CLASS, GENDER AND CAPITALIST TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA

By

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Feminist theory has recently been accused (and with some justice) of being 'Eurocentric', of assuming, «that it is only through the development of a western-style industrial capitalism and the resultant entry of women into waged labour that the potential for the liberation of women can increase» (CARBY, 1983, p. 222). Certainly, it is true that many debates in modern feminism concern themselves with the dramatic transformations in women's lives which accompanied the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe. In this paper, I want to raise some issues about women and capitalist transformation in Africa, not with the intention of presenting capitalism as a means to women's liberation, but rather with the aim of showing that capitalism does not everywhere have the same effects for women.

A consideration of capitalist transformation inevitably raises the question of emerging class divisions and their implications for women. For capital, wherever it goes, requires exploitable labour power, to work machines, to pack goods, to file letters. This labour power has to be created and set to work. I want to look first, then, at the process of proletarianization in Africa, noting the limited extent to which women have been drawn into this process and why. In so far as women do become part of the wage labour force, I want to consider the extent to which their labour is differentiated from that of men – the forms in other words, in which capital specifically exploits female labour power.

In the process of proletarianization, labour is subordinated to capital. But capital does not always, or even usually, confront labour directly. This is especially the case in Africa where capitalist enterprise is dominated by foreign capital, and the indigenous capitalist class is small. Capital works through intermediaries, at the point of production or within state institutions, to ensure that labour is effectively controlled to produce profits. In Africa, as elsewhere, these intermediaries are generally male, so that when women workers begin to be aware of their common class interests, this does not oppose them directly to other women. This is not to say that women are not implicated in the political and ideological processes whereby labour is subordinated. In Tanzania, as BRYCESON and

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MBILINYI note (1978, p. 144): «Wives of men in government and parastatal posts [parastatals are economic enterprises run by the state], many who rose from the ranks of the peasantry, have new-found class interests...» I want to consider here what these class interests are and how they manifest themselves.

To discuss the implications for women of capitalist class formation is to consciously reject the simplistic notion, often found in the literature, of 'African women' as a homogeneous category. The condition of women in Africa has of course always been culturally diverse. My concern here, however, is with emergent class divisions between women consequent upon capitalist transformation. From this perspective, women cannot be thought of as a single category, even though there are important and occasionally unifying struggles in which they may engage. At the same time, women cannot be simply analysed 'as men': gender is almost invariably a relevant social category. The point is that gender differences find differential expression at different class levels – gender is qualified by the places which women occupy in newly emergent classes.

In what follows I am conscious of the dangers of appearing to generalise for Africa as a whole. It is evident that the processes of capitalist transformation at issue here are concretely manifested in a variety of national situations which require concrete investigation. In this paper, I put forward various hypotheses which gain some backing from available evidence, but they are intended as an agenda for research rather than as definitive statements.

Class is conceptualised here, not as occupational stratification or socio-economic differentiation, but as a set of historically determined relations forged in the sphere of production – relations which are essentially contradictory and potentially conflictual. This theoretical construction of class raises considerable difficulties, however, when applied to women. In studies of class in developed capitalist societies, women have often been invisible, or treated as members of a class only by extension: «the worker and his family». Class position, in other words, has usually been seen as deriving from the location of male heads of households in the ensemble of production relations. Feminist writings have questioned this view of the class system from two directions. On the one hand, they have pointed out ambiguities where husbands and wives are both employed but at different levels in the occupational hierarchy (see, e.g. OAKLEY, 1974, Ch. I, and discussion by GARNSEY, 1978). By 'class' however, such accounts have often meant no more than occupational status. Another view has focussed on the class relevance of the domestic labour usually performed by women in capitalist society. Whilst it has been suggested by some that domestic labourers occupy a distinctive (class) place in the structure of production (see e.g. Dalla COSTA and JAMES, 1972, p. 21), it is more frequently argued that women's experience of the class system (whether direct via their own employment, or indirect via the wage/income of the head of the household) is mediated by their location in the relations of reproduction in the home (see e.g. BARRETT, 1980, West 1978).

In Africa, where class differences are in the process of formation, and where capitalist enterprise coexists with non-capitalist forms of production, these ambiguities – both conceptual and real – are accentuated. One example is suggestive. REMY, describing the experience of a group of women in Zaria, Northern Nigeria, refers to them as «working class women» by virtue of their husbands' employment in the Nigerian Tobacco Company. Many of these women, however, were «active in Zaria's indigenous economy» as petty traders and craftswomen *(1)*. Whilst often dependent on their husbands for the initial capital to buy stock or tools, a few were now economically independent (REMY, 1975, p. 361). This kind of combination, within a single household and with marked gender overtones, of persons with quite different (wage labour compared to petty commodity production and commerce) relations to the dominant form of production (capitalism) reappears again and again in Africa, as we shall see. The link between this pattern and women's role in the reproduction of labour power in Africa has hardly begun to be discussed.

CLASS AND CAPITALIST PENETRATION IN AFRICA *(2)*

If capitalist penetration in Africa generates forms of women's oppression which are distinctively different from those which characterised the rise of capitalism in Europe and America, one reason for this is the limited nature of capitalist transformation in Africa.

African economies are not developed capitalist economies, even though capitalist relations of a sort have been established in certain strategic sectors. The introduction of sophisticated technologies, revolutionary methods of work organisation, and large-scale forms of enterprise hiring wage labour have not been accompanied by a general transformation of relations of production in society. Capitalist enterprise operates side by side with non-capitalist forms of production based on the household. Such non-capitalist forms are particularly likely to be found in the agricultural sector with peasant production persisting in most areas. The first concern of peasant cultivators is to secure their own subsistence, and they do this mainly by producing directly for use, but also by producing a surplus for the market to generate a cash income to satisfy additional subsistence requirements, and to pay taxes. Peasant agriculture relies first and foremost on family labour, though in certain areas differentiation amongst the peasantry has thrown up a category of kulaks, peasants whose scale of operations is large enough to require the hiring of labour. The other form of non-capitalist production which is still significant in African economies is the petty commodity production of non-agricultural goods and services. Artisans and purveyors of personal services scrape a living in urban areas alongside capitalist enterprises, and petty commodity production finds expression in extensive petty commerce.

In Africa, in other words, capitalism has implanted itself ***without*** the process of struggle which in Europe led to the effective dispossession of the means of production from the majority of the people – that struggle, in Africa, is only in its inception *(3)*. Capitalist enterprise in Africa does

not represent a development out of indigenous forms of production and commerce, but is to be seen rather as one instance of the internationalisation of capital with its centres in Europe and America. The first phase in this process came with the intervention of European merchant capital later reinforced by colonial rule which entailed the more direct exploitation of a surplus from politically subordinated peoples. The post-colonial era has merely ended the monopoly of particular national capitals which characterised the colonial phase.

Capitalist enterprise in Africa today is still dominated by non-indigenous capital, whether in the form of foreign national or multinational private investment, or in the form of foreign aid or loans. One reason for the predominance of foreign capital is that most capitalist production is designed not, in the first place, to satisfy international demand, but to exploit African resources (raw materials and relatively cheap labour power) in such a way as to serve the expansion of capital in the imperialist centres. The home market in most African countries is in any case limited, this in itself being a reflection of the persistence of subsistence production. Whilst non-capitalist forms of production survive, they are put under sufficient political and economic pressure either to produce raw materials for capitalist production proper, or to offer up the labour to run such enterprises. Non-capitalist forms persist not only because they serve capital, but also because they are strongly defended by those who find in them alternative modes of survival which do not entail total subordination to capital. The significance of non-capitalist production as a form of resistance is particularly relevant to discussion of women.

All this means that in most African countries, there is only a very small indigenous capitalist bourgeoisie, and that proletarianization is of a limited and incomplete character. Workers are generally also members of peasant households. They rely on the land to feed and reproduce their families and they must return to the land in times of hardship, illness or old age. Capitalist relations of production counterpose this semi-proletariat against foreign rather than indigenous capital. The ruling classes of African social formations are not a capitalist bourgeoisie proper. They may be struggling to exert a more direct (though generally bureaucratic) control over the national economy, or they may be content to act as intermediaries for international capital. Such state or bureaucratic bourgeoisies have spawned an expanding category of bureaucratic functionaries whose rewards are many times greater than the incomes enjoyed by workers and peasants. Whilst they retain the security of salaried positions, they launch into entrepreneurial ventures 'on the side'. The success of such petty capitalist elements may create divisive tensions within the ruling class because they develop interests which are to a degree antithetical to those of foreign capital.

Capitalist penetration in Africa has, then, created class divisions which differ from those of developed capitalist countries precisely because the «pygmy property of the many» has not yet been transposed into... «the titan property of the few» *(4)*. Capitalist production is parasitic on pre-capitalist forms which sustain and reproduce a labouring class as well as producing cheap raw materials for the use of capital.

CLASS AND GENDER IN AFRICA

At what points does class formation in the underdeveloped capitalist economies of Africa intersect with gender? This is an area which needs a good deal more research, so any conclusions which I draw can only be tentative. I will argue here, however, that where proletarianization draws on *male* labour, it does not so much reconstitute women as privatised domestic labourers dependent on the male wage (often argued to be one of the effects of the rise of capitalism in the West) *(5)*, but rather intensifies their activities in, and struggles over, petty commodity production and commerce. Where it is women themselves who are drawn into wage labour, it is thus not as part of a reserve army of labour 'hidden in the household' but more nearly on the same (miserable) terms as men. Secondly I shall argue that whilst foreign capital is often the carrier of cultural assumptions about appropriate work for women, the effects are sometimes unexpected. Finally I will suggest that women with petty bourgeois class interests are actively involved in redefining the role of women at lower class levels in ways which serve the interests of their class as much as their gender.

(i) WOMEN AND THE PROLETARIANIZATION OF MALE LABOUR

It is now more than a decade since Ester BOSERUP commented that: «In Africa, the modern sector is virtually a male preserve» (1970, p. 190). Basing her conclusion on statistics gathered in the 1960s, she showed that women formed a very small proportion of the wage labour force in most African countries. Does this generalisation still hold true? Whilst overall statistics for Africa are not available (and even those statistics that are available are to be treated with extreme caution) *(6)* the following examples are suggestive (see table). In spite of rising levels of capitalist penetration in various parts of the continent, women's wage labour remains marginal. This pattern is the more marked when we consider manufacturing industry, the most dynamic sector of capitalist enterprise, where, with the exception of Tunisia and Swaziland, women's participation is in most cases less than ten per cent of the labour force in manufacturing. In this respect, Africa is to be contrasted not only with developed capitalist countries, but also with other parts of the Third World – particularly Asia and Latin America, where female labour power is increasingly sought out by local and international capital for its cheapness and assumed 'docility'.

In the most recent phase of global capitalist development, international companies have begun to establish what have become known as 'world market factories' in various parts of the Third World. Such factories produce goods, not for local consumption, but for export to the developed capitalist world – textiles, ready-made clothes, toys and electrical goods. Factories of this kind have been sited in countries all over Latin America and Asia, but to a much lesser extent in Africa. Tunisia, Swaziland, Mauritius and Morocco are, however, locations for such development (Tunisia being the most important in Africa in employment terms: FROBEL et al., 1980, Appendix).

TABLE I – African Women in wage labour

COUNTRY	Total: Economically Active Pop.*	% Women in Econ. Active Population	% Economically Active Pop. in Wage Labour	%Women amongst Wage Labourers	% of GDP in Manufacturing	% of Women amongst Employees in Manufacturing
Cameroon (1976)	2,757,899	40%	14.2%	9.8%	13% (1977)	6%
Mali (1976)	2,235,157	16.9%	4.1%	11.2%	11% (1977)	11.3%
Algeria (1977)	3,371,023	8.9%	47%	7.9%	11%	7.4%
Malawi (1977)	2,288,351	46%	17.7%	9.3%	12%	5.3%
Kenya (1979)	NA	NA	NA	16.9%	(1977)	
Gambia (1976)	NA	NA	NA	9.4%	10% (1979) (all industry)	4%
Botswana (1979)	NA	NA	NA	22%	5% (all industry)	18%
Liberia (1979)	NA	NA	NA	31%	5% (1979)	13.4%
Zimbabwe (1980)	NA	NA	NA	16.9%	17% (all industry)	7.2%
Tunisia (1975)	1,621,820	19.5%	53.6%	12.9%	11%	29%
Swaziland (1979)	258,511 (1976)	55%	NA	NA	9% (all industry)	23 3/4 %

NOTES:

Source of information for all except percentage of GDP in manufacturing: ILO *Year Book of Labour Statistics*, 1981, Tables 2A/2B, 3B, 5A.
For percentage of GDP in manufacturing: World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1979.

* 'Economically active population' includes members of the armed forces, and the unemployed but excludes «housewives, students and economically inactive groups». Tends to underestimate female participation in labour force, see Beneria, 1981.

The major reason why foreign capital is interested in establishing such concerns is because it can thereby tap sources of cheap and compliant labour which will allow it to undercut its competitors operating from high-cost labour areas in Europe or America. In addition, the low price consumer goods which it generates help to keep down the wage costs of European and American labour. In world market factories women workers are employed in preference to men (70% of those employed are female: FROBEL et al., 1980, p. 344). This is because in many areas of the Third World women can be «forced to accept lower wages and a higher intensity of work than men» *(op. cit.,* p. 348). Such factories often capitalise on skills which women have already learnt in the domestic arena. This is true for Africa as well. In Morocco, for example, «in six weeks, girls (who may not be literate) are taught the assembly under magnification of memory planes for computers – this is virtually darning with copper wire, and sewing is a traditional Moroccan skill» (SHARPSTON, 1976, quoted in ELSON and PEARSON, 1981, p. 93).

In these terms the advantages of female labour seem self-evident, so we are left with the question as to why such 'development' has lagged behind in Africa. The answer suggests a more general understanding of why women's participation in the wage labour force in Africa is so low. There is nothing in fact *intrinsically* cheap (or docile or dextrous) about women's labour. It is cheap relative to men's labour only where it is readily available and politically weak, and where all or a part of its costs of reproduction are borne elsewhere – from the wages of other members of the family, generally husbands or fathers, or outside the capitalist sector altogether. FROBEL et al., note that the wages paid to workers in world market factories, «are often insufficient to cover the reproduction.. [and] the psychic recovery of workers exhausted by highly demanding work» *(op. cit.,* p. 353). High rates of labour turnover and the frequent relocation of industrial activity is one consequence of such low wages – exhausting the labour supply in a very real sense. Alternatively the reproduction of labour power can be assured by «the subsidising function of the rural sector» (353) whereby workers supplement their cash wages with food provided by peasant families. In Africa, however, the supply and cost of female labour power is determined to a large extent by the fact that it is women who perform this «subsidising function» for male labour. I shall argue here that this takes two forms, both entailing the intensification of women's labour in the non-capitalist sphere. The most significant of these is the pressure on women's labour in peasant agriculture, but a subsidiary form is found in women's activities in petty commodity production and commerce. The extension of capitalist relations of production has simultaneously reinforced and undermined these modes of survival adopted by women outside of capitalist production.

In most parts of Africa (the major exceptions being Muslim areas) capitalism confronted a pre-capitalist sexual division of labour in agricultural production for subsistence in which women played the major role (see BOSERUP, 1970, p. 16; also BUJRA, 1982, p.148–9). Any demand for *wage* labour thereby drew initially on male rather than female labour.

A symbiotic relationship was set up in some areas of Africa which became, in effect, labour reserves for capitalist or semi-capitalist production to draw on. Male labour was drawn off from the subsistence economy to work at low wages in urban areas, in mines or on plantations or settler farms. There was no question of a 'family wage' here, no question of capitalism absorbing the reproductive costs of the *class* of wage labourers. Wages were intended to cover only the day to day reproduction of labour power. Sickness, unemployment, old age, the reproduction of the next generation of wage workers – all these burdens were borne by the rural subsistence sector. What this meant was that women's labour in agriculture and in domestic tasks – as well as the labour of children and less active men – effectively lowered the value of men's labour power in the capitalist sphere (DEERE, 1976). Examples of this pattern of male labour migration are found all over Africa, with particularly extreme examples in Southern Africa (See GREGORY and PICHÉ, 1982, pp. 27–30). Nearly forty per cent of the working-age male population of Lesotho, for example, are at any one time away working in South Africa. Their wives and families remain behind as subsistence farmers, on land whose fertility is declining year by year (MUELLER, 1977, pp. 157–8).

Thus, whereas in Europe capitalism drew its labour force from families already forcibly separated from land as a means of subsistence, and in the earlier years drew indiscriminately on the labour of men, women and children, in many parts of Africa capital confronted individual male wage labourers physically separated from their families. What effect has this had on the lives of women? Even though women had always played the major role in agricultural production, the departure of males has inevitably intensified their burden of work, without in most cases enlarging their freedom of manœuvre to take decisions. Where cash remittances from absent males are minimal or irregular, they must generate cash incomes themselves, in addition to shouldering the major burden of cultivation. Unlike men, they turn in the first instance to petty commodity production or petty commerce to generate such income, precisely because such activities can the more easily be combined with responsibility for young children. Where this income too is inadequate, they may turn to casual labour on neighbouring farms. An example from Kenya illustrates this process. A study carried out by MONSTED in the Kakamega area of Kenya showed that 36 % of households were headed by women – women who were managing, as best they could, to support their families in the absence of husbands. Women here found themselves not only growing food crops but also harvesting the cash crop – tea. This is unusual, since in much of Africa it is men who grow crops for the market. Even in Kakamega, women had no rights over the income from selling tea from bushes planted by their husbands – they were expected to hand over the proceeds. A woman whose husband was away working might expect to receive twenty to twenty-five per cent of his wage in the form of remittances, but this was rarely enough to cover expenses such as school fees, taxes and so on. Hence women were forced to sell part of their precious food stocks, or illegally brew beer for sale. In the last resort they would hire themselves out as casual labourers to better-off farmers (MONSTED, 1976).

In Lesotho women sell fruit and vegetables from their gardens, rear pigs and chickens to sell, brew beer and produce handicrafts for the market, all to supplement their basic food supplies from cultivation with cash to buy extra sorghum and maize (MUELLER, 1977, p. 157–161). Luo women in Kenya have adapted to a striking absence of men by growing crops for the market as well as food for eating, making ropes, pots, pipes or mats for sale and by becoming actively involved in trading activities (HAY, 1976, p. 108).

The process whereby men become wage labourers leads therefore to the intensification of women's work in subsistence production, but women are also drawn into production for the market. Women's labour in production and in domestic tasks such as child care and cooking is vital to the process whereby a class of (male) wage labourers is reproduced over time. When GREGORY and PICHE refer to labour migration as «the proletarianization of African rural masses: they sell their labour to those who have capital, agricultural land, and mineral exploitation rights» (1982, p. 19), it is as well to remember that this process of class transformation involves men rather than women, individuals rather than families, whilst at the same time it depends on the intensification of female labour power expended in non-capitalist forms of production. Women are forced to work harder by virtue of the absence of men; conversely this non-capitalist sector continually reconstitutes a reserve army of labour for capital.

There are areas in Africa where men rather than women play the major role in agriculture, or where urban living excludes agriculture as a mode of life. In such areas craft production and petty commerce have always been at the centre of women's contribution to the subsistence of their families. An example will indicate the extent to which, here too, women's labour may come to subsidise the commoditization of male labour power. In central Accra, a cooperative division of labour used to operate between husbands and wives, with men farming and fishing, and women processing and selling the products. As urbanization progressed, men were forced out of farming and fishing and into self employment as artisans, or increasingly into wage labour. Women continued to be traders but the productive mutuality of the family was eroded. ROBERTSON (1976, p. 131) found that as a result of low pay and unemployment, «husbands are increasingly tending not to fulfil their support obligations», and «the burden of educating [as well as feeding and clothing] children has fallen heavily on the women». This is in spite of the fact that women's income from trade was «only enough to get by». This pattern led one woman to insist that since: «My children were educated through the sweat of my brow, the children are my assets» (ibid, p. 128). Part of the value of this asset is however transferred to the capitalist sector or its administrative infrastructure, as educated or willing labour power available for employment.

In petty commodity production and commerce then, as well as in subsistence cultivation, women's labour underwrites the reproduction of labour power for capitalist enterprises. On the other hand the extension of capitalist relations of production has in various ways eroded the viability of these modes of ensuring familial reproduction. REMY noted that

because the women in her study were the wives of migrant workers, they were cut off from the wider network of kin – and especially other women – whose cooperation made trading and craft work practicable. Young women learnt craft skills from older women in the household (1975, p.364). ROBERTSON points out that cooperation amongst female kin in a single compound in Accra was declining due to the education of young women and their entry into paid employment. The expansion of manufacturing may threaten the market for the craftswoman's products – in Zaria «the demand for factory-produced printed cotton cloth has drastically reduced the market for the cloth woven by Hausa women» (REMY, op. cit., p.365). In commerce, as women's operations tend to be localised, and limited in their scope for capital accumulation, the more profitable ventures of wholesale trade and importation agencies are monopolised by large-scale capital (PINE, 1982, p.,398–9). Although petty commerce and craft production in Africa is by no means limited to women, in many areas it is women that are primarily involved, so that the dissolving influences of large-scale capital have a gender significance.

The same influences can be seen at work in subsistence agriculture. In areas where the colonial pattern of male migration continues to be the norm, there is considerable pressure on family life. The effects of this are worst in Southern Africa (MURRAY, 1982) where, in labour reserve areas family survival depends vitally on both the income from wage labour and on subsistence production. This perhaps explains a contrast noted by KIMBLE and UNTERHALTER: «Whereas women in the West have identified the family as a site of women's oppression, women in South Africa point to the destruction of 'normal family life' as one of the most grievous crimes of apartheid» (1982, p.13). There is evidence from elsewhere in Africa, however where these coercive forms of labour control do not apply, to suggest that given other alternatives, women will not endure such a familial division of labour for ever. OBBO describes how «Luo men [who] have been in Kampala for twenty years or more... only visited the villages when there was a marriage, death or major illness in the family. The responsibility of maintaining the rural base fell heavily upon the shoulders of women» (1980, p. 84). Husbands did not send money home; instead their wives went to town to claim it, fitting in their trips between work on the farm. OBBO reports that women in this situation became restless, «asserting that there was 'no free labour, even in the villages'». Rwandan women in similar circumstances were beginning to insist on accompanying their husbands to Kampala (op. cit., p. 72).

There are other processes at work which simultaneously reinforce and undermine the rural subsidy which women contribute to male wage labour. In the agricultural sector, the hiring out of their labour by some women in response to inadequate remittances from absent husbands may mean the hiring in of labour by other women. KITCHING (1980, p. 106, 241, 338) has shown how in Kenya the labour migration of men can feed into the process of increasing social differentiation amongst peasant producers, and how this is manifested in women's labour. Where men are able to obtain high income jobs, they can send home money to purchase extra land

and to employ labour to work the expanded farm, thus leading to an increase in income from the sale of cash crops. On such farms, the migrant's wife is able to reduce her own labour input in cultivation and to concentrate on the management of the farm or on petty entrepreneurial activities. Conversely, where the male migrant is in low-paid employment, his wife is left to cultivate the farm alone and is unable to purchase extra land or to hire labour. On the smallest plots, she must concentrate all her energies on subsistence with no margin for sale, and therefore no cash income. Such women are often forced into part-time agricultural labour for others.

These then are the beginnings of women's wage labour, and they coincide with the emergence of capitalist relations of production out of what had previously been relatively egalitarian societies. «At a certain point, the voluntary and mutual help on the farm from neighbours, relatives or beer parties is subtly transposed into the hiring of casual labour» (CLIFFE, 1982, p. 263).

(ii) THE COMMODITIZATION OF FEMALE LABOUR POWER

We do not know enough about the forces which propel women out of subsistence and into full-time wage labour. Under colonial rule, a wage labour force for plantations and settler farms was coerced into existence by exerting various forms of pressure on the subsistence sector to yield up surplus labour. In most cases, such enterprises drew on male migrant labour in the same way as did industrial establishments in the towns. But they also built up a resident 'tied' work force of families bonded to the farmer by their lack of land and dependent on him for housing. This form of bonded labour persists in some areas, though in its most extreme form in South Africa. In Zimbabwe, in 1980, a young woman described her life on a white-owned farm, where she worked a nine-hour day processing tobacco, in return for one room and a small wage (unlike male workers on the farm she received no 'rations' to supplement her wages): «...we are forced to work on the farm. If you refuse to work... the farmer sends you away from his farm. I cannot think of anywhere else I could go if I were driven away, so I must work on the farm. The farmer keeps records of all the people on his farm. He expects service from everybody...» (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau, nd., p. 23).

In post colonial Africa, capitalist relations in agriculture are being extended partly by indigenous enterprise, partly by the establishment of foreign-owned plantations. In some cases, women form a sizeable proportion of the work force. In Malawi for example, wage labour in agriculture is the largest single form of employment for women (29% of female workers: ILO, 1981). Whilst we know little about these processes whereby women become part of a rural proletariat, it is evident that they do not join the wage labour force on the same terms as men. It is women who face the problems inherent in combining domestic responsibilities with wage labour. In West Africa, women traders have for generations managed by way of mutual help amongst female relatives, and by carrying young children with them. The same kind of social arrangements have allowed women to

cultivate distant fields and to gather wild foods far away from home. MACKINTOSH (1979) describes how, in Senegal, the entry of women into wage work on plantations tested these time-honoured strategies to the limit. This example also illustrates the way in which capitalist transformation propels some women into wage labour, others into petty commodity production.

When, in 1973, foreign owned plantations were established in the area MACKINTOSH studied, women were drawn into the work force in almost the same numbers as men, but not on the same terms. Women «added their plantation work to their non-agricultural tasks which they undertake all the year round, thereby stretching their physical endurance almost to breaking point» (op. cit., p. 49). Women's performance as wage labourers is undermined by prior responsibilities in the domestic sphere, to the extent that they present themselves as a casual rather than a permanent work force, and are usually paid less. Women's domestic labour here consists not only in bearing and caring for children, but also spending hours every day fetching fuel and water, pounding millet and preparing food without benefit of labour-saving devices. The women best able to enter into paid labour are those who have daughters old enough to take care of younger children in their absence at the plantation. Otherwise they call on the help of elderly female relatives or neighbours. The process of proletarianization for women is thus dependent on the organisation of *other* unpaid female labour to shoulder domestic burdens. MACKINTOSH also describes how in more commercialised rural areas, certain tasks of food production and processing are becoming commoditized. Some women in need of cash become petty commodity producers of domestic products, whilst others purchase these commodities in order to 'buy time' to perform wage labour.

Women's entry into wage labour on farms, plantations, and food processing factories sited in rural areas, would seem to be motivated by the need to supplement *family* income. The exploitation of a supply of labour which has a pre-existing, if inadequate, source of income/subsistence, as well as domestic commitments, would seem to allow (as in the Senegalese example) for women's labour to be drawn on as a reserve of casual *cheap* labour. In Kenya, the Brooke Bond Liebig Tea Factory and Plantations at Kericho, amongst other companies quoted by FELDMAN (1981, p. 44), exploited female labour, but mostly on a casual or temporary basis: «the company's assumption was that women only worked on the plantation as wives of male employees who were the ones who were 'seriously' involved in employment. Nevertheless they conceded that some women came to work independently from neighbouring reserves, and did not live in the camps».

In these circumstances the cheapness of women's labour relative to men's would seem to depend partly on the degree to which whole families have become proletarianised (i.e. lost their precarious hold on land for subsistence). Where they retain this hold, then the cost of women's labour appears to relate to the sexual division of labour in agriculture. Evidence from Nigeria (WILLIAMS, nd., p. 26–27) seems to suggest that rural wage

levels for women are higher in the south eastern Igbo areas where women's labour is central to agricultural production, than in the north and west where women play a less important role in cultivation.

One might expect that in urban areas too, women would be drawn into wage labour as participants in a process of *familial* class transformation. But judging from existing studies, there are two features of women's lives in town that deserve emphasis. The first is that most women in towns get by in the same way as they get by in rural areas – in other words by generating incomes *outside* the sector where capitalist relations of production predominate. The second feature is that where women are found in wage labour they are more likely to be single than married, whether young women not yet married, or older women who are divorced, widowed or separated. Why should this be so?

If single women are found in town it is because they have put themselves outside the systems of familial reproduction we have been considering so far. When women migrate independently to town it is often because divorce or widowhood has disturbed a woman's rights to land (BRYCESON, and MBILINYI, 1978, p. 41; OBBO, 1980, p. 77; BUJRA, 1982, p. 126). Women who come to town with husbands may find themselves deserted. Such women are more likely to turn to petty commodity production than to wage work. This is not only because employers, accustomed to employing men, offer few opportunities. It is also because women actively choose to engage in work which will not stretch them beyond endurance, and which will allow them to combine domestic responsibilities with earning a cash income. Such petty commodity production often means capitalising on domestic skills in cooking, beer brewing or caring for children. It can also mean prostitution or petty commerce. In setting such skills to economic use women often serve the men who come to town as single migrants, cut off from the domestic labour they have taken for granted as part of family life in rural areas. Whilst these ways of making a living appear to be independent of capitalist relations of production they in fact constitute important ancilliary services which assist in the process by which male wage labour in urban areas is cheaply reproduced.

Why do more women not find work as wage workers in the so-called 'formal' sector? One reason seems to be that the rewards from petty commodity production are often commensurate with wage work, at least for women who have nothing to offer but unskilled labour power. Conversely, wage work is difficult to combine with domestic responsibilities, which perhaps explains the preponderance of single women in such jobs. What BRYCESON and MBILINYI term 'husbandless women' are not, however, necessarily childless, and consequently they face the probem of combining the care of children with work. In Dar-es-Salaam, BRYCESON and MBILINYI found that women were resorting to various expedients to resolve this problem – reliance on relatives, and in some cases the employment of other women. «Thirty per cent of women workers hired an ayah [nursemaid]. Wages... ranged between Sh. 40 and Sh. 75 a month, a considerable amount of money for women themselves receiving only minimum wages of barely over Sh. 300» (1978, p. 45). Two points can be drawn out of this – responsibility for child care seems always to be seen as residing with women, so that men would not have to consider such costs in

out of this – responsibility for child care seems always to be seen as residing with women, so that men would not have to consider such costs in consuming their wage. Secondly, built into the wage labour of some women in capitalist production, there is entailed the wage labour of other women (paid even more miserably) in the 'unproductive' sphere. Women's wage work brings in its train a degree of commoditization of domestic labour.

A good deal more research is required into the wages and conditions of women wage workers in industry and infrastructural occupations in Africa. In particular it may be that women's labour power is here exploited more on a par with that of men, so that the gap between male and female average earnings may not be so great as it is in developed capitalist economies. One example of this is that in Kenya in 1977, women's average earnings were 89.8% of male average earnings and even unskilled women workers were earning 78% of male wages (FELDMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 39; compare U.K., 1980, where women's earnings average only 65% of men's: WEBB, 1982, p. 124).

Given the generally low level of male manual wages (predicated upon the maintenance of the single worker, and the 'subsidising function' of the rural sector) it would seem that women's wages could not be markedly lower. Where women's labour (as single persons and often with dependents) is not merely a supplement to male wages, and where women have alternative modes of economic survival, then wage rates for women cannot fall much below those for men. From the point of view of employers, even where women present themselves as potential wage workers there may be no marked cost advantage in employing them in preference to men.

(iii) SEXUAL STEREOTYPING IN WOMEN'S WAGE WORK

I want to look next at the minority of women who are employed in industrial and infrastructural occupations. To what extent has capital reproduced in Africa forms of occupational stratification whose gender over-tones are familiar to us from developed capitalist society? The pattern which has developed in Europe and America is for female workers to be clustered together in certain occupational categories, characterised either by the lowest levels of skill and reward, or location in the routine white-collar sector of the economy. They are far less likely to be found amongst skilled manual workers or top professionals or in the higher reaches of management. And certain jobs – nursing, secretarial work, shop and 'domestic' work are heavily sex-stereotyped as 'women's work'.

Not surprisingly, this same occupational gender distribution reappears, with minor exceptions, in Africa; not because it is a 'natural' or obvious way for dividing up the work force, but because foreign employers carry their stereotypes with them. In the colonial period in Tanzania, an official statement declared that, «it is contrary to native custom and to general practice for native women to be employed at all, except in the transformation 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...» (c. 1930, quoted in BRYCESON and MBILINYI, 1979, p. 17). Whilst this statement calls on 'native custom' for its ideological backing, it is clear that other ideologies defining women's place are lurking in the background – for most 'native men' would have been equally unfamiliar with mechanics at this period.

These attitudes persist in present-day Tanzania, so that factory managers «generally viewed women workers as incapable of handling machinery of any complexity» (BRYCESON and MBILINYI, 1978, p. 38). In Tanzania it is men whose labour is called upon to effect the shift from production by hand to production by machinery. In the late sixties and early seventies a match factory and a coffee curing factory were automated, with women losing their jobs to men. In general, labour intensive operations in industry are designated as 'unskilled', and are seen as the most suitable work for women. The ideological rather than objective construction of the concept 'skill' is evident here – compare the usual association in Europe of production by hand as the preserve of 'skilled *craftsmen*'; machine minding as merely a semi-skilled occupation, appropriate in many cases for women. In Kenya too, female manual workers are disproportionately employed on the most tedious and unmechanised operations, offered few opportunities to learn 'skills' and rarely taken on as supervisory staff. FELDMAN (1981) quotes a company executive at Kenya Cashew Nuts Co. explaining why women are employed on routine labour intensive work: «They are more careful and do the job quicker than men». When asked why there were so few women in more responsible positions the reply was that, «probably women don't have the qualifications. One has to show initiative for these positions» (*op. cit.*, p. 45).

Such attitudes are not limited to foreign companies. DENNIS (1982), describing a locally-owned textile factory in Nigeria (Odu'atex) which was established in an area with a tradition of making handwoven cloth in which both men and women were engaged, argues that its management, «have set aside an essentially repetitive low-paid job (sorting out the thread for the looms) with little prospect of promotion, as the 'women's work' of the factory. This is based on their stereotypes of women workers, and tends to reinforce those stereotypes... it is the kind of work which does not demand much concentration» *(op. cit.*, p. 7).

If these stereotypes of female manual work are common in Europe, there are other patterns which are not. Given the relative paucity of women in towns offering themselves for wage work, it was common in the colonial period for men to be employed as domestic servants (Kenya was a good example of this practice, though in South Africa domestic work seems always to have been 'women's work; see BOSERUP, 1970, p. 102). Although women are now increasingly taking on this work, male domestic servants are found all over Africa (a vivid sense of this comes over in Ferdinand OYONO's novel, *Houseboy).*

Sexual stereotyping is more evident in jobs higher in the occupational hierarchy. This is indicated in the following table for Kenya where the proportion of female workers in each occupational category is set out.

Female Wage Workers in Kenya: 1978

Occupation	Females as percentage of workers in each category	Number
Medical Professions	44.3	940
Teachers	33.5	34,116
Other Professions	9.1	710
Managerial	5.9	1,808
Secretarial	90.4	11,347
Clerical, book-keeping etc.	11.7	7,515
Sales personnel	13.9	1,051
Skilled Workers	5.4	4,716
Unskilled workers (including agriculture)	13.4	58,742

Source: *adapted from Feldman, 1981, p. 38.*

It can be seen from this table that the vast majority of secretarial staff were female, and women constituted almost half of all medical functionaries and a third of all teachers. It is worth noting, however, that women form only a small proportion of clerical and sales staff – occupations which in the west are dominated by women. Clearly more research is required to uncover the reasons for this uneven application of Eurocentric stereotypes. It makes 'sense', in regard to medical personnel – where women are predominantly employed in nursing – to concur with SCHUSTER's view of similar patterns in Zambia: «in the post-independance era indigenous women become 'natural' recruits to systems in which colonial or other expatriate women were employed» (1981, p. 77). Similar reasoning might be applied to education, were it not that in the colonial period in most African countries, teachers were overwhelmingly male. In Senegal (and in Kenya too) the vast expansion in educational provision after independence led to a dire shortage of staff. Men with the requisite educational qualifications were now easily able to achieve more prestigious and better-paid occupations in government and administration, so female labour had to be drawn upon. In BARTHEL's study women often became teachers «because their parents had signed a statement on their daughter's entrance to school, committing her to the teaching profession for at least ten years following graduation» (1975, p. 8). But why is it that women predominate in secretarial work, men in clerical work?

In all African countries the first to be educated were boys, and clerical work for colonial officials was much sought after by young educated men. Women have not yet been able to break this male monopoly even after independence. Sales assistants, similarly, were originally male clerks of a kind. Secretarial work, however, is an occupation which has

expanded dramatically since Independence *(7)*. It is a job where clerical skills come second and a certain sort of feminity is at a premium. In Senegal, secretarial work is regarded as a 'glamorous' job (BARTHEL) and in Kenya at least, it is more highly paid than male-dominated clerical jobs. Nairobi is full of 'commercial' colleges, catering overwhelmingly to female students. In the short term 'secretarial skills' are scarce, for in addition to good looks and typing qualifications, young women must know how to dress fashionably (usually in Western style), and to speak well (usually in the ex-colonial language). Becoming a secretary then, entails definitive cultural resocialisation, not simply in the skills of the job, but also in terms of *what it is to be a woman*. Such women are forced to create a model of womanhood which has no precedents in African society, but which is often culled from imported films and magazines. Carmei DINAN has argued that in Ghana, women with white-collar and professional jobs enjoy a freedom to forge new life styles, often actively choosing to remain single whilst enjoying boyfriends and an active sex and social life, restricting their relations with kin so as to cut down on onerous obligations, and thereby asserting a measure of independence unknown for women in traditional society. There are thus contradictions in these new roles for women. On the one hand they allow women more autonomy of action; on the other hand this autonomy is often cast in a narrowly individualistic mould militating against solidarity with other women.

Patterns of occupational distribution by gender in Africa thus expose in various ways the *un*naturalness of stereotypes commonly imposed on women in Europe. On the one hand men are here found doing work which in Europe is thought of as 'women's work' (clerical and shop work, domestic service). On the other hand, where women are in occupations which in Europe are thought of as 'naturally' female, they are not in practice building on existing cultural stereotypes of women, but creating *new* ones.

The perpetuation, in many areas of Africa, of colonial salary scales based originally on racial privilege, has meant that inequalities of reward between workers at various levels in the occupation hierarchy are more marked than in developed capitalist societies. These patterns of inequality have been reinforced in the post colonial period by a general shortage of personnel with even minimal educational qualifications – and especially women. Hence skills such as nursing and typing are in short supply, so that even whilst the work itself may be routinised, the rewards are not. Thus in Kenya in 1976, whereas the average monthly wage of an unskilled female worker in the private sector was Sh. 304, the average wage of a secretary was almost *five times* as high (Sh. 1494), the wage of a teacher more than *three times* as high (sh. 1067), and the salary of female medical professionals averaged out at nearly *seven times* the unskilled wage (see FELDMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 40).

Differences in occupational status do not constitute class differences. Most of the privileged white-collar 'mental labourers' we have considered so far are engaged in reproducing the conditions – ideological and organisational – within which capitalist production may be profitable.

On the whole they do not exercise authority over other workers, or in other ways share in the control and surveillance of subordinated labour (CARCHEDI, 1975). Where income differentials are so marked however, and particularly where, as in Africa, the process of producing this 'superior' labour power entails such sweeping cultural resocialisation, there are very real effects at the level of subjective awareness which divide women one from another. As one Senegalese female social worker put it: «in so far as the women is educated and thinks herself superior, she becomes separated from her true self and from her Senegalese sisters». And indeed, a patronising attitude is often taken towards the poor. As a secretary said: «The women in the bush don't have the same problems [as we do]. In the bush the peasants are not forced to imitate fashion... The women of Dakar are obliged to follow present styles... Women in the bush are content with what they have. There the only problem is to grind the millet and make *couscous*» (quoted in BARTHEL, *op. cit.*, p. 12 and p. 13). Writing of political initiatives to 'emancipate women' in Mozambique after Independence, ISAACSON reported that: «Among the small number of women who had gained relatively prestigious jobs as civil servants, bank clerks, and secretaries, most opposed any alliance with illiterate peasants whom they considered to be distinctly inferior» (1982, p. 63). Such contemptuous attitudes may well be reciprocated. One woman, describing her move from a slum area to a 'middle class' housing estate in Nairobi expressed this feeling forcibly. There, «we used to help each other with things – salt, a cup of sugar and so on. But these *makarani* [literally 'clerks' – she meant educated men and women] here would give you nothing» (quoted BUJRA, 1973, p. 104).

(iv) CLASS PRIVILEGE AND THE CONTROL OF WOMEN

Here and there one finds women who are themselves members of the state ruling class, the occasional Minister in charge of social welfare or education *(8)*. One also finds, though even more rarely perhaps, women who are themselves employers of labour in capitalist concerns. More commonly, though, when we talk of women with petty bourgeois class interests we are speaking of women in social categories whose position is closely tied up with the fortunes of the ruling class – especially professional and commercial elements, and, equally significantly, the wives of men in these privileged strata.

In Africa, petty bourgeois wives seem rarely to be immersed in domestic concerns. To begin with, they almost universally employ domestic servants to carry out all the 'dirty work' of the household, and to nurse and tend young children. Such servants, who are amongst the worst-paid of workers, are today often women. To some extent this devolution of responsibility allows petty bourgeois wives more leisure to act as ornaments to their husbands' success: to engage in what Papaneck has called 'family status production' (1979, p. 775). More often, though, such women utilise paid domestic help in order to free themselves to work in high income white-collar or professional jobs or to engage in petty entrepreneurial activities – trade, shopkeeping, the running of bars and so on. When

Ghanaian migrant workers were recently expelled en masse from Nigeria, some of the loudest complaints came from petty bourgeois women: «thousands of Nigerian women were only able to take up jobs because they could rely on their alien [i.e. Ghanaian, and in this case mostly male] house helps – often paid a meagre wage with most of the payment going to the middleman who imported them – to look after their young children and do other household chores», reported Esther OGUNMODEDE in *New African*. «The *Daily Times* ran a front page report claiming that, 'MP's wives still keep illegal aliens'. These women told the *Daily Times* that their house helps were 'indispensable', and that 'the government should have considered the hardship to millions [sic] of Nigerian women» (April, 1983).

During national liberation struggles in Africa it was petty bourgeois elements who articulated the grievances of colonised people as a whole. In the course of struggle, emerging class differences between African women were submerged in a common opposition to colonial domination. Some women became consciously aware of this process through their own experience of active involvement in the struggle. One Zimbabwean woman recalled that: «When you get to a [guerilla training] camp, everyone becomes the same... whatever the class one considered oneself to be before... they become the same» (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau, p. 13). This woman had enjoyed a good education and secretarial training abroad. But in most African countries such women were not actively involved in the liberation struggle, and their 'natural' assumption of leadership roles relative to other women after Independence is a function of their, or their husbands', superior place in society.

In the post colonial era national women's organisations have been set up in many African countries, purporting to speak for the interests of all women. To what extent do such organisations transcend the differences between rural peasant women, urban women in wage work or petty commodity production and petty bourgeois elements? What role do such organisations play in class terms?

The Kenyan women's association (Maendeleo ya Wanawake) studied by Audrey WIPPER (1975), is typical of many. On the surface it appears to be an organisation promoting 'women's role in development', and it has branches throughout the country, in both rural and urban areas. In practice, as WIPPER shows, its leadership is composed of women, «from the developing middle class – professional, commercial and civil service sectors» (*op. cit.*, p. 104), often related by marriage or kinship to influential members of the government. Such women organise fashion shows and craft and cookery exhibitions; they travel abroad, attend receptions and dispense charity. They are increasingly cut off from the rank and file membership amongst rural women, whom they address in contemptuous and anti-feminist tone. This is very evident in the following newspaper report of a Maendeleo leader's speech: «no husband would like a dirty and lazy wife not prepared to contribute to the betterment of the home [she said]. Urging women to redouble their efforts in building Kenya, she said while women in other countries helped to develop their countries, it was shameful to note that in Kenya there were still women who preferred to gossip instead of doing something useful» (quoted, *op. cit.*, p. 110).

Such views (applauded by government ministers – male) expose the true class purpose of this association, which is to press poor women to work harder and longer in order that they, the petty bourgeoisie, might live better. This intention is sometimes disguised by the philanthropic activities and ideology of concern for the poor which characterises this organisation. 'Philanthropy' here involved well-publicised donations to Presidentially – sponsored charities (e.g. a hospital in the late President KENYATTA's home area) – it did not extend to effective or generous financing of activities to help women in its rural branches. Charity, as has been noted before (CAPLAN, 1978) is often but a means to keep the poor in their place, and to emphasize the social distance between them and the better-off. These associations thus play a role of social control on behalf of this class as a whole – they do almost nothing to transform the position of the majority of women.

Another example is provided by the Gambian Women's Federation which I investigated briefly in 1976. It was composed of several organisations, the most important of which were ex-pupils' associations of girls' secondary schools situated in the capital. Its representativeness is thus in doubt in a country where only 27% of the population of five to fourteen-year olds attended school, and where the proportion of girls was almost certainly much lower. In a country ninety per cent Muslim, its officers were, in 1976, one hundred per cent Christian. An interview with the President pinpointed the major concerns of the association. They were with charity work, reforming *Muslim* marriage law, finding employment for educated girls and preventing female juvenile delinquency (a euphemism for prostitution).

In Tanzania, the national women's organisation was again engaged in many activities designed to curb and control women and to remind them of their 'domestic duties'. It organised classes in sewing, knitting and cooking, and backed up the government's drive against 'provocative' women's dress (mini-skirts, wigs, make-up). MBILINYI (1982, p. 9) argues that: «Underlying that campaign was an extreme reaction against the growing number of young, unmarried working women in towns who engaged in liberal sexual practices and were no longer under paternal control» The association also initiated petty entrepreneurial enterprise in the form of cooperatives, from which, however, most of the members were excluded in view of the fees charged for entry. MBILINYI's general characterisation of this association is an indictment of its class and political role. Whereas it presents itself, «as an organisation to unite all women, regardless of different class or other interests [it] is accountable to the party and functions to organise women in support of the party and the government. The possible conflict between this goal and that of women's liberation is obvious. Thus far, its political practices... speak the message: 'women, work harder and behave yourselves'» *(op. cit.,* p. 8).

The existence of *women's* organisations in Africa is not, in other words, unthinkingly to be equated with the existence of any specifically *feminist* consciousness, or any desire to transform the class or economic structures of post-colonial society. Women's liberation is *disruptive* in its

challenge of male prerogatives; organisations such as these reinforce the status quo. They serve petty bourgeois class interests more than they serve women. To dismiss them out of hand because of this would be short-sighted however. For despite their primary significance as institutions of class control *(9)*, such organisations, in bringing women into communication with each other, can provide arenas of struggle within which women who are poor and subordinated can speak out and exert pressure on those who enjoy the rewards of post-colonial society.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have shown that capitalist transformation in Africa has had only a limited effect in drawing women into wage labour. Rather than relegating them to an 'unproductive' and privatised sphere of domestic labour it has indirectly channeled their energies into petty commodity production and petty commerce. In the short run this is in line with women's interests, even whilst it also serves capital's needs (for cheap agricultural commodities, for cheap consumption goods for male wage worker, for new generations of cheap male labour power, and for the circulation of commodities produced in the capitalist sector). In the longer run, the fact that women have not been exploited by capital to the same degree as men, has limited their struggles to localised outbursts in defence of precapitalist forms of organization of production *(10)*. In Nigeria the Igbo 'women's war' of 1929 followed rumours that women were to be taxed and seems to have been led by market women (Van ALLEN, 1976; also BUJRA, 1978, p. 36). In South Africa in 1959 women protested against a ban on African beer brewing at a shanty settlement in Durban: «2000 women gathered to tell their grievances to a local official; and the police... charged the women with batons, striking the women to the ground, often hitting the babies tied to their backs» (BERNSTEIN, 1975, p. 48). In Nairobi in 1969 prostitutes protested against attempts to 'repatriate' them to rural areas as vagrants (BUJRA, 1982b, p. 159–161). Such struggles are not to be explained away as merely the persistance of precapitalist relations of production (see CARBY's strictures, 1982, p. 227). They represent rather the struggles of women to survive and to retain control over the conditions of their production and reproduction at a time when the encroachment of capitalist relations threatens all such petty production, whether it be in peasant farming or in artisan activities. The success of such struggles depends on women's base in the community.

Levels of unionisation amongst women wage workers in Africa cannot be ascertained, but they often work in occupations which are not unionised. In South Africa for example (even though it is the most heavily industrialised of all African countries) the majority of women workers are domestic servants or agricultural labourers, and neither of these categories of workers is unionised. «Because of their comparatively small numbers in industry, black women in general lack the experience in work-solidarity relationships that have often provided a training ground for male political leaders. Domestic servants cannot join together to ask for high wages or

better conditions; each has, individually, to deal with an individual em ployer » (BERNSTEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 43). A female trade unionist in Zim babwe (a worker in the textile industry) complained that: «Women are reluctant to go on strike because of fear of losing their jobs. They may be the sole breadwinners of their families with many children to support. Since jobs are scarce for women, it is lucky few who get them and so they must keep them at all costs» (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau, nd., p. 28).

The relative paucity of women in wage work, and the localization of women's struggles over petty commodity production has left the mass of women vulnerable to exploitation by petty bourgeois elements, amongst whom are other women eager to promote and preserve class privileges. But perhaps one of the most paradoxical features of class formation as it affects women in Africa is that two contradictory processes seem to be taking place. As the extension of capitalist relations of production renders non-capitalist forms less viable women are drawn into processes of capitalist class formation as members of *families* – some families which are partially proletarianised by male migrant labour or fully proletarianised by the loss of land, others which are establishing themselves as petty bourgeois. But as labour power becomes a commodity, women too become aware of the value of their labour power: there is «no free labour», some are beginning to assert, «even in the villages». And children 'produced' by women's labour are beginning to be seen as their «assets». And hence there is another process of transformation which is very often the outcome of struggles *within families* – between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters – whereby women, in asserting their autonomy and making a living, individually become members of emergent classes. Gender struggle and class formation may thereby go hand in hand.

FOOTNOTES

1. Compare, however, the invisibility of women in Williams' account of the political consciousness of the poor in Ibadan, Nigeria. Although in Ibadan women's participation rate in trading and crafts is on a par with that of men (Mabogunje, 1968, p. 220–1), in Williams' account traders are, with one exception, refered to as *'men'* or *'he'* and artisans as 'craft*smen*' (Williams. 1980, p. 110–135).
2. The following account draws on various sources: see e.g. Amin, S., 1976; Cliffe, L., 1982; Ake, C., 1978; Arrighi, G., and Saul, J., 1973; Sandbrook, R. and Cohen, R., 1975; World Bank 1981.
3. This is not to deny the many struggles which have taken place in Africa – both broad-based anti colonial uprisings, as well as resistance to, and in some areas protracted guerilla warfare over the alienation of land. My point is that whereas considerable pressure was brought to bear on the subsistence sector it was not totally destroyed.
4. Marx, K., p.835.
5. Michele Barrett, for example, argues that the transition to capitalism in Europe led to «a far greater degree of dependence of women on men within the household», and that capitalism «constructed a wage labour system in which

the relationship of women to the class structure came to be partially mediated by an assumed or actual dependence on a male wage» (1980, p. 254). See also the debate on domestic labour, and its role for capitalism, discussed by Barrett, also Fox (ed.) 1980.

6. See Beneria in Nelson (ed.) 1981, and ch. 4 in Rogers (1980) on the biases in Statistics.
7. In South Africa, however, apartheid ensures that African women are hardly employed in clerical or secretarial work (less than 2 % of female African workers). Bernstein (1975) notes that «black office workers are seldom acceptable to their white colleagues» even though black nurses are employed in almost equal numbers with white female nurses (p. 37 and p. 67).
8. E.g. in Tanzania there are three women ministers (one of Education, one of State, one of Justice: Mbilinyi, 1982, p. 9); in Zimbabwe a woman is Minister of Youth, Sport and Recreation.
9. Such a view of national women's organisations in Africa may have to be qualified where socialist ideologies are being actively promoted (as in Mozambique or Guinea-Bissau: see Kimble and Unterhalter, 1982; Urdang, 1979), but as the example of Tanzania suggests, reality does not always match rhetoric.
10. For a discussion of the 'class' consciousness of petty commodity producers, see Bujra 1982b and 1978.

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RESUME

Dans ce document l'auteur affirme que l'introduction du système capitaliste en Afrique a très peu contribué à attirer les femmes vers le travail salarié. Au lieu de les reléguer au domaine 'improductif' et privé du travail servile, il les a amenées de façon indirecte à canaliser leurs énergies vers la petite production et le petit commerce. A court terme, cette tendance sert les intérêts des femmes bien qu'elle satisfasse en même temps les besoins du Capital (en produits agricoles bon marché, en produits de consommation à bon marché, en travailleurs salariés (hommes), en nouvelles générations de travailleurs (hommes) à bon marché, en circulation de biens produits dans le secteur capitaliste). A plus long terme, le fait que les femmes n'aient pas été exploitées de façon aussi intense que les hommes a confiné leur lutte à des explosions localisées pour défendre les formes pré-capitalistes de l'organisation de la production. Les femmes sont par conséquent à la merci de l'exploitation d'éléments petit-bourgeois au sein desquels l'on retrouve d'autres femmes qui désirent promouvoir et préserver leurs privilèges de classe.