the Portuguese. In this process, gender relations changed. Some women developed a new concept of themselves as women: new aspirations, new goals. A new female identity was emerging. Take the example of Cecilia, a nurse at the hospital in Pemba, provincial capital of Cabo Delgado. She had been in *Destacamento Feminino* during the war:

> When I was a child it never occurred to me that I should be educated, that I should become a nurse. I thought I would go to school until the fourth grade, and then I would marry and stay at home with my husband and children just like my mother had done. She was always at home, working the fields and looking after the house and the kids. That was what she did. But since I was in the armed struggle, everything has turned out differently for me. I have been to places that otherwise I would never have visited. I have come to know many different people and I've seen other ways of life in other provinces. These are things that I would never have known. All of this has been very important to me and it has changed my life. Formerly, although practices varied in each province, men kept women at a distance: men and women worked separately. Now we work together. My husband doesn't prevent me from working outside the home, or from participating in OMM meetings. But like me he was in the war and that of course is important. You still find many men who do not understand the necessity of women's liberation and who won't allow their wives to work outside the home.

Another example was Maria, now an agricultural worker on the state farm at Nguri, Cabo Delgado:

> During the war I was in *Destacamento Feminino* which sent me to a medical centre. I married but my husband left me. After the war, I knew that I could not be satisfied by going back to the village and living the life of a peasant woman. So when I heard of this state farm being started, I came here at once to enlist as a worker. After work I go to school at the factory. I want to continue my health education and become a nurse.

Three points emerged from my discussions with these veterans of the war. First, the conditions of war had challenged the relations between women and men and created the possibility for new gender relations and new female identities. Second, these new relations had been established through women's gender struggle: through confrontation with the male members of their families. Third, Frelimo had supported women engaged in this struggle.

## After the War: Abandoned by Frelimo and the OMM

After the war, Frelimo found itself in a totally new situation for which it was badly prepared. Independence came sooner than expected as a result of the overthrow of the fascist regime in Portugal. The Portuguese army had, in fact, learned about democracy and people's power (*poder popular*) from the African liberation movements it was fighting and put these lessons into practice in its home country. Portugal withdrew from its colonies in 1974, and in 1975 Frelimo gained power in Mozambique.

Fighting a liberation war is very different from building a nation state. The political center moved from the bush in the north to Maputo, the capital city in the south. It was a confusing situation: how was Frelimo to manage the complex tasks of creating a new nation? Rather than popular mobilization and collaboration with the peasantry, the focus now was on the creation of national institutions and the structures of economic and political power. In this process, different people and new ideas had to be relied upon. Most of the guerrilla fighters had been illiterate peasants, barely able to speak Portuguese. Habiba and others like her were removed as representatives of the OMM and replaced by girls educated at the mission schools, literate but without political fervor or experience. The idea of people power that had been developed during the war was insufficient as a political base in this new situation. Shortly after independence, at the third Frelimo Congress in 1977, the Liberation Front was transformed into a vanguard party in the Marxist-Leninist style and ideological/theoretical tradition. Similar changes took place in the OMM. At its second conference in 1976 policy toward women was restructured along the lines of the classical theories of women's emancipation (for a discussion of this see further on).

What happened to the women in the north who had been active in the war but had not had the opportunity, like Cecilia or Maria, to establish a different life? Habiba explained:

> During the war, Frelimo had said: "Women have always suffered: we must fight for women's emancipation: women too must be liberated." But it seems that all that mobilization was just to fight the Portuguese, for now it has all gone. During the war, women's problems were discussed but now nobody talks about that kind of thing. At that time we struggled to change the division of labor between women and men. Men and women worked together. But now men behave just as they did before the war. Nowadays nobody respects women. There are OMM representatives at all levels of the state, but they do nothing. Formerly the OMM was important, it had influence, but this is no longer the case. Nobody defends our lives and our needs. Our Mother doesn't protect our interests any more. Previously, when a quarrel was brought to the people's court, our Mother would deliver the judgment.

> But today our Mother, the OMM representative, doesn't even appear in the people's court. It is the men who make the judgments. The daughter is in prison, but the Mother doesn't care. I think the Mother is dead. But where did she die? Was it in the District or in the Province, or did she die far away in the capital? I ask because I do not know. The daughter is suffering because the Mother died.

In the rural areas of the north, gender relations returned to the situation before the war. Men took back what they had lost of patriarchal power. According to women, they took back even more than they had had. Cabo Delgado is an area of matrilineal descent where, in the case of divorce, for example, women remained in the house with their children while the husband left, and goods and household utensils were divided between them. By 1982 these practices were changing. As a peasant from Mueda explained:

> During the war Frelimo said all those things about women's emancipation, but today a husband can divorce his wife for no reason at all, and he'll stay in the house and keep all the goods that they have acquired together, even the *capulanas* [a piece of cloth used as a skirt] of his wife. She will have to leave the house with nothing at all. These days no woman is respected. We are at the bottom and the men are sitting on top of us.

I was impressed by the insight and anger of these women. They clearly felt that men had taken the upper hand in the gender struggle and that women were losing out; that women had been forgotten by their one-time supporter, Frelimo, and even by their own organization, the OMM. They felt that the OMM, their own organization, had ceased to exist.

## Women Defending the Initiation Rites

I was impressed but I was also puzzled, for these same women were defending the initiation rites! Indeed, a focal point of their reproach to Frelimo and their anger with the OMM was the political campaign to repress these women's rituals. This appeared to me an outright contradiction. As far as I knew—and certainly that was the position of the OMM—women's initiation rituals were the supreme expression of male dominance and female subordination. In these rites performed at puberty, I had been told, young girls were submitted to various humiliations in the course of which they learned to accept a subservient attitude appropriate to their subordinate position in a male dominated society. How then could it be that these strong and politically conscious women would defend them?

The explanation of this apparent contradiction emerged slowly through my conversations with the women, and indirectly as my direct questions didn't help me much in understanding their position. When I asked about the humiliating and oppressive aspects of these rituals, the women did not seem to grasp what I was talking about; and when I asked why they wanted to continue practicing them, I found their answers useless: "because it is our tradition, because we have always been doing it." One answer however was different. One woman said: "the drum is our only opportunity for playing." In the initiation rites there is a lot of drumming and dancing. During the rituals, the girls who have reached puberty stay for weeks in a hut outside village territory where they are visited by adult women but which no man may approach.

I gradually came to see the importance of the initiation hut as a kind of free space for the women: a gendered space for them to meet on their own without men. I was never present at an initiation ceremony, but on some occasions during my work in Cabo Delgado in all-women meetings arranged for the sake of my visit, issues of marriage, divorce, and love were discussed and the atmosphere could reach unexpected heights of laughter, with dancing and sexual pantomimes and jokes about the men. What I saw was a collective female gender identity, strong, self-confident, full of laughter. In their daily lives with men these women might be subdued and oppressed, but here, among themselves, they were not. Thus I began to understand why women who had experienced the war defended the initiation rites. The rituals instruct young women in the rules of decent female behavior: self-control, downcast eyes, respect to men and elders, always ready to provide a husband with food and hot water for his bath. But the rituals also provide adult women with the opportunity to get together under circumstances that permit a very different behavior: disrespectful, non-subservient, mocking men.

I came to see the initiation rites as the ritual celebration of a shared female gender identity. A focal point of the rites is the confirmation of the sexual maturity of the girls. Having passed the rituals they should be familiar with their own potential for sexual care and pleasure. This sexual self-confidence seems to be an important base for the strength of these women. Its existence and reproduction depend on the initiation rites. No wonder that the women saw them as important and indispensable, especially when traditional women's rights, such as divorce, were under attack.

During the war the initiation rites had been infrequently performed, partly because social life had been completely disrupted, but also because women had needed them less in the war situation of changing gender relations and new demands. In their new gender organization, the OMM,

women had been on the offensive in the gender struggle, seeking to establish new gender relations and a new gender identity, with gender equality as the ultimate goal. The idea of gender equality in this context is new, new not as a contrast to oppression, but because the traditional construction of gender identity did not rest on any notion of equality but rather on ideas of complementarity between women and men and the separation of male and female spheres, whether this be in the sexual division of labor or in the concept of different capacities.

The gender dimension of society was fundamental, men and women inhabiting different spheres in the complementary social duality. In prewar Cabo Delgado it seemed to me that this had been the basis of such power as the women had held. The war, however, had changed and challenged this situation, the gender spheres were broken up, men and women had been set on the move for new identities and new relations. But the war came to an end. The political atmosphere changed. The support to the women's struggles disappeared, whereas the men were able to take advantage of the new situation. The women continued fighting, but now it was a defensive gender struggle, aiming to maintain at least their traditional rights and the sources of power they had had in the past. The important point is that in this political context the past is not simply one of oppression, nor is the future an obvious progression. Women in Mozambique may have a lot to gain, as the experience of war demonstrated, but they have something to lose as well.

## Matriliny

The initiation rites are not the only example of what women have to lose. Women's defense of these rites is stronger in the north of the country than in the south. In the south, the rituals have virtually ceased. This seems to have happened for two reasons: first, the south is more involved in the money economy; men have been wage workers for generations, predominantly as migrant workers to the South African mines; second, in the north (roughly north of the Zambezi River) matrilineal systems of kinship prevail, while the southern societies are patrilineal. Matrilineal societies are not, of course, matriarchal. Authority in the family is the prerogative of men, as uncles and brothers. But this also means that women are primarily defined in their roles as sisters rather than wives. As a sister, a woman is surrounded by her own kin, for at marriage a man comes to live with his wife and is only accepted as a husband if he behaves well and has shown that he is capable of making her pregnant. Divorce is

easy for both partners, but at divorce a woman stays in the house with the children and her husband must leave.

Matriliny and matrilocality are sources of social authority for women. But this is not how Frelimo and the OMM see it, and they do not defend it. In fact, Frelimo and OMM promote patriliny, not explicitly but as a product of their general policy which centers on the promotion of the nuclear family. Ever since the second OMM Conference in 1976 the family as the basic cell of society has had a central position in OMM policy. It is conceived as a monogamous unit in which parents—not a woman and her brothers—have authority over their children. A woman is expected to be closely attached to her husband and, for example, to follow him if he is transferred to another job. Matriliny does not meet the requirements of this policy. It doesn't produce the small, mobile, nuclear family functional to a modernizing society.

Frelimo and OMM are equally opposed to divorce. But to women access to divorce is crucial. In the matrilineal areas women's right to divorce is one of the ways in which they avoid a polygynous marriage. When a husband starts to consider taking a second wife, the first wife will often initiate divorce proceedings. In the northern matrilineal areas, polygyny is less common than in the south. Under the new family law, divorce is in principle available to women but Frelimo and the OMM preach against it on the grounds that it disrupts family life. When women use their traditional rights to divorce, they are blamed for lack of respect for the institution of marriage and for being altogether loose and promiscuous. This angered the women in Cabo Delgado:

> Attitudes toward divorce began to change after independence because Frelimo doesn't want "unjustified" divorces. They say that the children won't know their father. The village Party Secretary doesn't like divorces; he punishes people who want to divorce. They have to do community service in the village. For instance, the Party house was built in this way. In the old days women divorced much more easily. The men are like *colonos*. They want everything. They marry two women. Then the first one says: "Look my friend, I don't want to put up with this." But the husband doesn't listen. He brings everything to the other woman's house. You say that this is too much and go to the Party Secretary in order to get a divorce. But he says, "No, you cannot have a divorce. Go back to your home, you must not disrupt your family."

It is invariably women who want to divorce who get the blame, not the polygynous husband. Polygyny, of course, is against the policy of Frelimo and the OMM, but men are rarely rebuked for it and the party often turns a blind eye to it.

## The Gender Policy of Frelimo and the OMM

I have argued that during the war Frelimo and the OMM supported peasant women in the promotion of their gender interests. Since then they have either failed to provide support or have directly opposed the gender struggles of women. There are, of course, many other examples of their direct and indirect interventions but these may serve as points of departure for a discussion of gender policy in the context of the socialist principles of Frelimo.

Frelimo is a vanguard party based on a worker-peasant alliance. It represents the interests of peasants and workers at the level of the state. The state is the people's state. The OMM is "an arm of the party, a link for communication between the party and the people" (OMM 1981). Class struggle is an important concept in Frelimo ideology. It is seen as the struggle of the people, united under the leadership of the party against "internal enemies" (Machel 1980), "aspirants to the bourgeoisie" (Maputo 1983), and other similar opponents of nationalist socialist interests. Class struggle does not mean the struggles of peasants and workers against the state. This kind of struggle is not conceivable, as the state and the party themselves represent the interests of the laboring classes. The function of trade unions is not to formulate the specific interests of their members. Strikes are not allowed. The role of trade unions in the socialist state is to "organize work, practice discipline, promote increased productivity, and encourage creativity and innovation" (Maputo 1983). The trade unions are seen as democratic mass organizations and their function—rather like that of the OMM—is to be a link for communication between the party and the people.

Similarly, specific gender interests are not acknowledged: "the antagonistic contradiction is not found between man and woman, but rather between women and the social order, between all exploited women and men and the social order" (Machel 1979, 139). The necessity of struggle between women and men is not acknowledged; women's demands are condemned as the "radicalism of the petty bourgeoisie" (OMM 1979, 20). This conception, however, fits facts rather badly. There are specific gender interests. You cannot miss them when you listen to peasants and workers. Gender struggle is a fact of women's lives, especially in the period of social and political turmoil in Mozambique during the war and since independence. The previous structure of gender relations has been shattered: women as well as men are fighting to defend their old rights and privileges or to gain new ones. The problem is that while Frelimo and the OMM do have women's emancipation and the construction of new gender relations on their agenda, they do not acknowledge that these will not emerge without struggle. Gender struggle is not (just) disruptive and destructive.

On the contrary, it is the means through which gender relations change, as class struggle is the means through which the relations of production are transformed. Women do not gain liberation without struggle, nor can they gain it as a gift from above. Women can only achieve liberation through their struggles as gender and class subjects. It is, therefore, much to be lamented that women do not have their own organization through which to voice their own interests and concerns. The OMM is an arm of the party, and the movements of the arm are decided in the head, in the all male leadership of Frelimo. The policy of OMM is the policy of Frelimo.

The socialist project of women's emancipation—like the socialist project in general—is a project of modernization. It is based on the rational, industrial exploitation of the riches of the earth; the small-scale peasant farmer must be turned into a wage worker on a state farm or maybe into a member of an agricultural cooperative. The emancipation of women is to arise as a consequence of their integration into new forms of social production on equal terms with men. The two initial paragraphs of the 1976 OMM program for action reflect this project. It is stated that the OMM must first, ensure that all women become engaged in production (in the factory or in the agricultural cooperative), in the planning and organization of work and social life, in the creation of the new man [*sic*] and the new society; and second, organize the struggle against the old ideas which constitute the obstacles to the full participation of women in public and social life as citizens, in economic life as free producers, and in family life as true companions and revolutionary educators (OMM 1979, 78).

In Mozambique both of these tasks are problematic. I shall begin with the second. The basic problem here is that emancipation is seen as a unilinear process. In the past there has been nothing but the oppression and enslavement of women. The OMM described their role in the old society as being "to serve men—as an object of lust, as a procreator of children, and as workers without pay" (OMM 1979, 89).

Emancipation lies in the socialist future. This gives no recognition to the degree to which women in the old society maintained spheres of autonomy and collective gender identity. The defense of these sources of strength in the past must, therefore, be condemned as reactionary, against modernization, an obstacle to progress. It does not acknowledge what women know in their bones: that the process of modernization favors male power. This may or may not have to be so but it certainly has been so. Through wage labor, however arduous it has been, men have gained access to money income denied to the vast majority of women, and this has increased their power in the family. In the process of urbanization, many women have lost such sources of economic independence as they had previously had and have become financially dependent upon men. The nuclear family,

advocated as the basis of women's emancipation, is the site of the dissolution of collective gender identity for women, the erosion of women's previous rights in marriage, and the individualization of male power. These tendencies correspond marvelously to the Christian mission morality of father right and female subordination and opposition to initiation rites and to women's control over their sexuality.

The political program of modernization and the exclusion of gender struggle often amounts to a tacit support for male power, whether intended or not. If women are to gain at all from the processes instituted under socialism, a defensive and an offensive gender struggle is indispensable.

The OMM's obligation to ensure women's participation in production is largely beside the point in the Mozambican context. The vast majority of women are already engaged in social production; indeed, the number of economically active women exceeds that of economically active men in Mozambique.

Here again the most important struggle is rather a defensive one of not becoming marginalized in the modernization process. It has not been women's lack of engagement in productive labor but rather patriarchal authority which has confined them to domestic life. The limitations on women's autonomy in the old society have been described, as well as its strengths. The emancipation of women in Mozambique must lie in breaking these boundaries, the boundaries of patriarchal authority, and the confines of domestic life.

For the family remains the dominant social and economic institution in Mozambique despite the inroads of capitalism. It is far from becoming merely a unit of consumption and reproduction. According to the 1980 National Census, more than 75 percent of the economically active population is working in family agriculture, 94 percent of all economically active women work in a family context, predominantly as farmers but including some 10,000–20,000 traders and artisans. Thus the vast majority of women are engaged in family production and spend their entire lives in the sphere of the family.

The socialist policy toward women described above is characteristic of other Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties and their women's organizations. But we need to explain the particular way in which Frelimo and the OMM have implemented these strategies in the Mozambican context. Why in particular did Frelimo withdraw its support from those women who had fought the war? These women were, by their very example, fighting old ideas; they were engaged in social production; they were following the route to emancipation defined by Frelimo. Why were they abandoned?

The answer seems to lie in the changed relationship between the party and the people and the focus on the construction of the state. During the

war, Frelimo stressed the need for daily collaboration with the people. Following independence, the priority was to extend the authority and control of the party and the state. This change took place, in most cases, without any overt alteration in political rhetoric as may be understood from the following illustration of the ways in which the meaning of the expression the principal task (*tarefa principal*) of the revolution as a strategy for women's liberation has been transformed.

In his opening speech to the second OMM Conference in November 1976, President Machel said:

> The decisive factor for the emancipation of the woman is her engagement in the principal task, the task which transforms society. At that time [that is, during the war], it was the struggle for liberation. What then constitutes the principal task in the present phase of the revolution? The principal task of the present phase of our process is the following: the construction of the material and ideological base for building a socialist society. Thus for the implementation of this strategy, which has as its objective the construction of socialism, the principal task is production and the principal form of action is class struggle. (Machel 1979, 23)

Production, in its turn, means fulfilling the plan. This is how the Secretary for Ideology of the Central Committee, Jorge Rebelo, put it when talking to the OMM in 1981. He advised the OMM to "concentrate its activity on what constitute at this moment the two principal tasks of all citizens—male and female—of the RPM: the increase of production and productivity so as to fulfill the plan for 1981 (PEC/81) and participation in the defense of our country" (OMM Maputo 1981).

More specifically the OMM was advised to investigate how women could participate in voluntary labor and in the maintenance of public buildings. In addition, women were asked to be active in the control of the new ration system, in the fight against contagious diseases, and for education, hygiene, and cleanliness. Finally, it was stressed that the role of women as mothers and educators in the family was fundamental. These activities, no matter how useful and necessary they may be from the point of view of the state, have little potential for altering gender relations. They constitute no challenge to male family authority. They provide no grounds for gender struggle.

### The Extraordinary Conference of the OMM, 1984

In 1983 the preparation for the fourth Frelimo Party Congress revived, for the time being, the old Frelimo ideals of popular democracy and peoples

power. Political debates were held throughout the country and people participated enthusiastically. The Party Congress itself became a forum for critical interventions, and discussion and radical policy measures of various kinds followed. Frelimo decided to hold an extraordinary OMM Conference in 1984 to discuss women's social situation as a basis for the revision of current policy on women's issues. The conference was to be preceded by a nation-wide campaign to collect information and views on women's lives and problems, especially in relation to family structure and customary practices important to female gender roles. The instruction issued by the Frelimo Central Committee to inaugurate the conference preparation campaign marks the policy shift very clearly: "being a matter of concern to the whole society, the liberation of women is, in the first place, the task of women themselves. No one can liberate a woman. Women must take over the struggle for emancipation themselves" (The Co-operatives of Maputo 1985).

For the first time since the war, women were mentioned as the subjects of their own emancipation. *José Luís Cabaço*, Secretary of the Central Committee (then Minister for Information), presided over the OMM national meeting at the start of the campaign. He criticized the *abaixo* ("down with") policies which had prevailed hitherto: *Abaixo* lobolo, *abaixo* polygyny, and *abaixo* initiation rites, which had been the catch words of OMM/Frelimo gender politics since independence. This kind of campaign, *Cabaço* said, is of no use when nothing else in society is changed. Polygyny and bride price are parts of a social structure; you cannot just do away with things like that without understanding their context and if there is nothing to replace them with. Before embarking on a policy of social transformation at least one must understand the society that has to be transformed. He stressed how important it was that the OMM brigades being sent out in preparation for the conference should listen and learn and not, as had become increasingly the practice of Frelimo agents, tell the people how they ought to behave.

What resulted were intense and very lively discussions that involved the whole country for months, even in the midst of war, drought, and famine. Once again it was demonstrated that when people, in this context mainly women, are allowed to speak out on the basis of their own felt needs and concerns, not in isolation but as part of a national movement and with the prospect of changing their own lives, amazing reserves of social energy are let loose. Thousands of discussion meetings and group interviews were held (I took part in the whole process at central level in the OMM and as a member of brigades at other levels. Some of the points in this article are based on the analysis of the mountains of data that were accumulated). The preparation for the conference allowed discussion of the traditional

sources of female strength to be linked to new perspectives on breaking down women's confinement to the family. For the first time the defensive and the offensive gender struggles could be seen to be intimately connected. Women grew in strength and confidence during these months and the OMM learned a lot.

Shortly before the national conference was to be held—a conference delegation from a remote province had already arrived in Maputo—the Party Central Committee postponed it for six months. They had obviously become nervous about what was going on: things seemed to have gotten out of control. When the conference was finally held, in November 1984, it was indeed well controlled. The president himself presided over all the plenary meetings with the party's second in command, Marcelino dos Santos, at his side. The only two women in the front row of the platform were the OMM General Secretary, Salomé Moiana, and Mozambique's only woman minister, Graça Machel. The rest were all men of the Political Bureau or the government.

Few delegates from the floor got a chance to speak at the plenary sessions. Only during the one day of group discussions (the conference lasted for five days) were the keen atmosphere of discussion and the fervor of the preparation period felt. The intense preparation could have produced guidelines for a powerful movement for social change, but this was not the case. The final resolutions of the conference are neither radical nor precise. In retrospect, the aspects of gender struggle at the conference seemed quite clear. The men, feeling threatened, had mobilized what they could in terms of dark, solemn suits to carry the paternal authority of the party.

## The General Union of Cooperatives in Maputo (UGC)

In striking contrast, women are organizing elsewhere, though not in association with the OMM and not along the lines of classical socialist theory of women's emancipation. An organization of agricultural cooperatives in the Maputo Green Zones (*Zonas Verdes*) consists mainly of women. It is not a women's organization; for that there is only the OMM. But more than 95 percent of these cooperative farmers are women. They produce vegetables for the local market. The UGC was created in order to fight for the interests of the cooperatives as productive units and the interests of the cooperative farmers as people and producers, but the cooperative members don't hesitate to put forward their views on women's emancipation. The striking thing about these views is that they combine the defense of women's traditional economic position with the struggle for a new gender identity. They understand women's situation from their own point of view and not from that of the state.

The growth of the agricultural cooperatives in the Maputo Green Zones[2] is impressive. Initiated in 1980 following the establishment of the Gabinete das Zonas Verdes (GZV, under the Ministry of Agriculture), the number of cooperatives has increased from 7 to 181 in 1987, with 10,500 members, 9,500 of whom were women. This growth arises from a clear policy directive from the GZV to support cooperatives without patronizing them and to cater not just for the needs of production but also for the needs of producers by ensuring their access to social services, such as crèches. In this process, democratic structures have been built up in each cooperative which, in 1982, formed a union, the UGC. This enabled them, some years later, to leave the GZV and to establish an independent organization. According to the President of the UGC, Celina Cossa, herself a cooperative farmer, the UGC has from time to time been in fierce confrontations with Frelimo, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other government institutions that have tried to intervene and control their activities. But because of the union's autonomy and democratic structure, they have been able to resist these external pressures. For these reasons, the women in the UGC are very conscious of their achievements and very clear about the basis of them. A document they prepared for a seminar in Maputo in 1986 states:

> In the first place it is important to be aware of the fact that the majority of these thousands of women [that is, the women who joined the agricultural cooperatives] were people without any kind of prospect for the future; they had no paid employment and they had been deprived of the opportunity of contributing to the upkeep of their families by farming their family land because of the shortage of land in the city since the vast influx of population. These women were, thus, condemned to live in a state of complete economic dependence on their husbands which, in any part of the world but especially in Africa, is a bad thing for a woman.
>
> In colonial and precolonial days, women could achieve social recognition only in their capacity as members of their families, and in the last analysis, as the property of their husbands…but in the cooperatives and in the union, women are working, women are taking part in the decision-making process, women are running the cooperatives themselves, and enjoying the fruits of their own labor in total equality and democracy. In this way, the cooperatives are breaking definitively with the social basis of women's traditional subservient status.
>
> All this creates new relations in the family because a woman, contributing to the upkeep of the family in an equal or even more important way than her husband, and in a way that is socially recognized, stops being just *um ser familiar* (a family being), she becomes *um ser social* (a social being). (UGC 1986)

The women of the UGC take their point of departure from what used to be their strength: a certain degree of economic self-sufficiency and their importance in maintaining the family at least in terms of producing food. This economic strength is essential to women and they do not want to lose it; it is "a bad thing for a woman" because a husband's power over his wife thereby increases. Taking part in cooperative production, however, serves not only to maintain a degree of economic independence. It also means that part of a woman's productive life is now spent outside the institution of the family. Here she makes decisions and directs: in the family this is the privilege of men. She achieves a social existence as a person in her own right, not merely as a member of a family, an appendage to a man. In the cooperatives, women are producers, not wives. This in turn creates new gender relations in the family.

The cooperative women in actual fact combine the defensive and the offensive gender struggles: they struggle to maintain old gender positions and rights, which are threatened by development and modernization, and at the same time they are fighting to break the confines of traditional women's lives. The experiences of the UGC women provide a basis for reflections on the possible combination of gender struggle and gender politics in Mozambique, as did the example of the women in the war. In both cases, the women are acting as subjects, collectively and organized, for changing their own lives. On the other hand, when this is not the case, gender politics and gender struggle seem to fall apart.

## Notes

1. Bibliographic note: Most of the material on which this chapter is based is available only as field notes or in Portuguese. This is particularly so for OMM documents, including those of the Second Conference (OMM 1979) and the Third National Council (*III Conselho Coordenador National do OMM* 1981).
2. Green Zones is the name frequently given to suburban farm land that surrounds large cities, such as Mozambique's capital, Maputo. Here most of the produce, chicken, eggs, and other foodstuffs found in the urban marketplace are grown. Before independence the Green Zones were primarily underused areas not under cultivation. When the Portuguese left, Mozambican farmers moved onto the land and, over the years, many were able to legalize possession through local authorities (Ayisi 1995). Editor's note.

# 9

# Angolan Women's Congress

*Marga Holness*

The years since the Organization of Angolan Women (OMA) held its first congress in 1983 have, until only recently, been so turbulent that solving many of the problems that faced women—and indeed Angolan society as a whole—has had to be a more lengthy process than it would otherwise have been. Five years after the congress, the invading South African army was finally defeated at the historic battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988, leading to its withdrawal from Angola, the independence of Namibia, and the end of apartheid in South Africa. Yet there were still external backers of the armed rebellion in Angola to ensure that peace for its people was postponed. Military action allied with diplomacy led to a tenuous peace, making it possible to hold general elections in September 1992. But when rebel leader Jonas Savimbi lost the elections he plunged the country back into the worst war so far experienced. Millions of people became refugees in their own country. OMA headquarters in Luanda, the capital, lost touch with large numbers of its activists and members, many of whom were killed, while others were scattered in the country as displaced persons.

Only after Savimbi was killed in battle in 2002, bringing the war to an abrupt end, has it been possible to start to tackle the social and economic problems resulting from the war itself, those inherited from the past and those specifically raised by OMA in 1983.

Much of what was discussed at the 1983 congress has been achieved. To give a few examples, new legislation stipulates equal pay for men and women, common law marriages give women the same rights as civil ceremonies, medical centers provide family planning and contraception, and domestic violence is publicly denounced and punished. The political leadership of the country continues to stress the need for gender equality and

the advancement of women. Intrinsically linked, national development and the emancipation of women are moving forward.

Campaigning for legislative elections scheduled for 5 September 2008 (the first possible in sixteen years),[1] more than 40 percent of the candidates put forward by the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) were women. A 30 percent quota was reserved for women. It is significant that a total of 81 seats were taken up by women (77 MPLA and four UNITA [União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola]).

## First Congress of the Organization of Angolan Women

*Unity, Organization, Development.* This was the theme of the First Congress of the Organization of Angolan Women (OMA), held in Luanda from 2 to 8 March 1983. A congress of unity it certainly was, bringing together 365 women delegates representing every province of Angola and a wide spectrum of Angolan society—peasants, workers, intellectuals, professionals. There was also a large number of foreign delegations, from every continent, who brought messages of solidarity to their Angolan sisters. Organizationally the congress was a remarkable success and included also social and cultural events and visits to crèches and other places of special interest. But perhaps most crucial to the congress was the question of development. Time and again delegates emphasized that the emancipation of women was a prerequisite for national development and, at the same time, that it was only through their engagement in national reconstruction that women could achieve true emancipation.

Intensive preparatory work had preceded the holding of the congress. During meetings at local and provincial level, women had analyzed and debated essential questions related to their lives and had also elected their delegations to the congress. Important documents had been prepared—filled with a wealth of historical, economic, social, and other information—under headings that were to be the titles of the working commissions of the congress: the emancipation of women, working women, women and the family, and the revision of the OMA statutes.

Mobilized by OMA, women played a vital role in the liberation struggle, taking part in combat and working as doctors, nurses, radio operators, to name but a few of their fields of participation. As a result of its work in literacy teaching, in 1971 OMA was awarded UNESCO's Nadezhda Krupskaya Literacy Award,[2] an honor usually accorded to countries, not to a woman's organization engaged in a national liberation struggle. Socially speaking, OMA registered a number of achievements during the liberation war; and it is an interesting fact that bride price was abolished in the liberated and guerrilla areas.

After independence in 1975, OMA was faced with very new tasks. It continued to have the backing of the MPLA, dedicated to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and to the emancipation of women. But the society it was now working within was far more complex than that of the guerrilla areas, involving also a whole range of activities that women who had worked clandestinely in the colonialist-held areas had not had to deal with. There were anachronistic laws inherited from the colonial past that remained in force until such time as they were replaced by new laws. New laws could not be blindly copied from those of other countries and needed the lived experience of the new Angolan society to determine what much of their content would be.

Not only laws were inherited, but conservative attitudes that stemmed both from a colonial heritage in which the Catholic Church and the fascist Portuguese state had formed a close alliance, and from traditional Angolan society. Starting from the basic premise that the *full emancipation of society is impossible without the emancipation of women,* it was necessary not only to persuade men to respect the equality of women, both at work and in the home, but to persuade many women themselves of the need to further their education and come out of the home to take part in the mammoth tasks of rebuilding a country devastated by two national liberation wars and continued aggression by racist South Africa and its Angolan hirelings. Changing the role and living conditions of peasant women was a vital need.

During the first years of independence, in addition to mobilizing women and building up a remarkably big membership, OMA's main activity was in support of different government programs, playing a vital role in the vaccination and literacy campaigns, for example, and making its presence felt wherever problems of women and children needed solution, particularly as regards war widows and orphans, displaced persons, and other victims of the country's bellicose enemies. During those years there were numerous conferences, meetings, and all kinds of discussions on the specific problems of women and their organization, so that by the time work started on organizing OMA's first congress in 1982, the organization had a rich fund of experience and serious study to draw upon. Meetings of working mothers held in many of the country's provinces provided substantial information on this important sector of the working population. Every province held meetings at local and provincial level to discuss women's problems and to elect delegates to the congress, so that when the congress met in Luanda in March 365 delegates attended, representing every province in the country. Only in Cunene Province, occupied by South Africa's armed forces since August 1981, did OMA members have to hold their preparatory meetings in Huila Province to the north. The congress for the

first time tackled officially problems specific to women in society, some of them requiring new legislation to replace anachronistic Portuguese laws still in force.

In his opening speech, President José Eduardo dos Santos stressed that women were "the most oppressed and exploited during the colonial period, if we consider that they were subjected not only to colonial domination but also to their husband's authority," adding that they still had to demand that their independence be respected "by many compatriots with a conservative and selfish mentality." "It is not an easy struggle, and not only a struggle for women," the President said; "it is the struggle of all progressive people in our society." He praised the courage and maturity of OMA for having raised sensitive questions and stated that the views of the congress would be decisive to the drawing up and adoption of new legislation to protect women's interests.

In her report to the congress, OMA's National Coordinator, Ruth Neto[3]—who was subsequently elected Secretary-General of OMA—traced the long history of the organization since it was founded, summing up the tasks achieved since independence and those still lying ahead. The problems faced by Angolan women today, she stressed, stemmed from the prevailing situation in the country, which was underdeveloped and daily attacked by South Africa and its protégés. "OMA and all Angolan women," she said, "must be united and organized for the struggle for peace and development against the racist South Africans and their Angolan puppets, the lackeys of imperialism, because we know that without peace and development we shall never achieve the total emancipation of women in our country." She added, however:

> There are other problems women experience in their day-to-day lives which are a result not of external factors but of objective and subjective internal factors. It is up to us to give impetus to their solution because we experience and feel them more intensely. And it is in this sphere that our organization must make its greatest efforts, so that women can involve themselves and participate ever more actively in all aspects of national life and fully exercise their rights.

After several days of debate during which there was a remarkable degree of unanimity, particularly if we consider that among the delegates there were both illiterate women and university graduates, the resolutions adopted were read at a plenary session. They stressed the need for profound changes in social, political, and economic structures to achieve women's equality in every sphere. The condition of peasant women—those most exploited and benefiting least from social change—was emphasized. They need to be encouraged to engage increasingly in cooperative work,

so as to gain more from the literacy campaigns, education and health, and technological change. Raising the educational level of all women was essential to their advancement. Regarding housework, the congress stated that the domestic economy was an essential part of the national economy that was often understated, resulting in discrimination against women. It considered that women should engage in national defense and encourage their children to do so.

On the question of women and the family, the OMA congress called for new legislation to enshrine the equality of men and women, defend the interests of children and create a new family morality, as well as services to inform and guide women regarding their rights. The state, it said, should ensure the greater protection and equality of children, whether or not born in wedlock, and there should be allowances for children born out of wedlock to be directly deducted from the father's pay. Special courts should be set up to deal with problems of the family and of minors, and new legislation was required on questions of paternity.

Legal and social measures should be introduced to protect unmarried mothers, who should receive family allowances. The legal rights of women living with men to whom they were not married should be protected. All young women should be able to study with a view to achieving qualifications ensuring their economic independence, and the party, OMA, and the party youth should organize meetings to discuss such matters as dating, marriage, and sex. Conditions should be created to ensure the right of women to freely consented motherhood. This required facilities for sex education, especially in schools, and publicity on family planning and contraception. Young girls who became pregnant should not be forced to marry against their will or against the will of the boy concerned. Traditional ideas about women's fertility were to be fought against and a family planning program introduced as one of the ways of reducing infant mortality. As a last resort, in the case of unwanted pregnancy, abortion should be authorized.[4] There should also be frank discussions on prostitution, especially in schools. Meeting, talks, and seminars should be held to ensure constant education for adults on the new relations in the family and society. There should be no discriminatory attitudes or measures in state organizations, and women should cease to have to obtain their husband's permission before traveling on official business, although it should be compulsory to have also the mother's permission before children traveled abroad.

On working women, the congress said that the equality of men and women at work laid down by the law should be put into practice. The right of working women to motherhood should be protected, as well as their access to further training. Special attention should be given to working women in rural areas, ensuring that they can study and hold responsible

and decision-making posts. Employers should ensure that pregnant women do not carry out tasks that could harm the health of mother and child. OMA further stressed the need to train more personnel for mother and childcare centers and called for a review of shop opening hours to facilitate purchases by working mothers, as well as the establishment of consumer cooperatives at workplaces. Another measure called for was the establishment of automatic laundries, as well as canteens in schools and at workplaces.

For the rural areas, minimal ways of alleviating the work of peasant women would be to drill fresh water wells, open collective laundries, and promote the production of local domestic articles. Traditional midwives should continue to be recruited and organized, while more crèches and kindergartens should be opened at workplaces, in neighborhoods and agricultural cooperatives. Meanwhile, more sports, recreational, and cultural activities for children should be organized.

Functional literacy should be given priority in rural areas, recruiting women from those areas to work as literacy teachers and providing them with incentives to ensure women's involvement in socially useful work. Article 158 of the General Labor Law provides for three months' maternity leave. The congress, noting that there had been irregularities, called on women not to abuse this law to the detriment of national reconstruction requirements.

Finally, women were called upon to be exemplary in their fulfillment of the tasks and targets of the country's General Emergency Plan and programs, the economic priority and austerity plan for this period of increased South African aggression and falling world commodity prices. In his closing speech, Lúcio Lara, MPLA Central Committee Secretary for Organization and Cadres, emphasized the importance of the congress, representing more than a million OMA members and said that

> the party and the state are now in possession of valuable elements which will make it possible to program action to solve many of the problems that face our women both in the countryside and in the towns, and which will help to establish more just conditions in our society. The correction of some anachronistic laws and combating certain phenomena which affect young women, working mothers, women in the home, pregnant women, and children have now become immediate courses of action for party and government organs.

The final event of the OMA congress was a gigantic peace march on 8 March, International Women's Day. The march started at the newly named Square of the Heroines. Inaugurated on 2 March, Angolan Women's Day, the square honors the memory of five founder members

of OMA, Deolinda Rodrigues, Lucrecia Paim, Irene Cohen, Engrácia dos Santos, and Teresa Afonso, who on 2 March 1967—while on an important mission in the MPLA's first military region in northern Angola—were captured by Holden Roberto's FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) and subsequently murdered in the notorious Kinkuzu camp in Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Under the main cry of "Women demand peace," delegates, guests, party, and government leaders and a large part of the population of Luanda marched through the streets of the capital to the Cidadela, a vast covered sports stadium.

There were speeches there by Dino Matross, a member of the Political Bureau and Minister of State Security, and a number of the foreign guests. This was followed by an impressive display of dancing and gymnastics, brightly hued clothes, and flags making a blaze of color against a backdrop of ever-changing colored panels held by students, forming vivid patterns and images. It was a fitting end to a crucially important national event which, from start to finish, had been a perfect illustration of the theme "Unity, Organization, Development."

Only days after the congress ended its proceedings, a new Angolan Family Law had reached the final draft, awaiting approval by the Central Committee and the People's Assembly prior to promulgation.

## Notes

1. No elections were possible until Savimbi died and the war ended in 2002, after which voter registration took a long time because of difficult access to remote areas, the need for mine clearance, the millions of displaced people, and other postwar factors.
2. This annual UNESCO prize is named for Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya (1869–1939), outstanding stateswoman and party activist, wife and companion of V. I. Lenin; she stands at the source of Marxist-Leninist educational science (Skatkin and Cov'janov 1994).
3. Ruth Neto became General Secretary of the Pan-African Women Organization (PAWO) and a Vice President of WIDF (Women International Democratic Federation); she was also the sister of President Agostinho Neto (1922–1979), the first president of Angola (Editor's note).
4. The current abortion law does not expressly allow abortions to be performed even to save the life of the woman, but the general principles of criminal legislation allow abortions to be performed for this reason on the ground of necessity (www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/angol1.doc, accessed 28 December 2009, Editor's note) .

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# Strategies for Change: Women and Politics in Eritrea and South Africa

*Dan Connell*

One of the first postwar surprises in Eritrea probably shouldn't have surprised anyone. Shortly after the shooting stopped in May 1991, men in many villages and towns formed secret committees to try to block women from participating in peacetime distributions of land.

"The men were rushing to divide the good land for housing and for agriculture before we established our rights," Askalu Menkarios told me one afternoon three years later over a hurried lunch in Asmara, the Eritrean capital. Askalu[1] headed the 200,000 member National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), which in 1994 was shifting its focus from mobilizing women to support the liberation struggle to educating and training them to participate in the postwar economy. By then, Eritrean women were also confronting the need for a rearguard defense of gains they had won during the thirty-year fight for independence from Ethiopia.

Women played a central role in the war, making up almost a third of the 95,000 strong Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and some 13 percent of the frontline fighters.[2] But they were not alone in their new conundrum. Reaction to radical social change commonly surfaces after victorious national liberation struggles, and by now the particular backsliding that takes place on women's issues has been widely recognized. Nonetheless, it seemed to take the Eritreans off guard. And the increased demands of peacetime domestic life added yet another dimension to the profound transition underway for the former women guerrilla fighters, constituting the "double shift."

We sat in Askalu's two-story, garden-style apartment in the compound known as Radio Marina, a former military installation built by the United States in the 1940s, where many EPLF members now live with their families. Melley, one of Askalu's two daughters, was recovering from flu that had kept her home from school the previous two days. Her sister Winta burst in shortly after I arrived to join us on her school lunch-hour. Moments later, Askalu's husband, Senay, then the head of training at the Ministry of Health, popped in to say hello and pick up something he'd forgotten earlier that morning. In what seemed like seconds, he raced out, late for something. The phone rang repeatedly.

Askalu and I traded snatches of conversation between interruptions. A tape recorder sat in the middle of the dining room table, wedged between bowls of *tsebhe dorho* and salad, like a postmodern centerpiece. This was Eritrea in the 1990s: a hodgepodge of unconsolidated revolutionary reforms, remarkably resilient traditions, and intense pressures emerging in daily life. The appearance of the secret men's committees was one of many instances of regressive forces re-emerging to challenge the social content of the revolution, but not the only one, at a time when new challenges and demands were appearing by the day.[3]

Leading women activists found themselves drawn into a steadily growing number of important but time-consuming political projects. These included writing a new constitution, revising the civil code, developing new legislation, restructuring the civil service, demobilizing former guerrilla fighters, forwarding recommendations for economic development, and drafting a host of other new policy initiatives. However urgent these tasks were, they represented a sharp break with the grassroots-level work to change gender relations with which they had been engaged throughout the war years, alongside (and often as a part of) an effort to draw women into activities that directly supported the independence struggle. But the larger problem they faced was the growing authoritarianism of the post-independence state and the constraints placed on women's autonomous organizing by the former liberation movement once it was in power.

Women veterans of South Africa's long anti-apartheid struggle faced a similar problem once the transition to democratic rule got underway in 1990. But their situation was complicated by the fact that the African National Congress (ANC) did not secure an unqualified victory—only a compromise that in 1991 took them out of the streets and into a political arena already defined and structured by their enemies. One unintended and unforeseen result was that the country's first non-racial elections in April 1994 siphoned off the best and the brightest from the liberation movement, including the most skilled and experienced women organizers, to carry on the struggle for democracy within the state apparatus.

Inevitably, this happened at the expense of the dynamic popular organizations that had helped bring the ANC to power in the first place. Some began to atrophy, others collapsed. Thus, in both Eritrea and South Africa, women found themselves battling for their social, economic, and political rights on new and decidedly unfamiliar terrain.

The transition from resistance to governance has not been easy for any of the armed political movements that have come to power in the former European colonies since World War II. And it has only become knottier since the end of the Cold War. Most national liberation movements moved to demobilize women once short-term political goals were achieved. Or, in the name of maintaining (male) unity, they postponed attention to women's demands in instances where national objectives remained unmet or new forms of counter-revolution surfaced. The postwar situations in Eritrea and South Africa however, presented a different challenge to women because the victorious political parties, acting through the state, continued to champion women's rights, even as they discouraged autonomous women's organizing.

## Gender Reform in Postwar Eritrea

The decades long independence war in Eritrea left the new country in ruins. At the close of the fighting, water and sewage systems in the towns barely functioned. The few asphalt roads had been torn up; port facilities were badly damaged; the rail system was entirely dismantled, its iron rails used to make bunkers; and the entire country had a generating capacity of only 22 megawatts, barely enough to keep the lights burning in the major towns.

In a society where close to 80 percent of the population lived through agrarian-related activities, women were uniformly denied the right to own or inherit land. In both Christian and Muslim communities, girls were routinely married at puberty under contracts arranged at birth. A bride might be as young as nine or ten, although she continued to live at home until menstruation commenced. Genital cutting, known euphemistically as "female circumcision," was widely carried out, as clitoridectomies in the mostly Christian highlands and often in more radical forms in the Muslim lowlands. Here the clitoris was removed, the inner and outer labia sliced away, and the remaining skin sewn together in a practice known as infibulation. Girls frequently contracted vaginal infections during and after these crude operations, and death in childbirth was extremely common, due to the chronic malnutrition and anemia that afflicted women, traditionally the last in the household to eat. At the end of the protracted conflict,

Eritrean women had a life expectancy of barely forty years. However, early in the postwar transition, programs targeting their second-class economic, social, and political status, originally developed and tested in the liberated zones, were codified and extended to the rest of the country. These programs formed the starting point for postwar gender reform and for the anti-feminist backlash.

After the clandestine postwar men's mobilization aimed at blocking women from gaining land was discovered in 1992, protesting women marched on the president's office to demand action. Several of the men spearheading the drive were jailed, but the incident highlighted the pressing need to reform Eritrea's complex land tenure system. In August 1994 a government-sponsored Land Commission recommended a form of nationalization that allocated use-rights to all Eritreans, women and men alike. Long-term leases were to be made available for commercial purposes, and individual land users were to be able to recoup or leave to their heirs improvements made to the land.

The other major initiative affecting women, announced in 1991 but not fully implemented until later, was a national service campaign. This required all women and men over eighteen to undergo six months of military training before spending a year on reconstruction projects. It was intended to compensate for Eritrea's lack of capital and to reduce dependence on foreign aid, while welding together the diverse society (half Christian and half Muslim, from nine distinct ethnic groups). It would also place women and men in a condition of relative gender equality for eighteen months, much as service in the liberation front had done. The importance of this social-engineering project was underlined when it was written into the new constitution, ratified in May 1997, as a fundamental obligation of citizenship, though the document and the rights embedded in it have yet to be implemented.

Meanwhile, the incident with the underground men's committees put women on notice that the dramatic gains they had made during the liberation struggle were far from safe. That message was reinforced by sharp rises in child marriage and other formerly banned practices, such as humiliating "virginity testing" for prospective brides, and by a sharp rise in the divorce rate among former fighters. Many men, often under strong pressure from their families, jettisoned their wartime wives in favor of traditional brides from their home villages.

These phenomena made it clear that measures such as the land reform, the national service, the enforcement of laws against sex discrimination by a woman attorney general, the appointment of a near majority of women to the fifty-member Constitution Commission, and the reservation of 30 percent of the seats for women in newly elected People's Assemblies,

would be insufficient to counter the efforts to roll back women's gains arising from within the deeply conservative society. In postwar Eritrea, custom remained more important than law, and the most powerful institution was not the government, democratic or not, but the family. Under these circumstances, slippage was inevitable. The question was what would the political movement, acting through the state, the party, and the various sectoral movements, do to stem it.

"From what we saw, it is clear that we have to campaign again to maintain the changes we've achieved," Askalu told me in 1994. This effort would require strong organization of women at the village level, as well as continuing advocacy at the national level, and a sustained campaign of public education that reached into all Eritrea's patriarchal institutions, old ones and new ones, including (and especially) the family. Unfortunately, the NUEW's insistence to maintain unchallenged hegemony over all work on women's issues, coupled with the centralist habits of the liberation movement, undercut efforts to expand and diversify this effort. As a consequence, many women who could play key roles in such work have walked away from it rather than sow disharmony in the political movement.

## The Eritrean Women's Movement

The NUEW, with 200,000 members in 2004, was the largest of three sectoral associations (along with those of workers and youth) that were spun off from the liberation movement, and throughout the post-independence war years it was the only legal institutional vehicle for women's interests. Founded in 1979 by the EPLF, the NUEW retained strong links with the liberation movement (renamed the People's Front for Democracy and Justice [PFDJ] in 1994), which controlled both the program and the composition of the NUEW's leadership. The union managed skills training, literacy, and self-improvement programs, as well as rural credit schemes and other development projects, and it routinely monitored and advised other bodies on legislation, trade union contracts, and policies that affect women. Each of these projects was accompanied by consciousness raising seminars.

With its emphasis on service provision and project management, the women's union was the least adversarial of the three former mass organizations, rarely challenging the state or the PFDJ in public. Its recommendations, for instance, to the Constitution Commission in 1995 were not even published in the NUEW's newsletter. That was in order to avoid controversy over its calls for recognizing the right of women to equality in the family and for the elimination of what were termed "harmful traditions."

Whatever its failings, the union had a positive effect on the lives of tens of thousands of women and helped give them access to areas of the country's economic, social, and political life hitherto denied them.

However, the EPLF/PFDJ did not tolerate rival non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and it discouraged program initiatives outside the union's mandate as defined by it in secret meetings (from which nearly all union leaders were excluded), so no women's organizing or advocacy developed within or outside the NUEW framework. The government's early hostility to independent civil society organizing intensified after the border war with Ethiopia in 1998–2000, which left tens of thousands dead, hundreds of thousands displaced, and the rest of the country on a more or less continuous war footing. Since then, the government has also shut down the country's private press, detained leading critics, and stifled policy-oriented public debate. Thus there were no public forums in 2004—in or out of government—where women could discuss, let alone contest, law or policy.

Despite these controls, the NUEW was successful in spearheading a number of early reforms to the inherited Ethiopia civil code, including:

- marriage contracts can be made only with the full consent of both parties;
- the eligible age for marriage was raised from fifteen to eighteen for women (matching that of men);
- both mothers and fathers were recognized as heads of the family;
- discrimination between men and women in divorce cases was prohibited (grounds for divorce are adultery, desertion for two years, venereal disease, and impotency);
- paid maternity leave was extended from forty-five to sixty days;
- abortion was made legal in cases where the mother's mental or physical health is threatened and in instances of rape or incest;
- the sentence for rape was extended to fifteen years.[4]

While the union's main programmatic focus was on services for poor rural and urban women at the behest of the ruling party, NUEW members meeting in workshops across the country in 1994 called for the banning of premarital virginity testing, circumcision, and infibulation; the inclusion of domestic violence as grounds for divorce; and the extension of the civil code to cover all citizens, including Muslims then falling under the jurisdiction of Islamic *Shar`ia* law. Professional women and former women guerrilla fighters also expressed a growing impatience over the lack of a forum to press their particular grievances at a time when many men, including former liberation fighters, were reasserting traditional male

prerogatives. The most urgent situation was that faced by demobilized women fighters, who were finding it difficult to return to home villages where they were considered unmarriageable due to their self assertiveness. Yet many chose not to join the NUEW, or joined it and then dropped out, because it lacked a focus on their needs and because it was not a campaign-oriented organization. As one former fighter put it to me, the NUEW was "an organization of women, not a women's movement."

"Women's concerns are so diverse that we need a wide variety of organizational forms—issue-oriented organizations, perhaps affiliated to the national union but autonomous," said one long-time EPLF member, critical of what she saw as too much centralism in the women's union. "We need to have lots of democracy," she added.

But though the country's leaders often expressed public support for independent organizing, every effort to establish independent women's organizations either failed or was blocked. One of the earliest attempts came when former women fighters moved in 1995 to establish the Eritrean Women War Veterans Association (BANA). Members pooled the payouts they were given upon leaving the front to set up a share company. Later, they also registered as an NGO that began to solicit and receive substantial foreign funds from European and North American sources. In one year, the membership grew to almost 1,000 women. They established a fish market, a bakery, training programs for commercial drivers and several other projects aimed at economic self-sufficiency. However, in the spring of 1996 the office was shut down after a row within the board of directors went public. There had always been questions about the project's form of registration under Eritrea's evolving legal system. But the combination of its rapid attraction of large-scale outside funds with its public exposure of internal problems appeared to do it in as an NGO, even though the share company was permitted to stay in business.

Another failed NGO experiment was provided by the Tesfa Association, formed by a group of ex-fighters in 1994 to address the lack of childcare facilities for working mothers. They established the Aghi Kindergarten and ran a series of public campaigns and fundraisers in Asmara, supported by top-level government officials, to underwrite the project. Soon, however, they began to attract substantial foreign funds, as they started to look at replicating their success with new projects. In 1996, shortly after BANA was stripped of its NGO status, Tesfa, too, was closed down, with its projects and resources turned over to the women's union. Afterward, there was talk about conflicts over the site of the childcare center, but the official explanation was that the project represented "unnecessary duplication" of work done by the NUEW, indicating that organizational rivalry was a significant part of the explanation. The effect was to discourage other such initiatives.

**Women's Rights in the "New South Africa"**

Nowhere in Africa do women have more clearly spelled out legal rights than in South Africa. The post-apartheid constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis not only of gender but also of sexual orientation. The ANC and its other partners in the Tripartite Alliance, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), each has a gender desk or department at the top of the organization, as well as at intermediate and lower levels, to monitor policies and programs on gender equity, as did most government bodies. And the post-apartheid Parliament, presided over by a woman speaker, boasted the seventh highest percentage of women in the world (up from 141st before the 1994 elections).

Yet, when I toured the country a year after the transfer of power, I found thousands of unemployed women, many of them single mothers, picking over rancid garbage for their single daily meal. They lived in crowded urban townships and burgeoning squatter camps little changed from when I saw them in the 1980s, except that they were bigger. Howling dust whipped through endless rows of makeshift tin-and-cardboard shanties, and open sewage spilled across the rutted dirt roads. The ramshackle settlements had the look of hastily constructed refugee camps, and hundreds of families were pouring into them each day from the economically depressed countryside. Worst of all, the vibrant grassroots women's organizations that sprang up in these communities during the fight against apartheid were defunct, and there was little sign of their imminent renewal. The very success of the liberation movement in gaining political power had had the effect of weakening it as a social movement and preoccupying it with other forms of struggle. For most women, the struggle for liberation had barely begun. It was also unclear how and by whom the struggle would now be waged.

Under South African law and according to the Zulu code (still in force in KwaZulu/Natal) married women had the legal status of minors and were under the authority of their husbands. Women comprised 36 percent of the national workforce, but most were stuck on the bottom rungs of the economy. Women made up 96 percent of the domestic workers who were paid an average of less than $150 per month, and many more functioned in the country's informal sector, falling outside most statistical analyses. Rural women were the worst off and least represented by political organizations. As a direct result of apartheid, among whose most devastating effects was the systematic destruction of African families, 70 percent of South African women lived in rural areas where they headed half the households (which is to say, men were absent). In 1994 only 53 percent of

rural people had access to a safe water supply in a country economically ranked in the middle range of nations, just behind Europe and ahead of all of sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to this, every 83 seconds a woman was raped, domestic violence was chronic, and women in most areas could not own or inherit property.[5]

During the 1980s, several strong and highly politicized women's organizations arose to address women's socio-economic needs, while at the same time mobilizing them to support the liberation struggle. Among the most effective were the Natal Organization of Women (NOW), the Federation of Transvaal Women, and two rival women's groups in the Western Cape—an area long marked by sectarian political struggles. The leaders of these and other legal women's groups were linked with underground members of the ANC and the SACP, but the organizations had a considerable degree of autonomy in their day-to-day activities, and they developed highly participatory methods of work. Their diverse undertakings ranged from literacy training, community choirs, and theater groups to backyard vegetable gardens, candle-making, and other income-generating projects. They also ran workshops on domestic and communal violence, developed rape crisis networks, and held educational seminars on racism. These activities were planned and developed at rambunctious community meetings where women discussed their needs and problems and were encouraged to decide among themselves what to do. As a result, there was little uniformity in program from one village or neighborhood to another. That complicated the work of the facilitating organization but it gave the projects a dynamism that powered a steady growth in the numbers of women members, many of whom were not affiliated with the underground.[6]

## The South African Women's Movement in Crisis

One of the tragedies of the post-apartheid era is that these extraordinary achievements so quickly dissipated with the ascension of the ANC to power. How this happened, and what to do about it, remains a subject of debate among South African women. By common consent, the independent women's organizations folded themselves into the ANC-sponsored Women's League when the party was unbanned in 1990, perceiving themselves as stand-ins for what one political commentator has called the "A team" of the liberation movement.[7] NOW, the strongest and most highly developed of the women's organizations, dissolved itself in September shortly before the official launch of the long-exiled Women's League. "We thought we were the internal wing of the ANC and would just collapse into it," one former NOW leader told me later. "This was naive, but

we thought we would be betraying the ANC if we stayed independent."[8] Soon after this, the Women's League dropped many of the innovative self-help programs developed by NOW and the other women's organizations in favor of narrowly drawn political tasks, starting with support for ANC negotiations with the white regime, then mobilization for the 1994 national elections, and later preparations for local elections.

"With hindsight, this was a mistake because those organizations had built up a particular tradition of organizing, a very strong working class perspective, and a real community involvement, and this wasn't transferred to the Women's League," said Jenny Schreiner, an SACP organizer who remained inside South Africa throughout the anti-apartheid struggle and who was active in the United Women's Organization in the Western Cape. Schreiner was one of four women and twenty-six men elected to the party central committee in 1991, after her release from prison. She won a seat in Parliament in the 1994 elections on the ANC ticket. "The demands of the negotiating period focused the leadership on the negotiating process and the lobbying and the policy formation. We weren't sharp enough to realize that you need to divide your forces and have a contingent of people to concentrate on that work, which was fundamentally important, and another contingent of people focusing on organizing."[9]

The party's 8th congress in December 1991—the first open congress in three decades—debated whether to establish a women's section, but decided instead to set up a gender department within the party that would monitor its political education and its policies and programs to ensure that gender issues were integrated into all the party's work. This left the ANC Women's League to function as the sole alliance vehicle to mobilize women as women. "Our commitment was to build the Women's League," said Schreiner. This debate was repeated, with the same outcome, at the party's second post-apartheid congress in April 1995. "The issue was one of not wanting to confront the League," said Nosizwe Mdlala, a veteran of NOW, an influential woman in the SACP and, after the 1994 elections, an ANC member of Parliament.[10]

Thenjiwe Mthintso, also an SACP leader and an ANC Member of Parliament, as well as a member of the ANC's National Executive Council in the 1990s, spent much of the apartheid era outside the country. She accepted the decision to fold the apartheid-era women's organizations into the Women's League as the correct one at the time, but she argued that the transition could have been better managed:

> When we came into the country, in one way we demobilized these women who had been active in their own right because we had this focus, a serious focus, on rebuilding the ANC, a proud ANC, a strong ANC.... The ANC

> Women's League had to find itself a role, and it identified it as mobilizing for the ANC, but it lost out on organizing women around issues that were affecting women. It lost those women who were doing that part of the work, the women who were keen on issues affecting women—violence against women, family violence, rape, and so on. It was preoccupied with the "political" issues, failing to recognize that rape is a political issue, violence is a political issue, family violence is a political issue.[11]

The sidelining of women in the negotiating process to end apartheid was a key factor in motivating women to organize the Women's National Coalition in 1992. Their aim was to draft a charter of women's rights that would be incorporated into the documents and legal structures then being crafted to define post-apartheid South Africa.[12] At its height the WNC brought together dozens of women's organizations from nearly all the country's political parties, as well as from the trade unions and a wide range of NGOs and voluntary associations, in a dynamic and highly participatory process. It produced a document, adopted at a conference in February 1994, that had a far-reaching impact on the constitution and on party programs and, in the case of the ANC, the composition and structure of the slate of candidates for the national elections in April. But once the charter was completed, turf battles nearly destroyed the coalition, according to Thandi Sigodi, who was elected its president in July 1995: "The ANC Women's League wanted to shut it down after the charter because they were suspicious that other parties would use it to gain access to rural constituencies in the elections." When it could not control the coalition, the Women's League dropped out. Without it, and without a clear mandate, or the financing to maintain its national network, provided earlier by foreign donors, the WNC floundered. With its effective demise and with the Women's League subordinated to the political imperatives of the ANC, its leadership decimated by political infighting (eleven of the twenty-five members of the Women's League's National Executive Committee resigned in 1995 to protest Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's alleged misuse of resources and her despotic leadership style), the South African women's movement lay in tatters.

## Engendering the Political Movement

The post-apartheid decline of the South African women's movement was all the more ironic because it coincided with a decision by the SACP to elevate the fight against gender oppression to a strategic objective, side-by-side with class struggle, for the first time in its history. A strategy paper adopted at the April 1995 congress asserted that "there can be no

consolidation of democracy, still less an effective advance to socialism, unless we also, simultaneously, overcome patriarchy and actively transform gender relations." It remained to be seen how this commitment would be implemented at ground level, but the efforts within the party to give it this importance provided a unique insight into the challenges that women faced in reorienting a national political movement to grasp gender as more than an add-on to its other programs. Jenny Schreiner described her experiences with gender issues in party leadership to me in Cape Town, where she served in Parliament:

> I go in there terrified out of my wits. I'm now with all the heavies, and I go in there thinking: well, I can sit quietly for three years and learn. It's about all I think I can achieve on the Central Committee.
>
> What surprises me is the extent to which we produce discussion documents which are gender-silent. And these are being produced by the party boffins! Yet they are silent on gender. And these are people who are extremely well-advanced theoretically—very developed intellectually. So we start staying, "Pssst! You left out women."
>
> Gradually, as your hand goes up, people know that you're going to say, "Women!" So then you say to yourself: I'm not going to say it. But if you don't say it, it doesn't get said, so you start trying to ensure that you've spoken about the State first, and you tag on gender at the end of a sentence.
>
> One goes through those difficulties of becoming branded as: "Hey, women! Hey, women!" And then saying: No, I'm not going to speak about women. I'm going to try to speak about other things. You develop the concept that people are going to listen to you, and then they may listen to what you have to say about women, as well.
>
> We got to a stage where the people who were doing the paper-presenting—who, needless to say, were men—would include something about women, but it would be a sub-heading for women, a paragraph for women. It was not gender being integrated into the analysis. We then got to the stage, from working in the Gender Department [of the party] and feeling a bit more secure in C.C. meetings, of producing a gender critique of any paper that was being presented.
>
> In the discussion, we tried to start from page one and say: "In your opening analysis of the South African situation you've spoken about capital, and you've spoken about racism—class and race are there, capitalism and racism are there—gender relations aren't there, patriarchy is not there. Anybody would think that, (a), women didn't exist, and, (b), there was no patriarchy in this country. And the interconnection between the three, the extent to which the classes you're talking about have gender tensions within them, the racial groups you're talking about have gender tensions within them, don't feature.
>
> We'd go systematically through the paper, draw out the implications of excluding gender, and get to the end, saying: "Therefore, the concluding

> things you're saying about the party are flawed because..." And then we'd try to unpack a strategy that is gender-sensitive, that includes gender transformation and women as part of party leadership.
>
> When we got to that stage, we got responses from the male comrades who had been writing the papers, saying: "Shit! I now begin to understand what you're talking about! I now begin to understand why you're saying we should include gender." Prior to that, they just included "race, class, and gender" in whatever they wrote. So long as you say that somewhere, put it in somewhere, that's it, it's all right.
>
> And then you sit back and look at Jeremy Cronin, Blade Nsimande, Raymond Suttner, Charles Nqakula [who make up the party's top leadership], and you think, how come they didn't understand the importance of what we've been saying for two and a half years? And you realize that there's a whole Marxist-feminist, socialist-feminist debate that takes place in gender journals. It gets circulated among gender activists, but the material that we use for our training and political education within party ranks is gender-silent. We haven't managed to take the Marxist-feminist, socialist-feminist debates out of the Gender Department and put them squarely on the [party] agenda.
>
> It's taken us a very long time, but we're now at a point where we can actually say to the drafting committee for the [9th Party] congress coming up in April: "Ensure that those papers are gender-sensitive." Then a paper gets sent to you, and you say: "Please critique this on a gender basis." And you send it back again, and the person actually sits down and does that work. You end up with a paper that's discussing the role of the party that from the beginning of the analysis of the present situation right through to what we should be doing is raising the issues of gender, patriarchy, women's emancipation.[13]

The opposite was true within the ANC, where gender issues tended to be ghettoized in the Women's League, which lacked either an analysis of patriarchy and its relationship to national and class issues or a clear and compelling program for tackling gender inequality in the society as a whole. In lieu of this, it focused on service provision at the community level and affirmative action for individual women, apart from its efforts to build the ANC. "Part of the problem of the ANC Women's League is the lack of understanding of gender as a social construct," said Mthintso, who accused League leaders of using the organization to advance their own careers. "If you looked at the people who were crying for so many women for certain positions, they knew that if you've got to increase the number of women, they would not be left out. It was an affirmative action that did not empower women on the ground, but selected the ones who were already up there."

Reconstructing a grassroots women's movement in South Africa provides a difficult challenge, since any attempt to start a new national

organization—or to restart any of the old ones—is certain to be seen as a provocation by the ANC Women's League. However, without a grassroots movement, it will be impossible to translate the impressive gains for women at the legal level into a living reality in the communities, especially in rural areas where a major struggle with the socially conservative traditional leaders quickly got under way.

Meanwhile, a problem the liberation movement had and still has—like many male-led left parties and movements—was far too many meetings. This arose in part from the overlap in focus and function among the various ANC allied social and political organizations, but it also came out of a political culture developed during the anti-apartheid struggle that was difficult to sustain. As one activist put it, "We equate meetings with democracy." It was not uncommon to find the most engaged organizers attending two and three meetings each day, including plant-based shop steward meetings, COSATU meetings, ANC branch meetings, SACP branch meetings, civic meetings, executive committee meetings, and others, often discussing the same issues hour after hour, simply switching hats to do so. This held dangerous potential for fostering exclusivity in the political leadership, especially as it affected women, who remained saddled with the main responsibility for home and family; as with the former women fighters in Eritrea, they were working a "double shift," often without the benefit of a supportive male partner.

If the formal commitment to women's emancipation was to have substance, the issue of competing demands on women's time needed attention. One woman, for instance, on the SACP Central Committee, was pointedly discouraged from running for re-election in 1995 because she was forced to miss many CC meetings due to other commitments, even though in each instance her reasons were deemed acceptable. Her experience was not untypical. An entire branch of the ANC Women's League in Johannesburg ended the year before because its members were being pulled in too many directions by competing organizational demands.[14]

"Almost all of us live double standards," said Mthintso.

When it comes to relations in the house, you'll find that there's no equality. My last partner was a very good theoretician and a communist to the core. He lived and breathed his Marxism but when we got home from a Central Committee meeting, he rushed for the TV and the paper, and I rushed for the kitchen. I led this double standard for a long time. It's a small thing, but it perpetuates the problem. My current partner, John Gonomo, says to me, "Don't cook if you don't want to, but I can't learn to cook at 49. I'm the president of COSATU and there's so much on my shoulders, please don't ask me to cook." He doesn't see a contradiction between standing up at a meeting and saying "Equality!" and then coming home and saying,

"I'm not going to cook, let's go and buy food from outside," when he knows we can't afford that.

Despite this trend, there were notable exceptions to the drift away from grassroots mobilizing in the 1990s that held promise for the future. One of these was the Self-Employed Women's Union. Started in the Durban area by long-time ANC activist Pat Horn, it was not sponsored by the liberation organization. A decade later, a number of dynamic issue-oriented new social movements in which women played prominent roles began challenging the state on its performance from outside the ANC. These ranged from activists on HIV/AIDS organized under the umbrella of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) to community-based initiatives like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and the Durban-based Abahlali baseMjondolo.[15]

If a popular women's movement is to resurface, it will do so out of organizations like these, developed around specific needs not being met by the state or adequately addressed by the ANC. Such issue-based groups are already organizing campaigns and alliances around common objectives and building coalitions with other groups with grassroots constituencies while leaving out the political parties and the women's groups they sponsor except as individuals. If the ANC Women's League continues to fail to respond effectively here, as it has so far, it will leave a vacuum that other organizations will continue to fill and, in the process, that will define the character and direction of a re-emergent women's movement.

## Sustained Change Needs Pressure from Below

The experience of women in Eritrea and South Africa is dramatically different. Yet there are common threads. In both, the political parties have clear positions on gender relations, and the state has taken the lead in law and policy, while grassroots struggles were left to weakened women's organizations that were not disposed toward public advocacy outside party frameworks. The Eritrean women's union, which is overcentralized, overextended, and too much under the thumb of the ruling party, nonetheless provides a potential base for the confrontations women are waging at the local level with traditional power, and it also functions as a muted lobby with government and within the party. So, too, does the ANC Women's League, which retains the respect if not the participation of many women for its role in the anti-apartheid struggle, though this is quickly fading in the face of its failure to produce results. In South Africa, where the power of the chiefs has not yet been dealt with, women's main strength has until recently

lay not with a mass organization but inside the government, which, like the parties that control it, has a gender commission at nearly every administrative level, and within the two interlocking national political parties—the ANC and the SACP. A key test for South African women lies with whether these parties are able (and willing) to challenge the power of the chiefs and tackle traditions that continue to hold women in virtual bondage.

In both Eritrea and South Africa, women made gains inside their liberation movements, but South African women have moved further to establish their own independent voices since then, albeit at the expense of the popular movement. There is an informal women's caucus within the ANC that includes many women not also in the SACP. The SACP, for its part, has no formal caucuses and no mass organization of women distinct from the ANC Women's League, but it does have (and tacitly supports) considerable informal networking among activist women in the leadership and substantial public debate over these issues. In Eritrea, the PFDJ, like the EPLF before it, does not permit organized caucuses or encourage public criticism of its policies. And there is no counterpart to the core of women in the SACP who have risen to the top leadership and now, as a group, directly influence the way the men in the leadership think about gender. Though a number of women hold prominent positions and have individual influence within the state, the overarching changes there are not woman-led. Eritrean women lack the organized representation in the inner circles that women in the SACP have. In both cases, however, women lack the external base of a genuinely autonomous and activist women's movement to push the state (or their own parties) from the outside. Ultimately, there is no stability for women in this, no guarantee that a sudden crisis will not result in the ongoing and far-from-complete struggle for gender equity being put on hold, even if not actually set back in the name of competing national priorities.

Nevertheless, what these countries have in common are dynamic processes of change that are drawing more and more women into direct participation in the economic and political life of their societies. As a second generation of women leaders emerges at the community level to tackle the massive social and economic problems there, a better balance between activism within the state and in the community may be restored. The danger is that current political leaders will rely over much upon quantitative changes in the society, increasing rates of female literacy, access of women to jobs and so on, to translate automatically or easily into the evolutionary dismantling of unequal gender relations, a qualitative outcome that experience elsewhere does not support. Such developments may set the stage for social change, but in the end organized and sustained pressure is needed

to consolidate and defend it, as the postwar experience of women in both societies already demonstrates.

Meanwhile, with the continuing mobilization of women into more active public roles, driven in part by the openings mandated in the political sphere by the liberation movements, come new demands on the parties. These are not only for programmatic change but for organizational change, not only for more women in positions of leadership, but for different ways of training and selecting leaders and for making decisions. In this respect, women are emerging as a force for increased democracy within their political movements, as well as in their societies. The questions women are raising about their own rights and socially constructed identities and roles inevitably have wider implications for the prospects for social change. Whether these women are outside, inside, or working alongside political parties, they will have a growing impact on the political arena. They will propel the national discourse and the party agendas in a feminist direction, while at the same time contesting the relationship between what are often narrowly defined as political issues and those typed as social.

Predictably, this emergent women's power and influence meet resistance. The most common refrain from those who oppose gender transformation used to be: "We can't do it now because this would weaken the national movement." What one hears now, in Eritrea and South Africa as elsewhere, is that the particular culture in question is uniquely resistant to changes in gender relations and for that reason the political movement must go slow on women's issues. There is some truth to this, insofar as it testifies to how deeply entrenched male domination is, but it is hardly unique to any one culture.

In fact, it is precisely these ubiquitous cultural hurdles that make independent political organizing both vital and viable for women across the third world. As the Eritreans and South Africans are seeing, a government or party that is still overwhelmingly male at top levels cannot exercise sustained leadership on gender transformation without organized women interpreting the reality in which they live, articulating strategies for change, and, at key junctures, pushing for action as well as understanding. Without strong popular organizations of women, all the principled positions and official policies in the world, however well-conceived, are not enough to guarantee follow through on the ground in patriarchal societies rooted in gender inequality. These national political movements, still led by men, are struggling with varying degrees of openness and creativity to cope with the increased strength and presence of women. The future of the development project with which each is now engaged is likely to turn on how they respond, not only to this as a challenge, but to the opportunity it offers to bring in fresh vigor, vision and leadership.

## Notes

1. By custom, most Eritreans use their first name as a formal self-designation, as no surname is inherited. Their second name is their father's first name, the third name their grandfather's first name, and so on.
2. These statistics were provided by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice in August 1996.
3. This section draws heavily on the Afterword to my book, Connell 1997.
4. These points, together with the issues raised at the 1994 NUEW workshops referred to below, were described in a NUEW report, excerpted in *Eritrea Profile,* 20 August 1994.
5. The information in this section is drawn mainly from a statistical summary compiled by the Women's National Coalition in 1994 and from an unpublished paper by Kompe and Small, provided to the author in January 1996 by the Transvaal Rural Action Committee.
6. Interview with former NOW leaders in Durban on 21 February 1995.
7. The decision to fold the women's organizations into the Women's League was taken by leaders of these organizations at a conference with ANC representatives convened in Amsterdam in 1989 and dubbed *Malibongo,* shortly before the official unbanning.
8. Interview with the author, Durban, 21 February 1995.
9. Interview with the author, Cape Town, 10 March 1995.
10. Interview with the author, Cape Town, 21 January 1996.
11. Interview with the author, Cape Town, 17 January 1996.
12. The drafting of manifestos, called charters in South Africa, has long been a feature of the ANC-led liberation movement, whose best-known effort was the Freedom Charter, ratified by a Congress of the People on 26 June 1955 that brought together the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress and the (white) Congress of Democrats. ANC women had earlier (in 1954) drafted a Women's Charter. See Walker 1991.
13. Interview with the author, Cape Town, 18 March 1995.
14. This account was provided by Shamim Meer, one of the branch's organizers and a founder and former editor of *Speak* magazine, which also shut down then.
15. The *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (Shack Dwellers) Movement began in Durban, South Africa, in early 2005 (Editor's note).

11

# The Nigerian Feminist Movement: Lessons from Women in Nigeria (WIN)

*Bene E. Madunagu*

In Nigeria, as in other countries, there is, as there always has been, a women's movement or more correctly women's movements. These existed before, during, and after colonialism. Many of them probably do not fit the conventional definition of a movement. Various forms of interest groups see themselves as movements. Although all of them serve interests that attempt to address inequalities between women and men in society, and although this is an acceptable criterion for minimizing disagreements in the characterization of women-based organizations, I admit that there are still substantial differences in the forms of movements that call themselves women's movements. Some movements may not have clear objectives, missions, or visions and exist as ad hoc bodies, useful when the need arises but with little or no coordination, continuity, or sustainability. Some may be limited to specific local struggles.

In Nigeria, the oldest and largest women's movement is the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) founded in 1958. Basu's (1995) definition clearly suits the NCWS: "The Nigerian women's movement is an unarmed movement. It is non-confrontational. It is a movement for the progressive upliftment of women for motherhood, nationhood, and development." This movement is at home with the protection of our culture and tradition as well as with the supremacy of men. It will not rock the boat. Essentially it accepts what the tradition has been and what religion sanctions.

There are sectors of the women's movement that are more radical than the status quo and that would raise the struggle to a higher level but are

still afraid of what the men would say or do. There are gender activists who would rather not be associated with feminism, publicly or privately. And there are women activists in the larger women's movement who call themselves feminists when they are in the midst of feminists but will quickly condemn "those crazy people," a reference to those who publicly admit and declare that they are feminists. There are yet others who are "feminists, but." These are women who want to be seen truly as feminists, but become uncomfortable with discussions on such questions as the totality of who a feminist is and the extent of feminism in terms of core values, principles, and praxis. They are satisfied with declaration and participation in meetings and conferences where the term feminism gets mentioned, but are generally silent when issues of sexual rights are discussed. For them, feminism has limits. They are, for instance, totally homophobic.

## Feminism in Nigeria

There is no denying the fact that some forms of feminist struggles existed in Nigeria before what was clearly acclaimed and identified openly as a feminist movement; however, they were largely undocumented (Mohammed and Madunagu 1986). I make bold to state that feminism in Nigeria in its present form—consistent, organized, with clear objectives and ideology—came into being with the inauguration, in 1983, of the organization Women in Nigeria (WIN) (Women in Nigeria Editorial Committee 1985). The organization came into being a year after the 1982 national conference on the theme Women in Nigeria. The organization was a direct outcome of the conference. WIN was envisioned as a feminist movement and named as such.

In its first ten years of existence, WIN facilitated the development of many of the self-identified feminists in Nigeria today. WIN started off with a clearly stated rights-based approach to issues about women in Nigeria and was very clear on the issues of gender and social justice. However, WIN's open policy of "come one—come all," where anyone, male or female, was accepted so long as such a person accepted the provisions of WIN's constitution, carried the danger of WIN including persons who have contempt for feminism but come into WIN with their own agenda. There was no punishment for anyone who played no active role so long as such a person showed up once in a while at meetings. Despite the inherent weaknesses in the nature of membership criteria for WIN, one must always pay tribute to WIN as training ground for the emergence of organized feminist struggles in Nigeria. WIN's open policy of membership led to the entry of many persons who had no clue about feminism and gender justice and its core

values and principles. Many enthusiastic members equated feminist struggles to abstract class struggle, with total disdain for gender issues. Internal conflicts generated by ignorance and opportunism as well as male chauvinistic understanding of social struggles as not including gender equality and equity as key components of social justice became a cankerworm that progressively weakened WIN as a movement for social transformation, which was a core focus of feminist struggles.

## The Uniqueness and Contribution of WIN to the Nigerian Feminist Movement

From the onset, WIN engaged in research, policy advocacy, and activism aimed at transforming the conditions under which women and other underprivileged classes lived in Nigeria. WIN's further uniqueness was its consciousness of both class and gender in the struggle for the emancipation of women. WIN acknowledged that, although the majority of women like the majority of men, suffered from the exploitive and oppressive character of Nigerian society, women suffer additional forms of exploitation and oppression as women. Thus WIN recognized the double forms of exploitation and oppression of women as members of the subordinate class and as women. WIN set out to struggle against both class and gender oppression through promoting the study of conditions of women, disseminating the outcome for policy formulation, defending the rights of women, and taking actions to transform the conditions of women.

WIN started off with the strategy of research, analysis, and documentation of women's conditions in various situations in society. The outcome of this strategy provided much needed data for advocacy and mobilization of women to demand their rights. This strategy also led to the practice of holding annual conferences as a means of public education and the creation of awareness, using research data and gender analysis as convincing tools for demanding women's rights. We may also mention the adoption of a clear constitution that emerged from the involvement and participation of all members, the establishment of WIN as an institution with basic feminist principles and values, the emergence of well-defined organizational structures of leadership and representation at the national level and in state branches, and clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and obligations.

In its first ten years of existence, WIN never received subventions from the government and so was able to maintain its independence. It could therefore take action without compromising itself since, as the saying goes, "the person who pays the piper dictates the tune."

One of the strengths of WIN's strategies was documentation of research and analysis from a gender perspective. Each year a research theme was chosen by consensus and the outcome was published. The first major publication of WIN was *Women in Nigeria Today* (1985), which came out of the conference that gave birth to WIN. This foundational publication was followed by *Women in Politics* (1989), *Child Abuse* (1992), *The WIN Document* (1992), *Women and Education* (1992), *Breaking The Silence: Women Against Violence* (1993), and *Women in Nigeria* (1993). These publications became invaluable in the understanding of gender issues in Nigeria.

There is no way a collection of persons from different backgrounds, cultures, and different experiences could be in serious actions together without conflicts. This would be unnatural. However, WIN had an in-house policy of conflict resolution, and the principles on which the feminists worked helped in the process of constructive criticism, which was a healthy practice for movement building. WIN succeeded as a training ground for many Nigerian feminists who are still committed in many ways to feminist struggles.

## Beyond WIN

A lot has happened since the transformation of WIN from its initial focus and content to the present period when in almost every feminist gathering questions arise that raise doubts. The Nigerian feminist movement has a forum, Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF, http://nigerianfeministforum.org/), which is larger and more coherent than WIN. The NFF was launched in January 2008 after an incubation period that started with the launching of the African Feminist Forum (AFF, http://www.awdf.org) in Accra, Ghana, in 2006.

As a chapter of the African Feminist Forum, the Nigerian Feminist Forum is bound by the values and principles of the AFF. The NFF has effectively replaced WIN as the Nigerian feminist movement, and it has gone beyond the historical stage of isolated country movements to become part of the continental (Pan African) feminist movement. AFF documents clearly state the content, context, values, and principles of the present vibrant Nigerian feminist movement. Let me quickly point out that we in the NFF know that there are many self-identified Nigerian feminists within Nigeria and in the diaspora who are yet to be part of the NFF, which is still very young. Hence the NFF is not a closed club nor is it a "come one, come all" club. We have learned from the past. There are clear guidelines and conditions for becoming a part of the NFF. The secretariat of both the

AFF and the NFF are ever ready to furnish potentially interested feminists who wish to be members with information on how to join. The information is contained in the Charter of the Feminist Principles for African Feminists, which clearly states how African and Nigerian feminists alike define and identify themselves, the commitment to dismantling patriarchy in all its forms in Africa, our ethics as individual and institutional African and Nigerian feminists, and our understanding of feminist leadership. The full text of the Charter of the Feminist Principles, which is binding on all the country level feminist forums including the Nigerian Feminist Forum, is appended.

## From WIN to NFF

WIN's lessons and experiences for the NFF as a new formation include the need for the adoption of basic principles of organization and action. There is also the need to agree on responsibilities as well as structures for coordination and leadership to ensure organized actions and sustainability. The NFF is already practicing these principles with a central organizing committee that is supervised by a joint secretariat of two feminist organizations, both located in Lagos.

Two recent events tested the strength of the NFF. One was the rallying of Nigerian feminists and many other progressive sectors of Nigerian society to put an end to attempts by a private university to force virginity and HIV testing on Nigerian girls entering the institution. Another was the mobilization against one state's attempt to ban the use of condoms. Nigerian feminists along with various institutions caused the state to annul the policy, thereby putting an end to the matter. The most recent test had to do with a proposed federal bill, introduced by the female chairperson of the Nigerian Senate Committee for Women and Youths, to institutionalize a dress code for women. The NFF, together with several women organizations, put an end to the proposed bill through several press conferences and by applying the weight of Nigerian women's mobilization to fill the hall where public hearings on the bill took place. There are many other situations that show the resurgence and revitalization of feminist activism in Nigeria.

We celebrate these victories. It is gratifying that this can happen in present primitive, neocolonial Nigeria (and Africa), where laws are imposed by the imperialist "International Community"; our leaders have kept us in the backyard of that global community to serve as the dustbin or refuse dump for what does not work or what is dangerous to the community of the G8 countries. Our leaders are prepared to sign imperialist conditionalities

drafted by the ailing IMF and the World Bank. These conditionalities for unequal trade agreements and perpetual indebtedness of the developing or retrogressing world where we are located, create and deepen poverty with women bearing the greatest burden imposed by culture and tradition and reinforced by the new forms of imperialist-driven religious evangelism. To worsen this already bad situation from present-day globalization policies of recolonization of Africa (in particular, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Zimbabwe, etc.), the United States and the rest of the West have come with poverty alleviation strategies and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to divert our attention from the cruel poverty imposed by their policies and the excruciating challenges women in particular face from the new importation of imperialist-style democracy. Hence, if in spite of these burdens, feminists, the larger women's movement, and our allies have been able to challenge effectively these offshoots of imperialist-directed democracy in our country, we have cause to celebrate—with our eyes open, of course, to see when they try other gimmicks.

This is the present state of the Nigerian feminist movement and its relationship with the larger Nigerian feminist movement, an offshoot of the Pan-African feminist movement (AFF).

I FORESEE A SUSTAINED, ACTIVE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA THAT WILL PLAY A STRONG ROLE IN THE AFRICAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND IN THE GLOBAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT AS A FORCE TO BE RECOGNIZED AND RESPECTED. THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES!!!

## Appendix

### Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists

The African Feminist Forum took place from 15to19 November 2006 in Accra, Ghana. The meeting brought together over 100 feminist activists from all over the region and the Diaspora. The space was crafted as an autonomous space in which African feminists from all walks of life, at different levels of engagement within the feminist movement such as mobilizing at local levels for women's empowerment to academia, could reflect on a collective basis and chart ways to strengthen and grow the feminist movement on the continent.

A key outcome of the forum was the adoption of the Charter of Feminist Principles, which was agreed by the regional working group for the forum, to be one of its principal aims. It was felt that we needed something to

help us define and affirm our commitment to feminist principles, which will guide our analysis and practice. As such the charter sets out the collective values that we hold as key to our work and to our lives as African feminists. It charts the change we wish to see in our communities, and also how this change is to be achieved. In addition it spells out our individual and collective responsibilities to the movement and to one another within the movement.

With this charter, we reaffirm our commitment to dismantling patriarchy in all its manifestations in Africa. We remind ourselves of our duty to defend and respect the rights of all women, without qualification. We commit to protecting the legacy of our feminist ancestors who made numerous sacrifices, in order that we can exercise greater autonomy.

## Preamble

### *Naming Ourselves as Feminists*

We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminists we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women—we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "Ifs," "Buts," or "Howevers." We are feminists. Full stop.

### *Our Understanding of Feminism and Patriarchy*

As African feminists our understanding of feminism places patriarchal social relations structures and systems, which are embedded in other oppressive and exploitative structures, at the center of our analysis. Patriarchy is a system of male authority that legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal cultural, religious, and military institutions. Men's access to, and control over, resources and rewards within the private and public spheres derives its legitimacy from the patriarchal ideology of male dominance. Patriarchy varies in time and space, meaning that it changes over time, and varies according to class, race, ethnic,

religious, and global-imperial relationships and structures. Furthermore, in the current conjunctures, patriarchy does not simply change according to these factors, but is inter-related with and informs relationships of class, race, ethnic, religious, and global imperialism. Thus to challenge patriarchy effectively also requires challenging other systems of oppression and exploitation, which frequently mutually support each other.

Our understanding of patriarchy is crucial because it provides for us as feminists, a framework within which to express the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations that affect African women. Patriarchal ideology enables and legitimizes the structuring of every aspect of our lives by establishing the framework within which society defines and views men and women and constructs male supremacy. Our ideological task as feminists is to understand this system and our political task is to end it. Our focus is fighting against patriarchy as a system rather than fighting individual men or women. Therefore, as feminists, we define our work as investing individual and institutional energies in the struggle against all forms of patriarchal oppression and exploitation.

### *Our Identity as African Feminists*

As feminists who come from/work/live in Africa, we claim the right and the space to be feminist and African. We recognize that we do not have a homogenous identity as feminists—we acknowledge and celebrate our diversities and our shared commitment to a transformatory agenda for African societies and African women in particular. This is what gives us our common feminist identity.

Our current struggles as African feminists are inextricably linked to our past as a continent—diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization, etc. Modern African states were built off the backs of African feminists who fought alongside men for the liberation of the continent. As we craft new African states in this new millennium, we also craft new identities for African women, identities as full citizens, free from patriarchal oppression, with rights of access, ownership and control over resources and our own bodies, and utilizing positive aspects of our cultures in liberating and nurturing ways. We also recognize that our pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial histories and herstories require special measures to be taken in favor of particular African women in different contexts.

We acknowledge the historical and significant gains that have been made by the African women's movement over the past forty years, and we make bold to lay claim to these gains as African feminists—they happened because

African feminists led the way, from the grassroots level and up; they strategized, organized, networked, went on strike, marched in protest, and did the research, analysis, lobbying, institution building, and all that it took for states, employers, and institutions to acknowledge women's personhood.

As African feminists, we are also part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations. Our experiences are linked to that of women in other parts of the world with whom we have shared solidarity and support over the years. As we assert our space as African feminists, we also draw inspiration from our feminist ancestors who blazed the trail and made it possible to affirm the rights of African women. As we invoke the memory of those women whose names are hardly ever recorded in any history books, we insist that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported into Africa from the West. We reclaim and assert the long and rich tradition of African women's resistance to patriarchy in Africa. We henceforth claim the right to theorize for ourselves, write for ourselves, strategize for ourselves, and speak for ourselves as African feminists.

## *Individual Ethics*

As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles which are:

The indivisibility, inalienability, and universality of women's human rights;

The effective participation in building and strengthening progressive African feminist organizing and networking to bring about transformatory change;

A spirit of feminist solidarity and mutual respect based on frank, honest, and open discussion of difference with each other;

The support, nurture, and care of other African feminists, along with the care for our own well-being;

The practice of non-violence and the achievement of non-violent societies;

The right of all women to live free of patriarchal oppression, discrimination, and violence;

The right of all women to have access to sustainable and just livelihoods as well as welfare provision, including quality health care, education, water, and sanitation;

Freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues, including reproductive rights, abortion, sexual identity, and sexual orientation;

A critical engagement with discourses of religion, culture, tradition, and domesticity with a focus on the centrality of women's rights;

The recognition and presentation of African women as the subjects not the objects of our work, and as agents in their lives and societies;

The right to healthy, mutually respectful, and fulfilling personal relationships;

The right to express our spirituality within or outside of organized religions;

The acknowledgment of the feminist agency of African women which has a rich *Herstory* that has been largely undocumented and ignored.

*Institutional Ethics*

As feminist organizations we commit to the following:

Advocating for openness, transparency, equality, and accountability in feminist-led institutions and organizations;

Affirming that being a feminist institution is not incompatible with being professional, efficient, disciplined, and accountable;

Insisting on and supporting African women's labor rights, including egalitarian governance, fair and equal remuneration, and maternity policies;

Using power and authority responsibly, and managing institutional hierarchies with respect for all concerned. We believe that feminist spaces are created to empower and uplift women. At no time should we allow our institutional spaces to degenerate into sites of oppression and undermining of other women.

Exercising responsible leadership and management of organizations whether in a paid or unpaid capacity and striving to uphold critical feminist values and principles at all times;

Exercising accountable leadership in feminist organizations, taking into consideration the needs of others for self-fulfillment and professional development; this includes creating spaces for power-sharing across generations.

Creating and sustaining feminist organizations to foster women's leadership. Women's organizations and networks should be led and managed by women. It is a contradiction of feminist leadership principles to have men leading, managing, and being spokespersons for women's organizations.

Feminist organizations as models of good practice in the community of civil society organizations, ensuring that the financial and material resources mobilized in the name of African women are put to the service of African women and not diverted to serve personal interests. Systems

and structures with appropriate codes of conduct to prevent corruption and fraud, and to manage disputes and complaints fairly are the means of ensuring institutionalized [ethics] within our organizations.

Striving to inform our activism with theoretical analysis and to connect the practice of activism to our theoretical understanding of African feminism;

Being open to critically assessing our impact as feminist organizations, and being honest and proactive with regards to our role in the movement;

Opposing the subversion and/or hijacking of autonomous feminist spaces to serve right wing, conservative agendas;

Ensuring that feminist non-governmental or mass organizations are created in response to real needs expressed by women that need to be met, and not to serve selfish interests, and unaccountable income-generating agendas.

*Feminist Leadership*

As leaders in the feminist movement, we recognize that feminist agency has popularized the notion of women as leaders. As feminist leaders we are committed to making a critical difference in leadership, based on the understanding that the quality of women's leadership is even more important than the numbers of women in leadership. We believe in and commit ourselves to the following:

Disciplined work ethics guided by integrity and accountability at all times;

Expanding and strengthening a multi-generational network and pool of feminist leaders across the continent;

Ensuring that the feminist movement is recognized as a legitimate constituency for women in leadership positions;

Building and expanding our knowledge and information base on an ongoing basis, as the foundation for shaping our analysis and strategies and for championing a culture of learning beginning with ourselves within the feminist movement;

Nurturing, mentoring and providing opportunities for young feminists in a non-matronizing manner;

Crediting African women's labor, intellectual, and otherwise in our work;

Creating time to respond in a competent, credible, and reliable manner to other feminists in need of solidarity and support whether political, practical, or emotional;

Being open to giving and receiving peer reviews and constructive feedback from other feminists.

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# Isis-WICCE Continues to Bring Women Together

*Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng*

If women hold up half the sky, as the Chinese say, why can't they have the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and why don't they have opportunities to gain access to valuable information that can promote their self-determination?

Isis International[1] is one of the oldest and most productive women's organizations; it has operated since the 1970s when it joined other organizations to spearhead women's emancipation. Isis saw that effective communication enhances changes of attitude since it builds women's trust in their own ability to make decisions. Access to information, ideas, means of expression, and solidarity can enable women to participate actively in searching for solutions to common problems as perceived and defined by them. Even after almost four decades of work, the Isis vision remains valid especially to women in the developing world, prompting Isis to evolve and grow. In 1983, the part of Isis that remained in Geneva, Switzerland, adopted a new program called the Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (WICCE); it has since become a vibrant aspect of Isis International's activities. WICCE brings women together from diverse cultures to share ideas and experiences; our purpose is to break the isolation of women living in various parts of the world.

Isis-WICCE moved to Africa in November 1993 in order to engage with African women, become more familiar with their position and status, and to get more involved with women's networks and organizations on the continent. As an information and communication service organization, Isis-WICCE holds to the vision of building a well-informed and gender-sensitive society in which women are empowered. We use

various strategies, including the exchange of skills and experiences, documenting women's lives, gathering, producing, and sharing information as well as networking, to pursue that vision. Since the move to Kampala, Uganda, Isis-WICCE has faced unique challenges, which have to do, for example, with patriarchal structures, the high illiteracy rate among African women, inadequate methods available for communicating relevant information, multiple languages required for communication, and the lack of indigenous information. Since its inception the organization has acquired a collection of materials but we needed to enlarge this for the new work.

The new situation called for Isis-WICCE to review its mandate and commitments in order to work more effectively. After a decade of existence, we undertook a process of self-diagnosis and strategy reformulation. The long and comprehensive phase of developing the organization helped Isis-WICCE to reflect on its core values and see more clearly how it could relate to the needs of women in Africa, particularly in Uganda. It also helped Isis-WICCE to analyze its internal and external processes in building programs that are relevant to local situations and at the same time maintain its international outlook (Isis-WICCE 1999). After the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 adopted the declaration and platform for action for the empowerment of women, Isis-WICCE rightly perceived that the recommendations constituted the Covenant for the New Millennium (1996).

## The Exchange Program

We reviewed the structure of the Exchange Program in order to fulfill its mandate, enable it to create stronger networks, and have an impact on all targeted groups, as well as to keep abreast of the changing environment in the women's movement. One major innovation allows the participants in three-week workshops to have hands-on practical experience in their own situation after building capacity on an identified theme. We have found this strategy not only to be useful to the participants but to the countries from which they come as well as to Isis-WICCE. It has been very successful in enabling the organization to document women's experiences in different circumstances, thus developing indigenous information about women in Africa and other developing regions.

Uganda is a country that has gone through the turbulence of armed conflict, which brought about disunity among our communities. We introduced a local exchange to give rural Ugandan women an opportunity to

share experiences with one another, understand each other's plight, and together strategize for a positive way forward for their communities and the country at large. The thinking behind this plan is to demystify the present belief that certain communities are favored while others are ignored. But this is not the reality in most cases, as far as rural communities are concerned. In the experience of Isis-WICCE, all women in rural Uganda face similar problems: domestic violence, poverty due to continuous conflict, lack of clean water, failure to educate children, and worst of all, poor reproductive health. At the same time, as the nation's food security and that of their families depend on them, women share in the responsibility to build a more united country.

The Exchange Program initiated a monthly dialogue in which Ugandan women discuss problems of concern to them, particularly women's rights. This activity aims to raise awareness on issues which in many cases have already surfaced, but whose impact upon effective national development has not been sufficiently reflected upon. Isis-WICCE is also moving these discussions to rural communities where ideas need to be exchanged on the meaning of concepts such as "empowerment of women," "engendering of policies and guidelines that concern communities," and "equality," among others. This rural strategy is planned in collaboration with other women organizations, rural women's groups, community-based organizations, and development agencies, as well as local government councils.

## Information and Documentation Program

The founders of Isis perceived information as the core vision that would help women uplift their status, and it has remained at the heart of Isis-WICCE's activities. All programs are centered on the issue of knowledge and skills as they relate to the ability to access information.

One of the main reasons for the move to Uganda was to tap the voices of the African women in order to integrate them into the global women's movement. This became Isis-WICCE's most complex challenge: to start the documentation of women's lives as a mechanism of getting their voices heard. Isis-WICCE explored a new landscape by involving the women themselves in documenting their own lives. This enabled them to appreciate that the exercise is for their own benefit since the production of their "voices," which convey important information, would be in their own languages and about their own experiences and thus useful to them. The initial documentation focuses on Ugandan women's experiences in armed conflicts. In 2003, Isis-WICCE won the Gender and

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Award for its initiative on "Documenting Experiences of Women in Situations of Armed Conflict in Uganda"; the award is sponsored by the Global Knowledge Partnership and the Association of Progressive Communications-Women's Networking Support Program. Isis-WICCE, an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations was recognized for innovative use of various information and communication technologies for the advancement of gender justice and women's empowerment, raising awareness of the ills of war to humanity, and using the tools to influence policy for redress. The documentation of women's experiences in situations of armed conflict was carried out in the Ugandan districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Katakwi, Kumi, Luwero, Soroti, and to some extent in Kasese.

The findings from one of the affected communities have already justified Isis-WICCE's consideration of an objective for all African women, and Ugandans in particular, to realize self-determination. War exacts a heavy toll on the physical, mental, and psychological health of women. Together with other women's organizations both in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa, Isis-WICCE expects to launch a consultative effort that will lobby and advocate support for these women. Isis-WICCE is planning to create a regional training institute where women's community leaders and trainers' trainers would learn skills that would help them support victims in their own localities. Accordingly, Isis-WICCE is proposing an antiwar coalition along with groups of women in similar situations (mainly from West Africa). The objectives of this coalition would be to put pressure on states, through solidarity with other agencies, to end war and armed conflict; lobby for support for women in the country that is in conflict; assist in training and developing sensitization programs; popularize women's rights and the gendered nature of problems that women face during and after the armed conflict; and collect, process, and disseminate information that would help in addressing the problem (Turshen 1999).

Another major activity is the creation of effective, conducive, and affordable mechanisms of disseminating information locally, regionally, and internationally. In this regard, Isis-WICCE has faced the challenge of reaching illiterate and disadvantaged groups in rural Africa where community media are lacking in most parts. It has been found necessary to initiate rural information units as pilot projects. Here tape recorders are made available so that rural women can record their views and share these with other communities as well as the general public through the mainstream media.

Isis-WICCE plans to progressively introduce new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance the accessibility and visibility

of rural women's experiences in Uganda and Africa in general. It is within this framework that Isis-WICCE needs to seek out relevant partners to identify and create effective means of making this possible. Partners at the community level would participate more in terms of content and of course give communities the chance to be directly involved in processing, producing, and disseminating information.

## Training Activities

Isis-WICCE and the Urgent Action Fund-Africa convened a three-day international conference in Nairobi, Kenya, 7–10 December 2009, to highlight the potential of women living positively with HIV and AIDS in conflict and postconflict settings to transform their lives. Supported by the Ford Foundation and with money, resources, and training from Isis-WICCE and the Urgent Action Fund-Africa, women from grassroots initiatives identified useful interventions and were in a position to take the lead in transforming themselves. The conference is a result of a two-year project that the two organizations have carried out in Liberia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe to address the intersection between conflict, gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS. The deliberations brought together a cross-section of donors funding HIV and AIDS activities and women's rights work and grantee representatives from the three countries.

Isis-WICCE and WOREC-Nepal (the Women's Rehabilitation Centre, www.worecnepal.org) ran the 2009/2010 training institute for forty-four women leaders in Nepal, 15–27 November 2009; the theme was human rights, human security, and participation. The Exchange Program's institutes are peace education programs aimed at developing human capital to address the deficit of women's leadership in conflict and post-conflict settings. The institutes build a vanguard of women leaders who are able to manage the issues and dynamics of conflicts as they continue working toward ending violence against women. Participants in the 2009/2010 skills building institute, who came from Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, shared their experiences and concerns about conflict and its consequences for women. Trainers led participants through the principles of international human rights and domestic human rights treaties as well as the mechanisms they could use in the process of documenting women's human rights issues. A further eighteen participants from Nepal received intensive training in research and documentation so that they could document the experiences of human rights defenders in their country.

## Publication Program

Isis-WICCE and other women's organizations on the continent are generating a lot of information on African women in various visual, audio, and print formats. Since we have three levels of clientele (national, regional, and international), the purpose of our program is to reach out effectively to all of them. The publication program remains a mouthpiece for Isis-WICCE, and we share our products with the rest of the world through our website http://www.isis.or.ug. The publication program also repackages information in forms that suit our clientele—radio programs, talk shows, and video programming, as well as simplified booklets, based on information that is generated locally and acquired through the internet and other new information and communication technologies. And we maintain an online library that subscribers can access through our website.

Unfortunately most women in Uganda still do not have many opportunities to interact with the new information and communication technologies. Even those living in cities rarely use a computer and are not able to use the technology to enhance their well-being. Isis-WICCE plans to open an internet café where women from all walks of life can have hands-on basic training in the use of ICTs. The strategy also aims to encourage women to use ICTs, to enable them to receive and send messages worldwide, and to demystify fears of the technology.

Isis-WICCE also publishes *Women's World*, a biannual magazine that appears in English and French and is available on the website. The most recent issue, Number 44, features articles on the implications of transitional justice to women in countries emerging from war and armed conflict. Other publications include poems, speeches, papers, and many institutional, research, and training reports.

## Note

1. Isis International is a feminist NGO, founded by Jane Cottingham and Marilee Karl in 1974 in Geneva, Switzerland; it is committed to creating spaces within information and communications structures and systems that promote the many voices of women, particularly those from the South. Now based in the Philippines, Isis International has a thirty-six-year history of advocacy and communication for women's rights and empowerment. The organization has contributed to the empowerment of women worldwide through multiple strategies of communication, advocacy, networking, and capacity building.

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# Sudanese Women Writing Their Status

*Asma Mohamed Abdel Halim*

This chapter addresses Sudanese women's contributions to the feminist religious and gender literature. It is by no means exhaustive, only an attempt to highlight some of the opportunities and obstacles that Sudanese women face in publication. A small selection is made of the areas in which Sudanese women published books or papers or other types of publications and the political economy of that activity. My intention here is to bring to light the work of Sudanese women, rather than to exclude Sudanese men and non-Sudanese scholars. Compared to the rest of the world, including some African countries, Sudanese women started researching and writing about their status fairly recently, starting in the 1940s.

One may attribute this late start to the fact that formal schooling of women in modern Sudan did not start till 1907 when Sheikh Babiker Badri of Rufa'a town started the first class for his daughters and a few other girls in his own house. Stating that, "Finally, in 1907, Babiker began his secular school for girls in a mud hut with nine of his own daughters and eight of those of his neighbors,"[1] the Ahfad University for Women (AUW) internet site quotes the statement of the British administrator who granted sheikh Babiker approval to start the school, "I would myself prefer that the government should not undertake the task [of girls' education] for some time. But…I cannot see that any possible harm can accrue from starting something [girls' education] here [at Rufu'a]."

Women had to wait for forty years after that classroom opened to earn a college degree. Fatima B. Mahmoud states that in 1947 the first female student graduated from the Faculty of Arts at Gordon's Memorial College

(GMC first opened in 1924), later on the University of Khartoum. The first female medical students graduated in 1952. The first female student to graduate from the Faculty of Economics earned her degree in 1960. The Faculty of Law graduated its first female students in 1962.[2]

Bibliographies of works on Sudanese women and gender issues still show a noticeable number of non-Sudanese writers. However, the 1980s and the first decade of this century witnessed a surge in Sudanese women producing a vast and valuable volume of writing, from journal and newspaper articles to doctoral dissertations and books. They proved to be the best researchers and writers about their history and social status. Not only that but they excelled in their professional spheres; they entered the medical, economic, legal, and other professional fields and their writings made it into prominent publications. Still, publishing their work faces some obstacles.

Chief amongst those obstacles are censorship and lack of resources. Some of the difficulties have been overcome by the use of electronic media, such as professional websites, blogs, and electronic libraries created by discussion boards to store women's publications. The economics of publication differed according to the institution or medium that is publishing the writings of women. I will attempt to address some of the media and the diverse ways in which Sudanese women published their work, as well as how a woman's place of residence affects the language and medium of publication.

## Publications by Universities and Organizations

The way women organized and published during the different political eras after independence in 1956 is interesting. The best two examples to introduce here are the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) and the Republican Sisters. The SWU, established in 1952, evolved from various small organizations started in the 1940s. Its members represented a wide spectrum of political views and educational levels. It focused on all women's issues from harmful traditions to women's rights in various laws. It was strictly secular in its approach.

The SWU initiated *Sawt almar'ah* (*Women's Voice*) magazine in July 1955 as the first magazine that addressed women's rights in the Sudan. The writers who published in the magazine were the early college and secondary school graduates who wrote short pieces and journal articles on Sudanese women's status. They addressed issues of women's rights in the family, women's education, harmful traditions such as female circumcision, equal pay, and pensions. The magazine boldly spoke out on laws and

political issues. In 1958 Sudan experienced its first military coup and *Sawt almar'ah* was banned and had to go underground. Suad Ibrahim Ahmed (1996) summed up the influence of *Sawt almar'ah* that led to its banning, "What was officially a women's magazine turned into one of the most effective weapons in the struggle for democracy in addition to the advocacy of women's rights." Despite the ban and deprivation of revenue from sales, the magazine continued as a political and women's rights tool through small contributions from trusted members that enabled it to be printed on antiquated roneo machines. *Sawt almar'ah* survived as an underground publication throughout the military dictatorships that ruled the Sudan. Another short-lived women's magazine *Almanar* was initiated by a splinter faction of the SWU, mainly women of the Muslim Brotherhood who shunned the leftist inclinations of the SWU.

The Republican Sisters (hereafter the Sisters) are a religious group that follows *alfikra al-jumhouriyya* (*alfikra*—the interpretation of Islamic norms by the late Muslim thinker, Ustadh Mahmoud Mohamed Taha). They did not have an organizational structure as did the SWU; they were party to everything that Ustadh Mahmoud was advocating and participated equally with men in writing and propagating his ideas, which were religious in nature and based on a new interpretation of the *Qur`an* and Islamic norms.

Despite the different structure and approaches of the two groups, both resisted the application of discriminatory versions of *Shar`ia* norms to women in the Sudan.[3] The type of publications they produced and how they distributed them as well as the style of addressing *Shar`ia* differed greatly. The Sisters contributed to the publication of *alfikra*, which was an innovation in the interpretation of the *Qur`an* and Islamic thought in general. One of the publications of *alfikra* was a booklet, published under the name of the Sisters, which highlighted what was available for women in the existing law. They highlighted issues such as *tafweed*, which concerns women's rights in divorce.[4] *Tafweed* is a doctrine that does not appear in the Personal Status Act of 1991, although it is recognized and enforced by courts as a contractual issue.

All of the Republicans' books were self-published. The participation of the Sisters in the distribution of those books was notable and unprecedented. They carried the books to the busy streets of the capital city for selling in what was known, among Republicans, as the Book Campaign. From about 1965 the books were sold for the cost of their production, which was nominal. The sellers were Republicans themselves, men and women. During the Book Campaign the Sisters answered any questions from the public on the street. Participation in the Book Campaign was not an easy task for the Sisters. Their presence on the streets and bold participation in

the discussion of the books was an unprecedented scene. The masculinity of those streets quickly manifested itself in the verbal abuse of the Sisters and their continuous shaming because they were occupying a space that was, until they appeared in it, reserved for men. The Book Campaign came to a sad end when in 1985 the military junta executed Ustadh Mahmoud for his interpretation of Islam, especially his arguments around the equality of women and non-Muslims.

The only journal ever published to address women and change exclusively was established by AUW (Ahfad University for Women). AUW was established in 1966 as the Ahfad College for Women and became the AUW in 1995.[5] In 1984 AUW established *The Ahfad Journal: Women and Change* (*AJ*). The journal then began its fruitful journey researching gender issues, development, and all aspects of the status of women.[6] In addition to *AJ*, a society affiliated to the AUW, Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women's Studies, published conference proceedings such as the proceedings of the 2004 Sudanese Women's Conference (Jamiat al-Ahfad lil-Banat 2004). Being a private institution, AUW has been able to raise funds and solicit international contributions to its journal. As it is strictly an academic research publication, it was hard for the government to intervene in its content or bar any parts of it. *AJ* is also a pioneer in introducing feminist issues that have yet to find attention in academic and feminist circles. One such issue is ecofeminism. The journal published an article by Salma Ahmed Nageeb (1994); the abstract states that it "discusses a theoretical framework suggested by Agarwal on ecofeminism in the context of Sudan and the Kordofan region of Sudan. The paper focuses specifically on one aspect of ecofeminism that is discussed by Shiva (1988)." The AUW continued to enrich gender and feminist literature by upgrading its Women and Gender Studies program to an Institute of Women, Gender, and Development Studies, which offers master's and doctoral degrees in gender and development studies.

Women's non-governmental organizations have been able to raise funds to print educational brochures and booklets as well as training manuals. One of these organizations is Mutawinat, a women's organization that specializes in providing legal aid to women. The legal aid it provides is not restricted to representation in courts and provision of legal advice; Mutawinat's work also has an educational side. Mutawinat has succeeded for the past fifteen years in securing funds for short legal educational publications for women. Its documentation office produced brochures on personal status law (family law) that simplified the language and raised women's awareness of the law and its implementation. Other publications included materials for workshops to train trainers in the unplanned residences of displaced people around the State of Khartoum and displaced

camps around major cities of Darfur. They produced a manual on constitutional and human rights that may be accessed and used by teachers and high school students.

Computers made a big difference for the lawyers at Mutawinat. By producing and printing their own material they are able to control time and expense even when they use commercial printers to produce large numbers of publications. Delivering camera ready copy to the printer saves them time and money. Mutawinat is looking into an online periodical journal as electronic publications are becoming popular, more respected, and cheaper to produce.[7]

Mutawinat made an indirect contribution to the legal literature in the country by invoking an international instrument that the Sudan had ratified in the past. In defending children they used, often with success, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UN conventions are rarely resorted to as part of the domestic law despite their ratification by the Government of Sudan.

The General Union of Sudanese Women, sponsored by the government, was created in 1990;[8] despite the government's direct sponsorship this union is registered as an NGO. In addition to a magazine called *Ausrati* (*My Family*), the union's statistics, information, and research section published three books, all in Arabic.[9] The union has an important biographical publication that included brief biographies of some prominent women titled *Pioneer women*. With the bulk of its funding coming from the government this organization has access to government resources and none of its material suffers censorship.

Accessibility to the internet made it possible for women's organizations and individual women to publish their programs and publications. Sudaneseonline.com, a discussion board for Sudanese created libraries in which the contributions of women were stored. Gender studies occupies a good part of that site.[10] Individual papers and contributions appear on other sites such as Sudan for All, Sudaniyat, and Sudanray.com.

Sudanese women attend international conferences and interact with women from other countries, especially in the area of gender studies and feminism. Interaction with African women is noticeable and unprecedented. African networks such as the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) found a home in Khartoum and participated in supporting Sudanese women's work. Among their publications is a periodical called *SIHA* which included articles on various countries in the Horn.[11]

Blogs are a new source for women's publications. Examples include: Ghada A. Khalid, a journalist, who has a blog for all political and gender issues, http://ghadaabdulaziz.blogspot.com/; Ishraga Mustafa who writes in English, Arabic, and German in her blog at: http://ishragamustafa.

blogspot.com/; and Kizzie Shawkat who has a blog that discusses women and religion and women's rights in general http://wholeheartedly-sudaniya.blogspot.com/2007/06/wom ... -are-they-equal.html.

## Sudanese Publishers

The best opportunity for publication of writings on women's issues came with the establishment of Sudanese publishing companies such as Azza, al-Zahra, and the Sudanese Studies Center. The Sudanese Studies Center is a commercial publisher that is interested in contemporary issues. In its recently established website, http://www.ssc-sudan.org/Ar/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabindex=0&tabid=1, the Center expressed hope that the site would become a gateway to documentation and recording as opposed to the oral and individual memory tradition that was incompatible with the abilities of Sudanese scholars. Women's issues appear as one of the main categories on the Center's website. The Center published several books by and on Sudanese women in Arabic.[12] *Kitabat Sudaniya* (*Sudanese Writings*) is a magazine published by the Sudanese Studies Center; it published a special issue on women and society in 1995.[13]

A major change took place in the 1990s when Sudanese women immigrated to other countries in unprecedented numbers. Mainly educated women, they left the country on their own or with their families through the U.S. Diversity Visa Program or through application for political asylum; once abroad, they embarked on obtaining baccalaureate and graduate degrees. The political economy of publishing in the United States and other Western countries differs greatly from that in the Sudan. In the West, censorship is almost non-existent, and publishers absorb the cost of publication in return for copyright. Most of the work published by Sudanese women abroad is in English, French, and German. Their publications range from material for immigrant organizations to books and scholarly articles. Immigration has been a golden opportunity for Sudanese women to produce skillful work, although most of it is inaccessible in the Sudanese market.

The long civil wars in the Sudan from the war in southern Sudan to the one raging in Darfur have been the subject of research and writing by Sudanese women; the complexity of these issues is superbly presented in their writings. Immigration and its effects were addressed in at least two books, Rogaia Abusharaf's *Wanderings: Sudanese migrants and exiles in North America* and Asma Abdel Halim's *Sudanese Women in the United States: The Double Problem of Gender and Culture*.

The most prolific writer in the field of economics is Eiman Zein-Elabdin (1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004), an economist by profession. She is a clear

example of how being in a free academic situation with access to publishers makes a difference in the productivity of Sudanese women writers. Another active writer who published in her field is Rihab Khalifa (1998), a professional accountant, who published and participated in workshops and conferences that dealt with gender in her field.

A cross-cutting issue in the contemporary writings of women is of course feminism. Although feminism was shunned during the early days by Sudanese women writers it received attention in the past two decades. The work of Souad Tagelsir Ali (1994, 2006) is an example of such endeavors. The SWU still resists tackling feminist theories as some of their members, especially the president of the union, Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, link it with lesbianism and sexual freedom in general. Such attitudes still prevail in Africa and the Arab world. Sudanese women scholars, however, have participated in theoretical writings especially in feminism and religion. Fatima Babiker (2008) followed the history of the women's movement in the Sudan and traced its political background and feminist inclinations. Doctoral dissertations and master's theses are a source of work by and about Sudanese women waiting to be published. For example Saadia Malik (2003) addressed issues of resistance to "norms of patriarchy, tradition, and gender discourses that all work toward controlling Sudanese women's positions and agencies" in her doctoral dissertation that was focused on women's songs, *aghani albanat*.

## Women as Novelists and Fiction Writers

Women started appearing as fiction writers in the 1940s when Malkat Addar Mohamed (1920–1969), a teacher from Kordofan Province in Western Sudan, published her short stories. Her best known work, written in 1950 and entitled *Alfragh Alareed,* (the wide void—or emptiness), was published by the government press about five months after her death in November 1969. Her stories articulated gender issues by describing the daily life of women in great detail. In her descriptions one almost feels the pressure, oppression, and self denial that could not be expressed out loud. As the first fiction writer she did not get the attention she deserved until recently when the internet provided unprecedented opportunities for writing about everything Sudanese.[14] A prominent contemporary short story writer whose stories are catching the attention of everyone is Buthaina Khidir Mekki. Mekki expressly tackles issues of girls' education through the eyes of a deprived girl, revealing problems of social shame and gender disparities in the society.

## Significance of Women's Writing

The literature on and about Sudanese women is no longer only in English or other European languages or exclusively the domain of non-Sudanese researchers. A good part of it is now in Arabic and accessible to the literate population. Local publications such as *Sawt almar'ah* filled a void that scholarly research did not. Written for a Sudanese audience without the complications of academic research produced for scholars' eyes, *Sawt almar'ah*—and the active debate created around its writing about issues such as equal pay or pensions for women and the *Ahwal shakhsiyya* (family law)—engendered change in those areas. The forcible return of a wife to her husband through obedience rules (*ta`aa*) was repealed, although the principle of obedience itself is still part of the law. Equal pay and pensions were introduced in 1974. The current blogs and discussion boards have attracted the attention of the government, Arab and Sudanese men writers, and reference providers such as the Library of Congress.

Having said that, I must point out that Sudanese women are not isolated; they have situated themselves within the African diaspora and non-African as well as Arabic circles. For example the writings of Rogaia Abusharaf, Ishragha Mustapha, and Fatima Abdelmahmoud, among many prominent writers, provided an insight into Sudanese women's lives that give firsthand experience and explanations of Sudanese cultures. Despite this considerable effect sometimes it appears that using Sudanese writers as references is not enough unless corroborated by non-Sudanese writers. I was once reproached for not quoting American Sudanist writers, despite the fact that I was writing on an issue that was neglected by Sudanists. By continuing to publish scholarly articles, Sudanese women writers may find their way to the ranks of American and European writers. Sudanese writers provide an insider point of view on many issues, as such enriching and supporting non-Sudanese research on all issues.

In summary, the ability of Sudanese women to publish enhanced their ability to participate in the international women's and human rights movements, as well as address political and social issues even in the face of the existing dictatorship. What women inside the Sudan may not be able to express or may suffer censorship for when they do, women in the Diaspora may be able to write and publish. An example of a woman's stand inside the Sudan that created some useful literature and political support for Sudanese women is what came to be known as the "Article 13 issue." The government, in an unusual step, included NGOs in the drafting of the Protection of the Child Act. All agreed that an article prohibiting female circumcision (FC) of girls must be included in the act. Despite the government's agreement to include an Article 13 that prohibited FC, the government

reneged and dropped the article when the bill was put before the National Assembly. The NGOs found out only after the law was passed. The government's action generated a valuable internet discussion on the issue and the effectiveness of the law. A historical document has been drafted by women's and human rights NGOs and lodged as a complaint against the government at the African Union. The response of the government and the ruling of the African Union will surely generate an international response and Sudanese women will not miss a chance to publish on this issue.

Another issue that caused an international outcry was the "trousers case." This is a case that actually made it to the international media. Lubna Hussein, a woman journalist, was arrested with other women for wearing trousers at a private party. She insisted on having a lawyer and going to trial. She was sentenced to be flogged and fined. The flogging did not take place, as Sudanese women, most of them wearing pants, surrounded the court in protest. The fine was paid by the Journalists Union and somehow Lubna found her way to France, where her case is being used to support the French government's endeavor to ban hijab in public places; surely this was an unintended consequence. The incident brought back a 1960s article published by *Sawt almar'ah* discussing Sudanese women's dress and its suitability for working women. This was at a time when even Islamists were not discussing a dresscode. The whole issue of dress and its imposition on women became a hot topic discussed by both men and women in scholarly articles as well as casual exchange on the discussion boards. Without the existence of such writings the above issues may not have caught momentum as fast and as vigorously as they did.

## Notes

1. http://www.ahfad.org/history.html accessed 24 January 2010. Two requests by Shiekh Babiker Badri in 1904 and 1906 were turned down by the British administrators.
2. For more details on women's participation in research and the intellectual arena see, Mahmoud, Fatima Babiker (2002).
3. For a detailed look at these organizations see Abdel Halim (2009).
4. *Tafweed* is the right of a woman to stipulate in the marriage contract that she reserves the right to divorce herself from the man. In *Shar`ia* law, divorce is an original right of the man that may not be moved to the woman. What she may do is contract for the right to demand a divorce whenever she wants and the man should comply. This is unlike her right to initiate divorce for the reasons indicated in the law, in which case the court may refuse to grant her divorce, if she fails to prove her case.
5. For the history of Ahfad University see http://www.ahfad.org/history.html

6. Many American universities are subscribers to the online version of the journal; tables of content may be accessed at http://www.ahfad.org/ahfad_journal_TOC.html
7. Other organizations such as Salma and the Gender Center for Research and Training were able to raise funds to print training manuals.
8. The General Union of Sudanese Women should not be confused with the Sudanese Women's Union that was formed in 1950s; the SWU still exists and was never replaced by any other entity.
9. The publications of the General Union of Sudanese women included: *Women honored by the State*; *Women's political participation in the elections act; Sudanese women facts and numbers*, which may be accessed at http://www.swgu.org/modules.php?name=c1; and *A journey in the life of the General Union of Women.*
10. The gender studies library, mainly in Arabic, may be accessed at http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?board=81.
11. See SIHA at http://www.sihanet.org/SIHA%20Journal-2007-final%20version.pdf
12. Among its publications are: Hayder Ibrahim Ali (2003) which contains excellent papers by Sudanese men and women covering gender, religion, and literature Nada Mustafa Ali (1998); and Khashm Almoos, Idris, and Salman (2003), which is a comprehensive bibliography of all writings by women and writings about women that were published in the Sudan between 1956 and 2002 (except 1956–1982 and 1990–1995) and includes all workshops, conferences, and seminars held in the Sudan.
13. It published papers such as: Nada Mustafa Ali (1995), which takes aim at how women are confined to traditional roles in those text books; Ali gives examples that could have resulted in students, including female students, believing that such roles are the normal uncontested gender roles because they are portrayed in Sudanese school texts.
14. In a Google search for Malkat Addar Mohamed (in Arabic) I found 11,200 results.

14

# Tuareg Women, Gender Politics, and Rebellion in Niger Republic

*Ousseina Alidou*

Between 1985 and 1990, the Tuaregs—a nomadic pastoralist people inhabiting the Sahara Desert—launched sporadic attacks from their military camps in Libya and Algeria with arms supplied by France, Germany, and other foreign countries. These attacks provided grounds for the Nigerien government to implicate all Tuaregs indiscriminately and to order the national armed forces to lead a merciless crackdown on Tuareg civilians. Both the Tuareg rebels and the national armed forces operating in the north of the country violated the human rights of innocent Tuaregs and other ethnic groups. The appalling silence of the rest of the population aggravated their fate. Why didn't the tradition of ethnic blending between Tuaregs and other ethnic groups prevent armed conflict in the Nigerien Sahara? What kept Nigerien women from creating a coalition to challenge the ideologies of warfare? What explains women's lack of solidarity, their failure to aid those women who were tragically affected by the armed conflict in the north? Why did women compromise solidarity by supporting one or another of the warring parties? Women swore their allegiance to either the government armed forces or Tuareg combatants.

In this chapter I try to find answers to these questions in the interplay between power, gender, class, identity politics, and the contest for the legitimacy of the postcolonial nation-state. In addition to secondary sources, I make extensive use of excerpts from an interview I conducted in December 1998 with Agaisha, a Nigerien woman from the north of the

country. Her journey is one of self discovery, one of coming to understand women's social position and political possibilities. She also learned the effect of conflict on relationships among women who are citizens of the same country. Agaisha was born in the war region and experienced the conflict first hand. Also participating in the interview was Mme. Amina Abdallah, known in Niger as the first woman ever to be designated to represent her party, UDPS-AMANA, in the government; she held the post of Minister of Commerce and Arts. Both names are fictitious to protect their identity.

## Background to the Conflict

From 1960 to 1991, the political leaders of successive civilian and military regimes in Niger sustained their authority through an excessively authoritarian and centralized system of government. The leaders maintained patron-client relations with organized social groups—such as the union of civil servants and the student organizations—which had the potential to oppose state authority (Charlic 1991, Gervais 1997). Both regimes marginalized rural farmers and nomadic and or non-nomadic pastoralists. The most alienated groups, which were excluded from formal participation in the national decision-making process, were the nomadic Tuaregs, Tubu, Fulanis, and Arabs,[1] as well as almost all women.

The various regimes neglected the development of rural economies and, worse, misappropriated international foreign aid allocated to Sahelian regions that were severely affected by prolonged drought and famine. Moreover, the revenues generated by uranium and coal mines benefited mainly the ruling political leaders who used them to maintain power by satisfying the interests of the urban professional middle class and students. At the same time, the regimes ignored the basic survival needs of the people who produced the mineral wealth.

Severe famine and lack of government assistance forced many nomadic populations to abandon their rural settlements and seek assistance in the towns. The Tuaregs were the most seriously affected, and the years 1984–1985 saw the mass exodus of nomadic Tuaregs and Fulanis whose livestock had been decimated by the drought. They moved south toward the cities and north into the neighboring countries of Algeria and Libya. The failure of their own government to assist them and their bleak future made thousands of frustrated Tuareg and Tubu vulnerable to Mu'amar Qaddafi's imperialistic designs, which were couched in revolutionary rhetoric. They became easy prey to his guerrilla force and were at the service of his expansionist interventions in the region. Similarly, border disputes

between Niger and Algeria led the Algerian government to organize a Tuareg insurgency against Niger (Charlic 1991, 141–142).

From 1986 Libya and Algeria began expelling Tuareg refugees from their territories, forcing them to return to Niger. This expulsion came at a time of intense sociopolitical crisis in Niger, the result of economic austerity that was precipitated by a number of factors. These factors include the fall of uranium prices, France's disengagement from Niger, and the antisocial measures of economic redress imposed by international donors through structural adjustment policies. This crisis triggered painful disappointment and disillusion with the promises of an all-inclusive national integration made by President Ali Shaïbou in the late 1980s.

The Shaïbou regime became conscious of the military training received by a significant number of returning Tuaregs and was extremely suspicious of them. The regime's authority was already weakened by the opposition of the middle class and student organizations, which saw their interests compromised by the economic austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Against this backdrop, Tuareg men and women became the target of harassment and repression and were subjected to mass political arrests and brutalization. Once more they were regarded as unfit outcasts in their own country.

By 1991 Niger's political crisis led to national fragmentation with three consequences: the marginalization of northerners—especially nomadic Tuaregs who resisted being mainstreamed into the national order; the increasing loss of the sympathy of groups representing the mainstream or center for the plight of marginalized Tuareg; and the exacerbation of stresses and tensions at the national level. The resulting rebellion was the response of the marginalized to their plight when no other solution seemed open to them.

In the meantime, the narrow ethnonationalism of the Tuareg elite made the Tuareg struggle vulnerable to ideological attacks from various fronts. First, the government successfully created propaganda to counter the rebels' request for the decentralization of power, and the regime projected the claim as an unpatriotic Tuareg disengagement from the nation that would split the country along ethnoregional lines. This propaganda was particularly successful in light of the silence of the ruling political classes—the civil servants and the students—in the face of growing harassment, and their lack of compassion toward, or solidarity with, the victims of the armed conflict. Second, the leaders of the rebellion were not tactful in embracing French and German racial accounts that portrayed Tuareg as "white nobles" oppressed by their former black slaves. This convenient myth spared France from facing its responsibility in shaping the colonial history of the country and in controlling its postcolonial destiny. Rebel

advocacy of federalism on racial grounds failed to galvanize the support of Nigeriens, many of whom are a product of intermarriages resulting in Sahelian ethnic blending. Finally, the majority of poor Nigeriens, who had been equally deprived of access to the privileges generated by the exploitation of natural resources, found it difficult to sympathize with rebels who explained their plight in terms of racial discrimination.

## *Brassage Sahélien*: Women Dispel the Myth of Ethnic Purity

A nomadic people found in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, and Niger, the Tuareg are believed to have originally descended from the Berbers of North Africa. Migrating with their tents from region to region in search of grazing pasture for their camels, goats, and sheep, most became Islamized and in the process were transformed from a matriarchal into a patriarchal order. The Tuareg eventually expanded into regions bordering the Sahara Desert and assimilated into their society various sedentary farming and trading people. From their early formation as a community, therefore, the Tuareg showed signs of multicultural affinity, even though they continue to be mistakenly regarded—especially in the Nigerien context—as a homogeneous ethnic unit. The mistake is partly attributable to the internalization of the colonial and postcolonial paradigm of racial and ethnic purity.

A combination of factors in this century has contributed to the creation of multicultural and multiethnic encampments of rural migrants on the outskirts of cities, bringing the Tuareg into even greater contact with other Islamized Nigerien people. The transformation of traditional survival customs led to forced sedentarization of Tuareg and other nomadic populations and their settlement in economically disadvantaged urban and peri-urban areas. The development of mining companies in the Sahara offered waged work, creating a rudimentary proletariat. And recurrent droughts accompanied by severe famine brought people out of the desert into the cities. One such encampment was Tudu where Agaisha grew up and which she described as the urban neighborhood of marginalized poor rural migrants on the outskirts of Agadez:

> Tudu is a very well known section of Agadez. It is inhabited by many different people. There are some Hausa, but it is predominantly inhabited by the Tuaregs who lost their cattle and moved here because they did not have enough resources to settle in town where they have to pay rent. The same explanation accounts for the Hausa who live here. Those who did not have money came here and pitched their tents next to the Tuaregs and settled down. There are also Fulani, another pastoralist group. Well for many of

> the Tuaregs, Arabs, and Fulani, it was not always poverty that made them settle in Tudu, it was habit and culture, because for them living in mud houses is like living in a prison. They prefer to live in tents. In Tudu, there are tents like in the countryside. The men go back and forth between Tudu and Agadez looking for money that will help them reconstitute their herds. They buy one or two goats here and there, sometimes three, and lead a country life in Tudu which still has some pastoral resources. Many people who live in Tudu are nostalgic because they did not want to leave the rural homeland; they were forced out of it.

Agaisha's narrative about her childhood in Tudu is significant: it informs us about the issue of land dispossession that confronted her people, the Tuaregs, and other groups of the Nigerien Sahara, and it provides us with some important information regarding transethnic, peaceful cohabitation even in a time of crisis. This coexistence is striking for it reflects the regional multi-ethnicity that predated European colonial rule. It survived the postcolonial governments in the form of class solidarity among people affected by a common socioeconomic fate. It suggests that ethnicity is not likely to have been the root cause of the crisis in Niger in the mid-1980s, as the Western media would have us believe. In fact, peaceful cohabitation and interethnic exchanges permeated the intermarriages that characterized the Sahelien identity. Agaisha herself is a living example of this complex Nigerien identity, which she believes is "*l'avantage d'être Nigerien*":

> I was born in 1960 in Tigida-n-Adagh in the county of Tchirozerine in Agadez department. My mother is Targui (female Tuareg) and my father is Hausa-Ba'adare from Tahoua. My father told me that if I am asked about his ethnic background I should say he is a sedentary Tuareg because the Ba'adare are originally Tuaregs who became Hausa through the sedentarization process and intermarriage. His mother is Targui from Talamses and his father is Ba'adare. My father was a forestry officer. He and my mother divorced and I stayed in the village with my maternal grandmother until I was seven when I joined my mother who was living in Tudu after the divorce. I learnt Hausa there with the other children.

Reflecting on her first marriage which took place in Tudu, Agaisha reveals more of her feelings about the meaning of Nigerien identity:

> My first husband was in the military. He is from Ader, a Ba'adare...But he himself is quite a mixture [laugh...]...Well, his mother is Ba'adara, but his father is from Dancandu, so he is Zarma [laugh...]...His father is Zarma and his mother is from Tahoua Hausa-Ba'adara. And here we are—he married me, a Tuareg [laugh...]...This is quite a distinctive characteristic of Niger [laugh]...There is this *brassage* (blending)...This is Niger...The

> *brassage* is even the advantage of being Sahelien, that is Nigerien, because all people are interrelated and one feels at home wherever one is. There is no one ethnic group today that can claim it is only Hausa or Tuareg... That is the fact... not being mixed does happen, but... that is how I describe the common *brassage*...

*Brassage* is not simply a mixture, for mixture does not necessarily produce the kind of comfortable blending highlighted by Agaisha. *Brassage* is a positive blending of cultures and ethnicities, which leads to the invention of new identities. The question is what happened to "*l'avantage d'être Sahelien*?" Why didn't *brassage* help prevent armed conflict?

## Tuareg Women Entrapped by Identity Ties

What emerged from my interviews with Agaisha and Mme. Abdallah is that warring parties use propaganda to manipulate the concept of collective identity and play it against women, giving them no space to make a choice during the war. Biological determinism, which depicts women as mothers, daughters, or wives, becomes the basis of a bondage that offers no real option for the majority of women who look Tuareg—those whose lighter complexion reveals their Berber ancestry. They have no opportunity to make an independent decision to side with one or none of the various parties in the civil war. Agaisha's response to the question whether Tuareg women were consulted about, or alerted to, the armed uprising reveals this lack of choice.

> We women were not consulted about the impending uprising. We were taken by surprise when the attacks were launched and the national armed forces started to raid our homes. The women knew that Tuareg men had left during the harsh drought and famine for Libya, Algeria or France to find work and provide for families left at home. Most of the men who went to Libya were recruited by the Libyan army. We knew that. They worked hard there, but then they were expelled. They returned home empty handed and the majority of them were very bitter. Bitter because the Nigerien government promised to assist them on their return but failed to deliver. These men became the rebels. They did not consult us because they knew the women would protest against violence. So they decided not to alert us and as a result we were very shocked by what we had to face. But they are our men, fathers, husbands, and brothers, so I guess we have to understand them.

In fact, for the majority of the civilian population and Tuareg women more especially, the armed conflict became a reality only when the national armed forces and security agents began to raid their homes and viciously subject them to intimidation, arrest, and torture. This operation

against women was undertaken in the hope of squeezing out confessions about their complicity in the rebellion or knowledge of key rebel agents and the source of their military support. Agaisha, for example, recounts her terrifying experience with the Nigerien gendarmerie in the late 1980s and early 1990s as follows:

> Everybody was targeted, not only me. But, maybe because as a woman I couldn't just watch what was happening to innocent people, I made a point to denounce what was going on in Agadez whenever journalists from British Broadcasting (BBC) or French International Radio (RFI) inquired. It was risky for me because I had a secure job as a secretary at the municipal office and I could have been killed just like others. But my conscience did not allow me to just watch the violation of innocent people's human rights. I used to gather women together to ask them to break their silence. We need to do something. We must write letters to the Préfet, to inform the nation about what is going on. But, because he feared being implicated as sympathizing with the Tuareg rebels, the Préfet (who is himself a Tuareg) did not react. He advised me to be careful. From that moment on, I continued to be the target of arrests and interrogation by the national security services, until I escaped to Algeria.

In Agaisha's account this reprisal was particularly violent toward women. The women saw themselves being victimized by their menfolk who, without warning, abandoned them and left them with the responsibility to provide for the needs of the family. In these conditions Tuareg women were forced to sell their valuable belongings and use whatever money they received to help the family survive.

The rebellion resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, leaving behind widows with large families to support and orphans who lost their entire families. It became yet another factor in the move to urban areas, forcing many dispossessed Tuareg women to migrate to the urban centers with their children and live as beggars, often at the mercy of the humiliating and unsympathetic urban population. The urban reception was hostile as the residents were captives of government propaganda that portrayed Tuareg migrants as traitors and betrayers of national unity.

Other groups of women risked their lives to seek refuge in a more sympathetic neighboring country such as Algeria where Tuaregs with Algerian nationality shared their cultural affinities. Agaisha sadly recounts the conditions under which her friend Dijal and other relatives perished in the Ténéré Desert in their attempted escape to southern Algeria.

> Dijal is a comrade who was committed to the Tuareg people wherever they are. I would say her struggle was for the future of all Nigerien women, not

> only Tuareg women. Her death in the Ténéré Desert was a result of the confrontation between the armed forces and the rebels which forced her to leave her home in Agadez. She was forced out. Initially she refused to go into exile. She believed in staying in Niger with the other women, children, and older people left behind, and she preferred to die here. But as the killings and the government harassment intensified, I pushed her to leave for the refugee camps in Algeria. But, she did not make it.

Women of other ethnic groups in the north were also greatly victimized during the rebellion. Some were abandoned by husbands who either joined the army or the rebellion or prolonged their seasonal labor migration in neighboring countries or in urban centers of Niger for fear of being ambushed in the conflict. Some women were dispossessed of their meager commercial goods at trading check points by either government soldiers or combatants from the rebel camps. Yet others were fortunate and succeeded in making their way to refugee camps in Algeria.

Women also began to demonstrate that even victimhood can be transformed once one is immersed in a war. Whether in reaction to their victimization by the government, or because of their affiliation with male kin in combat, or because they were rejected by many Nigeriens who accused them of complicity, some women embraced the Tuareg rebels by lending their service as spies. As Agaisha reveals:

> Despite the harassment, expulsion from their homes, humiliation, and torture, Tuareg women resisted. We were no longer afraid of being imprisoned or killed. To the contrary, we reinforced our contribution by spying for and coordinating the rebellion. Tuareg women endured a great deal and contributed fully, yes fully, by every means they could till the final victory.

Tuareg women in refugee camps in Algeria played active roles by nursing wounded combatants and by working at odd jobs to provide supplies necessary for the battle. Women's organizational abilities were not overlooked by the leader of the rebellion who solicited their contribution through Agaisha. Her activism led to her rise to leadership in the refugee camp in Algeria. In Agaisha's own words:

> One day the leader of the rebellion approached me. He said, "I have noticed that you women are very organized. Now, I think it would be better to assign to well-organized women in the refugee camps in Algeria a well defined mission." He told us that he wanted us to take care of the wounded combatants. Moreover, if at the military base they needed something, they would let us know. Till the end of the rebellion we cared for the combatants. We bought the supplies needed at the military base paying for them

> with money some of us brought from Niger or earned by working at odd jobs in Algeria.

The contribution of Tuareg women in the camps was carried out at high risk; they could have jeopardized the safe-haven granted to them by the Algerian authorities who opposed any form of political gathering. Though restricted, Tuareg women devised strategies to conceal their transactions with the rebels on foreign soil. Agaisha describes some of the ways she and other women avoided any suspicion of their active role in the conflict by the Algerian security service:

> How did we acquire medical supplies (drugs and bandages) without arousing the suspicion of Algerian pharmacists? If they knew that we are assisting the combatants, they would inform their government. We devised a strategy: as soon as we received a list of the supplies needed, we assigned a woman's name to each product and the designated person was in charge of acquiring that item. In this way we collected the necessary supplies during the conflict.

Despite harsh conditions in the refugee camps and the extreme hostility expressed toward them in Niger, Tuareg women transformed themselves from victims into active players through their involvement in the armed conflict. Some women like Agaisha came to realize women's importance and their powers through their contributions. This realization led them to craft a new identity and new roles to play in the national political arena. It is in this context of conflict that both Agaisha and Mme. Abdallah emerged as political figures. They contributed actively to the mediation of peace agreements between the rebels and the Nigerien government and were present at both local and international negotiations. Among the influential parties that were constituted during Niger's fragile transition to a multiparty system of government, UDPS-AMANA was predominantly Tuareg or supported by northerners. The party nominated Mme. Amina Abdallah to the post of Minister of Commerce and Arts in the democratically elected government of the Second Republic. As Mme. Abdallah points out, Tuareg women who assumed a political role at the national level were subjected to verbal abuse, disrespect by government and media, and continuous suspicion, intimidation, and harassment by government security agents.

Agaisha's conclusion on how war affects women is that women carry a heavy burden regardless of the roles they assume or the gains they achieve in society in the process. For a woman who lost her children, husband, and relatives, no material gains or new titles can heal the void created by the horrors of war. Thinking retrospectively about our dialogue on women's

experiences during the polarized national crisis, Mme. Abdallah and I agreed with Agaisha:

> Who is in pain? The one who dies? Or the ones who are left behind to mourn the loss of the loved ones? The memories of this nightmare are painful to go back to even though they are part of what we have become now as citizens, mothers, wives, daughters or friends of the belligerents . . . war has no winners, we are all losers one way or the other . . .

## Sisterhood during War

Patriarchy defines most Nigerien ethnic and cultural practices. The patriarchal interpretation of Islam, the centralization of political power in patriarchal hands, and allegiance to patriarchal ruling classes are some of the factors that have historically prevented Nigerien women from being actively involved in national politics. According to Agaisha, neither of Niger's most popular women's organizations—the Association des Femmes du Niger (AFN) founded in 1975 under the Kountché regime and the Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes du Niger (RDFN) which was created in 1990—opposed the armed conflict or lent solidarity to women in the conflict zones. Although both associations make women's rights and empowerment a central part of their platforms, their silence betrayed their class-based gender politics.

Women's participation in Niger's political parties is determined by identity politics, which thrives on the manipulation of ethnic and class differences. Women leaders in the opposition alliance, many of whom were elite Tuareg or northerners did indeed express their sympathy with northern women's struggles. They publicly protested against the manner in which the government dealt with the rebellion. But Agaisha's interpretation is that they did so only to position themselves as leaders and mediators in the peace process, seeking to become power-brokers in the shadow of male politicians. Agaisha commented that Tuareg women did not receive anything from either of the women's organizations, AFN or RDFN, but women in the AFC—a coalition of political parties—"lent their moral support to us since our party, UDPS-AMANA, was a member of the coalition." In effect, therefore, Tuareg women who were entrapped in the daily agonies of war became pawns, not only in men's game of power and control, but also in women's agenda. Women politicians and activists in civil society sought to gain privileges in the male-dominated order—locally, regionally and internationally.

## Conclusions

An important misconception is the binary stereotype of the roles that men and women play during wartime, men as active agents and women as passive participants. The many experiences of Tuareg women during the "Tuareg Rebellion" are further evidence that the stereotype is inaccurate.

What we learnt from Tuareg women's experiences during wartime is that Nigerien women have not conquered the differences that divide them—ethnic identity, regional and political affiliation, and class allegiance. As a result, many Nigerien women did not respond to the horrors of war confronting Tuareg women and other women in regions affected by the conflict.

Identity politics led Nigerien women to pay blind allegiance to one or another warring party. They responded to "imaginary" identities, forgetting the principles and experiences of *brassage* that truly defined them. They sacrificed what Agaisha regarded as the greatest advantage of being a Sahelien Nigerien.

Nigerien experience of armed conflict incorporated class-specific agendas and interests. Women's vested class interests constrained their ability to arrive at a common vision of how to confront patriarchal authoritarianism, political manipulation of identity, and the international and local forces that profited from the conflict to the detriment of women and children. Nigerien women, in other words, have not reached the level of political consciousness and maturity that would enable them to overcome conceptual boundaries during wartime. As a result, the strategies conceived by urban middle and upper class women failed the Tuareg women and other women victims of the conflict.

Even Agaisha, a product of *brassage*—the daughter of a Hausa-Ba'adare father and a Tuareg mother, married initially to a Zarma and later to a Tuareg—reinvented herself to deal with her entrapment in the war. She was entrapped by her physical Tuareg appearance, by her marital bond with a Tuareg who was apparently deeply involved as an arms trafficker on behalf of the rebellion that was led by his cousin Mano Dayak, and by her internalization of patriarchal values. She reacted to the horrors of a war that women had no role in initiating. In the absence of organized support from other women and women's groups that could incorporate her and women like her in antiwar efforts, Agaisha transformed herself from an innocent child of *brassage*, from a suffering victim, into a nationalist. She slid slowly into Tuareg ethno-nationalism to serve as a spy for the rebellion, finally to emerge as a Tuareg political figure of national importance. In the final analysis, therefore, *brassage* became a

liability rather than an asset within a political dispensation that seeks to exploit difference for the advancement of individual, group, and class agendas.

## Note

1. Arabs are an ethnic group (known as Schwa-Arabs).

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