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THE VALUE OF AFRICAN LABOR-POWER  
IN SOUTH AFRICA: 1948-1978

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In 1972, Harold Wolpe opened a debate on the so-called cheapening of African labor-power in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> He posited that, up to the 1940s, the wage and value of African labor-power had been cheapened as a result of an African pre-capitalist mode of production. That mode was seen as having provided African laborers with use-values for consumption and as having thereby resulted in a lower value of African labor-power and a higher rate of surplus value.

However, the African mode of production and its use-value transfers were understood by Wolpe to have been eliminated by the 1940s as a result of the dissolving effects of the capitalist mode of production. In the post-1940s period, particularly after the election of the Nationalist Party to parliamentary majority in 1948, the political and ideological processes of the state, including "Apartheid", were understood by Wolpe to have reproduced the cheapness of African labor-power. They did so, in his words, by "enforcing low levels of subsistence" for Africans.<sup>2</sup>

Wolpe's analysis, as that of many of the participants in the debate, is essentialist in two respects.<sup>3</sup> First, his analysis made the capitalist mode of production the essence of the social formation of South Africa. Second, the reproduction of the cheapness of African labor-power was understood as constituting the essence of South African capitalism.

Wolpe's analysis and the literature it provoked have raised a variety of questions, three of which are addressed by this paper. First, how can the relationship(s) among the wage, the value of labor-power and non-commodity use-values consumed by productive laborers be conceptualized? Second, in what precise ways were the wage and the value of African

labor-power cheapened in South Africa in the post-1948 period? And, finally, what were the contradictory effects of such cheapening of African labor-power on the reproduction of capitalism in South Africa? To address these questions, this paper takes the value of African labor-power as its particular focus.

Between 1948 and 1978, the value of African labor-power was overdetermined by a variety of class and non-class processes in the capitalist social formation of South Africa.<sup>4</sup> These included the ancient, capitalist and primitive communal fundamental class processes.<sup>5</sup> They also included processes of childrearing, distribution of non-commodity use-values, and the allocation of African labor-power, the last being a constitutive aspect of Apartheid.<sup>6</sup> These processes tended, overall, to lower the value of African labor-power and to differentiate it among different groups of African productive laborers. They also, concurrently, created contradictions for the reproduction of the capitalist fundamental class process in South Africa.

This paper considers but some of the aspects of the overdetermination of the value of African labor-power and its differentiation. It omits, inter alia, analysis of labor migration and the relation of the value of African to that of white labor-power. While such factors are not considered here for reasons of length, this paper develops concepts appropriate to their analysis.<sup>7</sup>

#### Theoretical Analysis: the Value of Labor-power in a Social Formation

The value of labor-power is here conceptualized as the value of

of the bundle of commodities that must, in a particular conjuncture, be purchased and consumed by productive laborers (producers of surplus value) in order to reproduce their social existence.<sup>8</sup> The social existence of a productive laborer is the bundle of (capitalist and non-capitalist) commodity use-values conjunctureally necessary to reproduce his or her ability to produce capitalist commodities (i.e., his or her labor-power commodity). The value of labor-power may be represented by the following equation:

$$(1) \quad V = \sum \left( \frac{ev}{uv} \right)_i \cdot uv_i \cdot h$$

where  $V$  = the value of labor-power;

$\left( \frac{ev}{uv} \right)_i$  = the exchange-value per unit use-value of the  $i$ th wage-commodity;

$uv_i$  = the quantity of the  $i$ th wage-commodity conjunctureally necessary to reproduce the labor-power commodity;

$h$  = the average length of the working day (not discussed here for reasons of length).

The value of labor-power is the measure of capitalist necessary labor. It indicates how much value must be exchanged with productive laborers for their labor-power in order to reproduce their social existence.<sup>9</sup> It also measures how much value-creating labor must be performed before that labor is productive of surplus value. It is an exchange-value concept and therefore not equivalent to the social existence of productive laborers, a use-value concept. It is also distinguished from the concepts wage, price of labor-power and standard of living.

The wage is the actual sum of value paid to productive laborers.<sup>10</sup> It may be composed of two elements. On the one hand, there is the sum

of value used by productive laborers to purchase wage-commodities for their own consumption. This is the price of labor-power which may be greater than, less than or equal to the value of labor-power. On the other hand, the wage may also consist of a portion of surplus value distributed via the wage to productive laborers who in turn redistribute it to one or more subsumed classes so that the latter may continue to reproduce conditions of existence of the capitalist fundamental class process.<sup>11</sup> The wage may be represented by the following equation:<sup>12</sup>

$$(2) \quad W = P_{lp} + \sum SC_i$$

where  $W$  = the wage paid to productive laborers;

$P_{lp}$  = the price of labor-power ( $\neq V$ ); and

$SC_i$  = the portion of surplus value distributed to productive laborers and redistributed by them to the  $i$ th subsumed class.<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, the standard of living of productive laborers is the total bundle of use-values (commodity and non-commodity) received by them for their direct consumption. It consists of use-values which are purchased as wage-commodities and are thus constitutive of the social existence of productive laborers. It may also consist of non-commodity use-values acquired by productive laborers as a result of either participation in a non-capitalist fundamental class process or as a result of subsumed or non-class processes. The standard of living of a productive laborer may be represented by the following equation:<sup>14</sup>

$$(3) \quad Q = V^r + R_1 + R_2 + R_3$$

where  $Q$  = the standard of living of individuals who occupy the class position of productive laborer;

$V^r$  = their social existence, the bundle of  $uv_i$  of equation (1);

$R_1$  = the bundle of non-commodity use-values provided to productive laborers as a result of subsumed class processes;<sup>15</sup>

$R_2$  = the bundle of non-commodity use-values received as a result of participation in one or more non-capitalist fundamental class processes; and

$R_3$  = the bundle of non-commodity use-values provided to productive laborers as a result of non-class processes. (These are not considered further for reasons of length.)

These definitional relations provide the concepts appropriate to the analysis of the value of labor-power, its differentiation and changes in it within a social formation. Of these concepts, the wage, the price and value of labor-power and the surplus value transfers are all value concepts, while the social existence and standard of living of productive laborers are use-value concepts.

The value of labor-power may change as a result of alterations of either the exchange-value per unit use-value of wage-commodities or of the amount of those commodities necessary to reproduce the social existence of productive laborers. The following analysis concentrates on the latter aspect. It focuses on the entry and exit of commodity use-values to and from the social existence of productive laborers as overdetermined by class processes within the social formation.

First, the demand for and supply of labor-power may affect the wage.<sup>16</sup> The change in the wage has an immediate and like effect on the price of labor-power. Omitting for the moment  $SC_i$  transfers, this divergence between the price and value of labor-power may have one of



three results. The price may return to the unchanged value of labor-power (with a like change in the wage), the value may change to the new price of labor-power (with no change in the wage), or both may change within these limits.<sup>17</sup> Which of these possibilities actually obtains cannot be predicted a priori.

Such price-value divergences with respect to the labor-power commodity may also result from changes in  $SC_i$  transfers of surplus value. Here the wage is initially unchanged and the alteration of the  $SC_i$  effects an inverse change in the price of labor-power within the wage.<sup>18</sup> Again, three results are possible: 1) the value may adjust to the new price of labor-power (with  $W$  and  $SC_i$  unchanged), 2) the price may return to the unchanged value of labor-power (requiring changes in  $W$ ,  $SC_i$ , or both), or 3) some combination of these may obtain.

If the value of labor-power does change as a result of class struggles consequent upon changes in either the market for labor-power or the wage distribution of surplus value, this is a change in the social existence of productive laborers.<sup>19</sup> This change in  $V^r$  may create contradictions for the reproduction of the capitalist fundamental class process. On the one hand, if the value of labor-power falls, it may result in reduced labor productivity, possibly offsetting the effects of the fall in  $V$  to result in a lower rate of surplus value.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, if the value of labor-power rises, with no change in either the length of the working day or the intensity of labor, this directly reduces the rate of surplus value. Again, such possible contradictions are not inevitable but over-

determined within the social formation.

Second, the value of labor-power may also be altered by productive laborers' consumption of non-commodity ( $R_i$ ) use-values. This may be the case if such  $R_i$  use-values substitute for wage-commodities within the standard of living of productive laborers thereby effecting their social existence.<sup>21</sup> Such possible effects are also contingent and not a priori necessary. In the case of non-capitalist use-values ( $R_2$ 's), their acquisition may require productive laborers to perform non-capitalist necessary (and surplus) labor; this may consequently reduce productivity of these laborers in the capitalist labor process. In the case of subsumed non-commodity ( $R_1$ ) use-values, their provision to productive laborers requires distribution of a portion of surplus value to the subsumed classes providing them. This leaves less surplus value to reproduce other conditions of existence of the capitalist fundamental class process, for example, the accumulation of capital.

In these ways, capitalist and non-capitalist fundamental and capitalist subsumed class processes may overdetermine the value of labor-power and changes in it.<sup>22</sup> They may also overdetermine its differentiation. The processes discussed may not have the same effectivity with respect to the value of labor-power of all productive laborers in the social formation. Some productive laborers may redistribute a large portion of their wage to subsumed classes while others may not. Some may participate in non-capitalist fundamental class processes and others may not. Some may receive  $R_i$  use-values and others not. Moreover,

the market for labor-power may itself be differentiated resulting in differentiated wages and prices of labor-power. These differences may result in multiple values of labor-power in the social formation.

Such multiple values of labor-power are overdetermined by processes that differentiate groups of productive laborers, e.g., men and women, black and white, skilled and unskilled, union and non-union. The differentiation of such groups of productive laborers and of the value of labor-power is not a simple or necessary effect of, for example, such ascriptive characteristics as race or gender. Rather, the meaning of such "characteristics" and their effectivity with respect to differentiating productive laborers and their values of labor-power are overdetermined by economic, political and cultural processes within the social formation. Such effects on the value of labor-power thus cannot be determined prior to or outside of conjunctural analysis of the social formation.

Conjunctural Analysis: the Value of African Labor-power in the Capitalist  
Social Formation of South Africa

Between 1948 and 1978, the capitalist social formation of South Africa was constituted by a variety of economic, political and cultural processes.<sup>23</sup> The capitalist fundamental class process was prevalent; its conditions of existence were reproduced on a continually expanding scale, unlike those of any of the other fundamental class processes. The social formation was also constituted by cultural processes which produced certain concepts of race. Indeed, the population of South Africa was conceptually

divided by "official" race concepts into four groups: Africans, whites, coloreds, and Asians.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, political and economic processes overdetermined by these race concepts resulted in poverty for the vast majority of Africans in South Africa.<sup>25</sup>

The object of **the** conjunctural analysis of the social formation of South Africa is to examine one overdetermined aspect of "African poverty" - the value of African labor-power. Based on the theoretical concepts discussed above, the analysis begins by considering the effects of capitalist subsumed class processes on the value of African labor-power.<sup>26</sup> Three such subsumed class processes are considered here: the allocation of African labor-power, childrearing, and the provision of non-commodity use-values "in kind" to African productive laborers.<sup>27</sup>

In order for the capitalist fundamental class process to be reproduced not only must labor-power be purchasable as a commodity, it must also be allocated to various productive employments. This may be accomplished via the 'free' movement of productive laborers within the market for labor-power. In South Africa, however, African labor-power was instead allocated by a complex series of state-operated labor bureaux with little or no free mobility of African productive laborers.<sup>28</sup>

Briefly, every African workseeker was required by law to register with a local state-run labor bureau. Each bureau was permitted to allocate its registered laborers to specific employments only. These were limited by occupation, geographical area, and sector or industry of employment. A given local labor bureau in Transkei might, for example,

be permitted to only "supply" unskilled African farm laborers to sugar estates in northern Natal. Africans could not legally sell their labor-power save via the labor bureaux.

To prevent illegal and uncontrolled African labor mobility, as a condition of existence of this form of allocation, a series of pass laws and influx control regulations were enacted and enforced. These in effect restricted African geographic mobility to that officially sanctioned by the labor bureaux, with some exceptions. As conditions of existence of this form of allocation of African labor-power, the pass laws, influx control and the labor bureaux, all aspects of the state, were supported by surplus value redistributed via corporate and personal taxes. By one estimate, the cost of supporting these subsumed class processes in the year 1974-1975 was \$98 million.<sup>29</sup>

This process of allocation of African labor-power tended to both lower and differentiate the value of African labor-power. On the one hand, it channelled African labor-power to less desirable productive employment in capitalist mining and agriculture, thus driving down the wage and the price of labor-power there. (It did not concurrently drive up the price of African labor-power in urban capitalist manufacturing employment as a result, in part, of the threat posed by the pass laws and influx control.)<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, it also differentiated the value of African labor-power in two ways. The specific allocation determined by the central labor bureau for each local labor bureau affected not only the

size of the reserve army for each particular productive employment (and hence the wages of Africans employed in it) but also the relative wage income for Africans from different rural locations.<sup>31</sup> This allocation also differentiated the wage and, it will be argued below, the value of labor-power between African men and women. African women were, by and large only allocated employment as casual farm laborers, food and cannery workers, textile workers and domestic servants.<sup>32</sup> The reserve army was large for these occupations, given the particular pattern of allocation, and the wage and the price of labor-power of African women employed in them were lower than those of male African productive laborers.

A second subsumed class process that complexly affected the value of African labor-power was that of African childrearing. A condition of existence of the capitalist fundamental class process is that labor-power be reproduced on a "generational" as well as a daily basis. Childrearing is the term that denotes this process.<sup>33</sup> In South Africa, African women were the primary childrearers; they fed, clothed, nurtured and generally cared for African children.<sup>34</sup> The childrearing activities of African women were generally supported out of the wages of male African productive laborers. Such support out of wages is understood here as having been an  $SC_i$  transfer of surplus value to subsumed childrearers.<sup>35</sup>

A condition of existence of the  $SC_i$  transfer of surplus value to subsumed childrearers was that African male productive laborers live with their families and thereby reproduce a certain form of kinship relations. The amount of the wage remitted to childrearers was much lower

or even nonexistent when African men lived apart from their families and the incidence of infant malnutrition and starvation was much higher for their children.<sup>36</sup> Over the period of the 1950's and 1960's, this condition of existence was eroded. Policies of influx control removed hundreds of thousands of African women and children from urban areas to the so-called homelands in rural areas.<sup>37</sup> This and increasing state emphasis on migrant labor increased the separation of families and resulted in lower  $SC_i$  transfers from African men to African women and hence in increasing malnutrition and infant mortality of African children.<sup>38</sup>

However, these decreases in surplus value transfers and the malnutrition of their children led many African women to seek wage employment, leaving their children in the care of "aunties" in the homelands.<sup>39</sup> As discussed, the particular allocation of their labor-power commodity via the labor bureau resulted in African women receiving a wage lower than that of African men. Yet African women remitted a large portion of that lower wage to "aunties" to support the rearing of their children. This drove down and further differentiated the value of their labor-power below that of male African productive laborers. It is thus not surprising to note that the group most suffering from malnutrition after African children was African women.

The value of African labor-power was also affected by the subsumed class provision of non-commodity use-values "in kind" to African productive laborers for their direct consumption. In South Africa, food and housing were so provided to African productive laborers by capitalist firms. These use-values were reproduced by intra-firm transfers of surplus

value and their provision was a subsumed class process constitutive of the firm.<sup>40</sup>

Food use-values were provided to Africans productively employed in capitalist mining and agriculture, as were housing use-values. With the allocation of labor-power resulting in lower wages in mining and agriculture than in capitalist manufacturing, these subsumed  $R_1$  use-values provided a condition of existence of a lower value of African labor-power in the former than in the latter. That is, these "in kind" food and housing use-values tended to maintain the consumption of African productive laborers (their Q) in the face of their lower wage and value of labor-power. As capitalist employers in mining and agriculture have stated, they provided food and housing in kind to reduce dissatisfaction with low wages and to maintain labor productivity at high levels.<sup>41</sup> As substitutes for wage-commodities, these  $R_1$  subsumed use-values tended to lower the value of African labor-power.

However, their effects were different for African men and women who occupied the class position of productive laborer. African women received far fewer  $R_1$  subsumed use-values for their consumption. As casual farm laborers, African women received few food or housing use-values in kind. Moreover, given the particular allocation of labor-power, no African women were productively employed in capitalist mining and thus did not receive the  $R_1$  use-values distributed to male African productive laborers employed there. Thus, once again, African women had not only a lower wage and value of labor-power, but also a lower standard of living than male African productive laborers.



In addition to these subsumed class processes, the value of African labor-power was also overdetermined by three fundamental class processes. These were the capitalist, primitive communal and ancient fundamental class processes. Each of these is briefly considered here with respect to its changing effects on the value of African labor-power.

The capitalist fundamental class process (the process of the extraction of surplus value) affected the value of African labor-power in two major ways in the 1948-1978 period. First, as has been frequently discussed in the literature, changes in capitalist labor processes in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in falling exchange-values per unit use-value for many capitalist wage-commodities, including food and clothing.<sup>42</sup> This tended to lower the value of African labor-power.

Second, several wage-commodities for Africans were produced and sold by the state as capitalist commodities, including housing, transportation and beer.<sup>43</sup> African productive laborers were hired for a wage to produce these commodities which were then sold by the state.<sup>44</sup> As constitutive elements of the social existence of African productive laborers, such state capitalist wage-commodities had two opposing effects on the value of African labor-power.

On the one hand, state housing and transportation commodities increased in magnitude within the social existence of those African productive laborers employed (particularly in manufacturing) in the so-called white urban areas.<sup>45</sup> As a result of the Group Areas Act and other legislation in the 1950s, Africans living in "white" urban areas were moved from their homes and relocated in segregated townships located at a

distance (one to thirty miles) from both their places of employment and white residential areas. This increased the amount of transport services that African productive laborers had to purchase for commuting.<sup>46</sup>

Further, such relocation also meant that Africans increased the amount of the housing commodity they purchased (now from the state) as they could not build their own homes in the townships.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, the prices charged to Africans for these two state wage-commodities seem to have been less than their values. As specified by several acts, the state "subsidized" housing and transportation prices in two ways. First, it taxed private capitalist firms not providing subsumed  $R_1$  housing use-values to their African employees and used these monies to directly subsidize state housing and transportation commodities.<sup>48</sup> These taxes were portions of surplus value redistributed from private capitalist firms to the state. Second, the state directly used profits from its production and sale of beer to Africans to subsidize state capitalist housing.<sup>49</sup> This legislated use of beer profits constituted an internal redistribution of surplus value within the state. Both of these subsidies, which tended to reduce the value of urban African labor-power, were overdetermined by protests, demonstrations, and (in the case of transportation) consumer boycotts by Africans when rent or fare increases were announced.<sup>50</sup>

While rural African productive laborers, largely employed in capitalist agriculture and mining, generally received subsumed "in kind" food and housing use-values, urban African productive laborers, generally employed in capitalist manufacturing, purchased food, housing and

transportation as commodities. This increased the social existence of the latter group of productive laborers over that of the former. It also differentiated their values of labor-power, but not to the same degree given the "subsidization" of the state capitalist housing and transportation commodities. The differentiation of the value of labor-power between rural and urban African productive laborers was thus overdetermined by the processes of the allocation of labor-power, the wage-transfer of surplus value to subsumed childrearers, the provision of  $R_1$  subsumed use-values and the subsidization of state wage-commodities. It was also affected by non-capitalist fundamental class processes and their uneven reproduction within the social formation.

The primitive communal fundamental class process is the process of the communal appropriation of surplus labor by the performers of surplus labor as a class. Among others, it has communal property in the means of production and kinship relations as two of its conditions of existence.<sup>51</sup> It is on the basis of kinship relations, broadly defined, that communal property and the products of surplus labor are distributed.

This class process was a constitutive aspect of the social formation of South Africa in the 1948-1978 period, though a continually waning one.<sup>52</sup> More precisely, it was an aspect of the so-called African homelands, the 12 percent of South Africa set aside for the legal permanent residence of Africans. During this period, the conditions of existence of this class process were continually eroded.<sup>53</sup> This was the complex result of many factors. These included the transformation of kinship relations partly due to increasing labor migration, the decrease

in per capita available land in the homelands as thousands of Africans were forcibly resettled there, changed patterns of land tenure, drought and increasing soil erosion.<sup>54</sup>

This primitive communal fundamental class process and its erosion had four major effects on the value of African labor-power. First, male African migrant productive laborers received  $R_2$  use-values as a result of their participation in this class process.<sup>55</sup> However, with the waning of this class process, these  $R_2$  use-values began to disappear, thus reducing the standard of living of the migrant productive laborers (their Q). This led to upward pressure on the value of labor-power and the wage to maintain their real consumption. However, this pressure was largely offset by the receipt of subsumed  $R_1$  use-values.

Second, the historical existence of the primitive communal  $R_2$  use-values itself led employers to keep wages low. Employers assumed that African productive laborers maintained their rural ties and access to these use-values long after they had actually disappeared. Reinforced by cultural processes reproducing concepts of the "primitive" African, these expectations also tended to keep the value of African labor-power lower than what it otherwise would have been.<sup>56</sup>

Third, the erosion of this class process also increased the supply of African labor-power in the homelands, from which it was largely allocated to capitalist agriculture and mining. This tended to increase the reserve army and to reduce the wage and price of African labor-power. Finally, the erosion of the primitive communal fundamental class process meant that African childrearing had to be increasingly supported out of

the wages of African productive laborers and not by primitive communal surplus labor as previously.<sup>57</sup> Where 'traditional' kinship ties were maintained between African men and their families,  $SC_i$  transfers rose from male African migrants to their families and the value of their labor-power fell. Where such ties were not reproduced, African women increasingly left the homelands for wage employment. As already discussed, this increased the reserve army of their labor-power and depressed the wage and the value of their labor-power, especially considering the size of the  $SC_i$  transfers to childrearers made by productively employed African women.

The final class process discussed here which affected the value of African labor-power is the ancient fundamental class process.<sup>58</sup> This is the process whereby surplus labor is self-appropriated by the members of the class of ancient producers of necessary and surplus labor. This self-appropriation may occur either via consumption of the products of ancient surplus labor or by their sale as commodities. Conditions of existence of this class process include access to the means of production as the private property of the ancient producers and control by them of their own labor-power.

The ancient fundamental class process was a constitutive aspect of the social formation of South Africa between 1948 and 1978.<sup>59</sup> In the homelands, African ancient producers made a variety of crafts for use and sale. In the "white" urban areas, African ancient class members produced and sold crafts, cooked food, laundry services, housing and beer.

The conditions of existence of this class process were reproduced

first on an expanding and then on a contracting basis during this period. (The erosion of the conditions of existence of this class process in the homelands was similar to that of the primitive communal fundamental class process and will not be considered further here.) In the 1940s and early 1950s, the mass migration of Africans to the cities resulted in the rapid growth of the production and sale of ancient commodities there, particularly so-called Bantu beer and housing (in the form of wood and tin shacks called pondoks).<sup>60</sup> However, beginning in the 1950s, the enactment of a variety of laws and other processes eroded this class process. They did so, inter alia, by removing male urban Africans to the townships (where the state had a housing monopoly), by resettling thousands of African women (many of whom were ancient producers) and children in the rural homelands, by increased enforcement of liquor laws banning the production by Africans of beer for sale, and by a variety of regulations limiting the production and sale of commodities by Africans to Africans, both in the homelands and in the urban areas.<sup>61</sup>

The ancient class process and its erosion had several effects on the value of African labor-power. First, it had effects similar to those discussed with respect to the primitive communal fundamental class process. These concerned  $SC_1$  transfers to subsumed childrearers, the increased supply of African labor-power and the erosion of the  $R_2$  use-values. However, unlike the primitive communal case, it seems that urban (male) African productive laborers who were not migrants and who lived with their families in urban areas reproduced conditions of existence of both access to the ancient  $R_2$  use-values and transfers of

SC<sub>i</sub> to subsumed childrearers. This depended largely on the ability of African women, who were the majority of ancient producers in the urban areas, to retain urban residence rights under the provisions of the Group Areas Act and thus not be forcibly resettled in the homelands.<sup>62</sup>

Second, the ancient fundamental class process also resulted in the production and sale of wage-commodities to African productive laborers. In some cases, particularly that of the wood and tin shacks, these ancient commodities had a lower exchange-value per unit use-value than their capitalist substitutes.<sup>63</sup> To the extent that the erosion of the ancient fundamental class process resulted in the substitution of capitalist for ancient wage-commodities (or a fortiori for ancient non-commodity use-values), it tended to increase the value of African labor-power. Yet, production of ancient commodities, particularly laundry services, prepared food and beer, was not eliminated. To the degree that it was reproduced and to the extent that these commodities had a lower exchange-value per unit use-value than their capitalist substitutes, the ancient fundamental class process tended to keep the value of African labor-power lower than what it otherwise would have been.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

This brief analysis has shown how the value of African labor-power was lowered by the complex action of multiple fundamental and subsumed class processes in the social formation of South Africa. It also showed how the value of African labor-power was differentiated between African men and women who occupied the class position of productive laborer,

and among Africans productive employed in (urban) capitalist manufacturing and (rural) capitalist mining and agriculture. The analysis of these effects of class processes on the value of African labor-power has depended on a particular Marxian theoretical framework, one which conceptually differentiates among the price and value of labor-power, the wage, and the social existence and standard of living of productive laborers.

Thus, for example, while the erosion of non-capitalist non-commodity  $R_2$  use-values reduced the real standard of living of African productive laborers, it did not result in either a compensating increase in the value of African labor-power or a permanent reduction in the standard of living equal to the fall in its  $R_2$  component as suggested by previous Marxian analyses. The tendency was for  $V$  to rise as a result of the fall in  $R_2$  and  $Q$ . However, such upward pressures on  $V$  and  $W$  were countered, inter alia, by increasing provision of subsumed non-commodity use-values to African productive laborers, falling exchange-values per unit use-value of capitalist (including state) wage-commodities, and a fall in the wage and price of labor-power due to an increasing supply of African labor-power.

Moreover, these effects on the value of African labor-power also produced contradictions for the reproduction of the conditions of existence of the capitalist fundamental class process. First, the various capitalist subsumed class processes reproducing a lower value of African labor-power required increasing portions of surplus value over this period. This left less surplus value to be accumulated as capital or otherwise reproduce this class process. Second, some of the processes



which tended to lower the value of African labor-power also tended to reduce labor productivity (e.g., as a result of the performance of non-capitalist necessary labor by productive laborers) and hence the rate of surplus value. Third, many of these same processes led to increasing malnutrition and starvation of African women and children, thus threatening the future supply of African labor-power. Finally, many of these processes - and their effects on African wages, infant mortality, etc. - overdetermined a variety of anti-Apartheid and class struggles. These included domestic and international consumer boycotts, trade union and guerilla actions, protests and demonstrations. These, in turn, tended to reduce inflows of foreign capital, realization of surplus value by domestic sales and exports, and labor productivity and to increase the amount of surplus value distributed to the state, particularly to reproduce police, military and propaganda activities.<sup>65</sup> The lowering and differentiation of African labor-power were thus neither deterministically functional nor "costless" to capital; rather, they had contradictory because overdetermined effects.

A more complete analysis of the overdetermination of the value of African labor-power in South Africa would include many factors that have been here omitted as being outside the scope of this paper. These factors include processes of health care, education, culture, religion, merchanting, and the provision of credit to consumers to name but a few. A fuller exposition would also include class analysis of such notional social groups as women, Asians, coloreds, whites, domestic and foreign migrants, and domestic servants. Finally, it would also analyze

labor migration, so-called racial wage discrimination (and the relation of the value of African labor-power to that of white labor-power), trade unions, the recent state-initiated "reforms", and the liberation struggle. While these aspects of the social formation of South African have not been considered explicitly here, analysis of them and their overdetermined effects on the value of African labor-power would employ the theoretical framework and concepts presented in this paper.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid", Economy and Society 1, 4 (1972), pp. 425-456.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, M.L. Morris, "Capitalism and Apartheid: a critique of some current conceptions of cheap labour-power" in T. Adler (ed.), Perspectives on South Africa (Johannesburg, African Studies Institute, University of Witwatersrand, 1977), pp. 51-95 and Michael Williams, "An Analysis of South African Capitalism - Neo-Ricardianism or Marxism?" Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists IV, 1 (1975), pp. 1-38. For a discussion of the essentialism of this literature and its difference vis-à-vis the analysis of this paper, see Frederick A. Curtis, The Value of African Labor-power in South Africa, 1948-1978 (Amherst, Massachusetts, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1983), pp. 211-233.

<sup>4</sup>Definition of terms, a fuller exposition of the Marxian theoretical framework of this paper, and references may be found in Curtis, Value, pp. 3-6. For present purposes, several key concepts may be defined as follows. The fundamental class process is the process of the extraction of surplus labor. A subsumed class process is a political, cultural or economic process which a) involves neither the performance nor the extraction of surplus labor, b) reproduces one or more conditions of existence of a fundamental class process, and c) requires for its reproduction a redistributed portion of extracted surplus labor. Overdetermination is the relational concept of this theoretical framework. It signifies that each aspect or process of the social formation is mutually determined, mutually constituted by the complex interaction of all the other aspects of the social formation.

To limit the present analysis, the social formation of South Africa is considered to be geographically bounded by the borders of the Republic of South Africa inclusive of the homelands and the period considered is limited to the years 1948-1978. See Curtis, Value, pp. 32-33.

<sup>5</sup>The constitutive feudal fundamental class process of the social formation of South Africa is omitted here for reasons of length. See Curtis, Value, pp. 92-99.

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I am indebted to Ron Caplan, Betsy Oakes, Stephen Resnick, David Ruccio and Jim Wooster for several helpful comments.

<sup>6</sup>Apartheid is here understood as a rubric denoting a particular grouping of political, economic and cultural processes and some of their effects in the social formation of South Africa. See Curtis, Value, pp. 40-43.

<sup>7</sup>These points are considered in Curtis, Value, pp. 148-195.

<sup>8</sup>This section is heavily indebted to Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, "Classes in Marxian Theory", Review of Radical Political Economics 13, 4 (1982), pp. 1-18 and to personal communication from Stephen Resnick

<sup>9</sup>As with all value concepts, it is measured in terms of hours of socially necessary abstract labor.

<sup>10</sup>Wages may also be paid to members of subsumed classes. This possibility is not discussed here as it lies outside the scope of this paper. See Resnick and Wolff, "Classes", p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>For purposes of this paper, it is assumed that productive laborers do not concurrently occupy the class position of capitalist subsumed class member and so do not retain a portion of the surplus value distributed via the wage for their own consumption. On this point, see Curtis, Value, pp. 27-28.

<sup>12</sup>Adapted from Resnick and Wolff, "Classes", p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>See note 11. The  $\sum SC_i$  transfers are used not only to provide for the consumption of subsumed<sub>i</sub> class members but also to purchase any required commodities used in the subsumed class process. Surplus value transfers to subsumed class members may take place in other ways than via the wage. These possibilities are omitted here for reasons of length. See Resnick and Wolff, "Classes".

<sup>14</sup>Adapted from Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, "The Concept of Class in Marxian Theory II: Implications for Value Theory" (Amherst, Massachusetts, unpublished, 1980), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Thus, productive laborers are here understood to receive  $R_1$  subsumed non-commodity use-values without their occupation of a subsumed class position.

<sup>16</sup>This discussion omits, for reasons of length, Marx's analysis of how changes in production may effect the exchange-value of wage-commodities. See his discussion of relative surplus value in Karl Marx Capital Vol. I (New York, International Publishers, 1967), pp. 312-321. A fall in the

demand for labor-power or a rise in its supply lowers the wage while a rise in demand or a fall in supply has the opposite effect. See Ibid., pp. 538, 613, 630-631 and 639-640.

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from Resnick and Wolff, "Classes", p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> This discussion abstracts from the effects of a change in one  $SC_i$  transfer of surplus value on others. A rise in  $SC_1$ , for example, may result in a fall in  $SC_2$ , leaving the price and value of labor-power unchanged. Such possibilities are excluded here as they lie outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>19</sup> If the value of labor-power falls as a result of increasing  $SC_i$  transfers, this may result in a greater mass of surplus value with which to reproduce the increased  $SC_i$ . See Resnick and Wolff, "Classes", pp. 12 and ff.

<sup>20</sup> Such reduced labor productivity, if in Department II of I, may directly or indirectly raise the exchange-value per unit use-value of wage-commodities. This may raise the value of labor-power and offset the effects posited in the text concerning the falling social existence of productive laborers.

<sup>21</sup> If  $R_i$  use-values increase without lowering  $V^r$  (thus constituting a rise in  $Q$ ), <sup>i</sup> this may still lower the value of labor-power. It may do so if the increase in  $Q$  results in a higher labor productivity in Departments I or II and hence a lower exchange-value per unit use-value of capitalist wage-commodities.

<sup>22</sup> Other processes, not examined here, might also affect the value of labor-power. Thus, the social existence of productive laborers (including the 'historical and moral element') might, for example, be effected by concepts of family responsibility, work ethic, etc. These are overdetermined within the social formation by processes which may provide conditions of existence for a price-value divergence re: labor-power to be 'resolved' in a particular way. These processes are largely omitted here as falling outside the scope of this paper. See Curtis, Value, pp. 150-160, 173-174 and 177-179.

<sup>23</sup> On the constitutive processes of the social formation of South Africa and the prevalence of the capitalist fundamental class process, see Curtis, Value, pp. 38-43.

<sup>24</sup> For example, the state operated a Race Classification Board to determine which of the four official races each South African belonged to. Asians, coloreds and whites are omitted from the present analysis for reasons of length. On whites, see Curtis, Value, pp. 170-184.

<sup>25</sup>African wage incomes were consistently below officially (and minimally) defined subsistence levels during this period. See Muriel Horrell or Loraine Gordon (eds.), Survey of Race Relations (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, annual since 1948). Further, African wages were much less than white wages. On racial wage differentiation and its relation to the value of labor-power, see Curtis, Value, pp. 170-184.

<sup>26</sup>The analysis begins with subsumed class processes for ease of exposition and not due to their having any greater importance than fundamental class processes.

<sup>27</sup>For other subsumed class processes not considered here, see Curtis, Value, pp. 65-91.

<sup>28</sup>The allocation of African labor-power was also reproduced by subsumed (private) labor recruiters. See Curtis, Value, pp. 62-63.

<sup>29</sup>Michael Savage, "Costs of Enforcing Apartheid and Problems of Change", African Affairs 76, 304 (1977), pp. 296-299.

<sup>30</sup>Africans who struggled for higher wages in "white" urban areas could be and often were deported to rural homelands where there were few employment possibilities. The only way to gain employment there was via the labor bureau - almost certainly in lower-paid mining or agriculture.

<sup>31</sup>Again, this is an effect of local, rural labor bureaux allocating African labor-power to specific "locations". Adjacent labor bureaux in a specific homeland might allocate African labor-power to different occupations, industries and locations with possible consequent differentiating effects on the wages of Africans living next to each other in the homelands.

<sup>32</sup>Of these, domestic servants were not productive laborers. Having said this, little else is clear about their class position. They may have been ancient producers of a "servanting" commodity or members of a subsumed class. This point is not examined further as it lies outside the scope of this paper. On servants, see Jacklyn Cock, Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980).

<sup>33</sup>The analysis of the education and health care of African children is similar to that of childrearing. The principal difference consists in the payment of fees. See Curtis, Value, pp. 73-79 and 83-84.

<sup>34</sup>As servants to whites, African women were frequently the primary rearers of white as well as African children. The present discussion considers only the rearing of African children.

<sup>35</sup>The present discussion is a partial reconceptualization of Marx's Volume I analysis of the value of labor-power and the family wage. For further discussion of the differences between Marx's analysis and the theoretical treatment of the value of labor-power employed in this paper, see Curtis, Value, pp. 6-23 and 224-226.

<sup>36</sup>United Nations, Food and Agricultural Organization, "Apartheid", Ideas and Action, bulletin 126, 7/8 (1978), p. 38. The reasons for such lower remittances were complex and cannot be considered here for reasons of length. See Curtis, Value, pp. 68-73, 99-108, 120-128, and 150-160.

<sup>37</sup>Alan Baldwin, "Mass Removals and Separate Development", Journal of Southern African Studies 1, 2 (1973), pp. 215-227.

<sup>38</sup>On the malnutrition of African children, see David Mechanic, "Apartheid Medicine", in Ian Robertson and Phillip Whitten (eds.), Race and Politics in South Africa (New Brunswick, New Jersey, Transaction Books, 1978), p.131. African infant mortality ranged from 77 per 1,000 live births to 216 per 1,000. Anne Fullerton, "Public Health Problems in Apartheid South Africa", Notes and Documents, Centre Against Apartheid, United Nations (1979), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>This "proletarianization" of African women was also overdetermined by the erosion of the conditions of existence of non-capitalist fundamental class processes as is discussed below.

<sup>40</sup>As a percent of annual average African earnings on the gold mines, for example, the cost of providing food to African productive laborers was about 29 percent. Computed from data in Francis Wilson, Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911-1969 (London, Cambridge University Press, 1972). On the cost of housing in capitalist agriculture, see Francis Wilson et. al. (eds.), Farm Labour in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1977), pp. 109-110, 131-132, and 174.

<sup>41</sup>See Wilson, Labour, p. 57 and Alide Kooy, "Farm Labour in the Karoo" in Wilson et. al. (eds.), Farm Labour, p. 109. Increases in productivity in agriculture may have also resulted in the direct or indirect cheapening of wage-commodities and hence the value of African labor-power.

<sup>42</sup>See among others, Morris, "Capitalism and Apartheid". With respect to unprocessed food, this was an effect of the concentration and centralization of capital in agriculture and the erosion of the feudal production of food. In manufacturing it was a partial effect of "capital restructuring". See Curtis, Value, pp. 44-47, 92-99, and 185-187.

<sup>43</sup> Thus, the state was partially constituted by the capitalist fundamental class process in Department II. This was also true for Department I, e.g., state phosphate, steel and electricity production. The state capitalist production and "pricing" of the elements of constant capital and their effects on the value of labor-power are not here considered for reasons of length.

<sup>44</sup> In some cases (especially beer), the state may have only purchased these commodities for re-sale to African productive laborers. Such merchanting activities are not considered here for reasons of length.

<sup>45</sup> The 1913 and 1936 Native Land Acts delineated 12 percent of South Africa as "African" and the remainder as "white". See Muriel Horrell, Laws Affecting Race Relations in South Africa (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1978), pp. 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> Limited transportation services often entailed long waits resulting in decreased labor productivity. See Stanley Greenberg, Race and State in Capitalist Development (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980), p. 188.

<sup>47</sup> Africans could largely only rent and not purchase township houses and the land on which they stood. They could not build their own houses for that required building permits which were rarely given to Africans. See Horrell, Laws, pp. 77-82 and Robin Bloch and Peter Wilkinson, "Urban Control and Popular Struggle: A Survey of State Urban Policy 1920-1970", Africa Perspective 20 (1982), pp. 2-40. On the ancient production of housing, see below in the text.

<sup>48</sup> These taxes could not by law be paid via wages and thus had no direct SC effects. On the laws requiring their payment, see Horrell, Laws, pp. 77-78 and 107-108. Between 1957 and 1972, these taxes yielded about \$24 million. Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>49</sup> See Gavin Maasdorp and P.A. Ellison, "The Township Today", in Gavin Maasdorp and A.S.B. Humphreys (eds.), From Shantytown to Township (Cape Town, Juta and Company, Ltd., 1975), pp. 84-85.

<sup>50</sup> For example, there were major bus boycotts in 1943, 1944, 1957 and 1976. See Horrell, Laws, pp. 107-108.

<sup>51</sup> For a more extensive discussion of this class process, see Curtis, Value, pp. 99-103.

<sup>52</sup> Primitive communal use-values included corn, sorghum (for making beer), cattle, vegetables, huts and crafts.



<sup>53</sup>This is a different position than usually taken in this Marxian literature, in which these use-values are assumed eliminated by 1948. For a discussion of the literature on this point, see Curtis, Value, pp. 226-231.

<sup>54</sup>See Curtis, Value, pp. 103-105.

<sup>55</sup>African men were the original migrants given the overdetermined roles of African women as childrearers and primitive communal producers. African men reproduced their access to the  $R_2$  use-values either by performing labor or by providing one or more material conditions of existence of the primitive communal fundamental class process. See Curtis, Value, pp. 106 and 153-154.

<sup>56</sup>See Curtis, Value, pp. 155-158.

<sup>57</sup>In the transitional period of the erosion of the primitive communal fundamental class process, it appears that primitive communal surplus labor supported the rearing of African children who later occupied the class position of productive laborers. See Curtis, Value, pp. 98 and 106-107.

<sup>58</sup>The ancient fundamental class process is here the conceptualization of what some have called petty commodity production. See Curtis, Value, pp. 108-114.

<sup>59</sup>What is conceptualized as the ancient fundamental class process is included in the literature on South Africa in terms of the so-called informal sector. See Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe, "The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation", Review of African Political Economy 7 (1976), p. 105 and A.S.B. Humphreys, et. al., "The Informal Sector" in Maasdorp and Humphreys, Shantytown, pp. 44-58.

<sup>60</sup>On the production of beer, see Humphreys, et. al., "Informal", pp. 48-49 and Philip Mayer, Townsmen or Tribesmen (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 140, 247 and 248. On ancient housing, see Gavin Maasdorp and P.A. Ellison, "Resettlement", in Maasdorp and Humphreys, Shantytown, pp. 70-71.

<sup>61</sup>On the liquor laws, see Mayer, Townsmen, p. 56 and Humphreys, et. al., "Informal", pp. 48-49. On the laws affecting the production and sale of ancient commodities, see Roger Southall, "African Capitalism in Contemporary South Africa", Journal of Southern African Studies 7, 1 (1980), pp. 41-46.

<sup>62</sup>For the relevant laws concerning urban residence rights, see Horrell, Laws, p. 174. Many urban African women were ancient commodity producers

as the ancient production of use-values allowed them to continue rearing their children, which would not have been the case if they had occupied the class position of productive laborer instead. See Curtis, Value, pp. 110-111.

<sup>63</sup>The data on the prices of ancient commodities are very limited due to the often illegal nature of such production in South Africa.

<sup>64</sup>A stronger conclusion cannot be drawn due to lack of relevant data.

<sup>65</sup>For example, between 1958/59 and 1978/79 cash votes for the Defence Budget increased from approximately \$50 million to \$2.7 billion. International Defence and Aid Fund, The Apartheid War Machine (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1980), p. 10.

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