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Social reproduction in single-black-woman-headed families in post-apartheid South Africa : a case study of Bophelong Township in Gauteng.

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Abstract

This study investigates the nature of social reproduction in single-black-woman-headed families in post-apartheid South Africa, through an ethnographic case study in Bophelong Township in Gauteng. The study focuses on the two coterminous aspects of social reproduction: the physical reproduction of labour power and the reproduction of social relations of the mode of production as such, in this case capitalism. The study included a socio-economic survey, participatory observation and in-depth interviews with woman-heads over a period of four years. After a preliminary analysis, the data concerning the woman-headed family form was organised into three generations, the Grandmothers, the Mothers and the Daughters. The conclusions are however tentative given that this was a qualitative study based on a particular type of woman-headed family, one sample in one township in South Africa. The internal variations within this family form expressed the woman-heads' concrete lived experience, biography and social agency; and are moments of a single totality. While black women's location is informed by many social determinations that intersect and deepen their oppression as woman-heads, they are cast into leadership roles and directly mediate relations within their families, with males, with family kin, with communities and society. The woman-heads find themselves in contradictory positions within patriarchal society, given their own socialization, the daily struggle to reproduce children physically and the need to transcend traditional patriarchal social relations, including the challenge to appropriate egalitarian forms of leadership and avoid becoming proxies for patriarchy. Despite daily struggles for survival, woman-headed families are important social spaces for struggles for egalitarian family arrangements, including those concerning sons and traditional culture, historically the domain of men. However, it is necessary that the struggles within the family are anchored and supported by the struggles for egalitarianism within society as a whole. In particular this means struggles anchored and supported by a radical, grassroots and dynamic women's movement.

Key words

black-woman-head social reproduction family-household