

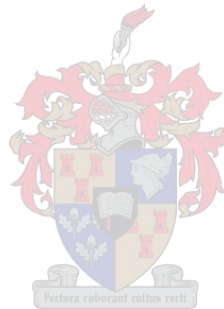
Work, wedlock and widows: Comparing the lives of coloured and white women in Cape Town, 1900–1960

By
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Declaration

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the lives of coloured* and white women in Cape Town from 1900 to 1960. This period includes the South African War, the formation of the Union, white women obtaining the vote, the two World Wars and the formalisation of apartheid. The comparison is appropriate because the population sizes of the two groups were similar – and there were many other social and cultural similarities, from language to religion. One important difference is that while white women have received some academic attention in South African history, coloured women have not. This work aims to fill the gap. I do so using sources such as a household survey and marriage records in order to understand their position in society. Themes that are investigated include marriage age, employment trends, family structures, living standards, wages and the gender wage gap, to name a few. Although these topics might seem disparate, they are all aspects of women's lives that have been identified as important factors in understanding women's agency within a society. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum have argued that these aspects of women's lives, such as whether or not they are employed in paid labour, play a pivotal role in their own position in society as well as that society as a whole. Ultimately, my purpose is to study the factors that shaped the lives of coloured and white women in early twentieth-century Cape Town.

In other parts of the world these aspects of women's lives have been investigated by historians in much detail, but women's history in South Africa has been marked by different concerns and approaches. When South African scholars first turned their attention to women's history, the country was in political turmoil amidst the apartheid regime; this set the tone in the field for decades. This thesis focuses on the history of coloured and white women in South Africa by asking new questions and adopting new approaches to answer them. While the subject is no longer neglected in South Africa, there are areas of women's history and approaches to the field that have been overlooked. Women's history has been limited by the availability of sources – and these sources usually focus on specific aspects of women's lives, such as their involvement in political organisations or events. Often, though, we lack a basic understanding of women's social lives. This has forced historians to make assumptions; assumptions that I am able to test with new evidence. This dissertation therefore challenges some ideas that have been expressed in existing historiography. One such idea, for example, is that all white households employed domestic servants in South African history. New sources

* In this study the socially constructed racial terms of "coloured" and "white", "Asian" and "black" will be used to describe people of different races as they were during the period covered by the thesis. This study does not condone these terms and acknowledges that they are contentious and fluid.

and approaches show that this was simply not the case. This dissertation also provides significant information on wages – something that is severely under-researched in South African history. This wage information is used in this thesis to determine the nature of women’s work in Cape Town, to understand race and gender wage gaps and to ascertain whether Cape Town was a male-breadwinner society.

Interdisciplinary methods and new ways of using source material now provide the opportunity to study hidden aspects of women’s lives that have been disregarded. These new approaches can challenge past assumptions and shed light on new questions.

Opsomming

Hierdie dissertasie verken die lewe van bruin[‡] en wit vroue in Kaapstad van 1900 tot 1960. Hierdie periode sluit in die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog, die formasie van die Unie, wit vroue wat die reg verkry om te stem, die twee Wêreld Oorloë en die formalisasie van apartheid. Die vergelyking is gepas omdat die populasiegrootte van die twee groepe soortgelyk was – en daar baie ander sosiale en kulturele ooreenkomste was, van taal tot godsdiens. Een belangrike verskil is egter dat, terwyl wit vroue sommige akademiese aandag ontvang het in Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis, het bruin vroue nie. Hierdie werk het ten doel om die gaping te vul. Ek maak so deur bronne te gebruik soos huishoudelike opname en huweliksrekords om hul posisie in die samelewing te verstaan. Temas wat ondersoek word sluit in huweliksouderdom, indiensnemingneigings, familiestrukture, lewenstandaarde, lone, en die geslagsloongaping, om ’n paar te noem. Al lyk hierdie onderwerpe uiteenlopend, is dit al die aspekte van vroue se lewens wat geïdentifiseer is as belangrike faktore in die verstaan van vroue se bemiddeling binne ’n samelewing. Amartya Sen en Martha Nussbaum het geredeneer dat hierdie aspekte van vroue se lewens, soos of hulle aangestel is in betaalde arbeid of nie, ’n beslissende rol in hul eie posisie in die samelewing gespeel het, sowel as in die samelewing as geheel. Uiteindelik is my doel om die faktore te bestudeer wat die lewens van bruin en wit vroue in die vroeë twintigste eeu Kaapstad gevorm het.

In ander dele van die wêreld is hierdie aspekte van vroue se lewens reeds deur geskiedkundiges in baie detail ondersoek, maar vrouegeskiedenis in Suid-Afrika is gekenmerk deur verskillende bekommernisse en benaderinge. Toe Suid-Afrikaanse geleerdes eers hul aandag op vrouegeskiedenis gevestig het, was die land in politieke onrus te midde van die apartheidsregering; hierdie het die toon in die veld aangegee vir dekades. Hierdie tesis fokus op die geskiedenis van bruin en wit vroue in Suid-Afrika deur nuwe vrae te vra en nuwe benaderinge aan te neem om dit te beantwoord. Terwyl die onderwerp nie meer verwaarloos word in Suid-Afrika nie, is daar areas van vrouegeskiedenis en benaderinge tot die veld wat oorsien is. Vrouegeskiedenis is beperk deur die beskikbaarheid van bronne – en hierdie bronne fokus gewoonlik op spesifieke aspekte van vroue se lewens, soos hul betrokkenheid in politiese organisasies of gebeurtenisse. Ons het egter gereeld ’n gebrek aan ’n basiese verstaan van vroue se sosiale lewens. Hierdie het geskiedkundiges geforseer om aannames te maak; aannames wat ek kan toets met nuwe bewyse. Hierdie dissertasie daag daarom sommige idees uit wat

[‡] In hierdie studie sal die sosiaal-gekonstrueerde rasseterme van “bruin” en “wit”, “Asiër” en “swart” gebruik word om mense van verskillende rasse te beskryf soos hulle was gedurende die tydperk wat deur die proefskrif gedek word. Hierdie studie kondoneer nie hierdie terme nie en erken dat dit omstrede en vloeibaar is.

uitgedruk is in bestaande historiografie. Een so 'n idee, byvoorbeeld, is dat alle wit huishoudings huishoudelike werkers in diens geneem het in Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis. Nuwe bronne en benaderinge bewys dat hierdie eenvoudig nie die geval was nie. Hierdie dissertasie verskaf ook beduidende informasie oor lone – iets wat erg onder-nagevors word in Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis. Hierdie looninformatie is gebruik in hierdie tesis om die natuur van vroue se werk in Kaapstad te bepaal, om ras- en geslagsloongapings te verstaan en om vas te stel of Kaapstad 'n manlike broodwinnersamelewing was.

Interdissiplinêre metodes en nuwe maniere om bronmateriaal te gebruik, verskaf nou die geleentheid om versteekte aspekte van vroue se lewens te bestudeer wat geïgnoreer is. Hierdie nuwe benaderinge kan vorige aannames uitdaag en lig op nuwe vrae rig.

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The world is so much larger than I thought. I thought we went along paths – but it seems there are no paths. The going itself is the path.

– C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*

This project has been a process of realising that the world is so much larger than I thought. I am exceedingly grateful to all who have supported me along this path. It is certainly a journey that cannot be undertaken alone.

Firstly, to my supervisor, Prof. Johan Fourie, I have been greatly impacted by your infectious optimism and desire to provide learning opportunities for all of your students. Thank you for the time and energy you put into my PhD-journey. To my co-supervisors, thank you Prof. Vivian Bickford-Smith for your thoughtful emails and Meraki lunches, and thank you Prof. Kris Inwood for your inputs.

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Introduction

Writing women's history in South Africa¹

1. Background

Women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of human life. They are less well nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have preprofessional or technical education. [...] In many nations women are not full equals under the law: they do not have the same property rights as men, the same rights to make a contract, the same rights of association, mobility, and religious liberty.²

We know implicitly that history matters. But, in many parts of the world, researching, writing, studying, and consuming history is a luxury. Why spend resources on the study of history when there are more pressing concerns in the present? Choosing *what* to write about, and *how* to write it, is therefore a real concern. Historians in Africa have to make a particularly strong case to justify what we choose to research.

This is one of the main reasons that women's history was slow to emerge in the developing world. In South Africa, the most academically prolific country in Africa and home to seven of the continent's top ten universities in 2021, the first research into women's history began in the 1980s, a decade later than in Western Europe and the United States.³ Women's history arose out of a desire to restore women to the historical narrative. In 1989, Louise Tilly translated and adapted Marc Bloch's definition of history to describe women's history as "the study of women in time."⁴ Tilly also noted that women's history was exceptional in that it did (and does) stem from feminist conviction. "All history emerges from a political frame, but relatively few histories have as close a connection with an agenda for change and action as women's history does."⁵ As is evident from the epigraph and daily life in South Africa, women's history deserves more attention.

In South Africa, women's history remains a category of historical inquiry that does not have mass appeal: only two of the top five universities in the country currently advertise

¹ A version of this chapter has been published: A. Rommelspacher. "Restating the case for women's history in South Africa," *Economic History of Developing Regions*, (36), (3), 2021.

² M. Nussbaum. *Women and human development: The Capabilities Approach*, (United States of America: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

³ D. Beddoe. *Discovering women's history: a practical guide to researching the lives of women since 1800 (3rd ed.)*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.1.

⁴ L. A. Tilly. "Gender, women's history and social history," *Social Science History*, (13), (4), 1989, p. 440.

⁵ Tilly. "Gender, women's history and social history," pp. 440–441.

undergraduate courses relating to gender or women's history. Although it can no longer be said that historical research about women in South Africa is neglected, few would deny that there are approaches to, and therefore important aspects of, women's history that have been ignored. While a diverse range of topics relating to women have been explored, a lack of interest in women's history and the absence of specific methods and sources have limited approaches to the study of women in the past. New approaches could help democratise the field. As I shall demonstrate in this study, interdisciplinary methods and different approaches to the source material could provide the opportunity to study hidden aspects of women's lives that have been overlooked.

Despite the slow emergence of women's history in the developing world, a growing body of literature has found that women's wellbeing is essential to economic development. Women's history arose out of a desire to understand and address women's oppression, and some of the spheres in which women have experienced, and do experience, oppression. This thesis seeks to understand the lives of coloured and white women in Cape Town according to these spheres in which women can experience oppression. The opposite of oppression is freedom, or agency, and Amartya Sen has argued that women's agency is central to social change and development.⁶ This thesis explores these aspects of coloured and white women's lives in Cape Town using methods and approaches that have not been employed in this field in the South African context. This approach is underpinned by the idea that each person experiences certain freedoms and unfreedoms and that exploring coloured and white women's lives in Cape Town according to the various aspects of their lives will provide the opportunity to understand their position in society. Sen wrote that "the freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements."⁷

At the beginning of the century there were many similarities between white and coloured women in the city. Their population sizes were similar and, in terms of religion, the large majority of each group identified as Anglicans. Politically, coloured and white men enjoyed many of the same civil rights. In his survey of coloured people in South Africa, S.P. Cilliers wrote in 1963 that "generally speaking, the Coloured population maintains the typical Western family system and pattern of life. This statement applies especially to that section of

⁶ A. Sen. *Development as freedom*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 189.

⁷ Sen. *Development as freedom*, p. xii.

the Coloured population generally known as the Cape Coloureds.”⁸ He went on to say that coloured people living in the Western Cape were “western in culture, social life, religion and language, and are closely integrated in the western economy of South Africa.”⁹ Of course, there were differences too. Mohamed Adhikari found that slavery had a significant impact on coloured identity at the Cape and argued that “the legacy of slavery persisted into the late nineteenth century and contributed to the negative stereotyping of coloureds by colonists.”¹⁰ Slavery also played a role in the economic position of the coloured people and caused wealth and income gaps between white and coloured people. Sonja du Plessis and Servaas van der Berg write that “shifting identities, ascribed to them by others, have long dogged this part of the South African population.”¹¹ They found that:

The position of coloureds in the mid-20th century was still much the same as in the nineteenth century, i.e. with a strong presence in the primary sector and in low status occupations, with almost no progress into professional and managerial positions, despite the fact that rural-urban migration grew rapidly in the 19th century.¹²

To understand the lives of coloured and white women in Cape Town, various aspects of their lives will be explored. These aspects include marriage laws and trends, seasonality of marriage, antenuptial contracts, female labour force participation (FLFP), wages, the gender and race wage gap, the characteristics of domestic workers and their employers, the experiences of widows and the nature of family structures in the city. However, we know that in many ways the experiences of coloured and white people in Cape Town were very different. With the formation of the Union and the introduction of laws that followed, the inequalities deepened,¹³ which occurred before the formalisation of apartheid in 1948. In 1930, white women (and not women of other races) gained the vote for the first time in the Union of South Africa, a change which directly disadvantaged coloured male voters.¹⁴ By 1950, the life expectancy of coloured men and women was significantly lower than that of whites. The life expectancy at birth in 1950 was 44.82 and 47.77 for coloured men and women respectively,

⁸ S.P. Cilliers. *The Coloureds of South Africa: A factual survey*, (Cape Town: Banier Publishers, 1963), p. 24.

⁹ Cilliers. *The Coloureds of South Africa*, p. 24.

¹⁰ M. Adhikari. “The Sons of Ham: Slavery and the making of coloured identity,” *South African Historical Journal*, (27), 1992, pp. 97.

¹¹ S. Du Plessis & S. Van der Berg. “Early roots of ‘coloured’ poverty: How much can 19th century censuses assist to explain the current situation,” *New Contree*, (68), 2013, pp. 78.

¹² Du Plessis & Van der Berg. “Early roots of ‘coloured’ poverty,” p. 78.

¹³ R.W. Wilcocks. *Report of Commission of Inquiry regarding Cape Coloured Population of the Union*, (Union of South Africa: Government Printer, 1937), p. 223, par. 1110.

¹⁴ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 229.

while it was 64.57 and 70.08 for white men and women.¹⁵ The interwar years were marked by increasing segregationist policies in the city in terms of spaces and politics. One of the ramifications of this was a housing crisis in the city, which affected black and coloured residents severely.¹⁶ Although there have been commissions of inquiry and surveys into the lives of coloured people in South Africa (1937, 1963, 1964), the lives of coloured women have not received much attention from historians in the post-apartheid period.¹⁷

Because of the focus and particular methodological approach of existing historiography, coloured women's lives largely remain missing from women's history in South Africa. A combination of quantitative and qualitative sources, including a household survey, Anglican marriage records, newspaper articles and commissions of inquiry provide the opportunity to investigate the lives of a large proportion of Cape Town society using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative methods can include the use of statistical regressions, but here it refers simply to the desire to quantify or measure. The methodological approach of the thesis will be further discussed at a later point in this chapter. This thesis, therefore, seeks to investigate the lives of coloured and white women in Cape Town using these methods.

These methods and approaches are not new. Claire Lemerrier and Claire Zalc write that when the *Annales* journal was founded in 1929, it “proposed to make room in history for economic and social as well as comparative methods, and for groups rather than individuals, in particular, groups that did not write their own history.”¹⁸ This is the ethos I want to apply to women's history in the South African context as women in the first half of the twentieth century did not write their own history, and historians have shied away from economic and comparative methods. Lemerrier and Zalc go on to explain that this philosophy of the *Annales* “implied using new sources, archaeological remains as well as marriage and death records, new methods, often borrowed from sociology, geography, demography, or economics.”¹⁹ Although these sources and methods are by no means perfect, as I will explain below, they do provide new perspectives and answers to questions that have not been asked in this context.

¹⁵ Cilliers. *The Coloureds of South Africa*, p. 21.

¹⁶ W. Dooling. “‘Cape Town knows, but she forgets’: Segregation and the making of a housing crisis during the first half of the 20th century,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (44), (6), pp. 1057–1076.

¹⁷ R.W. Wilcocks. *Report of Commission of Inquiry regarding Cape Coloured Population of the Union*, (Union of South Africa: Government Printer, 1937); S.P. Cilliers. *The Coloureds of South Africa: A factual survey*, (Cape Town: Banier Publishers, 1963); E. Theron & M. J. Swart. *Die Kleurling bevolking van Suid Afrika*, (Stellenbosch/Grahamstad: Universiteits-Uitgewers, 1964).

¹⁸ C. Lemerrier & C. Zalc (Translated by A. Goldhammer). *Quantitative methods in the humanities: An introduction*, (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2019), pp. 7–8.

¹⁹ Lemerrier & Zalc. *Quantitative methods in the humanities*, p. 8.

This introduction restates the case for the study of women's history in South Africa, and provides the motivation for this thesis, which explores the lives of coloured and white women at a specific time and place in the city in order to understand their position in society. In this introduction, I will consider the research that has been done on women in South Africa, specifically in Cape Town. I then reflect on what still needs doing, present the methodological approach and provide the chapter overview of this thesis.

2. Women's history in South Africa

This survey of the literature on women in South Africa suggests that there are two dominant themes in the South African feminist historiography of the 1970s and 1980s. The first is the portrayal of black women as oppressed "victims" of a special kind of capitalism buttressed by the state; the second is the celebration of the heroic resistance of women against such oppression. White English-speaking historians of South Africa found their quintessential victims and heroines in black South African women.²⁰

Penelope Hetherington's quotation outlines the two dominant themes in literature about women in the 1970s and 1980s. While it can no longer be said that South African women are missing from historiography, there are important approaches to women's history that have been utilised elsewhere and yet are still absent in South African women's history.

In South Africa, the writing of women's history took off in the 1980s with the work of Marxist historians who attempted to remedy the fact that women were missing from South African historiography. This period saw historians across the continent working to restore women to history. Additionally, in 1988 the Organisation of American Historians produced and published a series of teaching material aimed at including women in world history.²¹ Since then, the field has focussed on a very particular direction – specifically the experience of women under capitalism and colonialism. In 1993, Hetherington produced the first and only (published) historiography of women in South Africa. She stated that by that time, "articles and books are almost all about the related themes of black women's material and psychological oppression in South Africa and their resistance to that oppression."²² This focus can be explained by the sources that researchers of women's history have used, and the context of

²⁰ P. Hetherington. "Women in South Africa: the historiography in English," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (26), (2), 1993, p. 261.

²¹ I. Berger and E.F. White. *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: restoring women to history*, (USA: Indiana University Press, 1988).

²² Hetherington. "Women in South Africa," p. 269.

apartheid that shaped this historiography. The pioneers of South African women's history researched and wrote women's history during a time when the political reality of the country meant that academia was a site of struggle and protest. In his master's thesis – which provides a historiography of women's history after 1990 – Lato Ntwape recognises that the only two existing volumes focussed on women's history, published in 1991 and 2009 respectively, have been “located within social history and limited in political history.”²³ The diverse nature of South African society and the complexity of its history makes it easy to exclude certain groups of people in the past, and to avoid generalising about experiences.

African women's history gained traction a decade earlier. In 1970, women and development were brought to attention by Ester Boserup's publication *Woman's role in economic development*.²⁴ Almost two decades later, however, Nancy Hunt commented that “in American women's history, there has been concern that women's history might become the ‘department of social history’, [and] it appears that African women's history risks becoming a department for the literature on women in development.”²⁵ But this focus on development did not supplant research on women's history in South Africa. In South Africa, women's history developed along a very different trajectory from those followed in the West or other parts of Africa. One possible reason for this is the absence of a significant feminist movement. Apartheid created conditions very different from those elsewhere on the continent, and women's history arose in reaction to it. Perhaps the first work on women's history in the country, *For their triumphs and for their tears: Women in apartheid South Africa*, was by author and anti-apartheid activist Hilda Bernstein (1975).²⁶

Towards the end of apartheid and in the immediate post-apartheid era, the trend has been to emphasise the political struggles against apartheid. When sociologist Belinda Bozzoli published her article “Marxism, feminism and South African studies” in 1983, she recognised that there was no “significant South African feminist movement.”²⁷ She further noted that South African women lived in a society of a “patchwork-quilt of patriarchies” – a concept akin to intersectionality.²⁸ A special issue on women's history published by the *Journal of Southern*

²³ L. Ntwape. “A historiography of South African women's history from c.1990: a survey of monographs, anthologies and journal articles,” (Master's Thesis, University of Pretoria), p. 70.

²⁴ I. Berger. “African women's history: Themes and perspectives,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, (4), (1), 2003, pp. 1–19.

²⁵ N. Hunt. “Placing African women's history and locating gender,” *Social History* (14), (3), 1989, p. 372.

²⁶ H. Bernstein. *For their triumphs and their tears: Women in apartheid South Africa*, (London: 1985, International Defence Aid Fund).

²⁷ B. Bozzoli. “Marxism, feminism and South African studies,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (9), (2), April 1983, p. 139.

²⁸ Bozzoli. “Marxism, feminism and South African studies,” pp. 139–171.

African Studies in 1983 was a critical point in the field. Deborah Gaitskell summarised the views of these pioneers of women's history in the introduction to that special issue. She wrote that "Women in Southern Africa are united in the fact that their diverse societies throughout the region have all been shaped by colonialism and capitalism in recent times."²⁹ This focus on the dual oppression of capitalism and colonialism (and racial subjugation) has characterised much of women's history in South Africa since then. That first special issue was also marked by the use of case studies, something that has become a mainstay of women's history (and South African historiography in general). Because of this emphasis on case studies, and given the diverse nature of South African society, historians have been hesitant to make generalisations about South African women's experiences – something that has perhaps inhibited the adoption of new approaches to women's history.

The 1990s saw South Africa's transition to a democracy. From a historiographic perspective, the decade started with the publication of the seminal volume edited by sociologist Cherryl Walker, *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (1990). In 1991 Walker also republished her work on women in politics, *Women and resistance in South Africa*, which was initially published in 1982 but banned by the apartheid government. Apart from Walker's edited volume there is only one other work that has attempted to provide an overview of women's history, namely *Women in South African history: They remove boulders and cross rivers* – an edited volume produced by the South African government in 2007.³⁰ During this period, new aspects of women's lives were researched, but approaches remained largely the same, with a focus on individual women or organisations and the use of qualitative approaches.

In 2004 South African historians joined the international debate about whether or not the focus should be on women's history or gender history. The discussion was one of the sessions at the UCT History Department Centenary Colloquium. In approaching the subject, some panellists proposed that gendered history was produced in "cross-fertilisation with disciplines such as psychology, cultural studies, sociology and literary criticism."³¹ The colloquium further concluded that although "reclaiming women as subjects of history" may have initially been the focus of South African historiography, that focus soon shifted to "an investigation of the creation and maintenance of gender power relations in historical

²⁹ D. Gaitskell. "Introduction: Special issue on women's history," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (10), (1), 1983, p. 1.

³⁰ N. Gasa (ed). *Women in South African history: They remove boulders and cross rivers*. (Cape Town: HRSC Press, 2007).

³¹ N. Erlank & L. Clowes. "Session 7: Writing and teaching gendered history in Africa in the twenty-first century" in "Reports on colloquium sessions," *South African Historical Journal*, (50), (1), 2004, p. 231.

situations.”³² Despite the work on women’s history and gendered histories, Helen Scanlon noted in 2007 that “there remain considerable gaps in our knowledge of South Africa’s past.” She contends that “it is true that analysing women’s history in isolation can lead to ghetto-ising the topic, but much remains to be explored and told, and there is some way to go before this ‘recuperative’ process is complete.”³³

Researching women in South Africa has encouraged inventive approaches to the problem of limited source material – especially in the form of oral history. In 1985 Suzanne Gordon published her study that used interviews with 23 women working as domestic workers in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁴ Gordon’s work, among others – such as *Working Women. A portrait of South Africa’s black women workers* by the South African Committee for Higher Education Trust and Lesley Lawson – were published at a pivotal time, and played an important political role in activism against apartheid and presenting “documents of the victims of apartheid.”³⁵ Belinda Bozzoli’s ground-breaking work from 1991 traces the lives of 22 black women born before 1915 in Phokeng, a small town in the North West province of South Africa from 1900–1983.³⁶ While oral history approaches have been used to write about women in the past, these still represent individuals and small groups of women. In 1989, Gisela Bock wrote the following about women’s history: “Women’s history has used all methods and approaches available to historians, including biography, cultural, anthropological, economic and political history, history of mentalities and of ideas, oral history and the methods preferred in social history, such as the study of mobility, historical demography and family history.”³⁷ This cannot, however, be said of women’s history in South Africa. In particular, quantitative approaches to women’s history have not been utilised in the South African context.

Against this background, what is known about women in Cape Town in the first half of the twentieth century? At the beginning of the twentieth century, Cape Town received refugees fleeing from the Rand as a result of the South African War. Capetonians, including the Ladies’ Relief Committee, sought to care for those arriving. The care that they offered differed according to the race and gender of the refugee – a fact that set the tone for distinguishing

³² Erlank & Clowes. “Session 7: Writing and teaching gendered history,” p. 232.

³³ H. Scanlon. *Representation & reality: portraits of women’s lives in the Western Cape 1948-1976*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), pp. 1;5.

³⁴ S. Goron. *A talent for tomorrow: Life stories of South African Servants*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985)

³⁵ C. Boyce Davies. “Review: In their own words: Life and work in South Africa,” *College English*, (51), (1), p. 89.

³⁶ B. Bozzoli with M. Nkotsoe. *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, life strategy, and migrancy in South Africa, 1900–1983*, (United Kingdom: Boydell & Brewer, 1991).

³⁷ G. Bock. “Women’s history and gender history: Aspects of an international debate,” *Gender & History*, (1), (1), p. 8.

between people in the city for the rest of the century.³⁸ In the first half of the twentieth century, coloured identity was complex, “fluid and ambiguous”. Cape Town’s coloured community was often defined and referred to negatively. “Rejected by whites, coloured people were forced to redefine themselves. What were they: ‘African’ or ‘European’, ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim’, ‘English’ or ‘Afrikaans’, ‘Coloured’ or ‘Malay’, working class or middle class, conservative or radical?”³⁹

The term “coloured” has derogatory connotations in some parts of the world, but in southern Africa it is the accepted name for people of varied racial and cultural heritage. Mohamed Adhikari explains that:

[i]n South Africa the term ‘Coloured’ has a specialised meaning and does not refer to black people in general as it does in many other contexts, most notably in Britain and the United States. It instead refers to a phenotypically varied social group of highly diverse social and geographical origins.⁴⁰

The subject of race in South African history is an extremely complex one. Although race is not, in and of itself, the focus of this thesis, race is used as point of comparison because of South Africa’s history of racial classification and discrimination that is constitutive of the source material used and the real-life experiences of those being studied. The focus of this thesis is on the lives of “coloured” and “white” women, but some references will also be made to “black” and “Asian” people – who represented smaller populations in Cape Town during this period. Asian refers to those of Asian heritage, which included those who originated from Southeast Asia.⁴¹

Although many coloured people spoke Afrikaans, the Great Trek Centenary Celebrations of 1938 was just one of the many instances of their exclusion from city life.⁴² The white population of Cape Town was mostly English-speaking, with a constant stream of immigrants arriving from European countries, which formed a cosmopolitan and heterogenous white community. At the beginning of the century, white women were underrepresented in the general population. Amidst fears that British men would marry black or Boer women as a result of this sex imbalance, societies such as the South African Immigration Committee were created

³⁸ V. Bickford-Smith, E. Van Heyningen & N. Worden. *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An illustrated social history*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999), p. 13.

³⁹ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ M. Adhikari. “Contending approaches to coloured identity and the history of the coloured people of South Africa,” *History Compass*, (3), 2005, p. 1.

⁴¹ M. Adhikari. *Burdened by race*, pp. viii–ix.

⁴² Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 79.

in order to encourage women to come to, and remain in, Cape Town.⁴³ White and coloured people were the two biggest population groups in Cape Town for the first half of the century. By 1946, there were more than 400 000 people living within the bounds of greater Cape Town. Most of these were white, but both the coloured and white populations being close to 200 000 by 1946, with 30 000 black Africans and under 10 000 Asians living in the city.⁴⁴ The coloured population exceeded the white population for the first time in 1951.⁴⁵

White women contributed to city life in, among others, their capacity as doctors (for instance, Dr Jane Waterston) and politicians (for instance, Julia Solly). Cape Town feminists were inspired by prominent figures such as Olive Schreiner. In the 1910s, elite, white, English-speaking women in Cape Town rallied in groups such as the Guild of Loyal Women (founded in 1900), the Women's Christian Temperance Union (founded in 1899), and the Women's Enfranchisement League (founded in 1907).⁴⁶ The Women's Christian Temperance Union was an offshoot of the organisation founded in the USA, although at the Cape it had broader objectives than those of its parent organisation. At the Cape the organisation also focused on the promotion of gender equality and gaining the vote for women.⁴⁷ The founding of the Guild of Loyal women was celebrated in the gardens of the Arderne family home in Claremont and attended by more than 400 people. The guild was an organisation of colonial women (mostly recent British immigrants or descendants of British immigrants) who sought to express their political views – specifically their desire to maintain “the Cape Colony as a part of the British Empire.”⁴⁸ These organisations were important to the white women's suffrage movement and succeeded in securing the vote for white women in 1930. Unfortunately, the fact that white women gained the vote meant that the already limited suffrage of coloured and black men was diluted, while coloured, black, and Asian women remained disenfranchised.⁴⁹ During both world wars, English-speaking women in Cape Town rallied to found and drive a variety of charitable organisations. During World War II, white women replaced men in offices, shops and factories, in addition to which they also signed up for active service.⁵⁰ Although these organisations in Cape Town were dominated by elite Englishwomen, there were also coloured

⁴³ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Scanlon. *Representation & reality*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Scanlon. *Representation & reality*, p.31.

⁴⁷ J. McKinnon. “Women's Christian Temperance Union: Aspects of early feminism in the Cape, 1889–1930,” (Master's Thesis, UNISA, 1995).

⁴⁸ E. Van Heyningen & P. Merrett. “‘The healing touch’: the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa 1900-1912”, *South African Historical Journal*, (47), (1), 2002, pp. 24;28.

⁴⁹ C. Walker. *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), p. 313.

⁵⁰ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 97.

branches of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (the Cape Town branch was established in 1915). The coloured unions were exclusively led by educated middle-class coloured women, many of whom were teachers and nurses.⁵¹

Coloured women have received little to no attention from historians in South Africa. Existing work focuses on the apartheid period and looks at women in the province more generally. Coloured politicians in Cape Town in the 1910s saw women, especially women as mothers, as key to the social upliftment of the coloured race. The African Political Organisation (APO) was concerned with the defence of coloured people's rights; the APO Women's Guild was established in Cape Town in 1909 by Helen Abdurahman (wife of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman).⁵² Cissie Gool (1897–1963), daughter of the aforementioned Abdurahmans and also known as “the Joan of Arc of District Six”, was perhaps the most prominent woman in politics who represented the interests of the coloured people in the pre-apartheid period. Cissie Gool rose to prominence in Cape Town in the 1930s and was the only woman to preside over both the National Liberation League and the Non-European United Front.⁵³ Although it can be said that during the 1920s and 1930s the coloured communities developed a distinct political identity, this identity was not without its paradoxes. While coloured men who married black African women were still considered part of coloured communities, coloured women who married black African men were not.⁵⁴ Throughout the twentieth century the lives of coloured communities were persistently characterised by poverty and unrest. Coloured women worked as domestic servants and washerwomen in the city. The *Report of the commission of inquiry regarding Cape Coloured population of the Union of South Africa* (1937) emphasised that the natural position of women was that of homemaker. But it questioned whether coloured women were suited to this role. Coloured women's roles as homemakers were in conflict with their desperate need to work for an income outside of the home in order to escape poverty. Wayne Dooling highlights that this, in turn, affected their respectability in Cape Town society.⁵⁵

⁵¹ S. Duff. “‘Dear Mrs Brown’: social purity, sex education and the Women's Christian Temperance Union in early twentieth-century South Africa,” *Social History*, (45), (4), 2020, p. 481; J. McKinnon. “Women's Christian Temperance Union,” p.37

⁵² P. Van der Spuy and L. Clowes, “‘A living testimony of the heights to which a woman can rise’: Sarojini Naidu, Cissie Gool and the politics of women's leadership in South Africa in the 1920s”, *South African Historical Journal*, (64), (2), 2012, p. 349.

⁵³ Van der Spuy & Clowes. “‘A living testimony of the heights,’” pp. 343;345.

⁵⁴ M. Adhikari. *Burdened by race: Coloured identities in Southern Africa*, (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), p. 164.

⁵⁵ W. Dooling. “Poverty and respectability in early twentieth-century Cape Town,” *Journal of African History*, (59), (3), 2018, pp. 422;431.

Questions related to coloured identity have been at the forefront of research into coloured people in South Africa. For most of the twentieth century, the coloured population did not make up more than nine percent of the population of South Africa and most of this population (over forty percent) has lived in and around Cape Town.⁵⁶ Adhikari has outlined some of the changes that restricted the rights of coloured people in the twentieth century.

In the 1920s and 1930s the economic advancement of the coloured community was undermined by the Pact government's 'civilised labour' policy and a number of laws designed to favour whites over blacks in the competition for employment. Furthermore, in 1930, the influence of the coloured vote was more than halved by the enfranchisement of white women only.⁵⁷

During the apartheid period coloured people experienced a deluge of limitations on their rights. Compulsory racial classification was introduced under the Population Registration Act of 1950, which largely enabled formalised segregation. This was followed by the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1948 and the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, which both made it illegal to marry interracially. With the introduction of the Group Areas Act of 1950, thousands of coloured people were forcibly removed to designated areas. 1953 saw the introduction of the Separate Amenities Act which further extended exclusion by segregating public amenities.⁵⁸

Elizabeth van Heyningen has produced important work about women in Cape Town. Her 1984 article investigated prostitution and the contagious diseases act at the Cape Colony from 1868–1902. In this article she shows that in 1868, a register of prostitutes for Cape Town revealed that, although there were at least thirteen nationalities represented by those on the register, 53% of the prostitutes in the city were coloured.⁵⁹ She has also studied the life and work of Jane Waterstone, the first white women doctor in South Africa, who qualified in Ireland in 1879.⁶⁰ For women in the rest of South Africa, Van Heyningen's research has focused on the South African War, with works on women and gendered aspects of the war,⁶¹

⁵⁶ M. Adhikari. "Contending approaches to coloured identity and the history of the coloured people of South Africa," *History Compass*, (3), 2005, p. 2.

⁵⁷ M. Adhikari. "Hope, fear, shame, frustration: Continuity and change in the expression of coloured identity in white supremacist South Africa, 1910–1994," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (32), (3), 2006, p. 467.

⁵⁸ Adhikari. "Hope, fear, shame, frustration," p. 467.

⁵⁹ E. Van Heyningen. "The social evil in the Cape Colony 1868–1902: Prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Act," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (10), (2), 1984, p. 182.

⁶⁰ E. Van Heyningen. "Regularly licensed and properly educated practitioners' Professionalisation 1860–1910," in H. Deacon, H. Phillips and E. Van Heyningen (eds). *The Cape Doctor in the nineteenth century: A social history*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 195–222.

⁶¹ E. Van Heyningen. "Women and gender in the South African War, 1899–1902," in N. Gasa (ed). *Women in South African history: They remove boulders and cross rivers*. (Cape Town: HRSC Press, 2007), pp. 91–128.

and women's voices during the conflict according to their letters, diaries, and reminisces they wrote.⁶² Women's history has also been central to Van Heyningen's study of public health.⁶³ Despite Van Heyningen's work, no research has been done to generalise the experiences of coloured and white women in Cape Town using quantitative approaches.

Instead of attempting to reference or summarise the entire historiography of South African women, each chapter of this thesis contains its own topic-specific literature review and methodological framework. In addition to that I have created a table (see Appendix A) containing a chronological list of publications related to women in South Africa. Although Ntwape provided a similar table in his master's thesis, his list only referred to the period 1992–2011 and does not provide the titles of all the works published.⁶⁴ While it is impossible to create a thoroughly exhaustive list, I believe that my list will provide a useful resource and starting point for future researchers of women's history.

There are a few trends in this literature represented in Appendix A that are worth highlighting: the first is that more than 90% of the publications are authored by women and the second is the share of journal publications that are related to women's history. Figure 1 below shows the number of articles related to women's history as a share of all articles published in the *South African Historical Journal* and *Historia* since 1975. These two journals were chosen because they are the longest running English-language history journals in South Africa. Articles were deemed to be "women's-history-related" by their titles. Since the 1990s, the levels of women's-history-related papers to other papers has stayed relatively constant, though there has been an increase, especially in *Historia*, since 2010. That said, women's history remains a relatively small component of all published history papers with an average of fewer than one in ten papers focussing on the topic.

⁶² E. Van Heyningen. "The voices of women in the South African War," *South African Historical Journal*, (41), (1), 1999, pp. 22–43.

⁶³ E. Van Heyningen. "Public health and society in Cape Town, 1880–1910," (PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989).

⁶⁴ Ntwape. "A historiography," pp. 128–131.

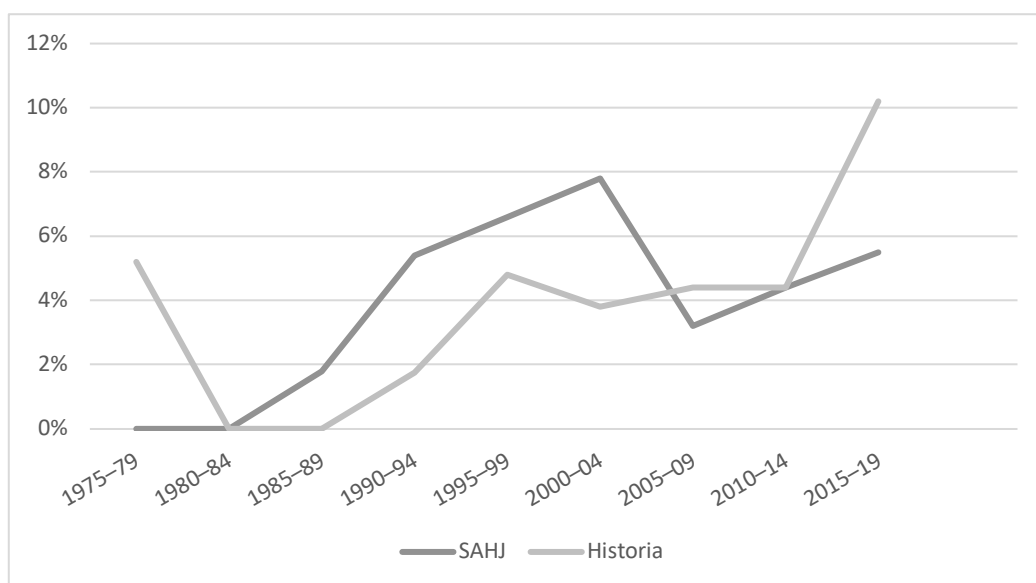


Figure 1: Women's history articles as a share of all publications for the *South African Historical Journal* and *Historia*.

Source: Compiled by author.

3. What remains to be done

Historians who have sought to study women in South Africa have often complained about the apparent lack of sources. Women's marginalisation has meant that they are often unrepresented in historical records, and as Walker points out, this often weights research towards organisations, events and the lives of individuals who are better documented. This in turn creates a historical bias in favour of those institutions and organisations that have maintained records of major events, and those women whose lives have been considered important enough to document.⁶⁵

Despite the early work of historians that focusses on women in South Africa's past, that focus, has, understandably, largely been on the history of black women. But such a focus has meant that the histories of other (marginalised) groups have remained largely uncharted. Histories of coloured women, for example, have suffered double marginalisation in the sense that they have been neglected to the point that they are not even mentioned in research that points out neglected areas of women's history.⁶⁶ Indian women's history is another area that requires much attention. Gaitskell noted in the introduction to the 1983 thematic issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* that there is "an urgent need for the analysis of white women's roles within the region, as well as of the different experiences, employment patterns, family

⁶⁵ Scanlon. *Representation & reality*, p. 20.

⁶⁶ Ntwape. "A historiography," p. 123.

responsibilities and political involvement of Coloured and Indian women.”⁶⁷ Since Gaitskell made that comment some research has been done on white women. This work has had a particular focus on Afrikaans women’s involvement in propagating Afrikaner nationalism as *volksmoeders* in the 1930s and 1940s – a period synonymous with the rise of Afrikanerdom.⁶⁸ Research on English women concentrates on the nineteenth century with the emergence of the English settler middle class on the frontier, and in Cape Town.

Yet, the major neglect has not only been groups or subgroups of society, but the methods used to study women in history – which has led to the marginalisation of certain topics, such as marriage. Most of what has been written about women in South African history has used small scale, qualitative source material for case studies. Such qualitative sources include the administrative papers of political parties or the private material collections of noteworthy individuals. Because of this, historians have been either hesitant or unable to make generalisations about broader trends and draw comparisons between regions. Where generalisations have been made, such generalisations have often not been supported by appropriate sources.

Such weaknesses in historical analyses are often attributed to a lack of available source material. And indeed, the availability of certain types of sources has often been a barrier to the study of women’s history in Africa. Data on wages, for instance, are often lacking – not only because the records were not preserved, but because women were often working outside the formal labour market, fulfilling domestic duties, subject to informal (and underpaid) labour arrangements. In addition, although South Africa does, perhaps, have better archives than other developing regions, accessing archives and libraries and transcribing sources are time consuming and therefore costly. Creative responses to these challenges can be found in the work of Felix Meier zu Selhausen, who has produced interesting and substantial scholarship on female empowerment, women’s participation in collective action and gender inequality.⁶⁹ Similarly, in their work on women’s contributions to economic growth, Akyeampong and

⁶⁷ Gaitskell. “Introduction: special issue on women’s history,” p. 13.

⁶⁸ See Appendix A.

⁶⁹ F. Meier zu Selhausen. “Missionaries and female empowerment in colonial Uganda: new evidence from Protestant marriage registers, 1880-1945,” *Economic History of Developing Regions*, (29), (1), 2014, pp. 74–11.

F. Meier zu Selhausen. “What determines women’s participation in collective action? Evidence from a western Ugandan coffee cooperative,” *Feminist Economics*, (22), (1), 2016, pp. 130–157.

F. Meier zu Selhausen & J. Weisdorf. “A colonial legacy of African gender inequality? Evidence from Christian Kampala, 1895–1911,” *The Economic History Review*, (69), (1), 2016, pp. 229–257.

Fofack unite approaches in history and economics to grapple with difficult topics in pre-colonial and colonial periods in Africa.⁷⁰

But these constraints on sources are being overcome. The democratisation of sources, especially by digitising and transcribing large individual- and household-level records into open access databases, can encourage research into women's history by increasing access and lowering the costs of such research. Analysed with easily accessible statistical tools, sources such as marriage records, household surveys, and death notices can provide new insights into important aspects of women's lives.⁷¹ Themes that need investigating include female agency in marriage, assortative matching, social mobility, employment trends, wages, living standards, and the wage gap, to name but a few. These are topics that have already received much attention elsewhere. But the democratisation of access to sources will also allow investigations into topics that are unique to developing countries and, in this way, expand the field of women's history into new directions. Using Anglican marriage records, for example, Fourie and Inwood have investigated interracial marriages in early twentieth-century Cape Town and demonstrated a sharp decline in these marriages before the imposition of the Prohibition of the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949.⁷²

Household surveys are an example of a source that can, but has not yet been utilised for women's history in South Africa. The Batson Household Survey, for instance, provides a plethora of information about women and the households they were part of. This survey offers much important information about women for the period just before World War II. Each household provided information about the members of their households, including who the wage earners were, their ages, genders, earnings, place of work, and occupations. For non-wage earners the survey provides information about their relationship to the head of the household, their age, gender, and marital status. Additionally, it also includes detailed information about the dwelling, such as the number of rooms, whether the property was rented or owned, what was paid for electricity and water. I also use the survey to reveal new information about wages – including the gender wage gap and race wage gap. Just before World War II, white men in Cape Town earned on average £17.50 a month, while white women earned just over half of what white men did; coloured men earned just less than white women

⁷⁰ E. Akyeampong & H. Fofack. "The contribution of African women to economic growth and development in the pre-colonial and colonial periods: Historical perspectives and policy implications," *Economic History of Developing Regions*, (29), (1), 2014, pp. 42–73.

⁷¹ J. Fourie. "Making South African historians count," *Historia*, (66), (1), 2021, pp. 3–14.

⁷² J. Fourie & C. Inwood. "Interracial marriages in twentieth-century Cape Town: Evidence from Anglican marriage records," *The History of the Family*, (24), (3), 2019, pp. 629–652.

and coloured women earned just more than half of that. In other words, coloured women earned less than a quarter of what white men did. I also find that less than a third of white households in Cape Town employed domestic help.

4. Methodology

Historian Steven Ruggles quoted American historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his Social Sciences History Association presidential address in 2019 to say that: “the economist, the political scientist, the sociologist, the geographer, all the allied laborers in the study of society, have contributions to make to the equipment of the historian”.⁷³ The methodological approach of this thesis is based on this idea that historians can, and should, borrow and introduce various methodologies in order to write a history that “enlarges and enriches the collective present”.⁷⁴ Quantitative approaches to history have gone in and out of fashion in the twentieth century, and after a decline during the 1980s (in the midst of the cultural turn), these methods have seen a rapid increase in popularity in the last decade.⁷⁵

Ruggles explains that there have been three predominant waves of quantitative approaches to history in the United States. The first flourished in the first decades of the twentieth century and then declined in the 1940s and 1950s. The 1960s and 1970s saw the second wave, characterised by the rise of New Economic History, New Political history and New Social History. However, these were replaced with a renewed focus on narrative history with the “cultural turn” at the close of the twentieth century. Aside from American historians, this period of New History was also taken up by “the French Annales School, the British Marxist Social History and Historical Sociology”.⁷⁶ The third wave, which Ruggles terms “the revival of quantification”, began in the 2010s and he sees this wave as being ongoing. All of this is to say that methodological approaches move in and out of favour.⁷⁷ In South Africa today, however, a narrative approach to writing history still predominates.

Wessel Visser outlined five schools of South African history writing that emerged in the country. These are the: British imperialist, settler or colonialist, Afrikaner nationalist,

⁷³ S. Ruggles. “The revival of quantification: Reflections on old new histories,” *Social Science History*, (45), (1), 2021, pp. 1–25.

⁷⁴ S. Ruggles & D.L. Magnuson. “The history of quantification in history: The JIH as a case study,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (50), (3), 2019, pp. 363–381.

⁷⁵ C. Lemercier & C. Zalc. “Back to the Sources: Practicing and Teaching Quantitative History in the 2020s,” *Capitalism: A Journal of History and Economics*, (2), (2), 2021, pp. 473–508.

⁷⁶ J. De Vries. “Changing the narrative: The New History that was and is to come,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (XLVIII), (3), p. 313.

⁷⁷ S. Ruggles. The revival of quantification: Reflections on old New Histories, *Social Science History*, (45), 2021, p. 1.

liberal and the revisionist or radical schools. These emerged amidst various different changes in the country. The school that possibly most influences history writing in South Africa today is the revisionist or radical school. It arose in the 1970s and Visser argues that “the roots of this tradition lay in growing black resistance to the South African government.”⁷⁸ The methodological approach of the scholars forming part of this school ultimately still influence historical research and writing today. Visser wrote that “the radical revisionists believed theory to be essential in the formulation of historical questions.”⁷⁹ Visser recognised that, in 2004, the field of gender studies was becoming increasingly prevalent in the context of South African history research and writing.

This revisionist school arose in the international context of the emergence of New Social History. Historians belonging to this new school were “inspired by the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s: the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and above all the women’s liberation movement.”⁸⁰ Although there were some new social historians who quantified, quantification was not widely accepted and most rejected positivism. And quantification was not adopted by women’s historians or gender historians at the time.

Sonya Rose defines gender history by saying that it is “based on the fundamental idea that what it means to be as man or woman has a history.”⁸¹ She goes on to explain that:

[g]ender historians are concerned with the changes over time and the variations within a single society in a particular period in the past with regard to the perceived differences between women and men, the make-up of their relationships, and the nature of the relationships among women and among men as gendered beings.⁸²

A session at the UCT History Department Centenary Colloquium in 2004 addressed “writing and teaching gendered history in Africa in the twenty-first century”. Although some combine women’s history with gender history, and others argue that all women’s history is gender history, this thesis takes the stance that Deborah Gaitskell took at the UCT Colloquium that “both the concept and cause of ‘women’s history’” should be maintained”.⁸³ She went on to argue that “if we do not know what women were doing or thinking ... if we do not know

⁷⁸ W. Visser. “Trends in South African historiography and the present state of historical research,” *Nordic Africa Institute*, (23), (2), 2004, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Visser. Trends in South African historiography, p. 11.

⁸⁰ Ruggles. “The revival of quantification,” p. 10.

⁸¹ S.A. Rose. *What is gender history?*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), p. 2.

⁸² S.A. Rose. *What is gender history?*, p. 2.

⁸³ N. Erlank & L. Clowes. “Session 7: Writing and teaching gendered history in Africa in the twenty-first century,” in “Reports on Colloquium Sessions,” *South African Historical Journal* (50), (1), 2004, p. 231.

anything about how they experienced their lives, then how can we even begin to write gendered history?”⁸⁴

Women’s history in South Africa has not been approached using any quantification. Linking to the quote by Gaitskell above, I argue here that there are aspects of women’s lives that have been missed and add to her idea by arguing that they have been missed because of this lack of quantification. It is, however, important to differentiate between different types of quantification and how it relates to history. Claire Lemerrier and Claire Zalc explain that “although history is not an exact science, counting, comparing, classifying, and modelling are nevertheless useful methods for measure our degree of doubt or certainty, making our hypotheses explicit, and evaluating the influence of a phenomenon.”⁸⁵ Lemerrier and Zalc see these methods culminating in the possibility of a “constructivist, small-scale, and experimental” approach to quantifying.⁸⁶ They go on to say that for them approaching history quantitatively is “not to complain about the fact that a source has biases (they all have) or to find ‘the best’ source, but to assess *which questions* it could help answer.”⁸⁷

There are many questions that remain unanswered regarding women’s history in South Africa. The questions that underpin this research are inspired by the Capability Approach, developed by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, is used as a theoretical framework with which to study coloured and white women’s lives in Cape Town. Ingrid Robeyns writes that:

The ‘Capability Approach’ is a framework that offers a multidimensional account of well-being which focuses on what people can do and who they can be, such as the real opportunities they have to enjoy high-quality education, hold a job, have supporting and warm social relationships, care for their relatives and friends, enjoy good health, be mobile, and so forth.⁸⁸

Sen argued that:

These different aspects (women’s earning power, economic role outside the family, literacy and education, property rights and so on) may at first sight appear to be rather diverse and disparate. But what they all

⁸⁴ Erlank & Clowes. “Session 7: Writing and teaching gendered history,” p. 232.

⁸⁵ Lemerrier & Zalc. *Quantitative methods in the humanities*, p. 1.

⁸⁶ C. Lemerrier & C. Zalc. “Back to the sources: Practicing and teaching quantitative history in the 2020s,” *Capitalism*, preliminary, p. 5.

⁸⁷ C. Lemerrier & C. Zalc. “Back to the sources: Practicing and teaching quantitative history in the 2020s,” *Capitalism*, preliminary, p. 9.

⁸⁸ I. Robeyns. “Social justice and the gendered division of labour: Possibilities and limits of the Capability Approach,” in T. Addabbo, M. Arrizabalaga, C. Borderias & A. Owens (eds), *Gender inequalities, households and the production of well-being in Modern Europe*, (England: Ashgate, 2010).

have in common is their positive contribution in adding force to women's voice and agency – through independence and empowerment.⁸⁹

Using quantitative approaches to look at these different aspects of women's lives therefore provides the opportunity to understand women's position in society at a particular time and place.

In this thesis I use three main types of sources to investigate the unexplored aspects of the lives of coloured and white women in Cape Town. These are the Batson Household Survey, Anglican Marriage records, and newspaper articles from the *Cape Times*. These sources have determined the period covered by this thesis. Although it is a big period to cover, most of this research focuses on the 1930s and 1940s because of the nature of the Batson Household Survey. Although two of these source bases are not conventionally used by historians in South Africa, they are not unusual for those writing history elsewhere. Jane Humphries talks about the benefits of using rich incidental sources – that is, sources that were not created with the express purpose of providing information about the subject the historian seeks to understand.⁹⁰ The Batson Household Survey, for instance, was not created for the purpose of understanding the history of domestic workers and their employers in the city, but the incidental nature of this information lends itself to the possibility of rich perspectives into aspects of the past that are not visible in other sources. What follows is some background information about each of the three main sources.

The Batson Household Survey was conducted between October 1938 and April 1939 in various areas of Cape Town in an attempt to obtain a representative sample of the city's population. The survey cards were completed for fifteen different wards in the city, including Muizenberg, Sea Point, Claremont, Woodstock, and Observatory. The survey was carried out to inform a Social Survey of the city headed by Professor Edward Batson, professor of Social Science at the University of Cape Town from 1935 (when he was 29). It was conducted using random sampling methods, which provided a representative sample from which to draw conclusions about the city. The total initial survey, of 2 000 households, represented three percent of households in the city at the time and was conducted by the Department of Social Science at UCT and funded by the Carnegie Corporation. Of the 2 000 houses investigated, 1 017 were considered "European", or white, 834 as coloured, and the rest, 149, as "Native or

⁸⁹ A. Sen. *Development as freedom*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 191.

⁹⁰ J. Humphries. "Women in the workforce (over the very long run). *The Economic History Podcast*, 2020.

Asiatic”.⁹¹ Although there is information about black women in the Batson Household Survey coloured and white women are the focus of this thesis for the sake of narrowing the scope of the investigation. At the time Professor Batson was famous for his measurements of poverty, including the Poverty Datum Line, which determined the minimum standard of living required to avoid poverty in a society.⁹² The findings of this survey were published in a series of reports in 1941 and included “The Growth of the Population of Greater Cape Town”, “The Ethnic Distribution of the Population of Greater Cape Town”, “The Survey Poverty Datum Line”, “The Distribution of Poverty Among Coloured Households in Cape Town”, and “The Distribution of European Households in Cape Town”.⁹³ In addition, a conference was held in February 1942 to discuss the results. The aim of both was to formulate policy to alleviate poverty in South Africa.⁹⁴ Further findings were published in 1944. Professor Batson believed that one manifestation of extreme poverty was overcrowding, and he estimated that three-quarters of coloured households in Cape Town lived in three rooms or fewer.⁹⁵ One of the main findings of the survey was that 53% of Coloured households in the city lived below the Poverty Datum Line.⁹⁶

The template survey card includes information concerning the composition of the households by age, sex, and relationship to the head of the household. Other details include the occupations, wages, birthplace, and religious affiliations of those living in the household as well as details about the type of house/dwelling they occupied (number of rooms, cost of

⁹¹ The Carnegie Corporation was founded in 1911 and remains one of the biggest trusts in the world to this day. The benefactor of the corporation, Andrew Carnegie, was born into a poor family in Scotland in 1835. He immigrated to America and when he retired in 1901 he was one of the richest Americans. He founded a number of charitable trusts “to better the world”. The Carnegie Corporation was involved in a number of efforts to investigate and alleviate poverty in South Africa. Most famously the corporation funded two inquiries into poverty in the country – one in the 1920s and 1930s and one in the 1980s. M. Bell. “American philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and poverty in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (26), (3), 2000, pp. 483–484.

Batson Collection, Ms, 451. Manuscripts section, Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service. Diverse items including field book, specimens in newspaper envelopes, visitors cards.

Edward Batson (ed), “Surveying Methods,” University of Cape Town Department of Social Science: Reports and Studies Issued by the Social Survey of Cape Town, 12 March 1944. No. SS9, pp. 2;7.

⁹² The Poverty Datum Line was an estimate of the income needed by a family to survive or to attain the “minimum essentials for health and decency”.

Batson Collection, Ms, 451. Manuscripts section, Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service. Edward Batson (ed), “Surveying Methods,” University of Cape Town Department of Social Science: Reports and Studies Issued by the Social Survey of Cape Town, May 1941, No. SS3, p. 1; V. Bickford-Smith, et al. *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, p. 84.

⁹³ Edward Batson (ed), “The Poverty Datum Line”, University of Cape Town Department of Social Science: Reports and Studies Issued by the Social Survey of Cape Town, May 1941. No. SS1.

⁹⁴ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 109.

⁹⁵ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 146.

⁹⁶ Edward Batson (ed), “Poverty among coloured homes,” University of Cape Town Department of Social Science: Reports and Studies Issued by the Social Survey of Cape Town, May 1941, No. SS4, p. 2.

rent/mortgage repayments), and whether or not they employed domestic workers. For the purpose of this study, I have transcribed just over 1 000 of these cards, representing over 500 coloured (565) and just under 500 white (498) households. This represents all available survey cards that are legible and complete (some survey cards had been damaged and others censored, presumably by the surveyors themselves). I have utilised all of the survey cards available at the Stellenbosch University Library that are legible and were not rejected by the survey conductors for lack of information and other reasons. Some of the cards had their top sections cut off, presumably for reasons of anonymity because these sections included personal details of names and addresses. Many of the cards have matching tops in the collection and those that do not, were not used. The survey also included black households. These were not transcribed as the focus of the study is on coloured and white women and there were fewer than 150 black households surveyed.

The second main source used in this study is a newly constructed dataset that provides information about Anglicans who lived in Cape Town from 1865 to 1964. This dataset was transcribed by the Biography of an Uncharted People project from records found on Family Search, which were digitised by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. The Anglican church was the single biggest religious denomination for both coloured and white people in Cape Town for the period being studied. In the census of 1936, there were 54 839 white Anglicans in Cape Town, which represented 36% of the city's white population. The next most common religious group for white people in the city was the Dutch Reformed Church, with 28 981 members in 1936. The same census recorded 60 086 coloured Anglicans, which represented 39% of the city's coloured population, while the next most common religious denomination for the same group was also Dutch Reformed, recording 28 232 members representing 21% of the city's population.⁹⁷ The dataset includes just over 1 000 black couples. This number can be explained, on the one hand, by a very low black population in the city for the period covered by the dataset and, on the other hand, by the fact that the Anglican church was not as popular amongst the black population as it was for the coloured and white population. In 1936 the black population of Cape Town was only 14 160, representing 7% of the city's inhabitants in that year.⁹⁸

How representative, then, are these records of the population of Cape Town residents? The Union censuses of 1911, 1936, and 1951 all contained information about the religious

⁹⁷ *1936 Union census, religions*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1941), pp. 9;96; *1946 Union census, population*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1936), p.78.

⁹⁸ *1946 Union census, population*, p. 78.

affiliation of the population of the Union and the city of Cape Town. Unfortunately, each of these censuses represented figures according to different classifications of geography as well as different types of analysis. The Anglican church did, however, decrease in size over time – which is apparent when one considers the number of people who reported themselves as Anglicans as a percentage of the total religions reported. Despite a decline in membership, the Anglican church remained the single biggest religious affiliation for the first half of the twentieth century for both coloured and white people in the city. This was only the case for Cape Town though. In the Union as a whole, the Dutch Reformed church was the most common religious affiliation. According to the censuses, white Capetonian membership in the Anglican church dropped from a reported 36% in 1936 to 29% in 1951. For coloured Capetonians there is no figure available for 1951, but there is for 1946, and it drops from a reported 39% of the city identifying as Anglican in 1936, to 35% in 1946. In other words, the three biggest religious affiliations for coloured and whites decreased during this period and the censuses indicate a greater spread across denominations and religions as well as an increase in denominations and religions.⁹⁹ The black population in Cape Town fluctuated during the period under consideration but remained under 15 000 from 1904–1960 at a low of 1 541 in 1911 and a high of 13 013 in 1960.¹⁰⁰ The censuses reported the religious affiliations of black people even more haphazardly and the 1946 census is the first to contain all the relevant information. In 1946, the most common religious affiliation for black people in the city was Methodist, representing 30% of the black population, followed by Anglicans, representing 20% of the population.¹⁰¹ These numbers suggest that the Anglican records reflect a large proportion of Cape Town society even if there may still be selection effects at play.

The *Cape Times* is an English newspaper which was started in 1876 and it is the country's oldest daily publication. From its inception it adopted a pro-British stance – a

⁹⁹ *1936 Union of South Africa sixth census, volume VI, religions*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1941), Religions (Europeans), Table A.3., Denominations in the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs, Census 1936, p. 9; *1936 Union of South Africa Sixth census, volume VI, religions*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1941), Religions (Europeans), Religions (Coloureds), Table C.3., Denominations in the Principal Towns and Their Suburbs, Census 1936, p. 96; *1951 Union of South Africa population census, volume III, religions*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1956), Religions (Coloureds), Table 9.-Denominations in the Principal Towns and their Suburbs, Census, 1946, p.5 8.; *1951 Union of South Africa Population Census, volume III, religions*, Table 4.-Denominations in Metropolitan and other Principal Urban Areas-Census, 1946 and 1951, p. 26.

¹⁰⁰ *Urban and Rural Population of South Africa 1904 to 1960*, (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1968), Table 4.1.5. Bantu – Cities and Towns, Cape, p. 155.

¹⁰¹ *1951 Union of South Africa Population Census, Volume III, religions*, religions (Coloureds), Table 9.-Denominations in the principal towns and their suburbs, census, 1946, p. 58.; *1951 Union of South Africa Population Census, Volume III, religions* (Natives), Table 15.-Denominations in metropolitan and other principal urban areas-census, 1946, p. 74.

favourable view of the British Empire and British institutions.¹⁰² In the wake of the South African War, the readership was around 10 000 – a figure that doubled to 22 000 by 1921.¹⁰³ In the 1920s and 1930s, daily circulation figures stayed between 21 000 and 25 000.¹⁰⁴ It was the most popular English newspaper in Cape Town during this period. The different types of content from the newspaper include articles, interviews, reports, book reviews, advertisements and the classifieds. While other newspaper sources will also be used in this thesis, the *Cape Times* is one of the three main sources.

These sources will be integrated with others, which include newspapers and books published during the time period as well as a survey and commissions of inquiry – including the Wilcocks Commission (*Report of Commission of Inquiry regarding Cape Coloured Population of the Union*), Theron and Swart’s investigation into the coloured population in South Africa in *Die Kleurling bevolking van Suid Afrika* [*The Coloured population of South Africa*] commissioned by the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs and S.P. Cilliers survey of the coloured people of South Africa. Each of these sources provide their own advantages and disadvantages. While the Anglican marriage records provide tens of thousands of observations relating to coloured and white Capetonians in the twentieth century, they do only represent Anglicans in the city. The Batson Household Survey, however, represents a smaller number of observations (just over 1 000), but contains diversity as far as religious affiliation is concerned – and offers a representative sample of Cape Town residents. The commissions of inquiry were produced as government documents to report on specific issues at a specific time and place.

I acknowledge that this combination of sources, and my approach to using them, is unusual in the context of South African history writing. I aim to straddle methodological and theoretical approaches. Lotta Vikström outlines this conundrum well in her description of the methodological divide.

On the one side of the divide, social, cultural, gender and feminist historians predominate. Often, the emphasis here is on the interpretation of both research method and data. On the other side of this divide, we find historical demographers and economic historians who, in common with many empiricists, are rooted in the positivist paradigm.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² G. Shaw. *The Cape Times: an informal history*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999), p. 2.

¹⁰³ Shaw. *The Cape Times: an informal history*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Shaw. *The Cape Times: an informal history*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁵ L. Vikström. “Identifying dissonant and complementary data on women through the triangulation of historical sources,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, (13), (3), 2010, p. 212.

At this point in time, other history dissertations in South Africa might not need to allocate this much space to outlining methodological approaches; but, as mentioned before, this thesis attempts to adopt approaches that are new to history writing in South Africa while addressing topics that have not been addressed by historians in the post-apartheid period. I make no claim that I do this perfectly, but rather that I make a start.

5. Chapter overview

This thesis aims to present aspects of coloured and white women's lives that have been neglected in South African historiography, using sources and methods that are new to women's history in this context. Central to this investigation is a desire to understand women's position in society in the city. "Position" is understood in terms of women's rights, agency and wellbeing. Here wellbeing is broadly defined as wellness, or welfare according to the capabilities approach. Aspects of women's lives, such as whether or not they worked, the nature of their living situations, the laws that affected them as well as the laws and conventions regarding marriage, could all affect their wellbeing. Chapter 1 explores women's working lives and wages in the city just before World War II investigating the gender wage gap and race wage gap in order to understand whether or not Cape Town was a male-breadwinner society. The findings include that the situation was complicated because of the predominance of young white women working before they married and the low wages paid to coloured men and women. Chapter 2 focuses specifically on clerical work in the city to understand who worked as clerks and to investigate whether or not clerical work feminised in Cape Town as it did in other parts of the world at the beginning of the twentieth century. Because of the complexity of South African society and the difficulty of finding sources related to the topic, marriage is an underexplored aspect of South African historiography. Chapter 3 investigates various aspects of marriage for coloured and white women in the city. These aspects of marriage include: finding a marriage partner, age at first marriage, breach of promise cases, seasonality, the restitution of conjugal rights and divorce. This chapter finds that marriage trends amongst coloured and white couples converged as the century progressed, with age at first marriage and seasonality becoming more similar towards the end of the period. Chapter 4 focuses on the use of antenuptial contracts amongst coloured and white Capetonians to understand whether antenuptial contracts were in any way related to female agency. Signing an antenuptial contract was something that allowed women to retain their legal status as an adult upon marriage. Those who could sign antenuptial contracts gained considerable freedoms from doing so, but the

contracts were expensive, presenting a financial barrier to many couples. Chapter 5 explores domestic workers and their employers to understand who worked as domestic workers and who employed domestic workers in Cape Town. Most existing literature focusses on domestic workers and the apartheid period and makes the assumption that most white families employed a domestic worker in South African history. This chapter finds that this was not the case in Cape Town and that domestic work was a transient occupation with varying wages. This varied and difficult nature of domestic work meant that women were eager to leave this form of employment if they could. Chapter 6 investigates widows and family in the city in order to determine whether or not different family systems impacted the experiences of coloured and white widows. There were a number of different family systems represented in Cape Town in the 1930s, but the family structures of coloured and white households were remarkably similar. Widows in communities with strong family ties, for instance, are expected to be more likely to live with family members as widows, while widows living in communities with weak family ties are more likely to live alone as widows.

6. Conclusion

At the beginning of this introduction I raised the fact that African historians need to make a strong case to justify the topics we choose. Perhaps because of this, the cost of exploring new approaches, sources, and methodologies has seemed too high – especially in the case of topics not obviously related to the struggle against apartheid. While it is a truism that we understand the past to understand the present, in contemporary South Africa, with a history of having the highest levels of gender-based violence in the world, there has never been a better time to understand (and seek to change) the present by understanding the past.¹⁰⁶ Women matter and women's history matters. While the causes of gender-based violence are complex and varied, not considering women as agents and a lack of female empowerment are some contributing factors. The age at which women marry and the age gap between a woman and her partner, for instance, are indicators of women's agency. Other aspects of women's lives that impact their freedom include whether or not they work, what they earn and their legal position. Exploring

¹⁰⁶ C. J. Onyejekwe. "The interrelationship between gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS in South Africa," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, (6), (1), 2004, p. 34; "South Africa rape survey shock," BBC News, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8107039.stm> [08/07/2021]; N. Seleka. "Crime stats show that SA's women, children live in constant fear daily," *News24*, 14 November 2020, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/crime-stats-show-that-sas-women-children-live-in-constant-fear-daily-20201114> [08/07/2021].

these aspects of the past can provide a perspective on and start a conversation about women's rights in the present.

Although women's history is in and of itself no longer a neglected aspect of historical research in South Africa, there is much that can still be done. Past assumptions can be challenged with new methods and sources. There are many aspects of women's lives, in particular, that remain unexplored. This thesis seeks to explore the lives of coloured and white women in Cape Town to understand and compare their position in society from 1900–1960. Here I attempt to use interdisciplinary approaches in order to shed new light on old questions – or reveal new trends that require our attention. Historians of South Africa and Africa can learn much from the recent innovations and advances in women's history elsewhere in the world, but by adopting these methods and approaches, we also have much to contribute.

Chapter 1

“Too delicate to work”?: Breadwinners, women, and work in Cape Town before World War II

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, commentators continue to debate the old questions: Is work good for women? Does earning wages enhance female status, power, and consciousness? Does women’s work increase family prosperity or lead to the breakdown of “normal” family relationships? Has industrialization created the housewife or the liberated woman? Has women’s lot improved or deteriorated as a result of industrial development.¹

[T]here has long been a general agreement that increasing gender equality is fuelled, at least in part, by the growth in women’s paid labour force participation.²

Today, one thing seems certain, women’s paid involvement in the labour force aids their position in society and furthers gender equality.³ Amartya Sen wrote that “working outside the home and earning an independent income tend to have a clear impact on enhancing the social standing of a woman in the household and the society.”⁴ Globally, 42% of the working population is female.⁵ In South Africa in 2018, women represented 44% of the working population.⁶ Although South African women’s involvement in wage labour is higher than the global average, little is known about the history of female labour force participation (FLFP) and wage contributions in this country. The epigraph by Tilly and Scott summarises many of the questions, assumptions and ideologies that have characterised the debates about women and work over time. Jack Goody and Joan Buckley argue that women in Africa, and especially in sub-Saharan Africa, were involved in cultivation at exceptionally high rates compared to the rest of the world. Importantly they note that although this type of work was dominated by women, it was largely controlled by men.⁷ But despite these supposed differences between the

¹ L. A. Tilly & J. W. Scott. *Women, Work and Family*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), p. 1

² D. Cotter, J. Hermsen & R. Vanneman. “Women’s work and working women: The demand for female labor,” *Gender and Society*, (15), (3), 2001, p. 429.

³ K. Messing & P. Östlin. *Gender equality, work and health: A review of the evidence*, (Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2006), p. 11.

⁴ A. Sen. *Development as freedom*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 191.

⁵ Messing & Östlin. *Gender equality, work and health*, p. 2.

⁶ “How do women fare in the South African labour market,” <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=11375> [1 August 2018].

⁷ J. Goody & J. Buckley. “Inheritance and women’s labour in Africa,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, (43), (2), 1973, pp. 108–110.

nature and experience of labour participation for women in Africa and women living in other places, the subject has received scant attention in South African historiography and current research relies heavily on census data and emphasises low rates of FLFP, especially for white women. This chapter seeks to make a particular contribution. By using a household survey completed between 1938 and 1939 it will explore women's work and wages in order to understand whether or not Cape Town was a male-breadwinner society. It focusses on coloured and white women living in Cape Town (who represented the majority of the city's inhabitants) just before World War II, and seeks to understand how women in the city contributed to household incomes. The results suggest that although the male-breadwinner ideal predominated in Cape Town society, the wages of coloured men made it unattainable for most coloured households.

A novel dataset allows for the analysis of women's wages and their economic contributions for a period for which wage data is difficult to obtain. The survey in question also helps to understand the lifecycles of women's work. It shows that white women worked a variety of jobs in order to support their families. Women of both races delayed marriage in order to continue living with, and financially supporting their parents and other family members. However, the survey also indicates that some women sometimes worked because they wanted to and not necessarily because of dire economic circumstances. For young white women, working before they got married seems to have been a form of life experience or education – or possibly an opportunity to meet a spouse. A probable reason for low FLFP rates amongst white women could be the relatively low numbers of white households employing domestic servants – a finding that is contrary to current historiography and which is further discussed in Chapter 5. It is also clear that the survey cannot simply be taken at face value because women's work is not always obviously visible. Furthermore, the data from the Batson Household Survey also enabled me to address the question of whether or not white and coloured households conformed to a male-breadwinner household pattern.

Even though there are many ways of approaching the study of women's work, most studies focus on questions regarding of the type of work women did, whether only women did that particular kind of work, and what they were paid. This chapter uses male-breadwinner literature from other countries as a framework within which to explore coloured and white women's waged-labour contributions in Cape Town as well as their position in society. A male-breadwinner society is one in which it is the norm that men are relied upon as the main source of income for the household they are part of, which usually implies that they are also the head of that household. This chapter does not seek to affirm or question the male-breadwinner

ideology, but rather aims to understand whether or not coloured and white women were part of a society in which the male-breadwinner ideal was present. Ultimately the male-breadwinner ideal is linked to ideas about when or if women should work for a wage outside of the home. An increase in male breadwinners is associated with a decrease in women in paid employment. In her PhD thesis, Corinne Boter explains that “despite ample research on the topic, we still know relatively little about the causes of the decreasing FLFP rates and the rise of a ‘male breadwinner society’ in nineteenth-century western Europe”.⁸ While low FLFP rates are generally associated with a society that conforms to the male-breadwinner model, scholars working in the South African context have not yet explored if, or when, families came to rely on men as the main wage earner of the household they were part of or whether this model was applicable to both coloured and white households. Recent literature in South Africa does, however, confirm the existence of the male-breadwinner ideology in South Africa. Bianca Rochelle Parry and Puleng Segalo have written on women as breadwinners in the post-apartheid period saying that “women have furthered their domestic, economic and societal influence by becoming primary breadwinners in their homes.”⁹ This statement indicates that women were not always considered the primary breadwinners in their homes.

In approaching the subject of women’s work, and the concept of a male-breadwinner society, important questions arise with regard to when, how, and why women enter the labour force in the first place – and in current literature on the subject, answers to these questions remain dichotomous. On the one hand there are those who argue women’s oppression was caused by capitalism and patriarchy.¹⁰ British economic and social historian Ivy Pinchbeck argued in her book *Women workers and the Industrial Revolution* (1930) that the onset of industrialisation resulted in a reduction of economic opportunities for women and increased reliance on the wages of men – a process that Jan De Vries describes as follows:

The breadwinner-homemaker household, sometimes known as capitalist patriarchy, emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century in the most advanced sectors but became a widespread household norm in the century after 1850. Its defining feature is the withdrawal of wives and children from the paid labour force and the ideal of an adult male

⁸ C. Boter. “Dutch divergence? Women’s work, structural change, and household living standards in the Netherlands, 1830–1914,” (PhD Thesis, Wageningen University, 2017), p. 21.

⁹ B. Rochelle Parry & P. Segalo. “Eating burnt toast: The lived experiences of female breadwinners in South Africa,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, (18), (4), 2017, p. 183.

¹⁰ S. Horrell & J. Humphries. “Women’s labour force participation and the transition to the male-breadwinner family, 1790–1865,” *The Economic History Review* (48), (1), 1995, p. 94.

wage sufficient to support the household (the ideology of the family wage).¹¹

In response to Pinchbeck's work, a whole body of literature emerged which sought to understand, affirm, or oppose the notion of, what became known as the "male-breadwinner society" or the "breadwinner-homemaker household".¹² Horrell and Humphries', for instance, have argued that women and children's wage contributions to the household income were relatively small before industrialisation, and that industrialisation (and capitalism) did not cause women to exit the labour market.¹³ They also rule out patriarchy and capitalism as general explanations for the low economic contributions of wives, suggesting rather that a more holistic investigative approach is needed to explain the causes and subsequent changes in the patterns of women working.¹⁴ According to Horrell and Humphries, women were forced out of the labour market because production itself moved out of the home. Once this happened, married women, or women who cared for children, could no longer work *and* provide care for children (as they could when the home was the site of production). Contrary to this argument, De Vries has pointed to an increased demand for certain commodities associated with hygiene and nutrition becoming increasingly valuable during the Industrial Revolution. The demand for these commodities, he argues, required increased labour within the home, with the result that women and children withdrew from the formal wage-labour market outside of the home in order to meet this demand.¹⁵

Two of the most common and important factors of a male-breadwinner society are that men's wages are higher than those of women and that women's labour is concentrated in the home.

The male breadwinner model states that men and women specialize if there is a relative advantage to specializing, notable when husbands have higher earnings capacity on the labour market than their wives. If so, fathers will often specialize in gaining income, and mothers in running the household. Paradoxically, as a result, daughters of fathers with greater resources are more likely to have specialized skills related to the household.¹⁶

¹¹ J. De Vries "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution" *The Journal of Economic History* (54), (2), June 1994, p. 262.

¹² C. Boter. "Dutch divergence?," p. 21; Horrell & Humphries. "Women's labour force participation," p. 89.

¹³ Horrell & Humphries. "Women's labour force participation," p. 105.

¹⁴ Horrell & Humphries. "Women's labour force participation," p. 105.

¹⁵ J. De Vries. "The Industrial Revolution," p. 263.

¹⁶ R. L. Zijdeman, M.H.D. Van Leeuwen, D. Rbaudo & J.P. Pelissier. "Working women in France, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Where, when, and which women were in work at marriage?," *The History of the Family*, (19), (4), 2014, p. 539.

These two factors will be examined to understand whether or not Cape Town was a male breadwinner society, and whether this trend differed by race.

The male-breadwinner model is also viewed by some as an image, and something that has been adopted as a form of gender performativity. In her work on the emergence of the male breadwinner in colonial Nigeria, Lisa Lindsay contends that wives and husbands actively chose to perform the male-breadwinner ideal. Despite different ideas about the mechanisms that cause a male breadwinner society Lindsay's work agrees that wages are the centre of investigating the phenomenon. She writes that "[t]he creation of the male breadwinner image entailed two simultaneous moves: 1) to construe male earnings as supportive of women; and 2) either to ignore women's income-earning or to define it as something other than remunerative work."¹⁷

Some important questions arise in light of these theories. Firstly, *what* work did women do in Cape Town? Secondly, *why* did they do it? Thirdly, and most importantly, *how much* did they earn relative to men? Finally, how did their wages *contribute* to household incomes? As I mentioned before, the Batson Household Survey provides an opportunity to investigate the financial contributions of women to household income at a specific time and to question whether, or to what extent, Cape Town was a male-breadwinner society. The results will also pave the way for further research into the changes in these contributions over time.

This chapter proceeds by presenting a historiography of working women in South Africa in section two below. Section three provides a discussion of the data and the methodological underpinnings, while section four interprets the Batson Household Survey cards in an attempt to understand *when* coloured and white women worked and *what* work they did within and outside the home. Section five examines women's contributions to household incomes in order to assess whether or not Cape Town was a male-breadwinner society, and section six concludes the chapter by summarising its findings.

2. A historiography of working women in South Africa

In South Africa, the first three decades of the twentieth century were marked by urbanisation and industrialisation. The discovery of diamonds and gold in the last decades of the nineteenth century propelled the two republics and British colonies towards becoming a modern economy. In Cape Town, however, the first decade of the twentieth century was characterised by economic hardships in the wake of the South African War. In 1906, hungry coloured and white

¹⁷ L.A. Lindsay, "Working with gender: The emergence of the 'male breadwinner' in colonial Southwestern Nigeria," in C.M. Cole, T. Manuh and S.F. Mischer (eds), *Africa after gender*, (Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 242.

men and women took to the city's streets to protest the lack of poverty relief and rising unemployment levels. John X. Merriman, who became premier in 1908, introduced income tax in the city for the first time, which only added to economic frustrations.¹⁸ By 1909, just before the Union was formed, gold and diamonds were the top two exports from the Cape and Natal with 60.9% of exports being gold and 16.1% being diamonds. On average, gold remained over 50% of the total exports of South Africa between 1910 and 1949, only dipping below that figure during the great depression.¹⁹

In 1891, at the time of the first industrial census, Cape Town was characterised by artisanal establishments that carried out activities such as wool-washing, blubber-boiling and coffee-pulping, with only 327 of the 2 000 listed businesses in the census using steam or gas engines.²⁰ Although factories appeared slowly from the 1880s onwards, by World War I, manufacturing and commercial agriculture were still relatively insignificant, underdeveloped and unstable sectors in Cape Town.²¹ A recent article by Will Jackson provides evidence of views of working women between the two world wars. He refers to a white woman in Cape Town, Sarah Cooper, who in 1922 received a grant of £2 per month to support her family because her husband was abusive and did not provide for her or their children. A problem arose when Sarah used the grant money to hire a coloured woman to look after her children while she went out to work as a typist to earn more money in order to support herself and her children. Jackson says that "Officials' attitudes toward the Cooper family now hardened. As one pointed out, maintenance grants were intended to 'keep the home going,' to be paid out only if children were 'personally looked after' by their mother."²² Despite Sarah's best efforts, her children were later taken away from her because officials claimed that she was not taking adequate care of them. Implicit in this story is an assumption about the relationship between women and paid work outside of the home. Being a mother was considered incompatible with having an occupation. In addition, and as I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, £2 a month was not enough to live on. Policies introduced by the Pact Government (the coalition of the National and Labour Parties) in 1924 promoted the growth of the manufacturing sector with the purpose of providing jobs for one particular section of the Union's population, namely whites – more specifically, poor whites. Also during this time, white Afrikaans women from agricultural areas

¹⁸ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, pp. 33–35.

¹⁹ C.H. Feinstein. *An economic history of South Africa: Conquest, discrimination and development*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 101–102.

²⁰ Feinstein. *An economic history of South Africa*, pp. 114–115.

²¹ Feinstein. *An economic history of South Africa*, p.115.

²² W. Jackson. "The kindness of strangers: Single mothers and the politics of friendship in interwar Cape Town," *Journal of Social History*, (54), (3), 2021, p. 2.

took up jobs in the emerging textile, clothing and food industries in Johannesburg and Cape Town.²³

Elsabé Brink identified two forces that interacted in the period after World War I to specifically increase the number of women in the garment manufacturing industry. The first was the fact that *bywoners* (tenant farmers) had become so poor that they could no longer support themselves on the land and the second, the developing nature of garment manufacturing itself. Poor whites had become so desperate for access to employment in the cities during this period that one family (including a baby and two young children) walked over 1 600 kilometres from Knysna to the Witwatersrand in search of better economic opportunities.²⁴ Trade routes that had altered as a result of World War I also encouraged growth in the manufacturing sector as diminished foreign trade and higher demand from a growing urban population created favourable conditions.²⁵

Disturbances caused by World War I are believed to have significantly changed women's socio-economic conditions in Cape Town. Young coloured women took to the streets for leisure after working in offices and factories all day, and concerned organisations attempted to provide wholesome pastimes for the city's population in the form of organised activities and clubs, such as night schools.²⁶ After World War I, the city of Cape Town emerged as a centre of clothing manufacturing. Women, both coloured and white, were drawn into the textile industry. After a tenuous couple of years, industry in the Union broke free from the clutches of the Great Depression in 1933 with a boom in gold mining and dramatic growth in the manufacturing sector. The small white population could not provide the burgeoning manufacturing industry with sufficient labour and, as a result, black and coloured workers were recruited at a much faster rate than white labour in the 1930s.²⁷ World War II saw manufacturing output double – from £200 000 000 in 1938/9 to £400 000 000 in 1948/9.²⁸ The war also introduced new approaches to the manufacturing industry in the form of mass production and the standardisation of production.²⁹ Within light industry, the net value of output for food, beverages and tobacco decreased by 13.4 percentage points from 1924/5 to

²³ Feinstein. *An economic history of South Africa*, p. 118.

²⁴ E. Brink. “‘Maar ‘n klomp “factory” meide’: Afrikaner Family and Community on the Witwatersrand during the 1920s,” in B. Bozzoli. *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), p. 178.

²⁵ Brink. “‘Maar ‘n klomp “factory” meide’,” p. 178.

²⁶ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 54.

²⁷ Feinstein. *An economic history of South Africa*, p. 123.

²⁸ Feinstein. *An economic history of South Africa*, p. 123.

²⁹ Feinstein. *An economic history of South Africa*, p. 123.

1948/9. Textiles, clothing, leather, and footwear, however, increased by 5.2 percentage points.³⁰

Existing literature on the history of South African working women emphasises their exploitation in a patriarchal society and fails to explore the economic value of women's occupations outside the home or remunerated work inside the home. In other words, while the current literature focuses on the limited economic options available to women, it largely neglects to understand both how women's labour added value to households and trends in the lifecycles of working women. Most research about women and work in South Africa was done before or during the 1990s. Horrell and Humphries observe that in the 1990s research emphasised patriarchy and capitalism as the chief causes of women's oppression in industrialised society – an interpretation which is apparent in South African research about women and work produced at the time. Horrell and Humphries explain that this view, which is also known as “the capitalist patriarchy model” and which they do not agree with, defines women's position in society as the result of:

chauvinist trade unions, and campaigns for ‘a family wage’. These factors are depicted as excluding women from jobs which paid well enough for them to support themselves and their children, and crowded them into badly paid and insecure sectors of the labour market, thereby promoting their dependence on husbands and fathers.³¹

In *Threads of solidarity: Women in South African industry: 1900–1980* (1992) Iris Berger argues that white women had more choice in the nature of their employment outside of the home than women of other races, but emphasises that women's participation in the labour force was unusual and only occurred when men's wages were non-existent or insubstantial.

For neither black nor white women was a substantial number of wage-paying jobs available outside of domestic service, and most women sought formal employment only episodically: when economic depression, war, low male wages, drought, or in the case of black women, discriminatory laws, forced them out of their customary dependency either on the land or on male incomes.³²

Referring to the first two decades of the twentieth century, Berger states that “[e]ven as these new forms of wage labour were opening up for women, they remained integrated into a family

³⁰ Feinstein. *An Economic History of South Africa*, p. 126.

³¹ Horrell & Humphries. “Women's labour force participation,” p. 94.

³² Berger, *Threads of solidarity*, pp. 17–18.

economy, and many assumptions about domesticity and women's dependency continued to influence their wages and working conditions."³³ She also finds that women would usually withdraw from the labour market once they married, revealing the ideology that husbands would (and could) support them and that bias existed against employing married women.³⁴

An exception to this historiographical trend of emphasising the exceptional nature of women working in South Africa in the early twentieth century is Elsabé Brink's work on garment workers. Brink has explored the contributions that female garment workers in Witwatersrand made to household income in the 1920s. Her research also addressed the question of where women who ended up working in the garment industry came from. Poor white families who moved from rural areas to cities such as Johannesburg needed to function as an economic unit. The income of one family member was insufficient to sustain the whole family and Brink found that women became garment workers when men in the family were either sick or could only find work in positions that were more poorly paid. And so, Brink introduced the idea that in the suburbs of Johannesburg young women were often the breadwinners in their families.³⁵ In general, though, it can be said that South African historiography has viewed women's work as an infrequent and abnormal occurrence.

3. Data and methodology

Since this chapter seeks to understand women's work and their economic contributions to the household – including the circumstances under which they deemed it necessary to work outside of the home – it is important to outline the cost of living in Cape Town at the time. The reports produced as a result of the Batson Household Survey considered six expenses essential to the survival of a household: 1) food; 2) housing; 3) transportation; 4) clothing; 5) fuel and lighting, and 6) cleaning materials.³⁶ These expenses were not viewed as providing for a good standard of living, but were rather considered the bare minimum necessary for survival. By using prices in Cape Town for the years 1938–1939, the report determined that the minimum dietary requirements of an adult male could be met with 7s.6d. a month. The cost of feeding women and children of different ages was calculated as a percentage of the adult male's diet. A female's food requirements between the ages of 16 and 59, for instance, was believed to cost 85% of 7s.6d per month.³⁷ The survey also provided a breakdown of the clothing that an adult

³³ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 30.

³⁴ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 33.

³⁵ Brink. "Maar 'n klomp "factory" meide," pp. 183–184.

³⁶ Batson (ed). "Surveying Methods", May 1941, No. SS3, p.1.

³⁷ Batson (ed). "Surveying Methods", May 1941, No. SS3, p.5.

male, married adult female, and unmarried female earner would respectively need to purchase in a year. An adult male was expected to spend £4.17s.6d. on clothing per year; a married female £3.10s.6d., and an unmarried female earner, £5.4s.9d.³⁸ A woman living by herself was expected to need £1.14s.7d. a month to cover all of her own expenses. According to the Wilcocks Commission (*Report of Commission of Inquiry regarding Cape Coloured Population of the Union*), the minimum wage to support a “civilised” family of five (husband, wife and three children) in 1925 was between £90 a year (£7.10s. a month) and £110 a year (£9.4s. a month). (This concept of a “civilised wage” will be addressed later on in the chapter).³⁹ According to Batson’s calculations, the minimum monthly wage needed for a family of five to survive on in 1938/1939 was £7.0s.9d.–£9.4s.3d.⁴⁰ This bracket was described as “an estimate of the income needed by any individual household if it is to attain a defined minimum level of health and decency.”⁴¹ These figures will be used in the assessment of men and women’s wages to understand whether families could afford to live on one man’s wage or not and whether this was the same for coloured and white families.

A study of poverty in Cape Town published in 1936 and completed with the use of surveys conducted in 1933 provides a useful indication of what the composition of different municipal wards in the city was in the early 1930s. Sea Point was mostly populated by whites and there were only a few cases of grant dependents who lived there (who were predominantly coloured). Similar trends were observed in Three Anchor Bay and Green Point. The area in the city centre, between, and including, Loader, Jarvis, Dixon, and De Smit streets on the one side, and Buitengracht Street and Ebenezer Road on the other, was identified as having a high density of impoverished families. It was described as having “a fairly dense population of Coloured persons, with a sprinkling of Europeans”.⁴² Buildings in the area were described as:

by no means inviting as a whole, are frequently interspersed with dilapidated and untidy structures, which convey the impression that they were originally business premises used for storage purposes, but are now to some extent occupied as dwellings, in most of which live hordes of Coloured persons.⁴³

³⁸ Batson (ed), “Surveying Methods”, May 1941, No. SS3, p.8.

³⁹ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 36, par. 164.

⁴⁰ Batson (ed). “The Poverty Datum Line”, May 1941, No. SS3, p. 11.

⁴¹ Batson (ed). “The Poverty Datum Line”, May 1941, No. SS3, p. 1.

⁴² O. J. M. Wagner. “Poverty and dependency in Cape Town: A sociological study of 3,300 dependents receiving assistance from the Cape Town General Board of Aid,” (PhD Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1936), p. 32.

⁴³ Wagner. “Poverty and dependency in Cape Town,” p.32

Some streets were identified as “well-known poverty areas” and included Chiappini, Rose, Bloem and Orphan streets – all of which were included in the Batson Household Survey. Wagner relayed with disapproval how in these “well-known poverty areas”, “Europeans” and “Coloureds” lived alongside each other in squalor.⁴⁴ Gardens, the Kloof area, and Oranjezicht were identified as affluent areas inhabited by white people

Horrell and Humphries (1995) use household data for Britain similar to the data contained in the Batson Household Survey to draw conclusions about women and children’s economic activity.⁴⁵ In order to determine whether or not men were the breadwinners, they only utilised records in those cases where both husband and wife were present and the husband was working for an income outside of the home.⁴⁶ The advantages of the Batson Household Survey is that it captures data for a variety of classes, in different locations, for a specific period in time, and within the borders of a single city. A consequent disadvantage is that it does not allow for the observation of change over time.

4. Interpreting the Batson Household Survey

The Batson Household Survey provides a number of insights into what jobs women did, when they started working, when and if they stopped working, and how (the means by which) they contributed to their household income. According to the 1936 Union census, 20 609 white women in the greater Cape Town area listed themselves as “gainfully occupied”, which represented about 30% of the white working population of the city.⁴⁷ That is to say, that of the white working population, 30% was female. There were 19 980 “gainfully employed” coloured women, who represented 35% of the coloured working population.⁴⁸ On the basis of this data, a number of trends can be identified. Figures 2 and 3 show the lifecycle patterns of white and coloured women and reveal a clear tendency: most women only had wage-paying jobs until they got married and had children. These figures also show that white girls attended school for longer than coloured girls. For coloured women, it was most common to work between the ages of 16 and 20. Between the ages of 15 and 20 it was also more common for coloured women to work outside of the home than to be involved in “household duties”. For white women, “household duties” was the most common occupation for women at every life stage except at the age of 15, when they would most likely still have been in school. There is,

⁴⁴ Wagner. “Poverty and dependency in Cape Town,” p.32

⁴⁵ Horrell & Humphries. “Women’s labour force participation,” pp. 89–117.

⁴⁶ Horrell & Humphries. “Women’s labour force participation,” p. 91.

⁴⁷ *1936 Union of South Africa sixth census, volume V, occupations*, p. xi.

⁴⁸ *1936 Union of South Africa sixth census, volume V, occupations*, p. xxx.

however, still a clear trend in the most common working-age peaking before marriage. It was slightly later for white women than for coloured women given that a greater percentage of white girls attended school until they were 18. It was most common for white women to work between the ages of 20 and 24. Although marriage and having children resulted in women withdrawing from the labour force, this was not necessarily a permanent state of affairs. Once their children were old enough, women could, and often did, re-enter the labour force. In general, however, and especially for white women, to continue working after they got married was an exception.

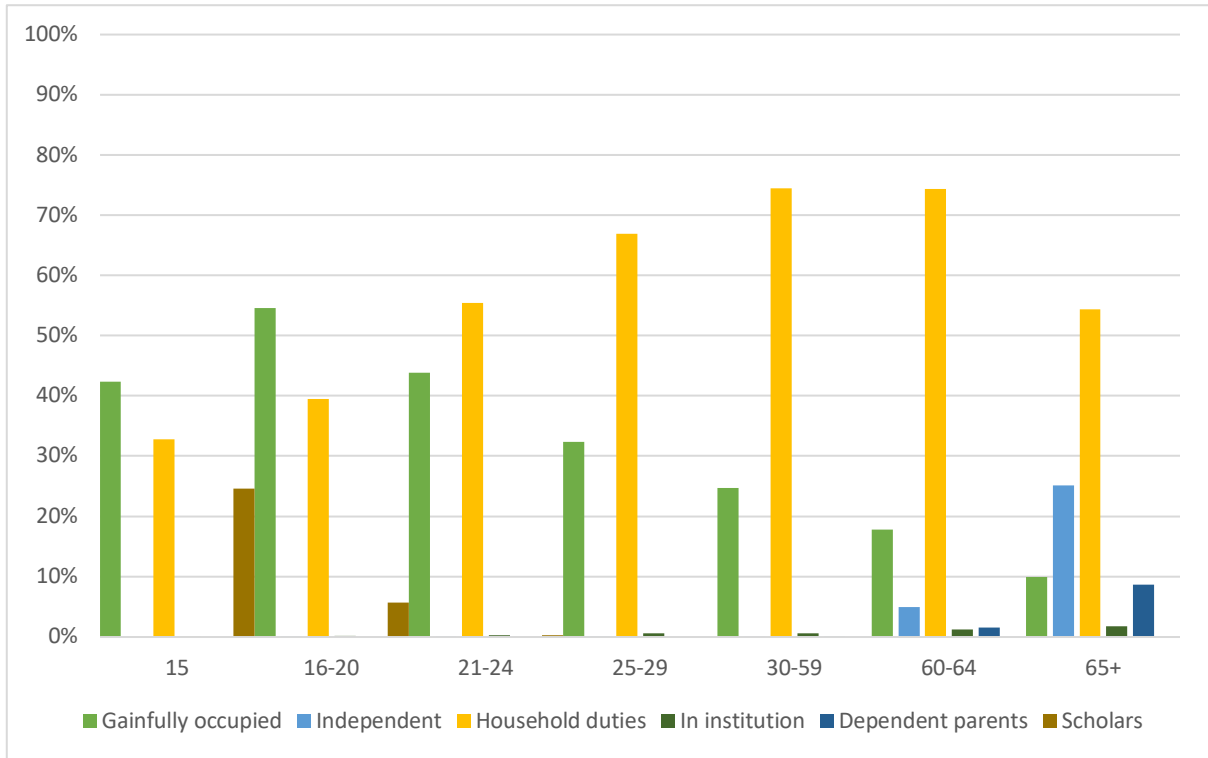


Figure 2: Coloured women’s occupations by age and percentage by age group.

Source: 1936 Union Census.

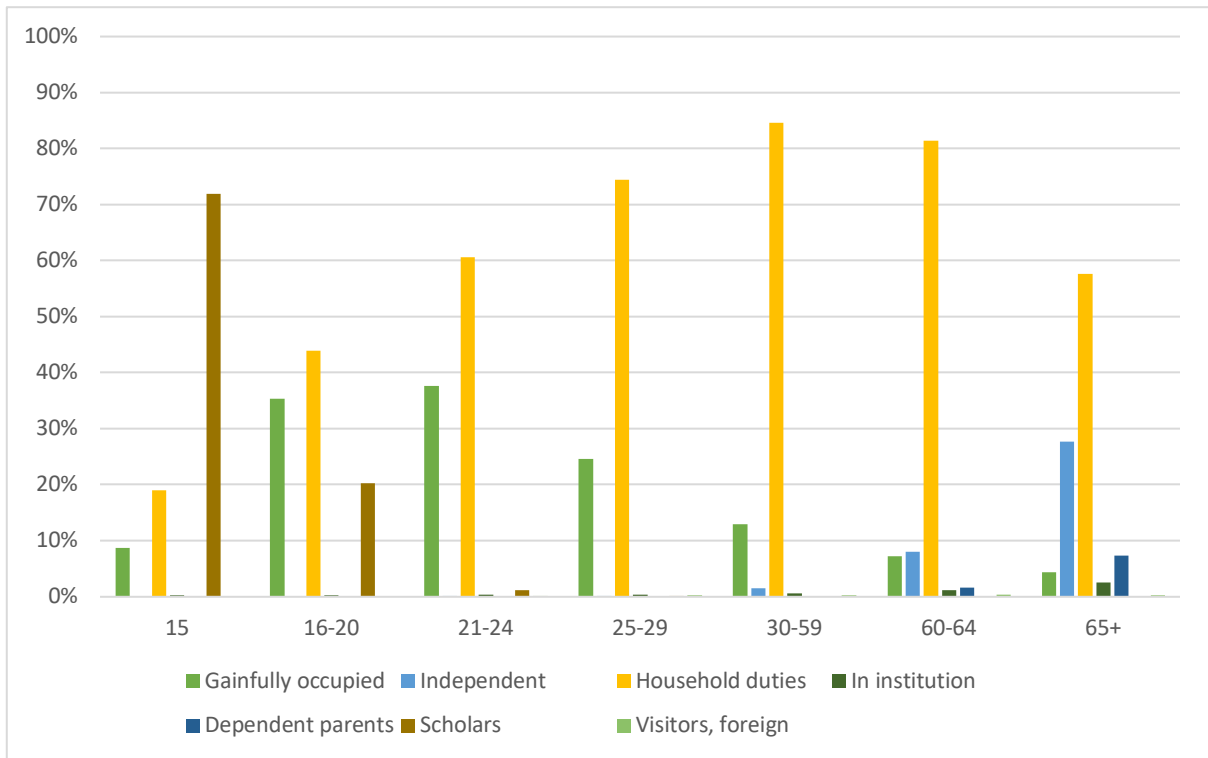


Figure 3: White women’s occupations by age and percentage per age group.

Source: 1935 Union Census.

South African FLFP rates were different for the different races by the time of the 1936 Union Census. It is useful to compare participation rates in the Union with those of other countries at the time. For the sake of comparison, it helps to look at Britain, where the rates for women ages 15–59 remained at about 38% from 1901–1931.⁴⁹ Using the South African census of 1936 I calculated the rates for men and women older than 15 until death. For the country as a whole the rates for white women increased from 17.11% in 1926 to 19.41% in 1936. For white men the figure decreased from 89.32% to 87.56%.⁵⁰ Census information is not available for coloured men and women for 1926. In 1936, the labour participation in the Union was 33.01% for coloured women and 93.12% for coloured men.⁵¹ According to the census statistics, coloured and white women were therefore participating in the labour force at a lower rate than British women were in the 1930s. Britain and the Union were of course very different places at this point in time. In addition, certain demographic trends arise when women work. For instance, Hatton and Bailey explain that in Britain in the 1930s “[i]n areas with little female employment, women married younger and employment after marriage was unusual. Where factory work was common, fertility was low, except where the occupation could be carried on part-time or in the home.”⁵² The nature and relevance of these trends for this study will be discussed in later chapters.

Taking a closer look at FLFP rates for Cape Town in 1936, white women’s rates (35%) were significantly higher than the Union average (19%). This means that 35% of all white women of working age in the city were employed. Coloured women in Cape Town were also more active in the labour market (42%) than the Union average (33%). While the 1936 census makes it clear that women were more involved in economic activities outside the home in Cape Town than was expected – a finding which in itself would be interesting to explore – this chapter will continue by focussing on the nature of women’s work as represented in the Batson Household Survey.

According to the survey, 29% of white households in the survey had at least one woman who was employed at the time, whether it was an unmarried woman, daughter, niece, wife, divorcee, widowed family member or some combination of those variables. For coloured households, the figure was higher at 42%. While it was common for coloured and white women

⁴⁹ T.J. Hatton & R. E. Bailey. “Female labour force participation in interwar Britain,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, (40), 1988, p. 166.

⁵⁰ *1936 Union of South Africa sixth census, volume V, occupations*, p. ix.

⁵¹ *1936 Union of South Africa sixth census, volume V, occupations*, p. lvii.

⁵² Hatton & Bailey. “Female labour force participation in interwar Britain,” pp.167–168.

to work once they finished school, most of the white women in the survey were found to have stopped working soon after they married, or as soon as they had children. Some white women also remained unmarried into their late 30s and 40s while continuing to work – sometimes in order to support their parent(s) or an invalid family member. The records hint at white, married women being reticent to admit that they worked in order to make a living. If they were widowed or economic circumstances were dire, however, white married women would work. In contrast, coloured women in the survey were more likely to continue working after they married.

Table 1: Percentage of women working according to marital status

Working women in the Batson Household Survey		
Marital status	Coloured %	White %
Unmarried	37	76
Married	47	18
Widow	15	5
Divorced	1	1
<i>n</i>	303	224

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938–1939

There are 303 coloured women in the records listed as wage earners. As Table 1 shows, almost half of these women (47%) were married while a significant percentage (37%) were unmarried. This contrasts sharply with working white women, more than three quarters of whom were unmarried. Statistically, it was therefore far more likely for white women to stop working once they got married, and for coloured women to continue working, or to find work, after they got married. Thinking back to the two factors that are important to identifying male breadwinner societies, that men earn more than women do and that the daughters of breadwinners specialise in home making, this finding complicates the idea that the daughters of breadwinners were more likely to specialise in skills related to the household.⁵³ Although this phenomenon, of most women only working when they are young and unmarried, is only true for white women. The number of coloured women working also indicates, as did Figure 2, that coloured women were more likely to work in general, further complicating the idea that Cape Town was a male breadwinner society in terms of the two aforementioned factors. But although young white women did work before they were married, they did usually specialise

⁵³ Zijdeman, Van Leeuwen, Rbaudo & Pelissier. “Working women in France,” p. 539.

in homemaking once they married. In Chapter 5 I will argue that unmarried white women used their wages to pay domestic workers to do this household labour.

Figures for both coloured and white households, obtained through the survey and censuses, underrepresent female wage earners. Later in this section, I will discuss the matter of members in the household contributing to the work of wage earners, hidden waged work and unwaged work that might have been overlooked by the surveyors. Debates continue over the definition of work, especially with regards to women's work in the home. Joyce Burnette argues that women's work within the home has always been greatly underestimated because such work is hidden by definitions of what constitutes work. Censuses in general are believed to underreport women's economic activities because the patterns of their work and types of labour they participated in vary greatly. Women are also more likely to work part time.⁵⁴ Such underreporting or misreporting is also present in the Batson Household Survey, as is evident in the case of washerwomen, women who provided for lodgers, and those who gardened vegetables and/or flowers and tended animals. Those who hosted lodgers and landladies, for instance are mentioned in passing, but no one in the records had their occupation listed as "landlady" or "boarding-house keeper".

The survey shows that white women generally finished school by the age of eighteen, after which they found an occupation outside of the home, although they usually continued to live with their parents until they got married. Members of coloured households occasionally mention working children in households. These children sometimes paid for their board and lodging while they continued to live with their parents, but it is not clear from the individual survey cards whether white children did the same. Married white women moved into a new home with their husbands once they married, forming a new household, but their parents – or their husband's parents – could, and often did, move into their children's homes once they retired. After World War I it became compulsory for white South African children to attend school until Standard VIII or until they turned sixteen (whichever came first).⁵⁵ The individual survey cards list unmarried daughters in their teens or early twenties as salesladies, hairdressers, shop assistants, stenographers, and clerks. Sometimes young women in the household would not necessarily be earning a wage outside of the home, but instead helped their family by running the household.

⁵⁴ C. Boter. "Ideal versus reality? The domesticity ideal and household labour relations in Dutch industrializing regions, circa 1890," *The History of the Family*, (22), (1), 2017, p. 82; J. Burnette. "Why we should not try to measure female labour force participation before the twentieth century," unpublished work, 2017.

⁵⁵ M.J.M. Prinsloo. *Blanke vroue-arbeid in die Unie van Suid-Afrika*, (Kaapstad: Nasionale Boekhandel-Kaapstad, 1957). p. 102.

Other descriptions show that young white women moved between working at home (completing domestic duties) and working outside of the home (for wages). One description reads: “Daughter now looking for job as shop assistant, was helping 9 [her mother]”.⁵⁶ This eighteen-year-old girl’s family included three wage earners – her father, an unmarried brother (25) and one unmarried sister (21). It is not always clear exactly how these young women were “helping” in the home, or what precisely their “help” entailed. For instance, one family – consisting of a married couple and their three children – had moved to Cape Town from Russia in 1911 and hired a daily female servant. In the comments section the two daughters, who were both in their late twenties, are described as helping their mother to “keep the house”.⁵⁷

There are examples in the Batson survey of older daughters of white families who remained unmarried and continued to live with their parent(s) or family members, or, alternatively, either boarded with another family as a lodger or lived alone. These women worked and occupied a wider variety of jobs and earned more than younger women. One example is of a family who lived in Claremont. The head of the household was listed as Mr. A.E. Gillman, who was an engineer at the “Postal Department” and who earned £14.12s.6d per month. His older sister was 30 years old at the time of the survey and worked as a supervisor at O.K. Bazaars (a retailer), earning £23 a month. The only other listed member of the household was Mr Gillman’s wife. Examples in the Batson Household Survey also include women who never married and continued to work, such as a Miss Dawson (age 52), who lived alone and worked as a “Lady-Clerk” for Colemans.⁵⁸ Single women also appear in the survey living alone or as lodgers. Miss Gay was a 30-year-old teacher, who lived alone and drove her own car (one of only two women who are listed as having owned a car). She lived in a one-bedroom flat for which she paid £8.8s. a month (which exceeded the average monthly income of white women).⁵⁹ A 24-year-old single woman lodged with Miss Lovie in Claremont and earned £7.10s. a month working as an “assistant” at the Wellington Fruit Company.⁶⁰

Though newly married women in the records are mostly listed as being without an occupation, some white women continued to work outside of the home after they got married and before they had children. Mr and Mrs Milner were a Jewish couple that had been married

⁵⁶ Batson Collection, Ms, 451. Manuscripts section, Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service. Diverse items including field book, specimens in newspaper envelopes, visitors cards. From this point on, when referencing the Batson Survey cards, only the specific card being referenced or the transcribed data will be referred to. Card 1305.

⁵⁷ Card 1374.

⁵⁸ Card 1953.

⁵⁹ Card 1856.

⁶⁰ Card 1660.

for five years by the time the survey was conducted. They had no children, and both worked – he as a traveller, and she as a typist.⁶¹ Very few white women continued to work once they had children, though to do so was not unheard of either. Mrs A.S. Mellor (43), for instance, ran a tearoom in Bakoven called “The Lady Ann Tea-Room” and her husband (56), was a professional cellist for an orchestra. The tearoom was part of their home. They had a four-year-old daughter and also listed a live-in female servant (who presumably helped with childcare) as part of the household.⁶² Another example of this is a Mrs Lehy, who worked as a forelady at Bally’s Shoes (which was also listed as her husband’s employer) and who had a six-year-old daughter. While the Mellor example suggested a domestic servant who cared for their daughter, it seems that the survey conductor of the Lehy household found the couple’s six-year-old daughter alone at home. The comment’s section reads as follows:

Called several times at above address. On 28.10.1938 found No. 9 [the daughter of the Lehy couple] at home. She informed me both No. 1 & No 2 [Mr and Mrs Lehy] are employed at Bally’s shoe Factory. They leave early for their work, and do not come home for lunch, which they have at a friend’s house. No. 9 says she is the only child.⁶³

While most surveyed white women did not work once they got married and had children, it seems that, if a family required additional income, they nonetheless sought employment outside of the home. Mrs Scott (38) lived in Claremont and worked as a “Head Assistant” at Clarke’s while her husband and nine-year-old son stayed at home. Mr Scott’s sister provided the couple with ten shillings a week to pay for their son’s education, which suggests that the family required an extra income to make ends meet. It was indicated that the sister made the money by selling poultry and flowers. The comments section of the survey card states that Mr Scott had not worked for eight years because of poor health. The couple had only been married for ten years and presumably Mrs Scott had worked for much of their married life.⁶⁴ The case of the Scotts also shows that white married men would not work when they were prevented from doing so as a result of poor health or other reasons.

There were 84 coloured households in which both the husband and wife were working at the time, which represents 15% of coloured households surveyed. For white households the figure was significantly lower, namely 30, or 6% of all white households sampled. For white

⁶¹ Card 2000 (2/2).

⁶² Card 1872.

⁶³ Card 1099.

⁶⁴ Card 1645.

households there was not a clear pattern of jobs that a husband would do if a wife worked, but in coloured households there was. In coloured households the most common combination of occupations was some sort of domestic work for the wife, and a labourer as the occupation for the husband. The second most common occupation for married coloured women (after domestic work) was laundry. Eighteen percent of working women whose husbands were employed were listed as washerwomen. This is most likely because of the flexible nature of laundry work, which could be done at home. White working wives of a household head were less likely than their coloured counterparts to have children living at home: a third of white working wives had non-wage-earning children who lived at home, compared to the 57% for coloured women. What this could indicate is that white women were less likely to work if they had children at home. The average age for coloured working wives in the survey was 34 and for white women, 32.

There are also indications that white women were often integral to the running of their husband's businesses, though in the records their exact financial contributions are unclear. One such woman, Mrs Olivari (40), is documented as a hairdresser who worked for her husband. The comments section states that although her husband was listed as the main wage-earner, he had had a nervous breakdown and, as a result, she was running the business alone.⁶⁵ Similarly, a certain Mr De Kock (45) and his wife ran a grocery store together. The card did not, however, indicate that she received any remuneration, but instead shows that her husband claimed £25 in profits per month. Mrs De Kock's wage section simply stated "Helps" even though her husband was listed as her employer.⁶⁶

Coloured women ran their own businesses, or were involved in the running of family businesses, sometimes from home. Dressmaking seems to have been an entrepreneurial occupation that attracted coloured women of all life stages and marital statuses. The unmarried daughter (29) of Mr Effendi, a widower, worked from home for her father as a dressmaker. Her widowed sister (31) was also listed as a dressmaker, and she gave her home address as her place of employment, though she was self-employed.⁶⁷ This family was considered somehow exceptional by the survey conductor, who wrote, "I gathered all information except income – which she [a daughter] said she could not give. I learned that they owned property in Loop St. The family is of Turkish origin and definitely comfortably off and superior to the usual Cape

⁶⁵ Card 1736.

⁶⁶ Card 1656.

⁶⁷ Card 820.

Malay.”⁶⁸ Another coloured widow who ran her own business as a dressmaker, a Mrs Van Wyk (48), listed her place of work as “various” and earned £1 per week plying her trade.⁶⁹ A 49-year-old female lodger of the Zerf family in Salt River was also listed as a self-employed dressmaker. She worked from the home in which she was a lodger, and made £2.10s. per week, which, as will be seen later, was more than double the average wage of coloured women.⁷⁰ Another 31-year-old woman worked from home as a dressmaker in Athlone. At the time of the survey, she was living with a man who was listed as a paving contractor, but he had not received a wage in the three weeks prior the survey. The woman earned 17s.6d. a week, though that varied.⁷¹

Almost 40% of the coloured households surveyed contained women who worked outside of the home, while the same figure for white households was 33%. A surprising similarity between the coloured and white households, is that 16% of both were headed by women. A difference consisted in the fact that white women who headed a household were less likely to work outside of the home in order to earn a wage (35%) than their coloured counterparts (59%). An example of one of the coloured female heads who worked outside of the home is Nell Scullard (36) who worked as a machinist at the African Tobacco Company, earning about £6 per month. Her 16-year-old daughter also worked as a machinist at the same factory and earned just over £4 per month. They lived in a shared home with her other child, a nine-year-old son, and paid £1.15s. rent per month for the one bedroom and a shared living area.⁷² Most coloured women who participated in the survey either worked as domestic servants or in factories. Domestic servants are described only by gender and race in the individual surveys of their employees. The vast majority of domestic servants in white households were female and coloured, although two households employed a white female, and three employed coloured males. Domestic service will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Another common occupation for women amongst extremely impoverished coloured families was laundry. One all-female household is a good example of this phenomenon, and

⁶⁸ Card 820.

The head of this household is listed as “T. Effendi”. Abu Bakr Effendi was a well-known Muslim theologian who came to Cape Town from Turkey in 1863. His third marriage (second in Cape Town), bore him five children, all born sometime after 1866. None of Abu Bakr’s children had the initial “T.”, though his third wife did, and it seems most likely that the head of this household is one of her sons. Abu Bakr’s first Capetonian wife (second wife), left for England with her children after she separated from him.

H. Gençoglu. “A report on the activities and challenges of an Ottoman Muslim theologian in the Cape of Good Hope,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2013), pp. 30;34.

⁶⁹ Card 1260 (3/3).

⁷⁰ Card 1272.

⁷¹ Card 153 (2/2).

⁷² Card 1160 (2/2).

also reveals the strenuous and fruitless nature of the occupation. A widowed woman, Mrs. M. Davis (88), her three daughters and niece lived together in a house with two bedrooms and a kitchen-cum-living room shared with another household. The daughters and the niece were spinsters and generated a combined income of £3 per month. The eldest daughter (46) received all the soiled laundry from customers, and then the rest of the household (excluding Mrs. Davis) would help her by washing the clothing at the Platteklip washhouse.⁷³ Their meagre income was pooled and each washerwoman ended up with 14 shillings per month for their efforts. They then used their income to pay for their living expenses such as rent, clothes, and food. The rent alone for this household was £3.17s.6d. and it seems that the only income they had to pay for the other expenses was Mrs Davis's old age pension of £1.1s. per month.⁷⁴ Another example of a family who earned their living by doing laundry was the Rustien household. They lived in Chiappini Street, one of the sections of the city centre that was associated with severe poverty, and shared a home with two other families. Mrs Rustien worked as a washerwoman and was assisted by her 18-year-old daughter and her husband. Together they earned £2.10s. per week. Although Mr Rustien, who worked as a packer, was listed as the main wage earner in the family, the survey card indicates that he had been unemployed for four years and that the only other wage earner was a 15-year-old son who worked as a messenger for 12s.6d. a week. Three members of the family are therefore listed as being involved in washing.⁷⁵ These examples reveal something of the difficult life associated with doing laundry for a living.

Washerwomen who participated in the survey did not always work at washhouses, such as the one at Platteklip. They also washed in private homes and did washing for families. Twelve of the 498 white households in the survey employed women to wash their laundry. These women would often move between homes and are listed as working in various homes; alternatively, more than one employer's name is given under "place of work". Some of them also ran washing businesses from their homes. The one commonality shared by all washerwomen in the survey is that they earned astonishingly little. The highest earning washerwomen received about £4 per month (equal to the average monthly income for coloured women in the survey)⁷⁶ but most of them earned as little as twelve shillings per month. One

⁷³ The Platteklip Wash House is located above Oranjezicht, on the slopes of Table Mountain. It has been restored by SAN Parks and functions as holiday accommodation today. It was renowned for its distance from the centre of town which required washerwoman to make a long journey on foot to complete their task. It was one of the first Municipal Washhouses in the country and was opened on the 1st of May 1888.

E. J. Jordan. "From time immemorial": Washerwomen, culture, and community in Cape Town, South Africa," (PhD Thesis, The State University of New Jersey, 2006), p. 1.

⁷⁴ Card 1898 (1/3) & Card 1936 (1/2).

⁷⁵ Card 1897 (3/3).

⁷⁶ Card 2058 (1/2).

survey card indicates that women turned to washing out of sheer desperation. It describes a household comprised of ten people – a couple, and their eight children. The head of the household is listed as a man (45), but the only (listed) wage earner in the home is his wife, who worked as a washerwoman and whose income varied between 15 shillings, and £1 per week.⁷⁷ The comments section explains that the head of the household had been out of work for six months because of poor health. His wife did “washing to keep home going, no help”. The survey conductor wrote that she suspected their eldest daughter (15) of running a shebeen in the home because she was “too delicate to work” outside of the home to contribute to her mother’s wages.⁷⁸

Within the coloured households there were many women who worked hard to ensure the survival of their families. A Mrs Williams and her husband had seven children, and she was pregnant with another one at the time of the survey. She said that she “had to work to provide for ‘all the kids’ ”.⁷⁹ She worked in a factory and earned £2 per week, which was 15 shillings more than her husband’s weekly salary and one of the highest salaries for coloured women. In response to the survey conductor’s questions (presumably about contraception) she answered that she “would have gone to the mother’s clinic, but head says it ‘cost a lot of money’ ”.⁸⁰ Another woman, Mrs Leah Jacobs, worked to support her own children in addition to which she housed and supported her grandchildren. She worked as a washerwoman and two of her teenage children, a son and a daughter, also worked outside of the home to earn wages. The household also included her mother (56), her youngest son (9), and two grandchildren (one not yet a year old, and the other five years old) as well as Mrs Jacobs’ unmarried daughter (18) who was working as a domestic servant. This household of six members lived together in a flat shared with thirteen other families.⁸¹ The total income of the family was £3 per month (with three wage earners).⁸² Another, Ms O. Christians, a divorcee (42), worked as a cook at the Alexander Hotel and was the main breadwinner for her household of five. She earned £4.19s.1d. per month while her seventeen-year-old daughter worked as a domestic worker and earned £2.14s.1d. a month. The household also included Ms Christians’ aunt (71) and two sons (12;13) who did not work.⁸³

⁷⁷ Card 1209 (2/2).

⁷⁸ Card 1209 (2/2).

⁷⁹ Card 1882 (1/2).

⁸⁰ Card 1882 (1/2).

⁸¹ All thirteen families for this property were surveyed, the number on the card indicates that there were thirteen in total and that this family was the thirteenth of thirteen in the household. Each of these households (2059 1–13/13) listed themselves as living in a shared flat. Card 2059 (13/13)

⁸² Card 2059 (13/13).

⁸³ Card 2081 (2/2).

So far, this section has explored women's work outside of the home. The cases of Mrs Mellor, the tearoom owner, and the story of Mr Scott's sister who sold flowers and poultry hint at another phenomenon. The Batson Household Survey shows that women participated in labour inside of the home that generated an income or that they engaged in activities that offset other expenses. In a section on the survey card, households were requested to indicate whether or not they had access to a garden, and if they did, whether or not they used the garden to grow vegetables and/or to keep poultry and/or livestock. Twenty seven percent of white households kept chickens and 8% grew vegetables. The figures for this kind of home production were lower for coloured households – which is most obviously due to the fact that only 28% of coloured households had a garden (compared to 61% of white households who had a garden of some kind). Sixteen percent of coloured households kept chickens and 3% grew vegetables. Two households also kept cows to provide milk and another was listed as having goats. This reciprocal labour (work completed without involving monetary transactions or markets) is essential for understanding living standards of households in history.⁸⁴ Women who reared poultry or grew fruit or vegetables for the family table were not listed in the surveys as having a wage-earning occupation, even though their contribution meant that less money had to be spent on food.

The survey also indicates that it was not uncommon for a family to let rooms and provide meals to lodgers. Unfortunately, there was usually no indication of how much lodgers paid to those they were staying with. The work associated with providing for lodgers was often not specifically assigned to women in the household who were not employed outside of the home, though there are many indications that this was indeed the case. Widows were the group most likely to keep lodgers in the white household surveys. For instance, a widow (38) hosted one lodger, a young woman who worked as a saleslady. There is no occupation listed for this particular widow whose daughter (17) worked as a stenographer. The description of this widow's household in the comments section suggests embarrassment about the need to work for an income. "9 [Head] is a widow & receives support from daughter & lodger. I firmly believe 9 dressmaking to augment her meagre income although she does not admit it."⁸⁵ While the survey conductor notes the importance of the income from the lodger, the amount she was paying is not given. Taking in lodgers could also supplement other incomes – as in the case of

⁸⁴ C. Boter. "Dutch Divergence?," p. 83.

⁸⁵ Card 1240.

another widow who kept a café. Her household included her unmarried children and three male lodgers of varying ages and occupations. Her daughter (34) and one lodger (a widower) assisted her in the café while her son (27) and another male lodger (30) worked as labourers. The third lodger (18) was an apprentice.⁸⁶

Coloured households also listed taking in lodgers and were more likely to indicate the income they got from offering board and lodging. While most of the lodgers in white households were listed as wage-earners, this was not the case for coloured households. For example, a 38-year-old divorced male lodger lived with a family of six, and he paid £1 per month for his accommodation. There is no indication of how he generated money to cover his expenses.⁸⁷ Similarly, a family of ten hosted a “schoolboy lodger” who also paid £1 per month for his accommodation.⁸⁸ Another example is Mr and Mrs Smith, who had three of their wage-earning sons living with them. They also hosted a lodger 21-year-old lodger who attended Zonnebloem College and paid them 15 shillings a week for board and lodging (this translates to about £3.15s. per month).⁸⁹ Mr and Mrs De la Cruis, as well as their son, worked, and their lodger, a 50-year-old widower, received £0.3s.9d. a week from “Board of Aid Groceries”, which he then paid over to the head of the household. He was also listed as a non-wage-earner and stayed at home with the De la Cruis’s two granddaughters.⁹⁰ There are very few female lodgers to be found in the coloured household surveys. Among the non-wage-earning lodgers, there was one listed: a nine-year-old girl, and it seems that the head of the household, a 71-year-old widow running a laundry business from home, was paid £1.10s.0d. per month for her care. The comments section explains that the young girl was “paid for by her mother, who is in domestic service”.⁹¹ The case of another non-wage-earning lodger suggests the possibility that lodgers were not always only accommodated because of financial benefit. The lodger in question was a 59-year-old man living with the Pietersen family and both the husband and wife were listed as wage earners. It is not clear whether the lodger contributed to the family income at all, but the comments section seems to indicate that he was being looked after out of goodwill. On closer inspection, the family relied entirely on the income of Mrs Pietersen, who worked as a machinist in a sweet factory since Mr Pietersen had been out of work for a few months. In the comments section it is explained that he, the lodger, was “old and infirm (semi-

⁸⁶ Card 1058.

⁸⁷ Card 1138.

⁸⁸ Card 1010.

⁸⁹ Card 1025.

⁹⁰ Card 1476.

⁹¹ Card 1525.

cripple)” and that they had “looked after him for many years” without any trouble.⁹² The family of four and the lodger lived in a two-roomed section of a house that they shared with others.⁹³ Sometimes, lodgers were a form of companionship, such as an example for a white household. Miss Lovie (57), mentioned earlier, was a spinster who lived with her 24-year-old female lodger. Miss Lovie earned £10 a month from private investments and stated in the comments section that her lodger was not a relation “but lived with her for company.”⁹⁴

Landladies are another group of females who are visible in the survey, although they are not acknowledged as wage earners either. None of them have their occupation listed as “landlady”, although landladies of specific households are often referred to as such in the comments section. Landladies also sometimes appear on the survey cards as the source of the information about the household.⁹⁵ In fact, 11 landladies are listed as the source of information on household survey cards for coloured families, compared to only one landlord. It would seem that this was a female-dominated space in the coloured community or that if men were landlords, that they might also have been working another job and therefore listed that work as their primary occupation. In the case of coloured households, these landladies either seem to have lived alone or to have shared living spaces with their subtenants. Many of the coloured households also sublet and it is often unclear who completed the administration associated with this process. Landladies also appear as the source of information in the white households, though far less often than was the case with coloured households. Furthermore, in white households, landladies are mentioned in passing in the comments section, where they are also listed as sharing living spaces with their tenants. In some cases they appear to have been the cause of friction with the survey conductors. One comments section reads: “[h]ave made 3 calls to see subtenants without success. Left Blue circular. Suggest a call about lunch time one Saturday. Final visit landlady would not allow me in. Said subtenants had seen circular, but were not interested.”⁹⁶ It is difficult to distinguish between landladies and those who let rooms as a form of income. This uncooperative landlady, for instance, was listed as a household separate to that of her three subtenants, even though they all lived in the same house.⁹⁷

⁹² Card 1120 (2/3).

⁹³ Card 1120 (2/3).

⁹⁴ Card 1660.

⁹⁵ Card 2055 (2/2).

⁹⁶ Card 1173.

⁹⁷ Card 1173.

5. Was Cape Town a male-breadwinner society before World War II?

The previous section explored *what* kinds of occupations women were involved in and *when* women worked. In light of the two factors that characterise a male breadwinner society, it found that coloured women worked more at more stages of their lives than white women did, and that young unmarried white women were more likely to work outside of the home than white women at other stage of their lives. This section looks at the other factor that characterises a male breadwinner society, namely, higher male wages. It explores the wage compositions of households that contained women workers in order to calculate how much women's wages added to the total income of the household. It also compares the wages of coloured and white workers in various occupations. Current literature focusses on the exclusion of women from the labour market and the mechanisms through which they were marginalised – as the epigraph by Tilly and Scott at the beginning of this chapter reveals. The current assumption is that young white women “received extremely low wages”, but wages are an underexplored aspect of South African history. This is partly because of limited availability data. The Batson Household Survey, however, provides an opportunity to remedy this given that specific wages and occupations are provided along with information about gender, age, and relationship status. It is therefore possible to use this information to determine whether or not there was a gender wage gap or a race wage gap in Cape Town.

This section finds clear race and gender-based differences in the earning patterns of coloured and white men and women. On the whole, women earned far less than men did, and occupations were divided according to race and gender. One noteworthy difference between white and coloured households is that while 6% of the 498 white households listed women as the head and main wage-earner of their households, the same statistic for coloured households was 10%. Generally, however, the breadwinner literature is not concerned with women wage earners who do not have a husband; rather, the focus is on the extent to which married women's salaries were relied upon when their husband was also employed. In short, the central question is, if there is a husband who can work, is he relied upon as the main source of income, or formulated differently, what percentage of a family's income is provided by the wife? Aside from this, it is essential to determine whether men earned more than women in general, and, for the sake of comparing the races, whether one racial group earned more than the other.

Women's wages and the gender wage gap (GWG) have been long-disputed topics in the study of women and women's work. While some argue that women's wages are market

related, others contend that the wages are determined by social values.⁹⁸ Corinne Boter, for instance, claims that women's relatively lower wages are not always caused by gender-based wage discrimination. She argues that three factors in particular – lower productivity rates, shorter hours worked and seeing couple's wages as a combined wage (family wage) – contribute to women earning lower wages than their male counterparts.⁹⁹ Having examined the wages earned by men and women for the same type of work in order to determine the existence (or not) of a GWG, she explains that:

an increasing wage rate of the husband normally results in a decrease of time spent on market work by the wife who then redeploys her time to domestic work. If women's wage rates do not increase as much as men's, this is all the more reason for women to withdraw from the labour market. The opportunity costs of women's labour increase when the GWG widens.¹⁰⁰

A male-breadwinner society is per definition one that relies on men earning higher wages than women. Such a society will only exist as long as a man earns a family wage – enough money to support his whole family. This argument was used in South Africa in 1937 to argue against women receiving equal wages. In the Batson Household Survey, there is a clear gender wage gap and the argument in favour of men being breadwinners was explicitly made by one man in an article in the *Cape Times*. He said that “a woman's living expenses do not equal those of a man, and therefore, economically, she should have less wages. A man is a potential provider for more people than just himself and should, on this count, also be given larger wages than a woman.”¹⁰¹ This quotation clearly reveals that the male-breadwinner ideology had currency in Cape Town in the 1930s.

In order to understand the wage contributions of each person in the survey, each person's wage was converted from the pounds, shillings, pennies format found on the survey cards into a pound amount. Before World War II, one pound was divided into 20 shillings and one shilling divided into twelve pennies. These pound amounts were then converted into a daily wage and then a monthly wage to ensure that each wage was being compared in the same terms as some of the wages were reported as daily wages while others were weekly and monthly.

⁹⁸ Boter. “Dutch Divergence?,” p. 99.

⁹⁹ Boter. “Dutch Divergence?,” pp. 99–100.

¹⁰⁰ Boter. “Dutch Divergence?,” p. 100.

¹⁰¹ “Move to equal pay for women,” *Cape Times*, 21 June 1937, p. 4.

This can be seen in Figure 4 where the head of the household and his wife indicated different wage intervals.

Wards Name LEHY, R.		Address 37 COVENTRY RD		UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN HOUSEHOLD SURVEY																					
No. 1099		Investigator S. L.		Day of Visit 8 . 11 . 38																					
No. 1099		Ward E																							
WAGE-EARNERS	class	index	relationship	sex	marital status	age	occupation in full	employer	place of work	week or month	gross earnings				unemployed for			transport							
											£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	yrs	wks	own motor cycle	public	other	cost per week or mnt			
	1		head	M	M	31	Chicken (part-time)	Baby's Shoe	Woodstock	W	5	14	0	5	14	0									
	2		WIFE	F	M	27	Fore Lady	Baby's Shoe	Woodstock	M	17	0	0	17	0	0									
	3																								
	4																								
	5																								
	6																								
	7																								
8																									
NON-WAGE-EARNERS	9		Daughter	F	X	6	ALL OTHER HOUSEHOLD INCOME		per week	per month	HEAD & WIFE				head			wife							
								£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	languages spoken				code							
											church attended				birthplace			year came to C.T.							
											St. Peter's				Cape Town C.P.			Cape Town							
											Borneo				Borneo										
											O ✓				B ✓			P ✓							
											E				I +5			A							
RESID. SERVANTS	17						DAILY SERVANTS		Households in Dwelling		Persons in Household		Source		No										
										1	3	No 1													
												A M I O N I													

Figure 4: An example of a survey card from the Batson Household Survey

Source: Batson Collection, Ms, 451. Manuscripts section, Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service. Diverse items including field book, specimens in newspaper envelopes, visitor's cards. Card 1099.

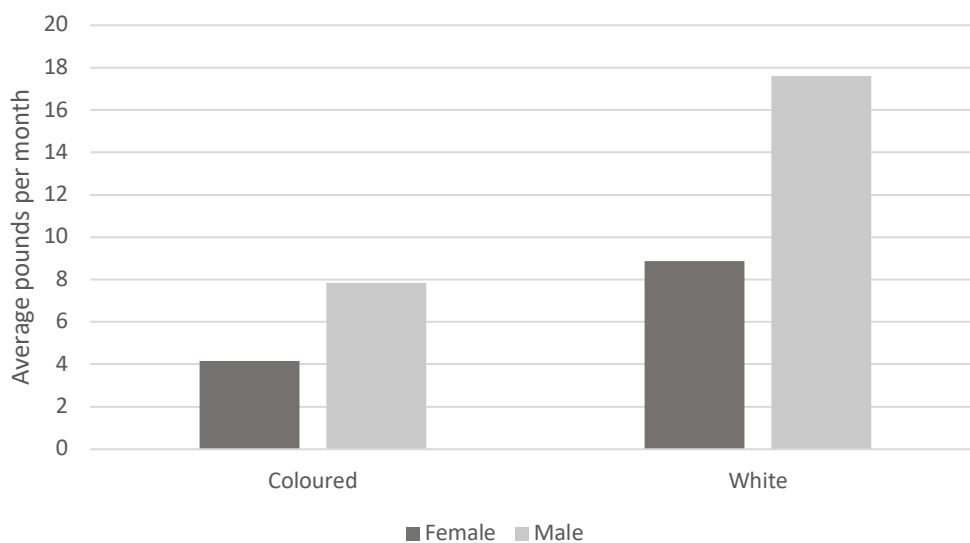


Figure 5: Wages in pounds per month of males and females

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/9

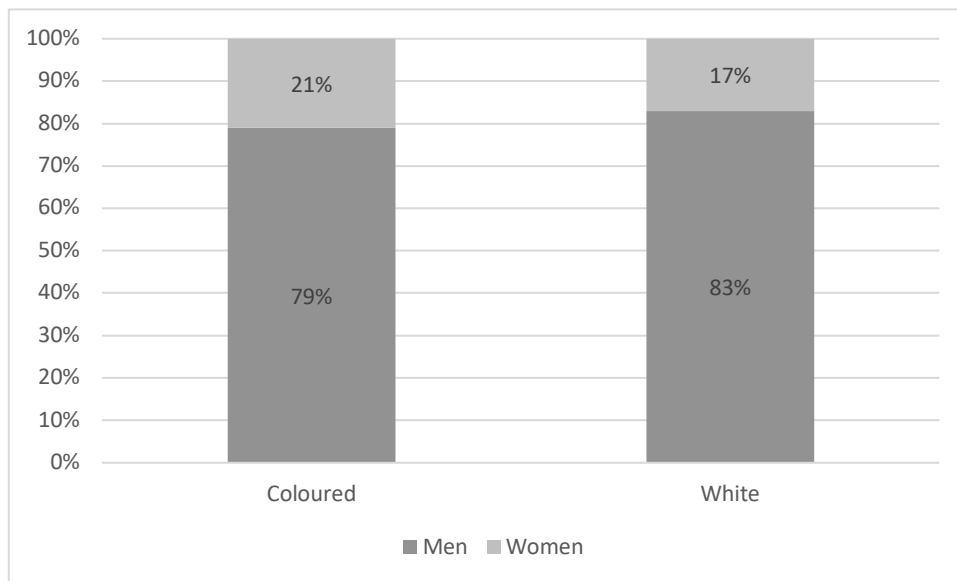


Figure 6: Percentage share of income by husband and wife

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39

While gender was one aspect of wage disparities, in the case of Cape Town, race added an extra layer to discrimination. White women in the surveys earned on average £9 per month and white men earned £18. Coloured women earned approximately £4 a month and coloured men £8. While the second factor characterising male breadwinner societies is a higher male wage, the difference in wages between white men and coloured women indicates the extent to which coloured and white people experienced a different reality in Cape Town at the time. Coloured men could not earn enough to support a family and their low wages meant that coloured women needed to work. It was only white men who had an average wage that was higher than the minimum income bracket calculated by Batson. Only white families could, therefore, afford to have a male-breadwinner supporting a household of his wage.

One reason for these differences could be that different races and genders were engaged in distinct and specific occupations. But, as will be seen in the following chapter, it is most likely that certain jobs were done by certain people because they paid more, or less, and were restricted according to social mores and laws. According to both the 1936 census and the Batson Household Survey, women had specific occupations not occupied by men, and vice versa. Furthermore, as the following chapter shows, certain jobs came to be predominantly occupied by white women. According to the 1936 census, the three most common occupations for white women in Cape Town were saleswoman/shop assistant, typist/shorthand typist/stenographer, and clerk. In that year there were seven occupation groups with over 1 000

white women working in them in 1936 in Cape Town.¹⁰² For coloured women, there was far less differentiation. According to the census, more than two thirds of all coloured working women (12 706) were listed as domestic servants with the next biggest group working as sewer/sewing machinist, with 995 women listed as such.¹⁰³ The Batson Household Survey, on the other hand, reveals greater diversity in the occupations of coloured women.

The Batson Household Survey also provides the opportunity to compare the wages or earnings between races and genders. What is clear from the data is that Cape Town presented the ideology of a male-breadwinner society – for both races – in that men of each race earned more than women of that race. However, coloured men could not earn enough for an entire family to live off their wage. Figure 5 shows that white women earned 51% and coloured men, on average, 44% of what white men did. Coloured women, in turn, earned 57% of what coloured men did. By the period 1946–1957, some of these inequalities had become more pronounced in the western part of the Cape Province, where coloured men earned only 30% and white women only 40% of what white men did. While this shows an increase of inequality between races and between white men and white women; wage inequality decreased between genders for coloured workers. By 1957, coloured women earned 70% of what coloured men did.¹⁰⁴

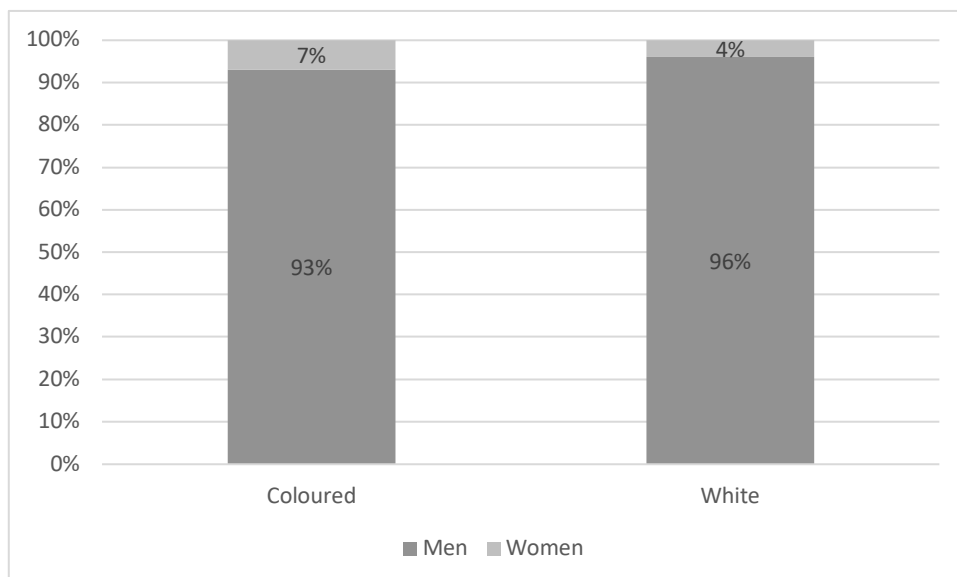


Figure 7: Percentage income of all households containing a working man and his wife

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39

¹⁰² 1936 *Union of South Africa sixth census, volume V, occupations*, pp. 32–36.

¹⁰³ 1936 *Union of South Africa sixth census, volume V, occupations*, pp. 110–111.

¹⁰⁴ J.D. Hampton. “The Role of the Coloured and Bantu in the economic pattern of the Cape Province”, *The South African Journal of Economics*, (30), December 1962, p. 259.

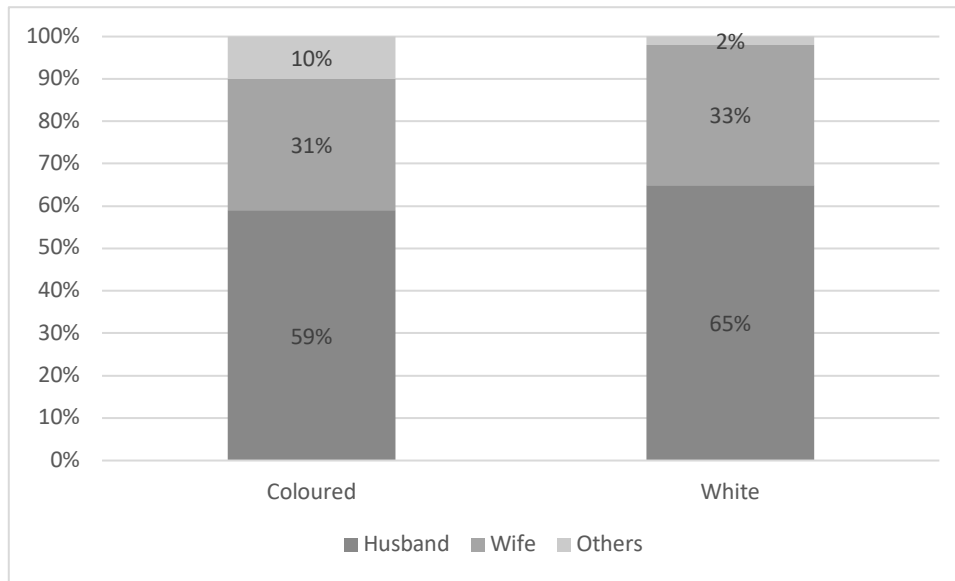


Figure 8: Percentage of household income with households containing a husband, wife and others working

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39

Analysing wage data for households where both a husband and wife worked is another way of investigating this if Cape Town was a male breadwinner society. Using a slightly different method to the one used by Horrel and Humphries, I have initially just looked at the wages of working couples in order to determine whether or not the city conformed to a male-breadwinner model. The fact that only 30% of the white households contained a working woman is also taken as indicative of the fact that women were not usually relied on as a sole provider. There were, however, households where a woman was the sole earner or earned more than male counterparts in the family. The fact remains that coloured men earned far less than white men and less than white women and coloured women earned even less than coloured men.

It is clear that coloured families relied more on women working outside of the home more than white families did, and 42% of coloured households contained at least one female wage earner. Sixty one percent of coloured households and 60% of white households with at least one working woman had a working married man as the head of the household. That is to say that for both races, if households contained a working women they would also have a married man as the head of the household. The difference between these households was that coloured households contained working women at all life stages, while most working white women were young and unmarried. Fourteen percent of all coloured households consisted of a working husband and wife, while only 5% of the white households contained a working couple. Figure 7 shows that in households with a working couple, if the sum of their income is taken to be 100%, coloured husbands contributed 80% of that income and coloured wives 20%. For

white households, wives contributed 17% and their husbands, 83%. This indicates that both races clearly exhibited the existence of a male-breadwinner ideal. The reality, however, was that a coloured man's wage was not enough to live on. Another difference between coloured and white households emerges when the income of other wage-earners living in households are added to the income of the husband and wife in the household. In coloured households, the husband's share then drops to 59%, and that of their wives increased to 31%, while others, such as children, lodgers, and other family members, contributed 10%. In white households where both the husband and wife worked, it was very rare for others to contribute to the running of the household or to be living with other family members as wage earners. Where it did occur, the white husband's contributions shifted to 65%, and that of their wives increased to 33%, while others contributed 2%. What this means is that when white households consisted of a working couple and other wage earners, the proportion contributed by wives increased dramatically.

It can be concluded, therefore, that coloured households needed multiple members of the household to contribute to household income. Wayne Dooling has found that, in Cape Town at this time, the poverty of black and coloured communities "was the fact of low wages", and that "the labouring efforts of women and children were vital to the economic survival of black [including coloured] families."¹⁰⁵ These facts are also clear from the wage information in the Batson Household Survey. Furthermore, Dooling states that, according to commentators in the interwar period, "one of the most dire consequences of low male wages and poverty was that women were propelled into wage labour and thus away from domestic responsibilities."¹⁰⁶ Ellen Mutari, Marilyn Power and Deborah Figart found that with the establishment of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 in the US, African-American women were excluded from the minimum wage policies and that the result was a double exclusion. "Through the inclusion and exclusion of particular occupation and industries, African-American women were assigned a subordinated gender identity as neither full-time mothers nor legitimate breadwinners."¹⁰⁷ In South Africa, similar legislation provided similar results. The "Civilised Labour Policy" defined "civilised wages" as "wages at which employees could enjoy white standards of living".¹⁰⁸ Howard Phillips defines the policy as "the single largest instrument of White [sic]

¹⁰⁵ W. Dooling. "Poverty and respectability in early twentieth-century Cape Town," *Journal of African History*, (59), (3), 2018, pp. 417–418.

¹⁰⁶ Dooling. "Poverty and respectability," p. 420.

¹⁰⁷ E. Mutari, M. Power & D.M. Figart. "Neither mothers nor breadwinners: African-American women's exclusion from US minimum wage policies, 1912–1938," *Feminist Economics*, (8), (2), 2002, pp. 37–61.

¹⁰⁸ I.M. Phillips. "The 'Civilised Labour Policy' and the private sector: The operation of the South African Wage Act, 1925–1937," (Unpublished PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 1984), p. ix.

economic empowerment before apartheid.”¹⁰⁹ The wage acts of the 1920s and 1930s meant that coloured men could no longer work in certain government departments or earn the wages they had before. These policies also “placed Coloured workers at an increasing disadvantage relative to White [sic] workers and undercut the economic base of the Coloured [sic] artisan class.”¹¹⁰ Effectively, coloured families could not afford to conform to the male-breadwinner ideal.

In a section discussing the impact of the abovementioned policy on coloured people, The Wilcocks Commission indicated the method used to determine wages at the time.

It must be borne in mind that the usual practice in determining what wages should be paid for many occupations is not based upon the work to be performed, but on the person who is to perform it. For this reason it is common to find a European [sic] and Coloured [sic] man performing the same task, but the European receiving a higher wage than the non-European [sic]. It has been admitted in evidence that the wages paid to the Coloured section are in the majority of instances below the civilised standard.¹¹¹

There were exceptions to this trend. There were coloured men earning enough for a family wage. When these men did earn a family wage, their wives did not work. Just one such example is that of Mr J.M. Bessinger (44), who worked as a rivetter and earned £21 a month; his wife (26) did not work.¹¹² There are also examples of white married women working when they needed to, and when they did not need to. The Mellor family mentioned earlier, for instance, where Mr Mellor was a cellist and Mrs Mellor owned her own café, had a total income of at least £38 a month, and £30 was earned by Mr Mellor.¹¹³ The Mellor family would have had a very comfortable life only living off Mr Mellor’s salary and such an example complicates the male breadwinner ideal. But it is exactly these exceptions – as evidenced through the representative sample of the Batson Household Survey – that prove the rule.

Another question arises concerning the reservation wages of white women. In a few cases, the salaries of “daughters” in white families made a valuable and necessary contribution to the family income. In other cases, the head of the household earned a substantial salary, owned a car, *and* his daughters would have jobs. An example of the latter is a family who lived

¹⁰⁹ H. Phillips. “Treating white poverty in interwar South Africa: ‘Civilised labour’ and the construction of Groote Schuur Hospital 1926–1938,” *South African Journal of Economic History*, (20), (2), 2005, p. 115.

¹¹⁰ I. Goldin. *The politics and economics of Coloured identity in South Africa*, (South Africa: Maskew Miller Longman, 1987), p. 47; Goldin. *The politics and economics*, in Phillips. “Treating white poverty,” p. 110.

¹¹¹ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 41, par. 200.

¹¹² Card 1076 (1/3)

¹¹³ Card 1972

in Wynberg. The head of the household earned a weekly wage of £7 and was wealthy enough to own a car and afford a three-bedroom home. Two of the head's daughters also contributed to the household income. The eldest (24) earned £12 per month working for O.K. Bazaars as a shop assistant while her sister (22), working the same job in the same business, earned £9.10s. per month.¹¹⁴ Both daughters earned more than the average monthly wage for white women. Their earnings were far from insignificant and, combined, contributed 40% of the household income – even though the family could have lived comfortably on the father's income. While it is unclear how much of the daughters' salaries were pooled, the family (including the mother and two other siblings) hired a washerwoman and a daily servant, spent £7.7s. a month on rent, and could afford for one of the siblings to attend a college.¹¹⁵ The case of this family stands in contrast to the idea that white women's wages were "extremely low" during this time. Iris Berger argues that during South Africa's industrialisation at the beginning of the twentieth century young white women were essential contributors to the family wage, despite their meagre earnings.

The pattern for poor white families was similar to that of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe; by the age of fourteen or fifteen, young people were expected to work until marriage to assist their parents and younger siblings. During this period in which young women received extremely low wages, employers relied upon their families to supply room and board as a supplement to their scant earnings.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Card 1806.

¹¹⁵ Card 1806.

¹¹⁶ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 42.

Data from the survey suggest that white married women very seldomly worked outside of the home and that when they did, they earned more than the average unmarried woman. This suggests that the reservation wage for white married women was relatively high – which could be because of the high wages of white males. As mentioned earlier, domestic workers in the survey earned between £2–4 per month. The provision of childcare is also an essential consideration in understanding what kept women away from wage labour outside of the home. In nineteenth century Western European countries, women with two children or fewer were more likely to take up employment outside of the home after marriage than those with five or six children.¹¹⁷ Married women who worked outside of the home had to rely on family or pay a domestic worker to care for their children and to clean the home. In the Batson Household



Figure 9: Portrait of a woman wearing a white hat, by Florence Zerffi

Source: Artnet, Past Auction

Survey, 352 (or 71%) of the 497 white households in the sample had a stay-at-home wife.

There are a number of white widows in the survey records who appear to have been self-sufficient. Florence Zerffi¹¹⁸ (43) was one such widow. She is listed as an artist and earned £20 a month from selling her own work. In 1938 she supported her 13-year-old son and 21-year-old niece (who was attending university) on this salary. She also employed a live-in servant. The comments section explains that in addition to selling her own work, she taught art at Wynberg Girls' High and one other unnamed school. She owned the house she lived in.¹¹⁹ Florence Zerffi is the widow with the highest income in the survey. The other

white widows who worked were also usually the main wage-earners in their families. One

¹¹⁷ Boter. "Ideal versus reality?," p. 93.

¹¹⁸ P. Elliot. *Nita Spilhaus (1878–1967) and her artist friends in the Cape during the early twentieth century*, (Cape Town: Peter Elliot, 2015).

¹¹⁹ Card 1718.

worked as a waitress and earned £11.6s.1d. a month while her daughter (17) worked as a typist and earned £7 per month. Her second child, a 14-year-old daughter, attended school and stayed at home. They rented a two-roomed property for £2.15s. per month.¹²⁰ Another widow, Jane Miller (56), worked as a midwife and earned between £6 and £10 per month. Her salary varied according to the number of births she delivered. Her son-in-law (29), the only other wage-earner in the household, worked as a handyman for £6 per month.¹²¹ Chapter 6 looks more closely at widows and their role in Cape Town society.

Almost twenty years after the Batson Household Survey, and eight years after the National Party came to power, debates took place in South African parliament about discrimination against women in the workplace. Members of the National Party were adamant that paying men and women the same wages would lead to serious societal issues. These issues, it was argued, would arise because women would likely prefer working outside of the home to caring for their families. Marie Wentzel put it as follows: “They [The National Party] were also totally opposed to the idea that women could be viewed as the breadwinner as they felt that it would have the consequence of women losing interest in marriage, and would therefore no longer fulfil their calling as mother and homemaker.”¹²² Evidence from the Batson Household Survey shows that Cape Town society largely presented the male-breadwinner pattern, and that white men earned enough to conform to the male-breadwinner model. By the 1950s, expectations were still that white women stop working once they married. However, coloured men’s wages were not enough to live on, which meant that coloured women were more likely to work at all stages of their lives.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to determine the rates of FLFP in Cape Town, and to offer a closer look at *what* work women were doing, *when* they worked, and whether or not Cape Town can be considered to have been a male-breadwinner society in the period just before World War II. In some ways the work of coloured and white women in the city looked similar and female labour force participation rates in the city were similar. In thinking of Sen’s quotation at the beginning of the chapter, that paid labour outside of the home provides women with agency, it

¹²⁰ Card 1663..

¹²¹ Card 1176 (1/2).

¹²² Own translation from M.E. Wentzel: “Hulle was ook heeltemal daarteen gekant dat die vrou as die broodwinner beskou sou word aangesien dit tot gevolg sou hê dat die vroue nie meer sou belangstel om te trou nie end us nie hulle roeping as moeder en tuisteskepper sou nakom nie.”

M. E. Wentzel. *Statutêre beperkinge op die posisie van die vrou in die Arbeidsmark, 1910-1988*, (Pretoria: Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing, 1989), p. 10.

seems that both coloured and white women had access to this opportunity for agency. But it is clear from the wage discrepancies and the timing of labour outside of the home, that coloured and white women had very different experiences. Coloured women worked at various different life stages while white women mostly worked before getting married. The wages of white women were, however, higher than those of coloured women (and higher than those of coloured men). There are examples of unmarried white women who seemed to have worked because they wanted to, and not because they had to. Although more coloured women worked outside of the home than white women did, they did so out of necessity. Low wages led to a situation in which many members of large coloured households needed to work without their wages necessarily providing much relief from poverty. Coloured women's contributions to the total household income exceeded that of white women, but this did not change the fact that their wages were extremely low. Coloured women may have had more agency, specifically in the context of marriage, as will be seen in later chapters, but their low wages (and the low wages of coloured men) limited their freedom in many other ways.

There are a number of factors that characterise a male breadwinner society. The first is that men earn more than women do, the second is that the daughters of breadwinners specialise in household activities and the third is that it is rare for married women to work outside of the home in paid employment. After measuring the contributions of couples it is clear that Cape Town society presented the male-breadwinner pattern and that men were expected to provide the vast majority of their family's income. Coloured households were, however, mostly excluded from this pattern. Although coloured men earned more than coloured women, the wages they earned could not support a family with the result that women and other family members needed to work in order to survive.

Chapter 2

“Truly a three-dimensional job”: Race and the feminisation of clerical work in Cape Town, 1900–1960

1. Introduction

‘Hello, yes, this is Smith and Co... . no! I’m sorry, he is not in ... Smith and Co., just hold the line. I’ll put you through ... no, I’m sorry, there is no answer ... Smith and Co. ... through ...’

Hers is perhaps one of the most nerve-racking jobs in the business life of to-day, for she has a thousand things to do at once and as many to remember. Her hands, her mind and her ears are all occupied at once.

I chatted with a telephone operator who has charge of a small branch exchange, and who is also reception clerk for the firm by whom she is employed.

‘Nobody really knows what my job is besides looking after the switchboard,’ she told me. ‘I type for several departments, in between which I also look after the mails coming in and going out, see to the dispatching of goods.’

‘This is only part of my job, as the switchboard is considered part-time work. I have a certain amount of accounting to do and have to recognise and be tactful with all the firm’s clients calling into the office.’¹

This epigraph is from a *Cape Times* interview with a woman in Cape Town working as a telephonist. From these lines it is clear that her job entailed more than operating a switchboard; she was also something called a reception clerk, and her job entailed various other responsibilities. The journalist goes on to say it is a “truly three-dimensional job” and a “trying position”. This chapter asks how many women there were in Cape Town that were employed in these “three-dimensional” jobs. Something that is assumed about the woman in this article is her race – articles in the *Cape Times* at the time only seem to have specified race if the person being referred to was not white. From the last chapter it is clear that the type of work that women did outside of the home matters – coloured and white women were doing different jobs in pre-World War II Cape Town and they also earned very different wages. Here I focus on a specific occupation, clerical work, and investigate whether it changed from being a male

¹ “Telephonist,” *Cape Times*, 26 January 1937, p. 11.

occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century, to one dominated by women – as it did elsewhere in the world. More specifically, I explore whether these changes took place for coloured and white women in Cape Town. The overarching questions are: did the feminisation of clerical work take place in Cape Town and, if yes, did it take place for both races?

The 1920s to 1940s was a time when, in other parts of the world such as Canada, the USA and Britain, the nature of clerical work changed as growing economies increased the demand for clerical workers. Alongside increased rates of Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP), clerical work changed from being a male-dominated occupation to one dominated by young, unmarried, white females. Research that has been done on the feminisation of clerical work in other contexts provides an opportunity for comparative analysis: did this feminisation also occur in Cape Town as a city and South Africa as a whole? As others, such as England and Boyer, have argued, the feminisation of clerical work provides a useful window into women's fluctuating involvement in the labour force in the twentieth century.² The period demarcated for this chapter ends when the National Party's government gained power in South Africa and the consequent formalisation of apartheid began.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Section two provides an overview of the relevant literature on FLFP and the feminisation of clerical work as well as race and working women. Section three offers a historiography of women's work in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. In section four, I utilise a variety of sources to present a survey of clerical work in Cape Town, with a specific focus on the lives of women working as clerks in the city over the period 1900–1960. Section five concludes.

2. Background

The feminisation of clerical work in the twentieth century has been well documented in Western contexts. A number of theories seek to explain why this change occurred and they emphasise changes in the economy, changes in the nature of work, and changes in the nature of society. Firstly, as economies shifted away from agriculture and towards manufacturing and financial services, business became more administrative. Graham Lowe comments that “[t]he staid world of the clerk was thrown into turmoil after 1900. When the depression hit in 1930, clerks were the largest and fastest growing occupational group in the booming white-collar

² K. England & K. Boyer. “Women’s work: The feminization and shifting meanings of clerical work,” *Journal of Social History*, (43), (2), 2009, pp. 307–340.

sector.”³ In contrast to the varied nature of clerical work before – clerical work came to be characterised by much routine and repetitive labour. This new, revolutionised clerical work required certain skills not obtained in schools, and as a result, colleges emerged that offered courses to equip women with the requisite skills. In his work on the feminisation of clerical work in Canada, Lowe explains that two occurrences were vital to the evolution of office work, which further led to clerical work acquiring the status of “women’s work”. These two occurrences were, firstly, the increase in paperwork that resulted from a more specialised economy and secondly, rising managerial dependence on the office as the heart of administration.⁴

It must also be acknowledged that this type of shift in an occupation is very rare. Samuel Cohn explained that “few occupations change sex-type so dramatically over time”.⁵ A book about clerical labour in Britain published in 1935 explains this shift and the link between labour-saving technology, deskilling and the feminisation of clerical work.

Without altering standard conditions, the Government has enormously increased, during the last decade, the proportion of women employed on [sic] clerical work, and the women are paid on lower rates than men. Again the machine has invaded the field of clerical labour, just as earlier on it invaded the field of manual labour. The typewriter, the adding machine, the comptometer, have resulted in the replacement of thousands of clerks by what are in effect machine tenders.⁶

The abovementioned book also emphasised that the women working as clerical workers in Britain were young. In 1911, 66% of them were younger than 25, while the figure for men under 25 was 47%.⁷ By 1936, 46.6% of clerical workers in the British General Post Office were women.⁸

Claudia Goldin explains that these changes to clerical work were also affected by increased FLFP in the twentieth century, caused, in turn, by general shifts outside of the occupation:

These changes include the increased relative demand for female office workers in the early twentieth century which made “nice” jobs

³ G. Lowe. *Women in the administrative revolution: The feminization of clerical work*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 47.

⁴ Lowe. *Women in the administrative revolution*, p. 47.

⁵ S.R. Cohn. “Clerical labor intensity and the feminization of clerical labor in Great Britain, 1857–1937,” *Social Forces*, (63), (4), 1985, p. 1060.

⁶ F.D. Klingender. *The condition of clerical labour in Britain*, (London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., 1935), p. ix.

⁷ Klingender. *The condition of clerical labour*, p. 19.

⁸ Cohn. “Clerical labor intensity,” p. 1061.

available, and the growth of educational institutions at the secondary level from the 1910s to the 1940s which greatly increased the supply of potential office workers.⁹

These “nice” jobs, as Goldin calls them, were especially occupied by young, white, unmarried females. Goldin comments that: “[b]oth the increased demand for clerical workers and the increased supply of high school graduates meant that, prior to marriage, young women entered nicer, cleaner, shorter-hour, and thus more ‘respectable’ jobs.”¹⁰ Geographers Kim England and Kate Boyer have also argued that the changes took place as the nature of clerical work itself underwent important changes. The summary of these changes is worth quoting at length.

In the early twentieth century clerical work was done almost exclusively by men, mostly in small, paternalistic, family-run businesses. ‘Black-coated workers’ as Lockwood famously called them, handled all phases of an assignment, frequently doing tasks considered managerial today. Clerical work was high status work, offered good job security, and for those men in senior positions was a most prestigious job of the sort associated with middle management today... Automating clerical tasks occurred alongside the downgrading of clerical work’s status. Unlike the multi-purpose clerk in the nineteenth century pre-mechanized office, women clerical workers in the early twentieth century rarely enjoyed substantial opportunities for advancement... Further, the feminization of clerical work was not a simple substitution of women for men clerks. Instead new types of clerical work came to be associated with women.¹¹

England and Boyer also outline a very important gender aspect of this new kind of clerical work, namely that although the tedious nature of this office work caused feminisation, clerical work was very much seen as a respectable job for young, white women before got married: “white”, because of a certain level of respectability associated with working in an office, and “young”, so that men’s fears of being replaced by ambitious women in search of a career would be allayed. In fact, clerical work was seen as the perfect temporary job for educated, white women before marriage. Women who worked as clerical workers would not be seen as abandoning their (future) role as wives and mothers, because they were either expected to or forced to resign upon marriage. These jobs were also seen as an opportunity to meet men (and

⁹ C. Goldin. “The quiet revolution that transformed women’s employment, education and family,” *American Economic review*, (96), (2), 2006, p. 3.

¹⁰ Goldin. “The quiet revolution,” p. 5.

¹¹ England & Boyer. “Women’s work,” pp. 310–312.

be trained to be a suitable partner for an intellectual man). Businesses contributed to this status of clerical work as a transitory arrangement by paying women low wages.¹²

Others, too, have explored the interaction of race and women's labour outside of the home. In her work on South African women as shop workers, sociologist Bridget Kenny explains the complicated relationship between whiteness, respectability, and work in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. This was a time when white women, especially white Afrikaans women, were being called upon to be mothers of the nation and therefore focus on the domestic in order to promote the advancement of the white race.¹³ In her words:

The register through which white women could be considered workers required a domestication of their economic role ... As service workers, they claimed skill while reinforcing limits to their authority and, in many instances, reproducing an infantilised status in relation to white men. Yet, their incorporation as a respectable workforce required ongoing effort that indicates interplay between daily relations and forms of representation. Ultimately, white women themselves reaped a reward ... in playing to the meaning available, thereby securing their respectability.¹⁴

Oral histories of Canadian women who worked during the Great Depression reveal that many of them believed that clerical work was reserved for white protestant women. Additional research shows that government agencies and other organisations rejected the applications of “Jews, Afro-Caribbean Canadians, and people of eastern and southern European descent” for clerical positions “because of their racialised descent”.¹⁵

Outside of clerical work, the feminisation of the labour force in the twentieth century has been the subject of debates that have mostly been concerned with the causes of increasing and decreasing FLFP rates. World War II is often seen as having been central to increased FLFP rates in the West. Feminists such as Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell have argued that the war created great economic opportunities for the advancement of women in the West. These scholars see the end of the war as a time of women's forced withdrawal from the labour force through legal coercion and propaganda. Arthur Marwick, on the other hand, has argued that World War II was a time of greater access to childcare and jobs historically reserved for men –

¹² England & Boyer. “Women's work,” 313.

¹³ E. Brink, “Man-made women: Gender, class and the ideology of the *Volksmoeder*,” in C. Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1990).

¹⁴ B. Kenny. *Retail worker politics, race and consumption in South Africa: Shelved in the service economy*, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 28.

¹⁵ England & Boyer. “Women's work,” p. 314.

conditions that were not reversed after the war.¹⁶ Globally, the idea has been entrenched that women in the West moved into the labour force in their large droves because of World War II. Stephanie Coontz captures this the popularised idea when she states that:

Married women poured into workforce during World War II, on a much more financially rewarding and culturally approved basis than in the past ... As part of the war effort, women worked in jobs that had previously been unthinkable for their sex. They became pipe fitters, mechanics, welders, carpenters, and shipfitters.¹⁷

However, a recent literature has questioned the mechanisms that led to this phenomenon. Evan Rose argues that it was not the fact that men had left, but that certain industries developed that drew women into the labour force. Looking specifically at the American context, he argues that women were drawn into the labour market as a result of burgeoning industries, and that they moved out again as those industries contracted with the economic downturn at the end of World War II.¹⁸

To summarise, scholars are divided over the effect that World War II had on FLFP rates. While some argue that the war had enduring effects, others, such as Rose, argue that the war provided temporary conditions that led to the increase of women in the labour force – although there are different opinions about what those conditions were. The argument that World War II was the catalyst for an increase in FLFP rates has been applied to the South African context. Although World War II is not seen as having caused the feminisation of clerical work elsewhere, current literature does interpret it as the reason that white women became clerks in South Africa.

3. Historiography

Historically, white womanhood has been used to promote and maintain the whiteness of certain jobs and work-related spaces. An important motivating factor for granting white women the vote in the Union of South Africa in 1930 was that it would further dilute the already limited suffrage of black men.¹⁹ Jonathan Hyslop, who has written extensively on labour and class in

¹⁶ P. Summerfield. *Women workers in the Second World War: Production and patriarchy in conflict*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.

¹⁷ S. Coontz. *Marriage, a history: From obedience to intimacy or how love conquered marriage*, (USA: The Penguin Group, 2005), p. 200.

¹⁸ E. K. Rose. "The rise and fall of female labor force participation during World War II in the United States," *The Journal of Economic History*, (78), (3), p. 673.

¹⁹ C. Walker. "The women's suffrage movement: The politics of gender, race and class," in C. Walker (ed.), *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), p. 313.

the South African political and social spheres, suggests that when white South Africans went to the polls in 1938, their predominant concern was the threat that white women's inclusion in the workforce posed to their womanhood. Their participation was thought to increase contact with black and coloured men. He further contends that an Afrikaner female proletariat emerged amidst dramatic changes in the society and economy of the 1920s and 1930s.

This period saw large numbers of young white women drawn into industrial labour, while at the same time, urbanization and industrialization were eroding the paternalistic form of racial domination which had earlier been predominant in an agriculturally based social order.²⁰

Hyslop also argues that during, and in the wake of the great depression, and as the economy shifted, white women were increasingly assuming the position of the breadwinner in their families.²¹

As elsewhere, World War II is considered to have been a watershed moment for FLFP in South Africa. That said, scholars have also identified various changes that impacted women's labour in the Union of South Africa in the two decades preceding World War II. Social and legal restrictions along gender and race lines were relaxed as the need arose.²² The growth in industry, which had started to flourish in the 1920s, drew coloured and white women in particular into manufacturing jobs.²³ Iris Berger shows that while this development provided greater opportunities for poor women in urban areas, these opportunities, "shaped as they were by racial and gender stereotypes and by state policies over which they had no control",²⁴ continued to regulate their position in society. She nevertheless recognises that even within these restrictive boundaries, white and coloured women still actively rejected certain occupations.²⁵ Berger writes that "young white women were refusing to accept factory employment, preferring jobs in shops, offices, and restaurants."²⁶

World War II changed the nature of the economy in Cape Town. The city's reliance on the food and clothing industries grew and maritime traffic around the Cape increased the

²⁰ J. Hyslop. "White working-class women and the invention of apartheid: 'Purified' Afrikaner nationalist agitation for legislation against 'mixed' marriages, 1934–9," *The Journal of African History*, (36), (1), 1995, pp. 57–81.

²¹ Hyslop. "White working-class women," p. 513.

²² Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, pp. 131–132.

²³ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 47.

²⁴ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 47.

²⁵ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, pp. 47–48.

²⁶ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 155.

demand for foodstuffs. For instance, the Cape canning industry's production increased from 96 million lbs in 1940 to 198 million lbs in 1944.²⁷ Current literature sees World War II as having drawn a greater number of women into the labour market throughout the Union because of a burgeoning industrial sector. During the war, labour shortages experienced by various industries in the Union increasingly propelled white women – as well as and black and coloured men – into skilled positions.²⁸ According to Berger, 300 000 South Africans contributed to the war effort.²⁹ Bill Nasson puts the number of full-service volunteers at 334 000, of which 132 000 were white and 123 000 were coloured and black.³⁰ In 1936, the total white population of the Union was 2 003 334, which means that, according to Nasson's estimate, at least 13% of the white male population enlisted for the war.³¹ Both scholars suggest that a significant number of men were removed from the labour force and that these gaps were filled by women. The large majority of volunteers were English-speaking, white citizens of the Union of South Africa and Nasson finds that women of this demographic were especially eager to participate in the war efforts.³² For countries such as England and America, the literature regarding FLFP and the war explains that labour shortages arose because of large numbers of men away at war, and rising demands from war-stricken countries. It is generally presumed that this is also what happened in the Union of South Africa – and that this phenomenon might further have contributed to the feminisation of clerical work in the country. But little evidence has been provided in support of these claims.

While the post-war period brought greater freedom for Africans on the rest of the continent under colonial rule, coloured, black, and Asian South Africans experienced increasing economic and political oppression. As in other countries, black workers in South Africa protested their working conditions and threatened the country's economic stability. But the response of the authorities to these protests was different. In contrast to the appeasement that took place in other countries, the South African government increased its discriminatory laws and practices.³³ Nancy Clark argues that officials maintained and increased production by using white women and largely excluding black men and women from the manufacturing

²⁷ Brink, “‘Maar ‘n klomp “factory” meide’,” p. 64.

²⁸ T. R. H. Davenport & C. Saunders. *South Africa, a modern history*, (Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), pp. 638–639.

²⁹ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 131.

³⁰ B. Nasson. *South Africa at War 1939-1945*, (South Africa: Jacana, 2012), p. 19.

³¹ Bureau of Census & Statistics. *Union Statistics for fifty years*, (Government Printer: Pretoria, 1960), p. A–3.

³² B. Nasson. *South Africa at War 1939–1945*, p. 36.

³³ N.L. Clark. “Gendering production in wartime South Africa,” *The American Historical Review*, (106), (4), 2001, p. 1182.

industry.³⁴ In other words, women were used to keep certain occupations white. She shows that, during the war, women were paid less than men in the same position, and less than they were being paid in peace time. Initially women were largely barred from entering skilled positions.³⁵ However, in 1941, a maximum wage ceiling for women was introduced, which led to them being hired in skilled positions while enabling factories to get the same work done for less.³⁶ Unions attempted to limit the kind of positions that women could occupy and demanded that they only be allowed to operate machines that did “repetitive” work, not assembly work, and not when it was possible to find a man to do the job.³⁷ With the progression of World War II, however, an intensification of munition production saw these parameters being relaxed.³⁸ This resulted in women taking up skilled positions that fell outside of the restrictions imposed on them by the unions. In an attempt to uphold at least certain requirements from the unions, these women were paid the same wages as unskilled employees.³⁹ Clark argues that this entry of women, and especially white women, into the labour market, disempowered black men and that this disempowerment prevented South Africa from following the same path as other colonies after World War II. She explains that:

South African officials sought to increase factory production without upsetting the labour status quo that reserved skilled jobs for whites and kept Africans, no matter what their job, classified as temporary and unskilled ... White women would provide the solution to South Africa’s dilemma.⁴⁰

Despite wartime demands, the numbers of white women involved in paid labour was still very low. When World War II began, less than 20% of white women and 33% of coloured women over the age of fifteen were economically active in the Union, though these figures were higher in Cape Town. The figures for men of the same age were 87% for white and 93% for coloured men.⁴¹ Clark notes that women who worked in cities were, “single women, usually from rural areas, who worked to supplement their families’ incomes.”⁴² Chapter 1 showed that this was not the case for Cape Town. Most working women were born and bred in Cape Town or had immigrated from European countries and coloured women continued working after they

³⁴ Clark. “Gendering production in wartime South Africa,” p. 1185.

³⁵ Clark. “Gendering production in wartime South Africa,” p. 1192.

³⁶ Clark. “Gendering production in wartime South Africa,” p. 1192.

³⁷ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 134.

³⁸ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 134.

³⁹ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Clark. “Gendering production in wartime South Africa,” p. 1185.

⁴¹ Clark. “Gendering production in wartime South Africa,” p. 1189.

⁴² Clark. “Gendering production in wartime South Africa,” p. 1185.

got married. White women usually stopped working once they got married, and while they were single, living with their parents and working, their incomes did not seem to be essential to their household's income. Current literature indicates that although white FLFP rates increased during the war, once the war ended, women were moved out of the labour force again. Berger writes that "for white women workers the Second World War was but a temporary episode."⁴³ Ultimately World War II is seen as the cause of white women's participation in clerical work in South Africa. Berger argues that:

[u]nder wartime conditions, white women also succeeded in penetrating the preciously male world of clerical work. Newly employed in significant numbers, both employers and the state continued to perceive these young women as docile and dependent, paying them wages that necessitated continued reliance on their families. Reinforcing this downward pull was the absence of substantial competition for women workers outside the domestic sector.⁴⁴

Most literature emphasises women's participation in South African history as conforming to the "reserve army of labour" model as outlined by Marx. Cheryl Walker conforms to this view when she comments that since World War I, women in capitalist societies, including South Africa, have been pulled into the labour force as demands arise. She finds that women were also expected to leave the labour force once they were no longer needed. While this drew women out of the home and contributed to them acquiring freedom and movement in urban areas, she argues that they nonetheless continued to inhabit gender-typed occupations. Alongside the division of labour across gender lines, as has been outlined in this overview, South Africa has a history of delineating employment according to race.⁴⁵

Grietjie Verhoef has found that there was a dramatic increase of women working as clerical workers over the course of the twentieth century in South Africa. She finds that clerical workers as a percentage of all female workers increased from 0.4% in 1921, to 20% in 1991.⁴⁶ By 2018, 72% of the clerical workforce in South Africa was female.⁴⁷ While these figures show an increase, they neglect to show *when* the occupation came to be considered a specifically

⁴³ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 133.

⁴⁴ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 34

⁴⁵ Walker, *Women and resistance in South Africa*, pp. 3;17.

⁴⁶ G. Verhoef. "The role of women in the South African economy," *South African Journal of Economics*, (64), (3), 1996, p. 184.

⁴⁷ Statistics South Africa. "Employment share by occupation and sex, Q2:2018," http://www.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Data-Story-Images-4_1.jpg (Date accessed: 15/08/2019)

female occupation, or even when that shift started. As I shall argue in the following section, the feminisation of clerical work started far earlier than these figures suggest.

4. Clerks in Cape Town

In this section I investigate the daily lives of working women in Cape Town in order to highlight indications of women working as clerks as well as the feminisation of clerical work. The purpose of this is to understand whether clerical work feminised, and if it did, whether it did for coloured and white women alike. In 1901, advertisements appeared in the *Cape Times* that specifically targeted female clerks. According to these advertisements, typing and other types of office work were also considered “clerical” work and they quite clearly stipulated the attributes that applicants were expected to have. For instance, one such advertisement read: “A LADY Clerk, by a wholesale firm; must be accurate and quick at figures, and have experience”.⁴⁸ Another required the services of: “A LADY Clerk, thoroughly skilled in the use of the typewriter and in shorthand-writing”.⁴⁹ A 1903 advertisement reveals that female clerks earned less than barmaids. While the latter were offered £10 per month, a female clerk could only expect to earn £6 per month (both included board and lodging).⁵⁰ One woman advertised her services as an “Expert Lady Clerk, Stenographer; and Typist, with 5 years’ experience in legal and accounting work”⁵¹, further revealing the range of work that was classified as clerical at the beginning of the century. Throughout this period, there were advertisements revealing that employees were looking to hire someone of a particular race, though it seems that applicants knew which races could apply/would stand a chance when applying for a particular job. In the first decade of the twentieth century there were no advertisements for “Lady Clerk” in the *Cape Times* that explicitly specified the race of the applicant, but stating the desirable age was common practice and advertisements usually invited applications from women between the ages of 16 and 18. What is clear is that it was increasingly common for advertisements to specifically state that a business was looking to employ a female clerk. While from 1900–1909 there were 20 advertisements in the *Cape Times* for “Lady Clerk”, the figure increased to 34 over the period 1910–1913.

As the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter revealed, clerical work could include a range of tasks. The descriptions in the marriage records, along with contemporary definitions,

⁴⁸ “Situations vacant,” *Cape Times*, 26 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁹ “Situations vacant,” *Cape Times*, 12 April 1901, p. 2.

⁵⁰ “Situations vacant,” *Cape Times*, 5 December 1903, p. 2.

⁵¹ “Situations wanted,” *Cape Times*, 2 March 1909, p. 2.

give indications of what these working women's day-to-day work consisted of and how to define "clerk" and "clerical work". A clerk, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "an official responsible (as to a government agency) for correspondence records, and accounts and vested with specified powers or authority (as to issue writs as ordered by a court" and "one employed to keep records or accounts or to perform general office work" and "one who works at a sales or service counter".⁵² The broadness of the definition could perhaps mean that a variety of women not specifically listed as "clerks" in the marriage records, could also be considered clerical workers. Examples include receptionists – there is someone listed as a "receptionist-clerk" – and other office workers that listed their occupation simply as "Office worker" or "Office-girl". An advertisement in 1933 in the Cape Argus further shows the extent to which these the differences between the occupations were not always clearly distinguishable. The advertisement read "Bilingual shorthand-typist bookkeeper"⁵³, revealing that a variety of tasks could be expected of one employee. The Shops and Offices Act No.41 of 1939 definition of an office included three types of occupations. It said that an office was "any premises in which there is performed book-keeping, typewriting or any other clerical work whatsoever, and premises includes any land, structure, vehicle or vessel."⁵⁴

There is much evidence that women in Cape Town were being employed in clerical positions in the early twentieth century. Aside from the abovementioned advertisements, a book published in 1903 and written to inform the decisions of young English women who were immigrating to the Cape on how to be economically successful in their new lives in the colony, contains a section on office work. The book's title, *Women workers and South Africa: Some hints regarding lucrative employment for women in South Africa, and how to obtain it; with various information concerning the country for every one*, suggests the expectation that women were to be involved in economic activities.⁵⁵ Its author, Alys Lowth, writes that office work required a specific type of woman and further suggests that working in an office was respectable. "[T]here are openings too for thoroughly good and reliable stenographers and typists, but it is necessary that they should be really clever at the work, quick, accurate, and neat, besides being women of some education and intelligence."⁵⁶

⁵² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clerk>

⁵³ "Situations Vacant: General," *The Cape Argus*, 27 February 1933, p. 4

⁵⁴ M. Schaeffer. *Regulation of Employment and Industrial Conciliation in South Africa*, (Cape Town: Juta & Company, Limited, 1957), p. 157

⁵⁵ A. Lowth. *Women workers and South Africa: Some hints regarding lucrative employment for women in South Africa, and how to obtain it; with various information concerning the country for every one*, (London: Kegan Paul, Tench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. Paternoster House, Charing Cross Road, 1903).

⁵⁶ Lowth. *Women workers and South Africa*, p. 122.

The idea that working in an office was something respectable and considered suitable for young white women is also apparent in other sources. In 1908, a number of young women in Cape Town were lured into a dubious setting with an advertisement that read, “Office Girl – Bank of Africa Chambers, Corner Loop and Strand Street, second floor, 15, Art Studio.”⁵⁷ A man used this advertisement to entice “a number of young ladies” into his office as they hoped to apply for the position. As one young woman (17) later recounted, once she arrived in his office for the “interview”, he “seized hold of her by the arm, putting his arm around her waist, holding her on his knee, and putting his hand on her back.”⁵⁸ The account of the court case provides some evidence of what the process of obtaining employment as an “office girl” entailed. One of the complainants explained that “she saw an advertisement in the press for an office girl, and applied at the room in the Bank of Africa Building. She arrived at about half-past nine in the morning, and had to wait her turn, as there were a number of other applicants.”⁵⁹ Once she was in the man’s office, though, he grabbed her arm. She asked him what he wanted, and he responded that “he did not require an office girl, as he had got a coloured girl to do all of the work that was necessary.”⁶⁰ While it is not explicitly clear what type of work this “coloured girl” was doing, it does seem likely that she was working in his office. Another complainant, also seventeen, said that she applied for the position because she was a shorthand writer and typist, which confirms the skill set “office girls” were expected to have.

A petition from 1912 offers a glimpse into the working life cycle of a female office worker in early twentieth-century Cape Town. The petition states that Capetonian Ada Wetton worked at the Telephone Branch of the Post Office for eleven years before resigning in 1912 when she got married.⁶¹ Although this particular document reveals that Ada Wetton stopped working when she got married, the censuses of the period do not reveal the marital statuses of clerical workers. It is difficult to tell whether married women were barred from clerical work in Cape Town and therefore whether they were expected, or forced, to resign once they got married – or whether this was something they chose to do. In his doctoral thesis on Sanlam (a financial services company based in Cape Town), Wynand Beukes reports that by 1932, more than 30% of the company’s employees were female and that more than 50% of the female staff were married.⁶² This does not, however, provide any clues as to whether or not there was a

⁵⁷ “An advertisement snare,” *Cape Times*, 8 September 1908, p. 5.

⁵⁸ “An advertisement snare,” p. 5.

⁵⁹ “An advertisement snare,” p. 5.

⁶⁰ “An advertisement snare,” p. 5.

⁶¹ “Petitions,” *Cape Times*, 18 April 1912, p. 10.

⁶² W. Beukes. “Van Afrikanerkultuur tot korporatief: Die geskiedenis van Sanlam se hoofkantoorpersoneelkorps, 1918-2018,” (Unpublished PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2017), p. 282.

marriage bar in other organisations and, specifically, in government organisations as was the case in other colonial contexts. Ushehweu Kufakurinani finds that in colonial Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), white married settler women were not allowed to be employed permanently if they were married; these restrictions were in place from 1931 to 1971.⁶³

Unfortunately, due to changes in administration across the period, it is difficult to trace Cape Town's female clerks across the various censuses. The censuses of 1911 and 1960 do not provide occupation data at a city level with the result that I had to use provincial (as opposed to city-level) data for those years. To improve the quality of the comparison, I added a ratio column to Tables 2 and 3 in order to observe the relationship between the percentage of women employed as clerical workers and the total percentage of women in the labour force. An added complication arises from the fact that the occupation section of the 1951 census was never completed or published.⁶⁴ The categories of occupations also create problems for counting clerks across the period. In 1911, the main category for clerks was "Commercial Assistant, Clerk, Typist."⁶⁵ The 1921 census, however, provided for three different types of clerks, "Bank Clerks", "Insurance Clerks" and "Other Clerks" to which typists and stenographers were later added as distinct categories. The changes in categories between the censuses and the broad definition of clerical work has meant that counting clerks, typist, and stenographers as clerical workers is the best way to track them over time.

Table 2: Coloured women's labour force participation

Coloured Women's Labour Force Participation over time in Cape Town and South Africa						
	% of women workers employed in clerical or related occupations	% women clerical workers (of clerical workers, what % is female)	% women in labour force (of the entire labour force, what percentage is female)	% of female population 15+ working	Ratio of share of female clerical workers over share of females in the labour force	
Cape Town						
1911	0.04	13	31	44	0.43	
1936	0.19	34	35	42	0.97	
1946	0.16	22	37	45	0.59	
1960	1	27	32	23	0.83	
South Africa						
1911	0.06	2	27	44	0.09	
1936	0.06	13	26	35	0.48	
1946	0.09	19	47	45	0.41	
1960	1	25	32	23	0.79	

Source: 1911, 1936, 1946, 1951, 1960 censuses

⁶³ U. Kufakurinani. "Gender and settler labour markets: The marriage bar in colonial Zimbabwe," *Economic History of Developing Regions*, (36), (3), 2021, published online.

⁶⁴ A. J. Christopher. "The Union of South Africa censuses 1911–1960: An incomplete record," *Historia*, (56), (2), 2011, p. 7.

⁶⁵ *1911 Census of the Union of South Africa*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1913), Table VII, p. 538.

Table 3: White women's labour force participation

White Women's Labour Force Participation over time in Cape Town and South Africa					
	% of women workers employed in clerical or related occupations	% women clerical workers (of clerical workers, what % is female)	% women in labour force (of the entire labour force, what percentage is female)	% of female population 15+ working	Ratio of share of female clerical workers over share of females in the labour force
Cape Town					
1911	4	22	15	14	1.46
1921	18	38	28	33	1.35
1936	19	43	30	35	1.41
1946	27	53	30	34	1.77
1960	44	50	26	19	1.91
South Africa					
1911	4	23	16	23	1.46
1921	12	28	25	32	1.11
1936	26	35	18	19	1.98
1946	38	46	21	29	2.20
1951	45	49	22	24	2.23
1960	49	52	26	39	2.04

Source: 1911, 1921, 1936, 1946, 1951 censuses and Union Statistics 1951

Tables 2 and 3 show that in Cape Town, FLFP rates increased relatively consistently from 1921–1946. While the figures for 1911 and 1960 are anomalies because they represent provincial participation rates, they do reveal that women in rural areas were less likely to report an occupation than those living in cities or urban centres. In short, adding rural areas and towns to the statistics for Cape Town decreases FLFP rates. Both coloured and white FLFP rates in South Africa seem to have been impacted by the Great Depression, with white women's labour force participation dropping the most dramatically – from 32% in 1921 to 19% in 1936. FLFP rates in the Union appear to have increased because of World War II – from 19% in 1936 to 29% in 1946 – but by 1951 it had decreased again to 24%. For white women in Cape Town, the war saw a slight decrease in FLFP, from 35% in 1936 to 34% in 1946. This slight decrease contradicts the conventional narrative that the war was somehow a watershed moment causing an increase in FLFP rates and, on the contrary, reveals that the war did not have much impact at all. Tables 2 and 3 show that, while the war period witnessed the feminisation of the South Africa's workforce, the percentage of women in the Cape Town workforce remained stable for white women and increased slightly for coloured women. It is clear from both tables that it became more common for women to take up clerical work over this period – which is to say that if women worked, they were more likely to work as clerical workers in 1960 than they were in 1911. The period from 1936 to 1946 saw the biggest jump in the feminisation of clerical work for white women, with the figure increasing from 43% of the total white clerical workforce in 1936, to 53% in 1946. The number of coloured women who worked as clerical and office workers remained minute for the entire period. In fact, Table 4 shows that the share of clerical work done by coloured females decreased during the period. In other words, it is not

just that coloured women moved out of clerical work over time, but also that they moved out at a faster rate than coloured men did.

As we know, the feminisation of clerical work was not limited to Cape Town alone. Even though, as far as white women were concerned, the city feminised faster than the rest of South Africa, it still lagged behind the feminisation trends of other countries. By 1920, more than 48% of clerical and related office workers in Canada were female, while the same figure for Cape Town in 1921 was 38%. The city was not that far behind the USA, though, where in 1921, 41% of clerical workers were female. Cape Town was, however, ahead of both Canada and the United States as far as FLFP rates for white women were concerned. In fact, for the entire period from 1921 to 1946 (the years for which census data for Cape Town are available), the ratio of women to men in the labour force was higher in Cape Town than it was in both Canada and the United States.⁶⁶ In the USA, women only reached 30% of the total workforce in the late 1950s and in Canada as late as 1971.⁶⁷ Table 2 shows that although a greater percentage of the population of coloured women worked compared to white women, coloured men were also more likely to work, which means that as a percentage of the total labour force, the coloured labour force was less female than the white labour force.

Here it is important to note that one trend endured for coloured and white women in Cape Town throughout the war period. The majority of women only worked until they got married; marriage and the arrival of children ended their working careers. While this trend was true for both races, though for white women it was more concentrated. For coloured women, working as a clerk was highly unusual, with only 40 in the whole country working as clerks in 1936. The 1936 census lists only 50 coloured female clerks for the whole country, compared to 1 309 coloured male clerks, 1 920 white female clerks, and 8 121 white male clerks.⁶⁸ By 1936, only fifteen coloured women worked as clerks in Cape Town. By 1960, there were 144 922 white female clerks in the country as opposed to 131 530 white male clerks, 6 701 coloured male clerks, and 2 264 coloured female clerks. These numbers also show the increase in demand for clerical workers over the period. Rapid urbanisation during the first sixty years of the twentieth century affected the structure of employment in South Africa but affected coloured and white women differently.⁶⁹ Social and economic commentators in the 1950s and 1960s viewed coloured workers as semi-skilled or “half-schooled”, while whites were seen as

⁶⁶ England & Boyer. “Women’s work,” p. 309.

⁶⁷ England & Boyer. “Women’s work,” p. 309.

⁶⁸ *1911 Census of the Union of South Africa*, Table VII, pp. 538–539.

⁶⁹ E. Theron & M. J. Swart. *Die Kleurling bevolking van Suid Afrika*, (Stellenbosch/Grahamstad: Universiteits-Uitgewers, 1964), p. 35.

the skilled workers, and black workers as unskilled.⁷⁰ One commentator concluded that the position of the coloured population in the economy improved dramatically from 1936–1957 because of an increase in coloured women working in the private and secondary sectors. Despite this, it was very rare for coloured women to occupy clerical positions.⁷¹

As is evident from Tables 2 and 3, women in Cape Town were already working in clerical positions before World War II, and by 1938 there was a training college for women in the city called the “Underwood School for Lady Clerks and Stenographers in Capetown”. This training college provided short courses for female clerks and accepted new students on a monthly basis. It offered subjects such as shorthand and typewriting and advertised the fact that all staff members were women.⁷² The college shared its name, Underwood, with a famous brand of typewriter. The name of the college also reveals the assumed similarities between different types of office work. A young white woman who was surveyed in the Batson Household Survey confirms the existence of this college. Miss Zurnamer, the 16-year-old daughter of German immigrants to Cape Town, is listed as being enrolled at “Underwood”.⁷³ The college was not the only institution that offered clerical-related training. Although it was not exclusively catering for women, an institution called “Cornhill’s” advertised in 1935 to offer: “A thorough training: Shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping: pupils prepared individually for Bankers’ Institution. Insurance and Institute Bookkeepers’ examinations”.⁷⁴ By the 1950s, Underwood was still operating. In the 1951 *City of Cape Town Official Guide*, Underwood is mentioned as one of the “numerous” business colleges in the city at the time.⁷⁵

There are also examples in the Batson Household Survey of white women who were employed as clerical workers. They are, without exception, all unmarried, although of different ages. Miss Chace, a 40-year-old woman, was earning £17.10s. per month working as “clerical staff” at “Heynes Matthews” [sic].⁷⁶ Heynes Mathew and Co. was a big pharmaceutical company that occupied a large building that still stands on the corner of Adderley and Longmarket Streets.⁷⁷ Other clerical workers listed in the Batson Household Survey include

⁷⁰ Theron & Swart. *Die Kleurling bevolking van Suid Afrika*, p. 36.

⁷¹ Theron & Swart. *Die Kleurling bevolking van Suid Afrika*, p. 35.

⁷² “Opvoedkundig,” *Die Huisgenoot*, 4 Augustus 1944, p. 39.

⁷³ Card 1992.

⁷⁴ “Educational tuition,” *The Cape Argus*, 9 July 1935, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Authorised by the Council of the City of Cape Town, *City of Cape Town official guide*, (Cape Town, December 1951), p. 272.

⁷⁶ Card 1819 (1/2).

⁷⁷ Extract from “The Cape Town guide”, 1897, p. 139.

https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldg_images.php?bldgid=5887#351011 [Date accessed: 1 December 2020]

Miss Kohn, a 49-year-old unmarried woman who lived with her widowed 81-year-old mother. Miss Kohn worked as a clerk for a grocery store called “Stanley Co.”, in Muizenberg. She earned just over £14 per month. While it is unclear how long she had been working as a clerk, and therefore how many salary increases she can be assumed to have received, it does appear from the Batson Household Survey that female clerical workers who entered the labour force earned the same wages as their male counterparts, but they did not receive the same number of salary increases or promotions.⁷⁸ For instance, Miss Zurschmiede, a 20-year-old clerk for Standard Bank, earned £11 per month.⁷⁹ Mr Botha (18) was a clerk at the South African Railways and earned a lower salary of £9 a month.⁸⁰ Another South African Railways employee, a 43-year-old male clerk and head of household, Mr Gessler, earned a tidy sum of £33 a month which suggests that men could expect to be promoted within the company (or were doing different types of clerical work), thereby increasing their earnings.⁸¹ While Mr Gessler is one of the highest-paid clerks in the Batson Household Survey, the lowest paid clerk is also a male – a 17-year-old who earned £5 per month working for Henz and Bauman.⁸² In summary, it seems that there was great variation in the wages earned by clerks, and perhaps the type of work that was being done. What is clear is that older male clerks were earned two or three times as much as young male and female clerks in the early stages of their careers.

Anglican marriage records from Cape Town show that, by the late 1930s, women were working in a variety of clerical positions and executed a wide range of tasks, including operating comptometers⁸³ and wage machines, in addition to working as invoice clerks and bank clerks.⁸⁴ Anglican marriage records only consistently list bride’s occupations in the mid 1930s. While it is not clear what exactly prompted this change, it does seem to indicate, at the very least, that in the 1930s, women’s occupations became something worth mentioning. The types of clerical work and workplaces are also revealed in these marriage records. Varying levels of detail in their descriptions reveal the kind of the differences that brides themselves considered important: “Accounts Clerk”, “Assistant Clerk”, “Clerk Shell Company”, “Clerk in United Building Company Cape Town”, “Clerk Chief” and “Clerk (Airwoman

⁷⁸ Card 1701.

⁷⁹ Card 1813.

⁸⁰ 1371 (1/2).

⁸¹ Card 1824.

⁸² Card 1300.

⁸³ A comptometer was a mechanical calculator invented in 1887 by D.E. Felt. <http://www.vintagecalculators.com/html/comptometer.html> [Date accessed: 27 October 2018].

⁸⁴ “South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004.” Database with images. FamilySearch. <https://FamilySearch.org> : 14 June 2016. William Cullen Library, Wits University, Johannesburg.

S.A.W.A.A.F.)". These job titles and others such as "Wage Clerk", "Reservation Clerk", "Waste Clerk" and "Travel Clerk", also indicate the great variation that existed in what was considered "clerical" work, and the nature of the work undertaken by these clerical workers.

Taking a closer look at a specific company can provide an indication of the nature of work inside an office in Cape Town. In his thesis on the history of Sanlam's staff, Beukes explains that by the 1920s there was a clear division of labour at the Sanlam head office in Cape Town. There was a senior accountant, first assistant, second assistant, cashier, stop order clerk, shorthand writer, assistant policy typist, and junior typist.⁸⁵ By the 1930s, the company hierarchy comprised, from top to bottom, a board of directors, general managers, sheriffs, head clerks, and the rest of the employees.⁸⁶ In 1950, a Sanlam report expressed concern that the company was perhaps employing too many women. By 1953, 78% of women who worked for Sanlam were clerks and they represented 58% of all clerical workers in the company.⁸⁷ The reason Beukes gives for this rise is a shortage in the number of men who were able and available to do clerical work, but he does not explain exactly what could have caused this shortage of qualified men.

Newspaper advertisements that specifically targeted women appeared throughout the 1930s, showing that women's labour was in demand, not just as a form of labour, but because businesses specifically wanted to hire women. In 1933, for instance, an advertisement appeared in the *Cape Argus* that specifically required women's services in middle management. It reads, "[f]emale supervisors wanted [...] for the famous Pat Shirts"⁸⁸. In the mid-1930s, newspapers advertised a variety of opportunities not just for women, but also by women. In 1935, an advert in the classifieds of the *Cape Argus* read, "Young lady for office telephone switchboard; one with slight knowledge of shorthand typewriting preferred".⁸⁹ In the same year and in the same newspaper, a woman also advertised her services as a driving instructor. Her advertisement read, "LADY Instructor of motor driving: pass out guaranteed – very moderate terms."⁹⁰ These advertisements also provide some indication of the kind and level of education women were expected to have when they applied for an office job. One read, "Junior office assistant. Observatory. Girl from school would suit."⁹¹ All young women who had just finished school were eligible for this position. Additionally, the advertisement was placed in a section of the

⁸⁵ Beukes. "Van Afrikanerkultuur tot korporatief," p. 37.

⁸⁶ Beukes. "Van Afrikanerkultuur tot korporatief," p. 38.

⁸⁷ Beukes. "Van Afrikanerkultuur tot korporatief," p. 286.

⁸⁸ "Situations vacant: General," *The Cape Argus*, 6 February 1933, p. 3.

⁸⁹ "Situations vacant: General," *The Cape Argus*, 9 July 1935, p. 4.

⁹⁰ "Educational tuition," *The Cape Argus*, 17 June 1935, p. 4.

⁹¹ "Employment offered (women)," *The Cape Argus*, 14 December 1937, p. 2

classifieds titled “Employment Offered (Women)” which shows that there was sufficient demand for female labour to justify allocating a specific section of the newspaper to job opportunities for women. All this is to say that women were entered a variety of occupations at this time, and that they were being sought out to for specific types of jobs.

The idea that women were better than men at certain jobs comes through clearly in a *Cape Times* article from 1937 on the topic of whether or not men and women should be paid equal wages. The author of the article had interviewed different employers around the city to ask their opinion on this matter. While most of these employers commented on the possible negative consequences of equal wages, one stated that he preferred employing women for certain jobs:

A head accountant, when interviewed, stated that for many jobs in his department, particularly that of ledger work, he found women better than men.

‘If I had to pay equal wages to either sex’, he said, ‘I would still keep on a percentage of women to do the special jobs at which I think they are more capable than men.’⁹²

During the war, many clerical jobs were available to women in Cape Town. Advertisements in the *Cape Times* occasionally displayed a stereotypical approach to women who wanted to work in clerical or administrative positions. Women were to be good-looking, well-spoken, and be willing to work receptionist-type positions as well as doing the bookkeeping. These advertisements also reveal the varied nature of the work they would be doing. “A SMART, intelligent young lady of good address and appearance to be trained for sports house: typing and shorthand, also elementary bookkeeping a recommendation; commencing salary £3.10s monthly”⁹³ and “LADY BOOKKEEPER-RECEPTIONIST wanted by City Hotel; must have hotel experience; high salary to suitable persons”.⁹⁴ As the war progressed, advertisements started requesting that women should fill positions on a permanent basis and not just for the duration of the war. One advertisement read, “WANTED CAPABLE LADY ACCOUNTANT for suburban manufacturing concern. Working a five-day week. Gentile firm. [...] Position is a permanent one and is not relieving anyone who is away on

⁹² “Move to equal pay for women: Opinion of Cape Town employers,” *Cape Times*, 21 June 1937, p. 4.

⁹³ “Situations vacant,” *Cape Times*, 5 September 1939, p. 2.

⁹⁴ “Situations vacant,” *Cape Times*, 1 April 1940, p. 2.

active service. Last accountant retained this position for a long time and is only leaving on account of domestic reasons.”⁹⁵

Clerical positions were advertised for both men and women. With more skilled men exiting the labour force in order to join the conflict abroad, the *Cape Times* began advertising positions to ensure that only women or men who were not fit for service, would apply. Clerical work was consistently seen as suitable for both sexes. Penny Summerfield found that in Britain around the time of the war, “sectionalisation” characterised women’s employment. She argues that opportunities increased for women in commercial and clerical classes but that they were relegated to specific occupations within those classes such as stenography and typewriting. These occupations were categorised as “women’s work”.⁹⁶ Similarly, with the feminisation of clerical work in Canada, Lowe also finds that women were increasingly employed for office work as the nature of the work became more repetitive and menial.⁹⁷

According to the *Cape Times*, by the time the war started it was becoming normal for young unmarried women to earn their own money, live alone, and spend their income the as they wanted to. Lucy Bean, in her account of the work of the South African Women’s Auxiliary Services (S.A.W.A.S.), refers to these white working women in the city in her explanation that recruitment meetings before the outbreak of the war were planned for the convenience of two groups of women: “housewives” and “those that worked in offices and shops”.⁹⁸ Anecdotes particularly emphasised young women as working in offices or businesses. An article from 1941 describes what it calls “Business Girls’ Problems”, which included wardrobe suggestions and the difficulty of finding a convenient time for entertaining guests. The article identifies a busy schedule as a barrier for young women who were trying to engage in hospitality. It suggests that busy business girls should organise a one-hour breakfast party at 11 a.m. on a Sunday so that even if they had been to a dance the night before, they could still have the house tidy by late morning on the following day. It also recognises that other activities that might have contributed to their busy schedule included a round of golf on a Saturday afternoon and sherry parties after business. The article also emphasises the importance of clothing to a young woman’s career and recommends that different attire be worn for different careers. This description of the types of clothing it considered suitable to different occupations also gives an

⁹⁵ “Situations vacant,” *Cape Times*, (8 November 1941, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Summerfield. *Women workers in the Second World War*, p. 11

⁹⁷ Lowe. *Women in the administrative revolution*, pp. 4–5.

⁹⁸ L. Bean. *Strangers in our midst*, (Cape Town: Timmins, 1970), p. 19.

indication of the variety of jobs open to women or considered acceptable or normal for them, as well as the characters they needed to assume for the role associated with each occupation.

Remember your wardrobe is vital to your career. Nobody will give important work to a girl who is befrilled in an office. She may have a sense of responsibility, but she must look the part as well. It must be remembered of course, that various careers require different wardrobes. A woman in a tea-room, for example, requires clothing to look softer, whereas a saleswoman [sic] should be well tailored and efficient looking. A teacher should avoid bright colours or unusual effects as it might tend to distract the attention of scholars.⁹⁹

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is essential to note that the newspapers appear to have been addressing a white audience, and that unless otherwise specified, those being referred to in the article were understood to be white. The census information and information from the Batson Household Survey, however, reveal that there were very few coloured men or women in clerical work between the World Wars. The Wilcocks Commission provides some qualitative information to remedy this lack of insight into coloured clerical workers. It provides an explanation for the low rates of coloured involvement in the commercial sector, which includes clerical workers.

The part played by the Cape Coloured in commercial and similar activities is affected by the fact that Europeans [sic] prefer to employ Europeans in such posts, and that European customers prefer to be attended by European clerks, so that Cape Coloured [sic] only have limited opportunities of obtaining commercial experience. Even should a Cape Coloured person have the requisite education and ability, he is mostly prevented from obtaining promotion to the higher grades in commercial and similar employment, as such promotion would usually entail his occupying a position of authority over European employees, which would be in be in sharp conflict with European sentiment and usage in South Africa.¹⁰⁰

While this excerpt from the commission of inquiry does not provide any mention of women in commerce, it does indicate that the author thought that it would be rare for a coloured person to have the necessary education to undertake a job in the commerce (including clerical work). Although it increased over time, the number of coloured pupils who completed (or could afford to undertake) the Junior Senior Certificate (the highest level of high school education at the time) was very low in comparison to white pupils. The numbers of pupils who passed the

⁹⁹ “Business girls’ problems – clothes, parties and home,” *Cape Times*, 12 July 1940, p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 81, par. 460.

certificate in 1930 were 3 618 white and 59 coloured. By 1935 it was 5 327 white and 259 coloured.¹⁰¹ This is to say that aside from the racist reasons for not being permitted to enter clerical positions, the educational opportunities for coloured students were also limited (for the same reasons). Although coloured students could attend school until the senior certificate level, the census shows that they were far more likely to be working while their white counterparts were still attending school. Speaking about the context of the United States, Sharon Harley explained that “[r]acism in the labour market meant that there were fewer white-collar jobs for blacks, male or female; but black males occupied many of the top-level clerical positions reserved for blacks”.¹⁰² Harley went on to say that in the 1920s and 1930s “the large number of white female clerks in the federal government by 1920 left little doubt that clerical work was largely white women’s work; less than five percent of the black female workforce occupied clerical positions.”¹⁰³ As is evident from Table 2, the figure for coloured women was even lower, reaching a high of 1% of the coloured female labour force in 1960. It is unclear whether there were certain clerical positions that were specifically reserved for coloured men in Cape Town, but it is clear that coloured men were more likely to occupy clerical positions than coloured women were.

While women had clearly been included into the workforce, in part, because of the war, they did not necessarily acquire new or different skills because of it. The war was, instead, an opportunity to extend their existing presence in clerical and financial occupations. Women were rarely afforded the opportunity to move into occupations that were usually occupied by men. Despite being in the defence force, women still mostly worked as “switchboard operators, clerks and shorthand typists”,¹⁰⁴ and office work was a big part of women’s roles in the war effort in South Africa. In her history of the South African Women’s Auxiliary Navy Service (SWANS), Margaret Laver describes South African office-girls from the war-time period, whether in the National Defence Force or working privately, as follows:

The ‘office-girl’ [...] lives at home, or if older has a flat of her own, travels to and from work by public transport, or gets a lift; she encounters both men and women in her work-situation, and friendships develop out of these encounters; she has the major part of the week-end free; she looks forward to payday; she goes on leave; she is transferred

¹⁰¹ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 150.

¹⁰² S. Harley. “For the good of the family and race: Gender, work and domestic roles in the black community, 1880–1930,” *Signs*, (15), (2), 1990, p. 340.

¹⁰³ Harley. “For the good of the family,” p. 341.

¹⁰⁴ “South Africa’s girl “soldiers”: Serving in East Africa,” *Cape Times*, 7 November 1940, p. 6.

from one department or section to another, perhaps when someone else is on leave, or for wider experience, or as a result of promotion.¹⁰⁵

Demobilisation did not clearly impact women's role in the clerical and financial sector. An article from the *Cape Times* in 1944 expressed concern over the process of demobilisation. It stated that 70 000 people were employed in wartime production in the Union and 200 000 soldiers would need to be included in the peacetime economy once they returned from war.¹⁰⁶ After the war, advertisements for vacancies sometimes specified "Ex-servicemen only need apply" or "State military record and enclose testimonials when applying".¹⁰⁷ Despite the push to provide jobs for returning soldiers, there were still advertisements for positions that explicitly required the services of women when they could also be filled by men. "CASHIER-LEDGER CLERK Capable bilingual lady required."¹⁰⁸ Soldiers were reportedly returning to the Cape at a rate of 2 000 per month from September 1945 onward. One article notes that "difficulty was being experienced to-day in placing men in office jobs" which were sought after by older men and soldiers who joined immediately after school.¹⁰⁹ It also comments that "[t]he position so far as jobs for European girls were concerned was normal" while there were lots of "domestic jobs" for coloured "girls", though they showed a "great reluctance to-day to take up this employment."¹¹⁰ The article further states that half of the men returning to the Cape moved back into the positions they had before the onset of the war.¹¹¹ This, combined with the fact that many businesses were cutting back on staff given the end of wartime production, meant that men were looking for jobs. This did not, however, seem to affect white women working in office jobs.

Evidence of the continued demand for young white women to take up office jobs can be found in newspapers and magazines. An upset parent wrote a letter to the editor of the *Cape Times* in November 1945 to complain that "Office Girls' Hours" left them no time to shop. She protested that "office girls" worked from 08:30 to 17:30 on weekdays and from 08:30 to 13:30 on Saturdays, leaving no time to do their weekly shopping. The only way in which they could

¹⁰⁵ M. Laver. *Sailor-women, sea-women, SWANS: A history of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943–1949*, (Simonstown: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), p. 46.

¹⁰⁶ "Selfish South Africans: Will lose interest in ex-soldiers: Employment when the war is over," *Cape Times*, 6 July 1944, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ "Situations Vacant," *Cape Times*, 31 October 1945, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ "Situations Vacant," *Cape Times*, 31 October 1945, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ "Finding jobs for Ex-Volunteers – Employment Position in Cape Area," *Cape Times*, 20 September 1945, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ "Finding jobs for Ex-Volunteers," p. 5.

¹¹¹ "Finding jobs for Ex-Volunteers," p. 5.

get what they needed, she wrote, was by going to the shops during lunch hour.¹¹² Another article in November 1945 explained that shops in Cape Town could return again to normal trading hours now that “men and women from the army” could “increase the depleted staff in most stores”.¹¹³ “Harassed housewives” and “busy business women” were told that they could once again shop during lunch hour and for longer times on Saturdays. Despite this, one manageress of big restaurant complained that she was still struggling to find women to work as waitresses even though “the pay is good and the hours worked are shorter than those laid down by the law.”¹¹⁴

By 1960, white women dominated clerical work in Cape Town and South Africa. A pamphlet on “Careers for girls at the Cape” reveals, as the censuses do, that clerical work was the occupation of young, white, and unmarried women. The pamphlet contained a section titled “Clerical and administration division” which outlined the training young women needed to complete in order to get jobs in the sector, the type of work they would be expected to perform, and salary expectations. They were also reassured that, although “women are rarely given the opportunity of promotion to high administrative positions, promotion from the clerical division to the lower ranks of the administration occurs.”¹¹⁵ The pamphlet reveals that typing was one the most common aspects of clerical work done by women and typists, stenographers, clerks, and secretaries were all classed as “clerical and administration” workers by the pamphlet. As far as training was concerned, it was recommended that young women should have a “minimum, Junior certificate and, for a typist, minimum speed of 35 words per minute. A university degree or matriculation ensure a higher commencing salary and more likelihood of promotion.”¹¹⁶

5. Conclusion

Just as in other parts of the world, clerical work in Cape Town and South Africa went from being a male occupation, to one most commonly filled by young, white and unmarried women. The feminisation of the clerical workforce in Cape Town was, however, a complex one. White women moved into clerical work as it was made harder for coloured men and women to partake in it. Limited educational opportunities, racist expectations of workplaces and increasing legal

¹¹² “Letters to the editor: Office girls’ hours,” *Cape Times*, 1 November 1945, p. 6.

¹¹³ “Mainly for women: All-day shopping again, many stores to end lunch-hour recess,” *Cape Times*, 3 November 1945, p. 13.

¹¹⁴ “Mainly for women,” p. 13.

¹¹⁵ National Library of South Africa, AP.371.425 BUS, “Careers for girls at the Cape”, (c.40.438), p. 13.

¹¹⁶ “Careers for girls at the Cape”, p. 13.

pressure meant that clerical work was not seen as a job for coloured women. Although race is not mentioned in the available textual sources regarding clerical work in Cape Town and South Africa, the censuses and the Batson Household Survey reveal that clerical work became white and female during this period. The feminisation of clerical work is also associated with increased FLFP rates. Although the rest of South Africa saw a decrease in FLFP in the wake of the Great Depression, women in Cape Town increased their participation in the labour force. Women in Cape Town also moved into clerical occupations at a greater rate than in the rest of the Union. In summary, amongst white office workers, clerical work feminised at a faster rate in Cape Town than it did in the rest of the country. While FLFP rates in Cape Town were higher than they were in the USA and Canada during this period, the feminisation of clerical work occurred slightly later than it did in the American and Canadian contexts.

In countries such as Canada and the USA, clerical work remained a very white occupation until the 1960s and remained linked to notions of middle-class respectability. This chapter has shown that in Cape Town the percentage of coloured women who worked as clerical or office workers in Cape Town decreased during the period, dropping from 34% of all coloured clerical workers in 1936, to 24% in 1946, before rising slightly to 27% in 1960. It has also offered some possible reasons that coloured women did not move into clerical work as white women did. Between coloured men and women, clerical work de-feminised. Clerical work became a white, female phenomenon, in part, through the exclusion of coloured women.

Chapter 3

Marriage trends for coloured and white couples in Cape Town, 1900–1960¹

1. Introduction

Marriage plays a vital role in determining and sustaining the fabric of a society. A government can, for instance, effectively control important aspects of half of its citizens' lives through the institution. In apartheid South Africa, the Nationalist Government created marriage laws that reflected the ideology of the party in everyday life. People living during apartheid were not allowed to marry interracially. "By incriminating some marriages and encouraging others, marital regulations have drawn lines among the citizenry and defined what kinds of sexual relations and which families will be legitimate."²

Although marriage plays a pivotal role in determining the nature of society, the history of the institution in South Africa remains neglected. Chapters 1 and 2 revealed that white women in Cape Town often worked when they were single but usually stopped working once they got married. Coloured women were far more likely to continue working after they got married as the income of a single, coloured wage earner was not enough for a family to live on. Chapter 2 found that one of the occupations that coloured women did not have access to was clerical work, while it was a job that young white women often did before they married. However, something that was common for both coloured and white women was that after leaving school most women in Cape Town got married. In this chapter I consider marriage in Cape Town by comparing various aspects of the institution for coloured and white women in the city.

But why focus on marriage? As sociologist Peter C. Smith wrote in 1980, "[s]ignificant changes in social or economic structure eventually generate pressures for change in a society's marriage regime; in turn, the marriage institution is pivotal in demographic change, more so perhaps than any other component of social organisation."³ The impact of regimes on the institution of marriage, and by implication the demography of a particular society, is evident in the case of East Germany following reunification with West Germany in 1989. Marina A. Adler finds that over the period 1989–1994, marriage and fertility rates dropped to unprecedented

¹ A version of this chapter has been published: J. Fourie & A. Rommelspacher. "Marriage in the Mother City: The Anglican marriage records of Cape Town, 1865–1960," *New Contree*, (86), 2021, pp. 48–66.

² N. F. Cott. *Public vows: A history of marriage and the nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 4.

³ P. C. Smith. "Asian marriage patterns in transition," *Journal of Family History*, (5), (1), 1980, p. 58.

lows in Eastern Germany. She argues that this occurred because during this period, the position of women changed in East Germany, specifically in that they had less support from government. This shift left them hesitant to commit to marriage and to having children.⁴

Similar to many other places in the world, the average age at first marriage in South Africa is above 30 for both men and women. In 2017, it was 34 and 31 for men and women respectively.⁵ In the same year, men were older than women in more than 75% of heterosexual marriages and the average age gap at marriage for heterosexual couples was four years.⁶ However, upon remarriage 44% of female divorcees who married men who had never been married before, married men who were younger than they were. The most popular month to get married in was December and of all races, white couples were most likely to get a divorce.⁷ These are facts about South Africa that are not known for the twentieth century. When looking back at marriage in the twentieth century in Cape Town, matters relating to interracial marriages should not be all that we see. The Anglican marriage records provide an opportunity to study the marriage trends of tens of thousands of Capetonians over 60 years of the city's history. This chapter seeks to explore the institution of marriage and marriage patterns in Cape Town from 1900–1960 by looking at these Anglican marriage records and various newspaper sources from the time. Age at marriage, age gap at marriage, ways of finding a spouse, divorce, and seasonality are just a few of the aspects of marriage that are investigated here.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section two I present an overview of what has been written about marriage in South Africa and highlight some of the trends in marriage research; section three considers matters of methodology and section four explores aspects of marriage and marriage trends in Cape Town. Section five concludes.

2. Literature

Marriage is an important indicator of a society's wellbeing because it plays a crucial role in governing human behaviour and, consequently, in shaping societies. Sociologist Göram Therborn outlines five different functions of marriage in a society. Firstly, it regulates

⁴ M. A. Adler. "Social change and declines in marriage and fertility in Eastern Germany," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, (59), (1), 1997, pp. 37–49.

⁵ H. Wasserman. "The most likely age for a wedding (and divorce) in South Africa – and 8 other surprising facts about marriage in SA," *Business Insider*, 12 March 2019, [<https://www.businessinsider.co.za/age-to-get-married-and-divorced-in-south-africa-2019-3>].

⁶ Wasserman. "The most likely age".

⁷ Wasserman. "The most likely age".

sexuality. Secondly, it is a way of organising procreation and the care of children.⁸ Thirdly it is a means of uniting or dividing societies. The final two are what Therborn calls “social status” and “householding” – which is to say that marriage is an important determinant of social status and social organisation.⁹ Human evolutionary biologist Joseph Heinrich argues that Western Educated Industrialised Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) societies all share five kinship traits which precluded their “WEIRD” status. These five kinship traits are: “(1) bilateral descent, (2) little or no cousin marriage, (3) monogamous marriage only, (4) nuclear family households and (5) neolocal residence.”¹⁰ He singles out “little or no cousin marriage” as a particularly important trait in the formation of WEIRD societies.

Although it has not gone uncontested, earlier literature also found a correlation between economic development and marriage. John Hajnal’s theory of a European Marriage Pattern (EMP) argues that for the two centuries leading up to the 1940s, sections of Europe (everywhere except for the eastern and south-eastern area) were characterised by a high age at marriage (about 23 for females and 26 for males) and large sections of society never marrying at all.¹¹ Building on Hajnal’s theory, Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden have argued that the EMP was central to the economic development of Western Europe.¹² Their reasoning is as follows:

The EMP emerged in north-western Europe in the late medieval period as a result of the preaching of the Catholic Church promoting marriage based on consensus, the rise of labour markets, and specific institutions concerning property transfers between generations that encouraged waged labour by women. It resulted in a demographic regime embedded in a highly commercial environment, in which households interacted frequently with labour, capital, and community markets.¹³

However, Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf have questioned the extent of this “‘girl-powered’ economic breakthrough” in England by arguing that while women who were part of the casual labour market experienced the “golden age” after the plague, this economic success

⁸ G. Therborn. *Between sex and power: Family in the world, 1900–2000*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 131–132.

⁹ Therborn. *Between sex and power*, p. 133.

¹⁰ J. Heinrich. *The WEIRDest people in the world: How the West became psychologically peculiar and particularly prosperous*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), pp. 156–159.

¹¹ J. Hajnal. “European marriage patterns in perspective”, in D.V. Glass & D.E.C. Eversley (eds) *Population in History*, (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1965).

¹² T. De Moor & J. L. Van Zanden. “Girl power: The European marriage pattern and labour markets in the North Sea region in the late medieval and early modern period,” *Economic History Review*, (61), (1), 2010, pp. 1–33.

¹³ Moor Van Zanden. “Girl power,” p. 1.

was not shared by women employed on annual contracts.¹⁴ Jack Goody also questioned the extent to which Hajnal's EMP was Western European. He argued that:

While Hajnal suggested that these patterns emerged in the late sixteenth century and were possibly to be linked with the development of capitalism and Protestantism, other writers have seen these same features as present in a yet earlier period, but characterising the north-west, rather than the whole of Western Europe.¹⁵

Research into marriage in Africa has focussed on various aspects of the institution such as bridewealth. Jack Goody wrote that “[o]ut-marriage and bridewealth in Africa stand in contrast to in-marriage and dowry in Eurasia.”¹⁶ Although others have argued against these ideas, Goody argued that pre-colonial Africa was essentially classless because of the prevailing marriage traditions.

Under Eurasian conditions, there is a tendency toward close rather than out-marriage and exogamy. In Africa, on the other hand, the ownership of land was not the main key to economic achievement. The agricultural output of work groups varied within fairly confined limits and in this respect the society was relatively homogeneous. Marriage policy was therefore less firmly directed toward like with like.¹⁷

In her work on marriage patterns in Kenya, Penelope Hetherington found that marriage underwent dramatic changes over a sixty-year period (1930–1990). These changes included an increasing age at marriage and a decline in practices such as female circumcision, bridewealth payments and polygyny. Hetherington attested these changes to shifts in the material world and to the work of Christian missionaries.¹⁸ Despite garnering the interest of the likes of Jack Goody in the twentieth century, Mark Hunter recently reflected that “African marriage, once at the centre of African studies, is overdue for attention.”¹⁹

Marriage trends are clearly integral to understanding the past, but for South Africa, these trends remain largely uncharted – a neglect that has continued into the third decade of the twenty-first century. In 2004, Debbie Budlender, a researcher at the Community Agency

¹⁴ J. Humphries & J. Weisdorf. “The wages of women in England, 1260–1850,” *The Journal of Economic History*, (75), (2), 2015, pp. 405–447.

¹⁵ J. Goody. *The development of the family and marriage in Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 9.

¹⁶ J. Goody. “Class and marriage in Africa and Eurasia,” *American Journal of Sociology*, (76), (4), 1971, p. 585.

¹⁷ Goody. “Class and marriage in Africa,” p. 601.

¹⁸ P. Hetherington. “Generational changes in marriage patterns in the central province of Kenya, 1930–1990,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, (36), (2), 2001, pp. 157–171.

¹⁹ M. Hunter. “Introduction: New insights on marriage and Africa,” *Africa Today*, (62), (3), 2016, p. vii.

for Social Enquiry co-authored an article with Ntebaleng Chobokoane and Sandile Simelane in which they explain the absence of research on marriage patterns in South Africa. They conclude that the complexity of South African society and its past is to blame. “The problems are particularly acute in South Africa as a result of the wide diversity in marriage forms, cultures, religions and languages. Inadequacies in coverage of large segments of the population during the apartheid years add to the difficulties.”²⁰ These difficulties, they go on to explain, are also due to the fact that the construction of data was influenced by specific ideas about marriage. For instance, the state, specifically the apartheid state, only recognised certain types of marriage. This, they argue, excluded large sections of society that viewed themselves as being married, though they were never officially recognised as such.

Customary marriage had no legal status in South Africa until the passing of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act in 1998. But Hindu and Islamic marriages were not included in the definition of customary marriage recognised by the act, which exclusively recognised black African marriage rites. Through the recognition of traditional African marriage ceremonies, the position of many black Africans, especially women, has improved. This has been specifically pertinent in the case of access to inheritance, insurance, medical aids, and child maintenance, among other things.²¹ The recognition of customary marriage is still a contested issue in contemporary South Africa and a high-profile case has drawn attention to this. In 2018, Judge Ratha Mokgoatlheng ruled that Lerato Sengadi was legally married to the late rapper Jabulani “HHP” Tsambo despite his family claiming that the rites had never been completed.²² This was not, however, to be the end of the case. HHP’s family appealed the judgement. As of March 2020, the case was in the Supreme Court and in February 2021, HHP’s father requested that the Constitutional Court rule that the marriage ceremony had not been concluded because he claimed that the handing-over (of the bride) ceremony did not occur.²³

Meghan Healy-Clancy has commented that, despite the complicated nature of studying marriage in South Africa, the insights that can be gained are worth the effort. She writes that,

²⁰ D. Budlender, N. Chobokoane & S. Simelane. “Marriage patterns in South Africa: Methodological and substantive issues,” *Southern African Journal of Demography*, (9), (1), 2004, p. 1.

²¹ Budlender, Chobokoane & Simelane. “Marriage patterns in South Africa,” p. 3.

²² Q. Qukula. “What is customary marriage? And when is it valid? An expert explains,” *Cape Talk*, 567 AM, 8 November 2018, [<http://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/326255/what-is-a-customary-marriage-and-when-is-it-valid-an-expert-explains>].

²³ C. Kekana. “Lerato Sengadi on HHP’s suicide: We need to have that conversation,” *Times Live*, 12 March 2020, [<https://www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2020-03-12-lerato-sengadi-on-hhps-suicide-we-need-to-have-that-conversation/>]; N. Sonjica. “Attempt to have HHP’s customary marriage revoked goes to ConCourt”, [<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-02-04-attempt-to-have-hhps-customary-marriage-revoked-heads-to-concourt/>]

although the institution has “operated quite differently, in law and practice, for South Africans of different classes, genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities, and regions in the past and present, marriage provides intimate insights into the making of these connections and inequalities.”²⁴

Other researchers have studied a disparate collection of marriage-related matters in South Africa in the pre-apartheid era. Jeanne Cilliers completed her master’s dissertation in economic history on marriage patterns in Cape settler society. Her chief concern was understanding whether or not marriage patterns in the Cape Colony continued to assume the form they had in the settlers’ countries of origin. In other words, did Hajnal’s EMP persist in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial society?²⁵ She found that the colony initially conformed to a non-EMP pattern, but that by the mid-eighteenth century, a new pattern emerged that was distinct to the Cape and which she termed “Pseudo-EMP”. “Pseudo”, she argues, because while the pattern did conform to the one outlined by Hajnal, it did not correlate with the theories of the causes of the EMP as argued by De Moor and Van Zanden. Their argument for the underlying causes of the EMP consists of three parts: first a change from parental authority to consensus in marriage formation, second an improved position of women in property transfer and third, increased access to, and size of, the labour market for women.²⁶ Cilliers could not identify any of these three “causes” of the EMP in Cape colonial society.

Interracial marriage is a topic that received some attention during apartheid, but Julia Wells has investigated the extent to which it already existed at the end of the eighteenth century in the Cape Colony. She demonstrates that mixed marriages were initially accepted by the London Missionary Society (LMS) – with many of the missionaries who were sent to colony being single men with little, if any, prospect of finding a wife of European descent when they arrived at their intended overseas destination. By 1809, the LMS had a policy that all missionaries it sent should be married, except for those who were sent to South Africa. Mixed marriages were accepted, and even encouraged, by the LMS in South Africa. Due to pressure from within the colony, however, Wells argues that the society was forced to change this acceptance (and encouragement) of interracial marriage so that from 1817 onwards, only married missionaries were sent to the Cape Colony.²⁷

²⁴ M. Healy-Clancy. “ASR Forum: The politics of marriage in South Africa: Introduction,” *African Studies Review*, (57), (2), 2014, p. 2.

²⁵ J. Cilliers. “Cape Colony marriage in perspective,” (Master’s Thesis, Stellenbosch University, March 2013).

²⁶ Cilliers. “Cape Colony marriage,” pp. 5–6; 59.

²⁷ J. C. Wells. “The suppression of mixed marriages among LMS missionaries in South Africa before 1820,” *South African Historical Journal*, (44), (1), pp. 1–20.

With regard to nineteenth century South Africa (obviously not yet a country at the time), Vetrees Malherbe has written on marriages between Christians and Muslims in Cape Town. She argues that, because many Cape Town Muslims of the first decades of the nineteenth century were slaves or the descendants of slaves (who were legally prohibited from getting married), their society was remarkably accepting of out-of-wedlock births.²⁸ She uses marriages between Christians and Muslims as a window into the lives of Cape Town's lower classes in the nineteenth century, following emancipation. She finds that there were few relationships between Christians and Muslims and that those that did exist did so discretely because of public fears regarding religious intermingling, specifically the fear of Christians converting to Islam.²⁹ Malherbe's other work concerning marriage in Cape Town also focusses on out-of-wedlock births and investigates reasons for the high rate of these births and the low levels of marriage in ex-slave communities in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁰

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, church weddings started to become popular among black South Africans. Historian Natasha Erlank, who has produced a range of studies on African Christianity, argues that studying the adoption of white-style weddings by Africans provides a lens through which to understand how black Africans produced their own social status in a context of oppression. She writes that "via commodification, families held onto and proclaimed the value of family life, and importantly, broader social networks as well as status-based associational life in an era of familial disintegration."³¹ Her conclusion is that the growing importance of these Christian weddings can be ascribed to the fact that the commodities and rituals associated with them assisted individuals and their families in creating social standing within black society and purchasing a level of validity in broader society.³²

Erlank's article was part of a 2014 special issue published by the *African Studies Review* on "The Politics of Marriage in South Africa". In the introduction, guest editor Meghan Healy-Clancy emphasises the important role of marriage in understanding all aspects of a society, including the political. She writes that "marriage offers an ideal lens through which we can apprehend the making of political communities."³³ The issue included a variety of perspectives

²⁸ V. Malherbe. "Christian-Muslim marriage and cohabitation: An aspect of identity and family formation in nineteenth-century Cape Town," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, (36), (1), 2008, pp. 5–24.

²⁹ Malherbe. "Christian-Muslim marriage and cohabitation," p. 18.

³⁰ V. Malherbe. "Ten reasons for not marrying: sex and illegitimacy in mid-nineteenth century Cape Town," *Historia*, (52), (2), 2007, pp. 186–213.

³¹ N. Erlank. "The white wedding: Affect and economy in South Africa in the early twentieth century," *African Studies Review*, (57), (2), September 2014, pp. 29–50.

³² Erlank. "The white wedding," p. 44.

³³ M. Healy-Clancy. "Introduction," *African Studies Review*, (57), (2), 2014, p. 2.

on the institution in the country, past and present. Healy-Clancy also contributed an article about the experiences of courtship, marriage, and public life of “New Africans” in South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s. She finds that: “the effort to ‘build Africa’ was hardly confined to the halls of male-led political organisations, but rather was part of women’s navigations of domestic hierarchies to assert new space for themselves in private and public life.”³⁴ The special issue also includes an article by Nafisa Essop Sheik on the regulation of marriage by colonial authority in Natal from 1843–1875.³⁵ Sheik has also worked on other topics related to marriage under colonialism. Most recently, in 2017, she published an article about the laws relating to a widower remarrying the sister of his deceased wife. Restriction of sororate marriages, she argues, “proved to be an obstacle to the successful reproduction of white settler families and through this, colonial masculinity, not just in Natal but throughout the British Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century.”³⁶

In 2006, Deborah Posel published on an unusual marriage ceremony that used to take place in Johannesburg in townships in the 1950s and 1960s. Black men and women who were trying to secure state housing would gather at the Native Commissioner’s office. The women would stay outside while the men entered the office and removed their hats, which they then handed over to the officials who were administering the ceremony. The men then left the room hatless. Their hats were then placed on tables in rows. After this, the women entered the room that contained the hats and selected one. The hat they selected determined their husband – the owner of the hat, and with that they were declared married.³⁷ Posel explains that these types of “Hat” marriages represented a significant number of unions amongst black Africans in the 1960s and argues that “this trend was the mark of an increasingly interventionist role played by the South African state in producing the sphere of African domesticity, along with the conditions of sexual and emotional intimacy.”³⁸

Economists Dorrit Posel and Daniela Casale, along with their colleagues, have produced a significant amount of the South African literature regarding marriage trends in the post-apartheid era. Most of their work is based on data from the recent past, with a particular emphasis on the persistent role that marriage-related institutions play in contemporary South

³⁴ M. Healy-Clancy. “The politics of new African marriage in segregationist South Africa,” *African Studies Review*, (57), (2), 2014, p. 24.

³⁵ N. E. Sheik. “African marriage regulation and the remaking of gendered authority in colonial Natal, 1843–1875,” *African Studies Review*, (57), (2), 2014, pp. 73–92.

³⁶ N.E. Sheik. “Customs in common: Marriage, law and the making of difference in colonial Natal,” *Gender & History*, (29), (3), 2017, p. 590.

³⁷ D. Posel. “Marriage at the drop of a hat: Housing and partnership in South Africa’s urban African townships, 1920s–1960s,” *History Workshop Journal*, (61), (1), 2006, pp. 57–76.

³⁸ Posel. “Marriage at the drop of a hat,” p. 73.

Africa. In a 2010 publication they demonstrate that, in South Africa, married black men earned approximately 23% more than those who had never married. They present evidence of a positive relationship between the likelihood of men marrying and an increase in their earnings before marriage. Another important conclusion they make is that bride wealth payments are an obstacle to marriage in South Africa.³⁹ Using the 2001 census, their 2011 article on sex ratios and marriage rates shows that amongst black Africans in South Africa, “economic-based measures of marriageability have a larger effect on marriage outcomes than simple sex ratios.”⁴⁰ Another 2011 article, co-authored with social linguist Stephanie Rudwick, asks whether *ilobolo* (the black African tradition of bride wealth payments in South Africa), could explain different rates of marriage amongst different races in the country. Their focus is specifically on understanding the correlation between an increase in rates of cohabitation and a decrease in marriage rates amongst young black South Africans in the post-apartheid era.⁴¹ They provide a useful analysis of the role and the practice of *ilobolo* and conclude that it has evolved over time.⁴² During this evolution, increasing significance came to be placed on the payment, which Posel et al. refer to as a “commercialisation of the practice”.⁴³ They argue that “*ilobolo* is widely supported and respected as a custom, but high *ilobolo* payments, in addition to other costs associated with a wedding, mean that marriage is not an affordable option for many African couples.”⁴⁴ Along with other scholars, Posel has also produced various other contemporary works on marriage in South Africa, often with a specific focus on *ilobolo*.⁴⁵

Looking beyond South Africa, legal historian Brian Outhwaite provides a helpful overview of approaches to the study of marriage from the eighteenth to the late twentieth

³⁹ D. Casale & D. Posel. “The male marital earnings premium in the context of bride wealth payments: Evidence from South Africa,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, (58), (2), 2010, p. 229.

⁴⁰ D. Posel & D. Casale. “The relationship between sex ratios and marriage rates in South Africa,” *Applied Economics*, (45), (5), 2013, p. 663.

⁴¹ D. Posel, S. Rudwick & D. Casale. “Is marrying a dying institution in South Africa? Exploring changes in marriage in the context of *ilobolo* payments,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, (25), (1), 2011, pp. 102–111.

⁴² Posel, Rudwick & Casale. “Is marrying a dying institution,” pp. 106–109.

⁴³ The authors present a useful history which shows how the practice has changed over time. The origins of the practice are still a point of contention, but what Posel et al. do find is that the payment amount does not always seem to have been the most important aspect of the process (as it is now). The evidence they provide for this is that in nineteenth century Natal, payments did not often exceed five head of cattle. A number of factors, including government interference (attempting to fix the price) and migrant labour practices (which increased men’s capacity to pay higher prices), ultimately led to *ilobolo* presenting “a significant financial burden on couples”. Posel, Rudwick & Casale. “Is marrying a dying institution,” pp. 106–109.

⁴⁴ Posel, Rudwick & Casale. “Is marrying a dying institution,” p. 109.

⁴⁵ S. Rudwick & D. Posel. “Contemporary functions of *ilobolo* (bridewealth) in urban South African Zulu society,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, (32), (1), 2014, pp. 118–136; S. Rudwick. “Zulu bridewealth (*ilobolo*) and womanhood in South Africa,” *Social Dynamics*, (41), (2), 2015, pp. 289–306; D. Casale. “Differences in subjective well-being within households: an analysis of married and cohabiting couples in South Africa,” *African Review of Economics and Finance*, (7), (1), pp. 32–52.

centuries. He argues that Thomas Malthus's ideas about the human response to crises provoked important questions about marriage in the late eighteenth century. Malthus argued, among other things, that men would delay marriage to avoid or prevent economic and demographic catastrophe. In the West, the nineteenth century was characterised by an increase in the production and processing of statistical data, which included information on births, deaths and marriage.⁴⁶ According to Outhwaite, anthropologists and sociologists had not (by the beginning of the 1980s) contributed to understandings of the history of marriage. Legal historians, he argues, were far more productive, with publications such as G. E. Howard's *History of matrimonial institutions* (1904) and W. Goodsell's *History of marriage and the family* (1934). The early twentieth century also witnessed the start of a steady production of feminist writing on the topic of marriage.⁴⁷ The emergence of the field of modern demography in the 1930s led to a focus on the measurement of marriage rates and fecundity – with data from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attracting the most attention.⁴⁸ In the 1950s, historians such as K.H. Connell, H.J. Habakkuk, and J.T. Krause argued that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, lowering ages at marriage and an increasing percentage of the British population marrying caused economic development in Britain.⁴⁹ The 1960s saw Hajnal present his work on the EMP.⁵⁰

Stephanie Coontz has written the most recent and complete work on the history of marriage in English. She argues that essential aspects of marriage have remained unchanged for most of human history. Families would seek a suitable partner for their children – usually someone who was already known to the family and who lived close by. The two individuals at the centre of this process usually had little say in the matter and marriage played an important role in creating and maintaining societal peace in a variety of ways. Marriage was a political and economic decision made *by* a community, *for* the community.⁵¹ This pattern, she argues, only shifted dramatically during the Enlightenment for the first time in human history.

Until the late eighteenth century, most societies around the world saw marriage as far too vital an economic and political institution to be left entirely to the free choice of the two individuals involved, especially if they were going to base their decision on something as unreasoning and

⁴⁶ R.B. Outhwaite (ed.). *Marriage and society: Studies in the social history of marriage*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 2.

⁴⁷ Outhwaite (ed.). *Marriage and society*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Outhwaite (ed.). *Marriage and society*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Outhwaite (ed.). *Marriage and society*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Outhwaite (ed.). *Marriage and society*, p. 4.

⁵¹ Coontz. *Marriage, a history*, p. 7.

transitory as love. The more I learned about the ancient history of marriage, the more I realised what a gigantic marital revolution had occurred in Western Europe and North America during the Enlightenment.⁵²

So, what changed? Coontz explains that during the Enlightenment, the concepts of free choice and marrying for love began to emerge as cultural ideals. This is, of course, not to say that the concept of romantic love did not exist before the Enlightenment, but merely that it was not seen as central to marriage.⁵³ The idea of marrying for love, and a culture of individualism introduced by the Enlightenment, meant that, “between the mid-eighteenth and the mid-twentieth century, the social functions and internal dynamics of tradition marriage were transformed. The older system of arranged, patriarchal marriage was replaced by the love-based male-breadwinner marriage, with its ideal of lifelong monogamy and intimacy.”⁵⁴ Coontz also finds that it was only in the last three decades of the twentieth century that this idea of a love-based marriage with a male-breadwinner at its centre was questioned.⁵⁵

This interrogation of marriage as love-based has its roots in a shift at the beginning of the twentieth century away from “sentimental marriage” (in the Victorian age), to “sexual marriage”.⁵⁶ Coontz explains this shift, in the Western world, by arguing that unmarried men and women had greater access to each other than they had before. A rise in literacy also meant that most people had access to information about sexuality, birth control and other related topics.⁵⁷ Speaking on the history of marriage in America, Andrew Cherlin argues that “[b]y the middle of the twentieth century, most people took the connection between romantic love and marriage for granted.”⁵⁸

There is, of course, a lot more to Coontz’s argument and although it is tempting to spend more time on the detail of her analysis, the purpose of spending this time referencing Coontz has been to provide a brief overview of the changes that marriage has undergone over the last three hundred years, particularly in the West. The history of marriage in South Africa is not known in any comparable detail. Little is known about when women married, who they married, how they met marriage partners, and how or whether this varied between races and cultures. In the next section I explore various aspects of marriage in Cape Town from 1910–

⁵² Coontz. *Marriage, a history*, p. 5.

⁵³ Coontz. *Marriage, a history*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Coontz. *Marriage, a history*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Coontz. *Marriage, a history*, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Coontz. *Marriage, a history*, p. 196.

⁵⁷ Coontz. *Marriage, a history*, pp. 197–198.

⁵⁸ A.J. Cherlin. *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*, (United States of America: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 63.

1960 for coloured and white couples. Given the focus of this section, it is important to note that all the research so far produced by historians about marriage in South Africa has one thing in common: coloured and white marriages do not feature at all. Sources such as the Anglican marriage records provide an opportunity to study the marriage patterns of thousands of coloured and white couples in Cape Town.

3. Marriage records and methodology

This chapter uses quantitative and qualitative sources in new ways, adopting new approaches, and posing new questions to study aspects of marriage that are neglected, often because of a perceived shortage of certain sources. A newly constructed dataset, which provides information about Anglicans who lived in Cape Town from 1865–1964, is one such quantitative source that provides the opportunity to explore marriage patterns in the city. Figure 10 shows the number of marriages by race and year in the Anglican marriage records. The graph shows how the marriage records are distributed according to race, which makes it clear that most couples who got married in the Anglican church in the city over this period, were coloured. The second largest group was white couples and the third and final group, with relatively low numbers throughout the period, was black couples. It is also clear from Figure 10 that the share of coloured marriages increased over this period: in 1910, there were more white couples than coloured couples but by 1960, coloured marriages were clearly in the majority.

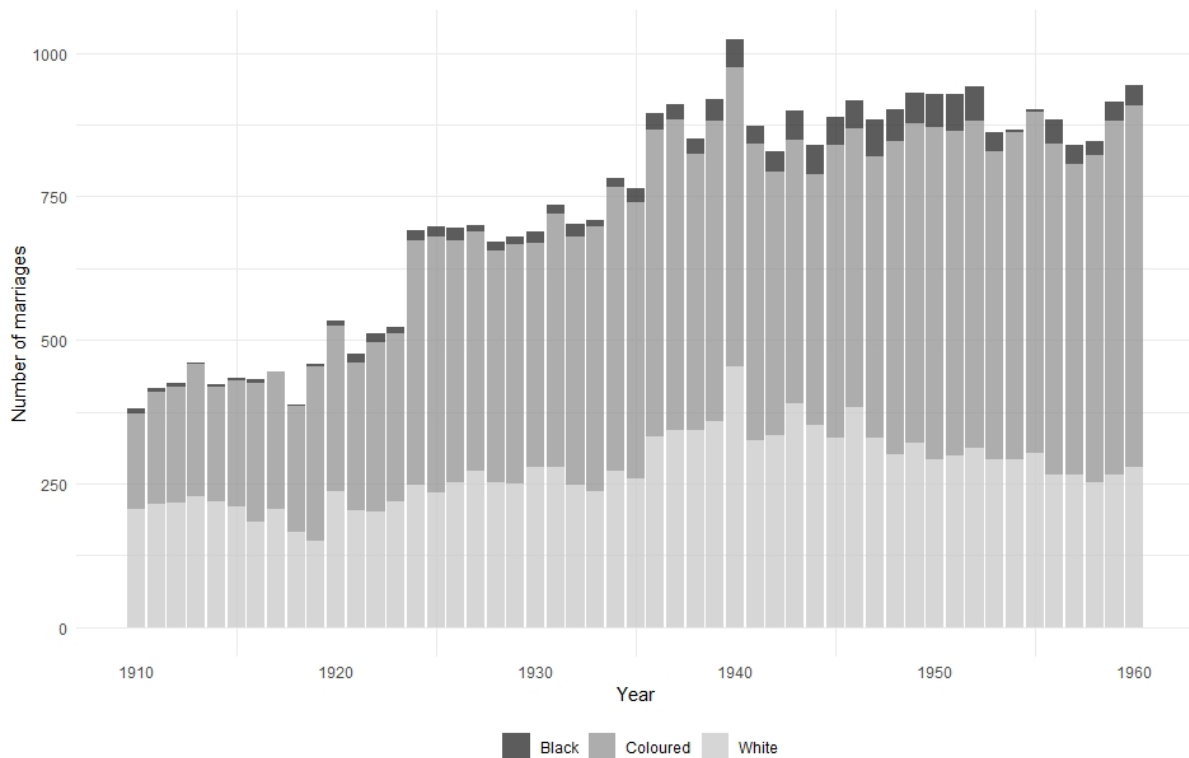


Figure 10: Number of Anglican marriages by race and year in Cape Town

Source: “South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004. Database with images. FamilySearch. https://FamilySearch.org : 14 June 2016.

1801-17/7/21-50-800. S. B.M.D. 3 (Union).

ORIGINEEL HUWELIKSREGISTER.
ORIGINAL MARRIAGE REGISTER.

No. 275.....12

Ras: Man Mixed Huwelik Bevestigd te S. Marki church Distrikt Att. Lona Provincie Cape
 Race: Vrouw Mixed Marriage Solemnized at District Province

Datum Huwel. Date of Marriage.	Volle Namen van Gehuwden. Full Names of Persons Married.	Geboorted. Country of Birth.	Persoonl. Sta. Personal Status.	Beroep. Occupation.	Woonplaat ten tijde van h. Huwel. Residence at time of Marriage.	Na Geboden of niet Speciaal Huweliks- licentie. Banns or Special Marriage License.	Met wien Toestemming. Consent by Whom given.	Op of sonder Huweliksvoor- waarden. With or without Matrimonial Contract.	OPMERKINGEN. REMARKS.
June 25 th 1932	Frank Henry evang. van der Spek	20 S. Africa	bachelor	cabinet maker apprentice	Kromboom Damm	Father	without		
	Henrietta June Stellenbosch	20 S. Africa	spinster	teacher	Kliffontein Athlone	Mother			

Dit Huwelik is bevestigd door mij op heden de
This Marriage was solemnized by me on this the
twenty fifth dag van June 1932
day of

in tegenwoordigheid van de ondergetekende getuigen :-
in the presence of the undersigned Witnesses :-
1. L. J. Stellenbosch
2. B. J. Stellenbosch

Dit Huwelik is voltrokken
This Marriage was contracted
by us
W. J. van der Spek
B. J. Stellenbosch

W. J. van der Spek
Predikant.—Minister.
Church of the Province
Kerkgenootschap.—Denomination.
Magistraat—Magistrate.

Figure 11: An example of a marriage record

Source: “South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004. Database with images. FamilySearch. https://FamilySearch.org : 14 June 2016.

Marriage records provide extensive information about couples who were members of the Anglican church. Each record provides details about the bride and groom, such as their names, races, ages, place of residence at the time of getting married, their relationship status prior to the marriage, occupations, and the date of their marriage. Some categories such as race were noted from as early as 1910, while others were added over time: “country of birth” was added in 1924 and female occupation was only recorded consistently from the late 1930s. Data from all parishes within the current borders of Cape Town have been transcribed, thereby representing all parts of Cape Town society. While each record provides interesting information about the specific couple that the record pertains to, putting the records together provides the opportunity to understand broader trends in Cape Town society.

Figure 11 provides an example of a marriage record of a couple from Athlone. The top left corner of the image shows that both the bride and groom were of “mixed” race (coloured). They got married in St Mark’s Church in the district of Athlone in the Cape Province and their marriage took place on the 25th of June 1932. The groom’s full name was Frank Henry George van der Speck, and his bride was Henrietta Jane Stellenboom. Both were 25 years of age and both were born in South Africa; neither of them had been married before. At the time of their marriage, Frank was a cabinet making apprentice and Henrietta a school teacher. Before their marriage, Frank had been living in Crawford Road in Kromboom, while Henrietta lived in Klipfontein Road in Athlone. They had their marriage banns read (meaning that their intention to marry had been announced in church services before their wedding day), and consent for the union was given by Henrietta’s mother and Frank’s father. They did not marry with an antenuptial contract. The handwriting of the couple is clearly legible next to the phrase “This Marriage was contracted by us” and it seems that Henrietta’s family acted as witnesses. While individual marriage records provide a wealth of information, comparing thousands of them provides the historian with an opportunity to investigate trends about marriage and other aspects of the couples’ lives.

Given how pervasive the institution of marriage is and what it reveals about social relations, marriage records have been used in different fields of research to address a wide variety of questions. Economists, for instance, have used them to understand more about standard of living and demographers have asked questions concerning demographic transitions. Marriage records have been used in a variety of ways to extract obvious information, such as age at marriage and marriage age gap, but also information on literacy, work seasons, empowerment, social mobility remarriage, employment, and widows/widowers. Some of the

approaches to marriage records implemented in the following survey have also informed this chapter.

Economic historian Felix Meier zu Selhausen used Protestant marriage records from Uganda from 1880–1945 to measure the change in women’s literacy rates over time in order to measure the impact of missionaries on their empowerment.⁵⁹ A working paper by Meier zu Selhausen uses Anglican marriage records to research intergenerational social mobility. By using the occupations of men as listed in the records, he concludes that, contrary to the common belief that British indirect rule perpetuated existing pre-colonial power structures, the colonial labour economy in fact empowered men who had historically belonged to the lower class.⁶⁰

Demographer Jan van Bavel and historian Jan Kok used marriage records in combination with birth and death certificates in order to understand birth spacing in nineteenth-century Netherlands. They also use marriage records to deduce women’s age at marriage and to determine whether or not marriage length affected fecundity.⁶¹ Demographers Frans van Poppel and Marloes Schoonheim have used information about the witnesses recorded on civil marriage certificates in order to arrive at certain conclusions about differences between religious groups. For instance, they found that, geographically speaking, Jews had a far broader network and greater family involvement in their marriages than Catholics and Protestants.⁶²

Biologists have also made use of marriage records. Castilla et. al. used civil marriage certificates in Argentina to determine the frequency of marriages between first cousins. In 1968, the Argentinian government introduced a change to the marriage certificate to include a section where the marriage officer had to indicate whether or not the couple were first cousins.⁶³ Other research has linked marriage records to sources of biographical data. Economist David Mitch studied marriage registers and census records in England for the

⁵⁹ F. Meier zu Selhausen. “Missionaries and female empowerment in colonial Uganda: New evidence from Protestant marriage registers, 1880–1945,” *Economic History of Developing Regions*, (29), (1), 18 June 2014, pp. 74–112.

⁶⁰ F. Meier Zu Selhausen, M. Van Leeuwen & J. Weisdorf. “Social Mobility among Christian Africans: Evidence from Anglican Marriage Registers in Uganda, 1895–2011,” *Economic History Review*, (71), (4), 2017, pp. 1291–1321.

⁶¹ J. Van Bevel & J. Kok. “Birth Spacing in the Netherlands. The Effects of Family Composition, Occupation and Religion on Birth Intervals, 1820-1885,” *European Journal of Population*, (20), 2004, pp. 119–140.

⁶² F. Van Poppel & M. Schoonheim. “Measuring cultural differences between religions using network data. An example based on nineteenth-century Dutch marriage certificates,” *Annales De Démographie Historique*, (1), (109), 2005, pp. 173–197.

⁶³ E. E. Castilla, M. A. Gomez, J. S. Lopez-Camelo & J. E. Paz. “Frequency of first-cousin marriages from Civil Marriage Certificates in Argentina,” *Human Biology*, (63), (2), 1991, pp. 203–210.

nineteenth century in order to observe changes in literacy and occupational mobility over time in both rural and urban contexts.⁶⁴

Little such work has been done in the context of South Africa. Natasha Erlank is the only example of a historian who has used marriage records. She used Diocesan records to study African weddings in the Eastern Cape during the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century, although her interest is in the wedding ceremony and its meaning.⁶⁵ There is none of the kind of social science history research into marriage that has been done elsewhere other than Johan Fourie and Kris Inwood's 2019 article in which they used a smaller sample of this dataset of marriage records. They concluded that interracial marriage rates began decreasing amongst Anglicans in Cape Town before the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, and not because of it.⁶⁶

4. Marriage in Cape Town

This section explores specific aspects of the history of marriage in Cape Town through marriage records and a variety of newspaper sources. While newspaper articles do provide information about engagements and weddings and perspectives on marriage and divorce, most of print media coverage is unfortunately only about marriages of white couples. Marriage records, on the other hand, offer an opportunity to pay equal attention to both coloured and white couples, as the data set is more representative of coloured couples.

4.1 South African marriage law

To *be* marriage, the institution requires public affirmation. It requires public knowledge – at least some publicity beyond the couple themselves; that is why witnesses are required for the ceremony and why wedding bells ring. More definitely, legal marriage requires state sanction, in the license and the ceremony...⁶⁷

The legal aspects of marriage – who can get married, when can they marry, what are their rights within marriage – are woefully under-researched in South Africa. Marriage law is key to understanding the shape of society – in the past, as well as in the present. The laws that governed marriage in the Cape colony before South Africa became a Union (1910), and in the

⁶⁴ D. Mitch. "Literacy and occupational mobility in rural versus urban Victorian England: Evidence from the linked marriage register and census records for Birmingham and Norfolk, 1851 and 1881," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, (38), (1), 2005, pp. 26–38.

⁶⁵ Erlank. "The white wedding," pp. 29–50.

⁶⁶ Fourie & Inwood. "Interracial marriages," pp. 629–652.

⁶⁷ Cott. *Public Vows*, p. 1.

decades that followed, provide the backdrop for understanding marriage for twentieth-century South Africa. When the British took full administration of the Cape Colony in 1806, Sir David Baird declared that marriages could only be solemnised by a member of the clergy, thereby making civil marriages illegal. Marriages by banns and special license were introduced in 1838 by an Order in Council (a piece of legislation formalised by Queen Victoria). Along with this order, marriage officers were appointed, and a marriage register was established. By 1860, magistrates were also legally acting as marriage officers. With the growth of the other colonies in South Africa, marriage laws came to deviate slightly between areas – depending on who governed them. After the establishment of the Union in 1910, marriage laws were still enforced at a provincial level but acts and amendments were introduced that modified certain pre-Union laws. For instance, the Marriage Law Amendment Act No.8 of 1935 raised the legal age of marriage across all provinces – from fourteen to eighteen for boys, and from twelve to sixteen for girls across provinces. In 1961, the legal age of marriage for girls was raised to eighteen. H.R. Hahlo, the German Jurist who edited the most prominent work on marriage law in South Africa, wrote in 1973 that “the monogamous ‘Christian’ marriage, being the only form of marriage recognised by our law, is open to all, White [sic] and Non-White [sic].”⁶⁸

The legalities surrounding marriage in South Africa deserve more attention and there is one law that deserves special attention because of the impact it had in the rights of married women. After union and until the introduction of the Matrimonial Affairs Act of 1953, white women’s groups were concerned with, among other things, improving the legal status of married women – a topic that will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter (Chapter 4). Hahlo referred to this act as “a major landmark in the development of South African matrimonial law”.⁶⁹ In summary, before the introduction of the act, women who married in community of property lost their legal status as an adult upon getting married. This meant that once they got married they became legal minors who were unable to, for instance, open a bank account or start a business in their own name. They would also lose their citizenship upon marrying a non-South African.⁷⁰ The passing of the Matrimonial Affairs Act in 1953 granted married women a number of rights and allowed them a range of freedoms they had not had before. One practical implication was that they could collect their own salary from their employer without running the risk of their husbands intercepting it. They could also bank in their own names and husbands were no longer allowed to access their wives’ private bank

⁶⁸ H.R. Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, (Wynberg: Juta & Co., Limited, 1973), p. 18.

⁶⁹ H.R. Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, (Wynberg: Juta & Co., Limited, 1973), p. 9.

⁷⁰ “Mainly for women: Wives fight for adult status”, *Cape Times*, 24 November 1945, p. 13.

accounts without their consent (prior to the passing of the act, husbands could legally access anything that was registered or held in their wife's name).⁷¹ Further benefits of this act and the details of how it came to pass will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.2 Finding a partner

At this point, I turn to marriage in Cape Town and the formation of relationships. Newspapers were used by individuals as a means to advertise their availability and their desire to form a relationship. These advertisements would appear in the classified section and the text was carefully tailored to explain the traits the advertiser was looking for in a spouse as well as what they would bring to a relationship. In the first decade of the century they were placed by men and women alike. One from a man reads: "A gentleman, formerly Officer of the German Guards, is desirous of forming an acquaintance with a wealthy lady (widow eligible) with a view to matrimony."⁷² These advertisements all varied, highlighting a diversity of personal traits and wishes. Wealthy women were definitely in demand. Another read "An Officer, age 33, shortly returning to England, wishes to correspond with a wealthy lady with view to an early marriage. To avoid delay please state income and [include] photograph (which will be returned)."⁷³ These types of advertisements sometimes appeared multiple times. The officer who required a photo, for instance, paid for his notice to be published at least three times. Some of these notices requested an interview, as opposed to letters and photographs. One advertisement that appeared just after the end of the South African War indicated that the "English Officer of high social position" who had placed the advertisement wanted "a personal interview" with interested parties. He further explained that he would be willing to stay in the Cape Colony if a "Lady of means (widow or spinster)" would want that of him.⁷⁴ These advertisements from officers following the South African War also indicate the effects the war had on the marriage market in the Colony. The presence of thousands of soldiers in Cape Town must have increased competition for women (who were already in short supply).⁷⁵ If a man was not seeking a wealthy woman, one with "domestic habits" would do. "A gentleman, about 45, of good position, is looking for a Lady, of domestic habits and peaceful disposition, with a view to marriage; capital not necessary."⁷⁶ Men advertised more commonly than women, but

⁷¹ Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, pp. 678–683.

⁷² "Marriage," *Cape Times*, 28 June 1900, p. 2.

⁷³ "Marriage," *Cape Times*, 15 October 1900, p. 6.

⁷⁴ "Matrimonial," *Cape Times*, 18 October 1902, p. 6.

⁷⁵ "Women settlers, the race problem, Lord Milner's scheme," *Cape Times*, 30 July 1902, p. 7.

⁷⁶ "General wants," *Cape Times*, 18 May 1901, p. 2.

there were also women who sought a marriage partner through the newspaper. One female version read: “Matrimony. – Charming, pretty Young Lady, well educated, is desirous of an introduction to a gentleman with good social standing; view early marriage.”⁷⁷

Once engaged, couples could expect formal celebrations of their engagement in their workplace, and for men with good positions in their company, this was marked by a gift. These were mentioned in the newspaper as “presentations”. The newspaper announcements conveyed much pomp and ceremony, often containing information about the nature of the groom-to-be’s position at the company, and the gift he had been given, and, sometimes with information about the bride-to-be and the couple’s future plans. One example reads:

A Presentation—Mr J.M. Young, of the accounting branch, Public Works Department, has been presented with a solid silver engraved salver by his colleagues on the occasion of his marriage to Miss Karie King, second daughter of Mr. Charles King, of Muizenberg. The presentation was made by Mr. L. Mansergh. At the expiration of the honeymoon Mr. and Mrs. Young proceed to Umtata, where they will in future reside.⁷⁸

Something silver, or expensive, was presented to the engaged person by their colleagues, in this case, a salver, which is a fancy tray. While most of these types of announcements celebrated men’s upcoming marriages, working women could also expect to be the subject of such presentations. One for a nurse reads:

A very pleasant little function took place at the Rondebosch and Mowbray Cottage Hospital on Tuesday afternoon, when Nurse L. Crowther, who for some time filled the post of acting matron, was presented with a handsome clock by the medical staff as a token of appreciation and good wishes for her future, on the occasion of her marriage. The presentation took place in the matron’s room, in the presence of the whole staff.⁷⁹

Nurse L. Crowther also appears in the marriage records where she is listed as Lydia Crowther (29) who married Hugh McIlraith (25), a clerk, on the 20th of November 1901 at St Barnabas in Cape Town. What is interesting about the description of Nurse Crowther’s presentation in the newspaper is that there is no mention of whom she was marrying, whereas the published presentations for men usually included a description of their fiancé.

⁷⁷ “General wants,” *Cape Times*, 1 September 1908, p. 2.

⁷⁸ “A presentation,” *Cape Times*, 3 May 1900, p. 7.

⁷⁹ “News of the day,” *Cape Times*, 21 November 1901, p. 5.

4.3 Breach of promise

Getting engaged did not, however, necessarily ensure that couples would get married. A number of breach-of-promise cases were reported in the *Cape Times*, which reveal some of the complications associated with finding a marriage partner in Cape Town. These cases also reveal what individuals' hopes had been for the relationship, and what the legal consensus was on the matter. In summary, an engagement to marry (also called a proposal) was recognised as legally binding. Breach-of-promise action could be taken by both men and women who had been jilted – though the data show that women did outnumber men as plaintiffs.⁸⁰ Such cases could also be used for blackmail and extortion as an individual could claim to be jilted and sue for damages, even if they had not been.⁸¹ At the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century, reports of breach of promise cases appeared consistently in the *Cape Times*. It was clearly an important matter at the time. In 1901, the “Jewish Working Men’s Club” of Hanover Square in Cape Town ran a “Mock Trial” of a breach of promise of marriage case.⁸²

A breach of promise case of 1902 was hailed as an unusual one because the plaintiff was a man.⁸³ The plaintiff was a Mr Jooste, and he was attempting to claim £400 in damages from a Mr Van Der Merwe. Mr Jooste claimed that he had given up a lease on his farm in the Orange Free State and moved to the Cape Colony to marry Mrs Van Der Merwe (before she became Mrs Van Der Merwe). She, however, claimed that she had never been engaged to him, but Mr Jooste produced letters in which her affection for him was deemed apparent by her use of “with love and kisses” and “You ask me about love, I love you, and I cannot give you up. I leave this in God’s hands. [...] I cannot think of breaking it off, it would be too hard for me”.⁸⁴ That said, in a subsequent letter she did indeed break it off, writing “You must put everything out of your head, for my heart is with another, and all has now become clear to me.”⁸⁵ Problems arose when it was revealed that Mrs Van Der Merwe, née Johanna van Vuuren, was a minor when she was supposedly engaged to Jooste (the one claiming damages). Initially Mr Jooste maintained that Johanna’s mother had given consent for their engagement, but ultimately it was ruled that this was not the case and that the plaintiff himself was to blame for situation he

⁸⁰ L. M. Werhnyak. “‘O, perjured lover, atone! atone!’: A legal and cultural history of breach of promise to marry, 1880–1940,” (PhD Thesis, University of Iowa, 2015), p. 4.

⁸¹ M. Coombs. “Agency and partnership: A study of breach of promise plaintiffs,” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, (2), (1), 1989, p. 12.

⁸² “Jewish Working Men’s Club” *Cape Times*, 13 December 1901, p. 6.

⁸³ “Jooste v. Van Der Merwe,” *Cape Times*, 15 February 1902, p. 6.

⁸⁴ “Jooste v. Van Der Merwe,” p. 11.

⁸⁵ “Jooste v. Van Der Merwe,” p. 11.

was in. The conclusion explains that the judge of the case had an idea that particular feelings between a man and a woman had to exist before they could become husband and wife. In his ruling the judge explained that, “She could hardly have known her mind at the age of fifteen, and when she came to a mature age she changed her mind, because she found that she could not have that affection for the plaintiff which a wife ought to have for her husband.”⁸⁶ The interesting thing revealed by the ruling is that, although Johanna was old enough to get married, in reality fifteen was not considered old enough for a girl/woman to make decisions about whom to marry.

Saskia Lettmaier argues that in England there was a decline in breach-of-promise cases in the first decades of the twentieth century as the call for women’s emancipation gained momentum. By the 1920s and 1930s the breach of promise action had become obsolete even though the relevant law only changed in the late twentieth century. Mary Coombs has suggested that feminists were opposed to breach-of-promise cases because they reinforced negative stereotypes of women, sexuality, and marriage.⁸⁷ As a source, Lettmaier used 250 actions that appeared in newspapers between 1800 and 1940.⁸⁸ Creating a dataset using such cases would provide an opportunity to understand their use over time as well as highlight other marital trends across regions in South Africa. This, in turn, would provide further insights into women’s rights movements and whether or not South Africa followed patterns similar to those in England, for instance, in terms of social and legal mores.

4.4 Age at marriage

As mentioned earlier, the Marriage Law Amendment Act No. 8 of 1935 raised the legal age of marriage – from fourteen to eighteen for boys, and twelve to sixteen for girls. Many economic, social, political, demographic and environmental factors affect the timing of the decision to marry. Levels of education, for instance, impact the age at which people marry. The reason for this is because individuals are less likely to marry while gaining their education and, when women are educated, they are more likely to marry someone of similar age.⁸⁹ More specifically, educating women significantly reduces child marriages and the phenomenon of child brides. Early marriage and late marriage have been defined differently at different times, but in his

⁸⁶ “Jooste v. Van Der Merwe,” p. 11.

⁸⁷ Coombs. “Agency and partnership,” p. 14.

⁸⁸ S. Lettmaier. *Broken engagements: The action for Breach of Promise of Marriage and the Feminine Ideal, 1800–1940*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸⁹ S. Carmichael. “Marriage and power: Age at first marriage and spousal age gap in lesser developed countries,” *The History of the Family*, (16), (4), 2011, pp. 416–436.

work on “Age at marriage and modernisation in Sub-Saharan Africa”, Michel Garenne defines early marriage as that which takes place at age 15–19 years and late marriage as those that take place above 25 years.⁹⁰ Countries with high levels of education and equality between sexes experience larger proportions of those societies delaying marriage. These delays in marriage result in decreasing population sizes, because with the delay of marriage comes a delay in having children and increased female labour force participation because women are involved in education and paid labour. Garenne writes that “female age at first marriage is an important characteristic of population dynamics” and explains that “developing countries and transitional societies seem to be in general in the 20–24 age band, with large variations at individual level.”⁹¹ Age at marriage and age gap at marriage are two indicators of women’s agency within those marriages and the broader society. The younger women are and the bigger the age gap between husband and wife, the worse off women are believed to be.⁹²

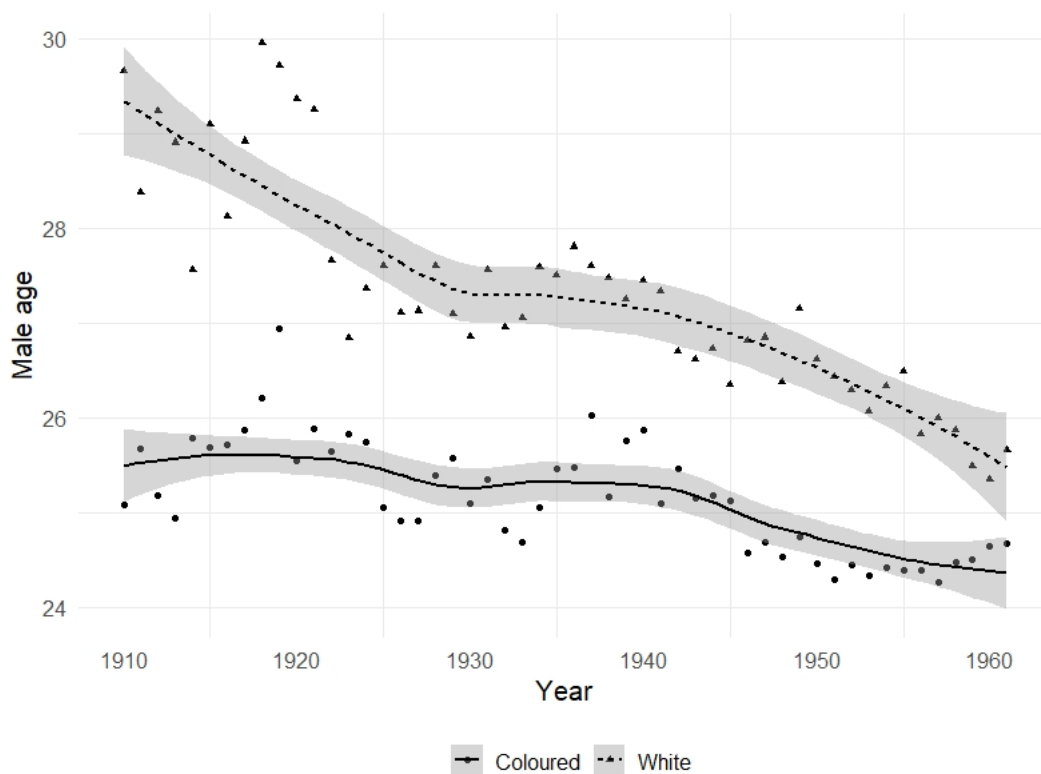


Figure 12: Average age at first marriage for males.

⁹⁰ M. Garenne. “Age at marriage and modernization in sub-Saharan Africa,” *Southern African Journal of Demography*, (9), (2), 2004, pp. 59–79.

⁹¹ Garenne. “Age at marriage and modernization,” p. 60.

⁹² Carmichael. “Marriage and power,” pp. 416–436.

Source: Anglican marriage records, 1910–1960.

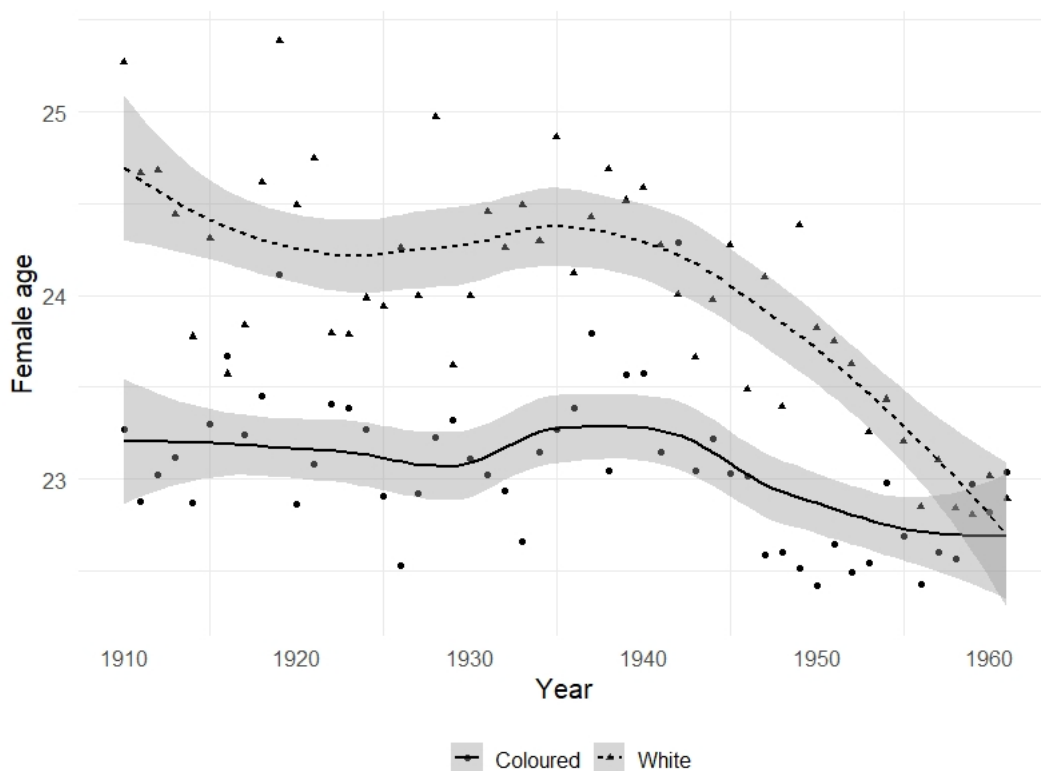


Figure 13: Average age at first marriage for females.

Source: Anglican marriage records, 1910–1960

But what determines the age at which people marry and what changes it? Figures 12 and 13 show that age at marriage decreased for Anglican Capetonians of all races and genders during the period 1910–1960, though the decrease was less dramatic for coloured men and women. They did, however, start at a lower point in 1910. Another interesting point is that the ages converged, and by the end of the period, coloured and white women had the same average age at first marriage. One theory is that age at first marriage is affected by gender roles in society. In contexts where gender roles are clearly segregated – men work outside of the home while women are homemakers – women marry younger. But in a context where both men and women work, age at first marriage increases. In the former context, age at marriage is dependent on men finding financial stability, whereas in the latter, both individuals seek financial independence before marriage.⁹³ The average age of white grooms dropped by more than three years over the period, while coloured grooms dropped by less than two years and the age of

⁹³ V. K. Oppenheimer. “A theory of marriage timing,” *American Journal of Sociology*, (94), (3), November 1988, pp. 563–591.

coloured brides dropped by less than two years while white brides recorded a decrease of just over two years.

Catherine Fitch and Steven Ruggles looked at the median age at first marriage for black and white brides and grooms in the United States from 1850–1990 and found a consistently decreasing age at first marriage from 1890 to 1950. In their results, white grooms were older than black men and white women were older than black women for almost the entire period.⁹⁴ Although the majority of white immigrants to the United States came from Western Europe, Fitch and Ruggles note that from the beginning of European immigration to the States, unique marriage trends emerged. Fitch and Ruggles provide a possible explanation for the low age at first marriage for black couples, which could be applicable to coloured couples in Cape Town. “[B]lacks on average were married about two years younger than whites. Earlier marriage among blacks may reflect lower expectations about life course economic opportunity; blacks often remained farm tenants throughout their lives and even nonfarm black experienced little upward occupational mobility.”⁹⁵

Hajnal’s 1953 study sought to explain the marriage boom in industrialised Western societies with low birth rates in the 1940s. He hypothesised that this boom was synonymous with a greater portion of society marrying and being married and therefore a lower age at marriage.⁹⁶ In the Anglican marriage records in Cape Town, however, there are clear indications of a decrease in age at marriage before World War II. Another possible reason for this downward trend in age at marriage is increasing prosperity. Fitch and Ruggles argue that decreasing marriage age in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century could have been related to the rapidly industrialising economy. “In the rapidly industrialising economy, young native-born white men increasing[ly] could find jobs that provided sufficient income to support a family.”⁹⁷ As in Europe, they find an “unprecedented marriage boom” in the US after World War II.⁹⁸ Donald Pursell comments that in South Africa “the European worker – as well as the African worker – found his living standards rising with the growth which developed after the price of gold was increased in the 1930s and the subsequent

⁹⁴ C.A. Fitch & S. Ruggles. “Historical trends in marriage formation: The United States 1850–1990,” in L.J. Waite (ed.), *The ties that bind: Perspectives on marriage and cohabitation*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000), p. 66.

⁹⁵ Fitch & S. Ruggles. “Historical trends in marriage formation,” p. 65.

⁹⁶ J. Hajnal. “Age at marriage and proportions marrying,” *Population Studies*, (7), (2), November 1953, pp. 111–136.

⁹⁷ C.A. Fitch & S. Ruggles. “Historical trends in marriage formation: The United States 1850–1990,” in L.J. Waite (ed.), *The ties that bind: Perspectives on marriage and cohabitation*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000), p. 64.

⁹⁸ Fitch & S. Ruggles. “Historical trends in marriage formation,” p. 65.

expansion during World War II.”⁹⁹ This could support the idea that economic growth and ensuing prosperity affected this age at first marriage. Census data reveals that an increase in the proportion of the population over the age of fifteen being married took place just before and during the Great Depression. The percentage of the coloured population that was married increased for men from 47% in 1921 to 51% in 1936. For coloured women this increased from 51% in 1921 to 54% in 1936. For white men the increase was from 50% in 1911 to 57% in 1936. White women, however, saw a slight decrease from 59.07% in 1911 to 58.52% in 1936.¹⁰⁰ This increase in the proportion of people marrying (for both white and coloured couples) is also interesting because in his survey of the coloured people of South Africa, Cilliers notes a decrease in the proportion of coloured people marrying by 1961. In reference to age at marriage, Cilliers also noted that:

[i]n comparison to Whites, the proportion of Coloured [sic] female minors entering into formal marriage is low. In 1957 7.3% of all bridegrooms and 23.5% of all brides were below the age of twenty-one. In comparison with those figures, 7.2% of all white bridegrooms and 40.1% of all brides in 1957 were minors.¹⁰¹

Age gap and age at which couples married will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

4.5 Seasonality

The seasonality of marriage is another important trend that provides insights into the nature of a society. Ann Kussmaul wrote that “[t]he timing of weddings within the year was sensitive to the annual rhythm of work” and “the seasonality of marriage can be made to reveal both the dominant patterns of work and, more important, the timing of changes in primary economic activities.”¹⁰² Economic historian Martin Dribe and sociologist Bart van de Putte studied 120 000 marriage records across 117 parishes in Sweden over two hundred years, from 1690–1895, in order to understand the affects the industrious revolution had on marriage seasonality. They found that the seasonality changed drastically over that time, and that there was a noticeable shift away from most marriages adapting to life cycles associated with grain

⁹⁹ D. Pursell. “The impact of the South African wage board on skilled/unskilled wage differentials,” *Eastern African Economic Review*, 1969, p. 73.

¹⁰⁰ *Union of South Africa sixth census, Volume III. Marital Condition of the European, Coloured and Asiatic Population*, 1936, p. vii.

¹⁰¹ Cilliers. *The Coloureds of South Africa*, p. 26.

¹⁰² A. Kussmaul. “Time and space, hoofs and grain: The seasonality of marriage in England,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (XV), (4), 1985, p. 755.

production (most marriages in late spring and very few marriages in summer) towards a much more varied pattern of marriages being spread throughout the year.¹⁰³

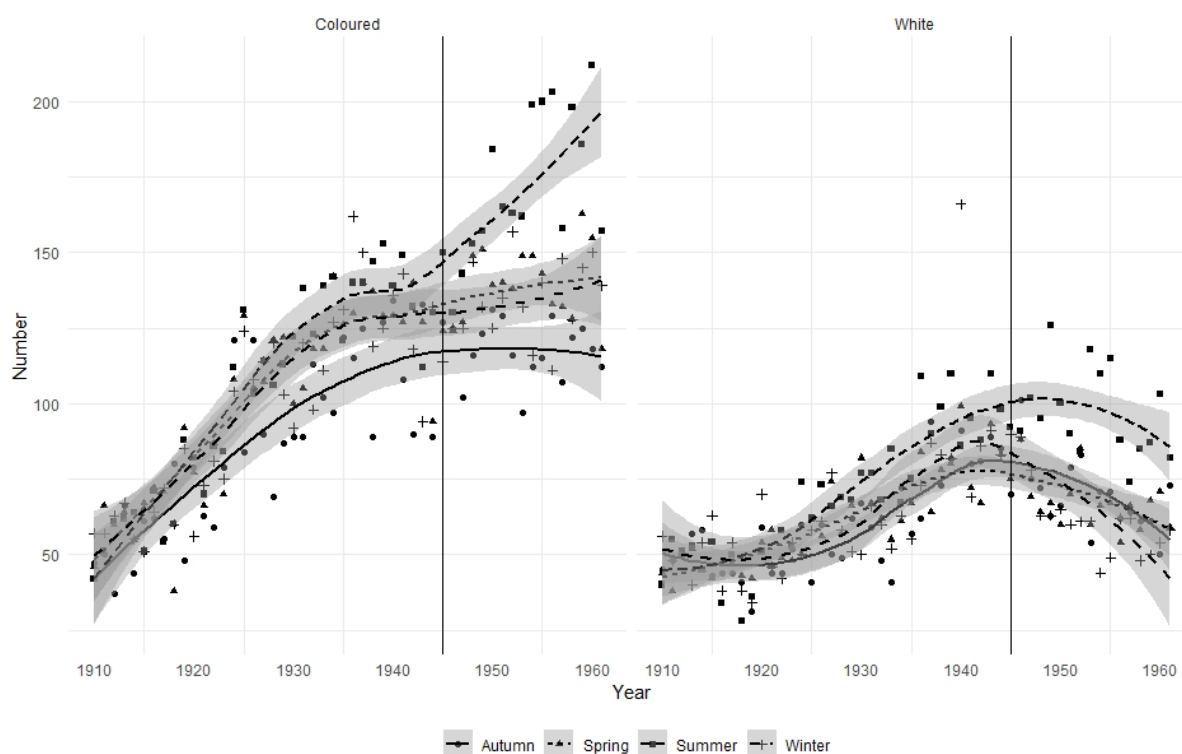


Figure 14: Number of marriages, but season, race, and year

Source: Anglican marriage records, 1910–1960

An article that appeared in the *Cape Times* in 1900 provides a useful overview of various marriage trends in the Cape Colony and speaks to the seasonality of marriage. It clarified that April and May were the most popular months to get married – which can be explained by the fact that couples waited for the end of Lent to get married since the Catholic Church prohibited celebrating weddings during Lent.¹⁰⁴ The article goes on to say that in the twelve months from July 1899–June 1900, Tuesday was the most popular day of the week to get married on. However, Figure 14 shows that in the Anglican Church, marriages of coloured and white couples went from having no clear seasonal preference, to having a clear preference for getting married in summer. In order to determine seasonality, all marriages for the period

¹⁰³ M. Dribe & B. Van De Putte. “Marriage seasonality and the industrious revolution: Southern Sweden, 1690–1895,” *Economic History Review*, (65), (3), 2012, pp. 1123–1146.

¹⁰⁴ G. Ruiu & M. Breschi. “For the times they are a changin’ – The respect for religious precepts through the analysis of the seasonality of marriages, Italy, 1862–2012,” *Demographic Research*, (33), (7), 2015, p. 179; “Rings and churches: Marriage matters in the Colony, and other items,” *Cape Times*, 7 July 1900, p. 5.

1910–1960 were grouped into one of four seasons. Any marriages that took place in December, January and February were categorised as “summer”, while marriages in March, April and May were classified as “autumn”, marriages in June, July and August were classified as “winter”, and marriages in September, October and November were classified as “spring”. In 1910 there is no clear season that was favoured by couples. By the end of the period, though, summer was had become the preferred season in which to get married for both coloured and white couples. More specifically, summer became the most popular time of the year to get married for both coloured and white couples in 1945. For coloured couples, autumn was the least popular time of the year to get married throughout the period, while for white couples, there does not seem to have been a specific season that was perceived as being less favourable.

The seasonality of marriages is important. As economies shift, the time of year that is most suitable to get married also changes. Dribe and Van De Putte explain that “[h]ow a culture conceives of time reveals a great deal about the way people live and think; it gives us a key to understanding a society’s cultural foundation.”¹⁰⁵ The shape and nature of an economy affects when people have time to get married. In pre-industrialised Europe, summer was not a good time to get married in because harvesting grain involved a lot of work. Societies that were largely dependent on a summer harvest time experienced a peak in marriages in late spring, and a low in summer. As the nature of their economies changed, with less labour needed for agriculture, marriages occurred more evenly throughout the year. This pattern was also different for different types of people and different types of work. The marriage patterns for those who worked in grain production were far more seasonal than for those who did not.¹⁰⁶ It is not clear what could have caused the change in seasonality for couples in Cape Town. That said, December was a time of many holidays and festivities for the coloured community. These Big Days included the celebration of the anniversary of emancipation from slavery on the 1st of December as well as Christmas, New Year’s Day, and the 2nd of January. It is possible that World War II brought economic opportunities, as mentioned earlier, that might have enabled coloured and white couples to take more time off work and to spend more time on marriage celebrations. The Factory, Machinery and Building Work Act no. 22 of 1941 made it compulsory for factory workers to get leave on Good Friday, Dingaan’s Day (16 December), Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. These latter three holidays all being so close to each other

¹⁰⁵ Dribe & Van De Putte “Marriage seasonality and the industrious revolution,” p. 1123.

¹⁰⁶ Dribe & Van De Putte “Marriage seasonality and the industrious revolution,” p. 1142.

in the summer months might also have played a role in the decision to marry in summer.¹⁰⁷ I have not found evidence of factories or businesses closing down between Christmas and New Year, as many do in South Africa today, but it is possible that this did occur during the period in question.

4.6 Restitution of conjugal rights

Not all marriages lasted, however. Newspaper articles published by people whose spouses had gone missing or disappeared on purpose appeared throughout the period 1910–1960. Husbands and wives could easily move on to greener pastures without ever being found again. Notices that called a missing spouse to the restitution of conjugal rights (or the restoration of the marriage relationship), were common. An example reads as follows:

To CHARLES EDWIN BENNER
 THAT whereas MARY LILY WHITE BENNER, of Cape Town, did, on the 5th day of February, 1904, petition this Honourable Court for leave to sue by edict her Husband, CHARLES EDWIN BENNER, latterly of Cape Town, for a decree of restitution of conjugal rights, and on failure thereof for a decree of divorce, by reason of his malicious desertion, and for the custody of the children, issue of the said marriage.¹⁰⁸

Sometimes these announcements were sent in from other countries. For instance, Kathleen Suzette Palsongrave lived in Cheltenham, but she placed a notice in the *Cape Times* to attract the attention of her husband, Ivan Palsongrave, “late of Pietermaritzburg South Africa”.¹⁰⁹ Unlike Mary Benner, Kathleen did not seek the restitution of conjugal rights – she wanted a divorce. Although the advertisements did not always specify as much, the spouses placing these advertisements usually wanted a divorce. Proving that their significant other had abandoned them was just the first step in the process. The notices often included information revealing that the wife was no longer living in South Africa. One example is of a couple who got married in London in 1893. The marriage was a “very ill-advised one” – the couple separated just days after the marriage took place and “from that time had no intercourse whatever.” The husband had moved to Cape Town and intended to dissolve the marriage. His wife lived “in Newcastle with her mother, and was in comfortable circumstances.”¹¹⁰ It should be kept in mind that until

¹⁰⁷ E. Theron. *Fabriekwerksters in Kaapstad: 'n Sosiologiese studie van 540 blanke en kleurling-fabriekwerksters*, (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1944), p. 256.

¹⁰⁸ “To Charles Edwin Benner,” *Cape Times*, 2 March 1904, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ “To Ivan Philip Palsgrave,” *Cape Times*, 13 June 1900, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ “Musgrave v. Musgrave,” *Cape Times*, 9 November 1900, p. 6.

1935, there were only two grounds for divorce at the Cape. The first was desertion and the second adultery.

The doctrine of the restitution of conjugal rights was introduced into colonial contexts by the British and in some contexts the action was used to force wives of abusive husbands back to them.¹¹¹ In Indian law the restitution of conjugal rights is central to debates around child brides and age of consent.¹¹² Early feminists opposed the action on the grounds that it could be used to condone marital rape.¹¹³ As the doctrine lost popularity in England, it became ubiquitous in India. It was abolished in South Africa in 1979, but is still retained by India and Lesotho.¹¹⁴ The doctrine has been used differently in different contexts with the trend in India being that it has most often been used by men. In Lesotho, however, it has most often been used by women.

4.7 Divorce

The history of divorce is something that has not been researched at all in South Africa's history. Adultery, the second legal reason for divorce before 1935, was at the forefront of many divorce cases that appeared in the *Cape Times* in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1902, John Palm wanted to divorce his wife, Cornelia. In the court proceedings of this case it is noted that John was a "coloured man", although there was no reference to anyone else's race. John tells the story of the demise of his marriage like this. He and Cornelia got married in 1880 in Beaconsfield, Kimberly. They lived together until 1883, at which point Cornelia asked if she could visit her aunt in Kroonstad. But instead of going to Kroonstad, Cornelia went to Johannesburg, soon followed by her lover, Gabriel Butler, who had been banned from the Palm household because he had already caused conflict in their marriage. John soon discovered his wife's actual whereabouts and also travelled to Johannesburg to find them. He arranged with Cornelia that she would come home, and he gave her money for the journey. During a dinner the evening before he left Johannesburg, Cornelia left and he did not see her again for two years. She did, however, send him their children. By 1902, at the time of the court proceedings, she was living in Sea Point with Gabriel Butler.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ L. Lammasniemi & K. Sharma. "Governing conjugality: Social hygiene and the doctrine of the restitution of conjugal rights in England and India in the nineteenth century," *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13200968.2021.1923252>.

¹¹² K. Sharma. "Withholding consent to conjugal relations withing child marriages in colonial India: Rukhmabai's fight," *Law and History Review*, (38), (1), pp. 151–175.

¹¹³ M. L. Shanley. *Feminism, marriage, and the law in Victorian England, 1850–1895*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 156.

¹¹⁴ V. V. Mateisi. "The analysis of the lawfulness of the restitution of conjugal rights order in Lesotho divorce law," (Bachelor's thesis, National University of Lesotho, 2020), p. 34.

¹¹⁵ "Palm v. Palm," *Cape Times*, 1 March 1902, p. 11.

Although in the newspaper reports of divorce cases, men most commonly filed for divorce against their wives for adultery (as opposed to wives filing on the grounds of desertion), there were also cases of women who filed for divorce on the grounds of their husband's adultery. Mrs Dalziel is an example of a woman who wanted to divorce her husband for this reason. Reference to their case appeared in the *Cape Times* in November 1902. They were married in 1887. In 1897, after living in several places, they settled in Mossel Bay. In October 1898, Mr Dalziel went to Uitenhage to look for work. A month later he sent his wife a letter and money – and that was the last time she heard from him. They had five children together and Mrs Dalziel explained that she then had to “part with her children and go into service to earn her living.”¹¹⁶ She managed to obtain a court order for him to pay £6 a month for maintenance, but he did not pay regularly, and she had to sue him again. Mr Dalziel was a carpenter, she said, and earned on average £16 a month. Mrs Dalziel accused her husband of having an affair with his niece, Miss Myland, and claimed that he had two children with her. By the time of the case, Mrs Dalziel was living in Woodstock and her estranged husband in Sea Point, with his mistress. A midwife, Christine Wagner, provided evidence to support the claims of adultery and explained that Mr Dalziel introduced Miss Myland as his wife. The decree of divorce was granted “with forfeiture of the benefits of the marriage in community of property; the plaintiff to have custody of the minor children of the marriage.”¹¹⁷

Divorce was a controversial topic on all fronts. By 1940, certain churches only recognised certain grounds for divorce. The Dutch Reformed Church, for instance, recognised only two, namely adultery and malicious desertion, and many feared that adding further grounds would lead to an uncontrollable spread of the dissolution of marriages. The Dutch Reformed Church Synod of 1940 confirmed that adultery and malicious desertion were the only two valid grounds. Someone in attendance at this synod, however, wanted to remove malicious desertion, claiming that people were becoming too comfortable with divorce and remarriage.¹¹⁸ An article in the *Cape Times* from 27 November 1941 reported the case of one particularly quick divorce during WWII when a sergeant divorced his wife after four days – to which a judge responded by commenting, “we have outdistanced Reno”.¹¹⁹ At the time Reno was the self-proclaimed capital of divorce.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ “Dalziel v. Dalziel,” *Cape Times*, 5 November 1902, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ “Dalziel v. Dalziel,” p. 9.

¹¹⁸ “D.R. Synod and divorce: Two grounds that are recognized,” *Cape Times*, 12 July 1940, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ “Quick Divorce in South Africa: ‘We have outdistanced Reno’ says Judge,” *Cape Times*, 27 November 1941, p. 12.

¹²⁰ “Quick Divorce in South Africa,” p. 12.

World War II was seen as a trigger for this escalation of divorces. One article stated that “in 1946 – the peak for divorces, reflecting the war’s aftermath of matrimonial discord – 998 marriages were dissolved in the Cape Town Court alone, whereas in 1927 the total number in the Union was 882.”¹²¹ The annual number of divorces for the Cape Division can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Divorces in Cape Town by year

Year	Divorces in CPT
1938	394
1939	369
1940	362
1941	404
1942	542
1943	677
1944	715
1945	760
1946	998

Source: “Divorces on decline: But still twice pre-war level,” *Cape times*, 11 September 1947, p. 2.

Although the war was seen as an important contributing factor to the increase of divorce rates, a change in divorce law in 1935 increased the grounds for divorce, therefore making it easier to obtain one. The additional grounds that were insanity (“seven years incurable insanity” to be exact), and habitual criminality (defined as being imprisoned for at least five years and a declaration of habitual criminality).¹²² This therefore doubled the number of reasons people could invoke as the basis for filing for divorce. While there were fears that expanding the grounds for divorce would lead to an increase in divorce rates, whether or not this happened has not been investigated. Marriage records, which specify when individuals remarried, could be one of the sources used to determine this.

4.8 Interracial marriage

Concerns about interracial marriage also came to the fore during this time. According to the Anglican marriage records in Cape Town, female divorcees were more likely to enter interracial marriage than any other demographic.¹²³ In 1909, J.C. Juta and Co. (Cape Town)

¹²¹ “Divorces on decline: but still twice pre-war level,” *Cape times*, 11 September 1947, p. 2.

¹²² Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, p. 8.

¹²³ Fourie & Inwood. “Interracial marriages,” p. 645.

published Mary Frances Whalley and A. Eames-Perkins' book, *Of European Descent*. A review of the book appeared in the *Cape Times* and it explains that the book is "a collection of short sketches of life—chiefly in the Cape Peninsula—designed to awaken the public conscience to the dangers of miscegenation."¹²⁴ The authors claimed that the sketches were all true. Episodes include a "Scottish domestic servant, dazzled by the 'flash' manners of a coloured groom, and ignorant of the meaning of colour" and "the apparently white offspring of miscegenation: a beautiful girl who sinks to vice in Johannesburg."¹²⁵ The review explains that, ultimately, the book makes a case for interracial marriage to be declared illegal – which, according to the authors, would protect the existence of a proud, white race. The author of the newspaper article distanced themselves from the book stating that they "do not agree with the authors that [the pride of race] has been lost, or that it is in serious danger of being lost."¹²⁶ The author of the review questioned whether introducing laws prohibiting interracial marriage would be effective stating that "it may be gravely doubted whether any legislation prohibiting intercourse between white men and coloured women would be efficacious."¹²⁷ Ultimately, the publication of this book in 1909 confirms what Johan Fourie and Kris Inwood have found using a subset of the marriage records database, namely that interracial marriages were uncommon before the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act. They outline that there were decreasing rates of interracial marriages before 1949.

A few interracial couples also appear in the Batson Household Survey. Of the household's surveyed, seven contained an interracial couple where the husband was the head of the household (only the race of the head of household and their spouse are provided on the survey card, so there might have been more interracial marriages represented, but they were not identified by the survey). One interracial couple represented the head and his wife of the household. The head (29) was listed as being coloured and his wife (30) was listed as being white. Both were listed as Muslim. The surveyor noted that the husband "comes from S/America" that he "sells herbs from door to door" and that the wife "is a thorough European women; parents European."¹²⁸ Most of the other households living in the area they lived in were coloured.

Given the country's history of segregation and apartheid, interracial marriage was and remains a contentious topic in South Africa. A spate of articles that appeared in Cape Town

¹²⁴ "Book reviews: The problem of miscegenation," *Cape Times*, 16 July 1909, p. 4.

¹²⁵ "Book reviews: The problem of miscegenation," p. 4.

¹²⁶ "Book reviews: The problem of miscegenation," p. 4.

¹²⁷ "Book reviews: The problem of miscegenation," p. 4.

¹²⁸ Card 2087.

newspapers in the 1940s show that concerns around “interracial” marriage were even broader than previously thought. In 1944, a certain Reverend W. Nicol from the Dutch Reformed Church published a statement in the *Cape Times* opposing “interracial” marriages between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking men and women.¹²⁹ There was opposition to Rev. Nicol’s statement, and those who opposed him pointed out that he was born out of an “interracial” relationship, using his definition, between Mr. Matthew Nicol and Miss Kloppers.¹³⁰ Yet others resigned from the Dutch Reformed church as a result.¹³¹

Returning to the question of the dissolution of marriages, by the late 1930s, the Mother City seems to have had a reputation of having a high divorce rate. A letter to the editor by Sidney S. Graumann¹³² promised to have the answer to Cape Town’s marriage problems. He started his letter on a positive note, perhaps preparing readers for what was to come: “In earlier letters I have dilated upon the charms of your climate, gorgeous scenery, beautifully laid out suburbs, model marine parades, and last but not least the hospitality of your citizens to up country visitors.” But then he moved to something he felt was problematic about the city, writing: “I now turn however to a more tragic side of life, by deploring the large number of divorces and separations which I understand have exceeded four hundred in the Peninsula during the past year.”¹³³ His answer to the problem was to “curb dangerous passions” caused by “an uncontrollable temper”.¹³⁴

4.9 War and marriage

War clearly impacted marriage in Cape Town. Interracial marriage, for instance, decreased from 7.5% of all marriage in the Anglican church before World War I, to 2.5% in the 1930s.¹³⁵ Because Cape Town was caught up in the South African War at the start of the twentieth century, there were fears that people would not be allowed to marry during the time of conflict or for those that had married during the war, that their marriages would not be legal. Notices were posted in the *Cape Times* assuring readers that marriage was still allowed under military

¹²⁹ “Letter to the editor: ‘Mixed’ Marriages,” *Cape Times*, 22 July 1944, p. 6.

¹³⁰ “Letter to the editor: ‘Mixed’ Marriages,” p. 6.

¹³¹ “Inter-racial marriages: letter to D.R.C. moderator: Predikants on racialism,” *Cape Times*, 24 July 1944, p. 5.

¹³² Graumann seems to have been an active penman. One of his letters is also quoted in Louis Grundlingh’s article on leisure spaces in Johannesburg. The letter that Grundlingh quotes is from 1930. L. Grundlingh.

“‘Imported intact from Britain and reflecting elements of Empire’: Joubert Park, Johannesburg as a leisure space, circa 1890s-1930s” *South African Journal of Art History*, (30), (2), 2015, pp. 94–118.

¹³³ S. S. Graumann. “Too many divorce cases: The secret of happy marriage,” *Cape Times*, 16 January 1939, p. 17.

¹³⁴ Graumann. “Too many divorce cases,” p. 17.

¹³⁵ Fourie & Inwood. “Interracial marriages,” p. 629.

rule, but that an official needed to be present. A special proclamation was issued, stating “to make assurance double sure and to set the seal of authenticity on the contracts of marriage so completed, this proclamation has been issued, so that the minds of those who were uneasy on the subject are set at rest.”¹³⁶ There seems to have been a lot of confusion and uncertainty about this because a few months later another notice was issued to ministers of religion, specifically those who were marriage officers under the previous government and who had been reappointed under the new regime for specific districts. The announcement explained that they were now allowed to act as marriage officers in every part of the Colony.¹³⁷ Fears seem to have escalated after the South African War as people in the former Boer Republics realised that they were now living under British administration. An ordinance published in October 1902 suggests as much when it made clear that marriages by ministers of religion were valid, as fears were voiced that other marriage officials did not have legal clout during and after the war. Various ordinances were published to address these concerns, stating, for example:

Marriages were celebrated by or on the strength of certificates granted by Landdrosts who were appointed both before and after the annexation, and some doubt has arisen as to the legality of these marriages, so to remove the feeling of anxiety that this creates, the present ordinance formally lays down that all such marriages are quite lawful.¹³⁸

World War II had many different effects on marriages in Cape Town. For one, South African Women who were deployed on active service were getting married overseas. For instance, Women’s Auxiliary Army Service (W.A.A.S.) Captain (Miss) Elizabeth May of Cape Town, married Mr. J. Neville Wood of London at St. George’s Church, Hanover Square, in 1944. She was the first member of the W.A.A.S. to get married in Britain. Despite the war-time shortages, her dress was made of white satin and bought in Paris.¹³⁹ In Cape Town, visiting soldiers married local women and the city saw an increase in marriages during the war. The number of marriages increased from 999 in 1939 to 1 149 in 1942. One *Cape Times* article states that “servicemen from overseas, particularly members of the Royal Air Force, continue to select South African girls as brides. Scarcely a week passes without one or more of the lads in air force blue answering, “I will”.”¹⁴⁰ Local women also married men of other nationalities, such

¹³⁶ “Marriages Under Military Rule” *Cape Times*, 13 June 1902, p. 5.

¹³⁷ “Note from Pretoria,” *Cape Times*, 20 September 1902, p. 12.

¹³⁸ “Further Ordinance,” *Cape Times*, 23 October 1902, p. 11.

¹³⁹ “W.A.A.S. Marries in London” *Cape Times*, 21 December 1944, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ “1,043 brides this year: Year-end rush at marriage office,” *Cape Times*, 22 December 1944, p. 8.

as Greeks, North Americans, Belgians from the Congo, French from Equatorial Africa, and Chinese.¹⁴¹ Many examples of such marriages are listed in the marriage records. Occasionally, such marriages would even consist of two non-Cape Townians. For instance, Ronald Frederick James Penny (24), of the Royal Navy, married Sheila Mary May (25), a statistical clerk, born in Lesotho but who lived in Kalk Bay at the time of their wedding. They married at Holy Trinity Church in Kalk Bay in 1942.¹⁴² Another marriage at the same church shows how the circumstances of war made new interactions between men and women possible. Frederick Graham Penfold (25), a fitter for the Royal Airforce, married Joyce Nancy Smith (29), a parachute packer for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force who, like Sheila, lived in Kalk Bay.¹⁴³ During the war eighteen foreign-born men got married at Holy Trinity in Kalk Bay, which represented 16% of the grooms for that church during World War II. Foreign-born grooms hailed from a diverse array of places such as the Seychelles, St Helena, Holland, Canada, the USA, England, Ireland and Scotland, although only six of them were associated with the war in some capacity or another.

5. Conclusion

Although marriage is an important part of any society, and the institution is integral to understanding women's position in society, research into the institution in South African history is limited. Using the marriage records and newspaper material this chapter explored aspects of marriage in Cape Town for the period 1900–1960 for coloured and white couples. In the Anglican marriage records for Cape Town, most couples in the first half of the twentieth were coloured and the records provide insights into coloured marriages that cannot be found in the newspapers sources.

An investigation of these marriage records in Cape Town reveals that, for coloured and white couples, the seasonality of marriages changed by the end of World War II. While the seasonality of marriage differed greatly at the beginning of the period, by its close, couples of both races preferred to marry in summer. This could be because of the formalisation and growth of the economy and holidays as the century progressed. Age at marriage is another aspect of marriage in Cape Town that saw a common shift for both coloured and white couples. During the time period the age at which people married decreased across genders and races. One possible reason for this is because of a bigger section of the population marrying, something

¹⁴¹ "1,043 brides this year," p. 8.

¹⁴² Marriage record: index id 168, image id 165, parish id 497.

¹⁴³ Marriage record: index id 174, image id 168, parish id 497.

that was corroborated by the census. A third factor that coloured and white couples had in common was divorce. It seems that divorce increased during the period under discussion, and that it was a concern for both coloured and white couples. Interracial marriage was a hot topic, though there were only seven coloured and white interracial marriages in the Batson Household Survey. The topic of interracial marriage was also broader than expected, with a debate appearing in the Cape Times about “interracial marriage” between English and Afrikaans-speaking individuals.

Despite the many similarities found between coloured and white couples when it came to marriage, there are many aspects regarding the institution that are not observable for coloured couples in the newspapers. The next chapter will look into the ways in which coloured and white women experienced marriage law.

Chapter 4

Buying agency? Antenuptial contracts, marriage and female agency in Cape Town, 1924–1961

1. Introduction

Today woman has the suffrage. Women of all classes of society go out to earn their own living or supplement their husbands' incomes. The universities and the professions are wide open to them. And with the economic equality has come equality of standing in the family. The idea of matrimony as an institution in which man is the lord and master and woman is the obedient slave has gone for good. Its place is being taken by the concept of marriage as an equal partnership of man and wife. Divorce, 'the rod of marriage', has lost its social stigma. Indeed, if anyone lays himself open to society's tacit censure, it is not the divorced person, but the spouse who refuses to release his partner agreeing to a divorce.¹

Less than two centuries ago, in England, the United States, and many other countries women had no legal existence separate from their husbands. Less than one century ago, women had no political rights in most countries. Not even half a century ago, even in the most developed countries women still faced severe discrimination in many areas of life, including the labour market. Today, we observe a high correlation between measures of women's rights and GDP per capita – women's rights are still lacking in most of the poorest countries in the world.²

Despite the buoyancy of the first quotation above, for the first half of the twentieth century, many aspects of South African law continued to work against women within marriage. As the second quotation reveals, in much of the world, even in the late twentieth century and today, women have face multifaceted discrimination. In South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century, every father was automatically considered the "natural guardian of his children born within marriage".³ This meant that upon divorce, it was very hard for women to gain custody of their children – even in the case of their husband's infidelity. Husbands also had the legal right to make decisions about every aspect of their wife and children's lives. Another example of this inequality is that in South Africa, women acquired their husband's nationality upon marriage. This meant that if a woman born in the Union of South Africa married a man from

¹ H. R. Hahlo. "A hundred years of marriage law in South Africa," *Acta Juridica*, 1959, (47), p. 47.

² M. Doepke, M. Tertilt & A. Voena. "The economics and politics of women's rights," *Annual Review of Economics*, (4), 2012, p. 360.

³ F. Kaganas & C. Murray. "Law and women's rights in South Africa: An overview," *Acta Juridica*, 1994, (1), p. 9.

another country, she automatically lost her South African citizenship and effectively became a legal alien. However, upon divorce, or her husband's death, she would regain her South African citizenship.⁴ Laws that focussed on married women's rights came to the fore in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. Amendments to the marriage law were first raised in 1943 – with a stated purpose of changing the law to allow married women to maintain the rights they held as unmarried women once they got married.⁵ The bill was introduced by a Mr Davis who requested “[t]hat the Government would consider the advisability of introducing legislation at the earliest opportunity to remove all disqualification and inequality to which married women are subject to in the common law of the Union of South Africa.”⁶ More specifically, the relationship between married women's rights and the signing of an antenuptial contract was raised in the House of Assembly in 1944.

Six years earlier, in 1937, South Africa's first female member of parliament, Leila Reitz, submitted a motion in the House of Assembly in which she requested the creation of a commission of inquiry in order to investigate the “discrimination from which women in South Africa suffer, as well as the legal and economic disqualifications that they are still under.”⁷ The commission was not created until the late 1940s, and when it was completed, it culminated in the publication of the *Report of the Women's Legal Disabilities Commission* in 1949.⁸

In 1943, Mr Davis relayed one example of the negative consequences of South Africa's marriage law. He spoke of a situation in which a woman was married to a man who had stopped working and was no longer supporting their family. As a result, she returned to paid employment outside of the home as a teacher to support their children. Her husband, acting completely within his rights, went to her employer to ensure that the salary was paid directly to him – which led to further problems for the family because she could not spend the money in a way that would meet the family's needs.⁹ This kind of situation was particularly problematic in cases where the husband was addicted to alcohol or gambling or displayed criminal tendencies. Another example was that of Mr Davis's own friend, Bertha Solomon,

⁴ *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission*, (Union of South Africa: Government Printer, 1949), p. 20, paragraphs 225&226.

⁵ Unie van Suid-Afrika, *Debatte van die Volksraad (Sewende Sitting – Agste Parlement)*, 16 Januarie tot 27 April 1943, *Dele 45 en 46*, (Kaapstad: Unie Volkspers BPK), p. 3942.

⁶ Translated from: “Dat die Regering versoek word om die raadsaamheid daarvan te oorweeg om by die eerste moontlike geleentheid wetgewing in te dien ter verwydering van alle onbevoegheid en ongelykheid waaraan getroude vrouens onder die gemenerereg van die Unie van Suid-Afrika onderhewig is.”

Unie van Suid-Afrika, *Debatte van die Volksraad (Sewende Sitting – Agste Parlement)*, p. 3942.

⁷ Unie van Suid-Afrika, *Debatte van die Volksraad (Sewende Sitting – Agste Parlement)*, p. 3942.

⁸ Kaganas & Murray. “Law and women's rights in South Africa,” p. 11.

⁹ Unie van Suid-Afrika, *Debatte van die Volksraad (Sewende Sitting – Agste Parlement)*, p. 3945.

who was a qualified advocate, suffragette, and member of parliament. The absurdity of her situation was summarised by Mr Davis: “[a] woman advocate married in community of property was entitled to conduct a case in the Court of Appeal, but she herself could not sue or be sued in her own name. The present system was not only absurd, it was unfair.”¹⁰ The author of the article in which he was quoted suggested that signing an antenuptial contract was the obvious solution for women who wanted to retain their rights once they got married, but claimed that for most couples the high fees involved in drawing up an antenuptial contract were prohibitive. In the late 1940s that cost amounted to £7 or £8 which was an amount similar to the average monthly wage for white women in the late 1930s in the Batson Household Survey.¹¹ The article concludes with the statement that “[m]arried women should be placed on the same legal footing in South Africa as they were in other parts of the civilised world.”¹² The Matrimonial Affairs Act was finally passed in 1953 to “amend the law relating to the property rights of spouses, to orders for maintenance, to the guardianship and custody of minors and to divorce.”¹³ Before 1953, however, married women could only claim these benefits if they had signed an antenuptial contract. Hahlo explains that implementing the Matrimonial Affairs Act still did not mean that couples automatically married out of community of property, but that “while retaining community of property and profit and loss, and the marital power, [the act] confers upon the wife a modicum of independent legal capacity, with a corresponding diminution in the marital power of the husband.”¹⁴

In the relevant literature, various aspects of women’s lives have been used to determine the nature of their position or agency in society. Age at marriage, age gap at marriage and literacy are just a few. This chapter uses Anglican marriage records in Cape Town to get a glimpse of whether or how antenuptial contracts were utilised by coloured and white women in the city. Regardless of race, in the Cape women were equal under marriage law at the time. This chapter also seeks to take a step towards the possibility of new indicator of female agency: the signing of an antenuptial contract. My guiding question is, in 30 000 Anglican marriage records in Cape Town over the period 1924–1961, who signed an antenuptial contract? This time period is an important one because it was marked by great improvements in the position

¹⁰ “House of Assembly: Dr Malan’s motion again debated: Bill to raise the status of married women”, *Cape Times*, 5 February 1944, p. 12.

¹¹ *Report of the women’s legal disabilities commission*, p. 11.

¹² House of Assembly: Dr Malan’s motion again debated,” p. 12.

¹³ Union Gazette Extraordinary, 28th October, 1953, No.37, 1953, found online: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201505/act-37-1953.pdf [22/02/2020].

¹⁴ Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, p. 10.

of white women in South African society. Firstly, they obtained the right to vote in 1930. Secondly, they joined labour markets in larger numbers, and thirdly, women's rights activists were advocating to pass the abovementioned amendment to marriage law, which would dramatically improve the legal status of married women. These marriage records provide information about whether or not an antenuptial contract was signed by the couple as well as the respective occupation of the bride and groom, their ages, races, places of birth and other biographical and geographical details. This wealth of information will allow me to address such questions as, who exactly signed such contracts and whether or not women who displayed "agency" in other areas of their lives would be more likely to sign one? Antenuptial contracts were at the centre of these debates and movements that sought to advance women's rights in South Africa because they provided a means of attaining increased equality within marriage before the relevant laws could be changed. Furthermore, this chapter concludes by emphasising the importance of further research into antenuptial contracts as an indicator of female agency. The first two chapters of this thesis have investigated women's position in society relative to the jobs they did, when they worked, how much they earned and how their earnings contributed to that of the household. And the third chapter looked at broad marriage trends in the city. This chapter turns to their legal position.

The investigation into antenuptial contracts in marriage records provides an opportunity to observe the extent to which coloured and white Anglican women in Cape Town utilised these in order to improve their position. The structure of the chapter is as follows. Section two discusses the data used for analysis; section three explores the literature on measuring agency while section four argues for the relevance of using of antenuptial contracts in order to measure agency. Section five looks at the signing of antenuptial contracts in the context of the real lives of couples in Cape Town and section six concludes.

2. The sources

For this chapter I use transcribed Anglican marriage records for the period 1924–1961 for all 90 parishes in Cape Town. Although the original dataset starts in 1876, these dates have been chosen because 1924 marks the year when antenuptial contracts started to be reported consistently, and 1961 is both the year South Africa became a Republic and when the data becomes less representative, because some parishes are unrecorded. There is evidence from newspapers and other sources that antenuptial contracts were signed before 1924, but the Anglican church only started reporting their signing from 1924. Newspaper articles and the Batson Household Survey provide additional insights into the use of antenuptial contracts in

the city. As mentioned before, the most common religion for coloured and white Capetonians was Anglican.

8811-22/11/23-6,000-50. S. B.M.D. 3 (Union)

**ORIGINAL MARRIAGE REGISTER.
ORIGINEEL HUWELIKSREGISTER.**

No. 2 / 24

Race: { Husband European
Man
Ras: { Wife European
Vrouw

Marriage Solemnized at St Peter's Church District Mowbray Province Cap
Huwelik Bevestigd te _____ Distrikt _____ Provinsie _____

Date of Marriage, Name of Minister	Full Names of Persons Married, Volle Namen van Getrouwen.	Age	Country of Birth, Geboorteland.	Personal Status, Persoonlike Staat.	Occupation, Beroep.	Residence at time of Marriage, Woonplaas ten tijde van het Huwelik.	Name or Special Marriage License, Na Getroude of met Speciale Huweliks-Lisensie.	Consent by Whom given, Met wiens Toestemming.	With or without Antenuptial Contract, Op of sonder Huwelikvoorwaarden.	REMARKS, OPMERKINGEN.
January 1 st 1924	<u>Dirk Gnodde</u> + <u>Eleanor Spence Drury</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>Holland</u>	<u>Bachelor</u>	<u>Shipping manager</u>	<u>Mowbray</u> <u>Cambridge</u> <u>England</u>	<u>None</u>		<u>With</u> <u>A. N.</u> <u>Contract</u>	

This Marriage was solemnized by me on this the 1st day of January 1924
Dit Huwelik is bevestigd door mij op heden de _____ dag van _____ 1924

in the presence of the undersigned Witnesses —
in teenwoordigheid van de ondergetekende getuigen:—

1. [Signature]
2. [Signature]

This Marriage was contracted by us
Dit Huwelik is voltrokken tussen ons

Alfred Bantjes
Minister.—Predikant.
Church of England
Denomination.—Kerkgemeenschap.
[Signature]
Magistrate.—Magistraat.

Figure 15: Example of an individual marriage record where an antenuptial contract was signed.

Source: “South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004. Database with images. FamilySearch. <https://FamilySearch.org> : 14 June 2016.

Figure 15 shows an example of a marriage record. We can see that Dirk Gnodde and Eleanor Spence Drury got married on 1 January 1924, after having signed an antenuptial contract. Theirs was the second marriage registered at St Peter’s Church in Mowbray in 1924, but the first with an antenuptial contract. They were a white couple. He was born in Holland, and she, in England. He was a shipping manager, while there is no occupation listed for her. Their age gap at marriage was three years – and Mr Gnodde was older. The main objective of this chapter is to determine to what extent these details were exceptional to this couple and their signing of an antenuptial contract, and whether or not antenuptial contracts could be considered a measure of women’s agency.

3. The literature

We live in a world of wide disparities, both within and between countries. These disparities occur across multiple dimensions;

economic, cultural, but possibly most importantly in the ability people have to make meaningful choices about their lives. In many ways the lack of capacity in the latter dimensions is more important than financial measures of performance, and indeed it has been argued that it is these differences that matter most. This approach has made considerable headway in contemporary development economics; however, applications to history are few.¹⁵

Many economic, social, political, demographic, and environmental factors affect the decision to get married. In turn, various features of marriage can be used as indicators of various aspects of human life. Levels of education, for instance, determine the age at which people marry. As stated in Chapter 3, the more educated they are, the older couples are when they get married and the smaller the age gap at marriage between spouses.¹⁶ Countries with high levels of education and equality between sexes experience larger proportions of those societies delaying marriage. These delays in marriage result in decreasing population sizes, because with the delay of marriage there is usually a delay in having children. Age at marriage and age gap at marriage are two indicators of women's agency within those marriages and the broader society they are part of. The younger women are at marriage, and the bigger the age gap between husband and wife, the worse off women are believed to be.¹⁷

It is important to understand why the concept of "agency" is of concern as well as the manner in which various scholars have gone about measuring agency and the role of marriage as an institution in those measurements. In their book *Agency, gender and economic development in the world economy 1850–2000* (2017), Jan Luiten van Zanden, Auke Rijpma, and Jan Kok argue that "autonomous decision making, and female agency in particular, increases the potential of a society to generate economic growth and improve its institutions."¹⁸ There are various ways of determining the extent to which women exhibit agency. Van Zanden et al. use the family unit as a point of reference, explaining that "the household and the prevailing norms and values surrounding family are central to any attempt to achieve equality between the genders, which makes them the right unit of analysis to study links between female agency and overall socio-economic development."¹⁹ The authors base their approach to the role of gender and agency in development on two economic schools of thought: Amartya Sen's

¹⁵ J.L. Van Zanden, A. Rijpma & J. Kok (eds). *Agency, gender and economic development in the world economy 1850-2000: Testing the Sen Hypothesis*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 1.

¹⁶ Carmichael. "Marriage and power," pp. 416–436.

¹⁷ Carmichael. "Marriage and power," pp. 416–436.

¹⁸ J.L. Van Zanden, A. Rijpma & J. Kok (eds). *Agency, gender and economic development in the world economy 1850-2000: Testing the Sen Hypothesis*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁹ Van Zanden, Rijpma & Kok (eds). *Agency, gender and economic development*, p. 2.

work on agency and the capability approach, and New Institutional Economics.²⁰ Their work moves towards defining and refining measurable variables that relate to the concept of agency within family structures or institutions.²¹

Measuring agency is no simple task. The family systems within which women operate obviously differ from one part of the world to another and have affected women's agency in different ways. Measuring the agency of women in parts of Asia would be understandably different to the task of measuring the agency of women in Southern Africa. However, these differences can be mitigated by looking at a similar institution, such as marriage, which exists across cultures and time. Jan Kok identifies a number of preconditions that benefit women's position in society and finds that these were experienced by women in certain parts of the world more than others. These are preconditions are: "free partner choice, marriage at a relatively advanced age, limited age gap between spouses, matrilinearity [using the female line to trace kinship], endogamy, right to initiate divorce and retain custody, possibility of remarriage and control over property."²² These are concrete and measurable aspects of a woman's life. Carmichael and Rijpma note that most contemporary studies on agency are based on surveys and questionnaires but that these methods have a limited usefulness when it comes to understanding the past. They solve this by proposing to "measure agency indirectly through family characteristics that were shown [by Kok] to be important for women's agency."²³

This literature is grounded in Hajnal's 1965 theory (discussed in the previous chapter) that a specific European Marriage Pattern (EMP) emerged which contributed to economic development in Western Europe more than other places in the world at the time. He initially argued that the EMP displayed two primary characteristics: "(1) a high age at marriage and (2) a high proportion of people who never marry at all".²⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 3, according to Hajnal this pattern had been the norm for two centuries in Western Europe up until the 1940s. For instance, in all Western Europe in 1900, at least 80% of men for the age group 20–24 were unmarried. On average, 40% of women aged 25–29 were unmarried, with Ireland and Iceland's percentages as high as 56% and 59% respectively.²⁵ For Eastern European women of the same

²⁰ Van Zanden, Rijpma & Kok (eds). *Agency, gender and economic development*, p. 7.

²¹ Van Zanden, Rijpma & Kok (eds). *Agency, gender and economic development*, p. 7.

²² J. Kok. "Women's agency in historical family systems" in J.L. Van Zanden, A. Rijpma and J. Kok (eds), *Agency, Gender and Economic Development in the World Economy 1850–2000: Testing the Sen Hypothesis* (Routledge, London and New York, 2017), p. 50.

²³ S. Carmichael & A. Rijpma. "Measuring Agency" in J.L. Van Zanden, A. Rijpma and J. Kok (eds), *Agency, Gender and Economic Development in the World Economy 1850–2000: Testing the Sen Hypothesis* (Routledge, London and New York, 2017), p. 53.

²⁴ Hajnal. "European marriage patterns in perspective," p. 101.

²⁵ Hajnal. "European marriage patterns in perspective," (Table 2), p. 102.

age group at the same time, the average was 8%.²⁶ Ultimately, Hajnal argued that this marriage trend explained why “Europeans, a large proportion of them, not just the rich, had better housing, better clothing, a greater variety of food, more furniture and utensils, than people elsewhere.”²⁷ Because women married later, and therefore had children later, they could spend more time contributing to the economy. It also enabled women to accumulate wealth. They did this by earning a salary of their own before they got married, which could help them to establish a separate household with their husband once they did marry. This, in turn, presented a third identifying feature of the EMP: upon marriage, couples would form their own household. Most households in Western European societies were nuclear.²⁸ Other scholars have argued that the defining features of the EMP created conditions of economic growth that led to the Industrial Revolution. Authors such as Carmichael, De Moor, De Pleijt, and Van Zanden contend that “the EMP enhanced economic growth by restraining population growth (the classical argument found in Hajnal’s original contribution), by strengthening the position of women, by enhancing human capital formation (of women and their offspring), and by encouraging women and girls’ access to labour and capital markets.”²⁹

The role the features of the EMP played in the economic development of Western Europe has not gone uncontested. Sheilagh Ogilvie and Tracy Dennison have challenged scholars who posit a causal relationship between the EMP and the economic triumphs of Western Europe. In a 2014 paper they argue that: “[t]here is no evidence that the EMP improved economic performance by empowering women, increasing human capital investment, adjusting population to economic trends or sustaining beneficial cultural norms. European economic success was not caused by the EMP and its sources must therefore be sought in other factors.”³⁰ On the contrary, they argue that Western-European societies that witnessed the “most extreme manifestations of the EMP” saw economic inactivity as opposed to growth. Carmichael et al. responded to Dennison and Ogilvie in a 2016 article and countered with the argument that institutions (such as marriage) play a vital role as determinants of economic growth – and that the economic success of Western Europe is directly related to the characteristics of its institutions. The essence of their counterargument is that “it is very

²⁶ Hajnal. “European marriage patterns in perspective,” (Table 3), p. 103.

²⁷ Hajnal. “European marriage patterns in perspective,” p. 131.

²⁸ S.G. Carmichael, A. De Pleijt, J.L. Van Zanden & T. De Moor. “The European Marriage Pattern and its measurement,” *Journal of Economic History*, (76), (1), 2016, p. 196.

²⁹ Carmichael, De Pleijt, Van Zanden & De Moor. “The European Marriage Pattern and its measurement,” p. 197.

³⁰ T. Dennison & S. Ogilvie. “Does the European Marriage Pattern explain economic growth?,” *The Journal of Economic History*, (74), (3), 2014, p. 651.

important to realise that the EMP can be, [...] and should be conceived of as a dynamic system. The age of marriage, the percentage never marrying, and the structure of the family, are each the product of the interaction of family structure with economic conditions.”³¹ Although Dennison and Ogilvie agree with Carmichael et al. on one important point, namely that “female autonomy benefits economic growth”, they ultimately disagree with the postulation of a three-way relationship between the EMP, female autonomy, and economic growth.³² Instead Dennison and Ogilvie maintain that institutions, as opposed to family systems, determine the role of women in the economy.³³

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, in Amartya Sen’s work *Development as freedom* (1999) the role of women’s agency in economic development is emphasised. Sen argues that various parts of women’s lives could provide them with agency. These include “women’s earning power, economic role outside of the family, literacy and education, property rights and so on.”³⁴ Sen explains that there are societal norms, especially in the organisation of the family, which are detrimental to women. This “antifemale bias”, as he calls it, has various negative consequences within the home and for the society as a whole. In its various manifestations, this bias determines what women are entitled to in that society. This is linked to economic development in the sense that, where female literacy is a priority (that is, where women are entitled to an education), societies experience a reduction in both child mortality rates and fertility rates. These reductions, in turn, decrease general poverty.³⁵

The diverse variables identified in the literature thus have a unified empowering role. This role has to be related to the acknowledgement that women’s power–economic independence as well as social emancipation–can have far-reaching impacts on the forces and organizing principles that govern divisions *within* the family and in society as a whole, and can, in particular, influence what are implicitly accepted as women’s “entitlements.”³⁶

Although Sen’s focus is on women’s education, involvement in the labour force, and property rights, the age at marriage, and age gap at marriage fit neatly into his analyses. In a society in which women are entitled to an education, their labour outside of the home will be valued and

³¹ Carmichael, De Pleijt, Van Zanden & De Moor. “The European Marriage Pattern and its measurement,” p. 197.

³² T. K. Dennison & S. Ogilvie. “Institutions, demography and economic growth,” *The Journal Of Economic History*, (71), (1), 2016, p. 207.

³³ Dennison & Ogilvie. “Institutions, demography and economic growth,” p. 208.

³⁴ A. Sen. *Development as freedom*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 191.

³⁵ Sen. *Development as freedom*, p. 198.

³⁶ Sen. *Development as freedom*, p. 191.

they will be allowed to choose to remain involved in education and labour for longer than in societies in which women's ability to produce and care for children are considered to be their most valued assets. Women's access to education therefore also leads to a delay in marriage.

This delay in marriage is also a function of the ideas about marriage in that society. Societies in which arranged marriages are the custom are characterised by early marriages for females, and a large age gap at marriage. Parents usually choose their daughter's spouse and this could take place when she is as young as twelve years old. Such societies are very different to those in which individuals are allowed to choose their own spouse. In the latter society women marry later and there is a low age gap at marriage. Van Zanden, De Moor and Carmichael (hereafter, VDC) argue that looking for your own spouse results in the aforementioned characteristics in marriage. This occurs for two reasons: first, people can only start searching for a spouse at a certain age (resulting in a later age at marriage) and second, people will marry someone of equal age and status (resulting in the small age gap at marriage). In support of their argument, VDC paraphrase Claudia Goldin, "[w]omen who marry later have a chance to form an adult identity that may include a career or profession, while those who marry very early will likely see themselves as secondary workers, optimizing time allocations to accommodate their husband's labour market decisions."³⁷ They argue that these two aspects of marriage – age gap and age at marriage – can be considered indicators of female agency because they show "freedom of choice in whom to marry and equality within marriage"³⁸ They go on to show that these are indeed good and reliable indicators of gender equality by using the Gender Inequality Index (GII). The GII uses labour force participation, "empowerment", and reproductive wellbeing to determine the equality between men and women relative to development. VDC do, however, find some outliers. For instance, in 2010 Jamaica had the highest age at marriage for women but ranked 89th in the world according to the GII. VDC admit that the case of Jamaica is "hard to explain" and suggest that its high age at marriage could be explained by the predominance of "consensual unions", that is where couples live together without getting married and only get married once they have gained economic stability.³⁹ The case of Jamaica is important to note because a similar pattern seems to be characteristic of coloured women in Cape Town.

³⁷ J. L. Van Zanden, T. De Moor & S. Carmichael. *Capital women: The European Marriage Pattern, female empowerment and economic development in Western Europe, 1300–1800*, (United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 6.

³⁸ Van Zanden, De Moor & Carmichael. *Capital women*. p. 7.

³⁹ Van Zanden, De Moor & Carmichael. *Capital women*. p. 9.

There are useful examples of research into how the law has impacted the agency of women. The impact of “control over property” on married women’s freedom in the past has been explored for the context of Britain after the introduction of the 1870 Married Women’s Property Act. Using household composition data and property-holding data, Mary Beth Combs investigated changes in shares of household resources owned by women before and after the act. The act allowed women to own and manage their own property once they were married and to buy property in their own names as married women. She found that the act “had a substantial impact on the economic lives of women,” and that it “strengthened the ability of women to bargain and influence household investment decisions.”⁴⁰ Combs also makes a helpful statement about legal rights and real-life implications of the act for women. “While gaining legal rights did not mean attaining equality, economic theory suggests that the extension of such rights should have had a substantial impact on the share of resources owned by women and also on their ability to control and redistribute household resources.”⁴¹

The work of Van Zanden et al. provides the foundations of this chapter in two respects. Firstly, I use their definition of agency, which is “the ability to define and act upon one’s goals”⁴²; secondly, I explore the possibility of introducing another measurement of female agency within a family institution, namely marriage. Both the act of measuring agency using marriage and determining the requirements of such a measurement, are informed by their work. In this chapter I shall not only propose an additional measurement for agency, but also compare it to existing measurements in order to test its consistency.

4. Why antenuptial contracts

As alluded to in the introduction, antenuptial contracts provided important protection as well as rights to women in South Africa when they got married. The contract was signed before or upon marrying (though it was something that needed to be specially sought out and was not automatically offered to couples). In his 1973 volume of *The South African law of husband and wife*, Hahlo explains that “[a]nything may be agreed upon by antenuptial contract, which is not impossible, illegal or contrary to public policy. Thus, the contract may validly provide that community of property and profit and loss and the marital power shall be excluded...”⁴³ On the whole, the concept of marital power is confusing. In summary, it used to make the

⁴⁰ M.B. Combs. “*Cui bono?* The 1870 British Married Women’s Property Act, bargaining power, and the distribution of resources within marriage,” *Feminist Economics*, (12), (1–2), 2006, p. 74.

⁴¹ M.B. Combs. “*Cui bono?*,” p. 52.

⁴² Van Zanden, Rijpma & Kok (eds). *Agency, gender and economic development*.

⁴³ Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, p. 274

husband guardian over his wife upon their marriage, even if he himself was still a legal minor.⁴⁴ By signing an antenuptial contract, a woman ensured that she would retain the legal status she had as a single woman because the contract excluded marital power. Hahlo also explains that such a contract could provide for any variety of possibilities. In other words, the antenuptial contract provided women with many legal options which they would not have been able to benefit from without the contract – and these options included the exclusion of community of property without excluding profit and loss and marital power. In fact, without the antenuptial contract, women became legal minors upon marriage, which meant that they had the same rights as their children under twenty-one and fewer rights than their adult children. They could also not conduct legal proceedings without the help of their husband or someone else with his equivalent legal status.⁴⁵ A woman who got married without an antenuptial contract could not even open a bank account in her name.⁴⁶ Iris Berger explains that in the early twentieth century,

[u]nder Dutch-Roman law that applied to white women, unmarried women over twenty-one and widows were accorded the same legal status as men. Once women married, however, they became legal minors; unless protected by an ante-nuptial contract, a woman's husband automatically assumed control of her person and her property.⁴⁷

The antenuptial contract provided a married women with “control over property”, the right to sue her husband and others, and have control over her own finances. As Hahlo puts it:

Thus the antenuptial contract may provide that the wife, who is to be married to her husband out of community of property, shall be subject to his marital power, but that she shall have the power to alienate or encumber certain properties of hers without his consent or that her husband shall require her consent before he may alienate or hypothecate property of hers.⁴⁸

This means that, according to one of Kok's preconditions to women's agency, signing an antenuptial contract provided women with increased agency; it allowed them “control over property” and made it easier for women to get a divorce, because they could act as legal individuals apart from their husbands or another adult.

⁴⁴ Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, p. 147

⁴⁵ Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, p. 194

⁴⁶ “House of Assembly: Dr Malan's Motion Again Debated,” p. 12.

⁴⁷ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, p. 275.

There were also women who felt that marrying in community of property would be most beneficial for them. According to the *Report of the Women's Legal Disabilities Commission* (1949), that “community of property is unquestionably advantageous to a very large number of wives.” It states that, “women, for example, who marry farmers with large landed estates in community of property become on marriage part owners thereof.”⁴⁹ In such cases, women would even be entitled to half of the couple’s estate if she sued for, and was granted, a divorce. However, regarding the benefits of marrying in community of property, the report concluded that, ultimately, the husband could exert his marital power in a way that could negatively affect women. He could do this by, for instance, ruining or losing the estate or by intercepting her wages if she worked. In South Rhodesia (Zimbabwe today), marriage law was changed in 1929 so that everyone who married from that year onwards would automatically be married out of community of property. If couples wanted to marry in community of property, they needed to indicate so before their marriage took place. From 1929–1948, only three couples obtained a special license to be married *in* community of property.⁵⁰

In the *Report of the Women's Legal Disabilities Commission* South African women’s rights were compared to those of their counterparts in the West. The report covered topics such as the “property rights of husband and wife and marital power” as well as issues related to maintenance, support, tax, women serving in the military, custody and guardianship, divorce, and citizenship.⁵¹ By the late 1940s, there were still many countries in which, for women, marriage meant the absolute loss of property ownership rights. These included Belgium and the Netherlands. Countries in which couples could enter into an antenuptial contract in order to maintain their right to own property included Switzerland, France, Poland, and the USA (where women’s rights varied considerably between states).⁵²

That said, it is important to acknowledge that many South African women also consciously supported marriage in community of property. For instance, the National Council of Women of South Africa, which at the time represented 60 000 South African women, released a statement to say that they were “by no means opposed to marriage in community of property and are fully aware of its advantages under certain conditions.”⁵³ Members of one branch of the South African Association of University Women (SAAUW) felt that women in low income groups (80% of the population, according to their estimates) benefitted from

⁴⁹ *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission*, p. 5, par. 38.

⁵⁰ *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission*, p. 7, par. 48&49.

⁵¹ *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission*.

⁵² *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission*, pp 8–9.

⁵³ *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission*, p. 10, par. 82.

marriage in community of property.⁵⁴ The Suid-Afrikaanse Vroue-federasie agreed with the SAAUW and suggested that marriage in community of property was “more of a benefit than a disadvantage to women, especially those of the less privileged and poorer classes”.⁵⁵ The report ultimately predicted that, “even if the effect of ignorance, heedlessness and cost were removed there would still be a large percentage of marriages in community of property”⁵⁶ – mainly because husbands were then legally obligated to provide for their wives.

5. Antenuptial contracts in everyday life

With some context in hand, we can now turn to questions that arise, such as, who signed antenuptial contracts? Why did they sign them? Did women actually choose to sign antenuptial contracts for their own good? Figure 16 shows that after 1944 there was an increase in white couples who signed antenuptial contracts. It also shows that signing an antenuptial contract was not something that coloured couples did. It is also clear from newspaper sources that that women were not the only ones who benefitted from antenuptial contracts, and they were not necessarily those who advocated for the signing of such contracts. Men, too, stood to gain from signing an antenuptial contract and there are indications that these benefits to men were widely known and recognised. For instance, an advertisement by a clothing store in Cape Town’s Plein Street that appeared in the *Cape Times* in 1876 read, “Now, anyone that wants to protect himself (without an antenuptial contract) cannot do better than come to my Store. My goods require no certificate.”⁵⁷ Hahlo explained in *The South African law of husband and wife* that “community of property and the marital power could always be excluded by an antenuptial contract, and this has long been the practice among the middle and upper class”⁵⁸ in South Africa. Reports on divorce cases further indicate that men used antenuptial contracts to take out policies in their wives’ names, presumably for tax purposes. Newspaper articles of divorce cases, the marriage records, individual level marriage records and the Batson Household Survey also provide clues to the questions raised at the beginning of this section.

⁵⁴ *Report of the women’s legal disabilities commission*, pp. 10, par. 82.

⁵⁵ *Report of the women’s legal disabilities commission*, p. 10, par. 82.

⁵⁶ *Report of the women’s legal disabilities commission*, p. 11, par. 90.

⁵⁷ “Selling off. Selling off,” *Cape Times*, 28 December 1876, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Hahlo. *The South African law of husband and wife*, p. 9.

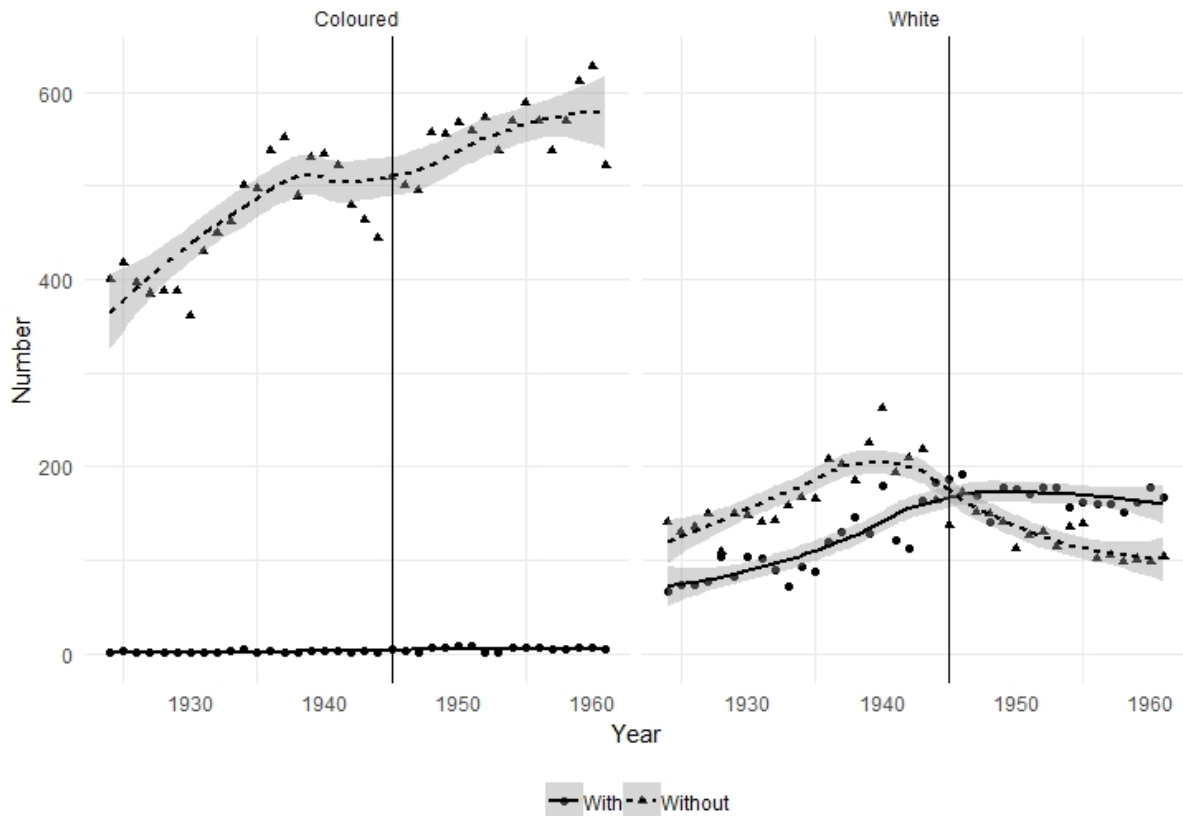


Figure 16: Number of coloured and white antenuptial contracts by year, 1924–1961.

Source: Anglican marriage records, 1924–1960.

Divorce cases provide an opportunity to understand both how antenuptial contracts unfolded at the end of a marriage as well as how they were created at the beginning of the marriage. The cases referenced here were published in the *Cape Times* and provide insight into the lives of couples at the beginning of the century (before the signing of antenuptial contracts was reported in the marriage records). Divorce cases show that either member of the couple could forfeit their rights to the benefits of the antenuptial contract depending on who was in the wrong. An example of a case in which a wife was attempting to get her husband to return to her (if he did not want a divorce to be granted) reads as follows:

Now this Court having taken the prayer of the said Georgina Darter into consideration and granted the same accordingly by these presents doth summon you, the said Adrian Albert Darter, lately of Cape Town, to cause an appearance to be entered before the said Supreme Court on or before the 1st day of June 1905, to show cause (if any) why you should not be ordered to return to and live and cohabit with the applicant as your wife or otherwise, why a decree of divorce shall not be granted by reason of your wilful and malicious desertion of her, and in the latter alternative why the said Supreme Court shall not order a forfeiture of

any benefits accruing to you by virtue of the Antenuptial Contract, and why you shall not be ordered to the costs of the Suit.⁵⁹

As mentioned in the previous section, marrying out of community of property (or signing an antenuptial contract) was seen as a possible risk for women because a husband could separate all their assets from their wife to the extent that she could find herself without anything when he died or they got divorced. The 1949 report states that, “[a]ctual cases have been brought to our notice in which husbands have formed attachments for other women, have alienated assets to them, and have made provision for them by will in disregard of the interest of their widows.”⁶⁰ A divorce case from 1905 that was published in the *Cape Times* reveals how wives could also be negatively affected by their own adultery. Details about the Rhodes vs Rhodes and Bowen case appeared in the *Cape Times* in March of 1905. The couple in question married in Grahamstown in 1895, out of community of property with an antenuptial contract. Mr Rhodes settled a £2 000 assurance policy on his wife upon the signing of the antenuptial contract. Mr Rhodes later claimed that his wife had begun an affair with a Mr Bowen in April of 1905 and that by June of that year she had deserted her husband and lived in “open adultery” with Mr Bowen. When Mr Rhodes sued for divorce, he requested three things. “He claimed a decree of divorce against the first-named defendant [Mrs Rhodes], and forfeiture of the benefits under the ante-nuptial contract, and £2 000 damages against the second defendant, with costs.”⁶¹ Under South African divorce law at the time, a man could claim for damages if his wife had committed adultery and this could affect the antenuptial contract. If a man’s wife cheated on him, he could sue the person she had committed adultery with. Women could not, however, sue the person their husband had committed adultery with. The result of this case was that the decree of divorce was granted against the then Mrs Rhodes along with the “forfeiture of the settlements under the ante-nuptial contract, and costs, and judgement against the second defendant [Mr Bowen] on the company paper for £500, with costs, the plaintiff [Mr Rhodes] to have his witness’s expenses.”⁶² In summary, although the antenuptial contract had been set up to benefit Mrs Rhodes, her affair meant that she forfeited those benefits – in this case, £2 000. It is, of course, questionable whether she ever had real control of the policy, or whether Mr Rhodes just used it as a safety net or in order to avoid tax.

⁵⁹ “To Adrian Albert Darter,” *Cape Times*, 13 April 1905, p. 4.

⁶⁰ *Report of the women’s legal disabilities commission*, p. 15, par. 119.

⁶¹ “Rhodes v Rhodes and Bowen,” *Cape Times*, 9 March 1905, p. 7.

⁶² “Rhodes v Rhodes and Bowen,” p. 7.

Sometimes, however, couples (or one member of a couple) realised, after they got married, that it would have been better had they signed an antenuptial contract. This was the situation a Mr William Mathewson and his wife (her name is not mentioned) found themselves in and who then approached the court in an attempt to sign a contract that would give them the benefits of an antenuptial contract. Their case appeared in court more than a year into their marriage. The judge declined their request in court, stating that it would have been considered if they had given some indication that they consented to this before their marriage and if they had attempted to make this application earlier.⁶³ Sometimes it was not the couple's fault that the antenuptial contract was not entered into. In the case of a petition by Robert Coutts, a mistake was made by a notary, which meant that Mr and Mrs Coutts' antenuptial contract was not registered. The result of the case was that the antenuptial contract was granted and the notary offered to cover the expense of the application.⁶⁴

It is also important to note that women do seem to have used their antenuptial contracts in order to do business in their own names. There is evidence of this in the *Report of the Women's Legal Disabilities Commission* in which women raised complaints about the cumbersome nature of the antenuptial system. The point of frustration was that women had to produce their physical antenuptial contracts if they wanted to do business in their own name and without the help of their husbands. "It was claimed that the necessity so to do entailed difficulties, delays and sometimes consequential loss. The point was also stressed that intelligent women regard the necessity of producing their antenuptial contracts as humiliating."⁶⁵

Despite the many benefits of antenuptial contracts, they did not seem to simplify complicated marriages – or their demise. The marital woes of one couple who got married with an antenuptial contract in the St Saviour Church in Claremont appeared in the newspaper. Herbert Lovett Stonham (33), married Gertrude Helen Reynolds (22) on 20 November 1900. He was a chemist and this was the first marriage for them both. In 1908, the *Cape Times* reported on the case that Gertrude was suing Herbert for divorce "on the grounds of his misconduct, custody of the minor child of the marriage, maintenance for the child, delivery of the furniture settled upon plaintiff under the antenuptial contract, forfeiture of all benefits made under that contract, further or alternative relief, and costs of suit."⁶⁶ At the time they were both

⁶³ "Petition William Mathewson and wife," *Cape Times*, 18 October 1907, p. 7.

⁶⁴ "Petition Robert Hy. Coutts," *Cape Times*, 29 July 1908, p. 7.

⁶⁵ *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission*, p. 10.

⁶⁶ "Supreme Court, Second Division, (Before the Hon. Sir E.J. Buchanan.), marital unhappiness: Liquor and misconduct, Stonham v. Stonham," *Cape Times*, 26 February 1908, p. 8.

still residing in Claremont. Upon their marriage, Herbert settled £500 worth of furniture on Gertrude through an antenuptial contract and they had one child together, a daughter who was four years old at the time Gertrude sued for divorce. Herbert had committed adultery in 1907 with a Dorah Webster. He admitted to committing adultery, but claimed that at the time he did not know her name. He claimed that after the adultery, the couple had reunited. However, he also claimed that Gertrude had nonetheless left him – something which, according to him, lacked reason or explanation, which was used as evidence against her. For her part, Gertrude denied that they had ever reunited after she found out about the adultery. Instead, she claimed that he started drinking heavily and mistreating her ten months into their marriage. It seems that Herbert was also refusing to hand over the expensive furniture to Gertrude as the article states that he “denied that the value of the furniture was £500 or that it was in his possession.” He claimed that at the time of getting married, the furniture was worth about £100.⁶⁷ Herbert wanted the case to proceed in one of two ways. The first was for Gertrude to restore his conjugal rights by moving in with him again; the second, was to be granted a decree of divorce, whereby Gertrude would gain custody of their child, but forfeit the benefits of the antenuptial contract. This, at the very least, suggests that the furniture may have been more valuable than he was claiming at the time.⁶⁸ This was not yet the end of this case.

Herbert in turn claimed that Gertrude was given to extravagance, and that in the past there had been “some unpleasantness owing to his wife not looking after her household expenses and not looking after the child.”⁶⁹ On a few occasions during the first years of their marriage and as the result of financial difficulties with his business, the couple had to move between the rooms attached to his chemist shop and better accommodation. He claimed that on one occasion when their fortunes had changes and he needed to move them back into the rooms behind the shop, Gertrude initially refused to move back in with him even though she did so later. In July of 1907, she became ill and was admitted to the hospital. During this time a friend of the couple took Herbert “to a house of ill fame where, for the only time in his married life, he had committed adultery.”⁷⁰ Further evidence brought against Gertrude was that she “was in the habit of using strong language”.⁷¹ This would become a pivotal part of the case against her. When her sister gave evidence of Gertrude showing her family the injuries that had resulted from her husband’s ill-treatment of her, the prosecuting lawyer asked, “Your sister has a bad

⁶⁷ “Petition William Mathewson and Wife,” *Cape Times*, 18 October 1907, p. 7.

⁶⁸ “Supreme Court, Second Division,” p. 8.

⁶⁹ “Supreme Court, Second Division,” p. 8.

⁷⁰ “Supreme Court, Second Division,” p. 8.

⁷¹ “Supreme Court, Second Division,” p. 8.

temper I believe?”, to which the answer was “I don’t know”. He then asked, “Have you ever reproved her for using bad language? – “No” – “Do you know that she uses bad language?” – “I don’t know”.⁷² Although at times it seemed that Gertrude would not be granted the divorce on her terms, the case did conclude in her favour. The divorce was granted in addition to which she also won the custody of their daughter, and £1 maintenance per month. The amount was decided based on the fact that Herbert was not in a sound financial position. Finally, Herbert was also ordered to return all the furniture to her. In this case, therefore, however complicated the process was may have been, Gertrude left the marriage with the furniture that had been put in her name through the antenuptial contract.

It seems that furniture was a common part of antenuptial contracts. The case of Sneedon vs Sneedon appeared in the *Cape Times* in November 1909. In this case, George Evelyn Sneedon, who it is noted was a bank clerk in Cape Town, sought to divorce his wife if there could be no “restitution of conjugal rights”.⁷³ The couple had married in Mauritius in November 1896 and they signed an antenuptial contract “under which he settled the household furniture in favour of his wife”.⁷⁴ In 1900 they moved to Cape Town for the sake of Mr Sneedon’s health but in 1905, with Mr Sneedon’s consent, Mrs Sneedon moved to Paris where she was to live with her parents. He also later moved to Paris and lived there with her for five months. Then they both returned to Cape Town – a considerable amount of travelling given that a one-way journey by ship could take about 18 days.⁷⁵ In 1907, though, after having lived together in Cape Town for a year, she again left for Paris, with his consent. She also took their only child with her. He later sent her letters in which he requested her return, but she refused. The notice placed in the newspaper on 3 November 1909 required her to return to her husband before 15 January 1910. Failing to do so meant that a decree of divorce would be granted against her and she would forfeit the benefits of the antenuptial contract, including the furniture her husband had put in her name.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, I have been unable to track down the reports on the conclusion of this case and consequently do not know whether or not they divorce was indeed granted.

⁷² “Supreme Court, Second Division,” p. 8.

⁷³ “Matrimonial Cases, Sneedon v. Sneedon,” *Cape Times*, 3 November 1909, p. 10.

⁷⁴ “Matrimonial Cases, Sneedon v. Sneedon,” p. 10.

⁷⁵ I am not sure of the exact length of the trip at this time, but I calculated that it was about 18 days by using the following website: https://transportgeography.org/?page_id=2135 and working out how long it took for the New York – Liverpool crossing and then multiplying that by three, because the distance between France and Cape Town is about three times that of the distance between New York and Liverpool.

⁷⁶ “Matrimonial Cases, Sneedon v. Sneedon,” p. 10.

While anecdotes such as these provide useful insights into the manner in which antenuptial contracts unfolded in everyday life, they do not tell us much about how widespread the use of these contracts was. Figure 15 shows the total number of marriages of both coloured and white people in the Anglican church in Cape Town and whether or not the couples had signed an antenuptial contract. It is clear that around the time that Mr Davis and Bertha Solomon started trying to change the laws governing the rights of married women, for white Anglican couples in Cape Town, getting married with an antenuptial contract had become more common than not. An analysis of each individual parish shows that more affluent parishes had far higher rates of the signing of antenuptial contracts than others. Throughout the period 1924–1961, the signing of an antenuptial contract was most common for older white couples in wealthy areas. In fact, a count of the number of antenuptial contracts signed in different parishes shows that couples in wealthier parishes were more likely to sign antenuptial contracts than their less-wealthy counterparts. It is possible that certain ministers in wealthier parishes were more likely than other ministers to suggest an antenuptial contract. In Observatory, for instance, of the 914 white couples who got married during the period 1924–1960, only 27% signed an antenuptial contract. In the relatively more affluent Rondebosch, of the 258 white couples that married over the same period, an astonishing 97% signed an antenuptial contract. Although the rate was already relatively high from the beginning of the records for Rondebosch, which is in 1927, it starts off being slightly lower (though still higher than any other parish). For the first decade, of 34 marriages, only three did not sign an antenuptial contract – which means that 91% of couples that married there between 1927 and 1937 signed antenuptial contracts). All of these couples were white.

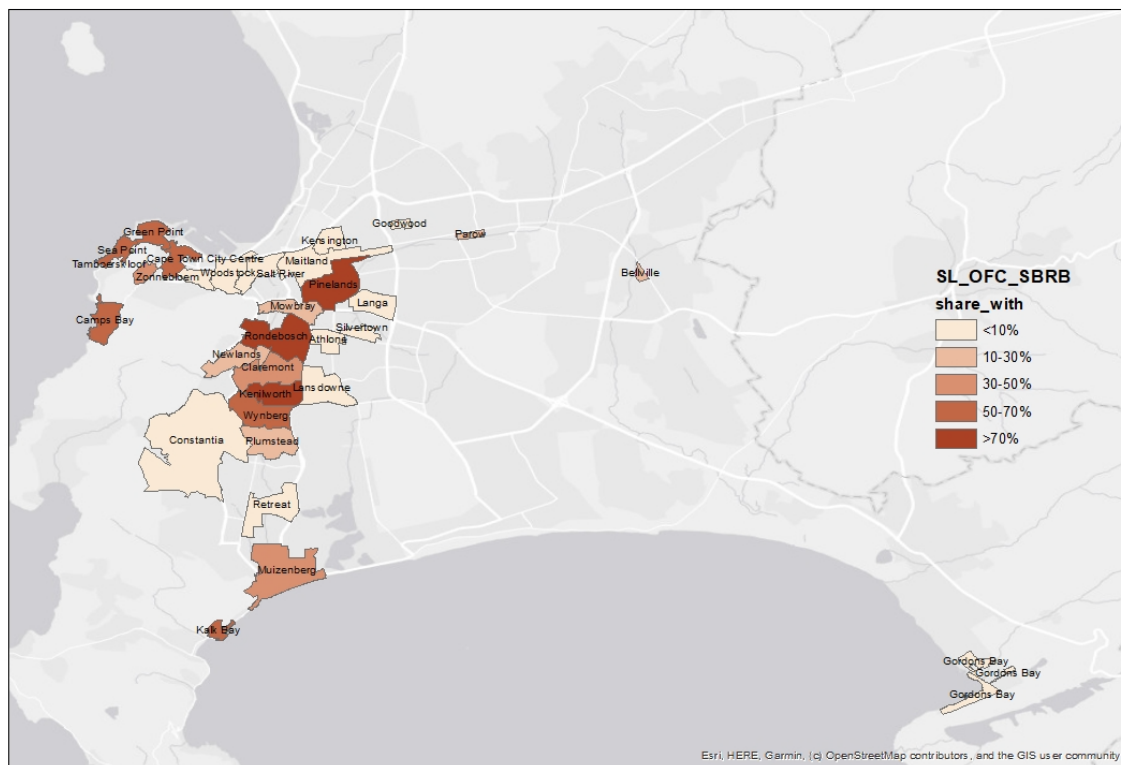


Figure 17: Share of antenuptial contracts by parish, 1924–1960.

Source: Anglican marriage records, 1924–1960.

Although an analysis of each parish and the prevalence of, and roles played by, antenuptial contracts in them is something that should be conducted in the future, there is one particularly unusual parish as far as the signing of antenuptial contracts is concerned. There are three strange things about the marriage records of the St Cyprian parish in Langa township, which had the lowest number of antenuptial contracts of all parishes in the city. In fact, there so few antenuptial contracts signed at this parish that, from 1932–1959, this category of the marriage records was mostly ignored. Out of the more than 1 200 couples that got married there, only three signed antenuptial contracts. The first strange thing about these cases is that all three of these couples were the white; the second is that they were the only white couples to marry in the parish. George Hardwick (46), a bank official, and his bride, Inez Jessie Lambert Bown Bown (39) got married there in October 1924. Both the bride and the groom were originally from England.⁷⁷ The second couple was Robert Ralph Tredgold (56), a lawyer from England, and his bride, Helen Margery Moodie (47), a nurse, who married there in October 1925.⁷⁸ The

⁷⁷ Marriage records: index id 65, image id 15, parish id 505.

⁷⁸ Marriage records: index id 174, image id 82, parish id 505.

third strange thing is that all four individuals were getting married for the first time and all of them were far older than the average age of first marriage at the time. The third white couple was Claude Neal Shuttleworth (24), an architectural assistant, and Julie Ella Rimanoczy (21), a clerk from England.⁷⁹

The demographic of the first two cases at Langa brings me neatly to another phenomenon. It is clear from the data that foreign-born grooms were more likely to sign an antenuptial contract than those born in South Africa. Figure 18 shows that foreign-born grooms were far more likely to enter into a marriage with an antenuptial contract than without one. Already from the mid-1920s onwards, there were more foreign-born grooms marrying with an antenuptial contract than not. For South African-born grooms, this tendency (of more getting married with an antenuptial contract than not) only occurred in the late 1940s. There seems to have been something specific that motivated foreigners to sign antenuptial contracts.

Many of these foreign-born grooms were from Britain. In her honour's thesis, Paige Smith found that 85% of foreign-born grooms in these Anglican marriage records between 1924 and 1940 were from Britain.⁸⁰ It is possible that the changes that they had experienced in their home country because of the 1870 Married Women's Property Act and other laws that were part of the British legal system surrounding marriage impacted their decisions once living in South Africa.⁸¹ Although marriage law in Britain and the US became increasingly equal for men and women during the nineteenth century, this was not the case in South Africa.⁸² Doepke and Tertilt investigated incentives for men to relinquish freedoms so that women could gain them and found two predominant motivating factors. The first, they say, is that men want what is good for their daughters and, secondly, improved rights for women improve education for the next generation.⁸³ It could be that these British men had already experienced the positive effects of changes to marriage law in their own country. Women in Britain had also, of course, won the right to vote in 1918, which was more than a decade earlier than South Africa.

⁷⁹ Marriage records: index id 6, image id 70, parish id 505.

⁸⁰ P. Smith. "Marriage and Migration in the Mother City: an investigation into factors contributing to the Anglicisation of Cape Town between 1924 and 1940", (Unpublished honour's thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2018), p. 28.

⁸¹ M.B. Combs. "Wives and household wealth: The impact of the 1870 British Married Women's Property Act on wealth-holding and share of household resources," *Continuity and Change*, (19), (1), 2004, pp. 141–163.

⁸² M. Doepke & M. Tertilt. "Women's liberation: What's in it for men?," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, (124), (4), 2009, pp. 1541–1542.

⁸³ M. Doepke & M. Tertilt. "Women's liberation: What's in it for men?," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, (124), (4), 2009, p. 1583.

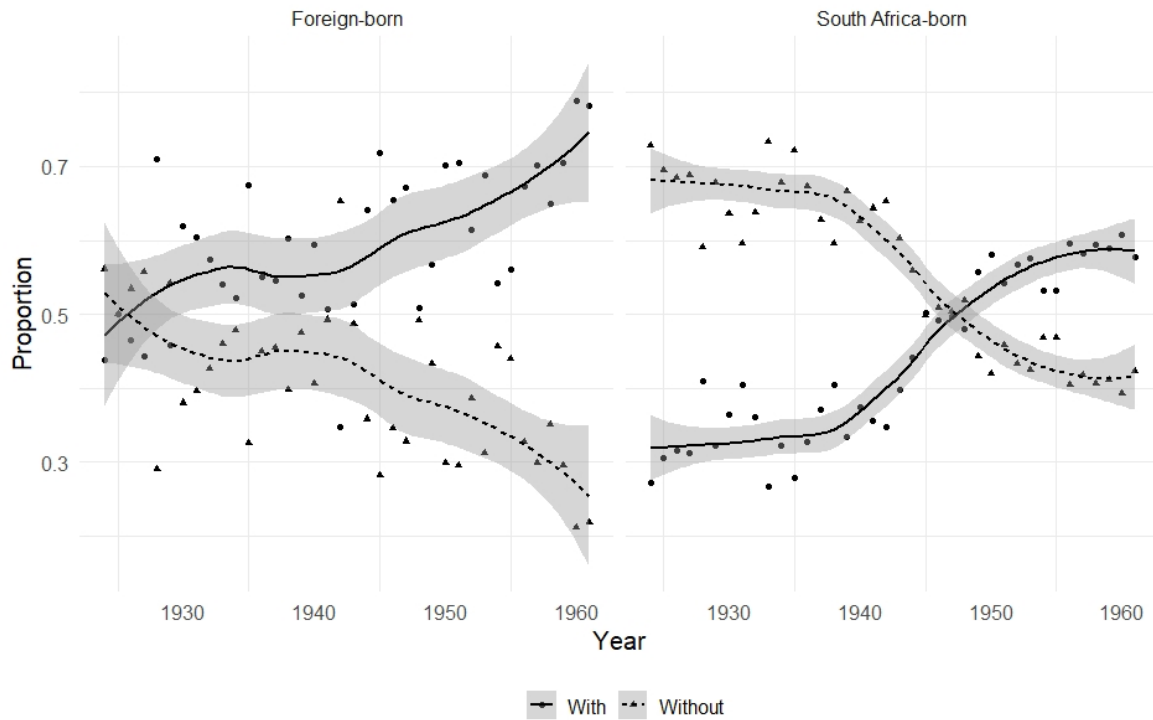


Figure 18: Proportion of antenuptial contracts for foreign grooms and South African grooms, 1924–1960.

Source: Anglican marriage records, 1924–1960.

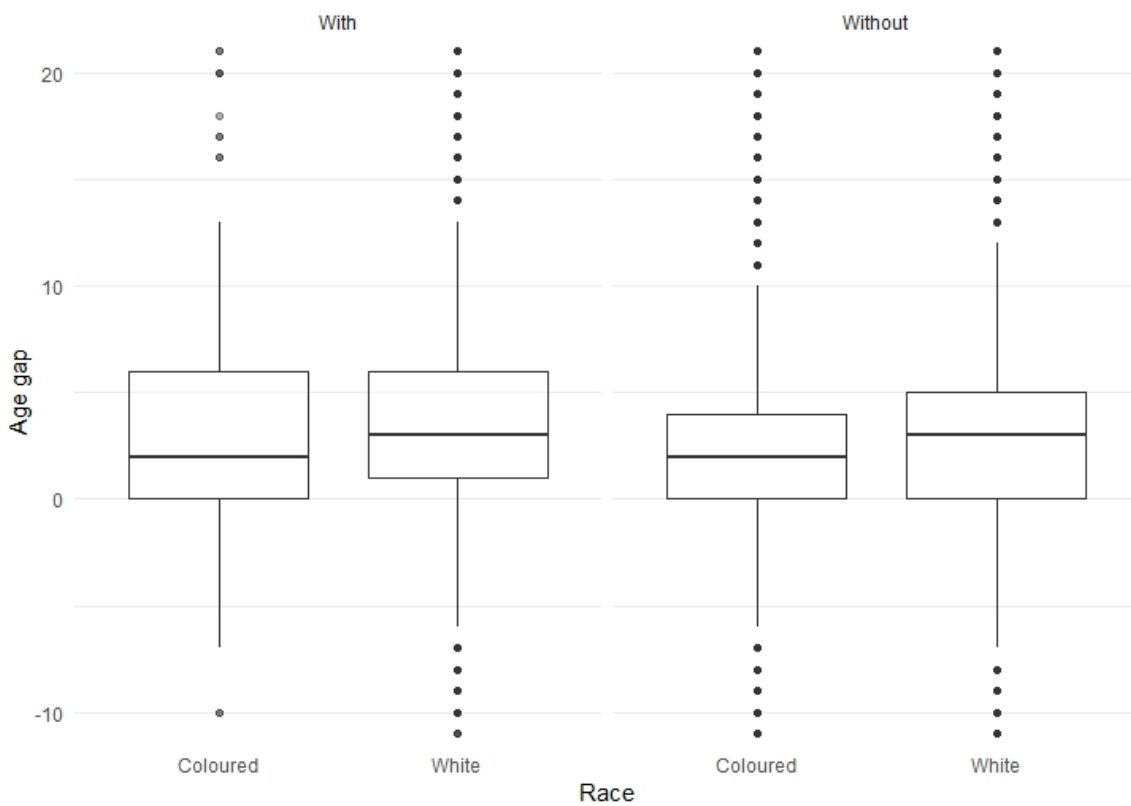


Figure 19: Age gap at marriage according to antenuptial contracts.

Source: Anglican marriage records, 1924–1960.

Figure 19 shows that age gap at marriage, a measure used by Carmichael and Rijpma to determine women's agency, was not smaller for those who signed an antenuptial contract. While a lower age gap at marriage is meant to indicate women's increased agency, it is clear from Figure 19 that for the period 1924–1961, coloured women had a slightly lower age gap at marriage than white women despite the fact that they hardly signed antenuptial contracts (which can be seen in Figure 15). The fact that coloured couples had such a low age gap at marriage creates a twofold problem. Either it undermines the use of the signing of antenuptial contracts as a measure of female agency, or it does so for age gap at marriage. Firstly, it could indicate that using the signing of an antenuptial contract as an indicator for female agency is ultimately flawed, because a lower age gap at marriage and the signing of an antenuptial contract did not coexist. Secondly, it could create a problem for the age gap measure of agency in that current literature on the coloured people in South Africa suggests that coloured women could not exercise as much agency as their white counterparts. In fact, their position was not favourable at all. Chapter 1, for instance showed that according to the Batson Household Survey, white working women in 1938/9 earned half of what white men did; coloured men earned half of what white women did, and coloured women, in turn, half of what coloured men did. In the city of Cape Town, poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, overcrowded housing, and marginalisation on the basis of race characterised the lives of most coloured people.⁸⁴ That said, coloured women did work outside of the home in greater numbers than white women did. One feature of working outside of the home is that it indicates and entails greater agency for women because they earned their own income and were more likely to be the ones deciding what to do with that income. This could also indicate greater equality in the marriage relationship without an antenuptial contract. Something that will also be discussed further in Chapter 6 is the existence of matrilocal or “mother-centred” households in the coloured community. Matrilocal families are characterised by a married couple moving in with the wife's family upon marriage. This meant that the husband was the newcomer to the family and had to submit to the wife's family culture. The fact that coloured women worked outside of the home in greater numbers (and from an earlier age) than white women seems to be the most likely reason for this low age gap at marriage. There was equality between young coloured men and women in that they both worked before marriage, and seemingly for a similar length of time.

⁸⁴ Bickford-Smith, Worden & Van Heyningen. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, pp. 33–7; 55.

The individual Batson Household Survey records could provide clues as to what made some couples sign an antenuptial contract, as well as what kind of couples were more likely to do so. I have manually matched couples in the Batson Household Survey to those in the marriage records (for all parishes) who signed an antenuptial contract (individuals indicated their religious denomination in the survey, which made it easier to see who would possibly be in the marriage records). There are two white couples that appeared in the Batson Household Survey for whom evidence exists in the marriage records that they signed antenuptial contracts. The first is a George John Champion (26), who married Mabel Kathleen Greenslade (20), on 19 January 1935 at St James the Great Church in Sea Point. In the marriage records George listed his occupation as “Fireman S.A.R.”.⁸⁵ By 1938 the couple lived in Maitland and their residence was named “Chez Nous” – French for “with us”. George was working for the S.A.R. as an engine driver and he earned just over £21 per month. Mabel stayed at home with their two-year-old daughter. Both George and Mabel were born in Cape Town. They lived in a rented house with one bedroom and two other rooms, which cost them £6.10s. per month.⁸⁶

Mr and Mrs Fargher are the second white couple found in the Batson Household Survey who we know signed an antenuptial contract. George Edward Fargher (31), married Marie Rosalie Jordan (30), on 18 December 1937. Both lived in Cape Town prior to their marriage. He was listed as a builder, but she did not list any occupation in the marriage records.⁸⁷ By 1939, they lived together in Wynberg and their house was called “Rosemarie”. George worked as a carpenter and earned just over £22 a month (sufficient to support a comfortable lifestyle). The month before he had earned £30 – a note on the index card indicates that he was paid per hour and that on average and depending on the weather, he usually only worked three weeks a month. He is the only wage earner listed in their household. Marie stayed at home with their first and only child, a daughter under a year old. They employed a daily (as opposed to residential) female domestic servant and at the time of the survey, they were living in a house that they were paying off. The house had two bedrooms and two other rooms as well as a garden, which they used to grow vegetables.⁸⁸

These are the only two couples I could find in the Batson Household Survey for whom there is evidence in the marriage records that they had signed an antenuptial contract. There may, of course, be more couples who were members of the Anglican church and who entered

⁸⁵ Marriage records: index id 1249, image id 158, parish id 555.

⁸⁶ Card 1361.

⁸⁷ Marriage records: index id 127, image id 42, parish id 566.

⁸⁸ Card 1775.

antenuptial contracts but for whom there will be no evidence of any such contract if they got married prior to 1924 because it had not yet become standard practice to formally acknowledge the existence of such a contract in the marriage records. Two things are immediately obvious about these two couples. Firstly, they both have a family income of exceeding £20 a month. Secondly, neither of the wives worked. Unfortunately, both of their marriages appear in the marriage records before it became common to record the occupation of the wife which may well mean that the wives had occupations before the birth of their children. Another glaring similarity between the two couples is that they are both white. There is no commonality between the ages of the couples or the age gap at marriage. The incomes of these households could indicate that only wealthy couples could afford to sign antenuptial contracts.

As mentioned before, according to the Anglican marriage records very few coloured couples signed antenuptial contracts. It is useful to take a closer look at those couples that did in order to see if there are any commonalities between them. To ascertain this, I will limit my sample to all coloured couples who got married with an antenuptial contract in one parish, namely St Peter's in Mowbray. The first three coloured couples who got married with an antenuptial contract at St Peter's (once the parish started recording the existence of antenuptial contracts) all did so between 1940 and 1950. The first was Joseph Wallace Ernstzen (50) and Catherine Wilhelmina Jaftha (25). They were married on 28 June 1941. He was a widower and listed his occupation as "printer". The printers listed in the Batson Household Survey earned between £3 and £9 per week (in 1938/1939). The lowest salary of £3 per week was 50% higher than the average salary for coloured men at the time according to the survey, which means that it was quite a lucrative occupation. Catherine's occupation was listed as "home duties".⁸⁹ The second couple was Nicholas William Adams (24), a cabinet maker, and Blanche Hendricks (17), a packer. They were married on 31 July 1948.⁹⁰ A possible relative of Nicholas, Joseph Elbert Adams (22) and his bride, a possible relative of Blanche, Daisy Beatrice Hendricks (22), got married in the same parish two years later, in 1950. Joseph was a furniture worker, and Daisy was a machinist. It could be that that two Hendricks sisters married the two Adams brothers, and that their familial proximity led them to both sign antenuptial contracts.⁹¹ Aside from their shared a surname, the fact that both Nicholas and Joseph worked with wood for a living could be interpreted as a further indication that they were related. It is important to note that the culture at St Peter's was not one that encouraged the signing of antenuptial contracts.

⁸⁹ Marriage records: index id 255, image id 133, parish id 519.

⁹⁰ Marriage records: index id 91, image id 202, parish id 519.

⁹¹ Marriage records: index id 133, image id 255, parish id 519.

Between 1924 and 1960, only 18% of couples at this church in Mowbray signed antenuptial contracts.

The second set of three coloured couples that married with an antenuptial contract at St Peters married between 1954 and 1957. The first of these was Gerald Leonard Fester (26), a medical practitioner, and his bride, Winnifred Mary Kannemeyer (20), a hospital nurse. Their marriage took place in July 1954. Perhaps these two met in the workplace.⁹² George Robert Edward Petersen (23) and Joy Margot Lynch (21) were the second coloured couple and they got married in January of 1955. At the time of their marriage he was an articled law clerk and she was a teacher.⁹³ The third coloured couple was William Albert Christian Arendse (56) and Christina Yon (45), who got married in October 1957. They had both been married before and both of their spouses had died. At the time of their wedding, William was a butcher's blockman while Christina owned her own café. It makes sense that Christina would have wanted to sign an antenuptial contract in order to keep her café in her name.⁹⁴ Christina and William were also the last coloured couple to get married with an antenuptial contract at St Peter's in Mowbray. A total of 574 couples got married at St Peter's between 1924 and 1960, 207 of them were coloured, but only six of these coloured couples signed antenuptial contracts.

There are some clear similarities between the coloured couples who signed antenuptial contracts. Firstly, all of the husbands had relatively good jobs – there are no coloured grooms who worked as labourers that signed antenuptial contracts in the St Peter's records. A commonality between the second set of three couples is that all the brides listed an occupation. There does not seem to be any particular trend in the ages of the couples, though there was an astonishingly large age gap of 25 years between Mr Ernstzen and Miss Jafta when they got married.

Income, therefore, seems to be an important factor in determining whether or not couples signed antenuptial contracts. The Batson Household Survey indicates that white couples who signed antenuptial contracts were living comfortably a few years after they married. The marriage records indicate that grooms in coloured couples from a specific parish who signed antenuptial contracts were all working employed in occupations that provided higher-than-average incomes. This could indicate that wealthier couples could buy agency.

⁹² Marriage records: index id 13, image id 255, parish id 519.

⁹³ Marriage records: index id 2, image id 261, parish id 519.

⁹⁴ Marriage records: index id 13, image id 299, parish id 519.

6. Conclusion

Despite the similarities in marriage trends seen in Chapter 3, this chapter finds a way in which coloured and white couples differed in terms of marriage. The Anglican marriage records have provided a glimpse into the use of antenuptial contracts amongst couples in Cape Town from 1924–1960. Along with other sources such as newspaper articles and the Batson Household Survey they reveal that the use of antenuptial contracts clearly had the potential to benefit women – especially as far as their property rights were concerned – but that these benefits depended on the terms of the contract and that not everyone had the means to sign one. Just as a small age gap at marriage did not necessarily represent the agency of coloured women in the city, antenuptial contracts were sometimes used to keep women from accessing their husband's assets (even when he was misbehaving). That said, the signing of antenuptial contracts did mean that women could maintain their right to own property, open a bank account in their own name, execute business, and to sue or be sued after they got married, which was not possible without the contract.

Various measures have been introduced to understand and measure female agency in historical settings. In this chapter I showed that one specifically delimited context – coloured and white women in Cape Town, South Africa, over the period 1924–1961 – introduces the potential for a new measure of women's agency, namely the existence of an antenuptial contract between couples upon their marriage. The signing of antenuptial contracts was most prevalent amongst white couples in wealthier areas of Cape Town which indicates, as would be expected, that wealthier white women possessed more agency than their poorer counterparts. Other measures, such as age gap at marriage, seem to be problematic in the South African context, as can be seen in the case of coloured couples who display a relatively small age gap at marriage – a fact that does not correlate with a historiography that presents a story of limited agency for coloured women in pre-apartheid and apartheid South Africa. The antenuptial contract could, therefore, be a more accurate measure of women's agency in Cape Town.

Trends that emerged among those that did sign antenuptial contracts are as follows: they were usually white; the practice was concentrated in certain (wealthier) parts of the city; more and more white couples signed antenuptial contracts over time and it does indeed seem to be the case that cost prevented couples from acquiring and signing an antenuptial contract. The *Report of the women's legal disabilities commission* of 1949 dedicates much space to explaining that most people did not sign an antenuptial contract because it was too expensive for them, or because they did not know it existed, or because they felt that it would not benefit them. In the case of coloured couples who signed antenuptial contracts it seems that word-of-

mouth/some relation to someone else who had signed a contract spurred others on to do the same. Another trend is that, from early on, it was more common for couples with foreign-born grooms to sign antenuptial contracts than it was for couples with South Africa-born grooms. While foreign-born grooms preferred antenuptial contracts to marrying in community of property as early as the late 1920s, for South African-born grooms, the practice only became more common than not in the 1940s.

By way of summary, two final conclusions. First, even before the amendment to marriage laws in 1953, marriage practices were already shifting amongst white Anglicans in Cape Town. From the 1940s onwards it became more common for white couples in Cape Town to sign an antenuptial contract than not. The change in marriage law, rather than triggering the actions of couples, shifted in accordance with already changed behaviour. Second, white couples could enter into antenuptial contracts because they could afford it. Ultimately, because of structural barriers, most coloured people could not afford the cost of an antenuptial contract even if they were aware of its benefits. The only way to provide women with certain legal benefits was to buy an antenuptial contract – which was largely something that only white couples could afford to do. In effect, this means that white couples could buy women's agency.

Chapter 5

Domestic service in Cape Town before World War II

1. Introduction

The subjugation of black women as domestic workers by the white ruling class during apartheid is a major strand of South African historiography. It continues to affect our understanding of their place in society, as approximately one million women in the country are employed as domestic workers.¹ Domestic work is at the centre of debates about privilege, oppression, and the legacies of apartheid and colonialism. Ena Jansen's recent book, *Like family* (2019), describes the complex relationships generated by domestic employment and has created a stir about the persistent social inequality associated with the job. Her latest research echoes observations made in other studies of female domestic servants in South Africa, from which the following quotations are a sample:

The fact that even the poorest of white families might employ an African servant established an incontrovertible racial hierarchy, lessening the likelihood of solidarity in other contexts.²

'White' women in Cape Town were able to take advantage of their privileged class position to enter higher skilled and paid jobs. Their relatively well-paid jobs probably allowed the employment of domestic workers to do the domestic work which was usually their responsibility.³

The employment of maids frees madams in various ways, not only to play golf and bridge, but to undertake paid employment, to be involved in the community – and to engage in academic research.⁴

Domestic service is often the point of entry to wage employment by newcomers to the job market; but others remain in the job all their lives. The labour itself is generally looked upon in society as inferior, servile, low in status, badly paid; those who can escape up or out, do so where possible. Conversely, it is the weakest and most socially subordinate

¹ "South Africa added 45,000 domestic workers to the economy last year," <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/298946/south-africa-added-45000-domestic-workers-to-the-economy-last-quarter/> [12 February 2019].

² Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 38

³ E. Boddington. "Domestic service in Cape Town 1891–1946: An analysis of census reports," Conference on Economic Development and Racial Domination, Paper 19, UWC October 1984, p. 8.

⁴ J. Cock. *Maids and madams*, (South Africa: Ravan Press, 1980), p. 1.

strata who end up in the job: women, immigrants, ethnic minorities. In South Africa, the people who ‘end up’ in the job are African women.⁵

Understandably, most of the research into the history of domestic work in South Africa has been and continues to be conducted from the perspective of the domestic worker rather than that of the employer. While in England domestic work was the most common form of employment for women until World War II, in South Africa this trend differed by race.⁶ For coloured women, domestic work was the most common occupation in the Union before and after World War II, after which there was a decrease. In 1936, 72% of employed coloured women worked as domestic workers but by 1946, this had decreased to 58%.⁷ After World War II the percentage of coloured women working as domestic workers continued to decrease as they moved into factory work and more black women moved into domestic work in the city. By 1960 56% of coloured women in the country worked as domestic workers.⁸ Although the largest sector of employment for black women for the first half of the twentieth century was agriculture, most academic attention has been on their role as domestic workers. For example, in 1946, 56% of employed black women in the Union worked in agriculture and only 37% as domestic servants.⁹ Despite the fact that most coloured women were employed as domestic workers in the first half of the twentieth century, they are largely missing from South African historiography.

In this chapter I look into some of the abovementioned observations regarding domestic workers in South Africa to demonstrate that Cape Town had low rates of employment of domestic workers in the late 1930s. This stands in contrast to the idea that “even the poorest of white families might employ an African servant”¹⁰. In this claim, the word “African” means black, but while this may be true of domestic workers in other parts of the country, in Cape Town most women in domestic service were coloured. In this chapter I use the Batson Household Survey to investigate the characteristics of coloured domestic workers and their employers in Cape Town just before the start of World War II. The aim of the chapter is to

⁵ D. Gaitskell, J. Kimble, M. Maconachie & E. Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender: domestic workers in South Africa,” *Review of African Political Economy*, (27/28 Women, Oppression and Liberation), 1983, p. 88.

⁶ P. Taylor. *Women domestic servants 1919–1939*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁷ *Union of South Africa Sixth Census, Volume V, Occupations*, p. 105; *Union of South Africa population census, 7th May 1946, Volume V Occupations*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1955), p. 105.

⁸ Theron, E. & Swart, M.J. *Die Kleurling bevolking van Suid Afrika*, (Stellenbosch/Grahamstad: Universiteits-Uitgewers, 1964), p. 39.

⁹ *Union of South Africa population census, 7th May 1946, Volume V Occupations*, pp. 191–193.

¹⁰ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 38

discover who employed domestic workers and who worked as domestic workers in the city as well as an investigation into the nature of that domestic work.

Census data reveal how many women reported that they worked as domestic servants at any given time. However, the rates at which they were employed (that is, how many employers of domestic workers there were) in pre-apartheid South Africa has not been explored. Many questions concerning domestic work remain unanswered. Did every white family employ a domestic servant? Were white women, employing domestic workers to keep their homes clean and care for their children so that they could work outside of the home? Were domestic workers employed to assist women in the home so that they could have more leisure time? Who worked as domestic workers? What did they earn? This chapter seeks to understand the rate of employment of domestic servants, the characteristics of their employers as well as coloured women's experiences as domestic workers. Although domestic service as a form of employment and the experiences of black domestic servants have received some academic attention, the employment of coloured women as domestic workers has not. The general objective of this chapter is to remedy this.

The main source for this chapter is the Batson Household Survey. While there are many possible ways to write the history of domestic workers in Cape Town for this time period, this chapter uses the Batson Household Survey data to explore various aspects of the lives of domestic workers and those who employed them. While others, such as Jacklyn Cock, have used interviews to gather this information, the survey data presents demographic, geographic and economic information relating to over 1 000 households surveyed as a representative sample of Cape Town's population (Jacklyn Cock used 225 interviews for her research).¹¹ The information contained in the data presents the opportunity to address questions such as, who employed domestic workers and how did their income compare to that of other occupations? The survey also shows where these domestic workers and their employers were born. This, for instance, shows whether immigrants to Cape Town were more likely to hire domestic workers or work as domestic workers. We can also see the age and relationship status of domestic workers – both of which cannot be seen in censuses. This information from the survey data is, of course, different to that which can be garnered from interviews, but it comes with its own benefits. It contains significant information that is not found in other sources. The survey is used in conjunction with newspaper sources and the Wilcocks Commission to explore the characteristics of domestic workers and their employers. In this study I include washerwomen,

¹¹ Cock. *Maids and madams*, p.

“houseboys”, and other forms of domestic employees as domestic servants or domestic workers because they are referred to as such in the household survey.

Section two below provides an overview of the existing literature on domestic servants in South Africa. Section three offers an analysis of the characteristics of the employers of domestic workers and the rates at which domestic workers were employed. Section four looks at who worked as domestic workers in the city and what the experience of working as a domestic worker was like. Finally, section five concludes.

2. Background: Domestic workers in South African historiography

The quotations in the previous section epitomise much of the literature on domestic workers in South Africa in that their focus is the exploitative nature of domestic service. This literature emphasises black women as domestic workers and fails to investigate the work of others. Marxist historians were the first to study domestic workers in South Africa. They did so in the 1980s when women’s history was an emerging sub-discipline in South Africa and these studies, understandably given the context of apartheid, emphasise the subjugation of black women. But literature written in the post-apartheid period has continued to focus on the oppression of black women as domestic workers. Some of the generalisations of the literature produced during the apartheid period include the idea that if women worked, they worked as domestic workers. A problem with both sets of literature is that they largely ignore two groups of women. The first group is coloured women, many of whom worked as domestic workers – especially in the Cape. The second group is the women who employed domestic workers. Marxist historians have theorised domestic labour as “a product of the complex operation of race, class, and gender divisions over time”¹² and their insights are largely theoretical. In this chapter I challenge current assumptions about and approaches to domestic workers in South African history, focusing specifically on pre-World War II Cape Town.

Jacklyn Cock describes domestic work in South Africa as a “a kaleidoscopic institution ... as it has involved slaves, San, Khoikhoi, ‘coloureds’, Indians, Europeans and Africans.”¹³ She charts how domestic work underwent significant changes from the time of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, to apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. The earliest evidence we have of a domestic servant at the Cape relates to Krotoa, a Goringhaikona girl who was taken

¹² Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender,” p. 96.

See also: J. Cock, *Maids and madams*; C. Walker (ed.), *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*; E. Boddington, “Domestic service in Cape Town 1891–1946”.

¹³ Cock: *Maids and madams*, p. 6.

into service by the Van Riebeeck family as a child minder.¹⁴ Cock finds that on the frontiers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, indigenous people provided (or were coerced into providing) domestic labour – as was the case with other forms of labour. In the Cape most domestic workers were slaves until emancipation in 1834. These slaves were replaced by emancipated slaves, or by European domestic servants (for those who could afford them). As the nineteenth century progressed, marked by the growth of urban areas and middle- and upper-class society in the Cape, the demand for white servants increased. Immigration schemes and a demand for labour saw over 14 000 British immigrants arrive at the Cape in the 1840s and among these were many domestic servants. Cock notes that these immigrants did not, however, want to stay in domestic service but moved on to other occupations as soon as they could. Some settlers also arrived with their own servants.¹⁵

Cock argues that from the 1840s to 1880s, domestic work went from being a predominantly white occupation, to an almost completely black one.¹⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth century domestic work looked different in different parts of South Africa. Gaitskell et al. used census data to show that in 1911, domestic work in the Cape and Natal had very different gender ratios. Three quarters of Natal's domestic servants were male and a quarter female whereas at the Cape it was the reverse – there were three female domestic servants for every one male.¹⁷

Although domestic work has been done by a number of different races, existing literature focuses almost exclusively on black women as domestic workers. More specifically, existing literature argues that domestic work has most often been dominated by amaXhosa women. Cock shows that amaXhosa women were pushed into domestic work in large numbers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards because of the Xhosa War (1850–1853) and the Cattle Killing of 1857. According to some estimates, 20 000 amaXhosa starved at this time and 30 000 turned in desperation to working for whites. These devastating events were followed by a series of natural disasters such as drought and the rinderpest in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which saw further increases in the number of amaXhosa women who entered domestic service.¹⁸ This predominance of amaXhosa women in domestic work has not been contested.

¹⁴ E. Jansen. *Soos familie*, (South Africa: Protea, 2015), p. 16.

¹⁵ Cock. *Maids and madams*, pp. 178;182.

¹⁶ Cock. *Maids and madams*, pp. 173–178.

¹⁷ D. Gaitskell, J. Kimble, M. Maconachie & E. Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender,” p. 96.

¹⁸ Cock. *Maids and madams*, pp. 202–203.

The experiences of domestic workers have also been studied anecdotally. Entering domestic service usually meant that amaXhosa women would have to relocate, moving from their homes in the Eastern Cape to their employer's farm, or townships on the outskirts of towns and cities from where they would travel to their employer's home daily. Some would live in – a practice which is still fairly common in present-day South Africa. These women often lived alone in a dwelling on their employer's property and would often not return home to their families more than once a year until their retirement.¹⁹ No data are available on the ratio of domestic workers “living in” relative to those who lived at home and worked at their employer's home in the day.

Over the past two hundred years, the type of work done by domestic workers has varied according to context and employer. For instance, domestic workers on farms could also assist in agricultural activities such as planting and harvesting if necessary. They would move between the home and the fields while those living in urban areas would concentrate most of their activities in the home.²⁰

In South African historiography, perceptions of the relationship between domestic workers and their employers have varied. The extent to which the lives of these domestic workers were intertwined with their employers, and especially their employer's children, led to many white South Africans in the past and today referring to “the help” as family. Seeing domestic workers as family has especially been problematised by white scholars. Evidence of this sentiment has been largely anecdotal. Ena Jansen finds evidence of the theme of black domestic workers as fiercely loyal and protective over the white children in their care encapsulated in the poem “Amakeia” by the Afrikaner poet A.G. Visser (1878–1929).²¹ The poem tells the story of a female amaXhosa servant who promises a dying settler mother to care for her child during the Sixth Xhosa War. The poem ends with the servant being killed while trying to protect the young child. According to Jansen, this poem encapsulates something that, even today, resonates with black and white readers alike. Cock, however, has questioned the existence of this sentiment in reality. She instead argued that relationships between domestic workers and their employers were varied and often strained.²²

Existing literature also emphasises domestic work as a form of employment that was avoided at all costs – that domestic work was only entered into in desperation. Iris Berger

¹⁹ Jansen. *Soos familie*, pp. 55–56.

²⁰ Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender,” p. 98.

²¹ E. Jansen. *Soos familie*, pp. 58–59.

²² Cock. *Maids and madams*, p. 87.

argues that there was always more demand for household labour than there was supply and that women were hesitant to take up domestic service:

African families, also fearing exploitation, were reluctant to allow their daughters and wives to enter domestic service; and black women themselves preferred more independent occupations, whether legal or illegal. For coloured women too, the demand for domestic labour generally exceeded the supply; while they predominated among domestic workers at the Cape, “complaints are rife ... of the difficulty of getting good servants.”²³

Berger further notes that, while there were some other forms of employment for white women in the first quarter of the twentieth century, this was not case for black and coloured women. She finds that specific jobs were usually reserved for specific genders and races – although there may not always have been a formal laws that barred entry.²⁴

Although existing literature on domestic workers focusses on black women, in Cape Town, most domestic servants in the first half of the twentieth century were coloured women.²⁵ Gaitskell et al. provide a graph showing that there were low numbers of African women in domestic service in Cape Town and that most domestic work was done by large numbers of coloured women.²⁶ This remained the case until the migration of black women to the city and increasing job opportunities for coloured women in the manufacturing sector, which shifted more black women into domestic service. In 1911, 31% of all domestic workers in the Union were black women.²⁷ This changed dramatically over the century so that by 1970, 79% of domestic servants in South Africa were black women.²⁸ Although coloured women constituted the majority of domestic workers in Cape Town for the first half of the twentieth century, they have received little attention. It is difficult to find sources that provide personal accounts of domestic workers in South African history. The Batson Household Survey provides an opportunity to understand how coloured domestic workers in Cape Town lived and who they worked for.

²³ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 22.

²⁴ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 23.

²⁵ “Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender,” p. 95.

²⁶ “Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender,” p. 96.

²⁷ “Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender,” p. 95; Jansen. *Soos familie*, p. 67.

²⁸ “Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter. “Class, race and gender,” p. 95.

The 1930s saw coloured domestic workers in Cape Town organise themselves into the Domestic Employees' Union. Their meetings were held in District Six²⁹ on Wednesday evenings and grew out of shortages of domestic workers in the 1930s.³⁰ Among their complaints that led to the formation of the union were a 50% decline in pay over ten years; working double time in two different households; lengthy and irregular hours, deceitful employers;³¹ unsanitary and inadequate accommodation; infrequent holidays, and wages. In the absence of legal protection, domestic workers were largely defenceless and depended on their employers' goodwill. It was not unheard of for employers to place a household item in their domestic servant's possessions so that they could be "caught" and discharged without pay just as the payment of wages was due.³² It is not clear exactly how long the Domestic Employees' Union lasted, but by 1940, they were struggling to find enough members.

In other parts of the world the number of employed domestic servants decreased dramatically with the invention of household appliances. In the USA, for instance, domestic service represented 18% of female labour force participation in 1930 but only 8% in 1960.³³ One study found that, in the USA, employing a domestic worker made people less likely to buy washing machines and that having labour-saving appliances such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners actually increased labour loads for women. Workloads increased for women because they were now expected to work outside of the home and still do all of the domestic work.³⁴ South Africa is of course different from the USA in many ways, and the uptake of appliances in the twentieth century was, comparatively, very slow. Much research still needs to be done on the introduction of home appliances in South Africa and the impact this had on the employment of domestic workers. Existing research shows that advertising campaigns for these appliances targeted poorer households that could not afford to employ a domestic worker.³⁵ Rebecca Ginsburg found that in affluent white households that owned home appliances, domestic servants were often not allowed to use them.³⁶

²⁹ District Six was a residential area in the centre of Cape Town with mixed-race residents. It was proclaimed a white area in 1966 under the Group Areas Legislation during apartheid. About 55,000 people were displaced over the following two decades and the houses in the area were razed.

D. M. Hart. "Political manipulation of urban space: The razing of District Six, Cape Town," *Urban Geography*, (9), (6), pp. 603–628.

³⁰ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 119.

³¹ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 119.

³² Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 119.

³³ G. Bose, T. Jain & S. Walker. "Women's labor force participation and household technology adoption," *UNSW Economics Working Paper*, 2020, p. 31.

³⁴ Bose, Jain & Walker. "Women's labor force participation and household technology adoption," p. 31.

³⁵ R. Ginsburg. *At home with apartheid: The hidden landscapes of domestic service in Johannesburg* (United States of America: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 68.

³⁶ Ginsburg, *At home with apartheid*, p. 68.

Most of the existing literature is based on qualitative sources that draw on the experiences of specific groups of domestic servants.³⁷ Exceptions to this are the works by Gaitskell et al. (1983) and Cock (1980). The former based their research on the censuses of 1911, 1921, and 1936, but still focus exclusively on black women as domestic servants. Cock's seminal study, *Maids and Madams* (1980) is based on interviews with 175 domestic workers and 50 employers of domestic workers in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The employers were predominantly white English women and the domestic workers, black amaXhosa women.³⁸ In her historiography of South African women, Penelope Hetherington mistakenly assumes that Cock's study was based on 800 000 black domestic workers in South Africa as a whole.³⁹ Despite being written in the early 1990s, Hetherington's statement about Cock's work still encapsulates the dominant trend in the literature on domestic workers in South Africa: "[i]n fact, the focus is largely on the exploitation and ideology of black women under capitalism, with less attention paid to black women in pre-capitalist societies or to the white women who are the employers."⁴⁰

In her master's dissertation about black female domestic workers and their employers in post-apartheid Soweto, Xoliswa Dilata echoes this sentiment about existing literature, saying that "[t]he focus of these studies has been on revealing the exploitation of domestic workers by their employers, focusing on the racial, gender and class divisions between the domestic workers and their employers."⁴¹ The focus of Dilata's work is on remedying the lack of research into the relationship between black domestic workers and black employers. She concludes that there are six defining features of this relationship. Firstly, that black African employers are fearful of employing a black domestic worker. Secondly, they seek a relationship of equality with their domestic worker, and use the word "helper" to affirm this. Thirdly, they employ domestic workers through informal networks, and therefore usually employ someone who is related to them or from the same clan. Fourth, employers often require their domestic

³⁷ See for instance: D. Gaitskell, "'Christian compounds for girls': church hostels for African women in Johannesburg, 1907–1970" *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6(1), 1979, pp. 44–69; J. Yawitch. "Black women in South Africa: Capitalism, employment and reproduction: Editorial collective of Africa perspective" (Honour's Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980) ; D. Gaitskell. "Housewives, maids or mothers: Some contradictions of domesticity for Christian women in Johannesburg, 1903–1939," *The Journal of African History*, (24), (2), 1983, pp. 241–256; I. Van der Waag. "Wyndhams, Parktown, 1901–1923: Domesticity and servitude in an early twentieth-century South African household," *Journal of Family History*, (32), (3), 2007, pp. 259–295.

³⁸ Cock. *Maids and madams*, p. 18.

³⁹ Hetherington. "Women in South Africa," p. 254.

⁴⁰ Hetherington. "Women in South Africa," p. 254.

⁴¹ X.P. Dilata. "Between 'Sisters': A study of the employment relationship between African domestic workers and African employers in the townships of Soweto", (Master's Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2008), p. 1.

workers to be live-in, and the workers often have very little time away from work. Fifth, the relationship continues to be characterised by exploitation, and inequality. Finally, employers struggle with their domestic workers not showing them the same respect that they show to white employers.⁴²

3. The employers of domestic workers in pre-World War II Cape Town

The employment of domestic workers is necessitated by the existence of housework. Laundry, cooking, cleaning, and childcare all need to be done by someone on a daily basis. Sociologist Ann Oakley has commented that, across cultures, women who do not work fulltime or employ a domestic worker are themselves usually fulltime domestic workers. This is of course not to say that they are *paid* domestic workers, but rather that their days are characterised by fulltime domestic work in their own homes.⁴³ Historically, at least in the past two centuries in the West, women have been responsible for the majority of housework, and mostly still are. If, for some or other reason, “wives” are unable to do this work themselves, daughters and domestic workers are useful substitutes.

A 1937 *Cape Times* article provides a number of useful insights into the way in which the relationship between domestic workers and their employers might have unfolded as well as the nature of the domestic work they were expected to do. The late 1930s saw a big drive in South Africa to promote the use of different electrical appliances for the home as the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM) expanded its power generating capacity. The author of the article, Josephine Alrick, related her experience of the “two-compartment unit with a large enamel-lined washing section and a centrifugal or spin-dryer type of water extractor”⁴⁴ which she had owned for five years, as follows:

For the first two years I had the machine I did the laundry work myself, for a family of six, with only the assistance of my two young daughters who, I felt, might with advantage be given a little practical training in this branch of housewifery.

I had previously employed a laundry woman for two or more days a week – depending on weather conditions – at 5s. a day, plus two meals and two teas. She refused even to try the new machine, and so did two or three others whom I tried, without success, to induct into my service.

⁴² Dilata. “Between ‘Sisters’”, pp. 90–93.

⁴³ A. Oakley. *The sociology of housework*, (Great Britain: Policy Press, 2018), p. x.

⁴⁴ Josephine Alrick. “My washing machine is five years old and has cost 2s. 6d. for repairs,” *Cape Times*, 26 January 1937, p. 8.

So, like the Little Red Hen of nursery tales fame, I did it myself,
 saving in wages alone, during the two years hire-purchase period,
 more than enough to meet the monthly instalments of £1 18s. 6d.⁴⁵

It seems that a housewife could use a washing machine to replace a domestic servant. At first Josephine saw the washing machine as something that could be used by a washerwoman but later she saw it as a replacement, with the added benefit of saving money. Josephine's story about trying to get the laundry woman to use the washing machine suggests that domestic servants could be moved in and out of employment relatively quickly. The purchase of a washing machine, and domestic worker's willingness to use the machine, could determine whether or not they would remain employed. The anecdote suggests that the introduction of labour-saving technology such as washing machines did affect the employment of domestic workers in Cape Town in very real and concrete ways.

The 1936 census shows that just over two thirds (12 706) of all employed coloured women in Cape Town were worked as domestic servants. Of the 3 285 black females over the age of ten in Cape Town, 1 132 were domestic workers.⁴⁶ The next biggest group of coloured working women was sewer/sewing machinist, with 995 women listed as such.⁴⁷ The high numbers of coloured women employed as domestic workers is also visible in the Batson Household Survey, where most coloured women are listed as domestic servants, washerwomen or factory workers. In the individual household surveys of their employers, domestic workers are described only by gender, title (name of occupation), and race. The domestic workers are, however, the only individuals visible in the survey more than once because they appear in the survey cards of their employers (although their names are not recorded) and in the survey cards of the households they were part of. In the survey cards of their own households, some of them report the name of their employer. The majority of domestic servants employed by white households were coloured women. Only six households listed domestic servants who represented other demographics: one household employed Asians, two households employed white females and three employed coloured males.

⁴⁵ Alrick. Josephine Alrick. "My washing machine is five years old p. 8.

⁴⁶ "Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter. "Class, race and gender: Domestic workers in South Africa," p. 101.

⁴⁷ *Union of South Africa Sixth Census, Volume V, Occupations*, pp. 110–111.

Table 5: The types of domestic employees in white households

Type of domestic work	Percentage	Number of households
Only live-in	39	60
Live-in + washerwoman	2	3
Live-in + cook	1	1
Only daily	50	77
Daily + washerwoman	5	8
Only washerwoman	2	3
Only houseboy	1	1

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

Less than one third (31%) of white households employed some kind of domestic help (153 of the 498 households), 42% of which were live-in domestic workers. Although three of the households that employed live-in domestics also employed washerwomen to assist with washing on a day-to-day basis, it was uncommon to employ more than one domestic worker. Washerwomen are also listed as “domestic servants” in the survey. The remainder of white households in the survey employed domestic servants who did not live in and listed their employees in a variety of ways such as: “domestic servant”, “charwoman”, “washerwoman”, “general servant”, “char and washerwoman”, “general”, “daily” or “maid”. These are classified into the categories in Table 5 above. In the 565 coloured households in the survey, 105 individuals are listed as domestic workers. Only 14 of these households (3%) are listed as employing a domestic servant. These employers are referred to later in this section. In his unpublished work (which forms part of his PhD thesis) on domestic workers, Kevin Elliott shows that Cape Town had a much lower rate of white households employing domestic workers than other cities in the Union. He uses the Survey of Houses and Servants Dataset (1950–1986) and finds that in 1950, only 20% of white homes in Cape Town employed domestic help. The figure for the same year in Durban, the city with the highest rate for the years 1950–1990, was just under 75%.⁴⁸

Table 5 shows that half of the white households that employed domestic workers employed daily rather than live-in domestic workers. Very few of the 153 households (only 12) employed more than one domestic worker and when they did, the most common

⁴⁸ K. Elliott. “The living standards of African female domestic workers in South Africa,” (Unpublished manuscript, March 2019), p. 11.

combination was a daily servant and a washerwoman. The employment of cooks and “houseboys” was rare. Charles van Onselen notes that, as with domestic servants, “it is difficult to generalise about the duties of a ‘houseboy’... Duties tended to vary according to the class of employer, the size and age of the family, the number of staff kept and the individual experience and attributes of the servant himself.”⁴⁹ The household that employed the highest number of servants belonged to the Japanese secretary to the Japanese Consul. They employed three servants: a cook, a nurse and a general domestic, all of whom are listed as “Asian” and could perhaps have come to Cape Town with the family.⁵⁰ An advertisement for a cook and a “houseboy” in the *Cape Times* a year before the survey was conducted shows that sometimes couples could be employed together in a household and provided with accommodation on the employer’s premises. The advertisement reads: “Cook-General and Houseboy Gardener, married couple preferred, for a modern home in Herschel-road, Claremont. Good wages and excellent quarters. References – Apply Waldorf Restaurant, St. George’s Street.”⁵¹ Further examples of this from the Batson Household Survey will be discussed in the following section.

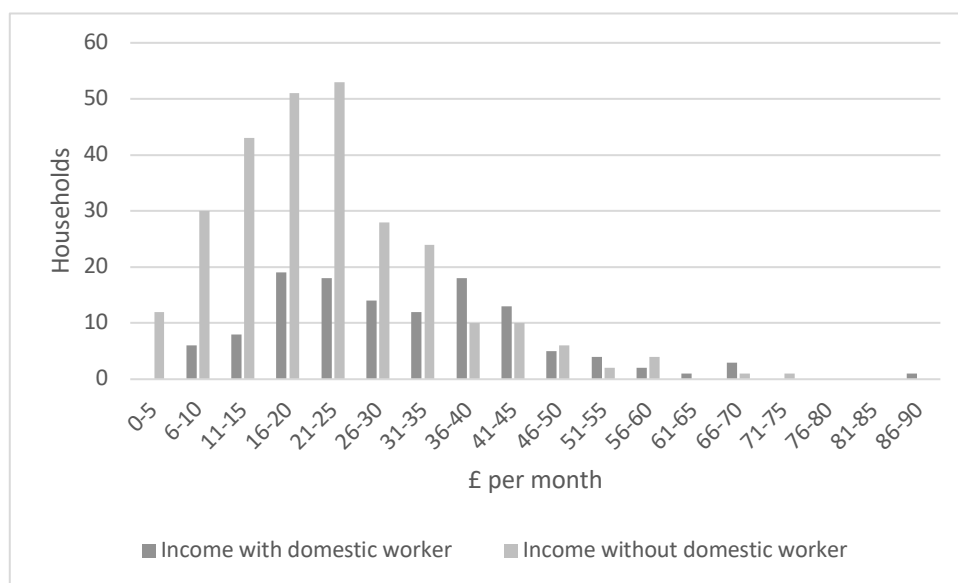


Figure 20: Monthly incomes of white households that did and did not employ domestic workers (DW).

Source: Batson Household Survey 1938/39.

⁴⁹ Research into the lives of “houseboys” in Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand show that they were often adult men. Some “houseboys” did much the same work as domestics did, but others could also be involved specifically related to the kitchen or work outside of the house.

C. Van Onselen. *New Babylon New Nineveh*, (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2012), pp. 239–240.

⁵⁰ Card 1975.

⁵¹ “Situations vacant,” *Cape Times*, 28 June 1937, p. 2.

One obvious difference between white households that employed domestic workers and those that did not, was income. Households that employed domestic workers had an average monthly income that was £9 higher than for white households that did not employ a domestic servant. Berger's statement quoted earlier, that "even the poorest of white families might employ an African servant", therefore does not seem to be true. This does not mean to suggest that all families who could afford to employ a domestic worker in fact did. There are a number of households in the survey with higher-than-average incomes that did not list domestic workers. The Jardine family, for instance, had a total monthly income of £71 (£49 higher than the monthly average for white households), but did not employ a domestic servant. The head of the household, Mr Jardine, ran a café called Outspan in Maitland with the assistance of two of his children – a daughter (31), and a son (30). Two of his other children also contributed to the household income: a daughter (21) who worked as a machinist and a son (24) who worked as a French polisher. Mrs Jardine is listed as a housewife, and the couple had one school-going son. Both Mr and Mrs Jardine were born in Madeira and had come to Cape Town in 1899 and 1903 respectively.⁵² Although this family could afford to employ at least one domestic worker, they did not – which seems to indicate that this was not a priority for everyone, or perhaps it was something they deliberately chose not to do.

Conversely, there were also households with lower-than-average incomes that did employ domestic workers, though it is possible that this appears to have been the case because not everyone within the household stated their income. For instance, Mr and Mrs Weatherly were a working couple who had no children and who listed employing a domestic worker. Mrs Weatherly (26) worked as a typist and listed her wages as £7 per month. Mr Weatherly (31) worked as a clerk and his income was not stated in the survey – which means that their household income only appears to have been £7 per month.⁵³ Other households with "low" monthly incomes that listed employing domestic workers include households headed by retired people who were no longer working and therefore no longer earning an income. Poor white families who participated in the Batson Household Survey did not, however, hire domestic servants. The fact that less than a third of white households reported employing a domestic servant further contradicts Berger's generalisation.⁵⁴

⁵² Card 1372.

⁵³ Card 1822.

⁵⁴ Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 38.

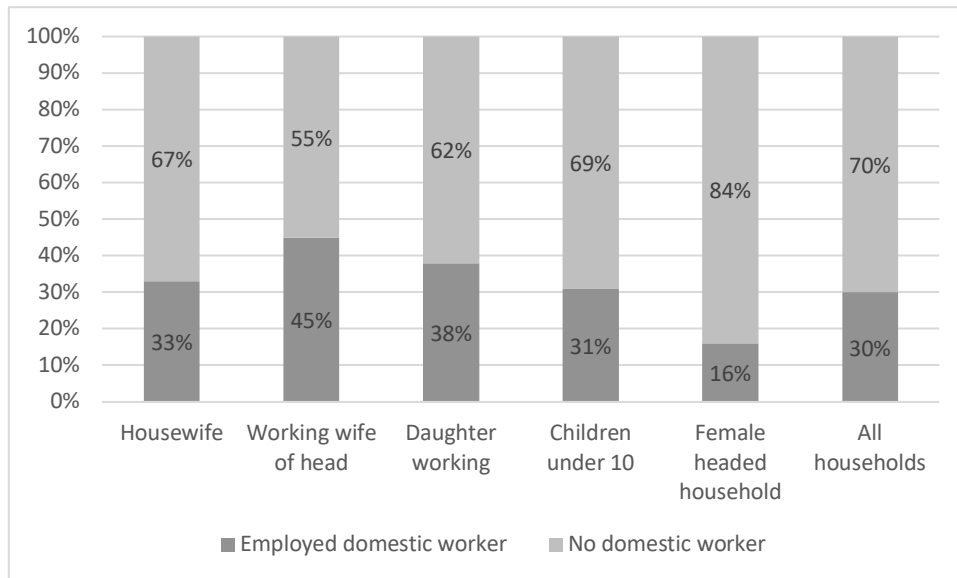


Figure 21: Types of white households according to domestic worker employment.

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

Another difference between employers and non-employers of domestic workers was the occupation of the wife of the household head. Some clear trends can be seen in Figure 22. The small group of households (29 out of 498) that listed having a working wife of the household head, had the highest rate of domestic worker employment. Something else that differed between employers and non-employers was the occupation of the wife of the household head. Surprisingly, households with children under the age of ten were not more likely to employ domestic workers than the average. Having a daughter who worked outside of the home made households more likely to employ a domestic worker and households with housewives were also slightly more likely to employ a domestic servant. Sixty five percent of households in the survey contained a housewife (wife of head of household not employed outside of the home). Figure 21 further shows that only 33% of these employed domestic workers. Working outside of the home seems to have been a strong reason for a woman to seek help with the housework. Finally, female-headed households were the least likely to employ a domestic worker.

Domestic servants freed young unmarried women who lived with their parents to engage in an occupation outside of the home. Young women who worked outside of the home, as opposed to staying at home and learning to be a housewife, seem to have raised some concerns, as was evident from the media at the time.⁵⁵ The Batson Household Survey shows

⁵⁵ A. Rommelspacher. "The everyday lives of white South African housewives: 1918–1945," (Master's Thesis, History, Stellenbosch University, 2017), p. 93.

that in Cape Town households, young unmarried white women's work was more valuable outside of the home. Their employment outside of the home was more beneficial for their household than it was for them to stay at home in order to perform domestic duties. Since it was the wealthier households that employed domestic servants, this could mean either that young women in those households were more likely to be expected to work before they got married, or that those households were wealthier because the unmarried daughters worked. It also suggests that these young women worked in order to earn money to pay a domestic worker to do the work that they would otherwise have been doing themselves in an unpaid capacity.

Once they were old enough, children in white households could and did offer some help with domestic work in white households. Figure 21 shows that households did not rely on domestic workers to a greater extent when they had children under the age of ten. It is clear, however, that on leaving school, sons and daughters were expected to find a job whether they needed the income or not. The survey required respondents to state (in the comment section) whether there were any children still living at the home who had left school but were not working. Miss Canning (19), for instance, was listed as a non-wage earner, but the comment section clarified that she "helps at home" and her brother (18) was "awaiting appointment to S.P.S. Battalion".⁵⁶ Such comments also reveal that while daughters were expected to help in the home, sons were not. There is not a single case, in white or coloured households, of a son listed or described as helping in the home. The surveyors also noted when there were daughters of school-going age in a household that were not attending school. A 15-year-old girl, for instance, was described as having "passed St.VI and helps at home".⁵⁷ She was part of a large family of seven who lived together in a house with only two-bedrooms and which could conceivably have required much domestic labour. There are also indications that family members of the employer sometimes assisted the domestic workers in the performance of their duties. An example of this is a Miss M. Van Niekerk's family of seven. Her fourth sister, the only one in the household who was not working outside of the home, cared for their sickly mother and the comment explained that she helped the domestic servant with housekeeping.⁵⁸

Households with domestic workers were slightly more likely to have a husband and wife who were both working than households without domestic workers.⁵⁹ Female headed households and female only households were, however, less likely to employ domestic

⁵⁶ Card 1607.

⁵⁷ Card 1685.

⁵⁸ Card 1303.

⁵⁹ Twenty two percent of working women in households employing domestic workers were the wives of the working head of the household, which is higher than the figure for all households, which is 18%.

workers. Only 76 of the 498 white households surveyed were headed by females. As Figure 21 shows, 16% of these employed a domestic servant of some kind. One example is Miss M. Van Niekerk, mentioned above. In 1938 she was 40 years-old and her income is not stated. She was unmarried, worked as a teacher and lived with her widowed and unemployed mother, unemployed younger sister, a nephew who was attending university, two younger sisters who both worked as typists, and an unmarried male lodger (37). None of their earnings were listed. They employed a daily domestic worker to clean the four-bedroom house they rented. An example of a female-headed household who did not employ a domestic worker is that of Johanna Croker (50) – a divorcee who ran her own boarding house. At the time of the survey, she provided lodging for two working men (both over the age of 60) and one non-working woman in her twenties who was married to one of the male lodgers. Mrs Croker’s income was not stated, but it is likely that she could not afford to pay a domestic worker to assist with the running of the boarding house and that she therefore did all the housework herself. Despite the fact that she did not employ any domestic help, she lived in a four-bedroomed house that she rented, and which also contained two “servants [sic] rooms”.⁶⁰

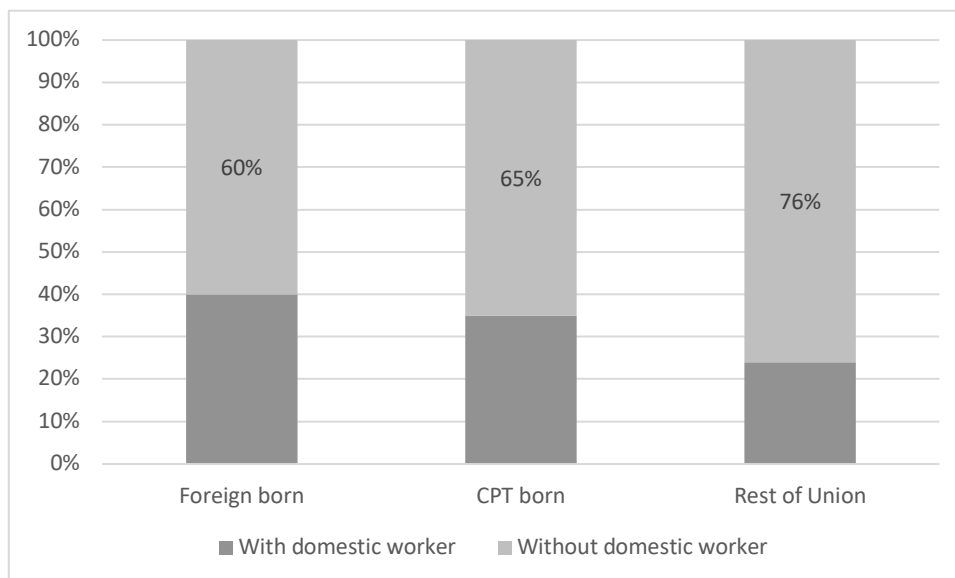


Figure 22: Birthplaces of white household heads comparing those who did and those who did not employ a domestic worker.

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

There are clear differences in terms of who could afford to employ domestic workers, and the types of households that employed them. Additionally, there are differences between the employers’ birthplaces and the employment of domestic workers. Of the 153 white households

⁶⁰ Card 1915.

listed as employing domestic workers, only 48 had a household head who had been born in Cape Town. This means that 69% of households who employed domestic workers had a head that had moved to Cape Town from elsewhere or immigrated to the city from another country during their lifetime. Figure 22 summarises this and clearly shows that white immigrant households were more likely to employ domestic servants than local white households. Furthermore, 40% of immigrant households that were surveyed employed domestic workers while 32% of Cape Town born households and only 24% of households headed by someone who had been born somewhere else in South Africa employed domestic workers. Household heads who had moved to Cape Town from other parts of South Africa were the least likely to employ a domestic worker. One example of an immigrant household that employed a domestic worker is that of the Jurowecki household. Mr and Mrs Jurowecki had come to Cape Town from Poland in 1927. Although they employed a domestic servant once a week, their living situation seems to have been difficult. They did not have any children, but they shared an apartment with other families. Mr Jurowecki worked as a baker and his wife, Mrs Jurowecki, explained that she was very ill. Mrs Jurowecki commented that “they can barely manage because [Mr Jurowecki] has to send money home to his aged parents in Poland.”⁶¹

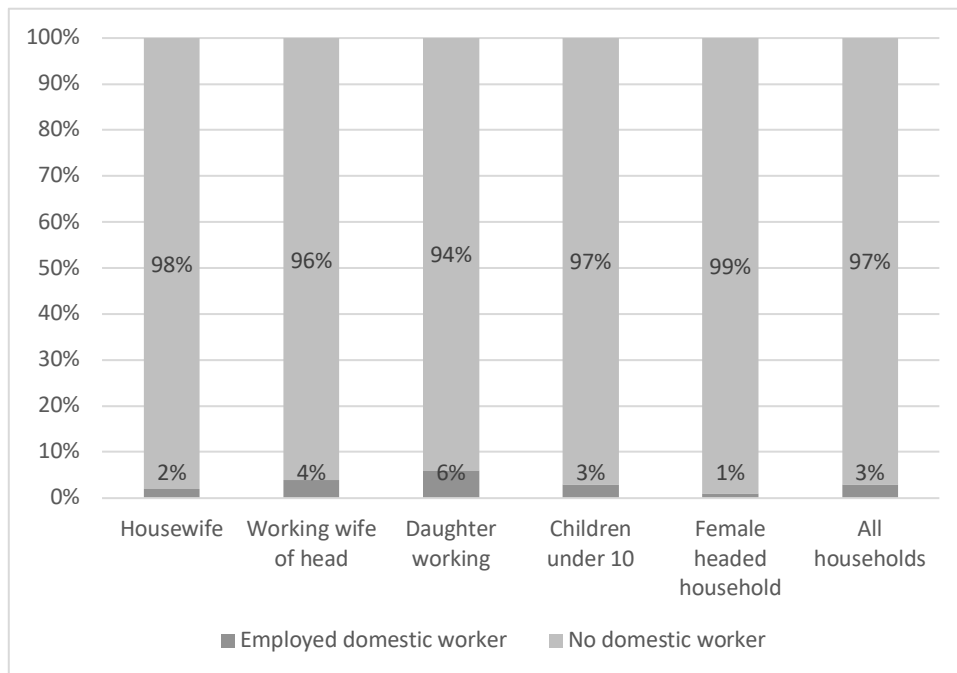


Figure 23: Different types of coloured households according to domestic worker employment.

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

⁶¹ Card 1995 (1/2).

Since the Batson Household Survey only recorded a few coloured homes employing domestic workers, it is useful to determine whether or not their characteristics correspond to those of the white households that employed domestic workers. Of the 565 coloured households surveyed, only fourteen (3%) employed domestic workers – a much lower rate than in the case of white households. Of these fourteen, four had a working wife of the household head. Figure 23 shows that the general trends discernible among the types of coloured households that employed domestic workers were similar to the trends among white households. Here, too, households with working daughters and working wives of the head were more likely than other households to employ a domestic worker. But unlike white households, coloured households who had a housewife were less likely to employ a domestic servant. More than half (55%) of the domestic workers employed by coloured households were live-in, which is a higher rate than for white households. The other 45% were daily domestic workers. Ultimately, however, this sample is too small to make adequate comparisons.

Just as in the case of white households, coloured households that employed a domestic worker had a higher average monthly income. The monthly income of coloured households that employed a domestic worker is £22 a month, while those that did not employ a domestic worker had a monthly income of £12. The difference in income, between those that employed domestic workers and those that did not, is similar to that of the white group, despite the big difference in average household incomes. One interesting case is of a coloured household that employed a domestic worker while one of its own household members worked elsewhere as a domestic worker. Mr. E. Ford (35) worked as a woodchopper and his wife (33) as a cook. They had seven children. Their eldest daughter (15) worked elsewhere as a domestic servant while they employed a live-in “general servant” to assist them with their household duties. The family’s total monthly income was just over £7 – which was lower than the average for coloured households. It is clear, however, that Mrs. Ford contributed the most to the family income – bringing in just under £4 herself – making it worth her working and employing a servant to do the housework and care for the children, as most domestic servants earned far less than £4 a month.⁶²

4. Coloured domestic workers in Cape Town

Of the 565 coloured households surveyed, 79 had a member of the household who was employed as a domestic worker. This section considers what these women did, who they

⁶² Card 1500.

worked for, and what they earned. These women listed themselves as “domestic”, “general”, “domestic servant”, “housemaid” and “charwoman” among other terms. The survey indicates that the type of work they did varied, and that their positions were diverse and tenuous. For instance, Sara Jacobs was a widow who listed herself as “cleaner and caretaker as well as charwoman” though she only named one employer.⁶³ Given the lack of sources, it is difficult to get a picture of exactly what a domestic worker’s average workday looked. An excerpt from the women’s magazine *Die Huisvrou*⁶⁴ (The Housewife), which was aimed at equipping housewives with all the information they needed to run a successful household, lists the types of tasks a domestic servant could be expected to complete in the course of a day, ranging from the preparation of meals to cleaning and caring for children.

Schedule for the servant:

Work begins at 07:00 in the morning

Prepare and serve breakfast

Discuss the meals of the day with the mistress of the house

Normal housework

Prepare and dish the midday meal

Organise the children

Rest until afternoon tea/coffee

Prepare and serve supper

Free time after supper and organise the kitchen

Sleep at 21:00⁶⁵

Domestic work was difficult for many reasons and the Wilcocks Commission provides an indication of the nature and perceptions of domestic work in the mid-1930s. It shows that other types of occupations were preferred by coloured women because of the long hours and other difficult conditions associated with domestic work. This excerpt also reveals a change in the nature of domestic work over time.

⁶³ Card 2501.

⁶⁴ *Die Huisvrou* was a women’s magazine compiled and published in Cape Town. It was in publication from 1922–1976. Its circulation, upon closure in 1976 was 12000 copies a month. L. Rabe, “Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van Sarie Marais as massatydskrif vir die Afrikaanse vrou,” (Master’s Thesis, Stellenbosch, 1985), p.8; A. Rommelspacher. “Food, nutrition and the Afrikaans housewife in *Die Huisvrou*, 1922–1945,” *Historia*, (65), (2), May 2020, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Rommelspacher. “Food, nutrition and the Afrikaans housewife,” p. 45.

Although there is a large demand for domestic servants, especially for Coloured [sic] females, the evidence shows that difficulties are encountered by both employers and servants. [...] Though certain advantages attach to domestic service, such as the value of the wages in kind and the training in home-making and general housekeeping, it has become unpopular. Many of the Coloured womenfolk are disinclined to undertake it, especially in urban and industrial centres, mainly because of the long hours of service, the absence of freedom it entails, the often inadequate sleeping quarters provided and the lack of social life. In urban centres factory work is often preferred because of shorter hours of work, fixed holidays, and, on the whole, superior cash wages.⁶⁶

Although the Wilcocks Commission was referring to domestic work for coloured women in the country as a whole, the findings of this section corroborate many of the points it raised as well as providing extra evidence regarding the nature of domestic work for coloured women in the city. The Wilcocks Commission also provided a rough scale of wages received by coloured domestic workers. It explained that the wages a coloured female domestic worker could receive would fluctuate according to whether or not there were black women in the vicinity who could do the work. For coloured women in urban areas, where there would likely be direct competition with black women for jobs as domestic workers, the Commission explained that the expected wages ranged from £1 to £1.15s. a month. In areas where there was not “competition” with black workers, the commission explained that coloured women could earn between £1 and £4 a month. It also explained that “the wages of domestics are almost without exception supplement by payment in kind, such as food, possible clothing, and sometimes, especially in the larger urban centres, sleeping quarters.”⁶⁷

The comments section of the Batson Household Survey provides a glimpse into the nature of the arrangements domestic workers had with their employers. Mrs Williams (49), for instance, worked as a “char and washerwoman” for “various” employers. She was a widow and lived with her four children, the eldest of whom was fifteen. She earned £1.4s.6d. a week and they all lived together in one room of a house. They shared a kitchen with the ten other households who resided in the same building. The card indicates that she had given birth to three other children, all of whom had died. Her son (15) sold newspapers and while she worked five days a week at different houses.⁶⁸ Vivian Bickford-Smith et al. offers another insightful description of one domestic worker’s relationship with her employers, which “ranged from a temporary resident from Britain – who lent her books and allowed her baby into the house – to

⁶⁶ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 70, par. 386.

⁶⁷ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 70, par. 385–386.

⁶⁸ Card 1894 (9/11).

a ‘screeching’ Greek immigrant for whom she worked for over 18 hours a day. The former treated her as a person; others referred to her as ‘the girl’...”.⁶⁹ Many coloured women who appear in the survey worked in two or more homes during the week, and the survey cards of those who employed domestic workers confirm that it was quite normal for employers to employ domestic help only once or twice a week.

Some comments reveal the varied daily and weekly routines of domestic workers and the extent to which the amount of work depended on who they worked for. Mrs L. Davids (31), worked as a “domestic” and listed her employer as private (she did not disclose the name of her employer). She had a husband and three children, and they were in the process of buying the house they were living in at the time of the survey. The comment states that she “comes home daily for 2 hours in the afternoon and sleeps at home.”⁷⁰ In another household, the woman who was employed as a domestic stated that she “comes home each evening and on Wednesdays at 2 P.M.”⁷¹ Other descriptions include the daughter-in-law of the head of a household doing “char” work one day a week.⁷² Another comment reveals interesting details about the life and routine of a young domestic servant who lived in. Miss K. Baxter (25) lived alone in a bedroom in a shared house when she was not working as a live-in domestic worker for the Woodhear family in Clifton. The survey conductor wrote that: “she does not cook on the premises for she has her meals at place of work. At present comes home to sleep while the employers are away on holiday, otherwise she comes home about 3 times a week.”⁷³ This shows that, even if they were live-in domestic workers, some did manage to go home a few times a week. It also seems to suggest that Miss Baxter may have cleaned her employers’ house daily while they were on holiday. To summarise, these individual cases in the comments section show that the domestic workers’ type of work, hours of work, and income varied greatly.

The demographics of the domestic workers in Cape Town also varied considerably. No clearly discernible group can be identified as representative of “domestic workers”, since, in the survey they represent a broad spectrum of ages, relationships and positions in households. The household headed by John Louw, for instance, had three wage earners: Mr Louw himself, his mother and his mother-in-law, both of whom worked as domestic servants even though

⁶⁹ Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century*, p. 194.

⁷⁰ Card 1534.

⁷¹ Card 1542.

⁷² Card 1051.

⁷³ Card 2022 (2/2).

they were both in their fifties.⁷⁴ Mrs Farquhar, a widow, worked as a washerwoman and lived with her two unmarried daughters, both of whom were employed as domestic workers.⁷⁵ Then there were also men who were employed as domestic workers and couples who both worked for the same family. An example of the latter is Jimmy Lucas (35) and his wife (35). Jimmy is listed as a “houseboy” and Mrs Lucas, with a salary of £12 a month, was the highest earning domestic worker in the survey. This suggests large variations in the earnings of domestic workers and this salary was much higher than the average bracket indicated by the Wilcocks Commission. In summary, during this time in Cape Town, domestic work was not something that was done by any particular demographic of coloured women (or men), but a form of employment that was open to anyone who was willing to take it up and something that coloured women entered into as and when they needed money.

Being employed outside of the home as a domestic worker reduced the amount of available time an individual had for domestic work in their own family home. Remarks in the comments section of the survey cards often explain how the rest of the family would operate when someone in the household, typically a wife or a daughter of the household head, was employed as domestic worker, as well as who in the household would be responsible for “helping in the home”. One such remark explained that the daughter of a particular domestic worker was “too delicate to go to work so cares for household in mother’s absence”⁷⁶. In another example, Mrs. Fester (53), was a widow who worked as a domestic servant and cook for Mrs Du Toit. She and her daughter (18) both worked outside of the home while her mother (83) cared for the home.⁷⁷ The daughters and wives of household heads were those who most commonly worked outside of the home as domestic workers. In some households, the wife of the head of household would stay at home as a housewife and while one daughter worked outside of the home as domestic, she would enlist the help of the other, usually younger, daughters in the home. An example of this is the August household. Mr and Mrs August had ten children, all of whom lived at home. Their eldest daughter (16) worked as a housemaid and their next oldest daughter (14) helped with the housework.⁷⁸

The varied nature of domestic work in Cape Town is also reflected in the wages domestic workers listed in the survey. How much women could earn fluctuated wildly and seems to have depended largely on their employer. One domestic worker stated that her “full

⁷⁴ Card 1180.

⁷⁵ Card 2081 (1/2).

⁷⁶ Card 1219 (3/3).

⁷⁷ Card 2102.

⁷⁸ Card 1087.

earnings depend on amount of work she gets – sometimes out one day (4/6) per week + sometimes 3 days p.w. at different rates.”⁷⁹ While it was often the employers who determined how much they worked, one domestic worker commented that her work depended on the weather. The description explained that she “does charring at Sea Point. Depends on weather, how many days per week she works.”⁸⁰ Young girls could work outside of the home as domestic servants and live with their employers while remaining linked to a parent household and aiding their families financially. In one such case the comment reads as follows: “Support from daughter – this is another young daughter (20) in domestic service, who sleeps in at her work. She gives No 9 [head of household] her earnings of £1–10 pm but No 9 must also clothe her out of that sum.”⁸¹ This shows that a young woman who worked as a domestic servant could be expected to hand over her wages to her parent. In this case, her mother was then expected to use some of that money to clothe her daughter.

Coloured households with a member who was employed as a domestic worker had a lower average monthly income than other coloured households. The average monthly household income for households in which one member was employed as a domestic worker was £9, which was £2 lower than for households that did not. There were, however, some exceptions. Two households who had a member employed as a domestic worker earned far more than the average. The first of these consisted of three working members – the head (25), who worked as a “delivery boy”, his wife (24), who worked as a domestic servant, and the head’s brother (24), who worked as a labourer for ESCOM. Together they earned £22 per month.⁸² The second household had a combined income of £31 a month and consisted of four wage earners. The highest earner was the head of the household (57), who worked as a salesman and earned £16 per month. The other three wage earners were his children – a son and two daughters, one of whom worked as a domestic servant.⁸³

Domestic workers often contributed their wages to a household in which a number of household members contributed to the total income. In the 1980s, Boddington notes that the *Report of the commission of enquiry regarding the Cape Coloured population of the Union* (1937) commented that:

⁷⁹ Card 1881 (2/3).

⁸⁰ Card 1074 (1/3).

⁸¹ Card 1949 (2/3).

⁸² Card 2843 (1/2).

⁸³ Card 2078.

[t]he Cape Coloured family in urban areas very often forms an earning unit, the income of the parents and one or more of the children being pooled to meet household needs. It does not appear to be exceptional for the contributions of a mother and daughter from domestic service or the washing of clothes and similar work to be as important as those of the “chief” wage earner, the father.⁸⁴

According to the Batson Household Survey, these “earning units” were common in white households too, and it was rare for “the father”, as Boddington calls it, to be the main wage earner in coloured households. On the contrary, in many cases, women employed as domestic workers were often also the head of a household in which the other wage earners were members of their family – often their daughters who were employed as domestic workers themselves.

There were many households in which at least one member of the household was a domestic worker, and which also consisted of a sick or invalid household member. Of the households that consisted of a woman who was employed as a domestic worker, 10% mentioned the ill health of a member of the household in the comments section. These descriptions include statements such as: “did not work fully owing to wife’s illness”,⁸⁵ “has lung trouble, does not go to school”,⁸⁶ “too delicate to work”,⁸⁷ “too sickly to work. Waiting to go to hospital for operation, cannot work again”⁸⁸ and “cripple from birth”⁸⁹. The details of the women who worked to provide a living for their ill or infirm family members provide additional insights into their lives and the way their working life affected their home life. One woman worked as a “domestic” for “various” employers; she was the only wage earner in the household and a comment says that her husband was “mentally deficient since the war and for 7 years he has been out of employment because of this defect.”⁹⁰ Similarly, Mrs Fontaine (35) was a widow who worked as a “charwoman” in the Gardens area of the city and headed a household made up of herself and her daughter (16) who was listed as “Simple – unable to get work.”⁹¹ The comment on the card also reveals that, although Ms Fontaine was not a live-in domestic servant, she worked until after six p.m. every day. The comment on the card also notes that Ms Fontaine’s sister lived nearby and looked after her daughter during the day and

⁸⁴ E. Boddington. “Domestic service: Changing relations of class domination 1841–1948,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1983), p. 115.

⁸⁵ Card 1051.

⁸⁶ Card 1285 (2/3).

⁸⁷ Card 1219 (3/3).

⁸⁸ Card 1049.

⁸⁹ Card 1471 (3/3).

⁹⁰ Card 1235 (3/3).

⁹¹ Card 2098.

shows that domestic workers usually worked more than five days a week as the comment read that Ms Fontaine “worked only 5 days last week”.⁹²

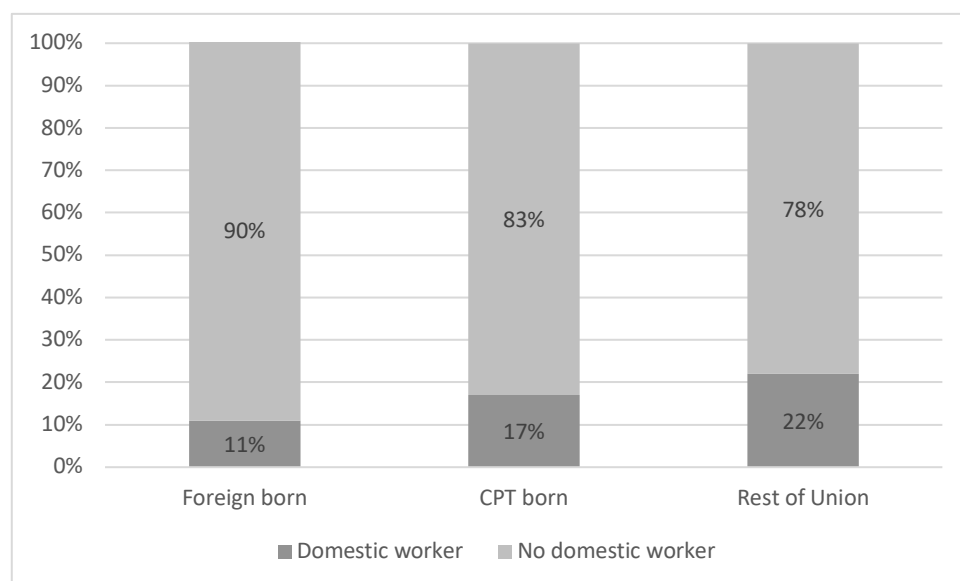


Figure 24: Place of birth of coloured household heads, comparing households that did and those that did not contain at least one person who was employed as domestic worker.

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

The Batson Household Survey contains details regarding the origin of the head of the coloured households. Figure 24 shows the place of birth of all coloured household heads and compares the birth places of household heads of households with or without someone working as a domestic. The data suggests that households that contained a member who was employed as a domestic worker were more likely to have a household head who had born in other parts of South Africa and moved to Cape Town during their lifetime. In other words, households that contained a domestic worker had household heads who moved to Cape Town later on in their lives, as opposed to being born in Cape Town or in other countries. Seventeen percent of households with a household head who had been born in Cape Town contained a domestic worker, while 36% of households with a head who had been born in other parts of the country contained one. This could indicate a number of things. It shows that upon arriving in the city, domestic work was an easy job to obtain. It could suggest, as others have shown, that those who entered domestic service were the most desperate for some form of employment and that, if given a choice, women would rather find other work.⁹³ This could indicate that being

⁹² Card 2098.

⁹³ Iris Berger writes that women still chose to avoid certain jobs: “When white and coloured women chose the mechanized routine of factory jobs over domestic service, and when black women struggled to maintain the viability of casual home-based economic activities, they were striving to assume responsibility for their own

employed as a domestic worker was often something done by those who were relatively new to the city, and therefore an occupation that was easy to move into, but not one they wanted to stay in. Coloured women who were born in the city were probably more likely to have had more options, and thus chose other occupations available to them. If the head of the household was born in Cape Town, they were more likely to have access to better jobs than those who had moved to the city more recently. Those who had moved to the city more recently might also have moved to the city because they needed to find a better financial situation and were therefore more likely to work in whatever occupation they could find. The Wilcocks Commission relayed that domestic work needed to be better regulated, especially in terms of wages because:

Even country girls [sic] who move to urban centres for domestic service, frequently proceed to factories after a time. The Commission is of the opinion that, in existing circumstances, domestic service in urban industrial centres as an avenue of employment is often not sufficiently attractive to induce the relation Coloured girl [sic] to adopt it as a calling.⁹⁴

5. Conclusion

Existing literature has made certain observations about domestic workers and their employers in South Africa. This chapter has sought to investigate some of those statements while investigating domestic work in Cape Town. One of these claims is that, in the past, most white households in South Africa employed domestic workers. This was not the case in Cape Town just before World War II.

This chapter used the Batson Household Survey to investigate domestic service in Cape Town in the late 1930s and, importantly, to determine who, and how many households, employed domestic workers. Existing literature has emphasised the extensive employment of black domestic workers without investigating their employers. Based on the Batson Household Survey, this chapter found that 18% of coloured households in the survey contained a woman who was employed as a domestic worker and only 31% of white households employed some form of domestic labour. South African literature has said little about the type of people employing domestic workers – or, in other words, who employed domestic workers. This chapter finds that white households employing domestic workers earned £9 more per month than those that did not – which shows that not everyone could afford to employ domestic help.

lives and for the well-being of their families in an increasingly hostile environment.” Berger. *Threads of solidarity*, p. 47.

⁹⁴ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 70, par. 386.

Additionally, some coloured households also employed domestic workers and their monthly income was £12 higher than the average monthly income for coloured households. It is clear that only those who earned a certain above-average income could, and did, employ domestic workers. There were, however, also a small number of households that had very high incomes, and could therefore afford to employ domestic help but did not do so.

The types of domestic workers employed differed between households. A substantial 42% of white households that employed domestic workers, employed them on a live-in basis. For both white and coloured households, those who had working wives or heads of household and working daughters were more likely to employ domestic workers. Surprisingly, households with children under the age of ten were not more likely to employ a domestic worker than other household types. Foreign-born, white household heads were most likely to employ domestic servants while those born in South Africa but outside of Cape Town, were least likely to do so.

Domestic workers themselves occupied varying positions within their employer's homes. It is difficult to generalise the experience of coloured women as domestic workers because of the extent to which their situations differed. The Batson Household Survey shows that one woman could work for a number of employers concurrently and that the numbers of days she worked changed from week to week and could be affected by the needs of their employers, or even by the weather. Some women who were employed as live-in domestic workers would be able to return to their family home a few times a week, others on a daily basis. The wages of domestic workers also showed great variation and some earnings fell outside of the scale presented by the Wilcocks Commission.

The demographics of domestic workers also varied considerably and ranged from very young women living with their parents, to widowed women and their daughters; from older female relatives who jointly formed a household, to young, single women living alone. Some households even had two or more women who were employed as domestic workers. A comparison of the average monthly income of coloured households showed that those with a member employed as a domestic worker earned less every month than those that did not have a member of the household employed as a domestic worker. Finally, the place of birth of household heads also revealed that those who had been born in Cape Town were less likely to have a member of the household working as a domestic worker than those who had been born in other parts of the Union. These findings confirm the observation that domestic work is not an occupation that women wanted to stay in, but rather, because of the bad conditions and low wages, a transient form of employment.

Chapter 6

What about the widows? Widowhood and family in Cape Town prior to World War II

1. Introduction

The death of a spouse often leads to a dramatic decline in the economic and physical well-being of the surviving spouse. It endangers the smooth operation of the family unit, as the survivor will lose the economic, service, social and emotional support provided by their partner.¹

Family systems are important because they are a key source of existing values and priorities and because of the willingness and ability of the family to provide the care needed by members as they age. In societies where family systems are strong and pervasive, people will perceive their own old age as inextricably tied to their families who are their primary – or perhaps only – source of aid and happiness.²

At any given time, an estimated 10% of female populations in the world consist of widows.³ This, of course, fluctuates over time and across societies. For instance, rates of widowhood increase dramatically during times of war. The lives of widows offer insights into the structure of societies and indicate how families operated within those societies. As the opening epigraph reveals, the death of a spouse causes major disruption in the lives of those who survive them. We saw in Chapter 1 that the male-breadwinner ideal was present in Cape Town society, but that the wages of most coloured men were not high enough for coloured families to conform to the ideal. For women in such a society, widowhood causes a twofold disruption – the death of a husband means the loss of a spouse and an income. When a husband dies, where does the widow live? Who does she live with? How does she earn a living? The Batson Household Survey provides the opportunity to observe widows in Cape Town just before the outbreak of World War II. This chapter seeks to understand the lives of widows in the city and determine to what extent the experiences of coloured and white widows overlapped at this time. Current

¹ F. Van Poppel. "Widows, widowers and remarriage in nineteenth-century Netherlands," *A Journal of Demography*, (49), (3), 2010, p. 423.

² M. Requena, D. Reher, M. Padyab & G. Sandström. "Women living alone in later life: A multicountry comparative analysis," *Population, Space and Place*, (25), (7), 2019, p. 2.

³ S. Hahn. "Women in older ages – "old" women?," *History of the Family*, (7), (1), 2002, p. 37.

literature finds that the experiences of widows are very much impacted by the type of family system they are part of. We have already seen that the difference in wages between coloured and white men and women impacted families and which households conformed to the male-breadwinner ideal. In this chapter the nature of family structures in Cape Town will be investigated in order to understand whether or not coloured and white households had the same family patterns and whether or not these family systems impacted their experiences as widows in comparable ways.

Studying the family is important because it is an essential building block of society. Throughout the world, the family has undergone radical changes during the twentieth century. Some believe that these changes have been for the worse. In the West, divorce rates have increased, birth rates have decreased and married women have moved into the labour force at much higher rates than ever before.⁴ Commenting on the implications of these changes, David Reher writes that “the way in which the relationship between the family group and its members manifests itself has implications for the way society itself functions. Politicians and public planners would do well to consider the nature of existing family systems when designing certain social policies.”⁵ He goes on to argue that family structures dictate the way in which people react to external events, such as losing their livelihoods. In Northern Europe, for instance, where neolocal family structures have predominated for the last few centuries, these countries are characterised by weak family ties, but strong governmental institutions. When someone in Northern Europe loses their income, the government has structures in place to support them. However, in countries in Mediterranean Europe, strong family ties mean that when someone loses their income, they will be supported by their family.⁶ Economists Alberto Alesina and Paola Giuliano have also argued that strong family ties are synonymous with bigger family size.⁷

This argument by Reher regarding family ties is influenced by the views of European family patterns popularised by pioneering historical demographers such as John Hajnal and Peter Laslett in the 1960s. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Hajnal argued that there was a line that ran from St Petersburg to Trieste that divided Europe into two areas with distinct marriage patterns. On the north-western side of the line he argued that the population was characterised

⁴ G. Becker. *A treatise on the family*, (United States of America: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 1.

⁵ D. Reher. “Family ties in Western Europe: Persistent contrasts,” *Population and Development Review*, (24), (2), 1998, p. 203.

⁶ Reher. “Family ties in Western Europe,” p. 217.

⁷ A. Alesina & P. Giuliano. “The power of the family,” *Journal of Economic Growth*, (15), 2010, pp. 93–125.

by older age at marriage and a high proportion not marrying. Laslett and his associates identified another line that ran from east to west. They argued that:

to the north of this line, households had been small and simple in structure, as they overwhelmingly consisted only of parents, some unmarried children and possibly servants, and marriages had been almost without exception ‘neolocal’, in that bride and groom set up their own household instead of staying with the husband’s family. To the south, by contrast, households appeared to have been larger and often ‘complex’ in structure, and it was common for newly-wed couples to start their married life in the parental home.⁸

An important, but less known aim of these approaches to family patterns in Europe, especially for Laslett, was to understand how households, or domestic groups, cared for vulnerable members of society, such as widows, the elderly, orphans and others in need. From this arose the theory that those living in neolocal family systems were left with less support from family members and that this necessitated greater external support. And from this stems the idea that the preponderance of neolocal families in northern parts of Europe was enabled by state support for vulnerable members of society, and in the southern parts of Europe, a lack of state support meant that these members of society were cared for by their families.⁹ These macro-approaches to family history came under fire in the 1990s and since then a number of studies challenging the model introduced by Hajnal/Laslett have been published. In some ways, Reher restarted the debate about these approaches with his abovementioned 1998 article about family ties.¹⁰

Such approaches to family patterns or debates about their application have not been addressed in the South African context. While I acknowledge that these approaches are not without contention, they have greatly influenced the fields of family history and historical demography. One of the few works on family patterns in South Africa speaks of South African families in terms of family ties.¹¹ But in South African history specifically, we do not know much about family patterns or widows or the extent to which their lives were impacted by family patterns. The Batson Household Survey data provides information on widows and family structures in the city. The number of widows in the sample, their ages, who they lived with, their incomes and where they lived are just some of the details provided. We can get a glimpse into the lives of widows who lived at a particular place and moment in time. The

⁸ S. Sovič, P. Thane & P.P. Viazzo. “The history of European families: Old and new directions,” in S. Sovič, P. Thane & P.P. Viazzo eds, *The histories of families and households: Comparative European dimensions* (Netherlands: Brill, 2015), p. 2.

⁹ Sovič, Thane & Viazzo. “The history of European families,” pp. 3–4.

¹⁰ Sovič, Thane & Viazzo. “The history of European families,” pp. 6–8.

¹¹ B. Nkosi & P. Daniels. “Family strengths: South Africa,” *Marriage & Family Review*, (41), (1–2), 2007, p. 13.

survey also provides information regarding the types of families these widows belonged to, and the impact of their financial situation on the structure of their family. This chapter uses family patterns as a point of entry to understand important aspects of widows' lives in Cape Town just before the outbreak of World War II. It also addresses the question of whether widowhood impacted coloured and white women in the same way given the potentially different family systems at play and the fact that women of different races had very different opportunities and lifestyles in many other respects.

After the introduction, there are four sections in this chapter. Section two provides an overview of the literature on family patterns and widows. Section three investigates the family patterns in Cape Town. Section four aims to establish whether or not there were differences in the experiences of coloured and white widows in the city. Section five concludes and suggests that family ties were at the root of widows' experiences in Cape Town.

2. Background: Family systems and widows

The city of Cape Town has a rich and complicated cultural heritage as a result of its turbulent history. This also means that we can expect to find many different family systems among its inhabitants in the city's past. Cape Town has a colonial heritage, with strong religious and cultural links to Europe – specifically the United Kingdom and the Netherlands – and a history of immigration, with different nationalities arriving at different times. The city is situated in sub-Saharan Africa, had Muslim influences (the result of a history of slavery and political prisoners brought from South-East Asia) and a history of complex relationships between settlers, freed slaves, indigenous people groups and indigenous communities. Contemporary research on South African family systems finds that “there is a paucity of data regarding South African families.”¹² Current consensus on family structures is that various segregation laws and migratory labour in the twentieth century, such as the Land Act of 1913, and migrant labour practices in the twentieth century eroded traditional African family structures. Furthermore, the idea is that all members of South African society, including the urban middle and working classes, experienced forces which should weaken family ties.¹³

Although black households do not feature in this thesis (there were very few black people living in Cape Town during the period under study), the role of African family systems should not be ignored. African family systems, like the Southern European family systems

¹² Nkosi & Daniels. “Family strengths: South Africa,” p. 13.

¹³ Nkosi & Daniels. “Family strengths: South Africa,” p. 13.

mentioned early, are characterised by strong family ties. Researchers Nkosi and Daniels distinguish between Western and African family structures.

The foundation of Western family structures is the institution of marriage as is based on the principle of individualism and independence. African family systems are predominantly extended families, and this term refers to a 'collectivity of people who live together, whose relationship could be traced through kinship or marriage and who considered themselves family.'¹⁴

Nkosi and Daniels conclude that, despite the many aspects of South African society that eroded family ties in the twentieth century, the country was characterised by a culture of strong family ties at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They do not differentiate between racial or cultural groups, but concluded that South African society as a whole is marked by strong family ties.

There are a number of factors that determine family structures. Steven Ruggles argued that some of these factors, such as the availability of kin, are obvious. It is very unlikely that a thirty-year-old woman will live with her married daughter because it is very unlikely that a thirty-year-old woman will have a married daughter. He explains that "in the nineteenth century, widows, widowers, older bachelors and spinsters, and orphans were much more likely to reside with extended relatives than was the rest of the population because they had no nuclear family with whom they could reside."¹⁵ Ruggles divides the determinants of family structure into two groups.

First, there are the demographic factors, narrowly conceived. This includes all of those variables that can affect the frequency and characteristics of living kin available for coresidence. The second category consists of everything else; it encompasses all influences on family structure which are not a function of the structure of the pool of available kin.¹⁶

Sociologist Göran Therborn outlines seven major family systems in the world. While not all seven types are relevant here, it is necessary to understand the four that could be most influential in South Africa, and more specifically, Cape Town. The first is the *Christian-*

¹⁴ Nkosi & Daniels. "Family strengths: South Africa," pp. 14–15.

¹⁵ S. Ruggles. "The availability of kin and the demography of historical family structure," *Historical Methods*, (19), (3), 1986, p. 93.

¹⁶ Ruggles. "The availability of kin," p. 94.

European family, synonymous with the “Western family pattern”. This family system is characterised by monogamy, individual freedom to choose a marital partner, the formation of a new household upon marriage, and the acceptability of non-marriage (that is, alternative arrangements such as never marrying or cohabiting with a partner). Therborn argues that this family pattern, because of its features such as the “freedom to marry, or not, monogamy, neolocality, and bilateral descent and inheritance (even if unequal), each and all gave Western European women a much stronger hand than their sisters elsewhere.”¹⁷ This family pattern was introduced to Cape Town by colonial authorities and immigrants to the city.

The second family system that had, and continues to have, an influence in South Africa, and especially Cape Town, is the *Islamic West Asian/North African* family. Islam was and is particularly prevalent amongst the coloured community in Cape Town. Within this family system, marriage, although viewed as a contract as opposed to a sacrament, is regulated by the holy law. Sexuality is controlled by a marital order and endogamy results in close and strong family ties (by the end of the twentieth century a third of all marriages in Egypt and a fifth of marriages in the Arabian Peninsula were between first cousins).¹⁸ While certain aspects of marriage may differ between Muslim communities across the globe, these elements are strictly aligned with Islamic law. Therborn explains that this law expresses “a general principle of male superiority” and emphasises it “in a number of concrete rules, of male guardianship, of delimited polygyny, of divorce by male repudiation, and of the patrilineal appurtenance of children.”¹⁹

The third family system that is pertinent to the South African context is the *sub-Saharan African* family pattern, of which one of the most noticeable features is the widespread practice of polygyny. While in other areas of the world (such as South Asia), dowry payments by the bride’s family to the groom or his family predominate, marriages in sub-Saharan Africa are characterised by payments to the family of the future bride. While within this pattern there is no system to control premarital female sexuality, Therborn argues that “sub-Saharan families are widely subject to strong and harsh male power.”²⁰ This generalisation has been contested by Kok, who suggests that “husbands had a more ambiguous and marginal role in these systems.”²¹

¹⁷ G. Therborn. “Family systems of the world: Are they converging,” in J. Treas, J. Scott & M. Richards (eds), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to the sociology of families*, (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014), p. 4.

¹⁸ Therborn. “Family systems of the world,” p. 4.

¹⁹ Therborn. “Family systems of the world,” p. 6.

²⁰ Therborn. “Family systems of the world,” p. 8.

²¹ Kok. “Women’s agency in historical family systems,” p. 31.

The fourth and final family system that is relevant to South Africa, and specifically Cape Town, is the *Creole family* system. This pattern, Therborn explains, was born out of a “violent encounter, of subjugated, enslaved, or enserfed African and American Indian populations with European conquerors and masters.”²² Although Therborn frames this family system in terms of American colonial history, the Cape Colony was the site of similar experiences. This system is characterised by “lower rates of marriage, much higher rates of informal cohabitation and extramarital births, more union instability, and more mother-centered families and kin than among white compatriots and comparable overwhelmingly white societies.”²³ Matrilineal societies or groups present more opportunities for female agency.²⁴ Vetrees Malherbe argues that in Cape Town, the slave and ex-slave population of the nineteenth-century was characterised by high rates of illegitimacy, which she ascribes to the Cape’s history of slavery.²⁵

One of the results of feminist movements in the twentieth century has been an increase in scholarship on unmarried women. In this scholarship, the Western woman’s life before and after marriage has been emphasised as one of independence and isolation. Slater also explains that there is an understandable difference between the lives of widows who belong to different socio-economic classes: “The upper-class widow has always been different, because she is the repository of significant wealth, but the middle-class mainstream Western widow who is old today is a social victim. Her desolation has a dimension that is missing in Africa.”²⁶ While there are many differences, a similarity between African and Western contexts is that the children of widows are integral to their care. Care from children does vary, though, and the children of widows can generally only support their mothers if they themselves are old enough to work.

Although some literature paints widows in Western family systems as being marginalised, Beatrice Moring and Richard Wall contradict this idea and write that “it cannot be denied that in historical studies women tend to be associated with poverty, old age, illness and death.”²⁷ They explain this as a tendency by gender historians to focus on narratives of oppression and clarify that “even in volumes disputing female stereotypes, failing economic power has been seen as a characteristic of old widows, as well as the limitation of their freedom

²² Therborn. “Family systems of the world,” p. 8.

²³ Therborn. “Family systems of the world,” p. 8.

²⁴ Therborn. “Family systems of the world,” p. 48.

²⁵ Malherbe. “Ten reasons for not marrying,” pp. 210–211.

²⁶ Potash (ed). *Widows in African societies*. p. xx.

²⁷ B. Moring & R. Wall. *Widows in European economy and society, 1600–1920*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), p. 5.

by society, church and family.”²⁸ Moring has found evidence to oppose this idea of the lonely and helpless widow in her work on rural widows in Nordic countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She finds that women who had land had economic security that lasted into widowhood.²⁹ Although literature on European women usually sees the experience of widowhood as wholly detrimental to women, there is a literature that argues that widows in sub-Saharan African societies have had a relatively better status and generally experienced more freedom than married women in those same societies.³⁰ This difference in the experience of widowhood is attested to very different family systems. Miriam Slater argues, regarding African widows, that “it is common wisdom in comparative ethnology and sociology that kin-based societies offer a corporate safety net for widows and orphans.”³¹ However, in her work on aging in sub-Saharan Africa, Christine Oppong shows that a lack of certain resources can also lead to increased familial ties. For instance, she writes that “low levels of technology and domestic resources (energy, piped water, etc.) have necessitated close cooperation between the generations in domestic and subsistence tasks on family farms.”³² It is conceivable that limited access to resources (especially in the form of wages) in Cape Town could have had the same effect.

Existing literature on widows in South Africa has focussed on the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. There are three works that specifically deal with the history of widows in South Africa. Von Fintel et al. find that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women in the Cape benefitted from becoming widows – something which is not usually the case in societies dominated by a Christian-European society. These women benefitted economically upon the death of their husbands because of the way in which they could make use of Roman Dutch inheritance laws.³³ Laura Mitchell has researched widows on the frontier and, almost as an aside, comments that those born on the frontier showed “more outward signs of conformity to European-based norms than their parents did”.³⁴ Mitchell uses

²⁸ Moring & Wall. *Widows in European economy and society*, p. 5.

²⁹ B. Moring. “Rural widows, economy and co-residence in the 18th and 19th centuries,” *The History of the Family*, (15), 2010, pp. 239–254.

³⁰ M. K. Slater (Foreword) in B. Potash (ed). *Widows in African societies: Choices and constraints*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. xv.

³¹ Potash (ed). *Widows in African societies*. p. xvi.

³² C. Oppong. “Familial roles and social transformations: Older men and women in sub-Saharan Africa,” *Research on Aging*, (28), (6), 2006, p. 655.

³³ D. Von Fintel, S. Du Plessis & A. Jansen. “The wealth of Cape Colony widows: Inheritance laws and investment responses following male death in the 17th and 18th Centuries,” *Economic History of Developing Regions*, (28), (1), 2018, pp. 87–108.

³⁴ L. J. Mitchell. “‘This is the mark of the widow’: Domesticity and frontier conquest in colonial South Africa,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, (28), (1/2), 2007, p. 50.

a selection of probate inventories for one family, focussing on widows, and she arrives at the conclusion that women and domesticity were central to “colonial encounters”³⁵. She writes that “Margaretha Passman’s porcelain plates and Hester Smit’s copper saucepan are symbols of frontier conflict, iconic representations of the culture they helped to forge on the frontier – a way in which widows left their mark.”³⁶ Both of these studies focus on white women in a colonial setting and find that widows experienced favourable circumstances within their societies. In a third study, Wayne Dooling looks at property transfer for the period 1750–1834 and finds that women, especially widows, were central to class formation at the Cape. Widowhood was something most settler women experienced and in this process, many of them inherited considerable property.³⁷

In the broader literature, widows are often depicted as those in need of care or support from relatives or others. The stereotype is of an old and needy women who no longer has a husband to take care of her. In Europe in the Early Modern Age, this resulted in “the stigmatization of women of advanced age (regardless of their actual biological age) as evil witches or sorceresses in league with the devil.”³⁸ Widows (and unmarried women in general) often do not fit neatly into our understanding of how societies function or how we believe they should function. Historian Sylvia Hahn writes that “[s]imilar to the situation of single women, widows also do not conform to society’s norms and rules, among the most fundamental of which are marriage and the family community.”³⁹ Historically, a common pattern amongst widows in urban contexts in Western Europe, and something that is also true of widows in this chapter, is that they shared their household with their unmarried children. However, in nineteenth-century Europe this arrangement did not last, and about two thirds of widows over 60 lived alone or with strangers and not with their children.⁴⁰

Religion plays a big role in our current understanding of family structures and how widows function in society. Reher, and other proponents of the European Marriage Pattern (EMP), argued that the Protestant Reformation and, later, Calvinism saw marriage as a partnership between two individuals, which encouraged independence from their parents. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, continued to encourage loyalty to the family and respect

³⁵ Mitchell. “‘This is the mark of the widow’,” p. 68.

³⁶ Mitchell. “‘This is the mark of the widow’,” p. 69.

³⁷ W. Dooling. “The making of a colonial elite: Property, family and landed stability in the Cape Colony, c.1750–1834,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (31), (1), 2005, pp. 147–162.

³⁸ Hahn. “Women in older ages – “old” women?,” p. 34.

³⁹ Hahn. “Women in older ages – “old” women?,” pp. 35–36.

⁴⁰ Hahn. “Women in older ages – “old” women?,” p. 48.

for the authority of parents.⁴¹ Protestant societies are associated with weak family ties, with children moving out of the home as soon as they get married, while Catholic societies display strong family ties, characterised by multigenerational households, revolving around ideas of marriage and family. Religion, therefore, has definite implications for the interpretation of the experiences of widows and their families in Cape Town. Protestant denominations dominated the Cape Town area, and most of South Africa, for the first half of the twentieth century. We would expect then that weak family ties would exist in Cape Town in the early twentieth century amongst protestant society, and that white widows would live alone. But there are many complicating factors. Cape Town experienced high levels of immigration during this time period. Great cultural and religious diffusion, therefore, makes it much harder to compare families and widows. However, because the city's pre-World War II population mostly consisted of coloured and white people, there is an opportunity to compare widows of the two races to establish what the similarities and differences in their experiences were.

3. Family patterns in Cape Town

Family systems typically define what it means to be related by blood, or descent, and by marriage; who should live with whom at which stages of the life course; the social, sexual, and economic rights and obligations of individuals occupying different kin positions in relation to each other and the division of labour among kin related individuals.⁴²

In order to understand the position of widows in Cape Town society, it is first important to establish what types of family patterns existed in the city and how widows fitted into them. Given the history of the city, it is expected that the Christian-European and Creole family patterns would have been the most prevalent amongst coloured and white households. As mentioned earlier, the Christian-European family pattern is characterised by the establishment of a new household upon marriage (neolocal family) that consists of a nuclear family only, while the Creole family pattern is characterised by matrilineal households that consist of an extended family living together in one household. In his 1963 survey of coloured people in South Africa S.P. Cilliers, commented that there were significant differences in the family structures within the coloured community. He argued that these differences could be attested to class and that they related to power dynamics within families. He wrote that “mother-centered

⁴¹ Reher. “Family ties in Western Europe,” p. 214.

⁴² K. O. Mason. “Gender and family systems in the fertility transition,” *Population and Development Review*, (27), 2001, p. 161.

and/or mother dominated families predominate amongst the lower class in contrast to a more father-dominated and equalitarian family pattern among the higher social classes.”⁴³ As such, the white households are expected to have conformed to the Christian-European family pattern and the coloured households to a combination of the Christian-European and Creole family patterns.

Table 6: Dominant type of families in pre-World War II Cape Town.

Type of family	Coloured %	White %
Extended	19	16
Matrilocal	2	1
Neolocal	78	82
Patrilocal	1	1
Total	100	100

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

To determine the prevalent types of families in Cape Town, each household was categorised either as extended, matrilocal, neolocal or patrilocal. The category “Extended” includes all households in which three generations or more lived together and/or with other members of the extended family, such as the cousins, adult siblings, nieces, and nephews of the household head. “Matrilocal” households are those in which the married daughter of the head of household and her husband live with her parents. “Patrilocal” households are those in which the married son of the head and his wife stay with his parents. “Neolocal” households are those in which a couple starts a new household upon marriage and live with their unmarried children until these in turn start (or are expected to start) a new household upon their marriage. Table 6 shows that the differences in family patterns between coloured and white families are not as dramatic as expected; in fact, coloured and white family types were very similar. Most families in Cape Town were neolocal families, that is, they lived in households composed of a married couple and their unmarried children. This high rate of neolocal families is higher than the rates identified by S.P. Cilliers in his reference to coloured family patterns 1960. Cilliers found that a:

feature of the composition of Coloured [sic] households is the high incidence of individuals other than the immediate members of the

⁴³ Cilliers. *The Coloureds of South Africa*, pp. 25–26.

families concerned. Research shows that about one-quarter of all families have such additional individuals as members of their households. Such people are usually mostly relatives such as grandparents or grandchildren.⁴⁴

Table 7: Characteristics of coloured and white households with and without widows

Household characteristics	Coloured	White
Average household size without widow	4.8	4.3
Average household size with widow	4.7	3.9
Average income of households without widow (£)	12	25
Average income of household with widow (£)	11	19
Loss of income	-6.40%	-16.20%
Households with widows	16%	15%
Non-widow households with lodgers	3%	5%
Widow households with lodgers	3%	11%
Non-widows living alone	3%	5%
Widows living alone	7%	9%
Widows receiving pension	32%	32%
Non-widow households with mortgage	6%	8%
Widow households with mortgage	5%	5%
Non-widow households own property	2%	16%
Widow households own property	1%	11%

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

Note: Loss of income is the difference in incomes per person between households without and with widows.

Despite the fact that most coloured and white households were neolocal, coloured and white women seem to have experienced widowhood in the same way. Table 7 shows the extent to which, despite these similar family structures, coloured and white women experienced widowhood differently. The death of a spouse was followed by a decrease in household income – especially for white households: those containing a widow had an income 16.2% lower than other white households (white households that did not contain a widow). Coloured households that contained a widow similarly experienced a decrease in income per member of the household. Table 7 further shows that both coloured and white widows experienced changes in their lives after losing their spouses and reveals some details about the difference in their experience of these changes. White widow-containing households, for instance, were far more likely to take in lodgers than other white households, while coloured widow-containing household were just as (un)likely to do so as coloured households that did not contain a widow. For both coloured and white households, widowhood saw a decline in income, mortgages, property ownership, and family size. In summary, while Table 7 shows a number of changes that were experienced by both coloured and white households that contained a widow, it also

⁴⁴ Cilliers. *The Coloureds of South Africa*, p. 25.

reveals a number of differences in their experiences as a whole. The interpretation of those differences is the subject of the next section.

4. Widows in Cape Town

The differences between the composition of coloured and white households in Cape Town during this time are subtle. Both were largely neolocal. Current literature sees widowhood in the neolocal family system as a devastating and lonely time in a woman's life. This section seeks to understand why coloured and white women, both of whom by and large lived in neolocal families, had such different experiences of widowhood. These experiences become visible when looking at some broader trends in the lives of these widows along with individual stories. These individual stories are pieced together from the comment section of the Batson Household Survey cards and by matching the names of the widows in the survey to other sources, such as death notices. Together they provide a window into the everyday lives of these widows and allow us to understand why women experienced widowhood so differently despite their similar household composition. This section specifically focuses on income, widows' positions in households, who lived with them, and those who looked after them.

A story of a white widow reveals the dramatic economic and emotional changes that took place in women's lives when they lost their husband. Mrs Courtney (55) said that she had had to put her children to work following the death of her husband a few months earlier. He had died of cancer after an expensive operation. Mrs Courtney, the widow, was sickly and so could not work. She sold the property in Bellville that she had lived in with her husband and had moved to Observatory so that her two working children could save money on travelling expenses. Her son (17) worked as a clerk and earned £5 per month while her daughter (16) worked as a shop assistant and also earned £5 per month. The family had no other source of income. Mrs Courtney also had two older children, both of whom were away and there is no indication that they helped her financially. The family was Presbyterian, rented a house in Observatory with two bedrooms and two other rooms and spent £5.10s. on rent.⁴⁵ A number of changes occurred in Mrs Courtney's life as a direct result of her husband's death: she had to sell their home (instead of home owners, they were now renters); her children had to start working in order to generate a household income; she herself was incapacitated, although it is unclear whether or not this was caused by the death of her husband, and the family had to move in order to be closer to the children's place of work.

⁴⁵ Card 1300.

Widows often had to scrape together an income in order to survive and various strategies were employed to ensure that they had an adequate income. Pensions were one such form of income. Interestingly, as Table 7 shows, the percentage of widows who received a pension was the same for coloured and white widows, namely 32%. That said, there was a discrepancy in the value of their pensions. While white women received between £1.10s. and £4.8s. per month (with most receiving £3.10s), coloured widows' pensions were lower and they ranged from £1.10s. to £1.15s. per month (with most receiving £1.10s.). Some survey cards specify who was paying this pension (for instance, the employer of the widow's husband), but most often it seems that they were state pensions and that £1.10s. was the standard pension for coloured pensioners and £3.10s. the standard for white pensioners. Act No. 22 of 1928, which was amended by Act No. 34 of 1931, entitled all coloured and white persons to pensions if they were above a certain age. It was, however, clearly stipulated that the amounts were different for coloured and white people.

The Pension granted to any Pensioner shall be of such amount as, having regard to the circumstances of such Pensioner, the Commissioner deems reasonable and sufficient, but shall not exceed in the case of –

- (a) a White Pensioner: the rate of £30 per annum;
- (b) a Coloured Pensioner: the rate of £18 per annum;

nor shall it be at a rate as will make the Pensioner's income (or means) together with the pension exceed –

- (a) £54 per annum in the case of a White Pensioner;
- (b) £36 per annum in the case of a Coloured Pensioner.⁴⁶

It is clear that government institutions provided far more support for white widows. This could be linked to Reher's argument that societies with weak government institutions have strong family ties and those with strong government institutions have weak ones.⁴⁷ This law seems to have forced coloured families to look after widows in a way that did not occur for white households. It also separated coloured and white pensioners from the elderly of other races, as it was only coloured and white persons that were eligible. The discrepancy in pension value indicates that government support varied within Cape Town society; white households in Cape Town benefitted more from government institutions than coloured households did. Table 7 shows that, although having a widow in the household made white households poorer

⁴⁶ Wilcocks. *Report of Commission*, p. 126, par. 737.

⁴⁷ D. Reher. "Family ties in Western Europe," p. 217.

by a greater margin than it did coloured households, the latter had a far lower monthly household income to start off with. So, although being a widow meant a big change in circumstances for white widows, their lives were still considerably more comfortable than those of widows in coloured households.

The sources of income among widows varied substantially from household to household. While some widows received financial support from their children, others received pay-outs of some kind that had been organised by their husbands. A coloured widow called Mrs. Davies (52), for instance, was a “widow supported by her two daughters.”⁴⁸ One of her daughters (18) worked as a cigarette packer and earned £5 per month, while the other (16) earned £5 a month as a cleaner. The household did not seem to have any other source of income. For some widows, the contributions from family members were unpredictable. For instance, the survey card of Mrs Cornwell reads “sons contribute but no regular sum.”⁴⁹ Other widows stated that they had an income but did not specify the amount or the source of that income. For instance, Mrs Hemmings (39), lived in Sea Point with her son (10). The rent for their flat was £8.8s. per month, but she did not disclose the source of her income.⁵⁰ Importantly, the source of incomes the widows received varied greatly, from private or state pensions, to widows own earnings; from keeping lodgers and passive income generated by properties, to selling paintings and support from their children. Mrs Hough (42), for instance, earned £4 per month from renting out a property she owned.⁵¹ Sometimes widows lived on a combination of incomes. Ms Lamey (35) hosted two lodgers (one male and one female, both in their twenties) but also explains that she had “insurance + benefit society monies which she received on death of husband.”⁵² She seemed reluctant to state how much she received, with the surveyor stating that she would not “share the amount of money she has in the bank. She says it is sufficient to enable her to live comfortably.”⁵³

Although it is clear from Table 7 that widowhood was usually accompanied by a decrease in household income, there are also examples of very successful and wealthy widows in the survey. The widow with the highest income in the survey was Mrs. Du Plessis (49). She earned £35 a month (one of the highest salaries in the survey as a whole) running her own hair salon in Longmarket Street (the surveyor added that Mrs Du Plessis was reluctant to share

⁴⁸ Card 1228.

⁴⁹ Card 1827.

⁵⁰ Card 1853.

⁵¹ Card 2912.

⁵² Card 1383.

⁵³ Card 1383.

exactly how much she made). She lived with her daughter (23) who was also a hairdresser who earned £12 per month working at the Waldorf. They rented a house in Sea Point with two bedrooms and one additional room for £8.8s. per rent. The daughter was her only child. Later in this section I consider widows who lived with their unmarried children in more detail.

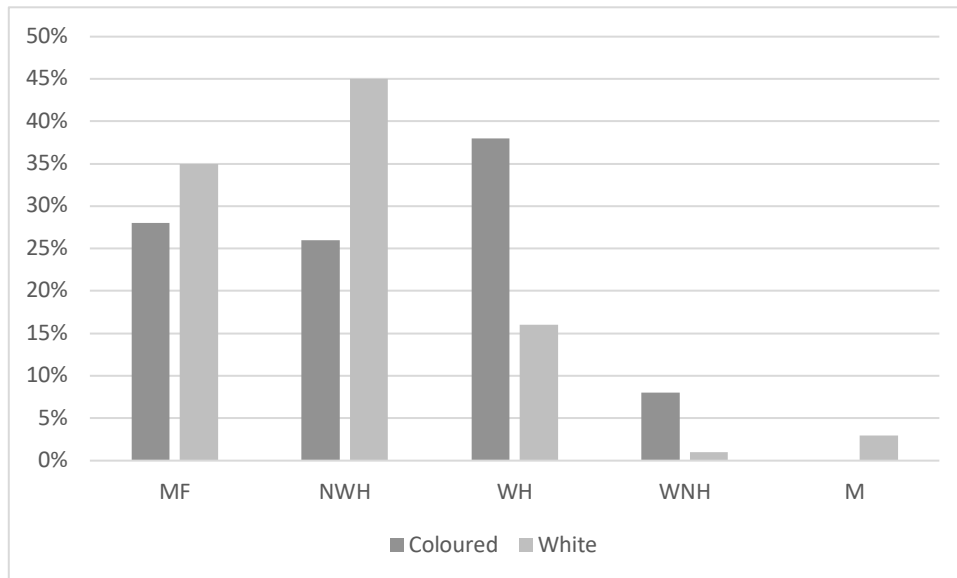


Figure 25: Percentage of widows by position in household.

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

Note: MF: member of family, NWH: not working head of household, WH: working head of household, WNH: working but not the head of the household, M: non-family member of household.

So far I have considered the broad trends regarding coloured and white families in Cape Town. Turning specifically to widows, their position within households reveals further important differences between family systems. Figure 25 maps the different roles of widows in households according to the Batson Household Survey and reveals a clear difference between coloured and white widows. Most coloured widows (38%) were the working heads of their household. In Chapter 1, I found that coloured women were more likely than white women to work at every life stage, and that finding is confirmed by the example of widows. Most white widows (45%), on the other hand, headed a household but without being employed themselves. As we will see later in this chapter, this was largely possible because their unmarried working children cohabited with them and supported them. Only 16% of white widows were working heads of their household households; 29% of coloured widows and 37% of white widows were non-working and non-head members of their households. These widows were members of households – either as non-working relatives of household heads or as lodgers or boarders – who did not work. In the case of coloured households, all these widows were family members, but in the case of white households, two were lodgers. One of these lodgers was 73 years old,

the other 85 (more about them later). A unique feature of the coloured households is that 8% of them had at least two widows who lived in them. Most of these had a widow as the working head of the household and one other widow as a member of the household. Only one white household had two widows living in it (which represents 3% of the white households that contained a widow).

Widows' position in the households they were part of also depended on their ages. For instance, 45% of white widows *under the age of 50* were working heads of their households. The same figure for coloured widows was much higher, namely 70%. Widows *over the age of 50* – for both races – were more likely to be non-working family members to the head of the household: 39% of coloured widows over the age of 50 were non-working family members of the household head while the same figure for white widows was 42%.

Table 8: Coresidents of widows by age and race

Coresidents	Ages 27–64		Ages 65+	
	Coloured (%)	White (%)	Coloured (%)	White (%)
Never-married child	52	52	8	27
Never-married child & lodgers	1	12	0	0
Other family & lodgers	1	7	4	6
Lodger(s)	0	2	0	0
Married child	17	7	50	39
Other relative(s)	17	14	29	6
Non-relative	0	0	0	3
Parents	4	0	0	0
Alone	7	5	8	18
<i>n</i>	71	42	24	33

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

Table 8 reveals how the age of widows impacted *who* they lived with. For instance, coloured and white widows in the age group 27–64 had very different rates of living with “Other family & lodgers”. Interestingly, for widows aged 65+, the rates for this category were far more similar. The opposite happened for the “Never-married child” category, where the rates for both races are initially the same, and then diverge. In the first age category, 52% of coloured and white widows lived only with never-married children, but for the second, the share decreased more dramatically for coloured widows. This suggests that the children of white widows were more likely to postpone or forgo marriage in order to care for their widowed mother while coloured children of widows would marry and form a household with their widowed mother as they got older. This is not to say that white widows did not live with their married children, but rather that their rates of living with unmarried children was far higher than they were for coloured widows. Older coloured widows were more likely than white widows to be part of a household formed with other relatives. The share of older white widows

living alone is also noteworthy when compared to that of older coloured widows. This can be seen as an indication of weak family ties amongst white families at the time. Esteve et al. argue that: “where the value placed on the individual is high, levels of living alone will also be high, and where the value of family co-residence, support and control is high, the incidence of living alone will be lower.”⁵⁴

As is evident from Table 8, most white widows lived with their unmarried children. For widows under the age of 50, these children were likely be too young to get married. But for women who were 50 years and older, these children could have had the opportunity to marry, but delayed or forewent marriage in order to care for their mothers. Although this was more common among white households, there are also examples of children in coloured households who delayed or forewent marriage. There is consensus amongst sociologists that by the end of the twentieth century, daughters in Western societies were more likely to care for their aging parents than sons were. Three main arguments have been made to explain this trend. The first is that there is a cultural tendency to allocate certain tasks, such as nurturing and household tasks, to women. The second is that parents prefer to receive care from their daughters because of certain taboos relating to bodily contact. The third is that men have historically been more involved in paid work and therefore have more to give up if they were doing to assume care duties.⁵⁵ This pattern of daughters postponing or forgoing marriage is revealed in the household survey. One such example of this is the Heuvel household. Mrs. S. Heuvel was a 70-year-old working head of the household. She was employed by the Wesleyan Church as a caretaker and earned just over £3 per month. She lived with her two unmarried daughters (ages 45 and 46), and an adopted son (7). Mrs Heuvel also had two sons who lived elsewhere. While the older daughter worked as a teacher, a statement in the comments section explains that the younger daughter cared for her mother. They lived together in a house with two bedrooms and two other rooms.

Another white widow, Mrs. Hellis (64), is listed as the non-working head of her household. She was, however, very busy working when the surveyor was trying to extract information from her. Mrs. Hellis lived in Rosebank with her unmarried daughter (29) (who worked as a dressmaker), and at least two lodgers. Mrs. Hellis was hesitant to provide details regarding the lodgers – and most other aspects of her life. She did not list a religious affiliation

⁵⁴ A. Esteve, D. Reher, R. Treviño, P. Zueras & A. Turu. “Living alone over the life course: Cross-national variations on an emerging issue,” *Data and Perspectives*, (46), (1), 2020, p. 182.

⁵⁵ J. Logan & G. D. Spitze. *Family ties: Enduring relations between parents and their grown children*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), pp. 35–36; I. A. Connidis & A. E. Barnett, *Family Ties and Aging*, 3rd Edition, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019), p. 210.

but did confirm that she was born and bred in Cape Town. She rented the house she lived in, which had six bedrooms and one additional room. The following information from the comments section gives a taste of the widow's somewhat tenacious personality.

Widow keeps small private boarding house. Called 31.10.38. She was v [sic] busy preparing lunch, gave the information recorded, also mentioned that she had lodgers – one male – place of work unknown. And one male – student at University. Said she couldn't give me any information about them before consulting them – also indicated that she was v. busy preparing lunch – too busy to answer questions. I left the blue sheet + said I'd call again. Called 9.30 a.m. 4.11.38. 9 said 'it was no use' – she couldn't tell me anything more as the people in the house objected! Refused to say in which year she was first married. Hardly think a repeat visit will be more fruitful.⁵⁶

The fact that her daughter was 29 years old and unmarried may mean that Mrs. Hellis encouraged independence, although this could also have been a necessity. It is conceivable that her daughter's income of £9 per month could also have contributed to covering their living expenses. Mrs. Hellis did not disclose what her boarders paid but other boarders in the household survey paid between £2 and £5 per month, with most paying £5. In his study of women in Verviers, Belgium, George Alter cautions readers not simply to assume that women remained unmarried and continued to live with their older parents as some form of statement of independence. Instead, he explains that in areas that followed the EMP (a feature of the societies that followed the Christian-European family pattern), this usually occurred as a result of the death of a parent. "The transition to a different type of household was more often caused by the death of parents than by unmarried women attempting to assert their independence."⁵⁷

Tracing mentions of Mrs. Hellis in other records allows us to understand more of her life as a widow, her relationship with her daughter and whether this daughter remained unmarried in order to support her mother. These records reveal that her full name was Minnie Margaret Hellis, née Calmeyer. She married Albert Edward Hellis at St Marks Church. Albert's nationality was given as "London, England". They had had six children (all daughters).⁵⁸ Albert died in 1933, when she was 58, and Minnie died in 1943 in her home in Rosebank at the age of 68. She died of "Mitral Incompetence" only a few years after the survey. Grace, the daughter who had been living with her at the time of the survey in 1938, was still living with her upon

⁵⁶ Card 1297.

⁵⁷ G. Alter. *Family and the female life course: The women of Verviers, Belgium, 1849–1880*, (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 20.

⁵⁸ Albert Edward Hellis, Death, Cape Province, Probate Records of the Master of the High Court, 1834-1989, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C91W-Y9FQ-X?i=976&cc=2517051>

her death. The death notices reveal that neither Mrs. Hellis nor her husband had an estate that exceeded £300 in value at the time of their deaths. Albert did, however, leave movable property. Mrs Hellis lived for ten years without remarrying. Her daughter, Grace, was 24 years old when Albert (her father) died. In other words, when her father died, she was still at a marriageable age. It therefore seems that Grace might have delayed/forgone marriage in order to support her mother.⁵⁹ Unfortunately Grace died in 1947 at the age of 37 – only three years after her mother. Upon her death Grace was unmarried and still worked as “Dressmaker / own account”. Her death certificate makes it clear that the end of her life was a tragic one. The description of her cause of death seems to indicate that she was murdered as her cause of death is given as “death due to compound fracture of the skull caused by some undisclosed persons”.⁶⁰

White widows very often lived with their unmarried daughters. Mrs J. Edwards (78) for instance, lived with her unmarried daughter (46). They were the only two members of their household and neither of them worked. They received an income of £6 per month from renting out a property and £1.1s. per month from a subtenant. Mrs Edwards owned the property they lived in in Wynberg, which had one bedroom and one additional room.⁶¹ Sixty four percent of white widows lived with daughters – whether these daughters were married or unmarried. Sixty one percent of white widows lived with their unmarried daughters whereas only 41% lived with unmarried sons. Eighteen percent of white widow households were made up only of widows and their unmarried daughters. A number of these daughters worked and were in their forties.

In white households, daughters in particular rallied around their widowed mothers. Sons would leave the family (and presumably get married), but daughters would very often remain unmarried and work, or return to their mother’s household with their own children. Mrs Stanley (65), a white widow, lived with her two daughters, grandson, and unmarried female cousin (54). One of her daughters was married but her husband was a fisherman and the card states that, because he travelled a lot, he paid his wife’s widowed mother board and lodging of

⁵⁹ Minnie Margaret Hellis, Death, Cape Province, Probate Records of the Master of the High Court, 1834-1989. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QG2H-8W6Q>; “South Africa, Cape Province, Civil Records, 1840-1973,” image 330 of 2682, database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-95FG-FBC?i=329&cc=1779109&personaUrl=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3A46M1-9ZN2>)

⁶⁰ Grace Mildred Hellis, South Africa, Cape Province, Civil Records, 1840-1972,” image 1003 of 4796, database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-G5NQ-S9LJ?i=1002&cc=1779109&personaUrl=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AQVSC-WQ3W>)

⁶¹ Card 1704 (1/2).

£4 per month. Mrs Stanley's elderly cousin did the housekeeping in exchange for board and lodging.⁶² Mrs Stanley's other daughter (31) was unmarried and worked as a typist.

There is a definite trend of white children of widows being more likely to delay or forgo marriage in order to support their widowed mothers. But there are also a number of examples of widows who got by without any assistance from others. As Table 8 shows, 7% of coloured widows and 9% of white widows lived alone. Widowhood is often the cause of the one-person household phenomenon, especially in societies with high rates of neolocality and weak family ties. Over the twentieth century, one-person households increased from 10% of all households in Britain in the 1910s, to 17% in the 1960s.⁶³ For both coloured and white women, widowhood increased the chances of them living alone. Reher argues that loneliness is a problem in societies with weak family ties and suggests that families in societies characterise by strong family ties are more likely to include an older person in their household than families who live in societies characterised by weak family ties.⁶⁴

In societies where family systems are strong and pervasive, people will perceive their own old age as tied to their families, who are the source of and aid of happiness. Where family systems are weaker, the value given to individualism and individual initiative will be greater, and this will lead to different strategies and realities when it comes to confronting personal aging.⁶⁵

The surveyed widows who lived alone were all older women. The youngest white widow who lived alone was 53 years old and the oldest, 76. There is no discernible trend as far as the religion of these solitary widows are concerned, except that there were only three Jewish widows in the survey, and two of them lived alone. One example of a widow who lived alone was Maria Marcus (76). She had two children, a daughter who had died and a son who was away at the time of the survey. While she indicated herself as the only person in her household, it does seem that she sublet rooms in her home to others, though they were not listed as lodgers. In the comments section, Maria is referred to as a landlady as opposed to a boarding-house keeper, and further explains that she sublet rooms to two men.⁶⁶

An example of a coloured widow who lived alone also reveals how quickly women had to make changes in their lives following the death of their husbands, especially when they did

⁶² Card 1884.

⁶³ K. D. M. Snell. "The rise of living alone and loneliness in history," *Social History*, (41), (1), 2017, p. 8.

⁶⁴ D. Reher. "Family ties in Western Europe," p. 217.

⁶⁵ D. Reher & M. Requena. "Living alone in later life: A global perspective," *Population and Development Review*, (44), (3), 2018, pp. 428–429.

⁶⁶ Card 1173.

not have children. Mrs. O'Sullivan (48) lived alone and worked in order to earn an income. She moved to Cape Town from Stellenbosch in 1910 and did not list a religious affiliation. She rented a whole house with two bedrooms and two additional rooms and paid £5 for rent per month. She only married her husband in 1934 and they did not have any children together. The comments section indicates that she had recently started to work after losing her husband: "No. 1 [the widow] has recently been widowed, and has only just commenced giving music + needlework lessons – so cannot estimate amount of earnings. No. 1 also intends letting 1 room of her house to increase her income."⁶⁷ There is no indication of any income other than what she was expecting to earn from doing needlework and offering music lessons. The range of activities she was willing to engage in in order to generate an adequate income seems to indicate that her husband had not made any provision for her in the case of his death. These activities, and the intention to let a room in her house, reveal what widowed women were willing to do in order to generate an income.

Living with non-family members was not common for either coloured or white widows in Cape Town. Only two widows in the survey are listed as staying with non-family members. Both were white. One of them (87) stayed with a Mr Soule and his family in Mowbray. Mr Soule earned £40 a month and his son (21) was the only other wage earner in the household. His wife and second son (12) were the other two members of his family. The last person to be listed in the household was listed as a "boarder" and this boarder was a widow. The comment on the card explained that they provided for the widow: "board and fees also provide for her clothing" and that Mr Soule's wife "looks after her – nurses, board + clothes."⁶⁸ Mr and Mrs Soule were paid £4 per month for this widow's board and lodging, although it is unclear who supported the widow financially. The Soules certainly did not need the money since Mr Soule earned one of the highest salaries in the entire dataset. And from the comment, it sounds like looking after this boarder required some work on the part of Mrs Soule. The second white widow (73) who did not live with family is listed as a lodger in the household headed by Harry Bazeley, living in Observatory. The lodger lived alongside the Bazeley family's five children. There is no comment on the card to provide more information about this lodger and no indication that she paid for her board and lodging.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Card 1450.

⁶⁸ Card 1353.

⁶⁹ Card 1305.

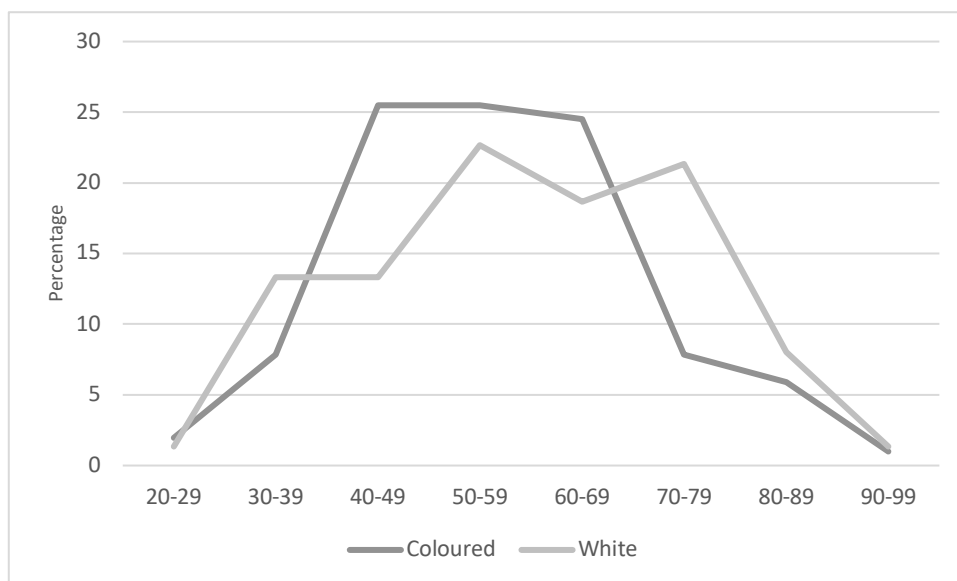


Figure 26: Age distribution of widows as a percentage of total widows by race.

Source: Batson Household Survey, 1938/39.

Figure 26 shows the ages of coloured and white widows. The average age of white widows in the sample is 60, while the average age for coloured widows is 56. The median age for white widows is 59 and for coloured widows, 56. Figure 26 reveals that in 1938/9 coloured widows were younger and were more likely to be widowed younger than their white counterparts. For the sake of comparison, in European cities the percentage of older widows increased over time. This is to say that the average age of widows increased over time and that women in the twentieth century were more likely to lose their husbands later on in life. In Zürich in 1637, for instance, 90% of all widows were younger than 70, but by 1870, this had decreased to 81% younger than 70.⁷⁰ If we consider this statistic at a country level and at a later time period, we see that in Austria in 1890, 79% of widows were younger than 70 but, by 1995, only 43% of widows were younger than 70. In Cape Town in 1938, 85% of coloured widows in the household survey were younger than 70 – a figure that was worse than the figure for Zürich in 1870. For white widows this figure was lower, with 69% being widows under the age of 70. Sixty percent of coloured widows were under the age of 60 and the figure for white widows was 50%. This distribution could be indicative of a number of factors. It could simply mean that coloured women did not live as long as white women did. Alternatively, it could mean that coloured men were more likely than white men to die young. Coloured households in the survey were also slightly more likely to contain a widow than white households were. Sixteen percent of coloured households and 15% of white households in the survey contained a widow.

⁷⁰ Hahn. “Women in older ages – “old” women?,” p. 34.

Overall, and as Table 7 indicates, the age of widows in the survey seems to point to the fact that living conditions for coloured households were not good and that coloured women were more likely to get widowed younger – at a time when they were more likely to be working or could more easily move into the workforce following the death of their spouse.

The profiles of the youngest and oldest widows in the survey provide further indications of how the experience of widowhood differed depending on the age at which women were widowed. The youngest coloured widow was 22 years old. She lived with her mother, also a widow (42), and they both worked as machinists. The younger widow earned a good salary (relative to what other coloured women were earning at the time) of over £9 per month, and she had a two-year-old daughter at the time of the survey – who also lived with them. The household employed a domestic servant – possibly to care for the younger widow’s daughter. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, it was rare at this time for coloured households to employ domestic servants – those that did had higher than average incomes. This family lived in a rented flat with one bedroom and one additional room.⁷¹ The oldest coloured widow in the survey was 91 years old and lived with her son, his wife, and their three children. Their home had two bedrooms and two additional rooms. The notes section added that the home they lived in was their own, bought from the council. This widow received a monthly pension of £1.10s.⁷²

The youngest white widow in the survey was 29 years old and lived with her sister and her family. Her brother-in-law was listed as the head of the household. There were five boys living in the household, two of whom were the young widow’s sons. The family was of recent Italian descent and both the head of the household and his wife listed their arrival in Cape Town as 1928. They lived in a rented property with three bedrooms and one additional room. The comments section suggests that this young widow and her sons did not stay with her family permanently. It reads that they are visiting after the recent death of her husband explaining that “they are the family of the man who was killed at the railway crossing at Lakeside recently.”⁷³ The widow’s sons were apparently also involved in the accident, but managed to escape unharmed.

⁷¹ Card 2023.

⁷² Card 1477.

⁷³ Card 2052.

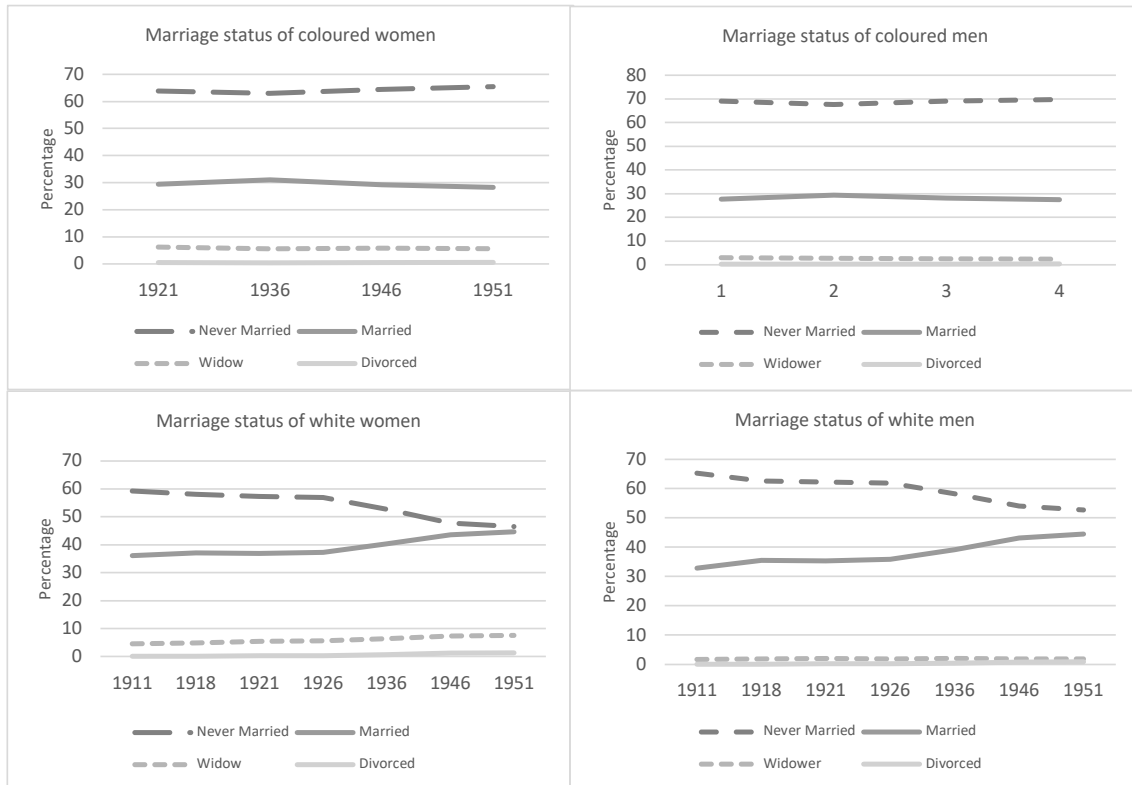


Figure 27: Marriage status of coloured and white women and men.

Source: Union Census, 1936.

Looking beyond the survey, Figure 27 shows the marriage patterns of coloured and white women and men in the Union for most of the first half of the twentieth century. It is clear from these graphs that while the proportion of the population that was married increased for both white men and women over time, it decreased for coloured men and women. Further, the proportion of widows remained relatively stable for coloured women, but increased for white women (as marriage rates increased). The proportion of coloured and white widowers remained low and relatively stable. While Figure 27 is not necessarily representative of the white population of the Cape and Cape Town, most (over 90%) of the coloured population resided in the Cape. Importantly, the number of white widows in the Union increased by more than three percentage points over this period, while the proportion of coloured widows decreased slightly by 0.7 of a percentage point. These graphs suggest that shifts were occurring in the family systems in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century – shifts that cannot be observed in the Batson Household Survey.

Something that is difficult to assess in the survey (unless explicated stated) is remarriage. One example is of a white widow who remarried a widower after the death of her husband. There was a substantial age gap between this couple – at the time of the survey the

wife was 32 years old and the husband was 56. Mr Lee, the husband, worked as a porter for the South African Railways and earned £12 per month. Two children from Mr Lee's first marriage also contributed to the household income. One of these was an unmarried son, aged 28 – almost the same age as his father's new wife. Mr and Mrs Lee both attended the Anglican Church. There were also three other children who were part of the household, one of whom was listed as being Mr Lee's stepson. Other than that, it is difficult to establish how many children, if any, children the couple had together. They lived in a house in Kensington that Mr Lee had built himself, which had three bedrooms and two additional rooms. The comments section indicates that it was a rather nice house, and the surveyor wrote that "it is surprising to see how cosily + conveniently head has built house."⁷⁴ Despite this example, it is difficult to say, based on information from the survey, how common it was for widows to remarry. Figure 27 does, however, reveal that widows were always more prevalent (at least at a country level) than widowers were. An investigation into remarriage trends would require the use of other sources, such as marriage records.

5. Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn from widows and their families in Cape Town? Firstly, although it was expected that coloured and white families would be structured differently and represent different family systems, because of the finding that coloured households could not fully conform to the male-breadwinner model while white households did, on the whole the family structures were remarkably similar. Most families in Cape Town prior to World War II were neolocal. There was a slight difference in the average sizes of families. For instance, coloured families were slightly bigger. But while these family patterns may look very similar on paper, the economic positions of families and the everyday experiences of widows of different races were very different. The difference in the pension value is one important aspect of how coloured people experienced less support from the government than white people did. Coloured women experienced this difference more pertinently than coloured men because they often outlived their husbands and spent more time as pensioners. In the case of white families, widowhood was accompanied by a drop of income per person in the household, a decrease in household size, and lower property ownership compared to households that did not have a widow. Although widowhood brought less dramatic economic changes for coloured women, this could be explained by the fact that they were worse off to begin with. Another general

⁷⁴ Card 1450.

trend is that, while the children of white widows were more likely to stay unmarried in order care for their widowed mothers, coloured women were absorbed into the families of their married children.

White women, especially, postponed or even forewent marriage in order to earn an income that would enable them to care for their widowed mothers. White and coloured sons did the same for their widowed mothers, though to a lesser extent. The family systems of Northern and Western Europe are characterised by nuclear/neolocal families and George Alter finds that in nineteenth-century Belgium this family system was characterised by very rigid boundaries around the family unit. Unmarried women, and previously married women, he argues, assisted and supported each other, while married couples rarely shared their home with other family members.

While we see strong attachment of unmarried women to the family of origin, we also see the exclusive nature of the nuclear family. The boundary around the nuclear family was such that other kin were rarely admitted. Few married women had other types of kin living in their families, and even widowed women tended to maintain independent households when they had older children. Consequently, unmarried women tended to form households with other unmarried and widowed, and seldom lived with married kin.⁷⁵

In Cape Town, therefore, the nuclear/neolocal family largely persisted into widowhood for the white community, but widowhood caused coloured families to move away from neolocality. Formulated differently, widowhood did not complicate the neolocal family system for white women, even though their lives changed dramatically in economic terms. While the average size of coloured and white households that contained a widow did not differ much, direct descendants such as unmarried children predominated white households that contained a widow, while coloured households often included cousins, aunts, nieces, nephews, and other members of the extended family. Neolocal families were representative of most coloured and white households, and while for white families this pattern persisted with the arrival of widowhood, coloured families adapted differently to the change. Coloured widows were incorporated into the households of married children, grandchildren, and extended family members, while white widows stayed with their unmarried children and supplemented their income with lodgers. These differences could be a function of family ties and suggest the existence of stronger family ties in the coloured community, and weaker family ties in the white

⁷⁵ G. Alter. *Family and female life course*, p. 20.

community. Furthermore, the economic position of coloured households necessitated these family ties.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Introduction

This is the way the story goes. First, there was old-fashioned history, in which political, military and economic themes relating to men and the public sphere dominated. Then, in the 1970s, a challenge to that history came from a group of younger and junior members of the profession, feminists who wished to re-establish women's place in history by recovering, analysing and understanding women's past, which, the story concedes, had been marginalised and trivialised in the reigning historical interpretations.

Although these early feminists were correct in seeing a masculine bias in history, the narrative continues, they were still limited in their outlook, and their writing was problematic for a number of reasons. They produced a history which was "compensatory", and like the older male-dominated history, represented only one piece of a more complex jigsaw puzzle. They simply "added" women to the existing historical stew and "stirred", without really questioning all the ingredients of history.¹

Although women's history rose to prominence in the West in the 1970s, as this quotation by Joan Sangster explains, it came under fire in the 1990s for merely describing women's experiences, as previous historians had done for men, and for ignoring the relationships between femininity and masculinity. Some argued that gender history was a "more theoretically sophisticated" approach to use as an alternative and to properly question the ingredients of history.² South African historians addressed these concerns about women's history in 2004. Gaitskell argued for the continuation of women's history stating that "if we do not know what women were doing or thinking...if we do not know anything about how they experience their lives, then how can we even begin to write gendered history?"³

In South Africa, women's history was not abandoned in favour of gender history. Instead, the field has not evolved as it has in other parts of the world. While women's history is no longer neglected, there are aspects of, and approaches to, women's history that are. There are questions that have been addressed in other places that have not been addressed in South African historiography. There is much we do not know about the country's past in general and

¹ J. Sangster. "Re-assessing gender history and women's history in Canada," *Left History*, (3), (1), 1995, p. 109.

² Sangster. "Re-assessing gender history and women's history," p. 110.

³ N. Erlank & L. Clowes. "Session 7: Writing and teaching gendered history in Africa in the twenty-first century," in "Reports on Colloquium Sessions," *South African Historical Journal* (50), (1), 2004, p. 232.

the history of women in particular. A shortage of sources has often been cited as a problem in writing women's history and the types of sources that are available have favoured the analysis of women's involvement in politics. Existing research into women in South Africa's past has focussed on the role they played in the political sphere, with black women and white Afrikaans women receiving the most attention. Methodologically, such research has relied heavily on case study approaches and has been presented as narrative history. But there are a number of data rich sources that could be used – sources such as surveys, voters' rolls, attestation forms, marriage records, baptism records, and death notices.⁴ The availability of newspapers online also provides an opportunity to create quantitative sources from qualitative ones. One example of this is job advertisements, which could be used to develop a wage series. Such sources have an important role to play in telling untold stories of the past and in representing people who are not otherwise represented in source material.

This thesis has sought to address some of these questions about coloured and white women and their position Cape Town in the first half of the twentieth century. Was Cape Town a male-breadwinner society? What did women earn? Did wages differ between genders and races? When did women work? What jobs did they do? Were there certain jobs that both men and women did? At what age did women marry and did this differ between races? When did couples marry? Was there any seasonality in weddings? What gave women agency? What was women's legal standing in marriage? How did women fare under South African marriage law? Who worked as domestic workers in the city? Who employed these domestic workers? What did family systems look like in the city? Who were the widows in the city? Who cared for them, and what impact did family systems have on widows? While these may seem to be a disparate group of questions, they relate to various aspects of women's lives that could have affected their position in society. While coloured and white women were similar in many ways, this thesis has sought to understand the ways in which they had agency and the ways in which their agency was limited.

In order to address these questions I introduced new datasets and new interpretive frameworks for approaching women's history in South Africa. While it is impossible to provide a complete picture of every aspect of life, this thesis looked at the impact that different institutions (for instance, work, marriage, and family) had on both coloured and white women in order to provide an idea of what life was like for them. While women's history has perhaps

⁴ J. Fourie. "The data revolution in African economic history," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (47), (2), 2016, pp. 193–212.

become somewhat passé in the last three decades given the emerging focus on gender history, it is unfortunate that this occurred before women's history in South Africa could branch out into methods and ask questions that are being addressed elsewhere in the world. This is not to say that gender history is not important. Instead, the problem is that there are questions that have been raised by historians relating to women's history that have not been addressed in the South African context.

Nussbaum and Sen argue that different aspects of women's lives, such as whether or not they work outside of the home, their legal standing and aspects of marriage, all affect their position in society. In this thesis I have investigated some of these aspects of coloured and white women's lives in Cape Town from 1900–1960 using two novel datasets along with other sources, such as newspapers and commissions of inquiry. Sen argued that ultimately development is linked to the empowerment of women and that factors relating to the wellbeing of women are central to the wellbeing of whole societies. The “classic” factors he identified were “women's education, their ownership pattern, their employment opportunities and the workings of the labour market”⁵ and he concluded that other factors include “the nature of the employment arrangements, attitudes of the family and of the society at large toward women's economic activities, and the economic and social circumstances that encourage or resist these attitudes.”⁶

A male-breadwinner society is one in which women and their children rely on the wage of an adult male who is usually the husband of the woman and father of the children in a household. Using a dataset created from the Batson Household Survey conducted in 1938–39, Chapter 1 sought to understand whether Cape Town was a male-breadwinner society prior to World War II. It found that the male-breadwinner ideal was present in the city, characterised by higher male wages and by husbands contributing the highest proportions of household incomes. But this finding is complicated by race because white women earned more than coloured men did, and only white men earned a family wage (or a wage high enough for a family of five to live on without any other member of the family working). White men earned the most, with an average monthly wage in excess of £17. White women had a wage of over £8 per month and coloured men earned just less than £8 per month. Coloured women earned £4 a month. Coloured households were more likely than white households to contain multiple wage earners and have a husband and wife who both worked. While working outside of the

⁵ Sen. *Development as freedom*, p. 202.

⁶ Sen. *Development as freedom*, p. 202.

home is supposed to provide women with agency within society and within their home, the work of coloured women was complicated by low wages and the jobs they had access to.

Differences between races were caused by factors relating to *when* women worked and *what kind of* employment they could realistically expect to find, as well as *what* they earned. Most white women worked before they got married. This finding contradicts the idea that “daughters of fathers with greater resources are more likely to have specialised skills related to the household.”⁷ Instead of specialising in skills related to the household, young white women seem to have used their wages to employ a substitute to do their household work for them. Coloured women were more likely to work at every life stage, and in Cape Town in 1936, 35% of all coloured women of working age, worked. The same figure was 30% for white women. Most coloured women were employed as domestic workers, while the rest found work as washerwomen or factory workers. Self-employed coloured women worked either as washerwomen or dressmakers. However, when coloured men earned a good wage, their wives did not work. For white women, this was different. There were white women working because they needed the income, but there were also women working whose husbands or fathers earned enough to pay the family’s expenses. Because of access to education and the limitations placed on coloured workers by the “civilised labour” policy, white women had many more options available to them when they did work. While some clear trends emerge regarding the types of work that women did as well as *when* they worked (and stopped working), there were also many exceptions. White women who were single again later on in their life and those with incapacitated husbands, or women who had been widowed, worked or were self-employed. They often owned cafés and/or took lodgers in. It is also clear that women earned incomes in other ways – ways not always listed as formal employment in the survey, such as being a “landlady”.

The limitations for coloured women relating to the kinds of work they could do directly translated into the feminisation and segregation of clerical work in the city. In countries such as Canada and the United States, clerical work went from being an occupation dominated by men to one dominated by women in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Many reasons have been offered to explain the process of feminisation. One possibility is that the nature of clerical work itself had changed. Clerical tasks had become more repetitive. With this change came decreased wages – despite an increase in the demand caused by increasing

⁷ R.L. Zijdeman, M.H.D. Van Leeuwen, D. Rbaudo & J.P. Pelissier. “Working women in France, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Where, when, and which women were in work at marriage?,” p. 539.

paperwork from growing economies. In other parts of the world clerical work increasingly became associated with young white females and it was seen as a respectable occupation for young women before they got married.

Chapter 3 investigated whether this feminisation of clerical work also occurred in Cape Town and, if so, whether this process impacted coloured and white women in the same way. I found that, for Cape Town and the rest of the Union of South Africa, clerical came to be an occupation dominated by white women. In 1911, 22% of white clerical workers in Cape Town were female and by 1960, 50% of white clerical workers in the city were female. In Cape Town, however, clerical work *defeminised* for coloured women. Although coloured FLFP rates increased from 1936 to 1946, coloured women as a percentage of coloured clerical workers decreased from 34% to 22% over the same period. In 1936 there were only 15 coloured women who worked as clerks in the city. At a time when South African industry was growing, particularly given the outbreak of World War II, employers had to choose who to use to fill positions created by the growing economy. Fears arose around the dangers posed to white women's purity in work-related situations where they could interact with black and coloured men. It is against this background that white women were employed in shops, to create a sense of respectability and safety for white shoppers and the other employees. It is entirely conceivable that white women were employed as clerical workers in order to keep office spaces white and the Wilcocks Commission indicated that limited opportunities for education and racist social mores kept coloured people from clerical work.

Despite these differences in the occupations and wages of coloured and white women, as far as marriage is concerned, there were a number of similarities. Marriage is an important institution in any society and for that reason, it can be used as an indicator of women's position in that society. However, the history of marriage continues to be under-researched in South Africa. One reason for this could be the complexity of the country's history and society and the resulting diversity of religions, cultures, and therefore marriage forms. Some of these marriage forms have only recently been recognised. Chapter 4 investigated marriage patterns in Cape Town using a dataset of Anglican marriage records that represent parishes from around the city for the period 1910–1960. The average age at marriage for women and men, coloured and white, decreased over this period. Even though coloured women and men were generally younger than white women and men when they got married during this period, coloured women's age at marriage decreased more gradually, with the result that the age at marriage converged for coloured and white couples. In 1910, the average age at marriage for white women was 25 and for coloured women, 24. By 1960, the average age at marriage for both had

decreased to 23 years. White couples saw a bigger decrease in age at marriage than coloured couples and a survey from the time also indicated that there were far more underage marriages for white women than there were for coloured women. This could have further decreased the age at marriage. A decrease in the average marriage age is also associated with a greater proportion of society marrying – something that was found to be true for both coloured and white people in South Africa. The seasonality of marriages also changed and converged during the period. In 1910, there was no clear seasonal preference for coloured or white weddings, but by 1945, summer had become the most popular season to get married in – and it remained so. A possible explanation for this is that the prosperity brought on by World War II meant that coloured couples could also afford to take more leave and get married at a time of the year (December and January) that coincided with important holidays. In 1943 it became compulsory for employers in certain industries (such as manufacturing) to give employees paid leave on the 16th and 25th of December as well as the 1st of January.

Age at marriage and age gap at marriage are two aspects of marriage that are commonly used to understand women's agency in society. The younger women are when they get married and the bigger the age gap between spouses, the worse it is for them. This is because the younger women are, the less likely they are to be educated and the more likely they are to be having children. Because of these factors they are more likely to have less experience of life outside of the home than their husbands. Some other aspects of marriage that are associated with agency are: freedom to choose a partner, the right to initiate divorce, the right to custody of children, and control of property.

Chapter 5 found that, during the 1930s and 1940s, there were debates in the Union of South Africa about women's rights within marriage. These debates highlighted that, for women, getting married without an antenuptial contract meant that they effectively became legal minors. Marrying with an antenuptial contract meant that women not only avoided becoming legal minors, but could consequently also conduct business in their own names, open their own bank account, have control over their own finances, and maintain the rights of an adult as they married. This is why antenuptial contracts were investigated as a possible indicator of female agency. But antenuptial contracts were very expensive and signing one was therefore something only wealthier couples could do. The Anglican marriage records show that very few coloured couples signed antenuptial contracts. The cost involved meant that white women could quite literally buy agency – or at least the freedom to do certain things – by means of an antenuptial contract. From the late 1930s onwards, couples with foreign-born grooms were more likely than not to marry with antenuptial contracts. For South African-born grooms

this change only occurred in 1946. By 1953, debates about women's rights in marriage resulted in the amendment of marriage law in order to, among other things, allow women to collect their own salaries from their employer and to open their own bank accounts without the consent of their husband. Although signing an antenuptial contract provided women with greater freedom or agency, it was something that only some women could afford to do. While in other ways there were similarities in the marriage trends of coloured and white couples, there was a stark contrast when it came to signing antenuptial contracts.

There are a number of claims that have been made about domestic workers and their employers in South African history. Although censuses provide information on *who* worked as a domestic worker, they do not provide any employer information. This means that without conducting interviews (as Jacklyn Cock did) information about the employers of domestic workers is hard to come by. Additionally, existing literature also focusses almost exclusively on black women employed as domestic workers, mostly during the apartheid era. But domestic work was the biggest sector of employment for coloured women in the first half of the twentieth century. The Batson Household Survey contains information about domestic servants and their employers.

Chapter 6 used the survey to investigate both domestic workers and their employers in pre-World War II Cape Town and found that only 31% of white households in the city employed some kind of domestic worker in 1938/9. Most of these domestic workers (58%) lived at home and just worked for their employers during the day. Households that employed domestic workers had a much higher monthly income than those that did not. Employing a domestic worker was therefore something that only wealthier households could afford to do. Households employing a domestic worker were more likely to contain an unmarried woman (usually the daughter of the household head) working outside of the home than those that did not. Young white women seem to have worked outside the home in order to pay for a domestic servant to do the work that they would otherwise have had to do in the home as many of these households did not specifically need the income of these young women. Households that contained a family member that was employed as a domestic worker had lower monthly incomes than those that did not. These households were also more likely to have a household head that was not born in Cape Town. The Wilcocks Commission provides further indications that domestic work was not a desirable occupation and that it was, therefore, a job entered into by those who did not have other employment opportunities. Although there were domestic workers in Cape Town who earned more than the estimated scale presented in the Wilcocks

Commission, domestic workers generally earned very little and their wages varied, as did their work.

The findings of this thesis reveal that there were stark differences between the lives of coloured and white women in Cape Town over the period 1910–1960. Coloured women showed agency in some areas, such as working outside of the home and a low age gap at marriage, but limitations such as low wages and restrictions on the types of jobs they could do meant that their daily lives were characterised by many unfreedoms. White women, on the other hand initially had a higher age at marriage, though this changed over the period, and could afford to sign antenuptial contracts. However, they usually stopped working once they married and they had a higher age gap at marriage. With all of these factors in mind, Chapter 6 used data from the Batson Household Survey to explore the lives of widows in Cape Town by focussing on the families and households they were part of.

Relationships within families or households have implications for the way in which society operates. For instance, some argue that societies that are characterised by strong families ties are associated with weak state structures, bigger families, and multigenerational households. In societies with weak family ties, on the other hand, government, rather than family, is expected to provide support when individuals struggle to survive. Societies with weak family ties are associated with smaller families and households with neolocal families (a couple and their unmarried children). Family systems are therefore also integral in determining how widows experience life following the death of their spouse. The Batson Household Survey reveals that most coloured and white households in pre-World War II Cape Town consisted of neolocal families. Despite this similarity, there were clear differences between coloured and white families when considering widows. For instance, the average household size for coloured families without a widow was 4.8, while for white families it was 4.3. The size of coloured households that did contain a widow was 4.7, while white households it was 4.3. There was also a difference in loss of income between coloured and white households containing a widow, with white households experiencing a greater loss of income. White widows were more likely to stay alone, especially in their old age. If they stayed with family, it was often their unmarried children who appear to have delayed or forgone marriage in order to care for their widowed mothers. Whereas coloured families moved away from neolocality upon widowhood, this was not the case for white households. Significantly, it is clear that white widows received more state support than coloured widows did, with white persons receiving a higher pension (by law) than coloured persons. This links to the argument that weaker state involvement results in strong family ties.

At a time when South Africa has some of the highest rates of FLFP rates and gender-based violence statistics in the world, it is more important than ever to focus on women's history. The unfreedoms experienced by South African women ultimately limit the development of the country and many of the unfreedoms of the past continue to restrict the lives of women today. As Sen argued "the changing agency of women is one of the major mediators of economic and social changes, and its determination as well as consequences closely relate to many of the central features of the development process."⁸ Women's history emerged in the throes of apartheid and its focus was, understandably, on overturning the political order. This particular emphasis, necessary as it may have been at the time, now needs to be supplemented by new questions and new approaches to women's history. When women's history was questioned in other societal and intellectual contexts, it responded to the challenge by introducing new approaches and bringing new questions to women's history. This has not, however, happened in South Africa. This is partially because, in many ways, South Africa's history is exceptional – and these exceptions continue to make research difficult. But exceptions can also be seen as opportunities. Our context, for instance, can lend itself to an investigation into the nature and ramifications of intersectionality.⁹ Historians in South Africa (and other developing regions) need to make difficult decisions as to what they will research. While a lack of sources has been a particular concern for South African historians, intersectionality and interdisciplinary approaches provide opportunities to ask new questions of sources and analyse sources in new ways.

In this thesis I have attempted to explore women's history by using new approaches and questions that have not been used in this context before. The findings show that there is still a lot of work to be done and that limiting the freedoms of women – whether it be the type of occupations they have access to, the education they can afford or their legal status in marriage – has detrimental consequences. Future research could continue along this trajectory by, for instance, studying inventories to understand the living standards of widows – as Beatrice Moring has done for the context of Finland and Sweden in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ Marriage records could also be used in combination with baptism records to understand more about sexual mores in South Africa – a process that Laura Richardson has

⁸ Sen. *Development as freedom*, p. 202.

⁹ P. H. Collins & S. Bilge. *Intersectionality*, 2nd Edition, (USA: Polity Press, 2020).

¹⁰ B. Moring. "The standard of living of widows: Inventories as an indicator of the economic situation of widows," *The History of the Family*, (12), (4), pp. 233–249.

started for Cape Town.¹¹ Richardson's approach can be extended to comparative studies between different areas of South Africa. Marriage records can also be used to investigate women's empowerment and the impact of Protestantism – as Felix Meier zu Selhausen has done for women in his study of Uganda for the decades at the turn of the twentieth century.¹²

Such research could assist us in understanding why certain changes occurred and what implications they have for life in the present. To continue researching women's history using the same approaches will invariably mean that certain women and their experiences will remain invisible. In as much as the root of women's history is “a commitment to make scholarship work on women's behalf,”¹³ it is my hope that this may remain true of women's history in present-day South Africa.

¹¹ L. Richardson. “Between duty and desire: pre-nuptial pregnancy and unmarried motherhood in Anglican Cape Town during the first half of the twentieth century,” (Master's thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2020).

¹² F. Meier zu Selhausen. “Missionaries and female empowerment,” pp. 74–11.

¹³ E. C. DuBois, G. P. Kelly, E. L. Kennedy, C. W. Korsmeyer & L. S. Robinson. *Feminist scholarship: Kindling in the groves of academe*, (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 197.

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Appendix A

Literature relating to South African women's history

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
1975	Hilda Bernstein	<i>For their triumphs and for their tears: women in apartheid South Africa</i>	Book
1975	Elizabeth Landis	African women under apartheid	Article
1978	Christine Qunta	<i>Women in Southern Africa</i>	Book
1979	Deborah Gaitskell	Christian compounds for girls': Church hostels for African women in Johannesburg, 1907–1970	Journal article
1979	A. Marriotti	The incorporation of African women into wage employment in South Africa, 1920–70	PhD thesis
1980	Jacklyn Cock	<i>Maids and madams</i>	Book
1980	Joanne Yawitch	Black women in South Africa: Capitalism, employment and reproduction: Editorial collective of African perspective	Honours dissertation
1981	Joanne Yawitch	Women and squatting: A Winterveld case study	Chapter in volume
1983	Belinda Bozzoli	Marxism, feminism and South African studies	Journal article
1983	Deborah Gaitskell	Class, race and gender: domestic workers in South Africa	Journal article
1983	Gaitskell et al.	Thematic issue on women's history	Special issue
1983	Deborah Gaitskell	Introduction: Special issue on women's history	Journal article
1983	Margaret Kinsman	"Beasts of burden": The subordination of Southern Tswana women, ca. 1800–1840	Journal article
1983	JJ Van Helten & Keith Williams	"The crying need of South Africa": The emigration of single British women to the Transvaal, 1901–10	Journal article
1983	Julia Wells	Why women rebel: A comparative study of South African women's resistance in Bloemfontein (1913) and Johannesburg (1958)	Journal article
1983	Deborah Gaitskell	Housewives, maids or mothers: Some contradictions of domesticity for Christian women in Johannesburg, 1903–1939	Journal article
1983	Julia Wells	The day the town stood still: Women in resistance in Potchefstroom, 1912–1930	Chapter in volume
1983	Sylvia Vietzen	Mabel Palmer and black higher education in Natal c. 1936–1942	Journal article
1984	Elizabeth van Heyningen	The social evil in the Cape Colony 1868–1902: Prostitution and the contagious diseases act	Journal article
1985	Hilda Bernstein	<i>For their triumphs and for their tears: Women in apartheid South Africa</i> (2nd edition)	Book
1985	Pundy Pillay	Women in employment in South Africa, some important trends and issues	Journal article
1986	Elsabe Brink	The Afrikaner women of the Garment Workers' Union, 1918–1939	Master's thesis
1986	Ivy Matsepe Casaburri	On the question of women in the South African struggle	Journal article
1986	Josette Cole	"When your life is bitter you do something": Women and squatting in the Western Cape	PhD thesis
1987	Belina Bozzoli	Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives	Edited book
1987	Elsabe Brink	"Maar 'n klomp 'factory' meide": Afrikaner family and community on the Witwatersrand during the 1920s	Chapter in volume
1987	Helen Bradford	"We are now men": Women's beer protests in the Natal countryside, 1929	Chapter in volume

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
1987	William Beinart	Women in rural politics: Herschel District in the 1920s and 1930s	Chapter in volume
1987	J. Cock & E. Emdom	“Let me make history please”: The story of Johanna Masilela, childminder	Chapter in volume
1987	Edna Bradlow	Women at the Cape in the mid-19th century	Journal article
1987	Shula Marks	<i>Not either an experimental doll: The separate worlds of three South African women</i>	Book
1988	Deborah Gaitskell	Race, gender and imperialism: A century of black girls’ education in South Africa	Chapter
1989	Anne McClintock	Double jeopardy: Race and gender in Victorian South African Culture	PhD thesis
1989	D. Gaitskell & E. Unterhalter	Mothers of the nation: A comparative analysis of nation, race and motherhood in Afrikaner nationalism and the African National Congress	Chapter in volume
1990	B. Bozzoli & M. Nkotsoe	<i>Women of Phokeng: Conscious life strategy and migrancy in South Africa, 1900–1983</i>	Book
1990	Catherine Campbell	The township family and women’s struggle	Journal article
1990	Deborah Gaitskell	‘The very house of difference’: Race, gender and the politics of South African women’s Christianity in South Africa	Journal article
1990	Cherryl Walker (ed.)	<i>Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945</i>	Edited book
1991	Helen Bradford	Herbs, knives and plastic: 150 years of abortion in South Africa	Journal article
1991	Edna Bradlow	“The Oldest Charitable Society in South Africa”: One Hundred Years and More of the Ladies’ Benevolent Society at the Cape of Good Hope	Journal article
1991	Jacklyn Cock	<i>Colonels and cadres: war and gender in South Africa</i>	Book
1991	Elizabeth van Heyningen	Poverty, self-help and community: The survival of the poor in Cape Town, 1880–1910	Journal article
1992	Iris Berger	Threads of solidarity: Women in South African industry 1900-1980	Book
1992	Linzi Manicom	Ruling relations: Rethinking state and gender in South African history	Journal article
1992	Patricia van der Spuy	Slave Women and the family in nineteenth-century Cape Town	Journal article
1993	Edna Bradlow	Women and education in nineteenth-century South Africa: The attitudes and experiences of middle-class English-speaking females at the Cape	Journal article
1993	Shireen Hassim	Family, motherhood and Zulu nationalism: The politics of the Inkatha Women’s Brigade	Journal article
1993	Pamela Scully	Liberating the family? Gender, labour and sexuality in the rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823–1853	PhD thesis
1993	Penelope Hetherington	Women in South Africa: the historiography in English	Journal article
1993	Mamphela Ramphele	<i>A bed called home</i>	Book
1993	Jenny Robinson	(Dis)locating historical narrative: writing space and gender in South African Social History	Journal article
1993	Gay Seidman	‘No freedom without the women’: Mobilisation and gender in South Africa	Journal article
1993	C. Walker & S. Hassim	Women’s studies and the women’s movement in South Africa: defining a relationship	Journal article
1993	Julia Wells	‘We now demand!’ The history of women’s resistance to pass laws in South Africa	Journal article
1994	Lindsay Clowes	Making it work: Aspects of marriage, motherhood and money-earning among white South African women, 1960–1990	Master’s thesis

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
1994	F. Kaganas & C. Murray	Law and women's rights in South Africa: An overview	Journal article
1994	Shula Marks	<i>Divided sisterhood: Race, class and gender in the South African nursing profession</i>	Book
1995	Morag Bell	A woman's place in "a white man's country". Rights, duties and citizenship for the 'new' South Africa, c. 1902	Journal article
1995	I. Berger & E.F. White	<i>Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: Restoring women to history</i>	Book
1995	Catherine Burns	Reproductive labours: The politics of women's health in South Africa, 1900–1960	PhD thesis
1995	Helen Bradford	Olive Schreiner's hidden agony: Fact, fiction and teenage abortion	Journal article
1995	Natasha Erlank	"Thinking it wrong to remain unemployed in the pressing times": The experiences of two English settler wives	Journal article
1995	Jonathan Hyslop	Incident at Ziman Brothers: the politics of gender and race in a Pretoria factory, 1934	Journal article
1995	Jonathan Hyslop	White working-class women and the invention of apartheid: "Purified" Afrikaner nationalist agitation for legislation against "mixed" marriages, 1934–9	Journal article
1995	Julie Parle	History, she wrote: A reappraisal of Dear Louisa in the 1990s	Journal article
1995	Cherryl Walker	Conceptualising motherhood in twentieth century South Africa	Journal article
1996	Helen Bradford	Women, gender and colonialism: Rethinking the history of the British Cape Colony and its frontier zones, c. 1806–1870	Journal article
1996	Jeremy Krikler	Women, violence and the Rand Revolt of 1922	Journal article
1996	Kirsten McKenzie	Wollstonecraft's models? Female honour and sexuality in middle-class settler Cape Town, 1800–1854	Journal article
1996	Grietjie Verhoef	The role of women in the South African economy	Journal article
1997	Deborah Gaitskell	Power in prayer and service: Women's Christian organisations	Chapter in volume
1997	Susanne Klausen	"For the sake of race": Eugenic discourse of feeble-mindedness and motherhood in the South African medical record, 1903–1926	Journal article
1997	Kirsten McKenzie	'My own mind dying within me': Eliza Fairbairn and the reinvention of colonial middle-class domesticity in Cape Town	Journal article
1997	Karel Schoeman	Vroeë geskifte deur Suid-Afrikaanse vroue, 1749–1865	Journal article
1997	Patricia van der Spuy	Silencing race and gender?	Journal article
1998	A. Appel	Trying to make them visible: women in Port Elizabeth in the late nineteenth- early twentieth century	Journal article
1998	Edna Bradlow	The social role of Jewish women in the Grunderzeit of the Cape Jewish community 1896–1930	Journal article
1998	Harriet Deacon	Midwives and medical men in the Cape Colony before 1860	Journal article
1998	Deborah Gaitskell	From "women and imperialism" to gendering colonialism?	Journal article
1998	Liese van der Watt	The comradely ideal and the Volksmoeder ideal: uncovering gender ideology in the Voortrekker tapestry	Journal article
1998	Julia Wells	Eva's men: gender and power in the establishment of the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–74.	Journal article
1999	Gwen Duganzich	She's' who make history: Reviewing the historical treatment of black women by four South African scholars	Journal article
1999	Anne Mager	<i>Gender and the making of a South African Bantustan: a social history of the Ciskei, 1945–1959</i>	Book

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
1999	Elizabeth van Heyningen	The voices of women in the South African War	Journal article
1999	Sylvia Vietzen	The letters speak: Mary Moore, war and the Battle of Colenso, December 1899	Journal article
1999	Louise Vincent	A cake of soap: The Volksmoeder ideology and Afrikaner women's campaign for the vote	Journal article
1999	Louise Vincent	The power behind the scenes: The Afrikaner nationalist women's parties, 1915 to 1931	Journal article
2000	Helen Bradford	Peasants, historians, and gender: A South African case study revisited	Journal article
2000	Simon Dagut	Gender, colonial "Women's History" and the construction of social distance: Middle-class British women in later nineteenth century South Africa	Journal article
2000	Helen Dampier	Settler women's experiences of fear, illness, and isolation, with particular reference to the Eastern Cape Frontier, 1820–1890	Journal article
2000	Natasha Erlank	"Raising up the degraded daughters of Africa": The provision of education for Xhosa women in the mid-nineteenth century	Journal article
2000	Deborah Gaitskell	Female faith and the politics of the personal: Five mission encounters in twentieth-century South Africa	Journal article
2000	Hilary Sapire	Engendering segregation: "Black women's work" in the urban American South and South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries	Journal article
2000	Pamela Scully	White maternity and black infancy: The rhetoric of race in the South African women's suffrage movement, 1896–1930	Chapter in volume
2000	Louise Vincent	Bread and honour: White working-class women and Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s	Journal article
2000	Lyn Wadley	South African archaeology, gender, and the African Renaissance	Journal article
2000	Jennifer Weir	"I shall need to use her to rule": The power of "royal" Zulu women in pre-colonial Zululand	Journal article
2000	Mirriam Zwane	The federation of South African women and aspects of urban women's resistance to the policies of racial segregation	Master's thesis
2001	Suryakanthie Chetty	Gender under fire: Interrogating war in South Africa, 1939–1945	Master's thesis
2001	Nancy Clark	Gendering production in wartime South Africa	Journal article
2001	Susanne Klausen	"Poor whiteism", white maternal mortality, and the promotion of public health in South Africa: The Department of Public Health's endorsement of contraceptive services, 1930–1938	Journal article
2001	Grietjie Verhoef	Informal financial service institutions for survival: African women and stokvels in urban South Africa, 1930–1998	Journal article
2002	Marijke du Toit	Framing Volksmoeders: The politics of female Afrikaner nationalist, 1904–c.1930	Journal article
2002	Marijke du Toit	"Moedermeesteres": Dutch-Afrikaans women's entry into the public sphere in the Cape Colony, 1860–1896	Chapter in volume
2002	Deborah Gaitskell	The imperial tie: Obstacle or asset for South Africa's women suffragists before 1930	Journal article
2002	Susanne Klausen	The imperial mother of birth control: Marie Stopes and the South African birth control movement, 1930	Chapter in volume
2002	Gairoonisa Paleker	"She was certainly not a Rosa Luxemborg": A biography of Cissie Gool in images and words	Master's thesis
2002	Eliza Riedi	Women, gender and the promotion of empire: The Victoria league, 1901–1914	Journal article
2002	Patricia van der Spuy	Not only "the younger daughter of Dr Abdurahman": A feminist exploration of early influences on the political developments of Cissie Gool	PhD thesis

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
2002	Elizabeth van Heyningen	“The healing touch”: The Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa, 1900–1912	Journal article
2003	Marijke du Toit	The domesticity of Afrikaner nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904–1929	Journal article
2003	Kameron Hurley	The voice of women?: The ANC and the rhetoric of women’s resistance	Master's thesis
2003	Jock MucColloch	Women mining asbestos in South Africa, 1893–1980	Journal article
2004	Catherine Burns	Controlling birth: Johannesburg, 1920–1960	Journal article
2004	Anthony Chennels	The mimic women: Early women novelists and white Southern African Nationalisms	Journal article
2004	Archie Dick	Building a nation of readers? Women’s organisations and the politics of reading in South Africa, 1900–1914	Journal article
2004	N. Erlank & L. Clowes	Reports on colloquium sessions. Session 7: Writing and teaching gendered history in Africa in the twenty-first century	Journal article
2004	Catherine Higgs	Zenzele: African women’s self-help organisation in South Africa, 1927–1998	Journal article
2004	Susanne Klausen	Race, maternity, and the politics of birth control in South Africa, 1910–39	Book
2004	Susanne Klausen	Women’s resistance to eugenic birth control in Johannesburg, 1930–39	Journal article
2004	Eliza Riedi	Teaching empire: British and dominions women teachers in the South African War concentration camps	Journal article
2005	M. Arnold & B. Schmahmann (ed.s)	Between Union and liberation: Women artists in South Africa, 1910–1994	Book
2005	Marijke du Toit	“The general view and beyond”: From slum-yard township in Ellen Hellmann’s photographs of women and the African familial in the 1930s	Journal article
2005	Patricia Romero	Health issues pertaining to French Huguenot women and children at the Cape of Good Hope and in Charles Town, Carolina, 1685–1720	Journal article
2005	Kathleen Sheldon	<i>Historical dictionary of women in Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	Book
2005	Liz Stanley	“A strange thing is memory”: Emily Hobhouse, memory work, moral life and the ‘concentration system’	Journal article
2006	Sarah Duff	From new women to college girls at the Huguenot Seminary and College, 1895–1910	Journal article
2006	Elizabeth Jordan	“From time immemorial”: Washerwomen, culture, and community in Cape Town, South Africa	PhD thesis
2006	Helen Ross	A woman’s world at a time of war: An analysis of selected women’s diaries	Master’s thesis
2006	Bridget Theron	Victorian women, gender and identity in the South African War: An overview	Journal article
2007	Nomboniso Gasa	Women in South African history: They remove boulders and cross rivers	Journal article
2007	Laura Mitchell	“This is the mark of the widow”: Domesticity and frontier conquest in colonial South Africa	Journal article
2007	Helen Scanlon	<i>Representation & reality: Portraits of women’s lives in the Western Cape, 1948–1967</i>	Book
2007	Pamela Scully	<i>Liberating the family?: Gender and British slave emancipation in the rural Western Cape</i>	Book
2007	L. Stanley & H. Dampier	Cultural entrepreneurs, proto-nationalism and women’s testimony writings: From the South African War to 1940	Journal article
2007	Judith Stone	<i>When she was white: The story of a family divided by race</i>	Book

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
2007	Sandra Swart	'Motherhood and otherhood' – gendered citizenship and Afrikaner women in the South African 1914 rebellion	Journal article
2007	P. Van der Spuy & L. Clowes	Accidental feminists? Recent histories of South African women	Journal article
2007	Ian van der Waag	Wyndhams, Parktown, 1901–1923: Domesticity and servitude in an early twentieth-century South African household	Journal article
2008	Peter Alegi	Rewriting patriarchal scrips: Women, labour, and popular culture in South African clothing industry beauty contests, 1970s–2005	Journal article
2008	Lindsay Clowes	Masculinity, matrimony and generation: Reconfiguring patriarchy in Drum 1951–1983	Journal article
2008	Gerald Groenewald	Een Spoorloos Vrouwspersoon: Unmarried mothers, moral regulation and the Church at the Cape of Good Hope, circa 1652–1795	Journal article
2008	Lindie Korf	Behind every man: DF Malan and the women in his life, 1874–1959	Journal article
2008	Lize Kriel	Intersections of gender and race in the missionary correspondence of deaconess Anneliese Dörfer, East and South Africa, 1936–1967	Journal article
2008	Louise Viljoen	Nationalism, gender and sexuality in the autobiographical writing of two Afrikaner women	Journal article
2009	Cathy Freeman	Relays in rebellion, the power in Lilian Ngoyi and Fannie Lou Hamer	Master's thesis
2009	Deborah Gaitskell	Gender, power and voice in South African Anglicanism: The Society of Women Missionaries' Journal, 1913–1955	Journal article
2009	Jackie Grobler	Volkmoeders in verset: Afrikanervroue-optogte in Pretoria, 1915 en 1940	Journal article
2009	Lize Kriel & Alan Kirkaldy	"Praying is the work of men, not the work of women": the response of Bahananwa and Vhavenda women to conversion in late nineteenth-century Lutheran Missionary territories	Journal article
2009	John Lambert	Maintaining a British way of life: English-speaking South Africa's patriotic, cultural and charitable associations	Journal article
2009	Rebekah Lee	African women and apartheid: Migration and settlement in urban South Africa	Journal article
2009	Thembisa Waetjen	Kitchen publics: Indian delights, gender and culinary diaspora	Journal article
2010	Suryakanthie Chetty	'Our victory was our defeat': Race, gender and liberalism in the Union Defence, 1939–1945	Chapter in volume
2010	Herman Giliomee	"Allowed such a state of freedom": Women and gender relations in the Afrikaner community before enfranchisement in 1930	Journal article
2010	Susanne Klausen	"Reclaiming white daughter's purity": Afrikaner nationalism, racialised sexuality, and the 1975 Abortion and Sterilisation Act in apartheid South Africa	Journal article
2010	Zine Magubane	Attitudes towards feminism among women in the ANC, 1950–1990	Chapter in volume
2010	Jessica Murray	Gender and violence in Cape slave narratives and post-narratives	Journal article
2010	Cynthia Pelak	Women and gender in South African soccer: A brief history	Journal article
2010	Damian Shaw	Harriett Low: An American spinster at the Cape, 12 January to 4 May 1834	Journal article
2011	Elsabe Brink	The "Volkmoeder" – a figurine as a figurehead	Chapter in volume
2011	Simone Kerseboom	Grandmother-martyr-heroine: Placing Sara Baartman in South African post-apartheid foundational mythology	Journal article

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
2011	Judith Stevenson	“The mamas were ripe”: Ideologies of motherhood and public resistance in a South African township	Journal article
2011	Ria van der Merwe	Moulding Volksmoeders or volks enemies? Female students at the University of Pretoria, 1920–1970	Journal article
2012	Nadia Davids	“This woman is not for burning”: Performing the biography and memory of Cissie Gool	Journal article
2012	Meghan Healy-Clancy	Women and the problem of family in early African nationalist history and historiography	Journal article
2012	Estella Musiwa	Frances Baard’s and Helen Joseph’s struggle against apartheid, 1950–1963: A comparative analysis	Journal article
2012	Lauretta Ngcobo (ed.)	<i>Prodigal daughters: Stories of South African women in exile</i>	Book
2012	Julie Parle	Bewitching Zulu women: Umhayizo, gender, and witchcraft in KwaZulu-Natal	Journal article
2012	P. Van der Spuy & L. Clowes	“A living testimony of the heights to which a woman can rise”: Sarojini Naidu, Cissie Gool and politics of women’s leadership in South Africa in the 1920s	Journal article
2013	Charl Blignaut	Doing gender is unavoidable: Women’s participation in the core activities of the Ossewa-Brandwag, 1938–1943	Journal article
2013	Charl Blignaut	Untold history with a historiography: A review of scholarship on Afrikaner women in South African history	Journal article
2013	Elena Moore	Transmission and change in South African motherhood: Black mothers in three-generational Cape Town families	Journal article
2014	Danike Beukes	‘It is not only the guilty who suffer’: Exploring gender, power and moral politics through the contagious diseases acts in the Cape Colony, c.1868–1885	Master’s thesis
2014	Meghan Healy-Clancy	<i>A world of their own: A history of South African women’s education</i>	Book
2014	Meghan Healy-Clancy	The daughters of Africa and transatlantic racial kinship: Cecilia Lilian Tshabalala and the Women’s Club Movement, 1912–1943	Journal article
2014	Jeffrey Murray	“These are our jewels”: Women and classical education at Huguenot College	Journal article
2015	Brett M. Bennett	Margaret Levyns and the decline of ecological liberalism in the Southwest Cape, 1890–1975	Journal article
2015	Suryakanthie Chetty	Mothering the “nation”: The public life of Isie “Ouma” Smuts, 1899–1945	Journal article
2015	Scott Everett Couper	“Where men fail, women take over”: Inanda seminary’s rescue by its own	Journal article
2015	Sarah Duff	“Facts about ourselves”: Negotiation sexual knowledge in early twentieth-century South Africa	Journal article
2015	Peter Elliott	<i>Nita Spilhaus (1878–1967) and her artist friends in the cape during the early twentieth century</i>	Book
2015	Allison Goebel	<i>On their own: Women, urbanization and the right to the city in South Africa</i>	Book
2015	Kalpna Hiralal	“Mothers of the Indian Nation”: The impact of Indian women nationalists on South African women	Journal article
2015	Susanne Klausen	<i>Abortion under apartheid: Nationalism, sexuality, and women’s reproductive rights in South Africa</i>	Book
2015	Esté Kotzé	Perspectives on masculinity, femininity and the South African military: Gender relations with specific focus on the impact of the South African Women’s College and the SADF (1971–1998)	Master’s thesis
2016	John Boje	Sexual relations between British Soldiers and Boer women: a methodological approach	Journal article

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
2016	Helen Dampier	'Going on with our little movement in the hum drum-way which alone is possible in a land like this': Olive Schreiner and suffrage networks in Britain and South Africa	Journal article
2016	R. Morrell & L. Clowes	The emergence of gender scholarship in South Africa and Southern Theory	Journal article
2016	Lalo Ntwape	A historiography of South African women's history from c. 1990: A survey of monographs, anthologies and journal articles	Master's thesis
2016	Sean Redding	Women as diviners and as Christian converts in rural South Africa, c. 1880–1963	Journal article
2016	Nafisa Essop Sheik	Entangled patriarchies: Sex, gender and relationality in the forging of Natal: a paper presented in critical tribute to Jeff Guy	Journal article
2017	Bianca Botha	Telling her story: Constructing a historiography of Mrs Alive Bring – Afrikaner woman in mission	Master's thesis
2017	Kalpana Hiralal	'What is the meaning of the word "wife"?' The impact of the immigration laws on the wives of resident Indians in South Africa 1897–1930	Journal article
2017	Meghan Healy-Clancy	Women and apartheid	Encyclopaedia entry
2017	Kate Law	"A hysterical spinster of mature age": Some reflections on recent biographies of Emily Hobhouse	Journal article
2017	Amy Rommelspacher	"Let Mrs Mafekeng stay": An evaluation of the Paarl riots of 1959	Journal article
2018	L. Ntwape & L. Kriel	Two books, two decades, two agendas: Cheryl Walker and Nomboniso Gasa's edited volumes on women's history in South Africa	Journal article
2018	Athambile Masola	'Bantu women on the move': Black women and the politics of mobility in The Bantu World – research	Journal article
2018	Bev Orton	<i>Women, activism and apartheid South Africa: Using play texts to document the herstory of South Africa</i>	Book
2019	Ena Jansen	<i>Like family: Domestic workers in South African history and literature</i>	Book
2019	Jill Kelly	Gender, shame, and the "efficacy of congress methods of struggle" in 1959 Natal Women's Rural Revolts	Journal article
2019	Amber Lenser	The South African Women's Movement: The roles of feminism and multiracial cooperation in the struggle for women's rights	Master's thesis
2019	Sian Eve Pretorius	Poor whitism: The fictional Volksmoeder in South African novels, 1920s–1940s–research	Journal article
2019	Isabella Venter	The modern girl and the lady: negotiating modern womanhood in a South African magazine, 1910–1920	Journal article
2020	Sarah Duff	"Dear Mrs Brown": Social purity, sex education and the Women's Christian Temperance Union in early twentieth-century South Africa	Journal article
2020	Koena Mashala	Were women hidden from South Africa's political history?: A life history of Mina Thembeke Soga	Journal article
2020	Benedict Carton	"My husband is no husband to me": Divorce, marriage and gender struggles in African communities of Colonial Natal, 1869–1910	Journal article
2020	Will Jackson	Immoral habits: delinquent white girls in 1920s Cape Town and the distribution of blame	Journal article
2020	Ronicka Mudaly	Grabbing the sharp end of the knife to bring liberation, peace and justice to South Africans: lessons from Ellen Kuzwayo and Phyllis Naidoo	Journal article
2020	Liz Stanley	Harriet Townsend and networks of settler women in Business in the Eastern Cape, 1840–1848	Journal article
2021	Nicholas Grant	Confronting apartheid: Black women's internationalism in South Africa and the United States	Chapter in volume

Date published	Author	Title	Publication type
2021	Leslie Hadfield	<i>A bold profession: African nurses in rural apartheid South Africa</i>	Book
2021	Esté Kotzé	More than just pretty girls in uniform: A historical study of women's military roles during World War II, 1939–1945	PhD thesis
2021	Laura Richardson	'Too unsavoury for our fastidious tastes': Unmarried motherhood in South Africa's Mother City, Cape Town, 1910–1948	Journal article

