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THE IMPACT OF IMPERIALISM ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

Imperialist domination has differentiated the South African people into sharp clan, racial and sexual categories. The South African black woman is the one who carries the heaviest burden of this domination which has taken the form of apartheid.

This paper attempt to trace the roots of Imperialist domination in South Africa its impact on the black women and resulting women response. The paper draws lessons from the South African scene for the attention of women in the frontline States.

IMPERIALIST DOMINATION OF SOUTH AFRICA - A HISTORICAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACCOUNT

South Africa has not always been under imperialist subjugation. Nor has this imperialism always manifested itself in the form of apartheid.

South Africa was first inhabited by Africans who lived under a loose system of state. The various foreigners that had contacts with the indegenous people of South Africa were well treated. The peak of foreign expeditions to South Africa was during the merchantist trade. Different shades of European merchants and exploiters masquarading as explorers came to South Africa; Portuguse Spaniards, Dutch, English, French etc. came to South Africa all in persuit of trade, plunder, and robbery. These advant-garde of merchantalist capitalism carried the flag of "peace and love" but did the opposite. Vasco Da Gama and many others who called themselves explorers came to the cape of "Good Hope" and went back to Europe with a variety of wealth that sharppened the apetite of various industrialists!

As a consequence of the wealth found in South Africa European Colonialist invaded the area, killing, occupying and looting as they advanced, large areas were occupied by force of arms Africans were killed in large numbers. Among the dead and disposesed were African women. Herethen lies the foundation stone of the African woman experience in the area. The entire South Africa was thus colonised and occupied by intruders and exploiters. The indegenous population of Africans was pushed into reserves to live there as animals.[1]

The Africans were forced into these reserves to enable the white invaders farm the best land, mine the minerals at will and cultivate fruits of his liking. The colonial conguest of South Africa had therefore nothing to do with any kind of civilizing mission. This we can call traditional or old apartheid and the one which is now practised new aparthed. In the words of Hill Christopher:

> Africans (officially known as "Bantu") will be free from white interference in the Reserves, each race developing separately in harmonious disjunction. Bantustans are thus presented or natural outcome if a way of life or old as white settlement in South Africa, with the difference that traditional apartheid was a static system of social differentiation and deprivation of political rights for almost all non-whites, whilst a separate development, as apertheid is now officially known) is a dynamic system, providing for the eventual emancipation of Africans on the Bantu areas. In other words South Africa's answer to the world's bodred of apertheid is to push it to its logical conclusion, which is complete separation of races, both territorial and social.[2]

Old and new apertheid are different forms of imperialist exploitation which is currently characterised by a complete domination of the economy by the western countries.[3] Martin Boiley in his book shows that apartheid is a form of imperialist domination. The author points out that "sixty-eight per cent of shares in EP in South Africa are held by the British Government.[4]

The imperialist domination in the form of apartheid is firstly characterised by a battery of land laws that are meant to deprive the Africans of the ownership of any piece of land and provide whites with sufficient land for agriculture, mining and industry. Eighty seven per cent of the best land is owned by the whites whereas 13 percent of the worst land is owned by Africans. This is despite the pact that today 1987 South Africa's population stands

at 30 million out of whom over 24 million are non-whites and less than 6 million are whites.[5] The Act that does this magic is the Group Areas Act 1966.[6] The Act ensures that different racial groups reside in different areas Whites recide in the best part of South Africa. The best part of towns are also for the whites wereas Africans are in the slums. As a consequence of the Group Areas Act most African women are in the rural areas. These areas are termed by South Africa as independent homeland for the blacks. They are seen as different states. The leadership in these Bantustans are black puppets who are charged with administering areas populated by very old black men, young children and women. Most men are in "white areas" selling their labour.

The creation of the different areas for different racial groups coupled with the general imperialist domination has relegated the South African women to the lowest position in the social economic and political structure (see the diagram below).

BLACK WOMAN'S POSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Source: Hilda Bernstein: For their triumphs and for their tears, women in Apartheid South Africa. International Defence and Aid Fund 104 Newgate Street CCI August 1975.

The women who thus are at the lowest position are in the following Bantustants.

Transkei
Giskei
Kwazulu
Bophuthatswana
Lebowa
Venda
Basotho (Qwa Qwa)
Swazi
Gazankulu
Ndebele.[7]

The women are in these unproductive Bantustans mainly as labour reserve for the white settlers and as producers of children who would grow to constitute labour force for the same white imperialist society.

The African woman as a worker

Essentially the African woman is a worker - she is a residual worker in the Bantustan. In the towns the African woman is a domestic servant to the "master race". In a recent ILO report it was noted that domestic workers in South Africa had to "struggle for survival in a legal vacuum". The ILO pointed out that hundreds of black workers subsist unprotected by any laws governing their wages, working hours or paid holidays.[8] At times black women burnt themselves or commi suicide as a result of racist women atitude towards them. For instance one has Gladys Govance burnt herself as a result of her white boss shouting at her while she was cleaning a fridge. She started and fell and the bioled water she was using burnt her hands very badly.[9] Such then is the fate of black women in the service of the

white racist. They are usually beaten, abused sexually, overworked, di-humanised and above all denied any family roles. They are cut off from their husbands, children, and other family members.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

The third area in which black women are exploited is in white farms. Women are engaged in the back-breaking jobs of fruit tendering wheat farming etc. In most cases these women are not paid a wage. They are only given food to ensure their day to day survival. Women are sheltered in poorly constructed huts in the White farms. Women are, many in agriculture as the table below shows.

Percentage of African Female Workforce in Selected Occupations

Occupation	1970	1980
Sales	20	47
Services	84	83
Agriculture and fisheries	98	89
Production	45	58

Source: University of York Centre for Southern African Studies, Conference Paper, 29 September - 2 October 1986.

The table shows that the largest employer of the named sectors is agriculture. It should also be noted that African Women are the majority in the entire South African labour force. The table below shows this point.

Percentage Distribution of Economically Active Women by Race

Year	Female	African	Coloured	Indian	White
1980	100%	65%	12%	2%	21%

Source: University of York Centre for Southern African Studies, ibid., p. 11.

African women currently constitute almost two-thirds (65%) of the economically active workforce. Coloured women form 12%, Indians 2% and Whites 21%.

Fourthly South African women are in slums supporting the industrial and mine workers. Towns like Soweto are inhabited mainly by women some brew local beer for the mine workers. Others are merely concubines for these workers. This level of men-women relationship creates a complex problem, the consequence of which is the distruction of the family life. Nearly 90% of the children born in South Africa live with their mothers who are in most cases divorced and therefore battling against apartheid single handed. Such life is difficult!

WOMANHOOD

South African women have always been insulted by the so-called immorality legislations whose purpose was to achieve purity of races.[10] Sexual intercourse nor marriage between whites and blacks was prohibited by the Immorality Act - this Act has now been repealed which means inter-racial sexual intercourse and inter-marriage

are possible in theory. This is not however easy since the Group Areas Act still applies. Different racial groups still have to live separately. Marriage between a black and white cannot therefore be consumated under one roof.

WOMEN RESPONSE TO APARTHEID

DIRECT CONFRONTATION

The bigest women action against apartheid was the out- pass law demonstration in which several women lost their lives. Women participated in the 1960 sharpeville event in which racist South Africa was confronted by an open defiance. In the 1976 Soweto uprising in which school children rejected outright the inferior "Bantu education", the school girls participated in full! Women also participated actively in the 1984 Sebokenge uprising.
Some women are forced to flee into exile with their husbands and children or by themselves. Others are leaders in liberation movements Among such women are Mrs. Sibeko and Mrs Shorpi, Mrs Kaulinge who headed PAC, and ANC delegations respectively in the Women Conference in Nairobi in 1985. The impact of these women freedom fighters on the Nairobi Conference is memorable.[13] Women liberators are playing different roles in the liberation movements of South Africa both at home and abroad.

Those within South Africa instead of waiting for their husband who works in mines almost all the year round except for few days only to bring money which is not enough even to feed. The

second kind of response relates to women who are in South Africa and whose husbands work in the mines; these women have taken initiatives to supplement the meagre income of their husbands, they work in industries and in towns as Domestic workers. As these women have to travel long distances from places of work to residential areas they use the wages on transport cost. This not withstanding women generate some income to meet some of the costs for the family upkeep. The responsibility for family upkeep particularly the children nests squarely on the women and they have taken it bravely.

LESSONS FOR WOMEN IN THE FRONTLINE STATES

In the analysis of women in Frontline States I am obliged to categorise them into two categories i.e. rural vs. urban women Frontline States vs. those still under direct imperialist domination.

It is improper to discuss the conditions and problems of women without specificity. This is because those in urban areas are much better off as compared to their counterparts in rural areas. They have clean water within the compound, fuel is not a very big problem. It is easy for them to start any income generating projects as the supply of basic needs is well developed as compared to rural areas.[14]

In rural areas women are faced with very tough conditions due to division of labour. All the household activities (i.e. preparation of family food taking care of children and other members of family, fetching water and looking for fire-wood). Women are also engaged in agricultural activities in which they are supposed to make sure that their families do not starve. They are obliged to produce food-crops

in big qualities; the workload is back-breaking due to the poor farming implements. Women are still using hand hoe to cultivate their plots while doing so men are usually busy in their cash crops plots.[15] This type of division of labour was promoted as Imperialism grew. During the colonial period colonialist did two major things to promote this division of labour. By firstly introducing and promoting cash crop production in large plantations. Men were obliged to work in these plantations and during that time they were forced to live in men's dormitories. Sisal plantations in Tanzania is a case in point. In this many men required some skills on how to take care of cash crops.

Secondly the colonialists went to the extend of changing the mode of life and responsibility of families as stated by Boserup[16]

> Women originally grew cotton, but in 1923 the European Director of Agriculture ruled that men should plant cotton, and by one decade, they dominated the growing and marketing of coffee... In places where cotton was still grown by women, the Europeans neglected to provide agricultural instruction for the women.

Boserup was referring to what happened in Uganda. But in reality this is what happened in most African countries. To make matters worse women as mothers, daughters and wives spend most hours in a day on the food crop farm. As Kaberry once noted, it is in this sphere of activity they (women) enjoy considerable independence and have well defined rights; and it is in this sphere that there has been less changes than in others... changes introduced in this

field will affect not only the status and position of women in marriage and the family but will radically modify the economy and the general standard of living".

Therefore from the above observation women occupy inferior position as compared to men. In order to end this problem rural women are supposed to firstly understand their power and ability. They must accept the fact of equality wholly.- It will then be possible for them to find ways of competing with men for the benefit of both men and women. This is what the women in the frontline states ought to learn from Liberation Movements - Women joined the struggles with men. The case of FRELIMO, SWAPO, ZANU, ZAPU, ANC and PAC are worth noting. Women were found even among the top position of the movements. This was possible because of their initiatives and thus men were forced to understand.

Secondly women must take the initiatives of educating men on the question of sex equality as happened in the case of SWAPO where women in the movement took the initiative to educate men in the movement. For this women in the frontline states must learn not to accept defeat easily.

The Frontline States, can be categorised into two - firstly, those bordering South Africa directly like Swaziland, Lesotho, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. These countries are not independent as their fate is determined by South African racist regime. This is justified by several bombing and killings within these countries by racist regime of South Africa. For this the role of women is the same as that of women in South Africa i.e. they must join any struggle against invasion. They must play the same role as that of women within South Africa. For other Frontline States like Tanzania and Zambia moral and material support of the liberation struggle is very important.

FOOTNOTES

1. Mfanga, M.: The National Question in South Africa, M.A. thesis 1986.

2 Hill Christopher: Bantustans, Heinemann Publisher London, 1963.

3. In the words of the ANC, Western links with apartheid South Africa is manifested by

   - Sales of weapons, weapon control system
   - sales of military equipment for supposed civilian or dual purpose employment
   - provision of spare parts and servicing for weapons previously sold
   - sales of Telecommunications and computer equipment to armed forces and armament industry
   - Nuclear collaboration
   - fuel supply to armed forces
   - shipment of armaments sold by another party
   - channelling of arms sales through third parties to hide the origin of sales.
   - provision of licences and patents to armaments industry
   - sales of machinery and tools for arms factories
   - sales of components and parts which only on assembly become identifiably military products
   - co-operation in research and development
   - joint development and production projects
   - activities in South African of multi-national subsidiaries
   - Academic and Scientific collaboration
   - General technology transfer
   - direct and indirect financing
   - secondment, exchange and training of personnel. (See Mark William Shope, ANC paper to the International Conference on the planned and spontaneous Refugee Settlements in Africa, Dar es Salaam 1st - 3rd April, 1987).

4. Martin Bailey: Shell and BP in South Africa. Third World Publications 151 Stradford Road Birmingham 1977.

Further evidence of imperialist domination in Southern Africa is illustrated politically by the refusal of United States and Britain to implement resolution 435 which has been universally accepted as the basis of political settlement of the Namibian question - South African authorities the USA and the UK government have insisted on the linkage of independence of Namibia with the withdrawal of the Cuban troops from Angola.

5. M. Mfanga, op. cit., p. 14.

6. This Act is an outgrowth of various legislations that sought to deprive Africans of land. Among these legislations is the Native land Act, the Stallard Commission of 1922 which synically provides in part

> Africans should only be allowed to enter the white man's creation when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart there from when he ceases so to minister.

Other legislations on land are:

Bantu Urban Areas Act 1945 No. 25

- Group Areas Act 1957.
- Group Areas Act 1950 No. 41.
- Native Trust and Land Act 1958 No. 41.
- Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act 1946 No. 28.
- Coloured Persons Settlement Act 1940.
- Coloured Mission Status and Reserve Amendment Act 1955 (No. 35).

7. Resalynde Arinslie: Master and Serfs Farm Labour In South Africa. International Defence and Aid Fund for South Africa 104 Newgate Stree London EC1 (Revised Edition) January 1977.

8. Grassroots (Johannesburg) July 1985.

9. From the Women's Desk: A PAC Women's Wing News Service. August 9 Special p. 10.

10. Immorality Act 1950 and Immorality Act 1957.

11. AZANIA News No. 3 1986, p. 16.

12. Hilda Bernstein: South Africa The Terrorism of Torture. International Defence and Aid Fund 1972.

13. From the Women Dest: A PAC Womens' Wing News Service. August 9 Special p. 7.

Other Women such Mrs Nelson Mandella are constantly subjected to arrests detention etc.

14. Availability of basic needs like medical facilities, essential commodities clean water and fuel is a problem in rural areas. The situation is aggravated by the lack of transports.

15. It is their plots in the sense that after the sale of the crop it is the men who appropriate all the money although their wives also participated in caring for crops.

16. Referred to by Achola Pala in her paper on "Women and Rural Development in Kenya" 1975.