

At the present time, the African women are caught between this conflict - the disintegration of tribal life on the one hand, with only poverty, disease, and slums to replace it; the breaking of the basis for tribal customs, which offered protection to the women, without political rights, education and the right to become free citizens, to replace it. Under tribal law, for instance, in most African tribes a man is permitted to take more than one wife. Each wife had to be paid for, in cattle or sheep or by other means. This payment is called 'lobola.' ~~Every~~ man had to provide a separate house for each wife (usually huts made of rushes and mud.) ~~The position of African women in tribal life is completely inferior.~~ In the tribe African women occupy a completely inferior position, but at the same time are given the protection of the whole tribe. A woman whose husband died had to be cared for - with her children - by her husband's male relatives. Such tribal conditions still exist in large country areas known as "reserves" which are set aside for the African people. ~~The~~ I will tell you a little more about the Reserves in a minute.

This tribal life is, of course, very primitive. In the tribes, the Africans knew nothing of education, save the traditions and customs handed down from tribe to tribe, and nothing of the world outside. ~~The tribes led a pastoral life, the women tended~~ The coming of industrial development in South Africa had to put an end to this existence. But there were some good features of ~~the~~ the primitive tribal life, and ~~in~~ the impact of our type of capitalist civilisation has broken the basis for tribal existence, destroyed what was worthwhile, and offered only slums, disease, poverty and starvation in its place.

As I write about our country, more and more things come into mind, and I have a hard task deciding what to put in and what to leave out. But then I must mention the first Land Act of 1913. This was the first Act to take the land away from the African people, to render them homeless, and to turn masses of ~~the~~ peasants into proletarian workers. The Land Act set whole families, whole tribes, wandering over South Africa. Today, 13% of our whole country is set aside as "Reserves" for the African people, the rest belongs to the whites, the farmers, mining companies, the government. The Government is fond of saying that this land is the most fertile in South Africa, but that the African people are ruining it through keeping too many cattle, and through using wrong methods so the soil erodes.

The truth is that while some parts of the Reserve are fertile, large masses of the land are the most ~~no~~ barren and difficult in the whole country. I remember, for instance, driving for long hours through one section of the Reserves, where the land was covered for hundreds of miles with rough stones and thorny bushes, useless for almost any purpose unless large-scale machinery and development cleared, ~~the~~ planned and planted it. On the other hand I remember also the Transkei - one of the largest reserves. We went there one year after plentiful rains, and the rolling green hills

*of the peasants.*

And the African woman is caught between the two civilisations - the old, primitive tribal existence, and the new, industrialised life of the workers. She falls under two kinds of laws, "Civil law", or "Common law", as administered in the Courts, and "Native Law", based on tribal conditions and customs, where the property belonged to the tribe as a whole; "Native Law" is administered in Special Courts, in cases affecting Africans only.

*wants to work*

How does this work? Most African women are married by Native law, in which the parents give consent, and the husband pays Lobola for his bride. ~~According to native custom, too, a~~ But times have changed. The husband goes to town to seek work, or to the mines, to work under contract. He must do this, partly because in most cases his land is too small or too poor to support his family, but mainly because the Government imposes money taxes, hut taxes, poll taxes, etc., which every man has to pay, and as he can only obtain money by working in the towns, he has to leave his land. Perhaps he goes to the mines under contract. While he is there he may form an association with another woman. There is no 'formal' marriage. Then, whatever happens, whether he returns to the countryside or not, there is a woman and children who must suffer. Or perhaps he goes to town and contracts TB or some other disease and dies. His wife and family left in the reserves are destitute, may be forced to give up everything. The woman probably leaves her children in the care of old parents and comes to seek work in the towns. I personally know hundreds of such women, and there are thousands throughout our country. Or brings the children and leaves them in one of the city's slums while she works all day as a servant.



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**FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN 1954-1963**

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