

Apartheid is a form of racism which is unique in the world.

Women in South Africa suffer first and foremost from the disability of apartheid.

A huge difference exists between discrimination which is based on prejudice, and that which is actually embodied in the law, with all the force of its authority.

South African society is built in layers, in which class and colour coincide. The position of women corresponds to their skin colour: the white man is at the very top, the black woman at the very bottom of the pile.

A vast superstructure of custom and law, in which the habits and institutions of an old pastoral society are cemented into a modern industrialised state, rests on the backs of the black women of South Africa. Black women suffer from additional disabilities in both law and custom as compared to the men.

Overlaying the colonial nature of South African society is a unique structure which does not simply discriminate against women as such, but reduces African women to the very ~~xxxxxxx~~ lowest status, stripped not only of rights and opportunities, but also of those things that are considered basic throughout the world - the right to live with one's own husband, the right to care for one's own children, the right to lead a normal family life.

What I am saying is that these disabilities are not simply the result of cultural or historical circumstances alone, nor solely due to the economic and political structures of the country, but are actually embedded in the laws. Apartheid is the ~~xxxx~~ very last station on the racist ~~line~~ line. If you wish to examine the ultimate in racism, the absolute in sexism, then you must study apartheid.

Apartheid attempts to justify a system of intensive exploitation which is racially based, by an ideology of separating racial groups.

It is important to note that the ideology has been constructed as an excuse for apartheid discrimination. It is not the other way round.

South Africa is probably the only country in the world attempting to separate into sections a nation that constitutes a single whole. According to the ideology, Africans don't belong to South Africa as such, they are citizens of what is termed their 'homelands.'

But at the same time, South Africa is a highly industrialised country whose prosperity rests on black labour. The contradiction between the geographical separation and the economic integration is resolved by a pattern of migrant labour.

Increasingly all black workers are becoming migrants. Wives and families are sent away from the urban areas to the 'homelands' - the reserves. Vast population removals are necessary to unscramble the different strands woven into a nation already long consolidated by its industrial development. By 1970 there were already close on 3 million removals out of a total population of less than 22 million.

The extended migrant labour system operates through the application of pass laws. I am speaking about migrants within South Africa - although there are migrant labourers from countries around South Africa, but that is a separate problem.

It is these three policy-factors: that is, the pass laws, migratory labour and mass population removals, deeply and devastatingly & penetrate the daily lives of the women of South Africa.

Migrant labour, as is well known, has an adverse effect on family life and social development. In South Africa the dislocation is not intended as temporary, it is permanent,

Migrant labour makes it virtually illegal for the majority of African women to live with their husbands, except during annual holidays when the husbands may go to the reserves to visit the wives. It cuts an impassable chasm between husband and wife. The wives and children are, in the words of a government minister, 'superfluous appendages'. 'This African labour force', he stated, 'must not be burdened with superfluous appendages such as wives, childrens and dependants who could not provide ~~xxx~~ service.'

'We need them to work for us,' stated Vorster, when he was Prime Minister, 'but the fact that they work for us can never entitle them to claim political rightsx, now, nor in the future...under any circumstances.'

'We do not want the Bantu women here simply as an adjunct to the procreative capacity of the Bantu population,' said a member of parliament.

The position of women is thus detefmined by apartheid's special labour policies. They are denied existence as human beings with abilities and aspirations of their own. Their way forward is blocked by law. Their role cannot change while they are debarred from all but the most menial and economically insignificant forms of employment, chiefly in domestic service and as farm labourers.

The status of women can only undergo a fundamental change in South Africa when the migrant labour system is abolished and when women are able to take part on equal terms in the economic life of their country.

Women in South Africa are required to be two totally incompatible things:

1. to be bound by laws and customs to tribal society, a society that no longer has any basis, any actual reason for existence in economic and social terms, only in the political sense. And simultaneously:
2. they have to live in a modern industrial society with laws to which they must conform, laws that are designed to control the working power.

AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE RESE~~RESERVES~~RESERVES suffer disabilities in virtually every facet of their existence, which is bound by this complex interlacing of ~~tribal~~ tribal custom and common law, together with the fact that unlike the men, influx control regulations and pass laws have prohibited black women from taking up residence in the towns.

Women are virtually perpetual minors under customary law. They cannot own property in their own right, inherit, or have legal guardianship over their own children. It is necessary to understand these things, as sometimes people will defend the past, trying to protect former customs, as for instance the payment of lobola, a bride-price. We are fighting the backwardness of the past as well as the evils of the present

In a tribal-based society the concept of the independant woman does not arise, people are members of kinship groups without class or sex war.

'Something more than legal reforms is required to emancipate women from patriarachal (tribal) author ty. The family must cease to be the main productive unit, women must receive modern education, and must participate along with the men in productive activity outside the home, before they can assert claims to equality of status.' (Simons.)

At the same time, all these conditions, migrant labour, influx laws, force women to be the heads of households and often to try to act as wage-earners as well.

WOMEN IN THE TOWNS. Fewer women than men qualify for residence in urban areas for reasons connected with the complicated laws that permit some families to remain in urban areas. Relatively few women have become integrated in the country's economy except as domestic servants, and they are thus less likely to have spent the necessary qualifying period of uninterrupted years in one place of employment, particularly as many black women leave the towns when having children.

Women who come to the towns, unqualified, may only stay there until they are found out. There is NO WAY in which they can legalise their position. There is NO WAY they may live legally with their husbands if the man qualifies for urban residence. The husband may visit the wife once a year. If the ~~wif~~ woman is qualified to stay in the town, and she marries a man who is not, then she is immediately expelled.

African domestic servants (male or female) are subject to immediate arrest if the husband or wife stays with them in their domestic quarters, even for one night.

The settlement called Crossroads, outside Cape Town - it recently has had some publicity in other countries - is an example of the way in which wives and children try to establish some right to live with their husbands.

While I have not time to deal with the position of women who work in urban areas, nor to analyse what work-opportunities are available, I would like to mention just one thing that casts light on woman's place. Apartheid discriminates in every facet of life, it operates even at the very lowest end of the scale: 'gratuities' made to wpmen prisoners for various types of work under prison regulatiosns, discriminate not only among the races, but also between men and women, with female African prisoners receiving the minimum.

THE CHANGING STATUS OF AFRICAN WOMEN= Sociologists have commented on the emergence of the single, indepdent African woman. In many ways the instability of the life of black South African^s is forcing women to exert greater strength and show higher qualities of character than the man. In South African white-dominated society, the black man is perpetually a 'boy'. In the towns he has lost what position he once had in tribal society - and of course, many are second and third generation town dwellers who never knew the tribe - and he is in effect denied the power that ,men have in most countries of being the head of his family. The women become the heads.

Migrant labour and resettlement camps place on the woma the total responsibility and burden of the management of home, old people and children. The man is a stranger to his own family. The woman is forced into an extraordinary kind of indepdence, bitter and painful, but calling forth qualities of strength and endurance. Lonely, impoverished, deprived as she is, she still remains the pivot of such life as the family has left to them, shouldering her immense burdens with unbelievable fortitude and tenacity.

Simons has written of the double burden of sex and race:

Women carry a double burden of disabilities. They are discriminated against on the grounds of both sex and race. The two kinds of discrimination interact and reinforce each other. A reform of personal law would not emancpate the women unless it were accompanied by such radical changes as a dissolution of tribal social relations, the spread of education, the absoprtion of women n remunerative occupations outside the home, and participation in the work of government. But advance on all fronts is held up by barriers erected to maintain the prerogatives and privileges of the

white minority.

Colour bars retard the process of female emancipation by impeding the progress of the whole race. Women therefore choose to fight along with their men for full civic rights, rather than against the men for legal and social equality. By taking part in the national movement against racial discrimination, women have established a claim to equality. This can become a reality, however, only when both women and men have become full citizens in a free society.'

In South Africa black women, these most vulnerable of all people, with the apartheid state, have been forced to embark on a struggle that takes them beyond their own specific oppression. The struggle of South African women for recognition as equal citizens with equal opportunities is primarily the struggle for national liberation. Nor is it a question of putting one first, then taking up the other. The victory of the struggle against apartheid is the absolute condition for any change in the status of women as a whole. And their participation is an expression not only of their desire to rid South Africa of apartheid, but also of their deep concern for their status as women.

Thus under the conditions of apartheid, South Africa's oppressed women cannot limit their objectives to those of simply trying to establish their legal rights in a modern industrialised society, nor can they hope to emerge with a few privileges in what is still largely a male-dominated world. But to destroy the whole basis of racist exploitation and in so doing open up the prospect of a free development for both women and men. In this they are an example to women's movements everywhere, for they know that the liberation of women is not simply a matter of amending laws or changing male attitudes, but of a fundamental restructuring of a whole society towards the aims of freedom and justice for all.

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