

Class, Race and Gender : The Political Economy of Women in Colonial Natal.

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PREFACE

Colonial Natal has become an increasingly popular field of investigation for historians of Southern Africa over the last decade or so. This trend is not premature or irrelevant for, although not demonstrating the economic impact of the diamond-mining industry of the Cape, or the gold-mining industry of the Transvaal, the political economy of nineteenth century Natal played a significant role in forming patterns of South African social and economic development, as well as attitudes towards this, not least of all in terms of labour exploitation.

The history of Natal during this period has been lacking by and large in what I consider to be two important aspects. Firstly, the colony, on the whole, has been neglected by Marxist and radical historians; and secondly, the history of women in South Africa, as yet a nascent area of research in itself, has not included an attempt to date, to understand the lives of those women who lived along the south-east coastal belt of Southern Africa, between the Drakensberg and the Indian Ocean. This study strives to be a preliminary step in the direction of redressing this imbalance, by offering an introductory exposition on the political economy of women in colonial Natal.

There are a number of acknowledgements which I would like to take this opportunity of making. First and foremost, I wish to express a deep debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Anthony Lumby. Throughout the preparation of this thesis and at all times, his door has been open and his time unstintingly given for the discussion of problems and for the assuaging of doubts. Without his scholarly guidance, his faith in my ability and his moral support, this thesis could not have been submitted in 1982. I would also like to use this medium to express my undaunted admiration for his dedication to the discipline of economic history and for his constant quest, both in his own work and in that of his students, for historical truth. In this regard, Dr. Lumby has always been sympathetic towards and enthusiastic over the coexistence in his department of a variety of theoretical paradigms, an attitude which is

not only admired and appreciated by those who work with him, but which is sadly recognized as a frequently unusual quality in the dichotomized and polarized academic community of this country.

My thanks are also due to Mr. Daniel North-Coombes for the time he has spent assisting me in my search for theoretical clarity and cohesion. He shares with Dr. Lumby a dedication to his work and to the discipline as a whole.

I owe much to the help of the staff of the University of Natal Library, Durban, the Natal Archives, Killie Campbell Africana Library and the Don Africana Library. I would also like to thank Professor S. Bhana and the Department of History at the University of Durban-Westville for making available to me material that was not accessible elsewhere. Thanks too, are due to Judy Granger for her speed and efficiency in the typing of this thesis and her patient perseverance in the correction of the proof.

Finally, and appropriately in the light of the nature of this study, I would like to thank one woman in particular. Were it not for the love, courage and support of my mother, as well as her encouragement and approval over the years, it is likely that this thesis may never have been undertaken. For her sacrifice and her understanding, my love, respect and heartfelt thanks are given.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Just as has always been the case with the inegalitarianisms of race and class, we see that sexual inegalitarianism proceeds with a massive disregard of the ordinary canons of empirical reasoning.(1)

The aim of this study is threefold: firstly to examine the role and status of women in the political economy of colonial Natal, secondly to examine the manner in which culturally determined ideologies of gender roles, as well as designations of race and class, affected the condition of first African, then white and finally Indian women in this particular setting and, lastly, to consider the extent to which social theory pertinent to this investigation, aids and abets such a form of historical research. The premise on which this work is based, is that it is impossible to write history without the use of a theoretical framework, whether or not this is recognized. Any attempt to explain the past in an a-theoretical sense, either explicitly or implicitly, is not to acknowledge the existence of personal or cultural prejudices or predilections. It also undermines the significance of historical epistemology and may lead to falling party to "... an artificial, sometimes jealously guarded, academic division of labour."<sup>(2)</sup> In particular, a study of this nature, which considers the juxtaposition of social groups and their location in the overall social structure, requires not only historical sensitivity, but theoretical awareness. To fail in this regard gives rise to the possibility of accepting uncritically, either contemporary or prevailing ideological justifications for, and stereotypes of, social and economic designations.

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1. P. Green, The Pursuit of Inequality (1981), p. 132.
  2. G. McLennan, Marxism and the Methodologies of History (1981), p. 233.

Further, a theoretical approach is called for in this instance, by virtue of the fact that the central preoccupation of this work is the general problem of inequality, as manifested in the particular historical context of colonial Natal. It is believed that the methodological priority of economic historians in particular, and social scientists in general, should be to understand and relate the foci of their research to the overall social and economic institutions and structure of which they form a part. Both, of course, should be understood in historical context. Social theory, in the tradition of Durkheim, Marx and Weber, has concerned itself with creating a picture of the social structure as a whole, locating particular groups within this whole and examining the way in which such groups relate to one another, as well as how they stand in relation to systems of control over economic and political resources. Social stratification and cleavages have been analysed in terms of a number of criteria, notably for present purposes, those of class, status and ethnicity. Some but not all commentators have concerned themselves with the question of gender. It is argued that such analyses can largely benefit from the addition of an historical dimension, both because present social relationships have a past, and because historical empiricism and understanding represents the other side of the theoretical coin. Further, it provides a safeguard against the tendency of some social theorists, to ascend to high levels of theoretical abstraction which are often tautological and which frequently obscure the reality of the experience of those groups with which they are concerned, and whose condition they are attempting to understand. At worst, this level of theorizing may pre-empt the need for any empirical investigation at all. //

Whilst not demonstrating eclecticism, the study aims at validating the use of certain theoretical models, which will be spelt out in Chapter Two. It is considered that one of the tasks of the historian is to communicate his or her ideas and findings as lucidly as possible. In line with this ideal, therefore, in the following chapter the concepts which are used are discussed as clearly and as simply as is practical, without, at the same time, doing injury to the theoretical complexities involved. Simplicity has also been striven for in the light of the sad

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tendency for much of the writing of the neo-Marxist tradition to be esoteric. The intention, therefore, has been to make the conceptual aspects of this work intelligible to both those familiar with the Marxist discourse and to those operating within an alternative paradigm.

This work is above all, however, an historical exercise, conducted within the particular framework of historical materialism. The assumption is held that theory without empiricism is sterile and thus not only may theory be used to elucidate historical investigation and explanation, but relevant theoretical models may be tested for validity in a particular conjuncture. Concurrence is reached with Stinchcombe who has held that the greatest theorists must necessarily be rigorous empiricists as well, because "they become great theorists down there among the details, for it is the details that theories in history have to grasp if they are to be any good."<sup>(3)</sup> The use of theoretical models, therefore, should be rationalized in terms of the historical evidence they are intended to illuminate. In this regard, and with reference to feminist theory in particular, cogniscance is taken of the comments made by Kuhn and Wolpe that:

... in arguing the need for a more rigorous and analytical approach to work on the position of women - in arguing, that is, for theoretical work - we have still to question constantly the purpose of such work. The need for theory cannot be taken for granted: theory needs to be justified for each specific situation within which and for which it is produced.<sup>(4)</sup>

It is specifically on these grounds that a theoretical approach must be embraced. Feminist theory has largely concerned itself with the position of women under modern capitalism. It cannot be directly applied to the complex modern South African context, let alone the situation which prevailed under pre-industrial colonial conditions. Hence, feminist theory must be used either only in part, or it must be adapted or refined

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3. A.L. Stinchcombe, Theoretical Methods in Social History (1978), p. 124.
  4. A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe (eds) Feminism and Materialism (1978), p. 4.

for it to bear relevance for less contemporary or orthodox historical situations.

By the same token, the adoption of class theory has to recognize the presence of a strong racial dimension in the development of inequality in Natal and, to be confronted, is the bourgeois critique of Frank Parkin who has argued that the Marxist analysis of class "cannot account properly for those complexities that arise when racial, religious, ethnic, and sexual divisions run at a tangent to formal class divisions."<sup>(5)</sup> Equally, when ethnic diversity is present, circumstances are frequently analysed purely in terms of 'race-relations', without sufficient recognition being given to material or other derivations of inequality.

It is necessary not only to discuss the need for and the nature of theory in history, (indeed, Chapter Two is devoted entirely to an exposition of the theoretical models which impinge upon the topic), but to expand here on the nature of historical investigation itself and, in particular, that of women's role in history. History is, above all, a selective view of the past. The history produced by a particular scholar, and economic history is no exception, is a response to the questions he or she asks of the past. What is deemed important is determined not only by the tools and source material at the researcher's disposal, but attitudes and preconceptions, consciously or unconsciously held. These, in addition, are dynamic in nature, altering as the contemporary power structure shifts. When a group or class of people becomes conscious of itself, or when society recognizes such a group, then a focus on that group's past is likely to appear. South African historiography itself, is replete with examples of this phenomenon, the burgeoning field of African history from the 1960s onwards, being an obvious case in point.

Historians generally have written women out of history, or more accurately, have not written women into history. This is largely as a

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5. F. Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique (1979), p. 4.

result of their ideas of historical significance and the approaches commonly adopted towards a study of the past. Traditionally, wars and politics have dominated the historical arena. Tangible and dramatic events, as well as the lives of dominant men, have determined periodization in history; and because women have rarely occupied roles in which they could wield visible political power, it has been assumed, if they have been thought about at all, that women were passive objects of history, that events acted upon them and that they have played no part in change.

With the rise of the suffragette movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women became conscious of themselves as a group and, more importantly, of their oppression. This resulted in the beginnings of the writing of women into history. This new trend towards a women's history, however, was crucially moulded by existing assumptions and attitudes about the discipline. Most works were concerned with women's institutions, for example the suffragette movement itself. The contribution of women to organizations or institutions constituted a further step along the path of women's history, as well as the biographies of outstanding women. However, as noted by Lerner:

The history of notable women, is the history of exceptional, even deviant women, and does not describe the experience and history of the mass of women. Also women of different classes have different historical experiences. To comprehend the full complexity of society at a given stage of its development, it is essential to take account of such differences. (6)

With the rise of economic history as a separate field, women were not, until very recently, specifically singled out for study. (7)

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6. G. Lerner, "Placing Women in History: A 1975 Perspective" in Carrol, B.A., (ed.) Liberating Women's History (1976), p. 357.
  7. It is interesting in this regard that at the Eighth International Economic History Congress held in Budapest in August 1982 there was a session devoted to 'Women in Economic and Social History'.

Furthermore, because the economic role of women is not always obvious, that is, because it is seldom seen to be in the forefront of the market place, an economic history of women, by definition, inquires into women's domestic as well as extra-domestic position and necessarily becomes not only an economic history, but a social history as well. Social history itself, and more particularly family history, accorded women a greater place. Nevertheless, family and social history are not women's history per se. They do not usually include single women or women's extra-domestic functions, and do not highlight the discrepancy between women's familial status and their societal and economic status. Thus, although these developments constituted a step forward in the direction of writing women into the past, they were not sufficient and they failed to produce a general picture of women's all-round condition in a given period.

These deficiencies are not only founded in the ideological preconceptions of researchers, but can also be largely explained by the nature of the documentation upon which scholars are often compelled to depend. By way of example, for this study of women in Natal, it proved difficult not to become preoccupied either with family history alone, or with the activities of exceptional women in the colony's past. Looking at African women in the pre-colonial setting, for instance, documents were largely concerned with women who occupied positions of social importance, such as the wives of chiefs or women who had status by virtue of their ritual significance. When reviewing the incorporation of the African population of Natal into the capitalist periphery, once again source material revealed the exceptional cases of those women who came to form part of the kholwa,<sup>(8)</sup> or who became urbanized and gained a measure of economic independence in the informal sector.

With regard to the investigations of white women, the position did not prove to be very different. Any attempt to assess their general status as a group and their social and economic role, was confounded by the fact

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8. This is the Northern Nguni word for 'believers' and was in common use from the early 1850s, referring to those Africans who attached themselves to mission stations.

that in the sources consulted, women's activities were frequently only documented by virtue of their husbands' positions.<sup>(9)</sup> Trade directories only listed the occupations of single women in business or agriculture, obscuring the extent to which married women may have been involved in extra-domestic economic activities.<sup>(10)</sup> Women's domestic activities, often of important economic significance, varied according to their geographic and social location in the colony, but so elusive is this area of life to historical reconstruction, that it had to be teased out of a vast and varied number of sources in an attempt to present a general picture of the socio-economic condition of white women.

With regard to Indian women, apart from the active participation of a number of Moslem women in the passive resistance campaign which was waged intermittently from 1906 to 1913, and their role in litigation over marital status, less documentation was found concerning the activities of exceptional or deviant women and, in many ways, from a survey of the reports of the Protector of Indian Immigrants and other government officials, an overall picture of the experience of the mass of Indian women was more easily constructed.

Given these handicaps and limitations, only very general conclusions may be drawn in this study, regarding the condition of the mass of women in colonial Natal. Further, to make an assessment of the varying historical experiences of these different classes and races of women is something which can only be done by drawing implications from the vast mass of often peripheral and only partially relevant material consulted. Any researcher involved in the investigation of women in history can attest to the dearth of references to the female sex in conventional source material. It is necessary, therefore, either to evaluate such material in new terms, or to turn to other, less commonly consulted sources. The problems involved have been highlighted by Smith:

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9. Cf. for example :

T.H. Lewis (ed.) Women of South Africa (1913).

10. The Natal Almanac Register and Directory, 1863-1913.

Historical materials are preserved when it is in someone's interest to preserve them. For women, it has seldom been in the interest of the institutions of society to preserve their papers - the two exceptions are family memorabilia and feminist collections. In the family documents, material on women is often hidden or lost because family papers are seldom indexed under women's names.(11)

In this regard it should be pointed out that for colonial Natal, no feminist collections were uncovered and family papers, which of course were only applicable for the study of white women, were not found to be of great use, given the fact that only the papers of eminent families were readily accessible and they did not, therefore, yield much information as to the condition of white women in the colony in general. With regard to African women, in pre-colonial society they are doubly screened by the paucity of written material which exists, and the suspect nature of much that is extant.

A reconstruction of their condition has depended upon a reliance on written records, such as the diaries of contemporary white observers,<sup>(12)</sup> oral tradition such as the James Stuart Archives,<sup>(13)</sup> and the work of anthropologists.<sup>(14)</sup> However, the observations of outside white witnesses about alien cultures with different values and world views, bear the danger of illustrating more clearly the assumptions of the observer than the observed. With regard to the work of anthropologists in particular, the discipline grew out of the colonial encounter and its findings, directed towards a European audience, have

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11. H. Smith, "Feminism and the Methodology of Women's History" in Carrol, B.A., (ed.) op.cit., p. 372.
  12. For example:  
 W.C. Holden, The Past and Future of the Kaffir Races, 1866.  
 J. Shooter, The Kaffirs of Natal and the Zulu Country (Reprinted 1969)  
 C. Callaway, Nursery Tales, Traditions, and Histories of the Zulus (1868).
  13. C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright, (eds) James Stuart Archive (1976).
  14. E.J. Krige, The Social System of the Zulus (1936).  
 O.F. Raum, The Social Functions of Avoidances and Taboos among the Zulu (1973).

often been made by investigators brought up in an androcentric and imperialist tradition. With regard to their assessment of women in society, one limitation has been pointed out by Rogers:

Judgements by anthropologists and sociologists about the "status of women" in other societies may tell us more about those who are making these judgements than about their subjects. It is rare to find Westerners attributing a higher 'status' to women of other cultures, even older women, than they do to women in their own.(15)

This was found to be true not only of some of the anthropological analyses consulted, but even more particularly of contemporary accounts, such as those of magistrates and missionaries.

For African and Indian women, therefore, the main source material relied upon was official documentation, evaluated in less conventional terms, guided by theoretical considerations. For white women, additional use was made of less commonly consulted sources such as letters <sup>(16)</sup> and magazines.<sup>(17)</sup> In respect of the latter, and in the absence of substantial literary expositions on the subject, some use was made of illustrative evidence from which assumptions were drawn as to the position of women in colonial Natal.

In addition to these problems and handicaps encountered when studying women in a colonial society founded upon an androcentric imperialist tradition, one is faced with the need to identify not only sexual bias,

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15. B. Rogers, The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies (1980), p. 33.
16. For example:  
R.E. Gordon, (ed.) Dear Louisa: History of a Pioneer Family in Natal 1850-1888: Ellen McLeod's Letters to her Sister in England from the Byrne Valley (1970).
17. For example:  
The Natal Mercury Pictorial, 1907.  
The Pictorial, October 1910 - September 1911.  
The African Monthly, December 1906 - May 1907.  
The State, January 1910 - December 1912.

which is very often prominent, but also cultural, racial and class distortions on the part of contemporary commentators. As a result, a reconstruction of the actual experience of the various groups of women in Natal has proved extremely complex. Despite the variety of sources consulted, they have not proved sufficiently adequate to paint anything more vivid than a pastel water-colour of the life of Natal's female population during the period in question, which is in itself a commentary on the status of women at the time. For this reason neither a true comparative approach, nor a definitive history of women in Natal can be claimed. Rather, this investigation is designed to introduce women into the study of Natal's past, not only to better understand their role and status but also to illuminate more clearly the history of the colony itself.

This brings us to the question as to what justifies studying women as a separate field in history? Would it not be more appropriate to study women as a part of a particular class, racial group or other social or economic category? To what extent is it justifiable to draw links or comparisons between the vastly different experiences of rural African women beginning to feel the impact of the process of proletarianization on their lives; of white settler women undergoing the hardships of the pioneering life but the social elevation which colonial living ultimately brought them; and finally, of Indian indentured women exposed to the demoralizing and harsh realities of a system of forced labour? Smith has argued that the study of women's history is justified by the fact that women have held a unique position in society, regardless of the other restrictions on their lives, and that sexual divisions have been amongst the most basic distinctions within any society, determining the role and attitudes of both men and women. She has stated in this regard that:

... by studying the history of men in the past, one by no means knows what the realities of women's lives were during a given era. It is necessary, therefore, to view the development of women as a distinct sociological group which has experienced both overt and covert controls through legal, political and social restrictions. (18)

To a point this is acceptable but whilst it may be possible to study women as a sociological group in historically and socially homogeneous societies, it proves more difficult when dealing with a political economy such as that which existed in colonial Natal. Here women, though sharing some forms of ideological oppression and gender-related subordination, were cleft by divisions of race and class, as shall be demonstrated in the following chapters. It is considered, therefore, to be counter-productive in this instance, to study women as a distinct sociological group without significant cogniscance being taken of other divisions, or to study them in isolation from the general socio-economic context which existed at the time.

Nevertheless, recognition must constantly be given to the fact that historians, men and women alike, have generally operated within conceptual frameworks based on a long tradition of patriarchal values, and that they have been subject to a process of socialization which has resulted in the acceptance of women in a peripheral or 'transhistorical' role, a status which is not justified and which can result in a distorted view of the past.

Hence, one of the major contributions of women's history is that it challenges many of the basic assumptions made by historians. Most historians acknowledge that 'objective' history is a myth and consent or assert that their own findings are not value-free. Frequently, however, "they are as yet quite unaware of their own sexist bias and, more important, of the sexist bias which pervades the value system, the culture, and the very language within which they work."<sup>(19)</sup> Thus women's history reminds the discipline of the need to review values and biases, and to check, if not eliminate, culturally-determined preconceptions which perhaps would not otherwise have been recognized. An example of how a consideration of women's role and status may modify accepted assumptions or hypotheses may be seen in Chapter Three. Here criticism is leveled at Bundy's interpretation of the fall of the South

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19. G. Lerner, op.cit., p. 362

African peasantry,<sup>(20)</sup> on the grounds that by virtue not only of its preoccupation with external determinants but also of its androcentrism, it under-estimates the significance of internal determinants in the peasantry's decline. Further, women's history not only draws attention to attitudinal predilections of researchers, but those embodied in the historical material itself.

Another contribution made by women's history, and one which is particularly relevant to this work, is that it challenges the traditional periodization of history. Events which signal a turning-point or change for men, are not necessarily those which most radically affect women. For Natal, whilst the imposition of British rule in 1843, the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, the attainment of responsible government in 1893, the Bambata Rebellion of 1906 and the establishment of Union in 1910 may have impinged on the lives of women as dramatically as on the lives of men, such political events may not have constituted a change in the status or condition of women sufficient to justify their use as the basis for periodizing a history of Natal, specifically concerned with the position and role of women. More relevant, for example, may be an alteration in or an attack upon the relations of productions, which could well constitute a turning-point in the experience of women. It is in fact demonstrated that this was the case for African women, when first discussing the impact of the growth of peasant agriculture and the beginnings of oscillating migratory labour on the pre-colonial mode of production.

With regard to white women, their very arrival into a colonial situation the pioneering element of early settler life, as well as the fact that they could avail themselves of cheap domestic and farm labour, constituted a fairly dramatic change in their condition and status. It will be argued further that gender-related ideological imperatives altered in a colonial setting, exacerbating the Victorian double standard and resulting in increased restrictions on the movement and flexibility of white women at a time when their European counterparts were flexing

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20. C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (1979).

their muscles and increasing their independence. The growth of such colonial attitudes towards women resulted in often unnecessarily draconian proposals and measures for the protection of white women from the perceived threat of black male sexuality.

In the case of Natal's Indian women, they moved from a status in caste-ridden India, where, in most cases, they had social or cultural security, despite perilous economic prospects. On arrival in Natal they were ascribed the status of forced-labourers where they experienced dubious economic security and, initially at least, social and cultural chaos. In most respects, this was even more dramatic than the impact of settler life on the condition and status of white women. As the Indian community in Natal became more entrenched, so Indian women played an important part in the development of cultural cohesion and stability as well as the economic development of this group. As was the case with white men, Indian men fought for the integrity of their womenfolk, particularly over the issue of the status of women married under the rites of religions recognizing polygamy. Indeed, this issue became one of great importance during the passive resistance campaign which was waged between 1906 and 1913.

In this review, therefore, the starting point differs for each group of women, whilst the study terminates for all three groups in 1913, a significant year in each regard. The changing role and status of African women is examined from pre-colonial times, through the colonial era and culminating in 1913 when the pattern of migratory labour was entrenched by the Natives Land Act of 1913. White women are reviewed from the beginnings of emigration to Natal until 1913 when the report was presented of a Commission which the Union Government found it necessary to appoint to enquire into Assaults on Women.<sup>(21)</sup> Indian women are reviewed from the time of their importation into the colony in 1860 until 1913, also a significant date for this group, given their full participation in the passive resistance campaign of that year partly concerned with the status of some of their ranks, and their role in the

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21. Report on the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Assaults on Women, U.G. 39/1913.

strikes of indenture labourers which accompanied it.

Having illustrated some of the advantages for historical study of the challenges of feminism, it is also necessary to point out the problems and pitfalls of feminist history. Feminism attempts to locate women at the centre of any effort to understand or to change social and economic attitudes and institutions. On its own, however, it falls prey to the dangers of idiosyncratic or theoretical irrelevance. Thus the valuable contribution of history to feminism must be recognized and has indeed been spelt out:

Without knowledge of historical roots, our view of daily life remains at the level of individual reaction to what strikes us as intolerable. Our analyses tend to document our feelings of subjection rather than the underlying conditions of the subjection of all women. Through historical studies of women, as changing, diversified participants in social development we can begin to answer the question, on what basis do women share an historical existence?(22)

This contribution, although illuminating the value of history for feminist endeavour, also reveals a great danger inherent in the study of women's history: the tendency of many authors to see women's oppression first in isolation from the mainstream of historical events; and secondly, in terms of a common unity, denying by implication, the enormous diversity of the experience of different classes of women. Gender differentiation has meant different things to different classes of women at different times. For example, one could question the extent to which improvements in the conditions of upper-class women have been dependent upon a deterioration in the conditions of lower-class women? Nothing illustrates this problem more clearly than the position of white settler women in Natal. Although subjected to the operation of Victorian

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22. A.D. Gordon, M.J. Buhle and N. Schrom Dye, "The Problem of Women's History" in Carrol, B.A., (ed.) op.cit., p. 84, (emphasis in the original).

patriarchal values and standards, the condition of these women was vastly elevated by the employment first of male and later of female African domestic and farm labour. Thus the periodization and study of women's history depends as much on class and race as on gender, and the researcher has to be constantly aware that women cannot be isolated from their historical setting but rather must be firmly located within it. In the case of South African history, and particularly its early history, women remain hidden from the past. Even with regard to more current studies, there is a general disregard for feminist concerns or the role and status of women in the social structure. Despite the number of Marxist scholars who have concerned themselves with a materialist interpretation of the South African social formation, to include in this the question of gender, is something which has been almost totally neglected, and certainly as far as nineteenth century studies are concerned.

In conclusion, it is necessary to locate colonial Natal within the bounds of the theoretical perspective adopted, that is, within the framework of historical materialism. In contrast to studies of the gold mining industry and the Witwatersrand, very few radical historians have concerned themselves with the history of Natal in the colonial period. The two most notable exceptions are Guy who was concerned with the subjugation of the Zulu state,<sup>(23)</sup> and Slater who has seen Natal as:

... one of many peripheral sectors of a single expanding world capitalist economy, albeit a sector made up of an articulation of modes or production based upon different and sometimes contradictory forms of socio-labour organization along a capitalist- pre-capitalist continuum.(24)

This view is considered valid particularly as it recognizes the importance both of internal and external determinants in the development

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23. J.J. Guy, The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom (1979).

24. H. Slater, "The Changing Pattern of Economic Relationship in Rural Natal, 1838-1914", in Marks, S. and Atmore, A. (eds) Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa (1980), p. 148.

of Natal's political economy. To achieve any lucid conception of the role and position of women in colonial Natal, it is necessary to examine their status and role in the social groups to which they belonged, not only in terms of their own internal dynamics but also in terms of the points of interaction between them, as well as with the colonial social formation itself. Further, by virtue of Natal's position as a part of the British colonial empire, its economic role as part of the periphery of the world capitalist economy and its peopling by British settlers, it is important to locate the colony in the context of the nineteenth century international economy.

In Natal, following the analysis of Slater, pre-colonial production was characterised by the lineage mode of production whereby the division of labour was conducted along kinship lines.<sup>(25)</sup> The Northern Nguni who inhabited the area were a class society. Nevertheless, for reasons which will be spelt out in Chapter Three, unlike the Zulu kingdom to the north, state formation had not yet taken place. With the establishment of colonial rule, an agricultural cash crop sector developed. Initially this development did not exhibit a racial dimension as African peasants and white settlers competed in the colonial market. However, given Natal's position as part of the capitalist periphery, "The main economic task of the colonial state was to create a labour-force in those sectors in which finance capital could be most profitably invested."<sup>(26)</sup>

As will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, in an effort to make settler agriculture viable and profitable, an effort which necessitated the provision of a cheap and abundant labour supply, an attack was launched upon the lineage mode of production. This involved the introduction of taxation (a hut tax in 1843 and a poll tax in 1905), in order to increase the cash needs of the African population and so induce them to engage in wage labour. It also involved land redistribution and the setting up of

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25. Pre-capitalist modes of production will be explained in Chapter Two.  
 26. J.G. Taylor, From Modernization to Modes of Production: A Critique of the Sociologies of Development and Underdevelopment (1979), p. 209 (Emphasis in the original).

reserves which, although initially adequate, during the course of the century became over-crowded and over-worked, rendering peasant and subsistence agriculture more and more difficult. Finally, the task of proletarianization also included efforts to introduce forced labour. A successful example of this was the operation of isibalo whereby young men had to serve a period of time in the construction of roads and railways. A less successful example was the attempt to induce Africans to engage in wage labour on the sugar plantations either by the apprenticeship of young boys or on a contract basis. The plantation sector, largely in the hands of finance capital,<sup>(27)</sup> eventually had to resort to the importation of forced labour in the form of Indian indentured immigrants. Thus for the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, the non-capitalist mode of production did not remain impervious to colonial strategies aimed at displacing it, but constantly resisted their implementation. The colonial state, therefore, was unable to guarantee the provision of a regular and reliable supply of African wage labour to the settler economy which operated alongside the non-capitalist mode. Despite the continued existence and importance of this non-capitalist mode, it is still possible to speak of a capitalist colonial social formation, particularly if the definition spelt out by Szymanski is accepted: He has stated that :

The social formation refers to the aggregate of modes of production that make up a given economy. It is quite possible for slave labour to exist alongside free labour and serfdom, as well as simple commodity production.... But normally one set of productive relations is dominant in any given social formation. This dominant set of relations of production determines the fundamental logic of that social formation as a whole.(28)

In Natal, capitalist relations of production became increasingly dominant

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27. P. Richardson, "The Natal Sugar Industry, 1849-1905" An Interpretative Essay", University of London, Institute for Commonwealth Studies: Collected Seminar Papers, Vol. 12, No. 28, 1981, p. 37.

28. A. Szymanski, Is the Red Flag Flying? (1979/80). p. 14.

during the course of the colonial era, but they were ultimately dependent upon "the holding of state power by the political representatives of the economically dominant capitalist class".<sup>(29)</sup> This class comprise white settlers engaged in commercial activities, agricultural production, extracting pursuits and land speculation. It was not until a much later stage that processing and import-substituting industries were established. At one level therefore, the task of the colonial state was to mediate between the various interests of the colonial capitalist class and at another level, the metropole.

Finally, whilst it is generally true that the driving force behind colonization was the desire of the European capitalist nations to widen world markets and to transform the colonies into producers of raw materials and overflow markets for European manufactured goods, Natal was incorporated into the British Empire with reluctance, and long before its economic potential was proved or realized. Indeed, nineteenth century Natal was never a pure plantation economy, or one exhibiting the general characteristics of colonial extractive endeavour. Despite the presence of sugar cultivation on a large scale from the 1860s and coal mining from the late 1880s, other sectors such as the smaller up-country farmers also represented a powerful lobby. As pointed out by Rex, colonial societies almost universally, also provide economic opportunities which major colonial owner-producers are unable, or unwilling to exploit.<sup>(30)</sup> White settler farmers and artisans, although falling short of the status of planter or coal-owner, owned the means of production and derived opportunities from the colonial situation far in excess of those which would have been afforded them in Britain. Further, labourers also emigrated to Natal and were elevated in status vis-a-viz black labourers by virtue of their ethnic affiliation to the colonial ruling class. Traders in Natal comprised white settlers as well as Indian traders who continually battled for hegemony in the commercial market throughout much of the period.

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29. J.G. Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 236.

30. J. Rex, "The Theory of Race Relations - A Weberian Approach", in UNESCO, Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism (1980), p. 134.

Thus it is simplistic to refer to colonial Natal only in terms of its position as part of the periphery of the world capitalist system. It came to develop a unique social formation of its own, although ultimately it was bound by its position vis-a-vis the metropolitan country. The capitalist class in the colony was not a homogeneous group which stood as unified exploiters of African and Indian labour. There were divisions of interest amongst planters, coal-owners, settler farmers, traders and urban artisans and workers. Whilst ethnic affiliation often transcended and placated class divisions among the settler interest, and whilst all exploited black labour to a greater or lesser degree, white cohesion was facilitated by the presence and activities of the colonial state. This comprised not only the metropolitan government and its directives, but the colonial administrators as well. The role of the latter was to mediate between the various settler interests in such a way that the normal range of colonial duties and activities could be carried out without the unnecessary and expensive involvement of Whitehall. Although they frequently did side with the interests of one or other settler group or with white Natalians as a whole, they ultimately had to keep the colonial show on the road and thus, in some ways, remained a distinguishable and sometimes disliked group in themselves.

Just as colonial situations exhibit their own social formations, so too, do these give rise to particular ideologies. Whilst much of the ideology articulated in colonial Natal was the product of a general Victorian imperialist world view, much was the product of the colonial conjuncture itself; the vast size of the African population and its general proximity to white settlement, the presence of a body of forced labourers in the form of Indian indentured immigrants who later came to form a substantial and a growing 'free' Indian community which attempted to compete for opportunities with whites, and so forth. Thus what follows is not only an attempt to understand the economic base of colonial Natal as it affected women, but the superstructure as well.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CLASS, RACE AND GENDER

According to the materialist conception of history, the determining factor in history is, in the last instance, the production and reproduction of actual life. Neither Marx nor I have asserted more than this. Whoever, then, distorts this proposition to infer that the economic factor is the sole determining factor makes a meaningless nonsense of this statement.

F. Engels.(1)

Given the complex and elusive nature of the topic under research, a strong and well articulated measure of theoretical guidance has been considered necessary. In this chapter the way in which theories of class, race and gender have been adopted will be spelt out, and the manifold inter-relationships between these concepts will then be briefly examined, within the framework of historical materialism.

#### Class

Social theorists have always been concerned with the investigation of inequalities in society and their translation into social stratification. By this is not meant that inequalities and social stratification are synonymous. The latter refers to the institutionalization of certain patterns of differential reward, whereby some groups succeed in maintaining their privileged position in the social order, through time.

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1. F. Engels in a letter to Bloch, quoted in: Lecourt, D., "Marxism as a Critique of Sociological Theories" in UNESCO, Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism (1980), p. 281. (Emphasis in the original).

How social stratification emerges, or originates, has been an area of debate amongst social theorists for many generations. The present controversy is waged between those who see social stratification as functional to the maintenance of social stability or equilibrium,<sup>(2)</sup> and those who follow more closely in the footsteps of the two great classical protagonists of class theory, Max Weber and Karl Marx. Whilst the functionalists emphasize the necessity of institutions for the continuance of a social system, the Marxian-Weberian tradition recognizes the inevitability of historical change, which Marxism in particular, associates with class conflict.

The theoretical divergences between Weber and Marx have been succinctly captured by Crompton and Gubbay, who have stated that:

Weberian theory focuses on the way in which societal rewards are acquired, and the manner in which patterns of acquisition are determined by the market. Marx's theory focuses on the manner in which new values are created, and the social relationships arising out of and sustaining this process.<sup>(3)</sup>

Weber conceived of class in terms of the notion of 'life-chances' that is, the extent to which individuals have the chance of acquiring material

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2. Functionalists are much concerned with the question of equilibrium in society, and in that respect their theory derives from Durkheim, although they also owe much to Weber. The name most commonly associated with modern functionalists is that of Talcot Parsons. Nevertheless, functionalists can derive from any theoretical school, or hold any world-view. Associated with functionalists, to a point, are structuralists who seek to identify a fundamental, hidden structure which holds society together and which differs from observable social relations. Structuralists and structural-functionalists are primarily concerned with social order and how society is held together. The most well-known exponent of the structuralist school is the anthropologist, C. Levi-Strauss, and, indeed, structuralism is more commonly associated with anthropology than with the other social sciences. The views of one notable structuralist, M. Godelier, are evaluated positively in Chapter Three.
  3. R. Crompton and J. Gubbay, Economy and Class Structure (1977), p. 16, (Emphasis in the original).

and non-material rewards. With regard to the latter, these symbolic aspects of social stratification Weber saw in terms of status. Status groups may be distinguished according to non-material criteria such as prestige or social honour and although "the distribution of honour often corresponds fairly closely to the distribution of material reward, the two are not always in conjunction and, in fact, often display considerable inconsistency."<sup>(4)</sup> Weber adopted the notion of status groups because he observed a disjunction between class and status positions in the societies or communities he studied. This was something he believed could not be adequately explained by marxist class theory. Neo-Weberians have tended to absorb Weber's distinctions too whole-heartedly and this has given rise to the 'multi-dimensional' model of stratification which sees inequality arising out of many independent and overlapping sources. Weber himself, on the other hand, had more in common with Marx in making class, as well as its symbolic dimension, status, the focus of his concern.

Weber believed that the life-chances which determined class operated through the market, that is, the distribution of material reward. Weber stated that:

We may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific casual component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets ... It is the most elemental economic act that the way in which the disposition over material property is distributed among a plurality of people, meeting competitively in the market for the purpose of exchange, in itself creates specific life chances.(5)

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4. F. Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order (1972), p. 28.
  5. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (eds) From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (1948), p. 181.

Thus what is argued is that classes may be distinguished from one another by virtue of their relationship to a market in which they compete with each other to maximize their material reward. Whilst class is dependent upon the objective criterion of the market, status is subjectively derived, being manifest in a particular 'life style'. Further, status groups also stand opposed to class. This is because by efforts to maintain prestige or social honour, they hinder "the strict carrying through of the market principle, i.e. the principle that a man, or what he offers, is valued in terms of the law of supply and demand in an open market."<sup>(6)</sup>

Whilst the distinction between class and status groups can be valuable, particularly with regard to the study of pre-capitalist societies where the classical marxist two-class model is difficult to apply, it has, according to the neo-Weberian Frank Parkin, limitations when used in an analysis of a modern class system.<sup>(7)</sup> In addition, the Weberian divide between class and status groups is not sufficient to warrant the adoption of this approach rather than a marxist analysis, for the study of pre-capitalist societies. Marx was concerned, above all, with the study of the capitalist mode of production and "The observations of Marx and Engels on pre-capitalist society ... were never molded into a systematic analysis."<sup>(8)</sup> Nevertheless, the marxist tradition has since devoted itself to a refinement of a materialist approach to pre-capitalist society, both in terms of the classical linear view of history and in terms of third world social formations. Further, Marx and Engels were quite aware of the difference between class and status. Marxism recognizes that within a class, individuals or fractions may have a higher or lower status. The fundamental divergence between a Weberian and marxist approach in this regard, is that for marxism, the acquisition or loss of status has little meaning for social change. Thus, although it has been argued that Weber offered a refinement of Marx's theory of

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6. J. Littlejohn, Social Stratification: An Introduction (1972), p. 23.
  7. F. Parkin, op.cit., p. 29.
  8. W.H. Shaw, Marx's Theory of History (1978), p. 114.

class, thereby completing the Marxist analysis, it is important to understand this intrinsic difference. Further it must be acknowledged that Weber differed considerably from Marx "in his conception of power, in his assessment of the course of European history, and in this conception of what constitutes a satisfactory explanation in sociology."<sup>(9)</sup> For Weber, and sociology in general, the notion of class depends not only on the economic position of people but on their consciousness or self-conception as well. According to Kühne, "It is a matter of dispute whether the notion of class in Marx's work really represents a sociological category. It is fundamentally an economic definition...."<sup>(10)</sup> For Marx, the basic and intrinsic criteria of class was that of property relations, that is, how people stood in relation to the means of production. In the final analysis, therefore, social class is determined by, and is synonymous with, economic class.

Marxist class analysis is, therefore, grounded in the relations of production rather than distribution. For marxists, the existence of a market is not simply taken for granted and is not considered synonymous with capitalism. The market and relations of exchange existed before the development of capitalist production and, indeed, it was the production of commodities for exchange which formed one of the preconditions for the development of the dominance of capitalist relations of production. For Marx, the most fundamental of all human activities was productive activity or labour, that is, the way in which people cooperated in order to transform nature, to win from it a livelihood.

Marx referred to the manner in which this process took place as the mode of production and this in turn had two essential components : the forces of production (comprising the means of production and labour itself) and the relations of production. By relations of production Marx meant the social organization of property relations, that is, the relations between

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9. J. Littlejohn, op.cit., p. 22.

10. K. Kühne, Economics and Marxism Volume I: The Renaissance of the Marxian System (1979), p. 22.

those who owned and controlled property and labour, and those who had nothing more than their labour-power (conceived of as a commodity in itself) to sell. The cornerstone of Marx's explanation of exploitation, and therefore class conflict, has been the labour theory of value, which states that commodities exchange against each other in relation to the quantity of labour necessary to make them. For Marx, labour could be useful or productive. Useful labour was that conducted to produce use values, necessary for the maintenance of human existence. The concept of productive labour is an historically specific concept,<sup>(11)</sup> being that labour which produces exchange value. In this regard, Lichtheim has argued that :

Exchange value is defined as a historical category pertaining only to commodities produced for a market. Under capitalism, where the producers no longer own their tools (as distinct from 'simple commodity production' where they do) exchange value acquires a further connotation: it now signifies that the social division of labour, which gives rise to the phenomenon of commodity exchange, is at the same time a division between classes.(12)

This arises out of the extraction of surplus value. In pre-capitalist societies, commodities have different use values, but the same exchange value. Under capitalism, certain classes arise with initial amounts of capital to invest with the intention of expanding this. For Marx, capital does not mean money, machines or tools or the market. Rather it is a social process. The purpose of the capitalist, on entering production, is to expand value. This is done by the exploitation of labour-power because, for Marx, the only objective measure of value is labour time. Labour-power is bought and is attributed a certain value commensurate with the maintenance of the worker and his family which, together with the costs of the means of production, is equivalent to the costs of production. Lichtheim has stated:

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11. I. Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour", New Left Review, 76, November-December 1972, p. 49.
12. G. Lichtheim, Marxism (1961), p. 178.

The difference between this minimum ... and the productive capacity of the labourer when applied at work, appeared in the form of surplus value. Hence profit was accumulated by those who owned the means of production ... because the productivity of labour under normal conditions exceeded what was necessary to maintain the labourer.(13)

Marx argued further that because of the drive to accumulate inherent in capitalism, capitalists would attempt to increase surplus value either by increasing the length of the working day - absolute surplus value - or by increasing productivity through the introduction of new techniques or mechanization - relative surplus value. The rate at which this process takes place Marx defined as the rate of exploitation under capitalism.

This process, the increase in the rate of exploitation - formed the foundation of the establishment and continuation of the capitalist mode of production, the chief preoccupation of Marx's theoretical career. It was from this process that the usurpation and continued control of political power by the bourgeoisie derived. Marx also saw this process as the fundamental reason for class conflict under capitalism and the source of the proletarian revolution which he envisaged would precede the socialist transformation.

Whilst an understanding of Marx's conception of the capitalist mode of production is essential to a comprehension of historical materialism in general and a Marxist interpretation of class in particular, it must be located in Marx's view of history and his overriding concern with social change. Historical materialism is founded on, although not trapped in, a linear view of history. Marx identified five progressive stages in human historical development. These were the: classless society of primitive communism; the slave-based society of classical times; feudal society based on serfdom; the capitalist mode of production; and finally the classless communist society of the future.

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13. Ibid., p. 179.

According to Marx, during the era of primitive communism, the forces of production were not highly developed, with people living close to the margin of subsistence. It was impossible, therefore, for one group in society to live off the surplus produced by another. Consequently there were no classes, as understood by marxism. As more sophisticated tools were developed, and as specialization began to evolve, so there grew up a division of labour which ultimately gave rise to the acquisition, by some, of private property, notably land and cattle. This in turn allowed those who owned or controlled scarce productive resources to exploit those who were not thus endowed. Out of this phenomenon, class society emerged, being a response to the growing productive capacity of society and giving rise to the inegalitarian possession of wealth and of the productive forces. This in turn gave rise to class conflict which resulted in the transition to the next historical epoch, that of classical antiquity and the slave mode of production.

Thus each successive historical epoch Marx saw as developing a characteristic type of class structure, ultimately culminating in a particular form of class struggle. In ancient civilization this occurred between slaves and slave owners, during the feudal era between lords and serfs, and under capitalism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The transition from one epoch to another was achieved, via the class struggle, by the victory of one class over another. This was made possible by the fact that the productive forces continually progressed, rendering the existing relations of production obsolete. In other words, conflict arose between the advancing state of technological development and the traditional social organization of the economy. The new social formation would always be superior to its predecessor as it was founded on relations of production which allowed a greater development of the forces of production.

As pointed out by Melotti, dogmatic Marxists have been content to accept the unilinear view of history without modification, and, in this way, Marx has not been well served by his more orthodox disciples. Marx himself "prudently refrained from claiming any universality for the

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pattern and progression in history he had detected and recorded for Western Europe...."(14) Hence, as recognized by numerous contemporary Marxists and neo-Marxists, historical materialism is not bound by this schema and, indeed, "every social group on this globe is not fated to tread through the same four or five stages of economic development, nor is the evolution of any particular social formation solely a matter of internal productive elements."(15)

From the discussion thus far, it can be seen that for marxism, class is not synonymous with capitalism, although it reaches its apogee under that mode of production. Rather it is the existence of private property which fosters the emergence of class society which in turn gives rise to the potential for exploitation, the precursor of the capitalist exploitation of wage labour. With the establishment of inegalitarian property relations, the relations of production came to form the basis of social divisions into classes, with conflicting interests such as those between slave-owners and slaves, landlords and serfs or the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Thus for any epoch or society demonstrating class cleavages, the following aptly pertains:

Classes according to Lenin's well-known definition are 'large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation .. to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and their mode of acquiring it.'(16)

Whilst this definition clearly applies to productive processes other than the capitalist mode of production, it is more difficult and more controversial to apply the marxist theory of class to other modes, although

14. U. Melotti, Marx and the Third World (1977), p. vii.
15. W.H. Shaw, op.cit., p. 79.
16. U. Melotti, op.cit., p. 3.

it is of value and relevance, following the work of Louis Althusser.<sup>(17)</sup> The most well known exponents of a marxist interpretation of the primitive communist mode of production are Hindess and Hirst.<sup>(18)</sup> Although from time to time they have revised their views, basically they see it as having no classes, no politics and no state, the relations of production being governed by ideological and social relations between individuals, whilst kinship relations form the basis of the distribution network. They have opened up a large area of debate and criticism has been leveled at their hypothesis, not least of all from marxist anthropologists. Keenan, for example has argued that they do not adequately explain the reproduction of the economy and have confused the relations of production under primitive communism, with the labour process itself.<sup>(19)</sup> In some respects, Keenan follows the views of P.P. Rey and E. Terray who assert that:

... control by elders over women in the first case and over prestige goods in the second enables the elders to control the surplus product, the partial or total use of which is for the reproduction of relations of dependence between the direct producers and this group, and out of this process they consider class relations to emerge.<sup>(20)</sup>

The debate amongst marxist anthropologists and historians of pre-capitalist societies, is involved with postulations on a variety of possible pre-capitalist social formations, on the assumption that feudalism may not be viewed as a worldwide phenomenon. These are, for example, the Asiatic mode, the tributary mode and the lineage mode of production. As indicated above, once theorists have decided on the applicability of interpreting a society in terms of one or other pre-capitalist mode of production, dispute may then arise as to whether

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17. J. Keenan, "The Concept of Production in Hunter-Gatherer Societies", in Kahn, J.S. and Llobera, J.R., (eds) The Anthropology of Pre-Capitalist Societies (1981), p. 2.
  18. B. Hindess and P.A. Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production (1975).
  19. J. Keenan, op.cit., p. 18.
  20. P. Bonner, "Classes, the Mode of Production and the State in Pre-Colonial Swaziland", in Marks, S. and Atmore, A., (eds) Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, op.cit., p. 86.

or not such a society can be regarded as classless or as a class society. The solution generally lies in understanding both the labour process and the relations of production under a particular mode or production. In pre-capitalist society, the labourer is not separated from the means of production. Nevertheless, exploitation may still take place by virtue of non-economic means, such as the intervention of politics or ideology.

Clearly, then, Marx and marxists have defined class in terms of economic criteria. The dominant class of a particular epoch is that which owns and controls the forces of production. By virtue of this position, it is able to exercise a large measure of control over the lives of the members of the oppressed class. The argument follows that this domination is strengthened by the fact that the agents and institutions of society serve the interests of the ruling class and the dominant ideology promotes and safeguards its privileges and interests. There is a dialectical relationship - in other words, between the economic base of society, the mode of production, and the superstructure, being the cultural, ideological and political props of society.

The causal relationship between base and superstructure, that is, between the productive forces and relations on the one hand, and political and intellectual processes on the other, has invited more criticism from historians than perhaps any other aspect of marxist theory. In this regard, marxism has been accused of the offence of reducing historical explanation to the level of crude economic determinism. Marx himself was not a vulgar economic determinist. Whilst he believed that the mode of production was the most important single aspect in understanding a social formation, he did not believe that the economic base of a society totally and rigidly determined every aspect of the superstructure.

Crude economic determinism, being the marxism understood (and even then not fully) by many of the critics of a materialist approach, is founded not so much on Marx as on the tradition of Plekhanov and Stalin, crystal-

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ising in the vulgar marxism of the Second International.<sup>(21)</sup> Banaji has argued that by its inflexible acceptance of theory, this approach gave rise to a 'rubber-stamp conception of history' which severely threatened the scientific possibilities of the historical materialist discourse. He argued that:

For Marx himself the task of scientific history consisted in the determination of the laws regulating the movement of different epochs of history, their "laws of motion" as they were called after the example of natural sciences. Vulgar Marxism abdicated this task for a less ambitious programme of verifying "laws" already implicit, as it supposed, in the materialistic conception of history.<sup>(22)</sup>

Not only was Marx himself not guilty of crude economic determinism, but marxism in his wake has largely avoided the pitfalls of the Second International and has increasingly refined its interpretation of the concept of social formation. Marx only defined it in general terms as comprising an economic structure, being the mode of production, and two superstructures, being the state and law on the one hand, and ideology on the other. Althusser developed the notion and argued that "the social formation exists as a complex totality containing a number of different practices - economic, political, ideological and theoretical" - whose unity constitutes what he terms "social practice".<sup>(23)</sup> Based on his own individual reading of Althusser, one of the main writers refuting the accusations of economic determinism leveled at marxism, is Poulantzas who has stated:

It can in fact be stated that Marx's analysis of social classes never refer simply to the economic structure (relations of production) but always to the ensemble of the structures of a mode of production and social formation, and to the relations which are maintained there by the different levels.<sup>(24)</sup>

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21. J. Banaji, "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History", Capital and Class, 3, Autumn 1977, p. 3.  
 22. Ibid., p. 2.  
 23. J.G. Taylor, op.cit., p. 106.  
 24. N. Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Class (1973), p. 63, (Emphasis in the original).

Indeed, in an effort to demonstrate how far marxism is from mono-casual explanations in history and from the fault of economic determinism, Banaji has gone so far as to submit that "the materialist conception of history did not actually produce a specifically materialistic history."<sup>(25)</sup>

Marxism, therefore, is not the rigid theoretical straightjacket it is often made out to be. What it does, is to present systematically the range of problems associated with social structure and social change as well as coherent, logical and consistent avenues by which to analyse them. As shown by Bottomore;

The general Marxist framework of explanation, in terms of the relations between classes and their connections on one side with the system of material production and on the other side with cultural production, can be used in various ways; and it does not in my view commit us to a single philosophy of history or to a rigid conception of the total historical process."<sup>(26)</sup>

Nevertheless, although historical materialism is characterized by a strong measure of flexibility, and although contemporary marxists continue to refine and up-date marxism in recognition of the fact that Marx wrote for and within a particular epoch himself, the marxist theory of class is not simply an adaptable sociological concept denoting different social strata in society. Whilst recognizing a host of causes for inequality, including that of human agency, the marxist theory of class goes beyond merely offering an explanation of social stratification in one social formation or another. Whilst social stratification refers to how members of a society are divided into categories which are differentially powerful, esteemed and rewarded, marxism attempts to explain such phenomena in a particular way and in doing so, grounds itself in the productive process and the exploitative character of that process. It attempts to explain the cause, nature and consequence of the

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25. J. Banaji, op.cit., p. 2.

26. T. Bottomore, "Structure and History", in Blau, P.M., (ed.) Approaches to the Study of Social Structure (1975), p. 165.

appropriation of the surplus product of the masses by an unproductive minority.

The point can be well summed up in the words of Green:

Since the most fundamental inequality in capitalist society is between the many who, owning no means of production, must work in order to live and the few who own means of production and thus need not work in order to live, political conflict will focus on that inequality, unless it can be somehow deflected.(27)

### Race

Before embarking on an examination of the sociological theories of race it is necessary to define what we mean by this term, and to understand its origin and usage. The term 'race', as it is understood today, or as it was understood in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, is not found in any texts written before the eighteenth century.<sup>(28)</sup> Today, the term is employed to denote a particular group of people displaying common hereditary characteristics based not on absolute differences, but on different gene-frequencies. The term means nothing more and nothing less and it cannot be inferred that race determines mental, social or cultural patterns or that it could or should define an individual or group's ranking in society. It is by now widely recognized that no society in the world ranks its members on the basis of biological race, or, what a competent geneticist would call 'race'.<sup>(29)</sup> This is not to say that birth-ascribed differences no

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27. P. Green, op.cit., p. 6.

28. G. Rozat and R. Bartra, "Racism and Capitalism", in UNESCO, Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism (1980), p. 291.

29. G.D. Berrman, "Race, Caste and Other Invidious Distinctions in Social Stratification", Race, XIII(4), April 1972, p. 390.

longer exist, they are merely justified in other terms. Even in South Africa, discrimination is no longer practiced in the name of racism, but in the name of cultural pluralism.

More important than the term race as such, are those of racism (being the conceptualization of racial differences between people) and racialism (being the practices which derive from such a conceptualization). Racism has been variously defined. Ruth Benedict, writing in 1940, defined racism as a dogma, "that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority."<sup>(30)</sup> O.C. Cox, the well-known marxist writer on racism, sees racism as a philosophy of racial superiority. Implicit in this definition and explicit in his work, is the idea that racism emanates from whites and that they have set the pattern for race relations.<sup>(31)</sup>

Subsequent marxists have defined racism as an ideology of racial superiority,<sup>(32)</sup> or as a doctrine that people's behaviour is determined by their racial stock and that they "stand to one another in relations of superiority and inferiority."<sup>(33)</sup> These definitions should be borne in mind when an attempt is made to examine the relationship between race and class. However it is defined, racism is not a neutral concept. It asserts that there are physical and psychological inequalities between people and that on the basis of these distinctions, social and economic inequalities can be explained. With regard to the concept 'racialism', it is not necessary to state more than that it refers not to the ideas embodied in racism but the practices that stem from this, and the discrimination and exploitation perpetrated in the name of, and legitimized on the grounds of, genetic difference.

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30. J. Gabriel and G. Ben-Tovim, "Marxism and the Concept of Racism", Economy and Society, VII(2), May 1978, p. 118.
  31. O.C. Cox, Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics (1948), p. 351.
  32. A. Sivanandan, "Race, Class and Power: An Outline for Study", Race, XIV(4), 1973, p. 383.
  33. M. Banton, "The Concept of Racism", in Zubaida, S., (ed.) Race and Racialism (1970), p. 18.

In seeking the origins of racism, it is a fact, therefore, that it was not the natural or inevitable product of the encounter of physically distinct people. It is true, for example, that "Africans were different from Englishmen in so many ways: in their clothing, housing, farming, warfare, language, government, morals, and (not least important) in their table manners."<sup>(34)</sup> However, the presence of 'strangeness' or 'culture shock' is not sufficient to explain the pejorative nature of racism. Rather, racism has to be seen as an explanation of and a justification for inequality, and it is generally recognized as such by social theorists today, bar the reactionary protagonists of the doctrine.

Racial consciousness, or an awareness of racial differences, can be traced back to ancient times, but there seems to have been little or no racial prejudice. The Roman contempt for barbarians, for example, was not based on racial considerations but on cultural ones. In medieval times, the inhabitants of Europe came into contact with darker-skinned Arab people who were recognized as more advanced in the fields of astronomy, medicine and technology. A dark skin, then, was clearly not a badge of inferiority, and in parts of southern Europe it identified the conqueror. The dominant Judeo-Christians world-view which characterized early modern Europe, precluded the emergence of racism in two ways. Firstly, society was seen to be divided along Christian-heathen rather than along racial lines. Secondly, until the strong emphasis put on natural science by nineteenth century positivism, justifications for inequality and exploitation were drawn not from biological science, but from theology.<sup>(35)</sup>

With the rise of capitalism, the hierarchical world-view of the medieval church was rocked by a spirit of competition and individualism which was a necessary condition for the emergence of racism. There is some debate as to when racism was first articulated as a dominant ideology. Cox selected the famous debate between Las Casas and Sepulveda at Valladolid

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34. W.D. Jordan, The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States (1974), p. 13. (Emphasis in the original).

35. J. Rex, "The Concept of Race in Sociological Theory", in Zubaida, S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 50.

in 1550.<sup>(36)</sup> Cox argued, however, that racist ideology only fully matured in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when it provided the rationale for the rape of the African and Asian continents and for the carving up of territories amongst the colonizing powers.<sup>(37)</sup>

More common is to locate the origins of racism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it became necessary to explain and defend the slave trade and the institution of plantation slavery. Certainly Cox is correct to locate the maturation of racism in the nineteenth century when, as pointed out by Banton, the publication of a number of books setting out a systematic doctrine of racism, such as Knox's The Races of Men in 1850, coincided with the demise of slavery:

For it can be argued that, as slavery was abolished, some people sought new justifications for maintaining the subordination of those who had earlier been exploited by being counted as property.<sup>(38)</sup>

Thus in the colonial situation, when light-skinned colonizers extended their domination over darker-skinned people, racial differences became linked to notions of innate superiority and inferiority, in order to legitimize the colonizers' claims to privilege and hegemony.

Although today the biological pseudo-science on which racism was based is dead, it is important for the historian of ideas to locate these in their own context. In examining racism in the nineteenth century, therefore, it is a questionable approach to grade the scientific theories of this era "in accordance with their truth value in the light of our present knowledge and in relation to their political and ideological implications

36. The discussion was concerned with whether Indians had souls and should be protected as subjects of the Spanish king, or whether they should be enslaved because of their base nature.

37. O.C. Cox, "Race and Exploitation: A Marxist View", in Baxter, P. and Sansom, B., (eds) Race and Social Difference (1972), p. 205.

38. M. Banton, op.cit., p. 19.

for our present social problems."<sup>(39)</sup> For, crucial to the successful acceptance and propagation of racism as an ideology at that time, was that it contained an element of science. Nevertheless, that on its own would perhaps not have been sufficient. Its successful dissemination hinged, above all, on the legitimizing role of racist ideology. This reached its apogee in the social Darwinism which derived from the thesis of Herbert Spencer on the struggle of nations for existence, and the survival of the fittest. Social Darwinism saw race as the major and intrinsic factor governing the history of mankind and argued for the right of the white race to dominate inferior races, following on its 'natural' superiority. These ideas were seized upon, magnified and publicized as an effective ideology of domination. They were used to convince the oppressed groups that they could never conceivably aspire to the status and privileges of the dominant ruling class, thus acting as a cement for internal social cohesion and stability. Further, it was used as a defence against external attacks on the existing system, which it sought to explain and morally justify.

Whilst this was, in many ways, a new ideology, in a number of respects its precepts were not innovative. With the accession of the bourgeoisie to political and economic power, and prior to the expansion of capitalist production to the periphery, an ideological system of domination had developed which had supplanted the old feudal world-view. This ideology served to legitimize the class divisions of industrial capitalism in Europe. As shown by Rozat and Bartra, to quote from the writings of the seventeenth century philosopher, John Locke, adequately demonstrates the operation of bourgeois ideology during the rise of industrial capitalism:

For the day-labourers and tradesmen, the spinsters and dairy-maids ... hearing plain commands is the sure and only course to bring them to obedience and practice. The greatest part cannot know, and therefore they must believe ... 'Tis well if men of that rank (to

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39. S. Zubaida, "Introduction", in Zubaida, S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 14.

say nothing of the other sex) can comprehend plain propositions, and a short reasoning about things familiar to their minds, and nearly allied to their daily experience. Go beyond this, and you amaze the greatest part of mankind.(40)

As the authors have pointed out, although referring to the working-class as alien, and not constituting an expression of racism, this passage evidences many of the ingredients which came to be embodied in racism, particularly the rationalization of economic exploitation.

This brings us to the thorny issue of the general relationship between race and class, and the way in which the concepts of racism and racialism have been explained by social theorists. Generally, sociologists see stratification as being based on either class, status or power or a combination of these. Until fairly recently, therefore, racism as a socially relevant phenomenon did not play a central role in the development of modern social theory. With the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany, however, as well as the attainment of independence by a number of previously colonized states, an interest in the question of race developed.

It is generally agreed by sociologists that systems of racial stratification are social rather than biological phenomena, even though certain genetically determined characteristics, such as skin colour, hair form or cranial size, may be used to indicate group membership. Thereafter, disagreement arises as to the relationship between race and class and to the extent racism can be viewed as a general rather than historically specific concept. Of those who do not accept that race can be equated with class in any way, the dominant theorist has been Lloyd Warner, who, on the basis of his 1936 study of race relations in the United States, argued that the situation was best understood in terms of caste. By caste Warner meant that the unequal distribution of privileges, duties, obligations and opportunities between higher and lower

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40. G. Rozat and R. Bartra, op.cit., p. 295. (Brackets in the original).

groups was institutionalized and social mobility was prevented by virtue of the operation of social sanctions and endogamy.<sup>(41)</sup> The theory of caste is well within any reasonable definition of stratification. Nevertheless, some social scientists question whether the concept has any meaning or relevance when defined cross-culturally, that is, beyond Hindu India.

Other bourgeois sociologists prefer to examine stratification on the basis of birth-ascribed rank, notably in terms of ethnicity. Ethnicity has meant various things but it has increasingly come to refer to "all social distinctions based on birth or ancestry, be they associated with race, language, or anything else."<sup>(42)</sup> Working within the bounds of ethnicity are pluralists whose model is applied to socially, culturally or ethnically diverse societies, the structures of which are accompanied by social separation and unequal participation in the political system. The most notable exponent of ethnic pluralism, frequently described as cultural pluralism, is Leo Kuper.<sup>(43)</sup>

One important and more radical model used by theorists who do not try to see race relations as a form of class relations, is the colonial model or the theory of colonialism. This correctly focuses on racism as originating in the phenomenon of western expansion and the exploitation of alien peoples. In the course of this process, of which racism was an integral part, the colonizers arrogated privilege and material reward to themselves by means of unequal exchange, technological and military advantage and the control and oppression of others. This they rationalized in terms of the alleged inferiority of the colonized races which, in turn, was used to justify and reinforce colonial domination. Recently these phenomena have been applied to relations within a nation, or even a region, for example with regard to an indigenous or imported

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41. W. Lloyd Warner, "American Class and Caste", in Baxter, P. and Sansom, B., (eds) op.cit., p. 364.

42. G.D. Berreman, op.cit., p. 388. (Emphasis in the original).

43. L. Kuper, Race, Class and Power (1974).

minority group. Thus it is necessary to distinguish between 'external colonialism' associate with imperialism, and this new area of study referred to as 'internal colonialism'. Colonialism is more associated with origins, and has been seen by different writers, to give rise to either caste, racial or ethnic stratification, or to cultural pluralism.<sup>(44)</sup>

Unlike the birth-ascribed status of caste, racial or ethnic stratification, class is seen by bourgeois sociologists as acquired status, catering, as well for social mobility. Those who most readily confront the issue of race and class are marxists and Weberians. Within both schools are the functionalists. The general premise of functionalism, and particularly marxist functionalism with regard to racism, is that the ideology is functional to the maintenance and development of the capitalist mode of production. To reduce ideology to this level of generalization is not to recognize that whilst it may ultimately be determined by the base structure of society, there is not an automatic, mechanistic relationship at work. Further, "ideologies have different functions in different configurations of social structures, and in different situations within the same society."<sup>(45)</sup> The Weberians stand in opposition to what they see as the over-simplification of racism as conceived of by the functionalists. Rex for example, has argued that there are elements of racialism which cannot be explained even by a flexible use of stratification theory. Rex has pointed out that for race-relations to be explained in terms of stratification, the latter term must be used in an inclusive sense,<sup>(46)</sup> whilst Parkin has argued that in addition to being related in some ways to class cleavages, racialism also leads to intra-class tensions as well as ethnic unity across class boundaries.<sup>(47)</sup> The Weberian approach to racism and its practical correlate of racialism involves, therefore, an examination not only of class but of status and

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44. G.D. Berreman, op.cit., p. 397.

45. S. Zubaida, (ed.) op.cit., p. 10.

46. J. Rex, op.cit., p. 39.

47. F. Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique (1979), p. 29.

power as well as theories of closure. Like marxists, Weberians do not ascribe racism to mere cultural incompatibility or psychological prejudice but rather relate it to the pursuit of economic interest.<sup>(48)</sup> Where Weberians differ, however, is in their interpretation of the overall historical process and in the way they explain the origins and maintenance of social inequality.

The first major work on the relationship between race and class, written within the marxist discourse, that of Cox, was functionalist in approach. Writing in opposition to the views of Lloyd Warner, Cox pointed out that many situations interpreted in the light of race relations would better be described as class conflicts. According to Cox:

... the fact of crucial significance is that racial exploitation is merely one aspect of the problem of the proletarianization of labor, regardless of the colour of the laborer. Hence racial antagonism is essentially political-class conflict. The capitalist exploiter, being opportunistic and practical, will utilize any convenience to keep his labor and other resources freely exploitable. He will devise and employ racial prejudice when that becomes convenient.<sup>(49)</sup>

In short, Cox claimed that racism was first articulated to maintain and legitimize the kind of capitalist relations of production which came to be embodied in the periphery, notably those of the slave plantation. Whilst Cox was correct in linking the rise of racist ideology to a certain level of capitalist development, his approach was crude and simplistic. He mechanistically reduced racism, an ideological form, to the exigencies of the economy. Further, as pointed out by Miles, he did this while ignoring in his analysis, the concept of the mode of production, the very site of class relations. By failing to locate and

48. J. Rex, "The Theory of Race Relations - A Weberian Approach", UNESCO, op.cit., p. 140.  
 49. O.C. Cox, "Race and Exploitation", in Baxter, P. and Sansom, B., (eds) op.cit., p. 208.

base class in the process of production, Cox necessarily made the fundamental error of conceiving of class and race as "equivalent concepts, that is, as two specific types of the same phenomenon".<sup>(50)</sup>

More recent examples of a reductionist approach can be seen in the work of Sivanandan who borders on conspiracy theory,<sup>(51)</sup> and Nikolinakos. The latter has stated that the economic factor underlies the so-called irrational origin of racism and that:

It is therefore evident that racial conflicts appear as racial only on the surface. In reality they are class conflicts and they have always appeared as such both in cases where racial groups have been dominated and where they have been dominant.<sup>(52)</sup>

Although racism can act as a mechanism through which class contradictions or struggles can be translated, for it must surely be, above all, a particular ideological edifice of a given social formation. It is essential to recognize the historical specificity of racist ideology at a given time and in a particular social formation. This gives it its own dynamic, and the relative autonomy of political and ideological structures should not be denegated. An ideology is not totally reducible to an economic root. It is part of a complex totality and its emergence depends on numerous influences. Although there is an interplay between the ideological and economic levels, their relationship is neither unilinear nor straightforward.

In the early 1970s, Eugene Genovese tried to refine and go beyond a crude deterministic analysis of racism.<sup>(53)</sup> His approach, which synthesised idealist and materialist positions, provided a richer and fuller inter-

50. R. Miles, "Class, Race and Ethnicity: A Critique of Cox's Theory". Ethnic and Racial Studies, III(2), April 1980, p. 184, (emphasis in the original).

51. A. Sivanandan, op.cit.

52. M. Nikolinakos, "Notes on an Economic Theory of Racism", Race, XIV(4), 1973, p. 368.

53. E. Genovese, Materialism and Idealism in the History of Negro Slavery in the Americas (1972).

pretation of slave systems although it has been criticized on methodological grounds. By examining the various patterns of race relations associated with Latin American, West Indian and North American slavery, he concluded that the differences were not intelligible in terms of material explanations alone. They were the product of the complex historical experience of the enslaving nations, each of which had a unique culture and world-view which interacted with the economic level, to produce these observable patterns. He has been criticized on the grounds that he ultimately confounded the notion of ideological and political autonomy with that of human autonomy, which led to the work being characterized as voluntaristic.<sup>(54)</sup> His critics, who have compared and contrasted his work with that of Cox and his followers, conclude that for a satisfactory resolution of a marxist conception of race and racism to be achieved, they must be seen as concepts whose objects are ideological. Further:

They must be considered as primarily the product not of economic exigencies (Cox et al.) or purposive human activity (Genovese) but of determinate ideological practices, with their own theoretical/ideological conditions of existence and their own irreducible contradictions. Only subsequent to this process of ideological production do specific racial ideologies intervene at the level of political practice and the economy.<sup>(55)</sup>

Put another way, only once racist ideologies are ideological internalized and institutionalized at the societal level in a given historical conjuncture, will the dynamics of class relations become influenced by the racial elements which may otherwise be present at a personal level, or which may be exhibited by individuals or groups.

What must finally be pointed out, and it is on this that the marxist conception of race and class should hinge, is that although racial elements may influence the dynamics of class relations, they are not

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54. J. Gabriel and G. Ben-Tovim, op.cit., p. 137.

55. Ibid., p. 139.

mutually compatible concepts, and racial categorization or discrimination does not cut across or distort the class structure. Marxists do not deny that in addition to the existence of classes in a social formation, there are also numerous other forms of social differentiation. However, class is rooted in the production process, and these other forms of social differentiation are not. They are not specific types of the same phenomenon. As demonstrated by Miles:

... the attribution of social significance to physical features through the expression of racism and unfavourable treatment in a given social formation in no way alters the nature of the dominant mode of production and, hence the class structure ... a racial category must, by definition presuppose phenotypical variation and the social attribution of significance to such physical difference, whereas class is a reality independent of a consciousness of class.(56)

### Gender

The study of women in historical development is a relatively recent trend, developing out of the Women's Liberation Movement and the growth of feminism. As there is a growing body of literature concerned with feminist theory and the relationship between feminism and marxism, it is necessary to outline the debates and the implications of these debates for social and economic studies. Women have been variously studied in their domestic role as well as in paid work, in relation to the state and politics and in terms of the various institutions of society. Women's subordination or oppression has been seen by feminists to be either a product of biology or, more commonly, a product of society. This latter view has given rise to, and derived from, cross-cultural studies of women, as well as socio-psychological studies. Further, women's social subordination, acknowledged to be present in most societies and in most historical epochs, has been seen by radical feminists, to derive from the

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56. R. Miles, op.cit., p. 185.

existence of the biologically-dictated ideology of patriarchy, and by marxist feminists, from the power relations between men and women, being by-products of changes in the mode of production. In this regard, women under capitalism are ultimately seen to be exploited not by men but by capital. Before discussing the role of gender in stratification theory and the relationship between marxism and feminism, because this study is an economic history, it is necessary to examine how women have been treated by economists, with regard to their economic role.

Women have generally been studied by economists, working within the mainstream of economic principles, in terms of either their role in the family or their role in paid employment. These studies can be said to have been conducted from two basic standpoints: that of the neoclassical school and that of the institutional school.

In terms of neoclassical theory, the primary analytical category is the rational individual who exercises freedom of choice in order to maximize utility, but whose behaviour is determined by various constraints such as income and prices. Within the family, members can be seen to operate on economies of scale, as in a firm, "the economists' version of the old adage: 'two can live as cheaply as one'".<sup>(57)</sup> Alternatively, the household division of labour can be analysed in terms of comparative advantage or economic maximizing principles. In other words, each member of the family or household, specializes in those productive activities for which he or she has a particular aptitude, so that the joint output is greater than the sum of the outputs they could produce individually. Comparative advantage can be determined by physical differences, fertility expectations, educational discrepancies or differences in anticipated earning power. Thus women may 'hire' men as breadwinners as they earn more in the market, whilst men may 'hire' women as child rearers as this role diminishes their earning potential and renders them more suitable for bearing the greater burden of domestic work.

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57. I. Papps, For Love or Money? A Preliminary Economic Analysis of Marriage and the Family, Hobart Paper 86 (1980), p. 15.

With regard to women in paid employment, neoclassicists argue that they are less productive than men due to a choice of investing less in human capital, that is, education or skill acquisition, given their child-bearing role. For the same reason, their labour force attachment is less stable than that of men. On these grounds, unequal wage differentials, employer discrimination on the basis of sex, and higher rates of female unemployment are explained and justified.<sup>(58)</sup>

The institutional school does not see the individual as a timeless, theoretical being. It pays greater attention to the environment within which the human being operates, taking into account not only the economic, but also the institutional factors affecting behaviour. Although challenging neoclassical orthodoxy, institutionalists have not renounced conventional economic principles. The family is seen as an institution rather than as a unit comprising a given number of individuals.<sup>(59)</sup> Decision-making processes are seen to be conducted in terms of opportunity costs, but by the family as a whole, influenced by social, political and psychological factors, as well as economic variables. For example, the choice of a family to have both husband and wife engaged in labour force participation, may depend on the number and age of the children, psychological or socially learned perceptions of sex roles, or the existence of substitutes for household production such as laundries, restaurants, child-minders and old age insurance. Institutionalists explore the connection between women's market and non-market work, particularly with regard to occupational segregation by sex which, they argue, is responsible for the lower rate of women's pay, rather than unequal pay for equal work. Occupational segregation is also

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58. Cf. for example:

J. Mincer, "Labour Force Participation of Married Women: A study of Labour Supply", in Amsden, A.H., (ed.) The Economics of Women and Work (1980), p. 41.

E.S. Phelps, "The Statistical Theory of Racism and Sexism", in Amsden, A.H., (ed.) op.cit., p. 206.

59. Cf. for example:

I.V. Sawhill, "Economic Perspectives on the Family", in Amsden, A.H., (ed.) op.cit., p. 125.

responsible for higher unemployment among women as supply always outstrips demand in the limited jobs available in a segregated labour market.<sup>(60)</sup>

Conventional economic theory has much to offer towards an understanding of women's role in the economy and in society, both in terms of the present and of the past. It is argued, however, that without historical study and application, it remains nothing more than theory. Marxist economists take a broader historical view of economic processes, and perceive the variables which concern neo-classicists and institutionalists - such as prices and income or supply and demand - as short-term reflections of a deeper and more fundamental process of change. Marxism, however, primarily emphasizes the relations between classes, and whilst it may be persuasive in explaining different forms of and reasons for male domination, or female subordination under different modes of production, it is said by many feminists to be less able to explain the omnipresence of the difference in status between men and women.

With regard to women, most class analyses assumed that women's place was first and foremost in the home, and thus they acquired their class position 'second-hand' via their husbands. Parsons argued that only one member of a family unit is normally a functioning member of the occupational system and that, invariably, it is the husband or father who, therefore, shares his status with the rest of the household.<sup>(61)</sup> Weberians, such as Parkin, have stated that it would be problematic to account for the process of class formation in terms of individual attainments rather than collective family resources. Parkin argued that class is generally determined by the position of the male head of the household so that "insofar as women occupied a place in the class structure at all, it was as the pale reflection of their husbands' or fathers' status."<sup>(62)</sup> For Marx, social class represented, above all,

60. A.H. Amsden, "Introduction ", in Amsden, A.D. (ed.) *op.cit.*, p. 15.

61. T. Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (1954), p. 328.

62. F. Parkin, "Social Stratification" in Bottomore, T. and Nisbet, R. (eds) *A History of Sociological Analysis* (1978), p. 627.

the relationship of individuals to the means of production. Classical marxism, therefore, fails as a theory, to be much concerned with sex. "In Marx's map of the social world, human beings are workers, peasants, or capitalists; that they are also men and women is not seen as very significant."<sup>(63)</sup> Nevertheless, with the entrance of women into the labour market, even if the family remains the unit of class analysis, it has been argued that women's class position need not necessarily be determined by that of their family. As demonstrated by West:

There are theoretical as well as empirical objections to the notion of derived class. The determination of class lies in the mode of production to which women have a relationship as do men. If married men and women share broadly similar class positions by virtue of their relation to the mode of production, then women as such do not constitute a class. Assumptions about derived class are unnecessary as well as questionable.<sup>(64)</sup>

Keeping women apart, however, can lead to the ghettoization of women's position, implying that they constitute a caste, rather than being members of a class. Thus it can be concluded that for marxist feminists although women may share the same class position as the men in their households, this need not necessarily be so, and should not be automatically analysed as such. Despite its problems, it is held that the marxist approach is the most helpful in explaining the position of women in history and at present. As stated by Rubin:

There is no theory which accounts for the oppression of women - in its endless variety and monotonous similarity, cross-culturally and throughout history - with anything like the explanatory power of the Marxist theory of class oppression.<sup>(65)</sup>

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63. G. Rubin, "The Traffic in Women" in Reiter, R.R., (ed.) Toward an Anthropology of Women (1975), p. 160.  
 64. J. West, "Women, Sex and Class", in Kuhn, A. and Wolpe, A., (eds) Feminism and Materialism (1978), p. 226.  
 65. G. Rubin, op.cit., p. 160.

It is necessary, therefore, to outline the way in which marxism has been used by feminists, in order to explain male dominance and women's subordination. Marxist feminism came to prominence during the domestic labour debates of the 1970s. Conducted mainly within the framework of existing marxist analysis, their focus was on the exploitation of women not by men, but by capital.<sup>(66)</sup> The attempt was to develop an alternative approach to the biological determinism of radical feminism by demonstrating that housework contributed economically to the maintenance of the capitalist system, by providing the labour necessary for the reproduction of labour power, rather than being private, unproductive labour providing use value for the family alone. Some writers such as C. Delphy, in an effort to produce a theory of the political economy of women, have even suggested that there were two dynamics: the capitalist mode of production on the one hand, and the family and domestic mode of production on the other.<sup>(67)</sup> However, if the mode of production is seen, firstly, as a unit of periodization and, secondly, as a concept by which relations of production and social formations are determined, then it would be difficult to justify the co-existence of a domestic mode of production with capitalism. Further, to do so would lead to viewing women as a caste rather than as members of a class.

66. The following are important examples of works concerned with the domestic labour debate:

V. Beechey, "Women and Production: A Critical Analysis of some Sociological Theories of Women's Work", in Kuhn, A. and Wolpe, A., op.cit.

M. Coulson, B. Magas and H. Wainwright, "The Housewife and her Labour Under Capitalism: A Critique", New Left Review, 89, 1975.

C. Delphy, The Main Enemy, (1977).

J. Gardiner, "Women's Domestic Labour", New Left Review, 89, 1975.

H. Hartmann, "The Unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union", Capital and Class, 8, 1979.

S. Himmelweit and S. Mohun, "Domestic labour and Capital", Cambridge Journal of Economics, 1, 1977.

M. Molyneux, "Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate", New Left Review, 116, 1979.

W. Secombe, "The Housewife and her Labour Under Capitalism", New Left Review, 84, 1974.

P. Smith, "Domestic labour and Marx's Theory of Value", in Kuhn, A. and Wolpe, A., op.cit.

67. C. Delphy, op.cit.

Despite the numerous theoretical problems associated with the domestic labour debate, it has correctly pointed out the contribution of the domestic sphere to capital both in servicing the needs of existing producers of surplus value and those of future agents of production - that is, children. However, women are not only exploited as housewives or as wage labourers obliged to perform a 'second shift' upon returning home. Women's position of inequality in the labour force under capitalism production must also be taken into account, and in fact has formed one of the largest areas of marxist feminist endeavour. This area of research, for example, has looked at the importance of women as an industrial reserve army, and Veronica Beechey, for example, has equated women's role as an industrialist reserve army with that of migrant workers who are paid below the average value of labour power because it is believed that they do not have to cover the costs of their reproduction. They can easily be disposed of when necessary, as it is assumed that they have economic resources other than the wage, upon which they can fall back. Following on this, both women and migrant workers can serve to depress wages generally.<sup>(68)</sup> Women have also been seen as serving the ends of capitalist consumerism by virtue of their roles as domestic administrators.

However, the assertion that women's oppression is so closely associated with the requirements of capitalism however, presents problems for marxist feminists. It does not explain the existence of female subordination or oppression in pre-capitalist societies or in societies which have already undergone socialist revolutions. Orthodox marxist theory explains why capitalism is hierarchical and why it promotes certain divisions of labour. What it does not explain on its own, is why certain groups, for example blacks, immigrants or women, might occupy the most subordinate areas of the hierarchical structure. Marxist feminists, in an effort to explain the origins and persistence of patriarchal relations under different modes of production and during various historical epochs, have based their work largely upon the ideas of the

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68. V. Beechey, "Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production", Capital and Class, 3, 1977.

structuralist marxism of Louis Althusser. For him, ideology is not seen as representing reality, but how men imagine themselves in relation to reality. Ideology is still seen as a material force, but he argued for the relative autonomy of ideology, economically determined only in the last instance. By understanding patriarchal ideology in terms of an Althusserian approach, it is argued that "it has become possible, within a new form of marxism, to accommodate the oppression of women as a relatively autonomous element of the social formation."<sup>(69)</sup> One problem with this version of marxism, particularly as understood by some marxist feminists, is that it tends to be abstracted from history. Before discussing whether or not the accusation that marxism is sex-blind holds, and whether this alleged handicap can be solved by such an approach, it is first necessary to enlarge upon the foundations of marxist feminist theory, and how it stands in relation to radical feminism.

Marxism is primarily concerned with the productive process and how people stand in relation to the means of production. Feminism, on the other hand, is concerned with the relations of gender, and women's oppression by men. Marxist feminists attempt to "identify the operation of gender relations as and where they might be distinct from, or connected with, the processes of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism."<sup>(70)</sup> Radical feminists, on the other hand, identify women's oppression in terms of the operation of patriarchy, holding sexism as the only social ill to be countered. Patriarchy is explained either in the Weberian sense of domination of the household by the father, or as a universal category of male dominance over women in society. Such dominance, they usually ground in biological determinism and the desire by males to control women's fertility and sexuality. The problem with rooting gender inequality in the operation of patriarchy is that it implies a fixed and static structure, obscuring the multiplicity of ways in which men and women have encountered and related to one another.

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69. M. Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis (1981), p. 31.

70. Ibid., p. 9.

Founded on F. Engels' The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State, first published in 1891<sup>(71)</sup> male dominance has been located by marxist feminists in the development of the phenomenon of the rise of private property. The underlying assumption is that before this arose, and with it class society, sexual equality existed. Under primitive communism, according to Engels, a division of labour along sexual lines was present, but without antagonism. Women controlled the means of production within the home, men controlled those without. The family as such did not exist. Production was for use value only and was conducted on behalf of the community as a whole. With the rise of private property, there was a preoccupation with identifying paternity in order to determine rightful inheritance and thus the patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal society was born. A woman no longer worked for the community but for her husband and his children. Engels insisted that the male line of descent heralded "the world historical defeat of the female sex."<sup>(72)</sup> From this time on, Engels argued, men used this power, their exclusive claim to wealth, in order to restrict women until the advent of the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism, because it destroys access to private property for most of the population, undermined the unequal divisions between men and women, prevalent in previous modes of production. For Engels, the fortunes of women and of the oppressed classes were intimately linked. Their emancipation was tied to their participation in social production and ultimately to the proletarian victory when, with the ending of private property, subordination of women could be expected to disappear.

Engels' analysis has been criticized not only on ethnographical and historical grounds but because it is clear that even when women were released into the labour market as wage earners under capitalism, they were still subject to various forms of oppression in the home. Further

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71. F. Engels, Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (Reprinted 1972).

72. Ibid., p. 120.

scepticism has been expressed about Engels' projections of a feminine utopia under socialism.<sup>(73)</sup> Despite the short comings and problems of Engels' thesis however, it is worth noting that:

If The Origins of the Family constituted an achievement it was this - that it asserted women's oppression as a problem of history, rather than of biology, a problem which it should be the concern of historical materialism to analyse and revolutionary politics to solve.<sup>(74)</sup>

To cope with the persistence of female oppression over time, despite the recognized multiplicity of women's roles across class and ethnic lines and in different social formations, marxist feminists have frequently attempted an interplay of the radical feminist conception of patriarchy with a materialist view of society.

Marxist feminists accept the notion of patriarchy, recognizing it as a coercive ideology necessary to force women to accept their subordinate or peripheral social designation. The greatest force for social control is usually separation or exclusion - exclusion of the poor from the sources of wealth, excusion of blacks from whites - but it is not always possible to exclude women in the same way as other groups, due to their important reproductive role. For this reason, it is argued, the function of ideology has assumed great importance in coercing women into a position inferior to men. It has been stated, for example by McDonough and Harrison, that patriarchy is economically determined by the sexual division of labour, and that this has arisen out of the need of men of all classes and most epochs to control the fertility and sexuality of women. They have argued that patriarchy is not a transhistorical force, as asserted by the radical feminists, but that its form alters with changes in the mode of production. Patriarchy is seen to transcend class, but for all women "it is their class position which limits the

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73. R. Delmar, "Looking Again at Engels' Origins of the Family", in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A. (eds), The Rights and Wrongs of Women (1976).

74. Ibid., p. 287.

conditions of the forms of patriarchy they will be objectively subjected to."<sup>(75)</sup> Another effort to develop a materialist explanation of patriarchy was that of J. Mitchell who attempted to synthesize a materialist approach with Freudian analysis in order to understand the relationship between history and the unconscious.<sup>(76)</sup> Although explaining the roots and persistence of male dominance, in the end patriarchy is a problematic concept and as a noun, "presents insuperable difficulties to an analysis that attempts to relate women's oppression to the relations of production."<sup>(77)</sup> Given the tendency of the concept to freeze gender relationships within the confines of abstract labels, and given the fact that "'Patriarchy' suggests a fatalistic submission which allows no space for the complexities of women's defiance",<sup>(78)</sup> it is questionable whether the theoretical acrobatics necessary to marry psychic and property relations are really worth the effort. Instead, it is eminently preferable to refer to patriarchal ideology, describing specific aspects of gender relations in a particular social formation. Ultimately patriarchal ideology capitalizes on biological reality: women give birth and lactate - men do not. If patriarchy is accepted as a concept equivalent to class, as say racism is accepted as an equivalent concept by some marxist scholars of race, taken to its logical extreme, this explanation of female oppression would mean that "the feminist program would logically require either the extermination of the offending sex, or else a eugenics project to modify its character."<sup>(79)</sup> This is obviously unacceptable to all but the most extreme radical feminists and, as pointed out by Rowbotham, many aspects of male-female relationships are not simply oppressive, but are also characterized by certain reciprocities. The concept of patriarchy has no room for such subtleties and assumes a constant and on-going antagonism.<sup>(80)</sup>

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75. R. McDonough and R. Harrison, "Patriarchy and Relations of production", in Kuhn, A. and Wolpe, A., (eds) op.cit., p. 36.  
 76. J. Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1975).  
 77. M. Barrett, op.cit., p. 19.  
 78. S. Rowbotham, "The Trouble with 'Patriarchy'", in Feminist Anthology Collective, No Turning Back (1981), p. 73.  
 79. G. Rubin, op.cit., p. 157.  
 80. S. Rowbotham, op.cit., p. 74.

If sexual inequality is seen only as a by-product of capitalist exploitation, however, it follows that with the advent of socialist societies, women's subordination would disappear with the onset of a new, sexually egalitarian society. Without entering the debate as to whether socialism has yet been achieved anywhere, it is clear that even with the collectivization of domestic labour in countries like China and the U.S.S.R., the main burden of housework still falls on women. Thus it is necessary to include in any marxist feminist analysis the notion of patriarchal ideology, which is all-pervasive and which persists from one historical epoch to the next. It is argued that patriarchal ideology of male dominance, leading to the domestication of women, is rooted in the rise of private property and the control of wealth by the male sex, by virtue of their greater strength and mobility vis-a-vis women. Relationships between men and women, however, are not always antagonistic, and are not always characterized by struggle to the same extent, from one time to another, or between one social formation and another.

As with the ideology of racism, patriarchal ideology is not an equivalent concept to class, and does not distort class relations. Whereas racism grew up in response to a particular phase in the development of the capitalist production process, (an ideology which can be seen to be both a function of it and relatively autonomous of it), patriarchal ideology can be seen to be a product of the rise of private property and men's predominant control over it. The control of women's sexuality and fertility by men is its functional dimension; but because it is true that when an ideology is internalized it comes to have not only a functional or responsive dimension but a reflective dimension as well, patriarchal ideology may persist over time, even when the relations of production are altered, as is the case under socialism.

Although marxism does not overtly confront the problem of gender differentiation or oppression, the discourse accommodates its study most adequately. An historical approach to gender relationships encourages the delineation of such relationships within different social formations

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and how they have developed. Marxism also carries feminism beyond the realms of biological determinism and locates gender relations in the social process as well. As shown by Rubin:

Marx once asked: 'What is a Negro slave? A man of the black race. The one explanation is as good as the other. A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes capital only in certain relations. Torn from these relationships it is no more capital than gold in itself is money or sugar is the price of sugar"... One might paraphrase: What is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in itself is money ...(81)

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81. G. Rubin, op.cit., p. 158.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### AFRICAN WOMEN IN COLONIAL NATAL

The wife of Somazwi stared at the earth and said: 'We know how man's prosperity forbodes an era of troubles. His triumph is a dagger against creation. It tilts the balance of life and threatens all things. The very dream of the gods has turned against them. So I ask you finally as master, husband, and friend: By the bond that keeps us together and the great love of creation Forbid the feeble-hearted to govern the universe. To do as they please on earth and spawn a race of anti-gods.'

M. Kunane.(1)

In this chapter, the social and economic position of Northern Nguni woman in Natal is examined.<sup>(2)</sup> Because history is concerned with change and development, and does not view society as static, this involves an analysis of their role in pre-colonial society and economy followed by a consideration of the changing position of woman which came with their incorporation into the rural periphery of the capitalist system, as it developed in colonial Natal.

Although there were and still are differences of custom and tradition among the various chiefdoms that comprised the Nguni of this region, sufficient similarities and continuities can be identified to generalise about the social and economic organisation of the Nguni and, consequently, the position of women within this social formation.

1. M. Kunene, Anthem of the Decades: A Zulu Epic Dedicated to the Women of Africa (1981), p. 55.
2. The term Nguni is a linguistic one, describing a language rather than a political or racial group. It refers to people speaking a number of different, but mutually intelligible dialects. The various Nguni chiefdoms also share similarities in social and economic practices, so that the Nguni can be said to be culturally as well as linguistically distinguishable from other southern Bantu-speakers. In addition to the African population of Natal, the Zulu Kingdom also comprised Northern Nguni, whilst the Xhosa who settled in the Eastern Cape are referred to as the Southern Nguni. Henceforward, for ease of reference, the Northern Nguni of Natal will simply be referred to as the Nguni.

African Woman in Pre-Colonial Economy and Society<sup>(3)</sup>

Regarding the manner in which questions about Nguni woman in pre-colonial society are posed, it is accepted that a sexual division of labour preceded class society and that with the rise of private property and social classes, sexual inequality was exacerbated and entrenched. As to the question whether woman's subordination to men has always existed, verification of Engel's hypothesis that matriarchy and concomitant sexual equality preceded patriarchy in prehistoric times, is not possible. The efforts of evolutionist anthropologists to draw links between matriliney, the hunter-gather band, women's control of the means of production and political status, are useful but inconclusive for the historian of one particular nineteenth century pre-colonial African society which, as far as can be established, demonstrated a mixed economy and was patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. It would be fruitless to try and discover, for example, even if it were possible, whether Nguni society had ever been matriarchal, or whether their forebearers were hunter-gatherers and if so, whether women were accorded greater status under such economic conditions as Leacock suggests would be the case.<sup>(4)</sup>

In pre-colonial times, Nguni women were in a position subordinate to men. They experienced a degree of oppression stemming from perpetual male tutelage and the sexual division of labour. This was ideologically reinforced by the practice of avoidances and taboos and a host of other socializing elements. Despite the fact that women were in a position of

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3. An outline of the condition of African women in social and economic life before the impact of colonization is given as a means to understanding the extent to which they were affected by their incorporation into the rural capitalist periphery. This is not to imply that the pre-colonial social formation was not dynamic in nature, an issue often not afforded sufficient cogniscance. However, a detailed study of pre-colonial Natal is beyond the scope of this study and has been dealt with elsewhere. Cf. J. Beall, The Function and Status of African Women in the Social and Economic Life of Natal and Zululand: 1818 - 1879 (1981).
  4. E.B. Leacock, (ed.) Introduction to F. Engels, The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (1972), p. 34.

dependence, however, they were important contributors to subsistence production. The lineage was an integrated whole, combining family, social and economic functions and it provided security for all members at every stage of life. Although women's status in the lineage was inferior to that of men, their value was upheld. Despite the rigid sexual division of labour, and the greater value that was placed on cattle-raising (the preserve of men), than on agriculture (the realm of woman), the implication was not that their labour was not publicly productive. Nevertheless, among the Nguni, cattle which were in the hands of men, were the only form of private property. It has been noted in this regard "that with the beginnings of animal husbandry, which is often the first private property, male dominance appears."<sup>(5)</sup>

The main socio-economic unit in Nguni society was the lineage, living in a single umuzi, or homestead, with a common ancestor in the male line. Society was polygamous and clans were exogamous. Each wife and her children formed an independent production unit which was self sufficient whilst creating, in addition, a surplus for the maintenance of the umnumzana, or homestead-head.

The arrival of a new bride enabled the establishment of a new branch of the household's economy, adding status and prestige to the homestead as well as increasing its overall productive potential and size. The strength of a wife's unit ultimately depended upon the number and the sex of the children she bore. Males gave prestige to the homestead, while females meant the accession of cattle in bride-price, or lobola. Many nineteenth century observers wrote that polygamy was a potential source of jealousy, discord and degradation for women. Whilst it is true that competition may have existed between wives, and that this could be capitalized upon by the husband, a new wife also gave company and assistance in labour to existing wives and was, therefore, frequently a welcome addition.

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(5) L. Mullings, "Women and Economic Change in Africa", in Hafkin, N.J. and Bay, E.G., (eds) Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change (1976), p. 245.

There was a strict sexual division of labour governing all areas of production and household work, well documented by Wright with regard to the Zulu Kingdom.<sup>(6)</sup> What is important to stress, however, is that all agricultural work was conducted by females, as well as domestic work and child-rearing, whilst males were responsible for all work connected with cattle. Women were rarely allowed access to cattle and, on occasions, even to dairy products and equipment. The main economic function of the homstead-head, however, was one of supervision and management. He rarely involved himself directly in production, his role being rather one of 'entrepreneur'.<sup>(7)</sup> Other male preserves were marriage negotiations, jurisdiction and most religious rituals, as well as political functions: that is, the decision-making processes.

The household unit of each wife was independent of the other units. In terms of production and consumption the wife had a relative autonomy, dispensing among her family the food which she had grown and prepared. However, women were always the wards of men, first of their fathers and then their husbands. Ultimately it was the umnumzana who controlled the means of production, the relations of production and who managed distribution. As illustrated by Wright:

The fact that it was a husband's duty to provide each of his wives with an area of agricultural land large enough to support herself and her children, with a private granary, and with the use of milch cows might place a heavy responsibility on him, but it also placed him in the position of provider and manager, and his wives in the position of dependents.<sup>(8)</sup>

Although a wife had control over food for immediate consumption, all surplus was in the hands of her husband. It was he who controlled the cattle from which was obtained sour-milk, or amazi, an important mainstay

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6. J. Wright, "Control of Women's Labour in the Zulu Kingdom", in Peires, J.B., (ed.) Before and After Shaka, Papers in Nguni History (1981), p. 82.
  7. O.F. Raum, op.cit., p. 85.
  8. J. Wright, op.cit., p. 89.

of the Nguni diet. In addition, the homestead's grain pit where cereals were stored was situated beneath the cattle kraal to which women had only limited access.

It is necessary at this point to ask why there was this strict sexual division of labour in Nguni society, and whether this was responsible for the high degree of male dominance? Strict biological determinists would argue that the main reason for the subordination of women is the lesser capacity of the female sex for demanding physical work. Yet the example of Nguni society clearly demonstrates that the bulk of hard labour was performed by women, not only in agriculture, but portering and construction of homesteads. Holden, a contemporary missionary, described the workload of the Nguni women he observed as being "as severe as that of the common labouring man ...."<sup>(9)</sup>

J. Mitchell has suggested that rather than women's physiology or psychobiological metabolism rendering them less useful members of the work-force, it was their lesser capacity for violence that, above all, determined their subordination to men. Although it is true that in most societies, and the Nguni were no exception, warfare was the preserve of men, it is difficult to prove that this was as a result of psychobiological preference or predisposition. More important in determining the level of women's participation in warfare or the critical sectors of production was Mitchell's focus on their role in reproduction.<sup>(10)</sup> Childbirth necessitated withdrawal from labour for a period, and breast-feeding, which in Nguni society continued for over two years, necessitated women performing labour which did not take them too far field and which involved minimum risk-taking. Adopting a similar analysis, Bryant observed in the nineteenth century:

In the Zulu social dispensation, agriculture and pastoralism reigned in equal state, the former the realm of the female sex, the latter that of the male. This primordial division of

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9. W. Holden, op.cit., p. 168.

10. J. Mitchell, Women's Estate (1971), p. 103.

labour was moreover a perfectly natural one. It was not due to any conspiracy on the part of the males that to the weaker sex should be relegated the more laborious task.(11)

This does not explain, however, why women were responsible for the vast bulk of domestic chores and for the rearing of children until puberty. Further, with regard to the political economy as a whole, equal worth was not accorded to agriculture and pastoralism. Whilst hoe culture was important, particularly in time of famine, "It is for cattle, not for grain, that wars were waged...."(12)

Thus whilst the above arguments might explain the reasons for a sexual division of labour, they do not explain why men occupied "a more highly valued place in the material process of life", and why it was that they came to "dominate women who occupy an exceptional place in the process of reproducing life."<sup>(13)</sup> Further, they do not shed light on the reason for the extensive system of ideological reinforcements of women's subordination that exist in most societies, including that of the Nguni. Mitchell argued that in order to restrict women to certain areas of production, coercion was needed. She has stated that "Social coercion as interplayed with the straightforward division of labour based on biological capacity, to a much greater extent than is generally admitted."<sup>(14)</sup> Certainly in Nguni society, the avoidances and taboos affecting women served to entrench their subordinate position, as well as the socialization of boys and girls into their respective life roles.

This was strongly formalized and conducted, not least of all, by women themselves. Differences in sex roles were accentuated by the rites of transition which, with regard to girls, were used to impress upon them

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11. A.T. Bryant, The Zulu People as They Were Before the White Man Came (Reprinted 1967), p. 297.
  12. M. Gluckman, "Zulu Women in Hoe culture Ritual", Bantu Studies, 9, 1935, p. 262.
  13. M. Godelier, "The origins of Male Domination", New Left Review, May-June, 1981, p. 15.
  14. J. Mitchell, op.cit., p. 104.

their subordinate status. At the ear-piercing ceremony, usually conducted between the ages of five and eight, girls were instructed in decorum and respect and this was again repeated at the puberty ceremony, occurring at the time of their first menstruation. In addition, this involved a period of seclusion, followed by festivities and public recognition of a girl's marriageable state. It can be argued that this ceremony had a dual function. There was much celebration of the prospect of the girl's fertility, and the implications this held. She had until then been a producer, but could now be exchanged as a reproducer as well. However, while men could control women as life-sustaining producers, dominating as they did the material process of production and monopolizing the risk-taking skills of hunting and warfare, greater coercion was needed to control women as life-giving reproducers. As if to eliminate an excessive self-conception of their social worth, along with the celebrations began a period of psychological conditioning in the form of instruction in the avoidances and taboos associated with menstrual bleeding. This is particularly significant given the fact that menstruation has always been associated with fertility. During the puberty rites and for a week out of every month for the rest of her child-bearing years, a woman was considered unclean. Of further significance is that many of the taboos concerning menstruation were associated with cattle or the products thereof, for example sourmilk or amazi.

This tends to support the rather reductionist assertion of the structural-functionalist anthropologist, M. Godelier, that the difficulty of controlling women's reproductive function was overcome by the ideological elaborations concerned with menstrual bleeding. He has dramatically stated that:

...a woman has then only to see blood flowing between her thighs, for her to lose the right to speech and give her silent consent to all the economic, political and ideological oppressions that she suffers. Our conclusion must be that it is not sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts the body's sexuality.(15)

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15. M. Godelier, op.cit., p. 16.

Marriage also highlighted the importance of women's reproductive role, particularly as it involved interaction with other clans. Without exogamy a society could become more and more isolated and this would increase the odds against its own extinction. Loss of a woman meant loss of a productive worker, but the gain of a woman, necessarily from another clan, meant not only the gain of a producer, but a reproducer as well - the guarantee of a future line of descent. Thus for society to continue to reproduce itself, it was necessary for clans to co-operate, and this was ensured by a system of compensation whereby cattle were exchanged for women under the institution of lobola.

Despite her importance in the marriage negotiations, however, it was at this point in her life that a woman began to experience the full weight of male tutelage.<sup>(16)</sup> She passed from the wardship of her father to that of her husband, falling under his authority and that of his parents. She worked under the supervision of her mother-in-law until the birth of her first child. This period was known as ukukotiza, and was a time during which she experienced extreme social and economic disadvantage. Throughout her married life a woman had to obey principles of hlonipha in relation to her husband and his family. Hlonipha conduct created social distance and reinforced the hierarchy of the homestead. It was not economically productive behaviour but rather symbolical, expressing "the correct attitude that should prevail in dyadic relationships."<sup>(17)</sup> It must be added, however, that such behaviour was reciprocal and did afford a woman a certain degree of privacy and dignity.

It is submitted, therefore, that women's subordination to men among the Nguni, was the result not of a lesser capacity for physical labour or violence, but due to their reproductive role rendering them unable to participate in productive activities which took them far afield or which

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16. W.C. Holden, op.cit., describes in detail the humble state to which a bride was reduced during the marriage ceremony.

17. O.F. Raum, op.cit., p. 532.

involved risk-taking. A rigid sexual division of labour resulted, however, maintained through ideological reinforcement and conditioning, via social institutions and taboos. By the same avenue, the activities of men were accorded greater social, economic and political significance than the part played by women in subsistence production and reproduction.

How it was possible for men to gain and maintain this position of dominance is perhaps best explained not in terms of cultural preference,<sup>(18)</sup> but by the fact that animal husbandry was the exclusive preserve of men. Whilst the value of agricultural production was never under-estimated, it is also true that among the Nguni, cattle were the only form of private property.<sup>(19)</sup>

Cattle reproduced themselves, creating a valuable surplus, and could be disposed of as the owner saw fit. Krige has elaborated on the economic value of cattle and on their ritual significance.<sup>(20)</sup> Raum has gone further in an effort to discover the social functions of cattle in economic life and in terms of ritual behaviour, and has come to the remarkable conclusions that they formed a 'neuralgic spot' in Nguni society.<sup>(21)</sup> Guy, on the other hand, has identified cattle as the link between production, reproduction and social formation. Although concerned with the Zulu Kingdom, it is considered useful and relevant to quote Guy at length:

In a society with few forms of storeable, alienable goods, cattle functioned as a "store of wealth". But this view can be developed further when one considers the implications of the fact that cattle were exchanged for wives,

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18. C.S. Lancaster, "Women, Horticulture and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa", American Anthropologist, 78, 1976, p. 558.
  19. In this regard it should be noted that land was communally owned. Further, private property is taken here to mean property with productive potential rather than personal possessions.
  20. E.J. Krige, The Social System of the Zulus (1936), p. 188.
  21. O.F. Raum, op.cit., p. 100.

and daughters for cattle. As we have seen agricultural production and stock-raising formed the two branches of the farming process in which Zulu labour was concentrated. Female agricultural labour created the material environment which enabled reproduction and production to take place; stock raising, the work of men, also contributed to the material environment as well as producing the cattle needed to bring women into the homestead as reproducers and producers. And so the process continued, a multi-dimensional interplay of factors characterised by the continual materialization of human labour in the form of cattle (the most readily available, alienable surplus) which were then converted into human labour power. The movement of cattle in Zulu society, in exchange for women, as tribute, gifts, or to establish clients, was in fact the movement of expended labour and potential labour power.(22)

There is, therefore, a strong link between male dominance due to their exclusive ownership of private property, and control of women's reproduction and production. The holding of cattle by men determined the relations of production. Kinship relations (being the social form of the reproduction of life) by the existence of privately held and exchanged cattle, were turned into relations of production. These were reinforced by symbolic forms surrounding cattle, which legitimized men's control over women's fertility. Of significance in this regard is the fact that women who were past child-bearing age were allowed greater access to cattle and were accorded higher status. When control over their fertility was no longer necessary, restrictions on their access to critical sectors of production fell away.

Pre-colonial life was not static, and social and economic patterns were severely disrupted from the first quarter of the nineteenth century, first by the impact of the Shakan revolution, and later the incursion of the Boers. According to Bryant, as a result of the mfecane, "Clan-life had been utterly broken up, chiefs had been slain, home-life destroyed,

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22. J.J. Guy, "Production and Exchange in the Zulu Kingdom", Mahlomi 2, 1978, p. 104.

social laws and restraints cast to the wind, men and women doing what they would, as best they could."<sup>(23)</sup> Some Natal chiefdoms such as the Lala, the Embo and the Kabela, became vassals of the Zulu king. In this way, they maintained political stability but the price was the payment of tribute, usually in the form of cattle. As stock numbers could not be guaranteed in the face of possible Zulu expropriation, greater reliance was placed upon cultivation for subsistence needs, and hence upon the labour of women.<sup>(24)</sup> Other Natal Nguni - for example, the AmaTuli who inhabited the Bluff, and the Cele of the Isipingo district - were reduced to a life of hunting and gathering. Yet others were forced to cannibalism. Under such conditions of dislocation, traditional divisions of labour assumed less importance as men, women and children worked together in the matter of survival.

During the peace which ensued, however, the Nguni began reconstituting themselves into "a vast number of independent tribes all living peacefully and prosperously under independent chiefs who ruled them with a mild and patriarchal sway."<sup>(25)</sup> From the oral evidence collected by James Stuart, it is possible to identify two important ways in which this reconstruction took place. One of the informants interviewed, Dinya Ka Zokozwayo, described how the Cele chief Mjozinana found a single mealie seed dropped by whites fleeing from a Shakan raid. This was planted and ultimately produced a garden. In time he was able to distribute seeds and food supply increased so that "people came to konza him".<sup>(26)</sup> Due to the fact that traditionally women were better acquainted with the soil and techniques of cultivation, there were pragmatic reasons why women's labour should continue to dominate this area of the economy. However, the fact that the Natal Nguni men never lost their abhorrence of agricultural pursuits, even when herds were depleted, also illustrates

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23. A.T. Bryant, Olden Times in Zululand and Natal (1965), p. 381.  
 24. J. Stuart and D. McK. Malcolm, (eds), The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn (1969), p. 24.  
 25. H. Brooks, Natal: A History and Description of the Colony (1876), p. 197.  
 26. C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright, (ed.), James Stuart Archive Vol. I (1976), p. 95.

the persistent strength of ideology, even though Fynn observed that among other Nguni people, such as the Mpondo and the Swazi, men could be seen alongside women in the fields.<sup>(27)</sup>

The second example of how the devastated Natal Nguni salvaged their lives illustrates recourse to another often used means of regaining economic self-sufficiency and social autonomy. Another of James Stuart's informants, John Kumalo, stated that a poor man could put himself under the protection of a chief who would give him cattle to tend. His payment would be the milk of such cattle, which he then made into clarified butter, exchanging it for fowls or goats. Eventually he was able to exchange these for cattle which would become his own personal property. As Kumalo demonstrated:

In time his small beginnings would increase; he would ultimately get sufficient cattle to lobola a wife with, and then he would have children, girls and boys; the girls would be married off, and his property increased proportionately on account of lobola paid from them.(28)

Thus it can be seen that there were a number of ways in which individuals or societies could recover from dislocation; and once normality was resumed, men and women could continue to operate in terms of their usually ascribed roles.

It is clear from the above that the condition of women in Nguni society was one of subordination. However, this must be seen in relative terms, that is, their condition must be compared with that which arose under the impact of white settlement and colonialism. In pre-colonial society, work and family structure were linked as part of an integrated cultural whole, and women performed a vital productive function in the subsistence economy. As A. Oakley has illustrated in her discussion of women's roles in pre-industrial societies:

27. J. Shooter, The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu Country (1857), p. 81.  
 28. C. de B. Webb and J. Wright, op.cit., p. 250.

The location of work does not entail separation from family life, and ... the work role and the family role do not prescribe different and conflicting goals in each. All adults work, and status in the community, for adults of both sexes, derives as much from identification with a family as from identification with a particular kind of work.(29)

In addition, the lineage provided security for women, whatever their marital state. Guy has stated with regard to the Zulu Kingdom, that, "One is struck when examining Zulu society by the complex laws of kinship and marriage which ensured that, in the event of death or disaster, women who had been isolated from a productive community would be drawn into another."<sup>(30)</sup>

Thus although women were subordinate and oppressed, they did have definite and inalienable rights and a guarantee of social and economic security which, in the light of their subsequent fate, proved to be a fair measure of compensation for an inferior status. Due to their important productive role, women could not be subjected to exclusion - the most common way of enforcing and entrenching social inequality in any society. Instead, African women were maintained in a position subordinate to men by an intricate network of ideological conditioning. Although their status was inferior vis-a-vis that of men, it is considered here that they shared the class position of their husband or his family, by virtue of the significance of kinship for the lineage mode of production.

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29. A. Oakley, Housewife (1974), p. 10.

30. J.J. Guy, "Production and Exchange in the Zulu Kingdom", op.cit., p. 104.

African Women in the Rural Capitalist Periphery

From the time of the Republic of Natalia and extending into the colonial period, it is argued, largely upon the evidence of C. Bundy, that many of the Natal Nguni came to constitute an African peasantry.<sup>(31)</sup> Bundy's definition refers to rural cultivators with access to land which they used for agricultural and pastoral pursuits to meet their consumption needs and to produce a surplus for sale, in order to meet the cash demands that arose out of their incorporation into a wider political and economic system. Although they maintained a fair measure of cultural integrity, they were dominated in cultural, political and economic terms, by a wider, alien society.<sup>(32)</sup> Bundy was concerned not only with the rise of the peasantry in South Africa, but also with their fall. Seeing peasants as part of the periphery of the world capitalist economy, working within the realms of underdevelopment theory, and being anxious to demonstrate that the decline of peasant production was not due to a lack of response on the part of the peasantry to market conditions, but rather to a process of proletarianization, it is argued here that Bundy may have placed too great an emphasis on external determinants to the detriment of an adequate consideration of the internal dynamics of the peasant economies he surveyed.

The peasantry cannot be described as a mode of production, but if it is accepted that the family constituted the main production and consumption unit among the peasantry, as advanced by Shanin,<sup>(33)</sup> then it is necessary to examine the relations of production within the family and between the family and the market. Whilst it is not disputed that the incorporation of the peasantry into the colonial and world capitalist system contributed above all to their underdevelopment, it is argued that in order to reach a fuller understanding of the organization of production among the peasantry, and its success or failure, it is also necessary to penetrate the internal determinants and to understand the way

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31. C. Bundy, op.cit., passim.

32. Ibid., p. 9.

33. T. Shanin, (ed.), Peasants and Peasant Societies (1971).

in which they were affected by the impact of colonialism. To do this, consideration should be given to the impact of the rise of peasant production on the sexual division of labour and vice versa, as well as women's role in the peasantry as part of the world capitalist periphery. It is also submitted that generalizations should be guarded against and that, in fact, the experience of the Natal Nguni peasantry differed according to geographic location, according to the type of landholding available to different cultivators, and according to the degree to which customary patriarchy was able to operate or was undermined by changes in the political economy of colonial Natal.

To do this one should consider separately, the experience of peasants living in locations or 'reserves'; tenants on white farms; squatters on white farms or Crown Lands; and the kholwa who attached themselves to Christian mission stations and who came to form the upper stratum of the Natal peasantry. An idea of the demographic patterns of the African population can be gleaned from Tables 5.4, 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7.

The first missionaries arrived in Natal in 1835, being Americans. They were followed by the Methodists in 1841, and later the Anglicans and others over the following few years. There were various denominations, reflecting a number of different aims and attitudes, but generalizations can be made about their response to the Nguni. Most laid down strict prohibitions - for example, against polygamy, beer drinking, witchcraft, and lobola - and they promoted living in square dwellings, the wearing of clothes and the speaking of English. This onslaught against customary norms was not greeted with enthusiasm. It is also possible to generalize as to Nguni response to the missionaries. It was initially almost universally hostile. In response to the question as to which Nguni groups opposed Christianity, Etherington has given the answer:

...nearly everyone, rich and poor; leaders and followers; old people and newly-weds; mothers and maidens' polygamists and single men. Opposition cannot be correlated with divisions of sex, class or status.(34)

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34. N. Etherington, The Rise of the Kholwa in South in South-East Africa (1971), p. 157.

This view stands in sharp contradiction to the widely-held missionary view at the time: that hostility came, above, all, from the men who were devoted to a life of idleness and lust, made possible by virtue of the practice of polygamy, whereby women were 'bought' and used as female slaves.

Etherington's evidence confirms that women and men alike resisted the cultural inroads attempted by the church, and only resorted to mission life in cases of extreme destitution or infirmity. Most converts were servants who had long been in the employ of whites, outcasts from Nguni society or destitute refugees and homeless orphans. However, Etherington may himself have been influenced by the sex-bias of some of his sources as for many women, life within the confines of a mission station was preferable to that under a tyrannical husband or chief. It is difficult, therefore, to tell which form of patriarchal ideology, traditional or colonial, was most resented and most resisted by African women. Whilst they may not have had a strong sense of their own oppression under pre-colonial conditions, it is possible from some of the evidence, to discern a choice being made by many African women, for whom choice was possible or feasible, to remain within the bounds of the rural chiefdom, or to move to mission stations or, later, towns.

They were lured by the economic opportunities offered by the missionary societies, above all the provision of land. There is some evidence that mission stations attracted young girls during the stressful years of adolescence, or who wished to avoid forced marriages; a group which the missionaries referred to as "cast-off old wives"; and women who had been accused of being witches.<sup>(35)</sup> The converts were initially despised by non-Christian Nguni who referred to them as kafula, which means 'to spit out'.

Residence on the mission stations drew the kholwa into a new set of economic relationships. Differences in dress and dwelling houses meant exposure to new aspects of the market. Missionaries attempted to instil

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35. R.C.A. Samuelson, Long, Long Ago (1929), p. 30.-31.

into their Nguni proteges the virtues of thrift and hard work. Production over and above subsistence needs was encouraged, as was the profit motive. The greatest impact on the internal dynamics of the traditional economy came with the introduction of the ox-drawn plough. The kholwa were quick to see the advantages of the plough over the hoe and adopted its use enthusiastically. However, it presented problems with regard to the old sexual division of labour. Due to avoidance and taboos concerning women's relation to cattle, they were not permitted to take part in this aspect of agricultural production. Thus the missionaries' encouragement of male participation in cultivation was reinforced by this customary prohibition. Constantly determined to undermine what they interpreted as the innate tendency of Nguni men to bask in the sun while their women laboured, the missionaries did nothing to undermine female exclusion from ploughing.

Referring to peasant production on mission lands in his district, the magistrate of the Umgeni Division commented in his 1878 report that:

The work among them is chiefly done by the men, the women taking part only in the lighter labours of the field. In this respect they present an honourable contrast to other natives.(36)

The missionaries consciously wooed Nguni women into the virtues of domesticity until they even became concerned that women "were acquiring unwholesomely long periods of leisure."<sup>(37)</sup>

Methodist missionary, William Holden, echoed the sentiments of most missionaries when he wrote in the 1860s that:

... in the absence of the purifying and elevating influences of Christianity, woman is reduced to the lowest state in the social scale, and is subjected to the most debasing and degrading servitude.(38)

There is a clear example of the tendency described by Rogers, of European male observers being unwilling to see women of other cultures as more

36. Natal Blue Book, 1878, p. JJ3.

37. N. Etherington, op.cit., p. 252.

38. W. Holden, op.cit., p. 200.

elevated in status than their own wives and daughters.

There is not, however, a great deal of evidence to show that Christianity did much to rescue African women from a position of servitude. In fact, domestic activities were encouraged not only on mission stations but in mission schools. As late as 1928, at the Seventh General Missionary Conference on South Africa at Lovedale, it was recommended in respect of the needs of the 'Native woman and girl' that there be "the preparation of a suitable book with reference to the life of the African woman bearing upon all the different aspects of the home", and that they be united into a well-organized 'Mothers Union'.<sup>(39)</sup> It was further resolved that:

The African woman and girl is also in need of a new vision of the opportunities that will come to her through the right kind of Christian education. We want for our women and girls a far more practical education. An education that will touch every aspect of the home life and community life ....Such an education will open up to women and girls a very large field of usefulness and service.<sup>(40)</sup>

Thus it is clear that the intention of the exponents of Christianity in South Africa did little to eliminate the domestication of African women. Indeed, a perusal of the reports of the Inspector of Native Education in Natal reveals a strong emphasis on domestic training in the education of African girls. A survey of the curriculum at Wesleyan, Catholic, American and Church of England mission schools, for example, demonstrates a strong emphasis on domestic activities such as needlework and cooking. The strongest evidence in this regard can be gleaned from a survey of the pictures of the African girls' school attached to Inanda Mission Station. In a Natal weekly magazine in 1910, a picture of schoolgirls learning arithmetic is happily juxtaposed to a picture of them 'stamping mealies'.<sup>(41)</sup>

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39. Mrs. Hofmeyr, "The Reintegration of the Social Life of Native Women and Girls", in Lovedale press, The Realignment of Native Life on a Christian Basis (1928), p. 78.

40. Ibid., p. 79.

41. The Pictorial, November 24, 1910, p. 240.

As noted earlier, traditionally the status of women in Nguni society was subordinate to that of men; but they had important contributory functions and security within the lineage, and an element of autonomy within the system of polygamy. With the growth of kholwa participation in the market economy, the economic role of these women was increasingly marginalized. The introduction of the monogamous family and the plough meant that women's role as semi-autonomous cultivators within the homestead fell away. The evidence seems to suggest that their contribution to production came to be centred around domestic activities and distribution. Shooter observed, for example, that:

In Natal, when maize is carried to the houses of Europeans for sale, the bearers were invariably females. A man or boy probably accompanies them, but he simply marches at the head of the procession, and carries nothing heavier than his own dignity.(42)

This picture clearly demonstrated a fusion of old and new patterns in relation to the attitude towards, and the status of, women. Women, as in the past, continued to be the carriers, but they were now increasingly excluded from the main stream of productive activities.

The problem for the kholwa, however, was that despite their success as peasant farmers, for the women, the family hearth did not adequately replace the security afforded by traditional culture. For example, lobola was wholeheartedly condemned by the missionaries as a barbaric custom which reduced women to the level of goods and chattels. The pragmatic function of lobola, however, was to buy not only a wife's productive and reproductive capacities, but also her future economic and social security, as well as that of her children within the patrilineal homestead. A christian wife who had not fetched lobola, held less status than a wife for whom cattle had been exchanged, and in the event of her husband's death, she and her offspring would be forced to return to her natal home. In addition, the children of a Christian wife were not entitled, under customary law, to their father's inheritance.<sup>(43)</sup>

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42. J. Shooter, op.cit., p. 80.

43. N. Etherington, op.cit., p. 185.

For reasons such as these, many of the kholwa, although initially acceding to the moral recommendations of the missionaries, often reverted to old customs and practices. Polygamy, for example, often persisted among the kholwa. "As time went on...and the kholwa grew richer, many of them sought to signal their material success in the customary fashion."<sup>(44)</sup> The wives of Christian polygamists on mission stations benefitted from the security afforded by traditional kinship ties, but had to forego the respect they were accorded as quasi-independent agricultural producers in the past.

Peasantization was not restricted to the mission stations. "The fact was...that the winds of economic change were blowing through kraals far removed from missions and townsfolk."<sup>(45)</sup> Many Nguni peasants living as tenants on white-owned farms, as squatters on Crown lands and in the locations became successful commercial producers, some reaching great heights of prosperity, others merely producing sufficient surplus to offset their cash needs and to avoid wage labour. This was possible as long as land was reasonably abundant, a situation which prevailed until the 1880s.<sup>(46)</sup>

The magistrate of the Umlazi Division reported in 1879 that, despite increased wages, "Natives are not tempted by them and will only consent to work by fits and starts, frequently absenting themselves when in service for two or three days a week and thus making their help of little worth."<sup>(47)</sup> Neither was non-Christian peasant production unaffected by technological innovation. Superintendent of Education in Natal, Robert Mann, remarked in 1867 that there was substantial spread of economic and

44. Ibid., p. 282.

45. Ibid., p. 35.

46. By the 1880s Shepstone's reserve policy was beginning to have the effect of making reserve land over-crowded and over-worked. Nevertheless, even after this time, there was a fair measure of African economic independence in the subsistence sector, or economic alternatives to wage labour in Natal, such as work on the Rand either on the mines, or more importantly for Natal Africans, in domestic service on the Reef.

47. Blue Book, 1879, p. JJ5.

technological adaptations from the mission stations to other Nguni cultivators.<sup>(48)</sup> In addition, Shepstone organized schemes enabling Africans to buy ploughs on credit, and many availed themselves of this opportunity.

Reporting on peasant agriculture in 1869, the editor of the Natal Witness commented that:

They have during the last ten years, brought many hundreds of ploughs - indeed we might say, with truth, thousands. They all have a few oxen...and, indeed, all that is necessary to set them up as plough-men.<sup>(49)</sup>

Indeed, 'ploughmen' is the operative word, for, as amongst the Kholwa, women were traditionally excluded from working with cattle. In 1879 the magistrate of Ixopo described the process of cultivation in his district as follows :

... all, or nearly so, have ploughs which are worked by the younger male branches of the family, enabling them to dispose of produce on a much larger scale than formerly when they used the hand-hoe only - their thriving stock of cattle gives them all they stand in need of.<sup>(50)</sup>

Nevertheless, ploughs did not take over from horticulture completely, and therefore it is difficult to generalize about African women in Natal who were not attached to the mission stations. For instance, "When Shepstone toured the district in 1849 to collect his 7/- hut tax, he had to take upward of 3,000 head of cattle in lieu of cash."<sup>(51)</sup> This could lead to a reversion to hoe culture if the stock base of such families was not

48. C. Bundy, op.cit., p. 173.

49. Quoted in N. Etherington, "Natal's First Black Capitalists", Theoria, XLV, October 1975, p. 30.

50. Blue Book, 1879, p. JJ18.

51. H.J. Simons, African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa (1968), p. 21.

initially large: firstly because there were no cattle to work the ploughs or, secondly, because men went into temporary wage labour to replenish their stock. Later, when cattle numbers became severely depleted during the Rinderpest epidemic in the 1890's and the East Coast Fever epidemic in the first decade of the twentieth century, the use of the hoe was once again resumed, with women as the labourers.<sup>(52)</sup>

An alternative course was to resort to wage labour in order to meet cash needs or to provide the necessary capital to build up cattle stocks and to purchase ploughs. This was usually undertaken by young men, although women did enter domestic service as well. Both men and women engaged themselves for only short periods and, although this signifies the embryonic phase of oscillating migratory labour in Natal, it was, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, conducted for the most part on a selective and voluntary basis.

Moving beyond a limited consideration of the sexual division of labour, the use of the plough was more a characteristic of the richer peasants; and it can be concluded that, with increasing stratification among the peasantry, the economic role of women among better-off producers became more marginalized. This conclusion can be corroborated by reference to the question of land. Under indirect rule, reserve land was allocated to male household heads. On white-owned farms, tenancy agreements were entered into with men alone. With reference to land purchase, this was confined to male Nguni buyers. Cash crop farming enabled a substantial number of peasant men to purchase land, at least until the 1880s when restrictions began to be imposed. There is much evidence to illustrate how individuals and partnerships acquired ownership of farms and worked them profitably.<sup>(53)</sup> With an increase in capital accumulation and private property, Nguni women, and particularly those from the upper stratum of the peasantry, experienced growing inequality relative to men. Firstly, because the reciprocal relationships of the homestead

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52. C. Bundy, op.cit., p. 188.

53. N. Etherington, op.cit., p. 34.

community were undermined by production for exchange, and, secondly, because of their restricted access to the means of production. The complementarity of male and female roles experienced in traditional society was upset and women were put in a greater position of dependency in relation to men.

Although there were these differences in the status of women amongst the various strata of the peasantry, the overall position of Nguni women worsened generally, with the impact of colonization and incorporation into the world capitalist economy. As indicated above, the greatest grievance of the white settlers was a scarcity of labour. Any attempt to recruit labour locally, however, necessitated a "head-on collision with the lineage mode of production."<sup>(54)</sup> This could involve not only an attack on the means of production, such as access to land, but also an attack on the relations of production which served to keep the economic unit of the homestead together and ensure its reproduction. As described by Slater :

These included polygamy and lobola. The relationship between material resources and these social practices was one of interdependence. Each represented one part of a total production complex....Loss of control over one of these key resources or social practices would therefore be likely to set off a vicious spiral at the end of which lay the demise of the homestead as the basis of socio-labour organization.(55)

This was fully realized by colonists and officials alike. The 'Kafir Commission' of 1853, reporting for the benefit of Lieutenant-Governor Pine and relying on evidence from settlers, missionaries and government officials, placed great weight on the sexual division of labour amongst the Nguni and the evils of lobola and polygamy, to explain the reluctance of the men to engage in wage labour.

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54. H. Slater, op.cit., p. 154.

55. Ibid.

It was argued that one reason for the want of labour was "the permitted polygamy which prevails, and the forced labour of the female kafirs."<sup>(56)</sup> The colonial administration set out to curb such practices and, indeed, the hut tax, initiated in 1849 and raised in 1870, can be viewed as a wife tax. In addition, Law I of 1869 entailed a progressive marriage fee rising from £2 for a first wife to £40 for a twentieth wife. Law I also legislated on lobola. It represented the first attempt to codify customary law, and many of the provisions were embodied in the Natal Native Code of 1878 and its subsequent amendments which still to this day deprive African women in Natal of proprietary rights and social adulthood - disabilities that they do not suffer in other provinces.

In some ways, the Natal Native Code also gave Nguni women some measure of independence. For example, in terms of Article 20, women were allowed to sue for divorce on the ground of ill-treatment by their husbands. This was greatly resented by Nguni men and was one of the main grievances articulated in the Natal Native Affairs Commission of 1881/2.<sup>(57)</sup> Nguni women were also, in terms of the Code, no longer forced to marry husbands against their will.

In September 1905 a poll tax was introduced, which devolved upon unmarried Nguni males, while married males were still subject to the hut tax. The Natal Native Affairs Commission of 1906/7, in addition to grievances regarding the loss of control over women, evidenced the complaint that chiefs and fathers were also losing control over the young men. The latter were now responsible for furnishing funds to meet their own tax and cash needs, and were less amenable to performing wage labour to pay for the hut taxes of the older generation. Further, in terms of the Natal Native Code, it was a legal requirement that all lobola be paid before marriage, and it became increasingly difficult for young men to acquire wives and engage in commercial or subsistence agriculture via the

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56. Proceedings of Report of the Kafir Commission, 1853, p. 26.

57. Report of the Natal Native Affairs Commission, 1881/2, passim.

lineage mode of production. This problem was particularly exacerbated when the cattle population was decimated from the last decade of the nineteenth century until the end of the period, due to the ravages of Lung sickness, Rinderpest and, later, East Coast Fever. Thus wage labour became more and more of a necessity for individual males and as time went on, was less frequently conducted on behalf of the community.

An exception was the practice of isibalo (forced labour for public works) which prevailed largely in the locations. Under this system, the Natal government required the chiefs to provide a certain number of male workers on a contract basis, to engage in the building of roads and railways, for example. It seems that in this case, wages were not entirely the preserve of individual labourers. Not only did the older males resent the loss of control over the younger men and their earning power, but they also resented the rendering of the hut tax on huts which housed old wives who were no longer economically productive.<sup>(58)</sup>

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Natal came to feel the impact of the mining revolution which was taking place in the interior. This had the effect of opening up new markets and opportunities which led to a burgeoning of white farming and trade. As a result, the incidence of absentee landlordism decreased and many peasant tenants and squatters were either evicted, turned into labour tenants or were subjected to escalating rents. This, in turn, led to an undermining of peasant cultivation and increased pressure on the land in the over-crowded locations.<sup>(59)</sup>

It is to this period, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that we can trace the beginnings of oscillating migratory labour on a substantial scale in Natal, a system which came to represent the most important way in which the cash needs of the Nguni population were met and which, for some time, only involved male workers. From the outset it

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58. Report of the Natal Native Affairs Commission, 1906/7, p. 749.

59. C. Bundy, op.cit., p. 189.

must be borne in mind that the incidence of migrancy varied throughout Natal and further, there was no uniformity in the forms of labour undertaken by men from different regions. For example, in 1902 the magistrate of the Ixopo Division reported for his district, a high and increasing incidence of migration to the goldfields.<sup>(60)</sup> The magistrate of the Mapumulo Division, on the other hand, reported that although there was a growing trend for men to seek work outside the Colony, on the whole, employment was taken up within Natal.<sup>(61)</sup>

The implication for women, was that as men increasingly became absorbed in the system of oscillating migratory labour, they were left in the subsistence sphere to depend on, and be responsible for, an ever-diminishing and deteriorating land base. Although the managerial functions often devolved upon the older men who remained in the rural subsistence sector, this was not always the case. In any event, the bulk of agricultural work fell to the women. Obviously, greatest responsibility fell upon those women in areas where men were engaged in migrant labour far afield, or where they were committed to long contracts which precluded them from returning to the rural sector at critical stages in the agricultural calendar. Where the plough had been introduced and worked by men, with their growing absence, hoe culture was reverted to, either due to the preclusion of women working with cattle or because cattle numbers had been so severely depleted that the use of the ox-drawn plough was no longer feasible.

This is of significance in interpreting the decline of the peasantry in Natal and is a factor which has been largely neglected to date. Bundy, whilst correctly emphasizing the underdevelopment of the South African peasantry, considered external determinants to the detriment of an adequate analysis of the productive processes involved in the lineage mode of production, not least of all the sexual division of labour and

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60. Colony of Natal: Ministerial Department of Native Affairs: Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1902, p. A2.

61. Ibid., p. A7.

the assaults which were made upon it. Whilst proletarianization and peripheralization predominated, as causes of the fall of the Natal peasantry, this process was aided and abetted by increasing reliance on women and the aged in the rural economy. In the pre-colonial era, women had been efficient and successful cultivators. However, following the incorporation of the Natal Nguni into the periphery of the capitalist system, their exclusion from the innovative and decision making processes, mitigated against their efforts when they were forced to assume the entrepreneurial functions which were previously the preserve of men.

It is clear in the case of Natal, that women not only resisted proletarianization but that Nguni men preferred that women remain within the confines of the pre-colonial rural economy. As pointed out by Bozzoli :

Proletarianisation of black women took place in South Africa from the time of colonial conquest. However, it has already been suggested that the distinctive thing about this proletarianisation was that it almost invariably followed that of black men.(62)

However, there were clearly 'push' as well as 'pull' factors involved. It was male black labour that the colonial capitalist class desired. Although women were employed as domestic workers and as farm labourers, on the whole, these jobs were done by African males or Indian indentured labourers. It was clearly in the interests of the ruling class that the African population should subsist in the reserves, thus lowering the cost of labour power. This was in spite of the perennial complaints of the unreliability of African migrant workers, an expected concomitant of this system of wage labour. Certainly for reasons which are expanded on in the following chapter, there was resistance to the development of permanent urban or peri-urban settlements of African workers.

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62. B. Bozzoli, "Feminist Interpretations and South African Studies: Some Suggested Avenues for Exploration", African Studies Seminar Paper, University of the Witwatersrand (1981), p. 26.

Despite this obvious preference for African male labour, the colony had its designs for the utilization of African females. From early on in its history, the ruling class in Natal and its ideologues intended that African women become engaged as domestic servants. In her renowned book Maids and Madams, Cock has stated that "By 1980 domestic service had been transformed into a predominantly black, female institution."<sup>(63)</sup> Whilst this may be true of the Eastern Cape, it was certainly no so for colonial Natal and it is suggested that the interpretation adopted by Bozzoli is more appropriate in this case. Despite the attempts of colonial administrators to encourage and train African women for service in white households, they were not forthcoming; and the trend, particularly among urban settlers, was to import and employ indentured 'coolie' servants.<sup>(64)</sup>

The aims and ambitions of the colonial state for the African population can be seen from its education laws. Industrial training was required in African schools. For boys this meant woodwork, metal work, gardening and so forth. For girls, it meant domestic chores, as pointed out above with regard to the educational programmes of mission schools. Reporting with favour on the industrial training provided African girls at the St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Mission school, the Inspector of Native Schools noted that :

The girls are instructed in needlework, washing, ironing; and other household duties by one of the sisters; as was explained, the aim being to render them good and useful domestic servants, and it appeared to me that the means taken were likely to secure the end in view.<sup>(65)</sup>

Despite a general and seemingly widespread resistance to domestic employment in white households by African women themselves and by their men, there is evidence that this form of service was a possible means of escape for African women who wished to reject traditional life patterns. It has been documented, for example, that even in the case of an elevated

63. J. Cock, Maids and Madams (1980), p. 174.

64. cf. Reports of the Protector of Indian Immigrants 1895 to 1913, *passim*.

65. Blue Book, 1886, p. U74.

woman, life in service might have been preferable to the rigours of traditional patriarchal ideology and practices, as was the case with Christina, wife of king Solomon in the 1920s.<sup>(66)</sup>

Nevertheless, domestic service was not always a happy solution and often merely provided a route for African women into the informal sector of towns or villages, where they were able to gain some measure of economic independence, if not cultural security. The ambivalent situation of African women in this position is spelt out in the scenario of one of James Stuart's informants :

... natives object to their daughters having premarital relations with their lovers; they desire young men first to get permission. Girls may then have to be corrected (beaten); they run off to some town, like Ladysmith, to work; they engage in the service of some European woman; the father goes off to look for his daughter ... The husband comes. 'What', he says, 'You want your daughter? No I can't let you have her; she is working.' Father goes off powerless to do any more. In the course of time the girl will let a lot of dishes, plates, etc. fall on the ground; she will then be beaten and dismissed by her mistress; she is afraid of returning to her angry father; she comes across gaudily dressed girls in the streets who question her and ultimately persuade her to join them and earn by prostitution ... the father curses his luck as he perceives no prospect of coming by the lobola ...<sup>(67)</sup>

What seems to have been common, however, was that girls and particularly those trained in domestic skills at school, often used this route to escape the confines of rural life.

It is tempting to conclude that most Nguni women were trapped in the subsistence sector, the victims of a double oppression - that of customary male control and that of an extraneously imposed patriarchal

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66. R.H. Reyher, Zulu Woman (1949).

67. C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright, op.cit., p. 215.

ideology. A perusal of the documentary evidence available, however, does not always accord with a picture of a docile, rural female populace. On the contrary, in the 1881/2 and 1906/7 Commissions on Native Affairs, both white and African informants, all of whom were male, complained of the growing independence and laxity among Nguni women. In 1881 W. Ackerman informed the Commission that :

... it is to my mind not at all marvellous that Native women should have gone some steps further in the assertion of their novel freedom than was intended. Indeed it is complained of that they have done so, and become unmanageable. This condition of things is to be regretted, but to me appears only as one of those events inseparable from a transitional stage between abject submission and the liberty of a higher grade of life.(68)

Resentment was not just confined to whites. Among Nguni men it is even more evident, particularly from the Report of the 1906/7 Commission. Indicative of generally held feelings are the comments of Mr. Gobozi of the Umlazi District, who complained about the exodus of women to the towns, as a result of their legal protection afforded by the Natal Native Code :

A girl might leave her parents for a mere triviality and come to Durban .... There were many Natives living in the country who were in trouble owing to their wives having deserted them and gone to Durban to lead an immoral life.(69)

The spirit of the Commission reflects a general sympathy for men with regard to their plight when deserted by the women, despite continued stated abhorrence by whites for the practice of polygamy and the exploitation of female agricultural labour.

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68. Report of the Natal Native Affairs Commission, 1881/2 p. 19.

69. Report of the Natal Native Affairs Commission, 1906/7 p. 824.

This notion of female liberty and independence does not seem to have been restricted to rural communities close to urban centres either. In 1902 F.E. Foxen, magistrate of the Ixopo Division reported that :

... in future years a large number of Natives will be dependent upon the Europeans for their food supplies, because the women are becoming too indolent to clean away the weeds, and it is infra dig for men to do such work.(70)

How then, can one explain this apparent independence of women and the resounding outrage of Nguni men, evident not only from the Commissions and Magistrates Reports, but a resentment echoed in the oral evidence collected by James Stuart?<sup>(71)</sup>

The paradox can perhaps best be explained by the efforts of the colonial government to undermine the lineage mode of production in its constant quest for labour, not only by attacking the means of production, but also the relations of production, and the institutions which held it together. To this end, laws were promulgated to reduce the subjection of women to the 'indignities' of polygamy or their being 'bought' by lobola, and hence women were granted the opportunity to escape the control of their parents or husbands in a number of ways. This represented the partial collapse of customary patriarchal ideology, and its replacement by a less narrow, less obvious but equally debilitating form, and one which was altogether alien in its practice and its articulation.

However, although this assault resulted in a number of women leaving the pre-capitalist rural sector for the towns, where they came to represent an informal sector of beer-brewers, prostitutes and hawkers, or for the mission stations where they came to be incorporated into the kohlwa community, testimony must also be paid to the persistent strength of customary ideology and the fact that most African women remained in the subsistence sector. It was the very ability of Nguni patriarchal tradition to maintain control over the activities of women, that allowed

70. Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1902, p. A2.

71. C. de B. Webb and J.B. Wright, op.cit., passim.

for the continuance of the pre-capitalist agricultural sector both in the face of the challenges posed by the growth of the capitalist sector, and the undermining of male authority occasioned by the depletion of the material base of such authority, namely cattle-holding which suffered under the impact of drought and disease from the 1890s onwards.

Efforts to assess quantitatively the impact of cattle loss or migratory labour on the African population of Natal are confounded by the fact that official estimates of the African population are highly unreliable. As late as 1891 no census of the African population had been undertaken because of "the practical impossibility of having an actual number of the natives in the colony taken."<sup>(72)</sup> For the 1891 Census each magistrate was instructed to have the population of two or three kraals in his division enumerated to obtain an average of the number of people living in each hut in his district, to provide a basis for an estimate of the African population of the colony. The sample surveyed consisted of 2 918 huts occupied by 10 002 inhabitants which gave an average of 4,1367 persons per hut. Earlier attempts to gauge the size of Natal's African population invariably underestimated rather than exaggerated it, not only because fewer numbers were thought to occupy each hut but because the number of huts was taken from the hut tax rolls which represented an underassessment of hut numbers in the colony. For these reasons, the statistics for Africans given in the Appendix should be treated with caution, prior to the 1904 Census.

By the same token, misconceptions about African society and about the prevalence of institutions such as polygamy, also led to arbitrary and inaccurate assessments of the gender distribution of the African population. As can be seen from Tables 2.3 and 2.5 in the Appendix, in 1852 it was wildly assumed that there were sixty per cent more females than males in the African population. In the 1860s a modified assumption of five females to every four males in the country was adopted. The sample survey of 1891, however, showed a more realistic and lower female to male ratio of eleven females to every ten males. Further, the census

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72. 1891 Census, Blue Book, 1891.

of 1904 revealed that the disproportion between the sexes was in fact much less than had been formerly assumed.

When examining the incidence of Africans in the towns, official figures also present problems. It is clear that it was Nguni men, rather than women, who first left the rural economy to take up wage labour. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 give the population of Pietermaritzburg and Durban respectively, for selected years from 1852 to 1904. However, as mentioned above, figures prior to 1904 cannot be considered as reliable and in the case of Durban, the 1904 census only showed Africans in service as residing in towns. Thus Africans in the informal sector, or not under contract in terms of the Master and Servants Act of 1850, were not enumerated. Nevertheless, from the more fastidious statistics of Pietermaritzburg it can be seen that there were, on average, approximately twenty women to every hundred men in the city during the period.

It may be argued that women were not proletarianized as early as men due to a general preference for male labour, given the greater mobility of men.<sup>(73)</sup> This may indeed be true in the case of isibalo. However, there is no apparent reason why women should not have been able to enter domestic service bar their own resistance or, probably more importantly, due to the restrictions imposed upon them by customary patriarchal control. As shown in Table 4.3 in the Appendix, according to the 1904 census, out of an estimated urban African population of 34 090, there were 30 730 males employed, chiefly as domestic servants. Paradoxically, therefore, it seems that the strength of patriarchal ideology within Nguni society and its association with the lineage mode of production, initially delayed for women the process of proletarianization that was to be the fate of men once their cash needs were sufficiently increased and as the material base of the rural sector was eroded.

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73. cf. K. Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production and Private Property", in Lamphere, L. and Rosalo, M.Z. (eds) Women, Culture and Society (1974), p. 220.

The implication seems to be, therefore, that for the Nguni women of Natal, the marginalization experienced during the prosperous phase of peasant production and the halcyon days of subsistence agriculture, diminished with the fall of the peasantry and the impoverishment of the rural sector. It may even be true that women's status, if not their material condition, improved with the entrenchment of male migrancy, although it is more likely that the operation of male tutelage continued, with greater authority being vested in the older male members of the lineage. With regard to women who left the rural sector, either temporarily or permanently, it seems that they were able to avoid full proletarianization, and the evidence seems to point to their proliferation in the informal sector and to a lesser extent in domestic service. This was both as a result of, and in opposition to, the patriarchal ideology of Nguni society. It should be noted in this regard that African women were frequently exploited sexually by White and Indian men, as is shown below. Further, the insecurity of urban life in the informal sector sometimes led to some of these women being forced to engage in prostitution.

In the longer-term, Nguni women in Natal came to be subject to a vast array of disabilities placing them among the most oppressed group in South Africa, a condition which persists to this day. What is significant, however, is that the roots of this oppression lay not only in colonial conquest and patriarchy, but in pre-capitalist forms of patriarchy as well. Thus, although their incorporation into the periphery of the capitalist system ultimately subordinated Nguni women beyond previous measure, it is as well to heed the warnings of Bozzoli that it is not always fruitful to apply concepts and theories, developed out of studies of advanced capitalism, to the South African context where the nature of capitalism is in itself an issue, and where there may be a strong case for the relative autonomy of female oppression, without abandoning a materialist analysis.<sup>(74)</sup>

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74. B. Bozzoli, op.cit., p. 4.

CHAPTER FOURWHITE WOMEN IN COLONIAL NATAL

We, the European women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, stand therefore in a position the gravity and importance which was not equalled by that of any of our forerunners in the ancient civilisation. As we master and rise above, or fall and are conquered by, the difficulties of our position, so also will be the future, not merely of our own class, or even of our own race alone, but also of those vast masses who are following on in the wake of our civilisation. The decision we are called on to make is a decision for the race; behind us comes on the tread of incalculable millions of feet.(1)

As was done with the chapter on Nguni women, white women in Natal are studied against a background of the status and role of women as experienced immediately prior to settlement. Because immigration continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this necessitates a survey of the position of women in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Following this background sketch, a picture of colonial life for women in Natal is constructed, both in a rural and an urban context. Because this is a general study, the manifold and changing nuances in the lives of Natal's settler women over the period are not examined in detail. At the same time, whilst continuity is recognized and whilst some issues have to be seen in the light of the whole colonial period, where necessary and possible, the study is broken down into two main parts.

The first period covers emigration to and life in the colony from the time of the first wave of British immigration between 1849 and 1851, until the Anglo-Zulu War. By this time not only had the condition of women in Britain altered significantly, but the type of life they faced

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1. O. Schreiner, Women and Labour (1911), p. 117.

in the colony was also substantially different. During these early years Natal was above all an agricultural settlement, in some ways very isolated and self-sufficient, in others vitally dependent on links with the metropole. The second period, extending from the 1880s until the eve of the First World War, saw many changes both in Britain and in Natal. The first wave of British emigration to Natal had occurred in a climate of economic hardship but by mid-century conditions in Britain had improved. Not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the confidence of the Victorians shaken. During this period the prospect of impecuniosity increasingly faced not only the traditional poor and the working-class, but many people of means. In Natal, the growth of the sugar industry, the development of coal-mining and the extension of the railways meant a broadening of the infrastructure and the economic base of the colony. This, together with the mineral discoveries in the interior, meant a growing economic if not a social and cultural insularity. At this time too, both in Britain and Natal, economic opportunities were changing for women although not in the same way or at the same pace. In Britain, it was the dawning of the era of the 'new woman': and the suffragette movement and changing economic conditions had caused women and men to redefine the role and status of the 'gentler sex'.

The way in which Victorians perceived their society in the nineteenth century did not demonstrate a clear vision of an emergent two-tiered class arrangement between proletarians and capitalists, pitted in conflict. Almost universally, a more complex arrangement of stratification was understood. They conceived, rather, of a more harmonious if multi-graded social world, extending from the traditional poor, through the various ranks of the working-class, to the upper echelons of society. These groups were identified as lower- or upper-middle-class and finally the aristocracy. In the context of this chapter, therefore, the term class is used not only in the analytical historical materialist sense, but also descriptively to apply to the Natal settlers' conception of themselves and of society. Nevertheless, from the context it should be clear that the term is used frequently in the latter sense, that is, to refer to what may be better described as 'class image'. In this regard it should be noted, however, that marxism

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does not deny the existence of status groups within classes or the possibility of intra-class conflict. White settlers were, from the time of their arrival, almost all members of the ruling class. White workers, and settlers who were not property-owners, soon came to adopt a bourgeois class consciousness and they benefited socially and economically from their racial affiliation with the ruling class. In this chapter and in the one following, which is concerned with Indian women, theoretical considerations will not be spelt out explicitly. This will be done, rather, in the concluding chapter when the status and position in the class structure of all Natal's women will be reviewed.

### Women in Victorian Economy and Society

The Victorian Era, which, strictly defined refers to the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901, began in an atmosphere of political and economic upheaval following the Napoleonic Wars. The 1830s and 1840s were years of economic hardship and, in addition, were accompanied by the rise of new social problems. By the end of the eighteenth century in the countryside, enclosure had reduced the independence of much of the population, resulting in the proletarianization of the rural labour force. Similar changes in relationships in the cities and towns followed on industrialization, which was also accompanied by urbanization and its concomitant problems. Victorian society and government was not unaware of these adverse changes in British society, as is evidenced by the number of commissions of enquiry which were set up during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Not least of all, many of these commissions concerned the position of working women who were first recognized as a 'social problem' from the 1830s and 1840s. In 1832 the Sadler Commission highlighted the problem of female factory workers. This was followed in 1842 by The Children's Employment Commission which exposed the problem of women workers in a number of other occupations such as "in the mines and the traditional

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outwork trades, where wages and conditions were no less degrading than those in the textile mill."<sup>(2)</sup> The plight of rural women workers was investigated in the following year by the Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture.<sup>(3)</sup> Whilst the findings of these commissions have been brought into question by subsequent researchers, the very number of them is significant in itself, with regard to women's condition.

Despite all these efforts to come to terms with the problems of women workers, however, the overriding concern was not so much with the exploitation of female labour and the harsh conditions which women workers had to endure, as with "the moral and spiritual degradation said to accompany female employment; especially the mingling of the sexes and the neglect of domestic comforts."<sup>(4)</sup> For upper- and middle-class women, wage work was taboo; for working-class women it was a necessary evil which was seen to threaten the very fabric of society. It was believed that women, who were supposed to be the guardians of Victorian morality, were unhealthily exposed to the realities of life once they left the kitchen for the factory or the sweatshop floor. In addition, female wage labour meant neglect of domestic duties which were viewed by the Victorians as of paramount importance. In describing the situation of rural women who were engaged from sunrise to sunset in the fields, either haymaking, hoeing turnips, digging potatoes or reaping, the 1843 Commission concluded that although fatiguing work, outdoor labour was healthy and invigorating for women as compared with, for example, the work of factory hands. What was less healthy was the fact that:

... the husband is a sufferer from his wife's absence from home. There is not the same order in the cottage, nor the same attention paid to his comforts as when his wife remains at home all day. On returning home from her

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2. S. Alexander, "Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century London; A Study of the Years 1820-50", in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A., (eds) The Rights and Wrongs of Women (1976), p. 60.
  3. Report on Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (Reprinted 1968).
  4. S. Alexander, op.cit., p. 61.

labour, she has to look after her children, and her husband may have to wait for his supper. He may come home tired and wet: he finds his wife has arrived just before him: she must give her attention to the children: there is no fire, no supper, no comfort, and he goes to the beer-shop.(5)

There was obviously little concern on the part of the commissioners for the way in which rural women were expected, obliged after a long day's toil in the fields, to perform the 'second shift'.

The most important reason for attitudes such as these, was the reverence of Victorians for the institution of the family and the almost obsessive concern of their social commentators and moralists with the home. The separation of work and home life which had occurred by the nineteenth century in Britain, as well as the assertive and competitive demands of industrial capitalism, meant that the home was increasingly seen as a serene retreat or refuge which had to be maintained and preserved. More than this, however, it became idealized and revered and, along with it, so too were women who were seen as the pivot of the home and the family hearth.

The ascribed role of the Victorian woman was marriage and procreation and to this end she was reared and educated. It was believed that a woman had an inborn desire for family duty and for motherhood, but, in addition, her education was designed "to bring out her 'natural' submission to authority and innate maternal instincts."<sup>(6)</sup> That women's submissive and passive tendencies could not be left to her innate preferences and that they had to be reinforced by ideological underpinnings was because:

One of the many hypocrisies of Victorian conservative thought was its typification of woman as a frail, delicate and decorative creature, and its simultaneous tolerance of, and indeed dependence on, the exploitation of

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5. Report of Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, op.cit., p. 27.
  6. M. Vicinus, "Introduction", in Vicinus, M., (ed.) Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age (1972), p. x.

vast numbers of women in every kind of arduous and degrading work, from coal-mining to prostitution.(7)

Victorian ideology regarding women's status did much, therefore, to obscure the realities of the working woman's life and to dictate the way in which they, as well as upper- and middle-class girls, were raised. Economic and social circumstances made it impossible for women of the working-class to attain the ideal of feminine gentility and leisure in the home. In fact, the perfect Victorian lady could only be such in the presence of the institution of domestic service, a service provided largely by the daughters of the working-class.

Women were generally educated to believe that they were morally superior to men because they did not exhibit the male sexual drive, but that they were physically and mentally weaker. Victorian prudery can be epitomized by Queen Victoria's wedding night advice to her daughter, 'Lie still, and think of the Empire'; and, indeed, it was believed that premarital chastity should be followed by a married life of physical submission rather than physical expression, so far as women were concerned. It has been said that "To read most histories of Britain in the nineteenth century, ... is to gain the impression that the Victorians procreated by some form of remote control."<sup>(8)</sup> Whilst this may seem true for the chaste and pure bourgeois wife, the model of the passionless woman was one which was confined to the wives and daughters of the upper- and middle-class. Whilst never matching the needs and desires of men, Victorian social commentators and moralists frequently projected on to women of the working-class, a large degree of sexuality.

Indeed, Victorian society needed and demanded its prostitutes who were considered to be a growing social problem during the course of the nineteenth century. They were required to gratify the appetites of upper- and middle-class men for whom marriage was a state entered into

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7. D. Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension", in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A., (eds) op.cit., p. 112.
  8. E.M. Sigsworth and T.J. Wyke, "A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease", in Vinicus, M., (ed.) op.cit., p. 77.

late in life and who were often not satisfied by their sexually inadequate and passive wives. Prostitutes were also demanded by working-class men who might be 'forced' by domestic circumstances to the beer shops. Further, prostitution was indispensable to the army and navy where long-term celibacy was dictated by legislation for all but the highest ranks. Thus girls of families on or below the margin of subsistence, who had failed to gain employment in other preferable spheres, were forced to hire out their bodies; and in so doing, performed the important social function "of preserving the virgins of the wealthier classes and shielding their married women from the grosser passions of their husbands...."<sup>(9)</sup> Although prostitution was recognized as originating out of conditions of poverty, it was nevertheless believed that women who broke the family circle in any way threatened social stability and were ultimately considered to be 'fallen' women.

Despite the greater difficulty for working-class women to attain the ideal of the perfect Victorian lady, nevertheless this ideal was admired and aspired to by most members of the working-class. Every effort was made to prevent wives from having to work outside the home.<sup>(10)</sup> Even if women had to take in washing, engage in piece work in the house, or undertake child-minding, this was considered to be more lady-like and acceptable than the toil of industrial life. The ultimate explanation for the universality of these attitudes can be said to be that:

The cult of domesticity rested firmly upon the double standard of sexual conduct. One rule for men and another for women demanded that the latter, of course, be divided into two groups: the 'pure' and 'fallen'. The two groups must never encounter each other, and the pure must pretend not to know of the existence of the others. The home was the habitat of the pure; the city streets the haunt of the fallen.<sup>(11)</sup>

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

10. P.N. Stearns, "Working Class Women in Britain, 1890-1914", in Vinicus, M., (ed.) *Ibid.*, p. 113.

11. L. Davidoff, J. L'Esperance and H. Newby, "Landscape with Figures: Home and Community in English Society", in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A., (eds) *op.cit.*, p. 157.

The apotheosis of the Victorian double standard was reached in the passing of The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869. In terms of this legislation prostitutes could be arrested, examined and detained if found to be suffering from venereal disease, whilst men who engaged their services were allowed to continue freely as carriers, even to infect their pure and virtuous stay-at-home wives.

The determination to keep the vast majority of Victorian women in the domestic sphere was not merely to allow the menfolk to indulge in clandestine exploits with those women who were forced to move beyond it. Women workers, by virtue of the lower wages they could command, were often preferred by employers. They were viewed as a threat by the male members of the working-class who were anxious, therefore, to restrict their access to the labour market. As far as educational attainments were concerned, until the 1870 Education Act, the provision of schooling for the working-class, male and female alike, was poor to say the least. Thereafter facilities for primary education were improved and, in contrast to the educational provisions for the upper- and middle-class children, there was no sex-differentiation written into the curricula. Thus working-class women were not disabled by lower standards when seeking unskilled or semi-skilled employment along with their men. Education differentiated on the basis of sex continued, despite the complaints of middle-class ladies about the 'servant problem' and their demands that formal education for working-class girls should be designed to direct them into domestic service.<sup>(12)</sup> For these reasons, the fears of the men of the working-class regarding competition from women, can be understood if not condoned.

The men of the upper- and middle-class were far more successful, by the use of symbolic boundaries, in excluding women from competing with them in the sphere of employment. Girls were taught either at home by a governess or at private schools, to be obsessed with little more than

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12. P. Marks, "Feminity in the Classroom: An Account of Changing Attitudes", in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A., (eds) Ibid., p. 191.

fashion, their complexion and their posture. With regard to the acquisition of knowledge:

Rote-learning was the norm and the greatest emphasis was laid on gaining the 'accomplishments' - painting, singing, dancing, playing the piano, how best to enter a drawing room and so on. (13)

Although allowed some knowledge, girls were ultimately educated towards their eligibility in marriage and thus they were also trained not to have or to articulate fixed opinions, "lest they seem too formed and too definite for a young man's taste...."(14)

As indicated above, however, the status of women in the Victorian era was not static. The economic hardships of the first half of the nineteenth century were followed by a rise in real wages from mid-century. In spite of this, living standards did not rise dramatically and even slowed down from the turn of the century. Nevertheless, the attainment of at least a margin over subsistence for most of the working-class was combined with a number of other factors which improved the lot of working-class women. One contributory factor was the reduction in family size, due to the dissemination of information regarding birth-control techniques from the 1870s onwards. Although initially the preserve of those privileged members of society who could get hold of the information and the equipment, it was soon clear that it was spreading to women of all but the lowest echelons of society. Whilst during the nineteenth century the average completed family size was between five and six children, with at least one infant mortality per family; by the time of the 1911 Census, the average family size was down to just below three children. It can be seen, therefore, that "The release from continual child-bearing and child-rearing was the starting point of women's emancipation."(15)

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13. Ibid., p. 182.

14. M. Vinicus, op.cit., p. x.

15. R. Adam, A Woman's Place 1910 - 1975 (1975), p. 15.

As mentioned above, access to education was enhanced from 1870, and even for women of the upper- and middle-class, following the 1864 Taunton Commission on Education, there was a gradual move towards assimilating the educational experiences of girls and boys.<sup>(16)</sup> This was most strongly opposed and all the ideological apparatus which could be assembled was used to prevent such egalitarian trends. For example, medical opinion was mustered to the cause and it was argued by the profession that women should rest during menstruation, the implication being that they were not up to the arduous task of intellectual endeavour.<sup>(17)</sup> In addition, social Darwinism was not just confined to justifications for racist ideology but was also used to explain sex-differences which Herbert Spencer put down to "a somewhat earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men; necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction."<sup>(18)</sup> Female energy, it was argued, was so expended in reproductive activities that there was little left for intellectual growth and thus, scientific authority and sanction was given to the social and political subjection of women.

Women themselves absorbed and reiterated such beliefs. The English writer and schoolmistress, Elizabeth Sewell, found it necessary to submit that:

Any strain on a girl's intellect is to be dreaded, and any attempt to bring women into competition with men can scarcely escape failure.<sup>(19)</sup>

Despite ideological deterrents such as these, however, upper- and middle-class women did, by degrees, attain greater access to an improved

16. Ibid., p. 189.

17. Ibid., p. 189.

18. Quoted in J. Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution", in Vinicus, M., (ed.) op.cit., p. 141.

19. E.O. Hellerstein, L.P. Hume and K.M. Offen, (eds) Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States (1981), p. 70.

education. During the 1870s, a small number of girls were admitted to Oxford and Cambridge for the first time, even though they were not graded along with the boys, but were merely awarded a pass or a fail.<sup>(20)</sup> At the level of secondary education, a new breed of governesses, be they teachers in private schools or in private homes, had begun changing the conception girls were to have of their worth. Sport was encouraged as were subjects previously the preserve of boys.

One significant reason for this can be traced to demographic as well as social and economic factors. By the second half of the nineteenth century, women outnumbered men to a significant degree. Although 1 039 males were born for every 1 000 females, the death rate amongst girl infants and children was lower than that for boys.<sup>(21)</sup> The situation was exacerbated by the maintenance of a standing army and navy, the majority of whom were precluded from marrying until late in life. Further, amongst the middle-class, economic necessity often dictated late marriage for the men of this group. Finally, the secondment of men to the colonial service, as well as the drain of many single men to the colonies, rendered a substantial group of middle-class females, spinsters. This large and growing number of women, educated for nothing but matrimony and yet statistically deprived of attaining that state, proved to be a significant anomaly of Victorian life. The only work these women were qualified to do, and which they in fact of necessity turned to, was that of becoming governesses. Such was the problem of these 'superfluous' women or 'distressed gentlewomen' that in 1843 The Governesses' Benevolent Institution was established to assist them in finding employment. These women are worthy of more than passing mention not only because they were responsible for changing the slant of education for upper- and middle-class girls in the later Victorian era, but because many of their number chose to emigrate to the colonies, rather than face the ambiguity of their status as half genteel lady - half servant in Britain.

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20. P. Marks, op.cit., p. 187.

21. P. Stearns, op.cit., p. 101.

The ranks of the governesses were swelled from the last quarter of the nineteenth century by the daughters of artisans and tradesmen who, as a result of the improved fortunes of the aristocracy of labour, both economically and politically, were given many of the educational and social opportunities of middle-class girls. It was hoped by their parents that they would attain upward social mobility by way of marriage; but, in addition, they were frequently better trained and in possession of more skills than the women of the upper- and middle-class who had to support themselves. Thus these women tended to monopolize most of the approved alternatives to governessing such as nursing, assisting in shops, and the new and growing opportunities in commerce as typists, telegraphists and telephonists.

The incongruity of the position of many women, therefore, as well as the movement towards women's suffrage which grew out of the trend towards more universal political participation in general, helped to render women more indignant, and, confident to question their ascribed status. By the end of the century, not only was it necessary that many of the women of the upper- and middle-class worked, but it was becoming more socially acceptable provided that their activities in the labour market were confined to spheres that originated with and that continually paralleled those within the home. Hence the close of the nineteenth century saw the dawning of the 'new woman'.

By the onset of the Edwardian era, the traditional poor remained poor but the material position of the proletariat in general was improving. For women, employment in the factories was available, and only after the massive inflation after 1910 were economic grievances largely forthcoming from this group.<sup>(22)</sup> For the wives and daughters of the aristocracy of labour; artisans and tradesmen, as well as clerks and lower-paid officials, social and economic conditions had generally improved. For some, there was the chance of upward social mobility whilst for many there was the opportunity of improved access to education and the acquisition of skills. For many wives in this group, the employment of a

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22. P. Stearns, op.cit., p. 101.

living-in maid was not unusual. It was mainly the unmarried women of the upper- and middle-class who suffered the greatest decline in economic circumstances at the turn of the century, and the very real prospect of indigence and downward social mobility.

Despite the overall improvement in some aspects of the lives of many Victorian women, however, the persistent strength of ideology should not be underestimated, nor its entrenchment in the institutions of society. This can be seen, above all, by an examination of how women stood in relation to the law. Women were regarded as perpetual minors, legally dependent all of their lives, first upon their fathers and later their husbands. Until the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1870, a woman could not own or have control over her personal property, earnings and income and could not even bequeath her estate to her children.<sup>(23)</sup> With regard to sexual and social conduct, however, no such egalitarian moves were forthcoming in the period under review. If women were found guilty of adultery, no punishment was considered too harsh, even to losing all manner of support and access to her children. This principle was changed following the precedent set by the case of Stark v. Stark and Hitchins in 1910, whereby it was held that the welfare of the children should be the paramount consideration.<sup>(24)</sup> Whilst the adulterous woman was shown no mercy, applications for divorce against men on the grounds of adultery would only be granted if it was accompanied by another matrimonial offence such as violence or habitual drunkenness. It was only with the passing of the Herbert Act as late as 1937 that the two sexes were placed in an equitable position regarding the grounds on which divorce might be obtained.<sup>(25)</sup>

Against this background, it is interesting to try and assess what class of women was brought or came to the colony, during the first wave of emigration to Natal in the late 1840s and early 1850s and in the less

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23. E.O. Hellerstein, L.P. Hume and K.M. Offen, (eds) op.cit., p. 448.

24. R. Adam, op.cit., p. 17.

25. Ibid.

dramatic but steady stream of emigration to the colony from 1880 onwards. It is also interesting to see ways in which women's role and status paralleled those ascribed in Britain, as well as ways in which the colonial conjuncture necessitated divergences. Finally, it is important to examine to what extent Victorian ideology regarding sex-differences and women's image was maintained and nurtured, and to what extent the racial dimension affected attitudes to class, but more particularly, to gender.

### Settler Women in the Colonial Setting

Emigration to Natal began in the context of economic hardship in Britain and in response to official encouragement given to private emigration organisations by the Colonial Land and Emigration Board which was set up in 1840. During the first phase of British emigration, almost 5 000 settlers came out under the aegis of schemes such as that of J.C. Byrne and Company's Natal Emigration and Colonization Company, W.J. Irons' Christian Emigration and Colonization Society and the Natal Cotton Company. The largest group was undoubtedly that brought out by the Byrne scheme. These people, for the price of ten pounds, looked forward to a free passage and the grant of twenty acres of land on arrival. Although the scheme was a failure in many respects, and half the Byrne settlers did not avail themselves of their paltry and unfertile plots, choosing rather to set up in crafts or trades in the urban settlements of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, these immigrants formed the foundation of settler society in the early period of colonization.

After this initial wave of immigration, settlers continued to trickle into the colony at a slow rate. However, the absence of dramatic success stories during the 1850s and the depression of the 1860s, served to deter prospective emigrants from choosing Natal as a destination, even though it was rigorously promoted by emigration societies as preferable to Canada or Australia because of the presence of an indigenous unskilled labour force. In 1857 the Natal government backed emigration schemes, and the colonists were encouraged to invite relatives and friends to emigrate from Britain and to guarantee the payment of ten pounds towards

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their passage and settlement. This scheme was not particularly successful, and it was not until the 1880s that the number of immigrants increased significantly, though never matching the first wave of immigration from the late 1840s. With regard to women, it was not until the replacement of sailing ships with clippers in the 1870s that the conditions of the voyage were safe, comfortable and slightly more respectable for women travelling alone.

An attempt to construct a picture of the class composition of Natal's white settlers of either sex, for all or part of the period under investigation, is an extremely difficult task and one which would require exhaustive research. Whilst it would be a most worthwhile study, the efforts of S. Spencer to trace the origins and destiny of Natal's British settlers who arrived between 1824 and 1857, show that it is not something that can be lightly undertaken.<sup>(26)</sup> In the first place, the status, if not the class, of many emigrants in Britain was ambiguous and this ambiguity of social and economic position often actually played a role in their motivation to become colonial settlers. Secondly, although emigration schemes were initially conducted by private societies rather than the British or colonial governments, assisted passage was dependent upon emigrants conforming to the requirements laid down by the Colonial Land and Emigration Board, unlike the Australian colonies where they wished to attract unskilled labour, it was argued that because of the presence of the indigenous Nguni population which could be used as labourers, it was necessary instead, to attract persons of skill and intelligence to direct labour rather than to labour themselves. Eligibility for free or assisted passage, therefore, was extended to agricultural labourers with the ability to oversee or direct African labour, mechanics, tradesmen, skilled labourers and small farmers, preferably with some capital.

Despite these stipulations, however, a survey of the emigration certificates of Natal's settlers is unhelpful as many were falsified in

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26. S.O. Spencer, British Settlers in Natal 1824-1857: A Biographical Register, Volume I, Abbott to Ayres (1981).

order to qualify for a steerage passage to the colony. For example, many families who had resided in Glasgow were recorded as agricultural labourers or farmers, and according to John Moreland who was Joseph Byrne's agent in Natal:

As far as I have been informed, the Emigration Commissioners strictly enforced the regulations alluded to, but were outwitted by misrepresentation... The same with regard to the gentler sex: a lady's maid became in the twinkling of an eye and experienced cook or kitchen maid. A milliner or dressmaker became a milkmaid, and a lady whose employment heretofore had been to dash off an air in a masterly style on the piano, work a little embroidery or play with the lapdog, was under this new order of things metamorphosed into a dairymaid.(27)

Once in the colony, however, these immigrants were less willing to accept their emigrant designations, and "it appeared not to be relished that they should appear on the stage of Natal in the same humble character, however readily they might have been persuaded to adopt it on leaving England".<sup>(28)</sup> Indeed, a characteristic feature of settler society in Natal was the social aspirations of the colonists and the high degree of snobbery which was extended by those who were successful towards those who were not. Although all whites ultimately became assimilated within the ruling class, affinities of race and culture transcending traditional class divisions, intra-class divisions based on wealth and status were not absent from white colonial society.

What can be said of the first wave of immigration between 1849 and 1851, is that an attempt was made to keep it select by rejecting application

27. A.F. Hattersley, The Natalians - Further Annals of Natal (1940), p. 70.

28. Ibid.

from poor-law guardians for their paupers to be allowed into the Colony. Exceptions to this rule were the cases of British landowners such as the Earl of Arundel and Surrey, and the Duke of Buccleugh who provided for their needy tenants by financing their emigration to Natal.<sup>(29)</sup> Of the 4 158 people who entered the colony during this early period, there were amongst them 322 cabin or intermediate passengers.<sup>(30)</sup> These were people of sufficient means not only to pay for their passage but to hire servants from amongst the emigrants in steerage.<sup>(31)</sup> Nevertheless, despite clues such as these, which suggest that Natal's early white population came from the upper working-class or middle-class, to establish clearly the class position of the colony's early settlers is difficult. Referring to women emigrants in general, A.J. Hammerton has warned that:

In most cases the evidence used has not been detailed or thorough enough to allow precision in identifying and quantifying the class backgrounds of the female emigrants examined. Too often it has been necessary to make inferences about them from the women's British or colonial occupations, in a few cases even from the tone of the their letters. There are obvious risks here .... (32)

One obvious risk from relying on the educational standard displayed in the letters of women immigrants, is that often daughters from a working-class background had the advantage of a better education than many upper - and middle-class women, particularly towards the end of the nineteenth century. Further, all immigrants whatever their social background, and particularly those who came to 'labour-laden' Natal, had aspirations towards gentility and worked tirelessly towards achieving

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29. R.E. Ralls, Early Immigration Schemes in Natal 1846 - 1853 (1934), p. 25.  
 30. H.M. Robertson, "The 1849 Settlers in Natal (Part I)", South African Journal of Economics, XVII (3), 1949, p. 274.  
 31. A.F. Hattersley, op.cit., p. 169.  
 32. A.J. Hammerton, Emigrant Gentlewomen (1979), p. 189.

this end.

Although colonial society generally offered liberation from a wide range of social constraints and a less rigid definition of gentility, as well as easier social mobility, within the capitalist class and into it, colonial egalitarianism should not be exaggerated in the case of Natal where from the beginnings of white settlement there was a tendency towards maintaining barriers of class or status which existed in Britain. At the top of the social hierarchy were colonial officials and members of the military, doing their service for the empire. Most of these men were unmarried or had left their wives in Britain. For the colonists proper, it was impossible to divide people in terms of property-ownership because land was so cheap that the lowliest immigrant had access to the soil and could build a house and parade as a veritable, if impecunious gentlemen. Thus it was business, finance and banking that came to represent status and which formed the kernel of the social cliques of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. These groups elevated themselves above the run-of-the-mill artisans, tradesmen, small farmers and labourers.<sup>(33)</sup> Later with the growth of sugar, wattle and, for a time, tea, the plantocracy joined the ranks of the upper echelons of the white ruling class. It was on these foundations, therefore, that merchant agrarian and industrial capital was built in Natal, aided and abetted by the functioning of the colonial state.

Early immigration into Natal was a family affair. At first it was thought that the best type of immigrants would be young married couples without children. It was found, however, that the most successful were families with children, of whom there was a fairly high proportion.<sup>(34)</sup> Single women rarely emigrated on their own, unless accompanying their families. An indication of the gender breakdown of Natal's early immigrants can be gleaned from Spencer's preliminary research on the colony's early British settlers.<sup>(35)</sup> According to her

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33. A.F. Hattersley, Portrait of a Colony (1940), p. 76-77.

34. Ibid., p. 35.

35. S. Spencer, op.cit.

lists, among those emigrants whose surnames began with the letter 'A', only three single women arrived in the colony before 1857, compared with ninety-six single or married men. Of these three, Julianna Acutt accompanied her uncle and his family.<sup>(36)</sup> Sarah Ashton came to Natal with her brother and his wife<sup>(37)</sup> and only Mary Austen, a bracermaker, seems to have travelled independently. She arrived under the W.J. Iron's scheme in July 1850 and by April 1851 had married a John Irwin in Durban.<sup>(38)</sup>

For the later period, it seems that a small number of single women, in addition to married women accompanying their husbands, came out to join family or friends in Natal. From the 1860s onwards in Britain, several emigration schemes were set up in the midst of the controversy over the nation's 'superfluous women', such as the Female Middle-Class Emigration Society which was formed in 1862. This society was little more than a colonial placement agency for governesses, even though there were requests from the colonies, Natal included, for girls prepared to engage in domestic service.<sup>(39)</sup> Whilst Natal was promoted as being eminently desirable for gentlewomen as the burden of heavy toil was borne by black men, those in the colony were often less enthusiastic about the softness of colonial life. Robert Mann, to become one of Natal's Superintendents of Education, described the type of women needed in the colony in the following manner:

She should know how to cook and bake and get up linen; She should be able upon a pinch to clean and place in order the sleeping and dwelling rooms of the house, and she should be well-skilled in the use of her needle. She ought to have energy enough to teach and rule the Kafirs entrusted with indoor occupations. Besides all this, she should have the temperament, and bodily strength which will enable her to find pleasure in these household engagements. The delicately nurtured lady, who can do none of these things, should on no

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36. Ibid., p. 4.

37. Ibid., p. 80.

38. Ibid., p. 83.

39. A.J. Hammerton, op.cit., p. 127.

account be transplanted to what must necessarily prove to her a sadly ungenial soil. In Natal she can find, at present, nothing but vexations, hardships, sorrows and regrets...(40)

These comments reflect not only the arduous nature of colonial life for even privileged settler women, but the high expectations of colonial men with regard to their required talent and energy. Perhaps not surprisingly, the demand for white domestic servants outstripped supply for most of the colonial period, or at least until this sector came to be dominated by indentured Indians, particularly in the towns.

From 1880 to 1914, a greater number and variety of female emigration organizations came into being. By 1884 the majority of schemes were united under or associated with, the British Women's Emigration Association (BWEA). This society catered for all social classes and directed most protected female emigration. In 1902, a sister organization to direct emigration to South Africa was established: the South African Colonisation Society (SACS). From 1902 the BWEA and the SACS jointly published a monthly journal called The Imperial Colonist which discussed openings for women in the various colonies, suggested which areas of settlement were the most promising and made suggestions as to the safest way to emigrate.<sup>(41)</sup> It is clear from a perusal of the pages of this publication that a fair number of women availed themselves of the facilities offered by the SACS and the opportunities that were promised in South Africa. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the salaries and the surplus of males in the Transvaal, made Natal a less attractive option for prospective female emigrants, despite calls for their services and civilising influence from early on in the colony's history until the eve of the First World War.

Returning to the period extending from the first wave of immigration until

40. Quoted in R.E. Gordon (ed.) Dear Louisa: History of a Pioneer Family in Natal 1850-1888, Ellen McLeod's letters to her Sister in England from the Byrne Valley (1970), p. 48.

41. The Imperial Colonist: The official Organ of the British Women's Emigration Association and the South African Expansion Committee, 1902 - 1912.

the 1880s, it is necessary to try to paint a picture of life for white women in Natal during this time. For much of this period Natal was very much a pioneering community with all the hazards and discomforts associated with such a settlement. Immigrant men who were accompanied by wives and daughters were fortunate in having female assistance in their efforts to carve out a new life for themselves. The business of home-making and house-keeping, whether in the towns of Durban and Pietermaritzburg or in the rural districts, was not an easy task. Although African males were engaged as domestic servants from fairly early on, they worked sporadically, often returning to their homes unexpectedly and for extended periods. It was difficult, therefore, for single white men, unused to domestic organization or household labour and hardly willing to embrace such activities, to depend on African servants exclusively in the running of their homes. Further, because African servants were not familiar with the domestic customs and practices of British settlers, they had, initially at least, to be directed in their chores. For these reasons, the single men of the colony, both those who were unmarried, and those with wives in the United Kingdom, were anxious to procure for themselves either wives, or the services of British domestic servants.

In a letter to the Natal Independent in 1851, a Byrne immigrant's wife spelt out the situation stating that "... a freight of respectable young women would do well, (they) either get respectably married and well settled or obtain exorbitant wages as domestic servants, governesses, etc."<sup>(42)</sup> The shortage of and necessity for women in the colony was recognized by the emigration agents themselves, and efforts were made to encourage women to the colony.<sup>(43)</sup> Colonists writing home also stressed the need for women in Natal and the opportunities which awaited them. In a letter to his parents in April 1856, Dr W.H.I. Bleek wrote:

I strongly advise that the emigrant should come as a married man. For several reasons I consider that absolutely essential, particularly as there is a shortage of young

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42. J. Clark, Natal Settler Agent: The Career of John Moreland Agent for the Byrne Emigration Scheme of 1849-51 (1972), p. 27.

43. Ibid., p. 26.

ladies here. The immigrant cannot, therefore, expect to marry here. I would prefer to advise him to bring unmarried sisters etc., with him, who may wish to emigrate. Should a family bring maid-servants out with them, then these will be very useful to the colony, but it should not be expected that these will stay in service longer than a few weeks. They will get many proposals of marriage, should they possess any kind of attractive appearance.<sup>(44)</sup>

These sentiments seem to be borne out by the description given by Thomas Greene of the reaction in the colony to the arrival of women on the first ships carrying immigrants. He said that "the women were worshipped - it was so long since we had seen an English woman that we were all off our heads...."<sup>(45)</sup> The shortage of women in the colony was not a phenomenon of the early period alone. Reference to Table 2.1 in the Appendix reveals that from the time of the 1852 estimate of the white population until the census of 1911, men consistently outnumbered women in Natal and that the ratio of males to females appears to have been fairly stable over time. Table 4.1 shows that whilst in 1886 only two-fifths of the white population were urban, and three-fifths lived in rural areas, by the time of the 1891 census, 54 per cent of the white population lived in the boroughs of Durban and Pietermaritzburg or the townships of Ladysmith, Newcastle and Verulam. On an overall level, the ratio of males to females seems to have been only slightly greater in rural than in urban areas. However, as shown by a closer look at the data from the census of 1891 and that of 1904, the sexual imbalance was more severe in remote districts and towns than in the coastal and major urban centres, as can be seen from Table 2.4. By 1904, out of a total white population of 87 776 in the territory of Natal as constituted in 1891, Table 2.2 shows that 52 615, or 60 per cent, came under the municipalities of Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Ladysmith, Newcastle and Dundee, or the Town

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44. W.H.I. Bleek, The Natal Diaries of Dr. W.H.I. Bleek (Reprinted 1965), p. 36.

45. J. Clark, op.cit., p. 68.

Boards of Verulam and Greytown. Amongst this urban population, men were 40 per cent more numerous than women. This indicates that the sexual imbalance in the colony was still a feature of Natal life by the first decade of the twentieth century.

The picture is illuminated by a survey of the conjugal condition of women in the colony, only possible with a fair degree of accuracy for the later period. As shown in Tables 3.1 and Table 3.4, in 1891, over 32 per cent of white women were married, 5 per cent were widowed, whilst just over 62 per cent were unmarried. Almost half of the married women fell into the thirty to forty-four year old age group, whilst for unmarried women, 66 per cent were under the age of fifteen years and 28 per cent fell into the sixteen to twenty-nine year old age group. By 1904, as is revealed in Table 3.2 and Table 3.4, the situation was not very much changed. According to the later census, the majority of married women, however, fell into the thirty-one to forty-five year old age group, being over 43 per cent of all married women. This group was followed closely by the sixteen to thirty year old age group, being nearly 38 per cent of married women. The overwhelming number of those unmarried were the 63 per cent of females under the age of fifteen, followed by 29 per cent between the ages of sixteen and thirty years.

What needs to be explained from these statistics is that if women were so badly needed in the colony and if bachelor life was so difficult for men, why was it that marriage was undertaken at such a late age and why was it that so many white females were unmarried? The figures, admittedly, do not give an indication of the situation in the early years of settlement. During this period, efforts were consistently made to entice women to Natal and to demonstrate the joys of colonial life for women. Although meeting with only limited success in attracting single women, the early propagandists in their pamphlets setting out the benefits of the colony, never failed to emphasize the advantages of African labour, not only for men wishing to engage in agriculture or trades, but for women as well. Methley, who was widely read in the north of England and

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who was responsible for attracting a large number of Yorkshire emigrants to Natal, stated in his booklet that Africans made tolerable servants and bore the main burden of heavy work on farms and in the home, normally undertaken by women. These included milking of cows, churning of butter, chopping wood and making and cleaning the fires.<sup>(46)</sup> These efforts to attract single women to the colony met with limited success and the initial disproportion between the sexes continued into the later period.

Once it was safer, more comfortable and less socially outrageous for women to emigrate alone, many were attracted to Natal through the schemes mentioned below and by the attractions of South Africa presented in the pages of the Imperial Colonist. In 1902 it was written that "The meanest white has his or her 'boy' to do the general work. These natives cook, do house cleaning, make beds, wait at table, cut firewood - in fact, a houseboy may be described generally as a Jack-of-all-work and master of none."<sup>(47)</sup> If that was not sufficient inducement, the same article went on to state:

The pleasantest feature of South African life to the English girl of humble degree is the larger amount of consideration and attention she receives from the male sex ... In a population where men largely predominate there are thousands that rarely come into contact with an English home. The sight of a fresh Englishwoman's face has the effect of recalling home memories to many a sunburnt manly form ... A girl of very homely appearance will loom a veritable beauty before the excited imagination of the up-country colonist, while a girl comely in look and figure will have the male population at her feet.<sup>(48)</sup>

Despite statements such as these, however, it seems that whilst it may have been true that Natal posed good marriage prospects for single women in the early years of settlement, these may have been exaggerated towards

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46. J.E. Methley, The New Colony of Port Natal: With Information for Emigrants (1850), p. 40.

47. The Imperial Colonist, I, 1902, p. 71.

48. Ibid., p. 72.

the end of the century. As among the middle-class in Victorian Britain, the socially aspiring colonists of Natal married late in life, not only for cultural and social reasons, but often due to economic necessity as young men tried to establish themselves before having to support a wife and children. Indeed, the official marriageable age for men given in the 1904 census, was twenty to forty years and for women, eighteen to thirty-five years. This gives some indication of social expectations at the time.

More difficult to explain than the late age at which marriage was entered into, was the high percentage of unmarried women in the colony, particularly given the continuing efforts to attract them from England. It is also puzzling when it is seen that in 1904, over 30 per cent of the white men in Natal were unmarried. The high incidence of unmarried men can be partly accounted for by the presence of 2 405 British troops in Natal, following the Anglo-Boer War. They would have been single or would have had wives at home. In addition, 2 237 of those engaged in the colonial service in Natal were imported married males whose wives resided in Britain. However, these only account for just over 8 per cent of the white male population in Natal at the time.

An additional explanation can be found in the fact that Victorians, and particularly those more isolated from the new trends in birth-control, had large families and there was a high proportion of children in the colony, swelling the number of both males and females who were unmarried. Further, among the less well-off members of the white population and amongst those engaged in farming in the rural areas, the labour of children, and particularly girl children, was frequently demanded by their natal families, who were often reluctant to see them married and thus to lose a valuable pair of hands. The letters of the Byrne immigrant, Ellen McLeod, to her sister Louisa, are a striking record of the battle for survival and success of an up-country farming family and their dependence on the labour of their children. In 1873 she wrote that her eldest daughter, who married at the age of thirty-one, was sorely missed as:

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... she has had the whole management of the house for so many years that I feel quite strange as housekeeper again; besides there is so much to do though our family is certainly very small now.(49)

Like many rural women, Ellen McLeod together with her children, supplemented the family income and often, by producing what was necessary for subsistence, saved them from starvation. In addition to domestic work and gardening, she and her minor children, with intermittent assistance from African servants, also ran a vegetable garden, fruit-trees, a dairy which produced not only milk but butter and cheese for domestic consumption and for sale, poultry, pigs and sheep. Until the 1870s at least, they made their own clothing, even shoes, whilst teaching, when there was time for it, was also done at home. As Ellen McLeod concluded in one letter to her sister, "there is always so much to do I think we could keep a hundred children at work if we had them."<sup>(50)</sup>

The vital importance of women's domestic and agricultural labour in the rural economy, particularly when the early experiments with cash crops such as cotton failed, goes some way to explaining why daughters were only allowed to marry late, often with reluctance and sometimes not at all. In the rural districts there were only 66,3 women to every 100 men.<sup>(51)</sup> Given the difficulties of farming for those uninitiated in Natal's conditions and the increasing amount of capital necessary to embark on this sort of undertaking, the rural areas were not readily populated with newcomers. Further, the young of these districts often engaged in transport-riding, moved to the interior, or sought employment in the towns.

Nevertheless, in the towns the disproportion between the sexes for those of marriageable age was even worse, there being practically two of these men to every woman <sup>(52)</sup> This can partly be explained by the greater presence of troops and colonial officials who were not married or who had

49. R.E. Gordon, op.cit., p. 168.

50. Ibid., p. 79.

51. Census of the Colony of Natal, Blue Book, 1904.

52. Ibid.

wives in Britain. A further explanation, in addition to the high proportion of children, was the fairly high number of women who could support themselves or who were supported, without having to resort to marriage out of economic necessity. Amongst these would be women in religious orders, of whom there was a substantial number given the missionary zeal of the Victorians and what they saw as a vast field of potential converts offered by the colony. A perusal of the Natal Almanac and Directory <sup>(53)</sup> also shows that the majority of women teachers in the colony were unmarried. Finally, one explanation for the number of unmarried women in the colony may lie in the long-hours and isolation of domestic service. Although white servants may have been treated as 'one of the family', and although they may not have had to engage in heavy duties, they were still required to be present and on duty for long hours and they spent much of their time in the care of children. Thus whilst it may have been easy for the well-heeled society women of Natal to court, marry and reproduce for the empire, it was often not so simple for those immigrants of the working-class and the governesses and daughters of the less successful and well-off settlers to meet people of their liking on a social basis.

Turning to the economic occupations and contributions of white women in Natal, it is difficult to give an accurate breakdown of their activities. The first partial occupational survey of the economically active white population was published in the Blue Book of 1861. <sup>(54)</sup> This divided the employed and self-employed into the three sectors of agriculture, manufacture and commerce. Many divisions did not submit returns and the data is too incomplete to be of much use to researchers. These partial censuses continued to be published annually until 1869, with little improvement in regional coverage. From 1870 onwards, an attempt was made to classify Natal's white population into a more detailed schedule of eleven occupational categories. However, major gaps persist in the statistics, figures seldom being available for the

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53. The Natal Almanac and Yearly Register, 1863 to 1913, (Also called The Natal Directory).

54. Blue Book, 1861.

main towns of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Moreover, in all these surveys, no distinction is made between the genders.

One is forced therefore, to rely on qualitative evidence to establish the economic role of Natal's white female population in these years. Quantitative information as may be derived from a study of the municipal directories is scanty and they most certainly conceal more than they reveal. Women listed in the directories were only those who were unmarried women or those engaged in professions or trades on their own account. Thus, not only does this obscure from quantification women's domestic and agricultural labour but also the labour of women who worked with their husbands in crafts, trades and stores, or who were employees in male-owned businesses. In 1875, for example, the Pietermaritzburg Street Directory only listed twelve widows and two spinsters with no specified occupations, eleven restaurant or boarding-house keepers, eleven nurses, nine schoolmistresses, four storekeepers, four milliners, three dressmakers or tailoresses, two bakers, one gardener, one brickmaker, one laundress, one carrier and post contractor, one carter and one poundmistress. For Durban, which only had a Trade Directory in 1875, reality is even more obscured. The only economically active women which could be found amongst its entries were six hotel, boarding-house or restaurant owners, four retail dealers, three milliners and dressmakers and one baker.<sup>(55)</sup> In the 1885 Postal Directory for the Colony, excluding Pietermaritzburg and Durban, out of 4 029 entries, only ninety women appeared. Of these, forty-nine, mostly widows, were entered without their occupations specified. Of the remainder, there are listed eighteen farmers, seven hotel or boarding-house keepers, six storekeepers, five school-teachers, two planters, one dressmaker, one governess, and one baker.<sup>(56)</sup>

What these directories reveal is that most women who worked on their own

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55. The Natal Almanac and Yearly Register, 1875.

56. The Natal Almanac and Yearly Register, 1885.

account were engaged in activities which were closely related to the domestic sphere. What they conceal is that many women, apart from reproducing the male settler population on a day-to-day and on a generational basis, engaged in producing or working for an income in their homes. It is unlikely that in the whole of rural Natal in 1885 there would be only one governess and even less likely that the services of one dressmaker in Dundee would have sufficed for the clothing requirements of Natal's female population in the country districts.

The first occupational census to distinguish between male and female employment of the white and Indian population groups was conducted in 1891, an abstract of which is shown in Table 6.1<sup>(57)</sup> This data can be usefully compared with similar information published in the more detailed Natal Census of 1904. In 1891 the total white population of Natal was 46 788. The census shows an extremely low participation of white women in the labour force. Only one out of every eleven white females was economically active in that year, as compared with three out of every five white males. The following percentage breakdown of white employment is most revealing.

TABLE A

SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF WHITE EMPLOYMENT IN 1891<sup>(58)</sup>

<u>Occupational Sector</u>	<u>Percentage of Total Whites</u>	<u>Percentage of Females</u>
1. Agriculture	18,6%	3,5%
2. Manufacturing and Mining	15,9%	16,0%
3. Construction	11,3%	0
4. Commerce and Finance	18,4%	4,7%
5. Transport and Communication	7,1%	0,3%
6. Services	<u>28,7%</u>	<u>75,5%</u>
TOTAL	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>

The most striking aspect of this breakdown is the low percentage of the total white labour force in agriculture, less than 20 per cent, in

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57. Census of the Colony of Natal, Blue Book, 1891.

58. Ibid.

spite of the dominance of agriculture in Natal's economy. This is largely due to the urban-orientation of the white population by this time, as well as the fact that most rural whites were farm owners and employers of labour rather than agricultural labourers themselves.

Female employment was not evenly distributed but was heavily concentrated in the services sector where 1 393 females or more than three-quarters of the gainfully employed white women were active. Of the remainder, nearly three hundred, or 16 per cent of the total, worked in the manufacturing sector as dressmakers, milliners and seamstresses. Women were unrepresented in construction and only eighty-seven, or less than 5 per cent of the total, were engaged in commerce and finance. This was not yet the age, in Natal at least, of the female clerk or copy-typist, as only four women are listed as commercial clerks in the census.

Fifty-eight women were recorded as farmers in their own right and seven as farm servants. This does not give an accurate picture of the engagement of women in agricultural labour, for wives and daughters of farmers not listed in the census performed agricultural work such as dairying, poultry and pig raising, vegetable and fruit growing and even ploughing.<sup>(59)</sup> With regard to transport and communications, one finds a couple of enterprising women engaged in cab-driving and transport riding. A handful of women operated the embryonic telephone service and had made inroads into telegraphing although, at this stage, these were still mainly male preserves. Looking at the services sector, we find women prevalent in professional ranks such as missionaries, nuns, nurses and schoolteachers. These numbered 807 whilst 508 women were employed as domestic servants or were laundresses. A further sixty-four women were classified as running boarding houses, hotels and inns.

The great bulk of Natal's white female population, however, was located outside the gainfully employed labour force. Out of every ten females

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59. R.E. Gordon, op.cit., p. 67.

listed as not economically active in 1891, three were children of school-going age, five were wives and daughters engaged in domestic or household duties for no remuneration, and two belonged to what was termed the 'unoccupied class' - that indefinite category which the census of 1904 defined as reserved for those whose pursuits were imperfectly described and for persons "of property or rank, or independent means, not returned under any office or occupation."<sup>(60)</sup>

A comparison of the 1981 census with that of 1904 reveals some interesting changes with regard to women's participation in the white labour force of Natal, as well as some not surprising continuities.<sup>(61)</sup> Whereas in 1891 8,8 per cent of the white female population worked, by 1904 the figure was 13,7 per cent, or one out of every seven females. As with the 1891 census it is interesting to note the occupational breakdown of white employment by sectors and the position of women in this regard.

TABLE B

SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF WHITE EMPLOYMENT IN 1904<sup>(62)</sup>

<u>Occupational Sector</u>	<u>Percentage of Total Whites</u>	<u>Percentage of Females</u>
1. Agriculture and Fishing	15,6%	7,2%
2. Mining	0,6%	---
3. Manufacturing	11,9%	12,3%
4. Construction	13,2%	---
5. Commerce and Finance	19,7%	13,3%
6. Transport and Communication	8,2%	0,5%
7. Services	<u>30,8%</u>	<u>66,7%</u>
TOTAL	<u>100 %</u>	<u>100 %</u>

60. Census of the Colony of Natal, Blue Book, 1904, p. 674.

61. Census of the Colony of Natal, Blue Book, 1904, p. 674.

62. Ibid.

It can be seen from the above that for white labour as a whole, relatively fewer whites were engaged in agriculture, 15,6 per cent as compared with 18,6 per cent in 1891. Nevertheless, the share of white female labour listed as economically active in the agricultural sector had doubled. This can be explained by the fact that as white farm owners became more successful vis-a-vis the African peasantry, they employed more African or Indian labour rather than white farm workers. The traditionally female agricultural occupations such as dairying, however, remained in the hands of the female members of rural white households. Although the bulk of hard labour, such as milking was done by African men employees, it is true that the manufacture of butter and cheese was a skilled and arduous operation and one which was not readily delegated. Thus the wives and daughters of farmers or white female employees would be involved in this kind of activity. With reference to dairy activities, the British commission in 1843 which enquired into the employment of women and children in agriculture stated:

But with respect to the dairy-farms, it is to be observed that where they are small, as is nearly universally the case in these counties, the most laborious part of the work is not performed by servants, but by the mistress herself. The prosperity of such a farm depends entirely on the quality of the cheese, or, in other words, upon the skill and attention bestowed on its making and subsequent management.(63)

By 1904, dairy production was less a subsistence activity for home or neighbourhood consumption than a paying and profitable area of agricultural endeavour, and thus it is likely that women engaged in this sphere would be more readily included as economically active in a census than would have been the case earlier.

In the mining, manufacturing and construction sectors, in 1904 there was a slightly lower proportion of whites involved. This is not to say that

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63. Report of Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, op.cit., p. 5.

progress had not been made in these areas, and, indeed, by this time mechanization and factory industry were becoming a more visible feature of Natal's economy. Despite the decline of handicraft production, and the gradual disappearance of small workshops and home production, with regard to white women, they clearly held their own in the face of factory competition. They still featured as dressmakers, milliners and seamstresses, although less prominently in manufacturing overall, than in 1891. The pages of the Natal Directory for the first decade of the century reveal that although women were still engaged in these capacities, they were becoming more and more, the employees of male-owned draperies, millineries and departmental stores.<sup>(64)</sup> As for mining and construction, these remained exclusively male preserves amongst the white population group in 1904.

It is in commerce and finance that white women had come to play an increasingly important economic role. Proportionately three times more women were working in that sector in 1904 than had been the case thirteen years earlier. By this time white women were employed as shop assistants, typists, stenographers, secretaries, accountants, clerks and even managers in the commercial sector. In retrospect, these inroads in commercial employment made by white women are significant, in the light of future trends. In Britain by the time of the First World War, women had taken over the typewriter, which had first come into use in the 1870s, as their own machine. Clearly in Natal white women were following a similar direction. However, as one author has quipped, "They might not have been so pleased with themselves if they could have known that their great-grand-daughters would still be anchored to the limitations and profound boredom of their cherished machine...."<sup>(65)</sup>

In spite of this perceptible increase in the proportion of white women engaged in agriculture and commerce in the colony by 1904, the services sector still held its place as the chief area of female employment. Nevertheless, whilst in 1891 it provided a livelihood for three-quarters

64. The Natal Directory, 1900 to 1913.

65. R. Adam, op.cit., p. 21.

of white working women in Natal, in 1904 it accounted for only two-thirds of their rank. Within this sector, too, there had been a shift from the professions such as religious orders, teaching and nursing, to domestic service, taken in its broadest sense to include cooks, servants, governesses, housekeepers, home-helps, gardeners and laundresses. Within the services sector also there were a wider variety of occupations available to white women than in 1891. There was a greater proportion in 1904, for example, of waitresses, matrons and barmaids as well as women employed in various designations in hotels and boarding-houses.

One thing that emerges from this census, therefore, is that the white women of Natal did not share a common condition. Well-heeled society women, particularly in the urban areas, were dependent on the services not only of black or Indian domestic servants but also on the labours of white domestic servants or home-helps. This was increasingly the case as white colonists became uneasy about leaving their children in the care of black males.<sup>(66)</sup> In an article in the Imperial Colonist on the need for domestic helps in Natal, the author stated:

... the educated mother in South Africa cannot exert the public and philanthropic influence due to her husband's position till she can gain suitable help in the care of her own home. In Colonial families nurseries are rare, the children are everywhere and the future lies with them. Here then is no mean mission for the young gentlewomen of earnest purpose, and she who will go out prepared to help to train the rising generation of South Africa in good principles and manners, and sound education, will be doing a noble woman's work for the Empire.<sup>(67)</sup>

The role of domestic servant, ladies' help or governess was performed either by immigrant 'distressed gentlewomen', the daughters of the British working-class, or the daughters of the less successful or well-off colonists.

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66. The Imperial Colonist, IV, 1906, p. 176.

67. The Imperial Colonist, II, 1903, p. 44.

Education for girls in the colony reflected the differences in status within the white population. During the period that education fell under the Superintendency, from 1858 until 1877, the government did not regard the education of white girls very seriously. Nevertheless, the Superintendents of Education, R.J. Mann and T.W. Brooks were, by and large, receptive to the wishes of the colonists. The educational needs of the less privileged girls were met by the model primary schools which provided girls and boys of this strata with the rudiments of education in as many parts of the colony as possible.<sup>(68)</sup> The aspiring, socially-conscious colonists who could afford it, and who determined the pattern of female education on the whole, dictated that their daughters were educated separately from males, either by governesses at home or in Ladies' Academies which were a prominent feature of Natal's educational system and later, in private schools. In 1878, government education in Natal was reorganized under the Council of Education and later, following Responsible Government, a Department of Education was constituted in 1894. Under the Council, the education of white girls was not radically changed: existing trends were merely reinforced. Fewer girls attended the government primary schools, perhaps reflecting the diminishing size of the white working-class, and whilst government education was provided for boys at secondary level, for girls this remained the preserve of private institutions.<sup>(69)</sup>

In her assessment of education for European girls in Natal from 1837 to 1902, S. Vietzen has stated that:

Underlying and pervading all of this was the Victorian social class structure .... The relegation of working class daughters to the 'useful' and 'ordinary' subjects of government primary education, and the drawing off of middle and upper class daughters to education which was private and secondary - an end in itself - was axiomatic in Victorian Natal.<sup>(70)</sup>

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68. S. Vietzen, A History of Education for European Girls in Natal in Natal 1837-1902 (1980), p. 91.

69. Ibid., p. 290.

70. Ibid., p. 321.

As in Victorian England prior to the changes from the 1870s, Natal required of its white daughters, humility, purity, obedience, a devotion to domestic management and a desire to breed sons and daughters for the empire. Natal lagged behind the new trends in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century and during the Edwardian era. In 1895 the Prime Minister, Sir John Robinson was applauded when he said in a speech at a function at the Durban Young Ladies College that "He trusted that the school would turn out the good old-fashioned true English type of women who had made England what it is, and that it would not produce what was known as the "new women"."<sup>(71)</sup>

Although lip service was paid to the suffragette movement in Britain and although there was a movement by women in Natal towards acquiring the franchise,<sup>(72)</sup> on the whole, women's activities in this regard were not revolutionary. The boycott in Britain of the 1911 census, suggested by the Women's Freedom League was looked upon with censure in the colony.<sup>(73)</sup> The activities of the Women's Enfranchisement League in South Africa frequently had little to do with emancipation or the vote. They included, for example, the nationalistic direction of the roles of women as consumers and they induced members to support the products of South African producers and manufacturers. They were also a type of charity organization, and with regard to this group, it was reported in the African Monthly in 1906 that "in these days of depression women are taking a very large part in the burden entailed by the much needed schemes of relief for the wives and families of the unemployed."<sup>(74)</sup> This, of course, only referred to unemployed whites. More typical and well patronized societies were those such as the Mothers' Union, established in Natal in 1904. This society had two branches in Pietermaritzburg, four in Durban and six in the smaller towns and rural districts. Its objects were:

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71. Ibid.  
 72. The Pictorial, October, 1911, p. 100.  
 73. The Pictorial, March, 1911, p. 731.  
 74. African Monthly, IV, 1908, p. 195.

1. To uphold the sanctity of marriage.
2. To awaken in mothers of all classes a sense of their great responsibilities as mothers in the training of their boys and girls (the future fathers and mothers of the empire).
3. To organize in every place a band of mothers who will unite in prayer and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness in life.<sup>(75)</sup>

For women of the working-class, as is shown from the aims of the Girls' Friendly Society in Durban, in addition to the duties expected of all women they were rejoined to "faithfulness to employers, temperance and thrift."<sup>(76)</sup>

The pages of the Natal Mercury Pictorial illustrate clearly the preoccupations of and attitudes towards the white women in the colony. Columns such as 'Durban Doings' reported on social events such as weddings, at-homes and race-meetings, including descriptions of who was there and what was worn. There were also regular features on manners and etiquette, two examples of which will suffice to demonstrate the manner in which women were to behave and the opinion in which they were held: in the May 1907 issue it was written that "Every woman ought to know how to walk and breathe properly...Brain workers, worriers, all nervous and physically uncultivated people let their head lead; "<sup>(77)</sup> and in June the same year the Ladies' Page cajoled, "That little pronoun "I" must be weeded out of our talk ... Then the asking of questions is a scarlet sin ... And a woman who listens well has achieved a triumph in the social arts."<sup>(78)</sup> Clearly the behaviour expected of women in Edwardian Natal differed little from that expected of women in Edwardian Britain.

An indication of the ideological assumptions regarding women in the colony, can be derived from the pages of the same magazine. In 1907 the

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75. The Natal Directory, 1913, p. 75.

76. Ibid., p. 859.

77. Natal Mercury Pictorial, May, 1907, p. 512.

78. Natal Mercury Pictorial, June, 1907, p. 583.

services of 'an expert in phrenology' were secured, to provide character sketches for readers from their photographs. In reply to a woman who signed herself 'Madam', the gentleman replied:

You possess a strong womanly nature, and will never unsex yourself by wishing to do that kind of work that will take you out of your sphere. You know how to make home cheerful and happy and are in your element when you have your family about you. You are quite conscientious in doing everything you can for their comfort.(79)

The less passive "Miss A." from Dundee was assumed to be a less malleable creature and it was suggested that:

As she advances in years she will not be contented with a subordinate position; her desire will be to assume responsibility and take the lead .... She should be educated for a teacher or a nurse.(80)

Clearly, the pioneering spirit and energy of Natal's early settler women was expected to wane or to be directed only into activities related to domesticity or motherhood.

Whilst white women as a group were discriminated against by men in the colony, and whilst their position was a subordinate one, their subordination and submission must be seen in perspective and within the overall context of the political economy of Natal. Even though there were differences in status amongst the white population and although there were many white females employed in the service sector, particularly as domestics and governesses, their plight was not unbearable, their consciousness was bourgeois and they benefited from their racial and cultural affiliation to the ruling class. Describing, for example, the conditions of her daughter who was a home-help in Durban, Ellen McLeod could tell her sister in England that:

79. Natal Mercury Pictorial, April, 1907, p. 470.

80. Ibid.

She likes being with Mrs Peel very much. Her duties are not very fatiguing as they have plenty of servants both white and Native; she has only to see that they do their work properly, and does a little dusting in the morning. In the afternoon she goes out driving and walking with Mrs Peel and Lille, or they pay visits and receive visitors.(81)

In addition, attempts were made to elevate or ameliorate the conditions of the poorer female members of the white population. In 1902 the Mayor of Durban decided to allow for the building of a hostel for the residence of working-class white women, and proposals for the same were put forward in Pietermaritzburg in that year.<sup>(82)</sup> In Durban in 1905, the Durban Creche and Children's Home was officially opened after it was found that "Many ladies who worked amongst the poor had tales to tell of mothers obliged to work and who were unable to provide the necessary care and attention for their children."<sup>(83)</sup> Thus amongst white women, although very conscious of position and status, there was a racial affiliation that transcended and eventually negated to a large degree, intra-class boundaries. Gender solidarity was also a discernible feature amongst white women, as is shown by these examples given.

This solidarity, however, was not extended to African women or those of the Indian population. Women domestics, either African or Indian, were rarely a feature of urban homes, this sector mainly being dominated by men. It was generally only rural women who even came into contact with women of the other racial groups. Whereas creches were set up for white working mothers, it was considered quaint to see an African woman who "washes and cleans my room with her little baby always tied to her back...."<sup>(84)</sup> The superior and condescending attitude of most white women towards their female African servants is amply illustrated by a conversation diarized by a woman settler in 1852:

Louisa has gone off to visit her mother for a week. She has only been eight weeks with me,

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81. R.E. Gordon, op.cit., p. 252.

82. The Imperial Colonist, I, 1902, p. 112.

83. The Pictorial, September, 1911, p. 1627.

84. R.E. Gordon, op.cit., p. 101.

yet she must have as much holiday as she asks. "Who will do your work, Louisa?" said I. "I don't know, ma'am." "Am I to clean the pans, Louisa?" "Oh no, ma'am!" "Who then?" She shrugged her shoulders, and suggested "Boy". "But Boy is busy in the garden; don't you think you could find me a good girl to do your work if I let you go?" "No ma'am no Caffre girl, only one Caffre girl at Mr. B--'s." "But you could find one, I think?" "No ma'am, no girl, they all wife." So I must manage as I can until Louisa chooses to return.(85)

Although Louisa had a family, a life and an independence of her own, this was not shared, let alone recognized by her employer. Further, as indicated in the previous chapter it was not unknown for white women to beat their African female domestic servants.

Those women who crossed the colour-line, or who were unfortunate enough to be the product of such a union, were not given the same consideration as women of the white working-class. The so-called 'coloured' group has not been singled out for study, for want of sufficient quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding their position. However, in the light of the question of the status of women and with regard to the attitudes of white colonists towards this group, the case of Katrina Maggie Entress of Dundee will suffice to demonstrate how they were excluded culturally and socially by whites. She was thirteen years of age at the time her case was brought to the notice of the magistrates' court. The product of an African woman and a white man, her 'drunken father' threatened to 'sell her to a kaffir.' When seeking advice from his colleague in Klip River, the magistrate of Dundee received the reply that interference in the case was not justified and that in any case, she had been placed in service with a Mr. and Mrs. H.H. Smith of Ladysmith.<sup>(86)</sup>

It can be said, therefore, that in colonial Natal, despite variance in status, white women were seen almost universally, as members of the ruling class. Just as 'fallen' women in Britain were seen as threatening

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85. E.W. Feilden, My African Home: Or Bush Life in Natal when a Young Colony (1887), p. 37.

86. Dundee Magistrates Reports, I/DJN, No. EE, 359/1892.

the moral fabric of society, so white women who deviated from the path of Victorian morality were seen as a threat to the authority and continued superiority of the white ruling race. During the Debates of the Legislative Assembly on the Criminal Law Amendment Bill in 1899<sup>(87)</sup> it was decided that although in England those who could be prosecuted for living off the earnings of prostitutes were only male pimps, in Natal the law would apply to both men and women. Great horror was expressed at the entry into the colony of prostitutes from the Rand, of whom twenty were arrested in a single day in February of that year<sup>(88)</sup> and it was agreed that strong measures were needed to curtail this growing trend. In this regard, one anxious member, a Mr. Woods enquired:

It says in Clause Two: "Any person residing in or frequenting the house or premises is living wholly or in part on the earnings of prostitution." Does that mean that if any man frequents these premises he is liable to be punished under this Bill? The Attorney-General replying: ... of course it is not intended to punish a person who merely frequents a place of this sort. Mr Woods: It does not say so.<sup>(89)</sup>

Clearly the double standard had been transported across the Atlantic to Natal, along with the rest of Victorian morality.

In Natal, however, the functions served by the Victorian prostitute were performed mainly by African or Indian women, and frequently against their will. The Natal Native Affairs Commission of 1906-1907 reported that one of the chief grievances of Africans was that white men tampered with African women, a state of affairs that would "stretch the endurance of even the most submissive people to breaking point." The Commission pointed out with some degree of enlightenment that "The morality act imposes severe imprisonment upon native men going with white women, who also may be penalised, but avoids the converse...."<sup>(90)</sup> A condemnation

87. This was Act Number 35 of 1899.

88. Debates of the Legislative Assembly of the Colony of Natal, Third Session, Second Parliament, 1899, p. 369.

89. Ibid., p. 370.

90. Natal Native Affairs Commission, 1906-07, p. 60.

of the prevalence of this practice was reiterated in the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Women in 1913 when it was stated that:

... the prestige and influence of the European place the native woman at a great disadvantage when he makes overtures to her, especially when he occupies some position of authority.(91)

It is significant that the Commission also revealed that in such cases the prosecution of white men had proved difficult owing to the reluctance of the police to take them up.<sup>(92)</sup>

\ In Natal, as in Britain, white women were groomed for and regarded as wives and mothers. The baser needs of men were adequately catered for by the exploitation of African and Indian girls and women. The law in Natal made punishable intercourse between white women and "natives or coloured men" whilst white men were accorded no penal consequences for intercourse across the the colour-line. Whereas an African man guilty of raping a white woman could expect nothing less than the gallows, a white man who raped a young African girl was fined the sum of six pounds.<sup>(93)</sup> Further, despite intermittent but widespread scares regarding sexual assaults on white women by black men, the law with regard to rape, assault with intent to commit rape, and indecent assault, became progressively more lenient from 1887 onwards. Throughout the period, the crime of rape was punishable by death but in 1898, Law No. 27 of 1887 and Law No. 17 of 1889 were amended by Act No. 22 of 1898. In terms of clause two of this Act, a lesser sentence could be passed at the discretion of the judge and according to clause three, a person accused of the crime of rape could be convicted of a lesser crime such as assault with intent to commit rape or indecent assault. Clearly the aim was not so much to protect the white women of Natal, supposedly threatened by black male sexuality, but to protect white men who freely took advantage

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91. Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Assaults on Women, U.G. 39-1913, p. 7.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid., p. 9.

of their position of authority vis a vis African and Indian females. Over the same period, the punishment for assault with intent to commit rape was reduced from a sentence of life imprisonment or not less than fifteen years in 1887, to a sentence of up to ten years in 1889. Indecent assault was first punishable by a sentence of two years with or without hard labour in 1887 but this was reduced to one year with or without hard labour in 1898.<sup>(94)</sup>

In some respects the white men of Natal demonstrated a degree of gender solidarity with black males which transcended racial or class lines. The Commission on assaults on women heard from a number of witnesses that the prevalence of such offences by African men had been greatly exaggerated by "women of nervous temperament."<sup>(95)</sup> The Commissioners also stated that "In discussing the predisposing causes leading to sexual assaults by men upon women it must be recognised that the passions in men of all races are the same...."<sup>(96)</sup> The ultimate expression of gender bigotry combined with prejudice, however, can be seen in the statement made by the Commissioner that:

In some of the cases in which undoubtedly such intercourse had taken place the facts seem to point to sexual perversion on the part of the female. In many other cases the medical testimony points to the view that the girls were of feeble mind.<sup>(97)</sup>

This statement recognizes natural passions in the African men involved in such liaisons, whilst implying that only deviant or mentally subnormal women would comply. Thus the subtle slight on the character of some women did not preclude the Commissioners from arguing that:

Violated chastity, especially where the offender is a male of inferior race, is keenly

94. Cf. Natal Laws of 1887, p. 126.  
Cf. Natal Laws of 1889, p. 28.  
Cf. Natal Laws of 1898, p. 42.

95. Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Assaults on Women, op.cit., p. 10.

96. Ibid., p. 13.

97. Ibid., p. 25.

felt amongst white people as an irreparable wrong to the victim and her relatives and an outrage upon the white race, and any acts of indecency to which a white woman is subjected are viewed with abhorrence.(98)

Ultimately, therefore, white women were to be the symbols of the authority and superiority of the white ruling class. They were urged to maintain their purity, morality and domesticity and were discouraged from thinking or, at least, from expressing their views. With regard to divorce a survey of the Natal Law Reports indicates that, as in Britain over the period, they were encouraged by legal discrimination to remain in their conjugal home, whatever the costs.<sup>(99)</sup> Their energies were to be directed towards their role as wives and mothers or into spheres that were allied to that role, particularly in as much as they benefited and elevated the white race.

However, white women in Natal showed few signs of rebelling against their designation and preferred to confine themselves to the familiar comfort and privilege of being white, than to enter into friendship or discourse with women of other racial groups. This was despite the growing broad-mindedness of women elsewhere in the empire at this time, and at the expense of putting aside matters of class-image and pretensions with regard to white labouring women. It is in the light of the experience of these white women of all stations that the position of African women in the subsistence economy and in the capitalist periphery should be reassessed, and, further, it is against their relative privilege that the abysmal conditions of life and work for Indian females, the most disadvantaged of all Natal's women at this time, should be measured.

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98. Ibid., p. 13.

99. Natal Law Reports, 1862 - 1913.

CHAPTER FIVE

INDIAN WOMEN IN COLONIAL NATAL

The teacher is ten times more venerable than a sub-teacher, the father a hundred times more than a teacher, but the mother a thousand times more than the father.

Manu II: 145. (1)

Whoever hath a daughter and doth not bury her alive or scold her or prefer his male children to her, may God bring him into paradise.

The Prophet Muhammed. (2)

According to E.H. Brookes and C. de B. Webb, the Indians were "the only part of the population of Natal which came by special and urgent invitation."<sup>(3)</sup> For it was on the backs of Indian indentured immigrants that the sugar industry of Natal was built. Whilst the industry wanted labourers, however, it wanted adult male labourers. Unfortunately for the planters, though, the Government of India, which had allowed the system of indenture to grow from 1830 onwards, had evolved a network of rules and regulations to govern the export of Indian labour. These came to include the provision that for every one hundred men that left India for a colony, so too had forty women (or a female quota of 29 per cent)<sup>(4)</sup> to depart for a life of labour overseas.<sup>(5)</sup> Despite this great disparity between the sexes and the associated social

1. Quoted in M. Roy, Bengali Women (1975), p. ix.
2. Quoted in: N. Minai, Women in Islam: Tradition and Transition in the Middle East (1981), p. 83.
3. E.H. Brookes and C. de B. Webb, A History of Natal (1965), p. 85.
4. Official documents such as the Reports of the Protector of Indian Imigrants refer to quotas of forty per cent, often misread by scholars as meaning forty women to sixty men, rather than the actual forty women to one hundred men.
5. H. Tinker, A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830 - 1920 (1974), p. 89.

problems which were to result, even this small percentage of women was not welcome in Natal.<sup>(6)</sup> There were no scenes of dockside euphoria to greet them, such as those which greeted British women, as described in the previous chapter.

Sugar had been grown in Natal on an experimental basis from as early as 1848. What prevented immediate success, however, was lack of capital and a shortage of labour. The problem of capital was overcome not so much by resorting to local finance or assistance from the Colonial Government, as by attracting funds from overseas investors.<sup>(7)</sup> The labour shortage, which existed because of the labour-intensive nature of sugar cultivation and the inability of the planters to induce the local African population to work on the plantations, was solved by importing indentured immigrants from India. The Colonial Government was of more assistance to the nascent industry in this regard than with respect to capital outlay, and by 1859, the necessary laws had been passed to facilitate Indian immigration.<sup>(8)</sup> Following the authorization of emigration by the Government of India by Act 33 of 1860, arrangements were made in Natal to see that the system was initiated swiftly. By the 17th November, 1860, the first shipload of 341 Indian indentured immigrants arrived in Durban. Immigration continued until 1866 by which time, 6 448 Indians had been brought into the colony: 4 116 men, 1 463 women and 869 children.<sup>(9)</sup> Through immigration and natural increase, the Indian population of Natal grew and, as can be seen from Table 1 in the Appendix, by 1891 it had almost equalled the white population and by 1897 had surpassed it. Between 1866 and 1874 Indian immigration ceased in Natal, partly because of the depression during the second half of the 1860s (from which the sugar industry was not immune) and partly because, by this time, complaints of ill-treatment and violations of the terms of indenture by employers had reached the ears of the Government of India. They were reluctant, therefore, to allow continued emigration to the colony.

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6. L.M. Thompson, "Indian Immigration into Natal 1860 - 1872", in Archives Year Book Vol. II (1962), p. 22.
  7. P. Richardson, op.cit., p. 37.
  8. These were Laws 13, 14 and 15 of 1859.
  9. S.R. Pather, (ed.) Centenary of Indians 1860 - 1960 (1961), p. 51.

In response, the Natal Government appointed a Commission of Enquiry in 1872 to look into the conditions of Indians in the colony. As a result of its report,<sup>(10)</sup> Law 12 of 1872 was passed by the Legislative Council, which allowed for a number of provisions to improve the lot of indentured Indians, including the appointment of a Protector of Indian Immigrants. From this time, immigration continued unabated until it was terminated by the Government of India in July 1911. Nevertheless, conditions for Indians under indenture, as well as those who moved out of it, remained quite abysmal. Three further Commissions of Enquiry were appointed, by the government of Natal, in 1885-87, 1909 and 1913.<sup>(11)</sup> Initially contracts of indenture were three years followed by two years of compulsory industrial residence. By Law No. 17 of 1864, however, contracts were extended to five years. After ten years, immigrants were allowed to remain in the colony as 'free' Indians or were entitled to a free passage back to India. Alternatively by the provisions of Law No. 14 of 1859, their passage could be commuted into a grant of Crown land equivalent in value to the cost of the journey. In practice, however, only fifty-three Indians ever received these grants and in 1891, when this law was repealed, there were 13 000 pending applications.<sup>(12)</sup>

When their terms of indenture expired, most Indians, having broken their caste by emigrating, elected to remain in Natal rather than return to a life of hardship and social ostracism in India. These 'free' Indians either laboured alongside indentured immigrants on the plantations or in other sectors which employed Indian labour, such as on farms, the coal mines and the Natal Government Railways. Alternatively, they set out to

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10. Report of Coolie Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Condition of the Indian Immigrants in the Colony of Natal ... August, 1872. This was also referred to simply as 'The Coolie Commission'.
  11. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission 1885-7. This was also referred to as the Wragg Commission.  
Report of the Indian Immigration Commission 1909. This was also known as the Clayton Commission.  
Report of the Indian Enquiry Commission, U.G. 16-1914. This was also known as the Solomon Commission.
  12. S.R. Pather, (ed.) op.cit., p. 52.

make an independent living as fishermen, agriculturalists and market-gardeners. Later they also came to be well represented in the manufacturing sector and in clerical positions.

In addition to indentured and 'free' Indians, there came to Natal in the wake of indenture a number of Indians referred to as 'Arab traders'. These Indians, who came at their own expense and without recruitment, were also known as 'passenger Indians'. The indentured immigrants came from the districts which fed the ports of Madras in the south and Calcutta in the north and spoke mainly the Tamil and Telugu languages. They comprised 12 per cent Moslems, 5 per cent Christians and 83 per cent Hindus.<sup>(13)</sup> The 'passenger Indians', on the other hand, came from the Bombay area or from Mauritius. They were predominantly Urdu-speaking Moslems, but also included Gujarati-speaking Hindus and Moslems as well. They came to form a separate and comparatively privileged trading community in Natal, engaged in importing and retailing. They catered not only for the tastes of Indian immigrants but also came to compete with white merchants. This earned them a great deal of hostility from the settlers, evident particularly from the late 1880s onwards.

It can be seen, therefore, that a study of Indian women in the colonial setting of Natal is complicated by the fact that Indians in the colony were not a homogeneous group at this time. Whilst suffering a number of discriminatory practices which developed in this racially-biased society, along with indentured Indians, on other levels and with regard to contemporary perceptions, both Indian and white, they were frequently worlds apart and they did not all share the same class position. Given the fact, however, that the period under consideration was overwhelmingly dominated by the institution of indenture, as well as the fact that indentured Indians and their descendants formed the majority of the Indian population of the colony, the emphasis in this chapter will be on women in these groups. Nevertheless, some attention will be paid to Moslem women, particularly with regard to legal recognition of their marital status, an issue which gained increasing momentum from 1906 onwards and which culminated in the passive

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13. E.H. Brookes and C. de B. Webb, op.cit., p. 85.

resistance campaign of 1913 and the Indian Relief Bill of the following year.

Before being able to understand the condition of Indian women in Natal on a cultural, social and economic level, however, it is first necessary to examine, briefly, their position in India. ✕

### The Indian Heritage

The history of the position of women in India is a long, and by no means static one, despite the fact that practices such as sutee or sati (widow-burning) amongst Hindus and purdah (seclusion and the wearing of a veil) amongst Moslems may suggest the contrary. India's ancient history was characterized by invasion and in fact, this trend persisted until modern times, including the period of British control from 1793 to 1947. Successive invasions meant two things: firstly, the reinforcement of traditional culture in the face of external threats; and secondly, the assimilation of various social practices, brought about by successive waves of invasions by people of varying social and cultural backgrounds. Most significant in its impact on Indian civilization was the invasion of the Indo-Aryans around 1500 B.C. These people from the Iranian plateau overthrew the previous Dravidian conquerors and initially settled in the north of India, gradually filtering across the whole peninsula. It was they who introduced Vedic Culture and the pervasive Hindu religion, the earliest literary evidence of which is the holy Sanskrit writings, including the Rig-Veda, a collection of hymns dedicated to their gods.<sup>(14)</sup> They also developed the enduring caste system as a means of keeping themselves separate from the people they had mastered. The other invaders to have a marked impact on Indian civilization, in more recent times, were the Moghuls. They were Moslem people who ruled India from the early sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. Although they made a lasting impression, particularly in the north, Hinduism was never totally surmounted,

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14. R. Thapar, A History of India Vol. I (1966), p. 31.

even in the halcyon days of the Moghuls, and neither was the caste system. Following the disintegration of Moghul rule, India fell into a state of chaos and political confusion, making it very vulnerable to the various foreign inroads it was subjected to, notably those of the Portuguese and later the British. Even in the face of British dominance, however, the persistent strength of Vedic religion and culture on the one hand, and Moslem tradition on the other, was remarkable.

The persistence of the caste system can be explained by the fact that it reflected the social and economic cohesion and interdependence of the Indian village communities. Caste is not an Indian word but one employed by European observers to describe the Indian belief in the four varnas or social estates and the jati which were the economic divisions of labour within each varna. According to the varna scheme, there are four estates excluding the untouchables. They are the Brahmin or the traditional priests or scholars; the Kshatriya or the rulers and soldiers, the Vaishya or merchants and artisans; and the Shudra or peasants, labourers and servants. The untouchables who fall outside the varna scheme are considered unworthy and unclean and are charged with the most menial and degrading tasks.<sup>(15)</sup> Within each category of this scheme fall smaller units referred to as jati, being lineage groups which traditionally perform the same economic functions. Both the varna and the jati are endogamous. Despite the continuity and cohesion this belief system gave to Hindu India, it did not render it impervious to outside influence. Indeed, many Moslem practices were absorbed into Vedic culture even though, in most terms, the two remained separate and autonomous. This dual process of mutual exclusiveness and cultural assimilation can be seen very clearly with regard to the position of women in India. Polygamy, for example, was practiced by Hindu and Moslem alike, as was child-marriage (a Hindu custom) and purdah (a Moslem practice).

In the Vedic tradition, Hindu women were not only respected but revered, particularly as mothers, and the mother-cult of India is well-known even

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15. H. Kuper, "Changes in Caste of the South African Indians", Race Relations Journal, XXII (3), 1955, p. 18.

today.<sup>(16)</sup> Despite this, Hindu women have been subject to some of the most degrading and cruel practices with regard to women, most notably sutee and child-marriage. Moslem women, too, are exalted in the Quran, and yet came to have the custom of purdah perpetrated upon them.<sup>(17)</sup> The purpose of this study is not to unravel the origins and mysteries of how Indian women came to be so subjected. What is important for present purposes is to realize that by the nineteenth century, when British control was becoming increasingly entrenched, these practices were still common and widespread in India.

Whilst not universally practiced amongst Hindus, sutee was sufficiently pervasive to cause horror and repugnance on the part of the British who outlawed the institution in 1829. Whilst this was successful, the British were reluctant, until 1856, to pursue the next obvious step which was to legalize widow-remarriage.<sup>(18)</sup> Even then, as pointed out by P. Thomas :

For obvious reasons, while legislation for the prevention of Sati was effective, the Hindu Widow-Remarriage Act remained, for all practical purposes, a dead letter for a long time. Sati could be stopped by the police, but policemen could not arrange the marriage of the widowed daughters, sisters and wives of the sixty thousand signatories to the petition opposing the Bill and their more numerous followers.<sup>(19)</sup>

Thus throughout the British period and beyond, the remarriage of widows was a seldom seen phenomenon. The life of Hindu widows was miserable and hard, living as they did in the households of their husbands, under the jurisdiction of their mothers-in-law. They were forced to bear the heaviest burden of work, were prevented from appearing cheerful or wearing bright clothing, and in some regions, particularly in the south, "the head of the widow was shaved in order to make her unattractive, and

16. Cf. for example: M. Roy, op.cit.

17. Cf. for example: M. Minai, op.cit.

18. P. Thomas, Indian Women Through the Ages (1964), p. 297.

19. Ibid., p. 299.

she was shunned as an ill omen by all."<sup>(20)</sup>

This practice was all the more horrifying, given the Hindu practice of child-marriage. According to Manu, one of the ancient writers of Vedic law, a man of thirty should marry a girl of twelve, whilst a man of twenty-four should marry a girl of eight.<sup>(21)</sup> The general rule was that a girl should not choose her own husband. This task was performed by her parents and it was regarded as essential that she should be taken in marriage before puberty. Whilst it was commonly argued that consummation of the marriage did not take place before menstruation had occurred, there seems to be sufficient evidence to the contrary.<sup>(22)</sup> In 1860, when the Indian Penal Code was enacted, sexual intercourse with a girl, even if she was a man's wife, was considered to be rape if she was under the age of ten. In 1891, the age of consent within marriage was raised to twelve years.<sup>(23)</sup> The enforcement of such a law was obviously difficult, and not until the Prohibition of Child-Marriage Act of 1929, which penalized the marriage of girls below fourteen and boys below eighteen years, was there any measure of effective control in this regard.<sup>(24)</sup> The persistent tragedy of child-marriage and the social stigma attached to widow-remarriage can be seen most potently from the following statistics from the Indian Census of 1931, the first taken after the passing of the 1929 Act.

TABLE C (25)

<u>THE NUMBER OF WIDOWS IN INDIA BY AGE-GROUP</u>			
<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number of Widows</u>	<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number of Widows</u>
0 - 1	1 515	5 - 10	105 449
1 - 2	1 785	10 - 15	183 998
2 - 3	3 485	15 - 20	514 394
3 - 4	9 076	20 - 25	846 959
4 - 5	15 018		

20. Ibid, p. 297.

21. P. Thomas, Women and Marriage in India (1939), p. 93.

22. Ibid., p. 95.

23. K. Basu, "Movement for Emancipation of Women in the Nineteenth Century", in Ray, R. (ed.) The Role and Status of Women in India (1978), p. 50.

24. P. Thomas, Indian Women Through the Ages, p. 340.

25. Ibid.

Another institution which fell prey to reformist zeal under British rule was polygamy. Although most frequently associated with Moslem Indians, it was a practice which was also adopted by Hindus following Moghul rule. For both groups, however, it was something more usually associated with men of wealth and status and the monogamous state was more common amongst the Indian masses. For this reason, it was less easy for the British to legislate in this regard, and although it was nominally prohibited by the Marriage Act of 1872,<sup>(26)</sup> this had little effect. The most that can be said is that its continued practice was regarded as somewhat 'old-fashioned' by the new breed of educated British Indians which grew up under the Raj.

Finally, the custom of pardah, introduced by the Moslems but also practiced by Hindus, was also something which persisted in the nineteenth century although it became less fashionable amongst the more westernized elements in India. More prevalent in the north, where Moslem influence was greatest, it was also rather a feature of the lives of women of the wealthier groups than an exclusively cultural practice. As far as possible, these women were secluded at home, but if they had to move outside, they covered their faces. Less privileged women who had to work in the fields or move about the cities and villages could not be so secluded, and their lack of freedom was only signified in the wearing of the veil. The stranglehold of pardah was more readily loosened in the south although this in no way signified the emancipation of southern Indian women.

Overall, women were by no means emancipated by the establishment of British rule in India, even if the more horrifying elements of their oppression were eliminated by statute. Most notably, the British were unable to change preconceptions with regard to female education. Amongst Hindus, it was considered a waste and, in any event, widespread child-marriage made it a practical impossibility. With regard to Moslem Indians, resistance to female education was even greater.<sup>(27)</sup> As late

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26. K. Basu, op.cit., p. 47.

27. P. Thomas, op.cit., p. 311.

as the Census of 1951, feminine literacy in India in general stood at 7,87 per cent.<sup>(28)</sup> Not only were women not emancipated by British rule, in some ways their condition actually deteriorated. The persistence of grinding poverty, as well as the dislocation of village life, meant that vast numbers of women were frequently forced to abandon their homes and flock to the cities in search of employment. Often they resorted to a life of prostitution, a problem that was on the increase during the nineteenth century in India. Apart from ineffectively legislating against the more aggressive forms of traffic in women and children, the British did little to ameliorate this trend.<sup>(29)</sup> In fact, as revealed by the recent work of K. Ballhatchet, prostitution amongst Indian women was encouraged in the main centres, to provide for the needs of the large military contingency of the Raj. He has pointed out that:

Indian prostitutes were therefore seen in a positive role as necessary to the satisfaction of the soldiers' physical needs. If those needs were denied satisfaction, dire consequences were envisaged ... On the other hand, the women were seen in a negative role as threatening soldiers with a disease which might destroy their manhood. A distinction was often drawn between respectable prostitutes, who accepted the control of the military authorities, and disorderly vagrants, who infested shadowy haunts at night and tempted unwary soldiers to destruction.<sup>(30)</sup>

Thus Indian women were no less subordinated as a result of the so-called civilizing and reforming influence of British rule. It is against this background, therefore, that the efforts of the recruiting agents of the indentured emigration schemes to acquire for each shipload a 29 per cent quota of women, should be reviewed.

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28. Ibid., p. 317.

29. Ibid., p. 349.

30. K. Ballhatchet, Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793 - 1905 (1980), p. 162.

Recruiters and their touts, or 'Coolie Catchers' as they were commonly known, were often unscrupulous. Frequently they lured people into indenture by means of misrepresentation or coercion. There was a clear correlation between years of calamity and an adequate supply of indentured labour for the colonies, and it was not unusual for substantial numbers in a village affected by famine to fall prey to the promises of the touts. It was difficult even in these cases, however, to make up the quota of four women to every ten men and according to one Emigration Agent writing in 1880:

In the absence of pressure of famine, men accompanied by their wives do not emigrate in sufficient numbers to make up the legal minimum of forty per cent of females.(31)

Coercion was thus resorted to and women were sometimes virtually kidnapped in order to make up the requisite numbers.<sup>(32)</sup> Many of the women who emigrated were abandoned wives and widows or destitute prostitutes, who would rather face the unknown than the ravages of a life of ostracism and starvation in India. Such women were often very young, not surprisingly in the light of the statistics of child-widows given above. Whereas the men had to undergo medical inspection and the most sickly or wasted of their number were turned down, the women received a more superficial examination and virtually all were let through, even when infected with killing diseases such as cholera, typhoid and dysentery or with venereal disease.<sup>(33)</sup>

Despite segregation of the sexes in the emigrant depots, men and women frequently established relationships and declared themselves married, a practice disapproved of but recognized by the authorities. As pointed out by Tinker:

The advantage to the man was obvious: he had someone to cook for him and attend to him in a society where females were very scarce. But there was also advantage to the woman in secur-

31. H. Tinker, op.cit., p. 131.

32. Ibid., p. 126.

33. Ibid., p. 138.

ing a protector in a savage new environment, and in establishing some sort of recognized position in a social order which held no place for an adult single woman.(34).

Given the ravages of the sea journey and the advantage taken of unprotected women, this was most certainly a preferable alternative to embarkation for a life of hard labour, isolated, used and abused. On board the vessels there is evidence of sexual assault from not only fellow emigrants but also the crews. In one case, the ship's surgeon, who was supposed to be in charge of the health and welfare of the indentured labourers, was arrested for "rape, attempted rape, or indecent assault against female immigrants."<sup>(35)</sup> It was under conditions such as these, therefore, that Indian women left their home country and travelled to Natal in order to start life anew.

#### Indian Women in the Colonial Setting of Natal

As is suggested by the above, Natal's indentured immigrants comprised distressed and despairing people who were victims of a system which could offer them at best subsistence, at worst destitution. Two-thirds of the immigrants were Tamil- and Telugu-speaking Hindus from the Madras Presidency. The remainder were from north India who came via the port of Calcutta and who were Hindustani and Gujarati speakers. As pointed out by S.R. Pather, the belief that all indentured immigrants came from the ranks of the untouchables is a myth, and amongst their numbers were Brahmins and members of the Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra varnas.<sup>(36)</sup> According to M. Tayal, of the immigrants from Madras, 50 per cent "were drawn from castes above, or at the top of the sudra level."<sup>(37)</sup>

Despite some flexibility in the caste system, once indentured, life in the depots on board ship and later on the estates in Natal, meant that it

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34. Ibid., p. 140.

35. F. Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans (1969), p. 10.

36. S.R. Pather, (ed.) op.cit., p. 46.

37. M. Tayal, Gandhi: The South African Experience (1980), p. 30.

was impossible for indentured immigrants to maintain the characteristic patterns of caste such as elaborate dietary rules, occupational functions and laws regarding social contact. On the immigrant vessels, passengers were given twelve cubic feet per adult and half that for children under ten years. For a journey that could last between three weeks and three months, sometimes as many as seventy different castes of all varnas lived, ate and slept together in these cramped quarters.<sup>(38)</sup> Living conditions on the estates were no better. Accommodation was frequently in the form of barracks in which men, women and children were housed with no regard for marital status or privacy, let alone the fastidious requirements of caste observances. The only feature of caste, which was practiced where possible, was caste endogamy. This single practice, however, was not sufficient to suggest the persistence of caste in Natal, and, given the scarcity of women of any caste, remained little more than an ideal. Ultimately, for indentured Indians and their descendants, marriages arranged on the basis of economic or educational status prevailed. From the start, Indians in Natal were incorporated into a new hierarchical structure in which caste was irrelevant. It was one based on barriers of race and class. Indentured Indians initially formed the poorest section of society. As forced labourers they were the most exploited members of Natal's proletariat. As the nineteenth century wore on, however, and as 'free' Indians strove to establish themselves and to better themselves in the colony, among their numbers there were those who became peasants, petty traders and property owners. nevertheless, racist ideology and discriminatory legislation and practice maintained Indians at the bottom of the overall social and political, if not the economic hierarchy for the duration of the period. This was despite the fact that there were vast differences in their material conditions and that status groups quickly arose within their ranks. This led, at times, to affiliations of race transcending class barriers, as was the case in 1913 when indentured labourers on the coal mines and sugar plantations, struck work and joined the passive resistance campaign.

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38. H. Kuper, op.cit., p. 23.

With regard to 'passenger Indians', they came not as isolated individuals but as families. If not accompanied by their wives, the traders sent for them later. Further, they maintained contact with their castes in India through business as well as marriage. Amongst Gujarati Hindus of 'passenger' status, therefore, although all the practices of caste society could not be adhered to, caste endogamy persisted.<sup>(39)</sup> When Hindu and Moslem women joined their trader husbands in Natal, they lived secluded and sheltered lives. The Hindu women helped their husbands in their stores as well as attending to domestic chores. Moslem women, however, initially observed strict purdah and rarely ventured beyond the confines of the home. When they did, they wore not only the veil but concealed themselves in burgha, robes which covered them from head to toe.<sup>(40)</sup>

Indian traders did not come to Natal under the same conditions as indentured immigrants and were subject to different legislation. As time wore on, commercial competition from this group as well as from a number of 'free' Indian traders meant that anti-Indian feelings amongst whites became rife in the colony towards the latter stages of the nineteenth century. Indians were only welcome in Natal as labourers and the presence of an unindentured Indian population was resented. This led to discrimination with regard to the issuing of trading licences, but, more pertinent with regard to women, it also led to discriminatory legislation with regard to immigration laws and the relationship between these and Indian marriage laws. Matters reached a head at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. The general practice until then had been to only admit a woman married to an Indian domiciled in South Africa if she was his only wife residing in the country. In 1910, however, the Searle Judgement stated that for the purposes of immigration, no marriage could be regarded as monogamous, and therefore legal, if it was celebrated according to the rites of any religion recognizing polygamy.<sup>(41)</sup> This in effect reduced the status of the wives of many Indian women to that of concubines. Polygamy was recognized by both the

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39. Ibid., p. 24.

40. F. Meer, op.cit., p. 19.

41. C. Kondapi, Indians Overseas (1951), p. 213.

Hindu and Moslem faiths but in reality only really affected members of the trading class. It was this group, however, that was the most wealthy and well organized and which had, therefore, the greatest political punch. Under the leadership of Gandhi, passive resistance which had been conducted from 1906 over immigration matters, was continued in 1913 when the provisions of the Immigration Bill of that year did not remove the uncertainty with regard to the status of Indian women.

Passive resistance was not only only conducted on behalf of the honour and sanctity of Indian women in marriage. Nevertheless, this became an emotive political issue and allowed for the participation of Indian women in the struggle. Mrs. Polak, the wife of Henry Polak who was a close associate of Gandhi, described the entrance of women into the political area at the time :

The women from Natal, all of them wives of well-known members of the Indian community, travelled up to Volksrust, were arrested and sentenced to three months' hard labour, and were the first of hundreds to go to gaol ... I think it may safely be said that, but for the early work of these brave women ... the wonderful response to the call of honour and country might never have taken place ... Today all these women are back in their homes and are busy in the usual routine of an Indian woman's life. There is absolutely none of the pride of heroism about them. They are the same patient, dutiful women that India has produced for centuries, yet they endured the publicity ....(42)

Clearly the excursion out of purdah for Moslem women and the release from exclusion for the Gujarati and Tamil women who participated, was a temporary phenomenon. As pointed out in Indian Opinion, all the women who participated in passive resistance from 1906 onwards were "wives or mothers or sisters of the men who had taken part...."<sup>(43)</sup> It was in this secondary or subordinate capacity that Indian women entered the

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42. Mrs. Polak, "Women and Passive Resistance", in Andrews, C.F. (ed.) Documents Relating to the Indian Question (1918), p. 14.

43. "Special Issue on the Hon. Mr. G.K. Gokhale's Visit to South Africa", Indian Opinion, 1912.

struggle against the injustices perpetrated upon them and upon their race although, it must be said, not in vain for the Indian Relief Act of 1914 provided for the recognition of existing monogamous marriages amongst Indians in South Africa and restored the position to that which existed prior to The Searle Judgement.<sup>(44)</sup>

This issue, however, was only really significant for the predominantly Moslem trading class for, given the imbalances between the sexes amongst indentured immigrants and their descendants, resulting from the disproportion between the number of men and women brought into Natal, the question of polygamy was hardly a crucial issue for these groups. As late as 1911, sexual disproportion ranged from twenty-nine women to seventy-one men in the case of the indentured population, and thirty-five women to sixty-five men amongst 'free' Indians.<sup>(45)</sup> It is with these numerically larger if not so politically powerful groups that the bulk of this chapter is concerned.

According to the Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants for 1911, the total Indian population of Natal stood at 113 192 when indentured immigration came to an end in that year. These reports, however, generally underestimated the size of the Indian population. Thus both the 1911 census and the census carried out in 1904 revealed that the total Indian population in these years exceeded the Protector's assessments by about 20 000 persons in both cases. It seems that this discrepancy was due to the poor registration of births and deaths as well as to the illegal, and therefore unreported population movements across the borders of the colony. From the Protector's returns, however, a rough gauge of the sources of Indian population growth in Natal over the period of immigration as a whole, can be gained.

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44. C. Kondapi, *op.cit.*, p. 215.

45. J.D. Beall and M.D. North-Coombes, "The 1913 Disturbances in Natal: The Social and Economic Background to Passive Resistance", Unpublished paper, The Natal history Workshop 1910 - 1961, 28th October, 1982, p. 1.

It was immigration which above all sustained Indian population growth. From November 1860, when the first labourers arrived, to July 1911, when the last shipment of Indians disembarked, 152 641 indentured immigrants landed on Natal's shores. Of these, 104 619 were men and boys and 48 022 were women and girls, or an average ratio of 46 females for every 100 males.<sup>(46)</sup> This population was reduced by deaths and departures from the colony which together exceeded the births over the period as a whole. While under indenture in Natal, Indians did not lose contact with their country of origin altogether. Although most were illiterate, they could hire scribes to write letters to their friends and relatives in India and regularly remitted money to them.<sup>(47)</sup> There was, moreover, a steady stream of returning immigrants, unwilling to remain in Natal after their terms of indenture had expired and who chose to return to India, either at their own expense, or by taking advantage of free passages if they were entitled to them.

Altogether, between 1860 and 1911, 42 415 immigrants and their children, some of whom had been born in the colony, returned home. The pace at which this emigration took place was relatively slow at first. Between 1874 and 1896, it involved a mere 13.9 per cent of the population introduced in the same period. Under the pressure of the £3 tax, however, imposed in terms of Act 17 of 1895 and which penalised 'free' Indians for residing in Natal if not under indenture, a much larger proportion left. Between 1901, when the tax came into effect, and 1911, when indenture was terminated, nearly 30 per cent of the immigrants introduced since 1895 returned to India.

Women were just as likely to return to India as men. However, comparatively fewer women and children left Natal for the adjacent territories. As much of this internal migration was temporary, it was practical for men to leave their wives and children behind, rather than subject them to the uncertainties of an arduous overland journey and to the rigours of a life in the inhospitable interior, where anti-Asiatic

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46. Census of the Union of South Africa, 1911, p. 3.

47. "Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants", Blue Book, 1898.

feeling ran particularly high. The Protector of Indian Immigrants estimated that 17 063 Indians left Natal for places other than India, up to 1911, mainly travelling to inland centres.<sup>(48)</sup> This figure understates the true extent of the overland migration, as many left without licences. This is not to say that net emigration from the colony over this period was greater than reported, however, since not only were these illegal movements temporary but, of those who left for the Transvaal with permits, many may have returned undetected and their whereabouts not recorded in the official statistics. Indeed, the net emigration to places other than India may have been less than official returns suggest.

The inaccuracies which crept into the Protector's assessments of the size of the Indian population stemmed not only from an inadequate coverage of internal population movements but also from the incomplete and inaccurate records kept of births and deaths in the colony. In spite of the shortage of women relative to men, births generally exceeded deaths on a year to year basis so that the Indian population also grew through natural increase. When the registration of births and deaths improved in the early twentieth century, a much greater excess of births over deaths, and consequently a higher rate of natural increase, was revealed than had been established in the past. In the ten years after 1876, for instance, the excess of births over deaths was reported to be 4,8 per thousand per annum as opposed to 11,5 per thousand per annum for the period 1901 to 1910.<sup>(49)</sup>

During the first period of indentured immigration, from 1860 to 1866, there were few checks on the treatment and conditions of indentured Indian labourers. On disembarkation, they were crowded together in dockside constructions, while registration and cursory health inspections were conducted. As the officials concerned were unfamiliar with any Indian languages and as the Indians could not speak English, communication was reduced to a minimum. The problem of allocation of

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48. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1913, no page.

49. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1910, no page.

labour was solved by tickets being picked from a hat. This led to the splitting up not only of friends and people from the same districts, but also relatives and family members. The whole horror of the situation can be gauged from the following example :

A little girl was found dying with anaemia on the roadway by a group of Indians. She had only that day landed in Natal and had been sent off in a train some fifty miles inland, and told to walk three miles uphill to her work. Nobody had bothered to check her condition or health.(50)

Following the journey to their place of employment, the labourers were first consigned to constructing for themselves, some form of dwelling. Thereafter work began, six days a week, from sunrise to sunset. Remuneration was at the rate of ten shillings a month for the first year of indenture, eleven shillings for the second, twelve for the third, thirteen for the fourth and fourteen shillings a month for the fifth year and thereafter. The women received half the amount paid to men, and children in proportion to their age. Apart from accommodation, rations and medical care were to be provided by the employer.

The system of indenture was open to a great deal of abuse. Apart from floggings, supposedly illegal under contracts of indenture, there was the constant threat of loss of wages, through sickness or 'unlawful absence' from work, a phenomenon which was not unusual given the squalid and unhygienic living conditions the labourers were forced to live under and the state of malnutrition to which many were subjected. At a deduction rate of one shilling a day, a labourer incapacitated for two weeks could end up in debt to his employer at the end of a working month. Further, in order to leave the estate or place of employment to lay a complaint before the Resident Magistrate, a written ticket of leave was required from the employer. This operated as a great deterrent to the redressing of grievances. Even when permission was granted, or when labourers left

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50. S.R. Pather, (ed.) op.cit., p. 74.

illegally, their charges were frequently dismissed or disregarded by officials.<sup>(51)</sup>

Following the reports of ill-treatment by Indians returning to India and the subsequent Report of the Coolie Commission in 1872, the office of the Protector of Indian Immigrants was set up. Despite the fact that the Commission revealed the prevalence of ill-treatment, misrepresentation and fraud by employers, inadequate housing, rations, ablution and medical facilities, the position of indentured Indians in Natal was justified by the Commissioners on the grounds that :

... it is essential to a fair understanding of their true position and prospects, and of the question as to whether they have benefited by emigration from their own home or the reverse, to bear in mind that, for the most part, the immigrants of Natal are drawn from the lowest classes of the population of India ....<sup>(52)</sup>

This was despite the recognition that legal safeguards for the protection of Indians had not been upheld. According to Law 14 of 1859, a half-yearly inspection of estates should have been conducted by the Resident Magistrates, a task which had 'never been carried out'. Later, in terms of Law 2 of 1870, this duty devolved upon the Coolie Immigration Agent, but only occasional visits were undertaken.<sup>(53)</sup> After 1872, the control and supervision of the indentured system was put in the hands of the Protector of Indian Immigrants.

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51. For coverage of conditions of indenture in the early period, cf. for example: A.G. Choono, Indentured Indian Immigration into Natal 1860 - 1911 with Particular Reference to its Role in the Development of the Natal Sugar Industry (1967).  
 F. Ginwala, Class Consciousness and Control - Indian South Africans, 1860 - 1946 (1974).  
 S.R. Pather, (ed.) op.cit.  
 M. Tayal, op.cit.  
 L. Thompson, op.cit.
52. Report of the Coolie Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Condition of Indian Immigrants in the Colony of Natal, August, 1872, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) Documents of Indentured Labour, Natal 1851 - 1917 (1980), p. 129.
53. Report of the Coolie Commission ... 1872, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 127.

The first Protector, Major-General Lloyd, who held the post for 1872 until 1876, was a man highly qualified for the post, both linguistically and judicially, and who had had past experience in India itself. Later Protectors, however, were not so well qualified; and from 1878, none possessed the knowledge of any Indian language. However, it seems that they undertook their duties with a fair measure of diligence and concern for the Indians under their charge. This generated hostility on the part of employers and those that represented their interests. It is significant that in the Report of the Wragg Commission, it was indignantly stated that :

In knowledge of Indian character, customs or habits, they have not been better qualified than the Resident Magistrates of the maritime districts wherein the majority of Indians reside ... as regards the judicial faculty and ability to weigh evidence, we fail to see how a Protector, who is totally without judicial training ... can surpass or even equal a Resident Magistrate who ... has administered justice daily, in open Court, for many years.<sup>(54)</sup>

From the time of this Commission it seems that the Protectors, and later the Deputy-Protectors, were increasingly emasculated. The Protectors' Reports after 1900 seldom revealed very little of the actual conditions of Indians. Employers were rarely taken to task over ill-treatment of workers and complaints were cavalierly dismissed as frivolous or without foundation. In 1904, by his own admission the Protector went so far as to state that "The Protector is, after all, the friend of the employer...."<sup>(55)</sup> It was with this in mind, therefore, that the comparative wealth of official documentation concerning Indians was approached and against this background that the following thematic reconstruction of the condition of Indian women was constructed.

The condition of Indian women in Natal, both under indenture and as 'free'

54. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 283.

55. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1904, p. 12.

labourers, was harsh. The indentured labour system deprived one and all of anything resembling a normal family life. In the House of Assembly, a lone champion of the rights of the Indian population, H.M. Meyler, the Member for Weenen, raised the case of an Indian, Muruga Gouvidam, who was sentenced to a twenty shilling fine or ten days imprisonment with hard labour for trespass. This was even though it was established that he had only visited his wife who was an indentured labourer on another sugar estate.<sup>(56)</sup> To maintain a family unit was difficult in conditions devoid of leisure and privacy, a situation which was made impossible by the frequent practice of employers of refusing to give rations to any Indians not engaged in labour. According to the manager of the Reunion Estate, E. Beater, "The women are free to work at 6d per day; we give them no rations."<sup>(57)</sup> That this attitude was not an isolated one is corroborated by the evidence given to the same Commission by E. Collard, manager of the Little Umhlanga Number One Estate.<sup>(58)</sup> Further, women and children under ten were only entitled to half rations. To avoid starvation, therefore, Indian women were frequently compelled to engage in task work on the estates, whether or not they were fit to do so, and were obliged therefore, to leave their infants unattended.

In the Report of the Wragg Commission, the question was raised of "the liability of all indentured Indian women to work and that of the employers to provide rations if they do not work...."<sup>(59)</sup> In discussing this issue, the Commission reviewed the various systems of female employment and payment. These ranged from women engaged in regular labour with rations and pay; to rations and pay being given for labour conducted on an irregular or daily basis; to women not being compelled to work but receiving "half the rations to which they are entitled by contract."<sup>(60)</sup> Legislation was not passed in this regard

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56. Union of South Africa, House of Assembly Debates, Fourth Session of the First Parliament, 1914, p. 2416.  
 57. Report of the Coolie Commission ... 1872, reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 135.  
 58. Ibid., p. 137.  
 59. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 296.  
 60. Ibid., p. 297.(Emphasis added).

but recommendations were made that employers ought to supply rations to indentured women who did not work, under certain circumstances. The cases where this should apply were when :

1. The Medical Officer in charge of an estate certify that a woman is unable to work by reason of advanced pregnancy, suckling, or ailments peculiar to the sex.
2. If her husband be in hospital and it be absolutely necessary that she should remain at home to attend upon her little child or children.(61)

These were only recommendations, however, and were open to arbitrary interpretation. In 1895 the Protector reported that women were often employed at task work on a daily basis, and the only difference between their conditions and those of men was that women thus engaged were not given rations whereas men got contract wages and rations as well. This he justified by arguing that "All that a woman requires to purchase daily is about a pound of rice. With this and the produce from her own garden she can live very well ... thereby saving the money they would otherwise have to spend in the purchase of food."<sup>(62)</sup> Whilst gardens were a common feature of some estates they were not universal, and in his 1898 Report, when dealing with poor health conditions on the collieries, the Protector recommended that gardens be established on the coal mines to supplement the diet of the Indians.<sup>(63)</sup>

Thus varying conditions prevailed in different circumstances and areas. More women had to work on the plantations, for instance, than in other sectors employing indentured labour. Further, the age at which children were considered to be able to look after themselves, or to work, was not uniform. For example, on the coal mines, boys were not allowed to work

61. Ibid., p. 298.

62. "Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants", Blue Book, 1895, p. A18.

63. "Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants", Blue Book, 1898, p. A8.

before the age of sixteen years whilst on the sugar estates, "there was no limit before which children, boys and girls, could be indentured and put to work."<sup>(64)</sup>

Single women were by no means better off. Despite their scarcity value, as noted by Tayal, frequently they were manipulated by employers and officials and :

... were treated almost as chattels, and even marriage was regarded with contempt in some quarters. On one of the biggest plantations, women were routinely used to punish recalcitrant male labourers.... Thus a situation was created in Natal which permitted the whites to believe that Indians were incapable of sustaining bonds of mutual affection or responsibility. This belief reinforced the cynical view of Indian women which derived initially from the fact that employers grudged the presence of potentially non-productive Indians on the estates.<sup>(65)</sup>

Rangassamy, giving evidence to the Coolie Commission in 1872, blamed the shortage of women for many sex-related crimes by Indians.<sup>(66)</sup> It is clear, however, that Indian women were subjected to the sexual harassment not only of Indian men but white overseers and planters as well. For example, up-country farmer W.T. Woods of Stockton near Estcourt, complained of the poor type of immigrant allotted to him and dubiously described two women formerly in his employ:

The women were perfectly useless. One, Mattachar, had to be carried from the railway station at Maritzburg to the Town Hill, as she could not walk; she was of a weak mind, and used to obey calls of nature involuntarily; she is dead .... The other woman Dorgia, after accusing all the white men about the place of

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64. Report of the Tuberculosis Commission, U.G. 34-1914, p. 76.

65. M. Tayal, op.cit., p. 37.

66. Report of the Coolie Commission ... 1872, reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 144.

raping her, and laying complaints before the Magistrate on charges of rape, which were dismissed, deserted; but not before all the white men, employed by me, left my employ by virtue of these accusations.(67)

Dorgia is probably the woman Woods referred to at the beginning of his evidence to the Wragg Commission who had deserted some months earlier, "infected with the venereal disease."<sup>(68)</sup> Woods had been refused his requests for indentured labourers by the Protector of Indian Immigrants between 1882 and 1884. It is interesting to note that the Commission recommended the lifting of this prohibition, and, with regard to charges laid against him by his Indian labourers, they were either dismissed or adjudicated in his favour by the Resident Magistrate. Further, in cases such as that of the woman Dorgia, when desertion was resorted to as a means of escape from intolerable circumstances this was considered a criminal offence under Law 2 of 1870 and its amending legislation, no immigrant being allowed to venture beyond a one mile radius of their place of residence and work without written permission.<sup>(69)</sup>

Even if not subjected to the more extreme forms of exploitation and harassment under indenture, the housing and living conditions under which Indian women had to attempt to build up family lives were intolerable. In the Coolie Commission of 1872 there were no complaints regarding housing and, in his 1877 Report, the Protector said that on his tour of the estates he had found "the state of Indians to be very good."<sup>(70)</sup> In the Wragg Commission Report of 1885-87, however, the question of housing and living conditions was gone into in some detail and some of the larger estates were singled out for investigation. The Medical Officer of Umzinto Circle, in his report for 1883, had found sanitary conditions to be bad on the Equeefa Estate, on which 450 Indians

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67. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) ibid., p. 433.

68. Ibid.

69. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 307.

70. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants for 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 243.

resided. Mill refuse was dumped in the reservoir which was the water supply to the estate and, in 1884, all streams and wells on the estate were found to be polluted. The proprietor of the estate refused to take the recommended measures to salvage the situation, thus leading to the investigation of Equeefa by the Commission. It was found that, in addition to effluent from the mill polluting drinking water, ablutions were performed in the open due to the absence of latrines, and as a result it was discovered that:

There is much rubbish about the coolie huts together with human excrement, which must, after heavy rain, be washed down and so contaminate the water in the stream and wells.(71)

Despite the revelations of the Wragg Commission, however, it does not seem as if conditions improved in this respect. In 1903 the Tongaat Sugar Company, for example, only received a minor rebuke for the fact that it pumped thousands of gallons of fluid refuse into the rivers and streams which supplied the drinking water for the indentured labourers on the estate.(72)

Once again, though, justifications were offered by way of racial stereotyping of Indians as being filthy in their habits. The incongruity of this is revealed sharply by the following extract from the 1905 Report of the Medical Officer in Natal :

... the abominably filthy surroundings in which the coolie is content to dwell, and which are entirely of his own making by defaecation on the ground in the immediate vicinity of the dwelling, are difficult of amelioration without his cooperation.... The most effectual remedy would be the provision of paved compounds that could be washed down, and latrines.(73)

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71. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 274.
72. "Report of the Health Officer for 1903", Blue Book, 1903, p. 31.
73. "Report of the Health Officer for 1905", Blue Book, 1905, p. 12. (Emphasis added).

That it was necessary for the Health Officer to report in this manner after the issue of the provision of latrines and the pollution of drinking water had been debated at length twenty years previously, is a commentary on the willingness of employers to see to the basic necessities of life for their indentured labour force, let alone their comforts.

With regard to housing, there were three main types provided for the indentured labour force - namely, grass huts, roughly constructed and erected at intervals from one another; 'lines', which were long buildings constructed of corrugated iron; and finally, barracks which were solidly built of masonry and roofed with iron. Grass huts were numerous on estates and were frequently preferred by Indians because of the greater privacy they afforded. Nevertheless, they were deficient in ventilation and lighting and if badly constructed would leak in wet weather.<sup>(74)</sup>

As late as 1898 the Protector reported that "numbers of the old fashioned grass huts have at last given way to sets of new buildings roofed with iron."<sup>(75)</sup> Nevertheless, the continued prevalence of grass huts was noted by the Tuberculosis Commission in 1914.<sup>(76)</sup> Given the high incidence of tuberculosis amongst Indians, which can be seen from Table 7.2 in the Appendix, grass huts were often preferred by employers because, if infected, they and their contents were instantly burned to the ground.

Lines and barracks, too, were badly lighted and ventilated. In addition, they were overcrowded and totally lacking in privacy. In this respect, the Wragg Commission Report noted that:

We regret to observe that too little regard is paid to this very essential requisite towards purity of life. There is a general huddling together of the sexes, of all ages, much to be

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74. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 302.
75. "Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants", Blue Book, 1898, p. A7.
76. Report of the Tuberculosis Commission, U.G. 34-1914, p. 93.

deplored. The Indians themselves have in no instance complained to us about such matters, and, indeed, it is manifest to us that to their own habits and customs, and not to the apathy of employers, must chiefly be attributed the disregard of decency to which we refer.(77)

Ignoring the difficulties experienced by Indians in laying complaints of any sort, it is easy to see in statements such as this the application of Victorian standards of morality to Indians, whilst disregarding the role of sexual imbalance and the circumstances of indentured life in explaining behaviour patterns and habits.

Poor living and working conditions inevitably led to miserable standards of health. It was reported in 1872 that of the diseases to which Indians were prone, the most common were :

... colds, fevers, dysentery, and other forms of bowel complaints; but all are usually of a mild type, and epidemic disease seems to be unknown. Venereal disease, however, it is to be feared is not uncommon.(78)

In view of the comment of the Tuberculosis Commission in 1914 that "The authorities state that the extent of the sickness and death rate has proved a most reliable index of the conditions and treatment of coolies by different employers",<sup>(79)</sup> a survey of the statistics provided by the medical officers in the colony and summarized in Tables 7.1 and 7.2 in the Appendix, proved most revealing.

It is clear that amongst all Indians, but amongst indentured Indians in particular, there was a high incidence of occupational and environmentally related diseases. Complaints such as enteritis and diarrhoeal diseases were the result of poor diet, insanitary conditions,

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77. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 87, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 302.

78. Report of the Coolie Commission ... 1872, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 124.

79. Report of the Tuberculosis Commission, U.G. 34-1914, p. 92.

polluted drinking water and overcrowded conditions. Also related to these factors was bronchial disease, although this was also an occupational hazard and it was noted by the medical officer in 1903 that it was most frequently found amongst indentured Indians on the collieries.<sup>(80)</sup> As shown in Table 7.1, tuberculosis, bronchitis or pneumonia accounted for the largest number of Indian deaths between 1904 and 1909, being 27,9 per cent of total Indian deaths, followed by diarrhoea, dysentery and enteritis which were responsible for 15,9 per cent of Indian deaths. It is noteworthy that in this period, only 115 or 0,95 per cent of Indians died of old age, compared with 3,95 per cent of the European population.

These figures conceal the true extent of the problem when it is realized that Indians of inferior physique or stamina were weeded out by employers, particularly on the coal mines. A phenomenally high figure of 3 800 or 7 per cent of all Indians brought into the colony between 1895 and 1910, were forced to return to India as invalids or unfit for labour, before their indentures had expired.<sup>(81)</sup>

As noted in the Report of the Coolie Commission in 1872, the incidence of venereal disease among Indians was high. This in turn led to a low birth rate and high infant mortality. As noted when discussing the condition of women in India in the nineteenth century, a large degree of prostitution was experienced there, induced by desperate socio-economic conditions, particularly in the cities. Many of these women resorted to emigration and it is true that a number of women entering Natal were infected with syphilis or gonorrhoea. It was automatically assumed, however, that these women were of low morals and that "as may be expected, they continue their evil practices in Natal not only on the estates to which they are allotted but on all the neighbouring estates."<sup>(82)</sup> How readily they were judged and stereotyped can be seen

80. "Report of the Health Officer for 1903", Blue Book, 1903, p. 41.

81. Reports of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1895 - 1911, passim.

82. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 87, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 293.

from the comments of the Depot Surgeon, F.W. Greene, in 1895 when reporting on the landing of immigrants in Durban. With regard to those who arrived on the vessel, the Pongola, he said that "The women are generally of the usual stamp. We detected venereal disease in one form or another, in fifteen of them."<sup>(83)</sup> Referring to those who came on the Umzinto VIII, he stated :

There is nothing special to remark about the women. Twenty five have either chancre, true gonorrhoea, or discharge of suspicious nature, necessitating isolation and treatment.<sup>(84)</sup>

Showing the same disregard for the conditions which might have induced such infection, not least of all sexual assault on board ship, the Wragg Commission recommended that such 'undesirable elements' should not be recruited for service in Natal.

The Wragg Commission labelled Indian women as promiscuous and blamed this for the for the high incidence of venereal disease. Although prostitutes were singled out as carriers, however, living conditions which promoted intimacy between men and women were also blamed. Nevertheless, among its recommendations were :

That authority be given by law, to employers, to deduct from wages the costs of removal to, and of treatment in, Central Hospitals, of Indians affected with venereal disease, so manifestly the result of misconduct. At present, employers not only lose the services of such Indians, when in hospital, but are actually compelled to pay the hospital fees.<sup>(85)</sup>

Hospital facilities were totally inadequate, and the Protector wrote in 1875 that with regard to Indians and Africans "They are now kept in a

83. "Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants", Blue Book, 1895, p. A19.

84. Ibid., p. A22.

85. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 296.

miserable delapidated building which is scarcely weatherproof!!<sup>(86)</sup> A system of district hospitals was proposed in the hope that this would place venereal disease under more effective control than under the existing system of state hospitals. The co-operation of employers in supporting the provision of local health care was not readily forthcoming. J. Liege Hulett, writing to the medical officer for the Stanger district, complained that "... for months together ... we have no need of medical attendance, but, directly new people arrive, sickness appears from various causes incidental to change of life, but three-fourths of this is the result of venereal complaints."<sup>(87)</sup> In the same vein, Edwin Essery lamented that "it is a beastly nuisance."<sup>(88)</sup>

Thus far, only the conditions of indentured life have been highlighted. Nevertheless, many of the elements dealt with also applied to 'free' Indians whose contracts of indenture had expired but who found it necessary to continue as wage labourers. Others moved into independent spheres as fishermen, market gardeners, hawkers, small producers or petty traders, to list a few of their main occupations, whilst some even became property owners. However, as has been pointed out elsewhere, by the end of the nineteenth century at least, the opportunities for Indians outside of indenture were not as extensive as was supposed by white colonists at the time. If anything, by this time they had declined. It was not automatic, therefore, that Indians who wished to change their indentured status could readily do so.<sup>(89)</sup> Certainly the socio-economic position of a large proportion of the 'free' Indian population was little better than that of Indians under indenture. The position of the 'free' Indians is less well documented but an indication of their condition can be gleaned from the number of deaths amongst their number from bronchial disease. As shown in Table 7.2, between 1904 and 1911, there was very

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86. Letter of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, July 1875, reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 209.

87. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, Appendix Q, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 615.

88. Ibid., p. 616.

89. J.D. Beall and M.D. North-Coombes, op.cit., p. 17.

little difference in the number of deaths resulting from tuberculosis between indentured and 'free' Indians, partly explained by the large number of the latter employed on the collieries. However, nearly three times as many 'free' Indians died of pneumonia and almost six times as many of bronchitis than did indentured Indians. This suggests, firstly, that the medical attention they could expect was far less than even the inadequate service provided for Indians under contract and who were under the direct supervision of the Protector of Indian Immigrants; secondly, it implies that housing and living conditions did not improve for Indians moving out of indenture, particularly in the depression years of the first decade of the twentieth century in Natal.

'Free' Indians were not welcome in Natal, and following Responsible Government in 1893, efforts to reduce the size of this community were stepped up. In terms of Act 17 of 1895, all new indentures had to terminate in India or be subject to the payment of an annual licence fee or tax of £3 if they elected to stay on in Natal, in addition to the £1 poll tax which applied to all adult males in the colony. As wages for 'free' Indians ranged from twenty-seven shillings for field labour to forty to fifty shillings for mine work and on the railways, this was a heavy penalty.

Although it was later claimed that the tax was not meant to apply to women and, indeed, under Section 1 of Act 19 of 1910 a woman could apply for exemption on the grounds of indigence, by failing to mention the labourer's sex in the original Act, it meant that females were also deemed liable. In 1903 the tax was extended to children of indentured labourers so that boys from the age of sixteen and girls from the age of thirteen were also affected. In 1905 it became a criminal offence to employ an Indian liable to the tax unless he or she were in possession of the required licence. Although officials experienced difficulty in controlling evasion of the tax amongst the 'free' Indians who were self-employed, it was still an effective measure of control and one which heavily affected less economically active females. In one case, a woman,

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Beebi, who was employed by Natal Estates, had been deserted by her husband and had been left with five children, two of whom were liable, along with herself, to the £3 tax. So desperate was her plight that she was forced to sell two of her daughters to a trader in Beira. On being questioned by Edward Saunders she answered : "Sahib, what could I do? They were pretty girls. I have no husband. I have no money. How could I pay the tax?"<sup>(90)</sup>

The £3 tax, a means of forcing Indians to reindenture or to return to India rather than a means of raising revenue, was consistent with the spirit of the Clayton Commission which reported that "the evidence is practically unanimous that the Indian is undesirable in this Colony other than as a labourer ... steps should be taken to prevent an increase in the number of free Asiatic colonists."<sup>(91)</sup> Later, in 1913, the Solomon Commission pointed out that the people liable to the £3 tax were those least able to bear the burden. Once the tax came to apply to children as well, a family of four could be liable to an annual tax of £12. For 'free' Indians, although the Indian Government had prohibited the imposition of criminal sanctions on defaulters, this was circumvented, and in 1912 the Department of Justice reported that offences under the Indian Immigration Laws accounted for the highest figures in the criminal record.<sup>(92)</sup> The issue of the £3 tax and its relationship to the 1913 strikes has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>(93)</sup> It was found that of the 54 052 immigrants introduced under Act 17 of 1895, only 20 per cent were able to opt for remaining in the colony without reindenturing. The high rate of reindenture reached its peak in 1912 when the rate was 95,25 per cent, even though the rate anticipated by the Protector was no more than 70 per cent. Hence it can be understood why the £3 tax was such an emotive issue.

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90. R.G.T. Watson, Tongaati, An African Experiment (1960), p. 135.

91. Report of the Indian Immigration Commission, 1909, reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 639.

92. Report of the Indian Enquiry Commission, U.G. 16 - 1914, p. 59.

93. J.D. Beall and M.D. North-Coombes, op.cit.

As can be seen from Table 7.1 showing causes of death from occupational and environmentally related diseases, the position of Indians, indentured and 'free' vis-a-vis the white population was clearly one of disadvantage. The same is demonstrated by a comparison of white and Indian housing conditions, as shown by the following table compiled from the 1904 Census.

TABLE D<sup>(94)</sup>

NUMBER OF INHABITED HOUSES OR DWELLINGS

	<u>Stone</u>	<u>Brick</u>	<u>Brick and Stone</u>	<u>Wood and Iron</u>	<u>Wattle and Daub</u>
Whites	1 759	11 922	768	4 168	208
Indians	318	2 218	88	10 186	4 702

Further, amongst the white population, the greatest proportion lived in homes sporting five, six or seven rooms whilst the majority of Indians lived in one, two or three roomed houses.

Inequality was also blatantly obvious with regard to education. It was reported by the Coolie Commission of 1872 that there were only four schools for Indian children, which received government aid to the sum of £68 per annum.<sup>(95)</sup> According to the 1886 educational returns, the number of schools for Indians had increased to twenty-seven. In attendance were 1 428 boys and only 274 girls. For much of the period there was parental opposition to female education although there was a call in 1885 for a school to be built for Indian girls.<sup>(96)</sup> The following table illustrates the unequal distribution of resources with regard to education in the colony.

94. Census of the Colony of Natal, Blue Book, 1904.

95. Report of the Coolie Commission ... 1872, reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 125.

96. "Educational Returns", Blue Book, 1886.

TABLE E<sup>(97)</sup>EDUCATIONAL SUMMARY 1885 - 1897

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Schools Under Inspection</u>			<u>Number of Pupils</u>		
	<u>White</u>	<u>African</u>	<u>Indian</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>African</u>	<u>Indian</u>
1885	51	64	25	3 922	3 783	1 480
1890/91	92	76	27	5 986	4 026	2 270
1894/5	221	130	28	77 339	6 790	2 919

Clearly the Indian and African groups were severely neglected in the sphere of education. According to the returns of the 1904 Census with regard to educational status, whilst 83 per cent of the white population could read and write, (and 98 per cent of the white population over the age of fifteen years), only 13 per cent of Africans and Indians could do so, (85 per cent being unable to either read or write). Further, literacy was over twelve times greater amongst male Africans and Indians than amongst females, partly as a result of cultural preference on the part of parents and partly due to the limited funds the colonial government was prepared to spend in this regard.

Thus it is clear that a colonial government intent on legislating to maintain the Indian population of Natal in the position of forced labourers was certainly not prepared to elevate Indians by way of educational opportunities. In this regard, it is interesting to survey the occupational distribution of the Indian population, with particular reference to female employment. In 1874, W.M. MacLeod, Late Special Agent to India, reported on the resumption of indenture to Natal in the Government Gazette of 22nd September 1874. He had met the Emigration Agent for British Guiana who had pointed out to him that in British Guiana women were recruited for work as well as men. Firth stated that:

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97. Statistical Year Book of the Colony of Natal, 1897.

I found in Demerara that women did weeding, and many other light descriptions of work, better than the men could do it. The planters in the West Indies are glad to get women and pay the same rate for their introduction as for men.(98)

It is clear that women in Natal were not so recruited nor so fully utilised as labourers. In a document entitled Notice to Coolies Intending to Emigrate to Natal, issued in 1874, it was stated that "care is taken not to separate families and relatives" and that "Great varieties of work, either for strong men or for women and children, are available."<sup>(99)</sup> In practice, however, it seems that Indian women were not active in the indentured labour force to an exceptional degree. Nevertheless, remunerated work was not the only labour they performed and, further, it is not possible to quantify women's economic role at this stage and thus only a qualitative picture can be drawn. Much of the information related to employment does not differentiate between the sexes. The Protector, reporting in 1877, for example, merely states that in 1876 there were 10 620 Indians in Natal, 9 000 of whom were engaged on the coastal plantations and 1 620 in domestic service, trade, storekeeping, market gardening, fishing and railway service. In addition, Indians were in demand up-country, as farm servants, in saw-mills and as machine operators.<sup>(100)</sup> By this time, too, some Indians had become land-owners or leased land as tenants or had become squatters on Crown land. None of this information, however, gives a clear picture of the activities of women in any of these spheres.

The Wragg Commission of 1885-87 gave some evidence of the occupational distribution of the Indian population, although this, too, is not very clear in the case of women. In June 1886 there were nearly 30 000 Indians in Natal, only a minority of whom were serving indentures at this stage. The majority were 'free' Indians although they were frequently engaged alongside indentured Indians on the plantations. Nevertheless,

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98. Natal Government Gazette, 22nd September, 1874, reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 204.  
 99. Reprinted in Meer, Y.S. (ed.) op.cit., p. 239.  
 100. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1877, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 243.

'free' Indians were found in a greater variety of occupations.<sup>(101)</sup> The ratio of 'free' to indentured Indian employment in the estate labour force was 30 per cent to 70 per cent. Unfortunately, no figures are provided by the Commissioners for female immigrants on sugar estates. However, some measure of their whereabouts, if not their occupational status, can be gleaned from the Wragg Commission. It reported that five times more indentured Indians lived in coastal rather than upland districts. Taking the Indian population as a whole, there were 23 505 living in the three coastal districts of Alexandra, Victoria and Durban County (including Durban) and some 6 000 in the up-country districts.<sup>(102)</sup>

The Wragg Commission also gave details of the great variety of occupations in which many of the 'free' Indians in Natal were engaged. Excluding Arab traders, within two miles of the borough limits of Durban, there were some 2 000 'free' Indians in 1886. They were engaged as market gardeners, cultivating small parcels of land and growing maize, vegetables, tobacco and fruit trees. They came to monopolise the urban market for vegetables at the expense of the small white farmers but to the benefit of the colony, as they supplied produce at lower prices and on a more regular and extensive basis. Indian women, it is clear, were engaged both in cultivation and distribution of produce. The manner in which fruit and vegetables were sold was reported thus:

From an early hour in the morning Indian hawkers, male and female, adults and children, go busily with heavy baskets on their heads from house to house, and thus citizens can now daily, at their own doors, and at low rates, purchase wholesome vegetables and fruit which, not many years ago, they could not, with certainty, procure, even in the public markets and at exorbitant prices.<sup>(103)</sup>

The whites explained their success in terms of the low standard of living of Indians and the way in which extended families were prepared to live in

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101. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 309 - 314.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., p. 321.

over-crowded conditions 'on the smell of an oil-rag'.

Indentured Indians were also engaged in market gardening to an extent. They were usually given small garden plots near their huts where they cultivated vegetables, tobacco, chillies and fruit. The women and children helped rear poultry as well. Any surplus above subsistence needs was sold in order to add to the indentured labourers' paltry earnings; and it is likely, given the lesser participation of women in the indentured labour force, that they would have been almost exclusively responsible for distribution.

In the urban areas proper, many 'free' Indians were engaged as traders or storekeepers. In 1886 there were twenty-six Indian stores in the borough of Durban. This group went into decline from 1880 onwards, however, under the pressure of competition from Arab traders who had immigrated to Natal at their own expense, from India and from Mauritius. Women clearly assisted in the stores or as hawkers in these cases as well. Some families settled on Salisbury Island and were engaged in fishing and fish-curing. Women and children also formed part of the Salisbury island community, although it is not clear to what extent they were productively employed. Commenting on 'free' Indians generally, the Commissioners said that they "thrived" in Natal because their wants were few and because of their industrious habits.<sup>(104)</sup>

The biggest employers of Indian labour, and particularly indentured Indian labour, were to be found in the coastal districts. Employment patterns between the coastal districts and the interior differed and within the sugar-belt itself. These can be seen from the following table which also depicts, for the sugar-belt, the distribution of estate size in terms of employment.

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104. Ibid.

TABLE F(105)

<u>Size of Labour Force</u>	<u>THE SUGAR-BELT</u>		<u>THE NATAL MIDLANDS</u>	
	<u>Number of Employers</u>	<u>Number of Workers</u>	<u>Number of Employers</u>	<u>Number of Workers</u>
Over 100 workers	8	3 704	-	-
51 - 100	12	898	1	88
20 - 50	19	582	3	101
Below 20 workers	136	609	220	894
TOTAL	185	5 793	224	1 083

With the concentration of landed property in the sugar belt, a tiny minority of seventeen large planters had arisen which, together with the Natal Government Railway, though constituting less than 10 per cent of employers in the area, gave employment to 64 per cent of the indentured labour force of 5 793 workers. There was also a small intermediate group of medium-sized estates and other enterprises which comprised 17 per cent of all employers and which accounted for 26 per cent of the regional work-force. In the sugar-belt, small properties were not uncommon. There were sixty-nine enterprises outside of Durban employing less than twenty workers. In Durban, an almost equal number of small employers of indentured labour were concentrated in the urban area.

It is true that the large plantations, organized on quasi-industrial lines, dominated the economic landscape and that the majority of Indians in the coastal districts experienced life in large estate lines, where several hundred workers lived in over-crowded and appallingly unhealthy surroundings. However, this should not obscure from view the small sugar

105. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, Appendix A, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) *ibid.*, p. 553.

estates which were twice as numerous as the large plantations. Here, working and living conditions for small groups of four or five workers were quite similar to those found in the interior of the colony.

In the Natal Midlands, indentured Indians were in frequent demand as farm servants, operators of farm machinery and so on. However, they were almost invariably employed only in small numbers by local farmers. This region had no equivalent to the large coastal employer of indentured labour. Indeed, 98 per cent of all up-country farming enterprises using indentured workers had only four workers, on average, in their employment. In the Midlands, too, the coal mining industry proved a source of demand for indentured labourers. From their inception in the late 1880's, the collieries were vitally dependent upon a plentiful supply of cheap labour given the fact that after drilling and blasting, coal was manually loaded, picked and sorted. In this regard, coal owners faced competition for labour from the surrounding agricultural districts, as well as from recruiters representing the Rand mines. Increasingly they came to depend on indentured and 'free' Indians, and for the period 1903 to 1913, Indians represented an average of 37,3 per cent of the work force on the coal mines, the proportion being highest in 1906 when it was 41,9 per cent. Women were not employed underground, but were used for surface work such as sorting and picking.<sup>(106)</sup>

Mine labour was not popular amongst Indians, despite the fact that the wages offered were higher than for field labour. Indentured Indians could only be drafted for mine work with their assent. As wages for African miners were four to five times higher than those paid to indentured Indians, it seems correct to argue that it was only the question of consent and supply which prevented the coal industry from relying more heavily on the requisitioning of indentured immigrants. Rations and housing, though often far from adequate for industrial indent-

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106. "Report on the Mining Industry", Blue Book, 1904 - 1909, passim,  
Mines Department Annual Report, U.G. 34 - 1911,  
Mines Department Annual Report, U.G. 49 - 1912,  
Mines Department Annual Report, U.G. 30 - 1914.

ured labour, were frequently superior to those afforded by agriculture. In 1903 the Protector stated that whilst the railways and coal mines were making an effort, if somewhat tardily, to improve the accommodation provided for Indians, ".....speaking generally the barracks fall far short of any decent standard and on some of the coast estates are absolutely unfit for human habitation...."(107)

It is only by looking at more detailed Indian employment statistics in the 1891 and 1904 censuses that a clearer picture of Indian female employment can be derived. According to these censuses, Indian women constituted between 13 and 15 per cent of the total Indian labour force. The higher proportion of economically active Indian women as compared to economically active white women can be explained partly by the greater sexual imbalance amongst Indians as well as their general position as part of Natal's proletariat. Indeed, two out of eleven Indian women were reported to be economically active, or more than twice the corresponding figure for white females. However, the prevalence of unpaid employment on white plantations and farms for the wives and daughters of indentured labourers, implies that the Indian female labour force participation rate was in fact probably much higher for example, than the 21 per cent of all females shown by the 1891 census figures.

The role played by Indian women in Natal's economy seems to have decreased slightly between 1891 and 1904, while, as indicated in the previous chapter, that of white women increased. (During this period, the percentage of Indian women who were economically active fell to 18 per cent.) This fall was largely due to the declining importance of agriculture as a sector of Indian employment, which was particularly marked in the case of Indian women. As can be seen from Table 6.3 and Table 6.4, whereas in 1891 over eight out of every ten economically active Indian women were agricultural labourers, fewer than two in every ten were engaged in that occupation in 1904. This shift out of essentially field labour was partially matched by a rapid move of Indian

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107. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1903, p. 14.

women into manufacturing, construction and mining, as general labourers. Unlike white women, Indian women do not seem to have been active in homecraft activities such as dressmaking. White women, on the other hand, did not share the experience of industrial labour under factory conditions, or heavy manual work which Indian women increasingly came to know, as the twentieth century dawned. Before the First World War, manufacturing in Natal had not really come into its own as a leading sector in the economy. Nevertheless, there were 415 mechanised power-driven factories in Natal in 1904. Altogether, there were 794 industrial undertakings in the colony.<sup>(108)</sup> They employed a labour force of 29 111 persons of whom 3 057 were female. Of the latter, a mere 162 were whites compared to 2 895 blacks. No distinction is made between Indian, African and "coloured" in the statistics of industrial employment for 1904, but it is likely that many of the two and a half thousand Indian women listed as general labourers in the occupational census would have been employed in manufacturing.<sup>(109)</sup>

The black female industrial labour force was concentrated in Durban and Umgeni and the sugar-growing areas of Inanda, Alexandra County and Lower Tugela. The types of industries in which black women were employed is given in descending order of importance in the following table extracted from the census of 1904:

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108. Only undertakings producing goods of a total value of or above £100 per annum were included. The balance of 379 were not power-driven by steam, oil or electric engines. Forty-five were wind or water powered, twelve animal powered and 322 used manual labour exclusively.
109. The number of permanent Indian female factory employees, however, probably did not exceed 1 000 as this level was only exceeded a decade later, although the casual Indian female labour force in manufacturing was consistently significant.

TABLE G  
BLACK FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN NATAL

<u>Type of Industry</u>	<u>Number of black female workers</u>	<u>Type of power used</u>	
		<u>Steam, oil, electric engines</u>	<u>Wind, water, animal, manual</u>
Sugar factories	1 764	31	3
Tea and coffee factories	445	10	2
Brick yards	149	58	27
Quarries and stone-breaking works	128	11	23
Coal mines	116	20	2
Tobacco, cigar and snuff factories	72	6	14
Match factories	62	4	-
Corn mills	38	49	26
Bread, biscuit and confectionery factories	29	9	42
Other	92	217	240
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2 895</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>379</b>

A very small proportion of Indian women were in the services sector. There was no Indian equivalent to the legion of white nuns, teachers, nurses, governesses and domestic servants. In fact, Indian domestic servants, dhobbies, laundrymen and gardeners were more often male than female. Only 663 Indian women worked in services in 1904 as opposed to 3 700 white women. Indian women had also not made any headway in commerce and finance. Most of the women in that occupational category

were hawkers of fresh produce, while some were storekeepers and assistants. Indian males, on the other hand, were increasingly being employed as bookkeepers and commercial clerks, both in the private sector and by the municipal corporations - a pattern which has persisted to this day.

In comparing the dependent and unemployed components of the Indian and white female populations, the sharpest contrast is found in the small number of Indian girls attending school. There were fewer than 400 Indian female school children in 1904, compared to more than 8 000 white schoolgirls. The Indian 'unoccupied' class was correspondingly larger and its male element included a number of officially recognized unemployed. The extent of the unemployment problem for females willing and able to work, however, is harder to establish from the available evidence and in the face of prevailing attitudes amongst Indians and whites that a woman's place was in the home.

Given this prevailing ideal, it is necessary, in conclusion, to examine the status of Indian women within the domestic sphere. Because of the scarcity of Indian women in the colony from 1860, there is much evidence to show that amongst Indian men there was a desire for the authorities to register and enforce marriages, to curtail adultery and desertion. Giving evidence to the Coolie Commission in 1872, Rangassamy, a hotel-keeper at Verulam, spoke generally on the problem of female scarcity, the marriage question and the need for controlling legislation. He stated that :

As to marriages, among the Coolies we first imported too many males were single and the scarcity of females caused many debauches, and in many cases they committed suicide; therefore I consider to stop this, when they agree to marry, the agreement should be drawn by the Coolie Agent, in the Coolie Office. After they agree to marry; if either party refuse to marry, the Coolie Agent should punish the guilty person. If a woman commits adultery, she should be punished by cutting off her hair, and ten days' imprisonment, and

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cautioned that if she goes to another man, she must pay to the first husband ten pounds. The adulterer should be fined five pounds, and be imprisoned for twenty days, and get twelve lashes. The wife should be imprisoned until she repaid the money, or went back to her husband.(110)

Clearly little joy was derived for women from their scarcity value. Indian men were anxious to minimize their disadvantage created by the sexual imbalance and were given a sympathetic ear by the authorities frequently at the women's expense. According to Government Notice Number 84 of 1873, the Protector could hear cases of breach of promise of marriage, for example, which, it was said, "may be decided ... in a summary manner, or by arbitration." There could be no appeal against his decision. The Protector was also empowered to adjudicate in cases of "... seducing, or cohabiting, or committing adultery with the wives of others; or enticing or abducting unmarried Indian immigrant girls under sixteen years old from the custody of their parents or lawful guardians...."(111) The Protector also had powers with regard to divorce which, although a rare occurrence amongst Indians in general, was an escape rarely afforded the unhappily-married or cruelly-treated Indian wife. In his 1877 Report, the Protector stated that his authority in this regard and the punishments associated with such offences (more harsh on women than men in many respects) had proved a successful deterrent.(112)

The Wragg Commission of 1885-87 dealt at length with the subject of marriage and divorce. The Commissioners pointed out that before 1872 there were no laws in force in the colony by which the marriages of Indian immigrants were recognized or regulated. This, combined with the disproportion between the sexes, led to difficulties arising out of these 'informal unions'. According to Law 12 of 1872, it was required that the Protector of Indian Immigrants compile a register of all Indian immigrant women in the colony, entering into it whether they were married, single or

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110. Report of the Coolie Commission ... 1872, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 139.

111. Reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 173.

112. Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, 1877, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.), op.cit., p. 244.

'living in concubinage'.<sup>(113)</sup>

In 1875 the Protector reported 1 539 women registered as married, 697 as single and 56 living in concubinage. Qualifying these figures, the Protector went on to state :

Those entered as 'single' include many aged widows and respectable persons, but the majority are no doubt dissolute and abandoned characters. It is not, of course, supposed that registration has put a stop to adultery among the Indians, but at least it affords the means of establishing the validity of their marriages and thereby facilitates a prosecution for adultery if committed. The best effect, however, is that it has certainly raised the women as a class; it has given married women a proper status, making them respectable in the eyes of the men, and thereby raising their own self-respect.<sup>(114)</sup>

This statement reflects the values of the Protector rather than Indian men and women, and what he neglected to mention was the fact that a legalized marriage was only open to those Indians who could afford a £5 marriage licence.

Between 1873 and 1886, 4 971 marriages between Indians in Natal were registered. In addition, there were twenty-seven polygamous marriages registered of which twenty-five were between Hindus. In 1886 it was stated that there were 4 047 married Indian women in the colony, 3 182 of whom were free and 865 of whom were indentured.<sup>(115)</sup> This seems to indicate that the opportunities for a stable family life under conditions of indenture were few, but that upon becoming 'free', Indians were relatively keen to legalize their unions.

Act 25 of 1891 saw the passage of further legislation with regard to Indian marriages. Section 71 stated that "No ceremony, religious or

113. Report of the Indian Immigrants Commission, 1885 - 1887, reprinted in Meer, Y.S., (ed.) op.cit., p. 259.

114. Ibid., p. 261.

115. Ibid. (It should be noted that these figures exclude 'passenger' Indians).

otherwise, either before or after the registration under the provisions of the last section, shall be necessary as far as this colony is concerned, for the validity of any marriage so registered."<sup>(116)</sup> As pointed out by E. Nundy in 1902 in a pamphlet on the law relating to Hindu marriages, the defect in the law was that religious rites had no legal value and thus the problems of breach of promise or adultery were not ameliorated. Not that this author held Hindu marriage ceremonies in high value, stating that :

... they consist of merely the beating of drums, and the making of discordant noises for the space of twelve or twenty-four hours to the annoyance of European and other neighbours.(117)

Nevertheless, he did draw attention to the practice of men having to purchase young brides from their parents and to the existence of unscrupulous parents who, following a marriage of their daughter by religious rites, would take her away and marry her to someone else, for an additional fee, by registration. In many cases, these daughters were below thirteen years, the legal marriageable age. Nundy reported that :

In Verulam alone, I am informed that ten marriages were solemnized in the month of August last, according to the religious rites of the respective parties. In two cases only the girls were approaching the legal age, viz.: thirteen; the rest were from ten to twelve years of age. None of the marriages have yet been registered.(118)

In this regard, the colonial government was in a difficult position in view of the fact that the Government of India strongly deprecated interference with the customs and rites of Indian immigrants. Nevertheless, it is clear that the custom of child-marriage arranged between parents was given an unsavoury edge by the situation created by sexual imbalance amongst Indians in the colony.

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116. E. Nundy, The Law Relating to Indian (Hindu) Marriages - Its Defects and Abuses (1902), p. 4.

117. Ibid., p. 13.

118. Ibid., p. 6, (Emphasis in the original).

Reference to Table 2.2 in the Appendix shows that from 1866 to 1911, males consistently outnumbered females although the proportion of women to men tended to rise over time. In 1866 the ratio was 29 females to 100 males. This rose to 46 females in 1876, 60 in 1891 and 66 in 1911. Thus sexual imbalance was still very marked in 1911, whilst at the same time for whites the ratio had improved to 87 females to every 100 males.

According to the 1891 census, the proportion of married women in the total female population was higher amongst non-indentured Indian women than amongst white women. Of Indian women, 52 per cent were married, 45 per cent unmarried and 3 per cent were widowed. The corresponding percentages for white women were 33 per cent married, 63 per cent unmarried and 4 per cent widowed. The higher frequency of marriages amongst Indian women can be attributed to the lower age at which they were married and the greater scarcity of women in the Indian population. Indentured Indians were less likely to be married than either white women or non-indentured Indians due to the barrack-like housing in which they were compelled to live and due to their lesser ability to afford the solemnization of marriage either by religious rites or by official registration.

Marriage was held as an ideal state by Indians in the colonial period, and yet it was a state deprived to many of their number by poverty and the abject living conditions associated with forced labour in the colony. When possible, marriage was entered into readily and undoubtedly proved a refuge from sexual harassment and exploitation for many women and girls. Indian men, although disadvantaged as members of Natal's proletariat and although suffering under the impact of gender imbalance in the colony, were frequently better off than the women, not only in terms of earning capacity and the legislation governing their personal lives, but possibly with regard to sexual relations as well. In addition to the sexual harassment they gave to Indian women, they also availed themselves of the wives and daughters of African men. Complaints of this nature were heard by the Natal Native Affairs Commission of 1906/7 from African men who were interviewed and particularly guilty in this regard,

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seemed to be Indian traders in the up-country districts. Clearly, like whites, these men used their greater sophistication and authority or their power as storekeepers offering credit, to exploit socially and economically disadvantaged African women and girls. This legacy of sexual harrassment helped lead to a more enduring legacy of racial antagonism between Africans and Indians in Natal in the first half of the twentieth century. This racial dimension of essentially class antagonism, with regard to the sexual exploitation of African women by Indian men at least, reached its apogee in the 1949 riots in Durban.

It is clear from the above that Indian women did not always face a happy future when choosing a life of indenture in colonial Natal, and efforts by their descendants to elevate their material and social position were constantly thwarted by government legislation. Nevertheless, the Indian community came to contribute much to the growth of the colony - not only in terms of capital accumulation, by virtue of their role as forced labourers, but as independent peasants, petty traders and merchants. In addition to labour force participation, therefore, credit should be given to those early Indian women who, despite an unpromising beginning and in the face of incredible odds, worked towards the re-establishment of cultural cohesion in a strange land in order to carve out for themselves and their descendants a niche in a hostile and oppressive environment.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

From the evidence gathered for this work, a number of implications can be drawn with regard to the role and position of women in the political economy of colonial Natal. Given the broad and complex nature of this topic, some of the conclusions drawn, both empirical and theoretical, are necessarily tentative. It is hoped, nevertheless, that this study will provoke not only interest in the subject of women in Natal's history, but will demonstrate the value and necessity for historical understanding of incorporating a consideration of women into an analysis of the past. Women, after all, represent over half the world's population and it is a sad reflection on the attitudes and institutions of society that, until recently, they have been consistently absent from the pages of traditional history writing.<sup>(1)</sup>

Despite the difficulties of using theoretical tools developed for advanced western capitalism when studying a pre-industrial and colonial social formation where class relations are complicated by those of race, not to mention gender, this does not suggest that a materialist analysis should be abandoned. On the contrary, this approach not only enhances historical study, but the degree of theoretical sophistication which has been reached within the marxist discourse comfortably accommodates pre-industrial and colonial social formations and allows for on-going debate and refinement.

Given the early roots of segregation in South Africa and the all-pervasive nature of apartheid ideology today, it is easy for historians to fall foul of absorbing or demonstrating racist preconcept-

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1. No attempt has been undertaken in this chapter to make use of the practice of vide supra. To do so would only lead to unnecessary confusion given the fact that this conclusion also involves extensive discussion and a consideration of the theoretical implications which can be drawn from the findings presented in Chapters Three, Four and Five. For this reason, when evidence discussed elsewhere in the text is referred to, only the Chapter number will be given.

tions, often unconsciously or in spite of efforts to avoid doing so. Social commentators and historians, not only pluralists but sometimes including radicals as well, often emphasize what is different between racial groups in South Africa, rather than what is common amongst them. Further, some revisionist researchers of the hitherto neglected history of the other side of the frontier, have been guilty of ethnographic tendencies in their approach. The pluralist approach is not only evident in social studies but in the study of economics as well. Economists and economic historians have frequently attempted to explain South Africa's economic development in terms of the watertight separation of the 'traditional' indigenous economy and the 'modern' imported economy, that is, in terms of the theory of economic dualism.

Whilst it is considered unsatisfactory to focus on the history of any group independently of the whole historical milieu, it is one of the tragic realities of the historical legacy of South Africa, as well as its present inequalities and injustice, that the racial dimension must inevitably form a significant part of a study, even a materialist study, of the present social formation and its antecedents. What must be recognised are the dangers and limitations of an approach which only gives prominence to the racial dimension in South African history, without paying due attention to among other things, economic imperatives. Further, the same dangers and limitations are inherent in a study of gender relations and the position of women if this does not also include an understanding of socio-economic aspects as well as the spatial and temporal dimensions of their experience in a particular conjuncture.

With these considerations in mind, it is believed necessary to review the position of African, white and Indian women separately and jointly; that is, how they stood within their own group and in the political economy itself. Further they should be reviewed in terms of both internal and external determinants in the development of the political economy of colonial Natal. Thus their status and role is considered in terms of the social and cultural groups to which they belonged as well as in relation to the colonial social formation itself. Where women of each group stood

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with regard to the social structure as a whole, however, frequently determined the way in which they reacted towards each other and, thus, the points of interaction between them must be viewed in this light. It is also important to consider the nature of patriarchal ideology as it developed in the colonial setting, and how this articulated with racist ideology and class conflict, in the light of the impact of the colonial state.

With regard to African women, it has been argued that under pre-colonial conditions the Nguni represented a class society based on the ownership of private property, namely cattle. Because cattle were exclusively in the hands of men, this put women in a position of dependence in relation to men who controlled material wealth and the means of production. In addition, women's unequal status was grounded in biological capacity which accorded men greater mobility. Women, due to their reproductive functions, were necessarily assigned roles which did not entail movement far from the homestead and which enabled them to perform their child-bearing and child-rearing roles along with work in subsistence production. This biologically-determined differentiation manifested itself in a sexual division of labour within Nguni society, whereby men assumed the functions of hunting, warfare, management and decision-making and women were the cultivators and reproducers.

It has been submitted, further, that this rigid sexual division of labour and their subordinate status which derived from the social surplus being appropriated by men alone, was reinforced by ideological conditioning, conducted by women as well as men. A complex system of avoidances and taboos, as well as transition rites, when taken together, served to ensure male tutelage and female subordination. In the same way, the spheres of male activity were accorded more social, economic and political significance than the part played by women in subsistence production and reproduction. Ultimately, it was the holding of cattle by men which determined the relations of production. These were reinforced by symbolic notions and practices surrounding cattle, which legitimized men's control over women's labour and fertility.

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Despite this position of subordination and the variety of inequalities experienced by women in pre-colonial Nguni society, the fabric of social and economic organization provided security for all members at every stage of their productive and unproductive lives. When cattle were exchanged for a bride on marriage, not only were her labour and her reproductive potential being bargained for, but she was, in addition, guaranteed life-time social and economic security within the patrilineal homestead. Further, her labour, though restricted to domestic duties and cultivation, was still considered to be publicly productive. Although the sexual division of labour was rigidly enforced, and although the persistent strength of customary patriarchal ideology continued to reinforce this as well as male tutelage, patterns did alter in response to changing conditions. In the face of the devastation experienced as a result of the mfecane, for example, the sexual division of labour was undermined, although it was rapidly reconstituted once peaceful conditions prevailed.

The incorporation of the Nguni into the capitalist periphery, as members of an African peasantry, dramatically affected the status of women. The most significant material force influencing women's economic role was the technological innovation of the ox-drawn plough. This effectively excluded women from certain areas of the production process due to the taboos surrounding women's access to cattle. Further, the efforts of settlers, and particularly missionaries, to instil into men a protestant work ethic and into women a belief in the virtues of domesticity, led to an ambivalence in the status and function of Nguni women. During this phase of the rise of an African peasantry, the role of women, and particularly those associated with successful peasant production, was increasingly marginalized. This was not only due to the spread of technological changes but to increased capital accumulation, the growth of private property and the prevalence of tenancy agreements which were conducted between white landlords or officials, and African men. Despite the indignation expressed by missionaries, settlers and colonial officials as to the degradation of Nguni women and their role as female

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slaves to idle, cattle-loving men, it is argued that the motivation behind the ideological onslaughts and legislation concerning women was as much an effort to undermine the relations of production associated with the lineage mode as to elevate the status of African women. Access to the means of production was attacked by land legislation and taxation. Equally important were the social practices which held the productive process together, and thus the attack on polygamy and lobola assisted in weakening the potential of the peasantry to reproduce itself. This irreversibly damaged the future security of women in Nguni society.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the process of proletarianization was accelerated by the growing success of Shepstone's land policy which meant that whilst the African population grew, the land base on which they were forced to rely remained the same. Cattle disease and increasing cash needs combined with this to force many African men into wage labour. Women were prevented, by customary patriarchal ideology, to leave the subsistence sector and the proportion of African women in employment was small. As men became oscillating migratory labourers, women were left in the subsistence sector to depend on a diminishing and deteriorating land base to assume productive and managerial function not undertaken before. In most cases, hoe culture was reverted to, both because cattle numbers had become so severely depleted, and because women were customarily prevented from working with cattle.

This is considered to be of great significance when explaining the decline of the African peasantry, and has been neglected in most literature concerned with subsistence or peasant agricultural production. Houghton, for example, has argued that "The absence at any one time of about half the able-bodied male population has led to further decline in the agricultural productivity of the reserves."<sup>(2)</sup> However, in his discussion of attempts by missionaries and government to develop agricultural technology, he has pointed out that instruction in farm work

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2. D. Hobart Houghton, The South African Economy (1967), p. 69.

was directed at males alone.<sup>(3)</sup> No attempt was made to relate these two phenomena, or to question the wisdom of educating men in technological skills which would be used in the rural periphery, when their destiny lay as wage labourers in the industrial centres. Bundy, whilst correctly emphasizing the underdevelopment of the South African peasantry, has considered external determinants to the detriment of an adequate understanding of the labour process,<sup>(4)</sup> something which is illuminated by a consideration of the sexual division of labour within the lineage mode of production and by an understanding of the impact of colonialism and proletarianization on peasant production. It is argued here that whilst proletarianization and peripheralization predominated as causes for the decline of the peasantry in Natal, this process was aided and abetted by increased reliance on women's labour and management in the subsistence economy. Without technical skill and material resources and inhibited by the persistence of customary patriarchal ideology, women necessarily reverted to the methods of production with which they were most familiar, which rendered them uncompetitive cultivators in the face of increased proficiency and competition from both white and Indian producers. It is clear, therefore, that it was a process of semi-proletarianization with mainly the men engaging in wage labour on an oscillating migratory basis and the women remaining as subsistence producers in the rural economy. This raises problems as to the class position of African women as this process took place.

It is necessary at this stage, therefore, to confront the issue as to whether the class position of women is autonomous or whether it is derived, either from their fathers or from their husbands. If women are workers, property-owners or employers of labour, their class position is unambiguous. If, however, their position within the division of labour renders them producers of use value alone, (for the daily reproduction of their husband's labour power and the reproduction of the labour force in

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3. Ibid., p. 70.

4. C. Bundy, op.cit.

the case of the wives of the proletariat and producers for and reproducers of the capitalist class in the case of bourgeois wives), the issue is more problematic. The question of married women who are not paid workers represents the kernel of the domestic labour debate. The family unit under capitalism differs from that under pre-capitalist society. In the latter case, the family depends directly for its subsistence upon the productive work of all its members, rather than upon a wage earned by one or several of them. Housework or subsistence production under capitalism, on the other hand, represents the production of use values for private consumption from commodities purchased with the wage and it has become the almost exclusive province of women.

The debate concerns the part played by this labour in the daily reproduction of the husband's labour power. The question is whether this is productive or unproductive labour, and the answer has implications for the class location of married women or for daughters not engaged in wage labour. The most common assumption is that the family is the basic unit of the class system, an assumption which has been challenged by a number of marxists and marxist feminists engaged in the domestic labour debate and concerned with female wage labour under capitalism. As argued, in Chapter Two, women do not have to constitute a separate class in order to have a class position in their own right. The notion of derived class is not only confusing but unnecessary because women, like men, stand in some sort of relation to the mode of production.

The problem is better understood when the position of the family and the role of its members is considered in relation to the social formation as a whole. In pre-capitalist society, such as that of the Nguni, production and consumption of the means of subsistence are not separate and therefore reproduction of labour power is embodied within the unit of social production. Under capitalism, the nuclear or extended family system demonstrated a number of people dependent for support on the wage of one or several adult family members. At the same time, they are all dependent on unpaid domestic work performed by women. Although the family system has its roots in pre-capitalist society, its form changes

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from one mode of production to another and over time within one particular social formation. As pointed out by M. McIntosh, the state can "initiate or guide changes in the family household system in relation to capital's need for the labour power of married women as well as in relation to the reproduction of the class in general."<sup>(5)</sup> The state can also initiate a move from one set of family relations to another. In this regard, the colonial state, by attacking customary kinship relations among the Nguni, guided and initiated changes in the relations of production of the lineage mode in order to force African males into wage labour and to minimize the cost of the reproduction of the African proletariat.

Under pre-colonial conditions, although a sexual division of labour existed and although African women stood in a relationship of dependence and subordination vis-a-vis men, there was a basic unity between the production of the means of subsistence and the reproduction of labour power. What occurred under colonialism, was an outright attack not only on the means of production but also upon the pre-colonial relations of production. The extent of these efforts varied over time. Due to the desire for mainly adult male labour, however, as well as the strength of customary patriarchal ideology which prevented African women from entering the wage labour force in large numbers, a process of semi-proletarianization resulted. For much of the nineteenth century, efforts were made to separate African women from the means of production as well, though on a much smaller scale. This can be seen from the efforts, for example, of the Superintendency of Native education to train girls for domestic service. By the turn of the century, however, there was less concern in this regard and African males continued to predominate in the urban centres and in the domestic service sector. As late as 1946, when the first official report on domestic servants was made, it was found that in Natal, in contrast to the other provinces,

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5. M. McIntosh, "The State and the Oppression of Women", in Kuhn, A. and Wolpe, A., (eds) Feminism and Materialism (1978), p. 279.

there were more African male servants than females.<sup>(6)</sup>

This semi-proletarianization of the African population during the period under review, meant that the family was still in possession of the means of production from which it obtained a proportion of its subsistence. In this way, the production of the means of subsistence was tied to the reproduction of labour power and further, the rate of surplus value for employers of African labour was increased, because male wage workers could be paid below the value of labour power. It is interesting to note, in respect of the foregoing argument, that in 1852 the Kafir Commission demonstrated the intention of the colonial state and those it represented of forcing the African population, but particularly the men, off the land and into wage labour, by attacking the institutions of lobola and polygamy and imposing on them the Victorian ideal of the monogamous, nuclear family. However, by the time of the 1881 Report of the Natal Native Commission, and even more significantly, by the time of the 1906 Native Affairs Commission, official attitudes had changed. There was a great deal of sympathy expressed towards African men who considered themselves injured by the loss of lobola which often resulted from the operation of the Natal Native Code and its amendments. By this time it had been realized that more advantageous than the total unviability of the lineage mode of production was the continued existence of the pre-capitalist subsistence sector which would ease the problem of the maintenance of order and control, but more important, would enhance capital accumulation in the colony. Thus, although African women were not proletarianized as such, their class position can be understood in terms of the way in which their labour in the subsistence sector increased surplus value for capital. In this way, too, the articulation of the pre-capitalist and capitalist modes within the colonial social formation can be understood.

With regard to white women in the colony, it has been shown, in Chapter Four that in terms of active labour force participation, their role was also minimal. A few exceptional women apart, remunerated economic activities were confined to

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6. Report on the Wages of Domestic Servants, U.G. 46-1946.

spheres related to the domestic role of women, as was the case in Britain at the time. Although there were a substantial number of women who were members of the working-class, engaged in the service sector particularly, given the scarcity of women in the colony they frequently married and gave up wage labour for the family hearth. Further, by virtue of their racial affiliation to the white ruling class, it has been shown that material disadvantage was reduced to a minimum, for example by the provision of hostels and creches for white working women.

Although they may have started out as proletarians, therefore, over time the majority of white women became unambiguous members of the ruling class. As with the African women, it should be noted that in respect of white women the notion of derived class is unnecessary. White women, though rarely engaged in socially necessary labour, stood in some sort of relationship to the capitalist mode of production in its nineteenth century colonial form. Further, it should be borne in mind that the relations of production have ideological and political components as well as economic ones. Women, therefore, can be conceived of as either members of the proletariat or as part of the bourgeoisie and can be treated as such by the institutions of society and in terms of the ruling ideology. Women, too, have a particular class consciousness. Whilst it may be true that this is often a pale reflection of that of their husbands or fathers, however ideologically conditioned, it is a class consciousness nevertheless. To deny this is to rob women of their individual will and to deprive them of historical agency. Further, it suggests that every family member not engaged in socially necessary labour, be they the aged, sick, disabled or unemployed, derive their class position from the male family breadwinner. In colonial Natal, even those women who were engaged in wage labour or who for other reasons might not be considered as members of the capitalist class except through their husbands' class positions, usually identified with the ruling ideology and demonstrated a bourgeois class consciousness even though, more often than not, this might be expressed in racial terms. Representatives of white women in colonial Natal were not so much the working women or the members of the Girls' Friendly Society but rather

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the women described in the pages of T.H. Lewis' Women of South Africa, such as Mrs. Natalie Acutt, wife of Courtney, and daughter of James Saunders, brought up on Tongaat Sugar Estate and educated at home by a governess;<sup>(7)</sup> or Mrs. Jessie Coventry, wife of George, a farmer in the Klip River County. She was reported to have been devoted to her domestic duties, gardening and poultry-raising although it was acknowledged that she had "strenuous experiences in the early days as a pioneer."<sup>(8)</sup>

As pointed out in Chapter Two, although women may share the same class position as the men in their households, this need not necessarily be so. At the same time, women should not be kept apart so that they constitute a class in themselves as this can lead to what was termed the "ghettoization of women's position." To reiterate the argument of West, "If married men and women share broadly similar class positions by virtue of their relation to the mode of production, then women as such do not constitute a class."<sup>(9)</sup> Of over-riding importance when discussing the class position of white women in Natal, is the way in which the Victorian ruling ideology sustained the ideal of a nuclear or extended family system whereby the female family members and children were dependent for financial support on the income of a male family head. It has been argued by McIntosh that the capitalist state, by promoting this family form, managed to establish married women as a latent reserve army of labour and as producers of use value for the reproduction of labour power.<sup>(10)</sup> She does not extend her discussion to deal adequately with the issue of married bourgeois women. What needs to be explained, therefore, and particularly with reference to the case of colonial Natal, is that they were functional to capital in as much as they reproduced the capitalist class not only materially, but in terms of the part they played in the propagation of ruling ideology. It has been shown, for example, that white women were not only subject to ideological conditioning which tied them to domestic activities and family life, undisrupted by intellectual endeavour or economic management, but that

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7. T.H. Lewis, (ed.) op.cit., p. 13.

8. Ibid., p. 71.

9. J. West, op.cit., p. 226.

10. M. McIntosh, op.cit., p. 226.

this ideology was internalized so that they came to believe in their civilizing mission and took to heart the need to bear and raise the future sons and daughters of the Empire. Significant in this regard is the fact that the education of white girls in Natal was largely in private hands rather than in those of the colonial state, and, in addition, it was run mainly by women themselves. Nevertheless, that their conditioning was complete and that their efforts received official approval is demonstrated by the congratulatory remarks of Prime Minister Robinson, quoted in Chapter Four.

In Britain the ruling class acquired its general training in social attitudes in the family and through education. Natal's colonial ruling class, whilst tied by links of blood and patriotism to the metropole and to the Empire, formed a specific sub-culture and developed its own views of the colonial situation and the nature of proper behaviour within it. Administrators, merchants, traders, planters, farmers and educationalists had their own assumptions regarding their role within the colonial setting. Their ideas and values came to be melded together in a colonial ethic which was secured by processes of socialization and sanction. With regard to settler women, it was necessary that they upheld these values and promoted them. White bourgeois women were not imprisoned in the home as a latent reserve army of labour. On the contrary, labour requirements were adequately met by the proletarianization of the African population and by the introduction of indentured Indian labour. Rather, they were necessary for the reproduction of the ruling class both on a physical and ideological level. As shown in Chapter Four, white women were encouraged to take seriously their responsibility for future generations of colonists and were considered vitally necessary to prevent men from falling prey to the moral deterioration that might result from close contact with people of "inferior races".

White women virtually became the symbol of white supremacy, as is shown by the attitudes evident in the Report of the Commission appointed to

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enquire into Assaults on Women.<sup>(11)</sup> For this reason they were increasingly sheltered and protected in Natal at a time when women in England were gaining more freedom and autonomy as individuals. This did not mean, however, that the Victorian double standard was not operational in the colony. The Debates of the Legislative Assembly on the Women and Children's Protection Bill in 1899 clearly demonstrate that although it was a Bill introduced "in the interests of womanhood" (and for womanhood read white womanhood), it might more appropriately have been called the White Male Protection Bill. The main concern of the debate was not so much the safety of women, but rather, which women deserved protection. The Member Mr. Woods summed up the mood of the debate when he stated that "It is no use mincing the matter - what is wanted is to protect the virgin women of the colony."<sup>(12)</sup> His colleague Mr. Greene further argued that:

It is very nice - we are protecting the females, and I shall do my utmost to protect them, but I do not know why males are not to have some protection.... I think that the men ought to be entitled to plead that the female was a prostitute even if he did have carnal knowledge.<sup>(13)</sup>

The main issue of the debate was the raising of the age of consent, and what Mr. Greene and others were concerned about was not so much white women but the position of white men should they be convicted of having intercourse with a minor African or Indian girl. As shown in Chapters Four and Five, the role played by prostitutes in Victorian England was forced upon the women of the black working-class in the colony. It was argued that because African and Indian girls matured early it was difficult for white men to determine whether they had reached the age of consent. The hypocrisy embodied in colonial morality is summed up in the words of the Deputy Speaker who argued that if the proposals did not refer to white women alone:

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11. Report of the Legislative Assembly of the Colony of Natal, 3rd Session of the Second Parliament, 1899, p. 618.
  12. Debates of the Legislative Assembly of the Colony of Natal, 3rd Session of the Second Parliament, 1899, p. 618.
  13. Ibid., p. 617.

... you place the life and liberty of every white man in this country at the mercy of every coolie girl, and let that be distinctly understood. Further than that you open the door to a system of blackmail; at which the Indians of India are past masters ... there are already ample provisions made in the Indian Code (sic) and the Native Code for the protection of Indian and Native women.(14)

As shown in Chapters Three, Four and Five, however, this protection was largely a figment of the Deputy Speaker's imagination. Not only did African and Indian women suffer in this regard by virtue of justifications made on the grounds of racial stereotyping, but sexual stereotyping as well. This can be seen throughout the period. In the 1860s, for example, the missionary William Holden wrote of the African population "... the heads and countenances of the women are by no means equal to the men in intellectual appearance" and that "... a really pure girl is unknown among the raw kaffirs."<sup>(15)</sup> S. Caxton, writing in The African Monthly in 1906, argued that the complaints of the African men about their women were justified and that they spent too much time at drinking bouts "... where they soon became far more noisy and quarrelsome than their husbands...."<sup>(16)</sup> Most significant in this regard were the decisions taken by the Magistrate of Dundee in the first half of the 1890s concerning cases of rape or indecent assault. Where African women or girls were assaulted in the female huts where there were communal sleeping arrangements, punishment was fairly severe: six months imprisonment and twenty lashes. However, in the case of Matepe who was convicted in 1890 of assault with intent to commit rape, the prisoner was discharged because the complainant was travelling alone which "... appears to me to be a serious consideration as to whether such acts do not invite young men to attack girls...."<sup>(17)</sup> Even in cases where convictions were granted, the sentences were low compared to those laid out in Chapter Four, which applied to people not falling under Native

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14. Ibid., p. 614.

15. W.C. Holden, op.cit., p. 198.

16. S. Caxton, "The Native Problem in Natal", The African Monthly, III, p. 511.

17. Dundee Magistrates Reports, I/Dunn Minute Papers 1889 - 1890 3/1/1.

Law, suggesting that it was not considered necessary to afford African women protection when they did not fall under British legal practice.

As regards Indian women, it is not necessary to introduce additional evidence to show how they were stereotyped, not only racially but in gender terms as well. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, the fact that some Indian women who were forced to emigrate to Natal were desperate prostitutes and carriers of venereal disease, and the fact that many women contracted venereal disease on board ship due to sexual harrassment during the journey, led white colonists to typify them, almost universally, as women of loose morality who were guilty of appalling sexual conduct. This was despite the fact that the proportion of women to men introduced into the colony stood at only 29 per cent and despite the fact that employers often used scarce women as bait or punishment in their labour relations with Indian men. That Indian women managed in the face of such odds, and under conditions of privation and legislative disability, to maintain stable relationships and create family units is testimony not only to the strength of their culture and traditional patriarchal ideology but to the fact that their abject state, and the socio-economic disadvantages they were subjected to, did not prevent them from elevating themselves and their families to positions worthy of respect. The only evidence that this was ever accorded to them was the salacious comment of 'B.W.' writing on "The Indians in Natal" in The African Monthly. Of Indian womanhood he wrote :

Their womenkind give a bright touch of colour to the streets; the market-place in the early morning is a perfect kaleidoscope of colours, and resembles a brilliant flower garden resplendent with gorgeous blooms .... they proceed with their bargaining quietly amid the loud chatter and weird noises of the Kafirs. They display the same outward indifference to their surroundings as the male sex, and to look at them one wonders if they could betray a really healthy excitement.(18)

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18. 'B.W.', "The Indian in Natal", The African Monthly, III, p. 572.

Indian women were undoubtedly the most exploited group in colonial Natal. Without even the comfort of cultural security or a land base however reduced, they were unwelcome as settlers, victimized as labourers, and exploited as women.

The wives and daughters of traders apart, Indian women were unambiguously members of the colony's working-class. It was men who were desired as wage labourers and women were imported grudgingly. Further on the estates Indian women were not used as labourers as extensively as in other colonies and settlements where indentured labour was introduced. Nevertheless, they shared the class position of the indentured males for one important reason. Women who did not engage in wage labour were not paid and were not even given rations. When they did engage in task work they were given half rations and paid less than a living wage. As has been shown in Chapter Five, it was expected that their subsistence needs and those of their children could be met from the wages of the men or from subsistence production on garden plots that were provided by employers. The manner in which women were exploited under such conditions has been explained by C.D. Deere who has stated that :

... plantation owners recruit whole families for work on the plantations, using the wage labour of women and children only during the peak agricultural periods and relying on women's subsistence production of foodstuffs to feed the families from small land parcels which are provided to them. The male wage is thus held to an absolute minimum.(19)

It can be seen, therefore, that the incongruous efforts of the colonial state to promote the Victorian ideal of family stability amongst the Indian population, whilst at the same time believing Indian women to be promiscuous and refusing to enforce living conditions conducive to normal

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19. C.D. Deere, "Rural Women's Subsistence Production in the Capitalist Periphery", in Cohen, R., Gutkind, P.C.W. and Brazier, P., (eds) Peasants and Proletarians: The Struggles of Third World Workers (1979), p. 135.

family life, can be understood in the light of the role played by the family in capitalist accumulation. As with the African labourer, it was assumed that the Indian worker could be paid below the value of labour power: firstly because accommodation and rations were provided; and secondly because the labour of women would provide a proportion of the subsistence necessary to reproduce the expenditure of labour power by men. In this way, the unwelcome quota of Indian females was turned to the advantage of agrarian capital.

As Indians moved out of indenture, many remained as 'free' Indian labourers in the colony for, as shown in Chapter Five, from the 1890s until the end of the period under review, opportunities outside indenture were exaggerated by many of the settlers who feared Indian competition in small-scale farming, in commerce and as semi-skilled or clerical workers. Some Indians, both 'passenger' and 'free' came to form a commercial bourgeoisie. The majority who moved out of wage labour, however, formed part of the petty-bourgeoisie as peasant producers, retail traders and professionals. This process of material improvement and upward social mobility has been described by both F. Ginwala and M. Tayal.<sup>(20)</sup> Women engaged in all these activities along with men, with the exception of the professions. The cultural opposition to female education on the part of Indians, early marriage amongst them, and the indifference of the colonial authorities to Indian education in general and Indian female education in particular, meant that the era of the Indian professional woman had not yet dawned.

At this point, it is necessary to examine the influence of racist ideology and the impact of the colonial state on class relations in Natal. With regard to Indians, they were only welcome in the colony as workers. Their efforts to establish themselves outside of wage labour were resented, as was the competition that resulted. Although the forms of oppression for some groups of Indians differed from those affecting others, at the level of politics the commercial bourgeoisie and the

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20. F. Ginwala, op.cit.  
M. Tayal, op.cit.

petty-bourgeoisie acted as a fairly unified force, under the hegemony of the commercial bourgeoisie. As has been shown elsewhere, racial affiliation amongst Natal's Indian population did not totally transcend class boundaries. During the 1913 passive resistance campaign, for example, the grievances of indentured Indian workers were used when it was politically expedient, but were never fully represented by the Indian political leadership at the time.<sup>(21)</sup>

At the same time, the Indian bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie were an intermediate group who did not identify with, and were not embraced by, whites sharing the same class position. As pointed out in Chapter One, in settler societies there were always economic opportunities which major colonial owner-producers were unable or unwilling to exploit. It was to these opportunities, particularly the supplying of goods and services to the colony, that the Indian bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie applied themselves. For this reason, their activities were in harmony with the interests of large-scale agrarian and commercial capital but in conflict with those of small farmers and merchant capital. Ultimately, however, their interests, like those of the African peasantry, became subservient to those of the white ruling class in general. For whatever the differences between the dominant expatriate groups in the colonial political economy, Natal was to become a settler and plantation economy, managed and controlled by the hegemonic white class, this hegemony invariably being justified in terms of racist ideology.

The colonial state stood between the political and economic pressures which emanated from Britain on the one hand, and those of local society on the other. With limited exceptions, the means of production and distribution were largely controlled by private interests, and white private interests at that. Their position had to be taken into account as well as that of the metropole when policy decisions were made. The choices of the colonial state, therefore, were always between alternative strategies for capitalist development. It was not always easy for administrators to manage colonial affairs in terms of Natal's position as

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21. J.D. Beall and M.D. North-Coombes, op.cit.

part of the capitalist periphery and in terms of the various needs of local capital, and they were, therefore, constantly juggling to keep several balls in the air at once. Ultimately it was those with the greatest political clout whose interests were most readily met. The needs of Indians and Africans, who were deprived of a political voice by comparison with whites, were largely neglected by the decisions of the colonial state and were frequently discriminated against.

Thus it can be seen that to view Natal only in terms of its position as part of the periphery of the world capitalist system, whilst important, is also simplistic. It came to develop its own unique social formation demonstrating its own relations of production, its own ruling ideology and its own methods of mediating with the metropolitan state apparatus. Fundamental to this development were the ideologies of racism and patriarchy which, although emanating from Victorian Britain, also developed an exclusive form in response to the conjunctures of colonial Natal. Even though racism has been shown today to be conceptually ill-founded on the basis of a disproved pseudo-science, in the nineteenth century it was an ideology which had grown out of the need to justify the subordination and exploitation of darker-skinned people, and one which was believed and internalized by Victorian colonizers. Whilst not espousing a reductionist approach to the relationship between race and class, it can be seen that, in Natal, racism was institutionalized so that it became a mechanism through which class contradictions were translated or deflected. Nevertheless, class and race are not mutually compatible concepts. As has been shown above, racial categorization and discrimination existed in ways that did not cut across the production process, as can be seen, for example, by the operation of the Victorian double standard in the colony.

In the same way, patriarchal ideology (and its translation in the nineteenth century into the Victorian ideal of the family in which a male breadwinner provided the income and a female housewife provided unpaid domestic services), justified the contribution of the domestic sphere to capital accumulation, both in servicing the needs of capitalists or producers of surplus value and those of future agents of production, the

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children. However, as pointed out explicitly in Chapter Two, and as shown in the treatment of African, white and Indian women in Chapters Three, Four and Five, patriarchal ideology was not exclusive to capitalist relations of production, but existed in pre-capitalist conditions as well. What is clear, nevertheless, is that gender relations and the ideology governing women's behaviour and women's role differed under varying social formations. As with the ideology of racism, patriarchal ideology is not an equivalent concept to class and does not distort class relations. Its form alters, however, in response to the needs of the relations of production in a particular social formation (its functional dimension), whilst its fundamental precepts, rooted in biological determinism, remain unchanging (its reflective dimension.)

In colonial Natal, whilst all three groups of women stood in some sort of subordinate relationship with regard to their men, in terms of their situation within the political economy as a whole, the position of African, white and Indian women differed radically. Without being reductionist, the position of Natal's female groups can be tentatively characterized as follows. Initially, attempts were made to proletarianize African women, although these gave way to the intention of keeping them in the position of rural subsistence producers to minimize the cost of reproducing African male labour power. Indian women were introduced into the colony with reluctance and were used either as wage labourers or, like African women and for the same reasons, as subsistence producers. White women were welcomed in Natal as a means of elevating the condition of the white ruling class and of reproducing it. For all three groups of women, to move out of their assigned roles was considered deviant, particularly in the case of white women who were the preservers and symbols of the hegemony of the colonial ruling class.

The role of the colonial state in terms of gender relations is less obvious than the part it played with regard to conflicts of race and class. The reason for this can be seen from the comments of McIntosh who stated with reference to the capitalist state that:

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... one of the striking features of the situation is that the state 'intervenes' less conspicuously in the lives of women than of men, and when it does it appears to be done more benevolently. (22)

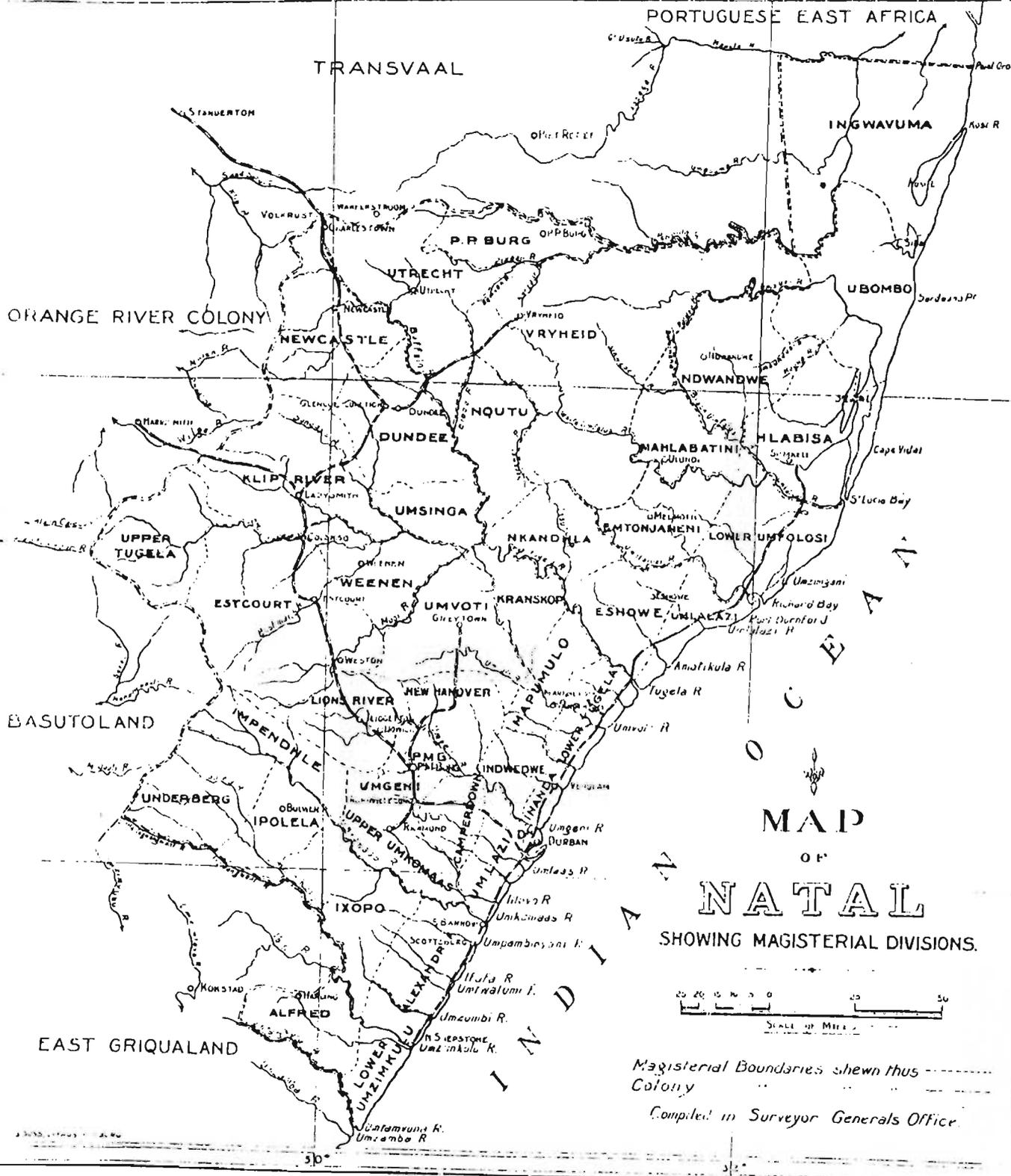
By recognizing and promoting the Victorian family ideal, the colonial state controlled the lives of women by relating to them solely through their men. When it intervened directly in their lives, for example, through legislation such as the Marriage Law of 1869, The Natal Native Code, Law 12 of 1872 or the Women and Children's Protection Bill the expressed concern was clearly one of ameliorating the unpleasant conditions to which it was believed women might be subjected. The reality, however, almost always betrayed less benevolent ideals.

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22. M. McIntosh, op.cit., p. 256.

MAP

COLONY OF NATAL 1904



STATISTICAL APPENDIX

TABLE 1      TOTAL POPULATION OF NATAL, 1852 - 1911

YEAR	WHITES	INDIANS & ASIATICS	"COLOURED"	AFRICANS	TOTAL
1852	7 269	...	...	112 988	120 617
1862	13 990	1 184	...	156 061	171 235
1866	16 963	5 041	...	170 855	192 859
1877	17 380	5 070	...	266 817	289 267
1876	21 045	9 751	...	252 024	282 829
1881	28 483	20 196	...	329 253	377 932
1887	37 437	30 345	...	374 915	442 697
1891	46 788	41 142	...	455 983	543 913
1897	49 110	53 370	...	528 337	630 817
1904(a)	87 776	100 749	6 450	608 527	803 502
1904(b)	97 109	100 918	6 686	904 041	1 108 754
1911(a)	88 815	139 742		666 060	894 617
1911(b)	98 114	133 439	9 092	953 398	1 194 043

(a) : Figures given for territory of Natal as constituted in 1891.

(b) : Figures given for Natal, the New Territory, annexed after the Anglo-Boer War and Zululand, annexed in 1897.

TABLE 2.1      WHITE POPULATION OF NATAL BY SEX, 1852 - 1911

YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1852	4 142	3 487	7 629	1886	20 231	17 206	37 437
1862	7 829	6 161	13 990	1891	25 787	21 001	46 788
1866	9 194	7 769	16 963	1897	27 282	21 828	49 110
1871	9 668	8 218	17 380	1904(a)	51 599	36 177	87 776
1876	11 302	8 943	20 245	1904(b)	56 758	40 351	97 109
1881	15 719	12 764	28 483	1911(a)	49 672	42 971	92 643
				1911(b)	52 495	45 619	98 114

TABLE 2.2      INDIAN POPULATION OF NATAL BY SEX, 1862 - 1911

YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1862	...	...	...	1891	25 686	15 456	41 142
1866	3 894	1 147	5 041	1897	31 577	21 793	53 370
1871	3 458	1 612	5 070	1904(a)	63 383	37 366	100 749
1876	6 650	3 101	9 751	1904(b)	63 497	37 421	100 918
1886	18 854	11 491	30 345	1911(b)	80 490	52 949	133 439

TABLE 2.3      AFRICAN POPULATION OF NATAL BY SEX, 1852 - 1911

YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1852	42 750	70 238	112 988	1886	170 406	204 509	374 915
1862	72 694	83 367	156 061	1891	216 589	239 394	455 983
1866	78 043	92 812	170 855	1897	255 564	272 773	528 337
1871	133 630	133 187	266 817	1904(a)	297 631	310 896	608 527
1876	121 699	130 325	252 024	1904(b)	426 766	477 275	904 041
1881	151 597	174 176	329 253	1911(a)	299 656	354 814	654 470
				1911(b)	430 179	521 629	951 808

TABLE 2.4      NUMBER OF FEMALES TO 100 MALES FOR WHITES AND INDIANS, 1891 AND 1904

WHITES	1891	1904	INDIANS	1891*1	1904
All Natal	81	73	All Natal	66	59
Boroughs & Townships	82	74	Boroughs & Townships	61	48
Rural Areas	81	72	Rural Areas	68	63
Lions River	53	74	Dundee	27	18
Klip River	63	75	Newcastle	33	42
Newcastle	66	70	Klip Rivier	43	35
T. of Ladysmith	72	77	T. of Newcastle	52	48
T. of Newcastle	74	90	T. of Ladysmith	53	45
Pietermaritzburg	87	85	Lions River	54	43
Durban	..	67	Pietermaritzburg	64	47
			Durban	62	49

\*1 Non-Indentured Indians only

TABLE 2.5      NUMBER OF FEMALES TO 100 AFRICAN MALES

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OFFICIAL ESTIMATES OF SEX RATIOS

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1852 Returns	164
1861 Returns	125
1891 Census	110
1904 Census	106
1911 Census	121
Zululand 1911	142

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TABLE 3.1 CONJUGAL CONDITION OF WHITE AND INDIAN WOMEN BY AGE GROUP  
ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS OF 6TH APRIL 1891

A. WHITE WOMEN

AGE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED AND DIVORCED	TOTAL
0 - 15	...	8 574	...	8 574
16 - 29	2 274	3 623	56	5 953
30 - 44	3 014	549	241	3 804
45 and over	1 437	176	705	2 318
Age Unspecified	61	52	21	134
TOTALS.	6 786	12 974	1 023	20 783(1)

(1) Excluding 218: "Condition not stated".

B. INDIAN WOMEN NOT UNDER INDENTURE

AGE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED AND DIVORCED	TOTAL
0 - 15	348	4 714	1	5 063
16 - 29	2 754	270	27	3 051
30 - 44	2 185	121	128	2 434
45 and over	441	48	229	718
Age Unspecified	275	19	11	305
TOTALS	6 003	5 172	396	11 571(2)

(2) Excluding 502: "Condition not stated".

C. INDIAN WOMAN UNDER INDENTURE

AGE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED AND DIVORCED	TOTAL
0 - 15	22	854	...	876
16 - 24	730	643	21	1 394
25 - 44	272	828	11	1 111
45 and over	1	21	...	22
TOTALS	1 025	2 346	32	3 403

TABLE 3.2 CONJUGAL CONDITION OF WHITE AND INDIAN WOMEN BY AGE GROUP  
ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS OF 17TH APRIL 1904A. WHITE WOMEN

AGE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED AND DIVORCED	TOTAL
0 - 15	1	14 762	...	14 763
16 - 30	5 626	6 880	114 (14)	12 634
31 - 45	6 492	1 324	463 (18)	8 297
46 and over	2 797	378	146 (6)	4 657
TOTALS	14 916	23 344	2 053 (38)	40 351

B. INDIAN WOMEN

AGE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED AND DIVORCED	TOTAL
0 - 15	1 319	15 245	10 (1)	16 575
16 - 30	11 216	1 277	167 (17)	12 677
31 - 45	5 570	456	331 (12)	6 369
46 and over	1 198	32	558 (12)	1 800
TOTALS	19 303	17 010	1 066 (42)	37 421

TABLE 3.3      SUMMARY CONJUGAL CONDITION OF WHITE, INDIAN AND "COLOURED"  
MALES ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS OF 17TH APRIL 1904

RACE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED & DIVORCED	PERCENTAGE OF MALES IN EACH RACE GROUP:		
				MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED & DIVORCED
Whites	17 153	38 408	1 197	30,2	67,7	2,2
All Indians	25 266	36 877	1 354	39,8	58,0	2,2
"Coloured"	948	2 562	100	26,3	70,9	2,8

TABLE 3.4      SUMMARY CONJUGAL CONDITION OF WHITE, INDIAN AND "COLOURED"  
WOMEN IN 1891 AND 1904

I: 1891

RACE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED & DIVORCED	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN EACH RACE GROUP:		
				MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED & DIVORCED
Whites	6 786	12 974	1 023	32,6	62,4	5,0
Free and Passenger Indians	6 003	5 172	396	51,9	44,7	3,4
Indentured Indians	1 025	2 346	32	30,1	69	0,9

II: 1904

RACE GROUP	MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED & DIVORCED	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN EACH RACE GROUP:		
				MARRIED	UNMARRIED	WIDOWED & DIVORCED
Whites	14 916	23 344	2 091	36,9	57,9	5,2
All Indians	19 303	17 010	1 108	51,6	45,5	2,9
"Coloured"	1 015	1 871	190	33,0	60,8	6,2

TABLE 4.1      URBAN-RURAL DISTRIBUTION OF WHITE POPULATION

YEAR	BOROUGHES & TOWNSHIPS			COUNTRY DISTRICTS		
	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1866	3 705	3 105	6 810	5 489	4 664	10 153
1876	4 767	4 359	9 126	6 535	4 584	11 119
1891	13 982	11 459	25 441	11 805	9 542	21 347
1904(a)1	30 228	22 387	52 615	18 966	13 595	32 561

1: Adjusted figures HM Troops and Shipping excluded.

TABLE 4.2      URBAN-RURAL DISTRIBUTION OF INDIAN POPULATION

YEAR	BOROUGHES & TOWNSHIPS			COUNTRY DISTRICTS		
	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1866	469	171	640	3 425	976	4 401
1876	1 119	581	1 700	5 531	2 520	8 051
1891	5 542	3 372	8 914	12 798	8 681	21 479
1904(a)	16 178	7 763	23 941	47 205	29 603	76 808

TABLE 4.3      URBAN-RURAL DISTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN POPULATION

YEAR	BOROUGHES & TOWNSHIPS			COUNTRY DISTRICTS		
	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1866	3 454	968	4 422	74 589	91 844	166 433
1876	4 282	1 120	5 402	117 417	129 205	246 622
1904(a)	30 730	3 360	34 090	266 901	307 536	574 437

TABLE 4.4 THE GROWTH OF TOWNS : PIETERMARITZBURG 1852 - 1904

YEAR	WHITE MALES	WHITE FEMALES	INDIAN MALES	INDIAN FEMALES	AFRICAN MALES	AFRICAN FEMALES	TOTAL
1852	838	686	...	...	700	192	2 416
1866	1 966	1 666	109	67	2 855	218	6 881
1874	1 726	1 533	62	37	1 269	237	4 864
1884	4 872	3 602	1 105	566	3 261	825	14 231
1904	8 134	6 952	3 588	1 692	8 060	1 614	30 130(1)

(1) Excluding 1 159 "Coloured"

TABLE 4.5 THE GROWTH OF TOWNS : DURBAN 1852 - 1904

YEAR	WHITE MALES	WHITE FEMALES	INDIAN MALES	INDIAN FEMALES	AFRICAN MALES	AFRICAN FEMALES	TOTAL
1852	619	516	...	...	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1866	1 739	1 439	360	104	599	750	4 991
1874	2 159	1 970		1 860		2 252	8 241
1889	5 308	4 721	2 153	2 700	6 000	2 000	22 802
1904	18 777	12 525	10 509	5 122	18 236	693	65 862(1)

(1) Excluding 1 980 "Coloured".

TABLE 4.6 URBAN PROFILE OF NATAL AS GIVEN IN BLUE BOOK FOR 1899

YEAR OF PROCLAMATION OR INCORPORATION, AREA, POPULATION, ROADS AND DWELLINGS									
Borough or Township	When founded or proclaimed as a Township	When incorporated as a Borough	Area in Acres	Population				Mileage of Roads*	Number of Dwellings
				Europeans	Indians	Natives	Total		
Pietermaritzburg	1839	1854	27,291	11,836	3,553	6,967	22,356	90	3,400
Durban	1835	1854	6,097	17,705	10,924	10,616	39,245	90	5,403
Newcastle	1881	1891	17,386	1,000	300	700	2,000	18	300
Ladysmith	1882	1899	16,877	2,200	1,200	1,400	4,800	12	430
Dundee	1896	....	5,000	1,100	300	1,000	2,400	21	320
Greytown	1896	....	10,274	600	100	350	1,050	12	234
TOTALS	....	....	82,925	34,441	16,377	21,033	71,851	243	10,087

\* Not including Roads maintained by Government.

P.T.O.

TABLE 4.6 Continued

UNALIENATED LANDS, FREEHOLD PROPERTY, RATES, GROSS ASSETS, DEBT, AND SINKING FUNDS									
Borough or Township	Extent of unalie- ated Lands	Estimated value of unalienated Lands	Freehold value of ratable Property	Rates - amount assessed in the £		Amount of Rates levied	Gross Assets of the Borough or Township	Net Debt	Sinking Fund
				General	Water				
	Acres	£	£	d.	d.	£	£	£	£
Pietermaritzburg	16,401	323,367	2,393,410	2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	27,424	680,107	402,000	31,526
Durban	3,968	829,154	5,626,695	2	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	58,611	2,128,598	969,000	131,673
Newcastle	15,899	12,990	134,341	2	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	1,300	38,162	15,000	...
Ladysmith	15,012	90,000	176,000	2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub>	2,600	131,000	28,000	...
Dundee	4,400	110,000	121,920	2	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	1,270	125,000	10,000	...
Greytown	571	2,100	88,020	1 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	...	643	20,479	...	...
TOTALS	56,251	1,367,611	8,540,386	...	...	91,848	3,123,346	1,424,000	163,199

TABLE 5.1      AREA OF LAND UNDER CULTIVATION BY WHITE AND INDIAN FARMERS AND AFRICAN CULTIVATORS, 1870 - 1899 (ACRES REAPED)

YEAR	WHITES	INDIANS	AFRICANS	TOTAL
1870	36 844	...	145 910	182 754
1875	35 806	...	156 002	191 808
1880	80 992	...	217 119	298 111
1890	85 861	...	305 377	391 238
1899	157 370	24 726	360 231	542 327

TABLE 5.2      CEREAL PRODUCTION BY WHITE AND INDIAN FARMERS AND AFRICAN CULTIVATORS, 1870 - 1899 (IN MUIDS)

YEAR	WHITES	INDIANS	AFRICANS	TOTAL
1870	124 358	...	500 081	624 439
1880	215 755	...	567 920	783 675
1890	252 880	...	959 142	1 212 022
1899	218 038	67 863	1 173 431	1 459 332

TABLE 5.3      DISTRIBUTION OF CATTLE OWNERSHIP BETWEEN WHITE FARMERS AND AFRICAN PASTORALISTS, 1870 - 1904 (NUMBER OF CATTLE)

YEAR	WHITES	AFRICANS	TOTAL
1870	121 678	378 467	500 145
1875	123 597	326 030	449 627
1881	140 683	379 907	520 590
1890	169 756	516 827	686 583
1899	155 456	122 077	277 533
1904(b)	314 756	343 159	657 915

(b) All Natal, including New Territory and Zululand

TABLE 5.4      AFRICANS IN SERVICE IN RURAL<sup>(1)</sup> NATAL, 1858 - 1904

YEAR	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1858	2 395	296	2 691
1866	...	...	8 975
1876	...	...	10 108
1887	...	...	14 006
1897	...	...	24 139
1904(a)	31 944	4 992	36 936
1904(b)	38 067	6 695	44 762

(1) Excludes Durban and Pietermaritzburg but includes servants in smaller towns like Ladysmith and Newcastle until 1897. 1904 figures refer to rural areas only.

TABLE 5.5      AFRICANS IN SERVICE IN URBAN AREAS, 1904 CENSUS

URBAN AREAS	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
All urban areas (a)	30 730	3 360	34 090
All urban areas (b)	31 679	3 537	35 216
Municipality of Durban	18 236	693	18 929
Municipality of Pietermaritzburg	8 060	1 614	8 674

(a) Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Ladysmith, Newcastle, Dundee, Vrulam, Greytown

(b) Includes Local Boards of Utrecht and Vryheid

TABLE 5.6      AFRICAN POPULATION RESIDING IN 'NATIVE AREAS', 1904 CENSUS

REGION	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
Natal as constituted in 1891	234 957	302 544	537 501
New Territory	38 091	48 820	86 911
Zululand	83 972	115 679	199 651
TOTALS	357 020	467 043	824 063

TABLE 5.7      AFRICAN WORKERS ON FARMS, CENSUS OF 1911

REGION	MALES	FEMALES	TOTALS
Natal as constituted in 1891	28 481	6 293	34 774
New Territory	4 211	2 759	6 970
Zululand	3 266	489	3 755
TOTALS	35 958	9 541	45 499

TABLE 6.1      OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE WHITE POPULATION, ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS OF 1891 PAYING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES	TOTALS
<b>1. AGRICULTURE</b>			
Farmers	2 779	58	
Farm servants and overseers	330	7	
	<b>3 109</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>3 174</b>
<b>2. MANUFACTURING</b>			
Bakers	84	5	
Brewers	8	1	
Confectioners	15	2	
Dressmakers, Milliners	...	258	
Seamstresses	...	23	
Tailors	104	6	
other (including mining 86)	2 206	...	
	<b>2 417</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>2 712</b>
<b>3. CONSTRUCTION</b>			
All categories	1 933	...	
	<b>1 933</b>	<b>...</b>	<b>1 933</b>
<b>4. COMMERCE &amp; FINANCE</b>			
Booksellers, Publishers	13	1	
Commercial clerks	1 139	4	
Dairymen	1	4	
Draper, Linen Drapers	97	6	
Shopkeepers, General Dealers	278	14	
Salesmen, Storemen	441	58	
Other	1 077	...	
	<b>3 046</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>3 133</b>
<b>5. TRANSPORT COMMUNICATIONS</b>			
Cab, Carrier, Omnibus & Trainway Services	136	1	
Telegraphists	55	2	
Telephone Services	...	2	
Transport riders	215	1	
Other	796	...	
	<b>1 202</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1 208</b>
CATEGORIES 1 - 5 Sub-Total c/f	<b>11 707</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>12 160</b>

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY		MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1 - 5	B/F	11 707	453	12 160
<b>6. SERVICES</b>				
(i)	Local Government	487	10	
(ii)	Defence	1 333	1	
(iii)	Missionaries	62	20	
	Monks, Nuns, Sisters & Charity	177	211	
	School masters, teachers	163	467	
	Nurse, monthly	...	109	
	Other Professional	667	...	
(iv)	Domestic servants (indoor)	33	404	
	Domestic servants (outdoor)	116	1	
	Laundressers	1	103	
(v)	Boarding House keepers	25	29	
	Barman, Barmaids	80	8	
	Hotel Inn Keepers	158	27	
	Photographers	21	3	
	Other	176	...	
		3 499	1 393	4 892
<u>TOTAL, ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION</u>		15 206	1 846	17 052
<b>7. DEPENDENT &amp; UNEMPLOYED</b>				
	Domestic Duties	...	8 938	
	Children at School	5 333	5 149	
	"Unoccupied class"	3 539	3 187	
	Not specified	1 442	1 877	
		10 314	19 151	29 465
		25 520	20 997	46 517(1)

(1) Excludes seamen in harbours.

TABLE 6.2      OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE WHITE POPULATION, ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS OF PAYING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
<u>1. AGRICULTURE &amp; FISHING</u>			
Dairy Farmers	15	116	
Fruit & Poultry Farmers	62	3	
Stock Farmers	22	...	
Farmers and Planters	6 434	268	
Farm Labourers & Cultivators	137	9	
Fishermen	100	...	
	<u>6 770</u>	<u>396</u>	<u>7 166</u>
<u>2. MINING</u>			
All categories	280	...	
	<u>280</u>	<u>...</u>	<u>280</u>
<u>3. MANUFACTURING</u>			
Bakers, Confectioners & Jam Makers	209	11	
Bookbinders, Printers, Publishers	498	7	
Dressmakers, Milliners, Tailors	264	656	
Other	3 808	8	
	<u>4 779</u>	<u>682</u>	<u>5 461</u>
<u>3. CONSTRUCTION</u>			
All categories	6 056	...	
	<u>6 056</u>	<u>...</u>	<u>6 056</u>
<u>4. COMMERCE &amp; FINANCE</u>			
Accountants	851	53	
Clerks	1 611	27	
Drapers and Assistants	305	109	
Managers (Commerce)	208	8	
Secretaries	44	7	
Typist & Shorthand writers	24	156	
Chemists	205	5	
Florists & Fruiterers	43	10	
Stationers	79	10	
Storekeepers	622	36	
Storekeepers' Assistants	958	294	
Other	3 418	20	
	<u>8 368</u>	<u>735</u>	<u>9 103</u>
CATEGORIES 1 - 5 Sub-Total c/f	<u>26 253</u>	<u>1 813</u>	<u>28 066</u>

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
Categories 1 - 5 b/f	26 253	1 813	9 103
<b>6. <u>TRANSPORT &amp; COMMUNICATIONS</u></b>			
Telephone Operators	...	26	
All other categories	3 742	3	
	3 742	29	3 771
<b>7. <u>SERVICES</u></b>			
(i) Local Government	2 818	11	
(ii) Defence	2 526	195	
(iii) Medical Practitioners	147	3	
Midwives	...	7	
Nurses	2	508	
Missionaries	118	103	
Religious Brother/Sisterhood	163	189	
School Teachers	276	709	
(iv) Artists, Actors, Musicians	153	157	
Barmen/maids	251	22	
Boarding Housekeepers	34	139	
Hotelkeepers	249	38	
Cooks	112	35	
Domestic Servants	120	963	
Governesses	...	290	
Housekeepers	...	86	
Laundrymen/women	12	42	
Matrons	...	46	
Stewards	189	18	
Waiters	55	45	
Photographers	83	16	
Gardeners	100	13	
Other	3 102	58	
	10 510	3 693	14 203
<b>TOTAL, ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE WHITES</b>			
	40 505	5 535	46 040
<b>8. <u>DEPENDENT &amp; UNEMPLOYED</u></b>			
Domestic Duties	...	19 798	
Children at School	8 206	8 266	
"Unoccupied Class"	6 800	6 456	
Not specified	511	295	
	15 517	34 815	50 332
	56 022	40 350	96 372 (1)

(1) Excludes seamen in harbour.

TABLE 6.3      OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE INDIAN\*  
POPULATION, ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS OF 1891 PAYING  
PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

\* Including Indentured Indians

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
<u>1. AGRICULTURE</u>			
Farmers (Fishermen : 8)	3 316	33	
Field Labourers (Indentured)	6 387	2 611	
	<u>9 703</u>	<u>2 644</u>	<u>12 347</u>
<u>2. MANUFACTURING</u>			
Bakers	19	4	
Basket Makers	15	5	
Dressmakers	...	2	
General Labourers	3 490	96	
Tailors	16	4	
Tobacco Manufacturers	34	1	
Other (including mining : 31)	100	...	
	<u>3 674</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>3 786</u>
<u>3. CONSTRUCTION</u>			
All categories	639	...	
	<u>639</u>	<u>...</u>	<u>639</u>
<u>4. COMMERCE &amp; FINANCE</u>			
Hawkers	261	81	
Storekeepers	597	11	
Storemen	233	3	
Other	321	...	
	<u>1 412</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>1 507</u>
<u>5. TRANSPORT &amp; COMMUNICATIONS</u>			
All categories	192	...	
	<u>192</u>	<u>...</u>	<u>192</u>
CATEGORIES 1 - 5 Sub-Total c/f	15 620	2 851	18 471

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
Categories 1 - 5 b/f	15 620	2 851	18 471
<b>6. SERVICES</b>			
(i) Local Government	156	...	
(ii) Medical attendants, nurse, midwives, Schoolteachers	3 35	9 3	
(iii) Domestic Servants (indoors)	270	193	
Domestic Servants (outdoors)	574	...	
Domestic Servants (indentured)	65	...	
Gardeners	1 254	69	
Washers	115	19	
Eating Housekeepers	22	1	
Other categories	500	...	
	2 994	294	3 288
<b>TOTAL, ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION:</b>	<b>18 614</b>	<b>3 145</b>	<b>21 759</b>
<b>7. DEPENDENT &amp; UNEMPLOYED</b>			
Domestic Duties	...	5 799	
Children at School	734	301	
(1) Unemployed(1)	4 396	4 321	
Unspecified	990	1 098	
	6 120	11 519	17 639
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>24 734</b>	<b>14 664</b>	<b>39 398(2)</b>

(1) Includes children under four

(2) Excluding seamen in harbour

TABLE 6.4 OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMICALLY, ACTIVE INDIAN POPULATION ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS OF 1904 - PAYING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO FEMALE EMPLOYMENT.

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
<b>1. AGRICULTURE</b>			
Farmers and Planters	3 235	52	
Cultivators	2 979	52	
Farm Labourers	12 691	3 451	
Fishermen	107	1	
	<b>19 012</b>	<b>3 556</b>	<b>22 568</b>
<b>2. MINING</b>			
All Categories	786	...	
	<b>786</b>	<b>...</b>	<b>786</b>
<b>3. MANUFACTURING</b>			
Basket Makers	47	8	
Cigar & Cigarette Makers	94	10	
Dressmakers	-	7	
General Labourers	11 384	2 415	
Other Categories	525	6	
	<b>12 050</b>	<b>2 446</b>	<b>14 496</b>
<b>4. CONSTRUCTION</b>			
All categories	1 161	6	
	<b>1 161</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1 167</b>
<b>4. COMMERCE &amp; FINANCE</b>			
Hawkers	1 377	110	
Fruiterers	140	11	
Storekeepers & Assistants	2 561	22	
Other Categories	858	2	
	<b>4 936</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>5 081</b>
<b>5. TRANSPORT &amp; COMMUNICATIONS</b>			
All categories	1 065	...	
	<b>1 065</b>	<b>...</b>	<b>1 065</b>
<b>CATEGORIES 1 - 6 Sub-Total c/f</b>	<b>39 010</b>	<b>6 153</b>	<b>45 163</b>

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
Categories 1 - 6 b/f	39 010	6 153	45 163
<b>7. SERVICES</b>			
(i) Local Government	665	2	
(ii) Defence	...	...	
(iii) Domestic Servants	1 701	431	
Dhobbies and Laundrymen	635	40	
Gardeners	3 486	158	
Cooks	453	4	
Waiters	655	3	
Nurses & Hospitals Attendants	22	15	
Teachers	66	4	
Other	817	6	
	8 500	663	9 163
<b>TOTAL, ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE INDIANS:</b>	<b>47 510</b>	<b>6 816</b>	<b>54 326</b>
<b>8. DEPENDENT &amp; UNEMPLOYED</b>			
Domestic Duties	2	17 200	
Children at School	1 843	397	
* "Unoccupied Class"	13 925	12 956	
Unspecified	134	52	
	15 904	30 605	46 509
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>63 414</b>	<b>37 421</b>	<b>100 835(1)</b>

\* Including Children Under 4 and not at School

(1) Excluding Seamen at sea (86)

TABLE 7.1(1)

SUMMARY OF CAUSES OF DEATH FROM OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RELATED  
DISEASES 1904 - 1909(2)

		1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909
Tuberculosis/Bronchitis/	European	164	144	179	146	139	116
	Indian	529	550	563	561	642	521
Diarrhoea/Dysentry/	European	164	122	139	116	93	75
	Indian	282	339	446	363	300	188
Malarial Fever	European	6	27	81	29	8	16
	Indian	1	153	552	417	81	55 <sup>(3)</sup>
Developmental Diseases	European	80	61	58	48	55	40
	Indian	145	157	205	172	159	159

- (1) These figures only include registered and diagnosed deaths so only present an incomplete picture, particularly with regard to the 'free' Indian population.
- (2) Total European deaths for the period 1904 - 1909 were 5 744 and total Indian deaths were 12 075. The Indian figures do not include invalids or workers unfit for labour who were shipped back to India who might otherwise have terminated their indentures and died in the Colony.
- (3) The high increase in the incidence of malarial fever amongst Indians in the middle of the decade is associated with the expansion of the sugar industry into Zululand.

TABLE 7.2

THE NUMBER OF DEATHS FROM ALL FORMS OF TUBERCULOSIS, PNEUMONIA AND  
BRONCHITIS FOR INDENTURED AND FREE INDIANS 1904 TO 1911

	Population	Deaths from Tuberculosis	Repatriation from Tuberculosis	Pneumonia	Bronchitis	All Deaths
Indentured	Rose from 30 567 to 43 332	1 579	660	592	122	5 284
Free	Rose from 54 117 to 67 610	1 056	-	1 371	748	11 218

Sources for Appendix

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