No Visible Means of Subsistence: 
Rural Livelihoods, Gender and 
Social Change in 
Mooiplaas, Eastern Cape 
1950 - 1998 

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Preface

This working paper provides research findings emanating from the De-Agrarianisation and Rural Employment (DARE) Research Programme funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and coordinated by the Afrika-Studiecentrum in conjunction with African research teams from institutions in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania and South Africa. We wish to acknowledge the encouragement of Hans Slot of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the editorial skills of Ann Reeves for providing vital back-up for the work of the programme's research teams.

Despite Sub-Saharan Africa's agrarian image, the rural peasant population is diminishing in relative size and significance. From a multi-disciplinary perspective, the DARE has sought to dissect the process of change, drawing attention to the new labour patterns and unfolding rural-urban relations now taking place. The programme research theme consists of four sub-themes: economic dynamics, spatial mobility and settlement patterns, social identity adaptations and gender transformations.

The objectives of the DARE programme have been to:
1) compare and contrast the process of de-agrarianisation in various rural areas of Africa in terms of a economic activity reorientation, occupational adjustment, social identification, and spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly peasant modes of livelihood.
2) examine how risks on rural household production and exchange influence the extent and nature of non-agricultural activities in rural economies.
3) explore the inter-relationship between agriculture and the service sector in African economies; and
4) publish and disseminate the research findings to policy makers and scholars in Africa and elsewhere.

The Afrika-Studiecentrum's role has been to facilitate the formulation of country case study research in various rural African localities by African researchers, provide a discussion forum for work-in-progress, and assist in the publication and dissemination of completed analyses of research findings.

The following study by Leslie Bank and Linda Qambata is the product of collaboration between the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University and the Afrika-Studiecentrum. The specific objective of the research was to document the changing nature of rural livelihoods, links to urban areas and relationships between agricultural and non-agricultural work, with special emphasis on the evolution of informal economic activities.

The overall findings from the DARE programme are intended to provide insight into the processes of change which are moulding the livelihood prospects of African rural and urban dwellers of the next century. It is hoped that the knowledge gained may be useful for formulating more effective developmental policies to assist in short-circuiting Sub-Saharan Africa's current economic and political vulnerabilities.

Dr. Deborah Fahy Bryceson
DARE Programme Coordinator
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CHAPTER ONE

RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN TRANSITION

1.1 The Place and the Problem

The aim of this project is to investigate the transformation of rural livelihoods in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The Eastern Cape is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa and has a large rural population, which is mainly located in the former homelands of the Transkei and Ciskei. The Mooiplaas location, situated 45kms outside the city of East London, in the Eastern Cape Province of the South Africa is comprised of fourteen villages situated on the fertile coastal strip between East London and the Kei River. Mooiplaas was included as an enclave of Ciskei ‘reserve land’ or ‘scheduled areas’ in terms of the 1936 Land Act. In 1945 there were 3388 square kilometres of so-called scheduled areas between the Fish and Kei Rivers. These included the southern districts from Fort Beaufort to the Border corridor, known as the main ‘Ciskei block’ or ‘Ciskei proper’, Glen Grey and Herschel which were geographically part of Transkei, the Whittlesea area, and twenty odd ‘unconnected units’ near East London, Stutterheim and Peddie. Mooiplaas was one of the latter units. In the 1920s all these areas were placed under the Chief Native Commissioner for the Cape, based in King William’s Town. The reserves of the Cape between the Fish and the Kei Rivers were later demarcated into magisterial districts, under the jurisdiction of a Native Commissioner or a magistrate presiding over a Native Commissioner’s Court (Mager 1999:3-4).

For administrative purposes Africans living on reserves like Mooiplaas (outside Transkei) fell under the Chief Native Commissioner (Cape) who was based at the regional headquarters of the Native Affairs Department (NAD). Unlike Transkei, chiefs and headmen in the Ciskei reserves were given no civil powers or criminal jurisdiction. It was considered that the powers of the chiefs had been broken in the Ciskei. In the period 1927 to 1934, eight local councils or Bunga were set up to advise the Commissioners on the administration of reserve areas. They were the interface
between reserve life and white officialdom. Mooiplaas fell under the Bunga for the East London district. The modern elected Bunga councils interacted with chiefs and headmen through their connection with the customary *inkundlas*, forums of men in the rural locations presided over by a chief or a headman. The residents of Mooiplaas were administrated in this hierarchy of power. When they left the rural areas to work in the city they fell under the municipal authorities. In this way there was no way of escaping the web of the state’s administrative web of control.

By the mid-1940s, there were over 300 000 people living a variety of fragmented communities in Ciskei reserves. These reserves were overcrowded and overstocked and there was a widespread belief that change was needed. This resulted in a major attempt by the NAD to restructure land use planning in the reserves in order to consolidate scattered homesteads into planned villages and introduce a ‘more rational use’ of land practice. In theory, betterment planning aimed to allocate every household in the reserves a residential site, some arable land and access to grazing encampments. With betterment came political restructuring. In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act was passed. This dispensed with the old Bunga system and replaced it with tribal authorities. In terms of the new system, customary power was transformed and extended to tribal and even regional authorities. Chiefs and headmen now acquired new authority. They were, amongst other things, now entrusted with the power to allocate land in their areas. In the fragmented Ciskei reserves, this meant that where customary power had been lost it had to be reinvented. These structural changes were critical precursors to the 1959 Bantu Self Government Act which paved the way for fragmented clusters of reserve areas, like the Ciskei territories, to be consolidated first into a self-governing homeland and then later into an ‘independent’ ethnic national political unit. Under the tutelage of the Apartheid state, Ciskei developed from a patchwork of separate and dispersed pieces of land in the 1950s into a politically independent homeland in 1981.

Although the people of Mooiplaas were never geographically incorporated into Ciskei and ultimately rejected political incorporation into the independent Ciskei state, they were party to all the political and economic changes brought about by the Apartheid restructuring in the region. Thus, while located outside of the core
designated Ciskei ethnic homeland, the people of Mooiplaas fell under the same system of authority. They were exposed to the same rules, regulations and government plans as other locations in the region. The aim of this project is to assess the impact of both apartheid and post-apartheid rural restructuring schemes on the making of rural livelihoods in Mooiplaas. The analytical reach of the report is 40 years, since our discussion begins in 1958 with the introduction of agricultural betterment in the area. However, the main focus of this study is on the social and economic changes that have occurred in Mooiplaas since mid-1986, when a rural rebellion in the location brought an abrupt end to Apartheid planning in the area. The research presented in the report is based mainly on fieldwork and life histories, which we collected in Ngxinxolo village in Mooiplaas intermittently over an 18-month period between the beginning of 1997 and June 1998. At the end of this research period, we administered a household questionnaire survey to a random sample of 100 households. We have used this survey as the basis for quantification and generalisation in the study.

1.2 Some Points of Departure

One of the central concepts informing this study is the idea of de-agrarianization. This refers to a process by which rural people gradually shift away from the dependence on agrarian resources for survival and come to rely on new combinations of social and economic opportunities. The de-agrarianization process, as defined by Bryceson (1996), involves changes not only in household livelihood strategies and occupational profiles, but also in settlement patterns, social relationships and local level identity politics. One of the key formulations in Bryceson’s work is the notion that de-agrarianization has accelerated markedly in Sub-Saharan Africa since Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) were first introduced under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the 1970s. South Africa was not exposed to the rigours of SAP during the 1970s and 1980s because of the international isolation of the Apartheid regime. De-agrarianization in South Africa has consequently been much more directly shaped by internal policies than by those imposed from outside. In the former African reserves, later the homeland areas, the pressures on rural people to move away from peasant lifestyles and become incorporated into non-agrarian pursuits dates back to the

The 1913 Land Act signalled the beginning of the end of a once prosperous African peasantry in South Africa and relegated Africans, who comprised 80% of the population to 13% of the land (Bundy and Beinart 1987; Keegan 1986). This initiated de-agrarianization in the former African reserves, which have since been continuous. At various points over the past ninety years, the colonial state had attempted to intervene in the rural reserve areas in order to slow down the rate of de-agrarianization, or to restructure rural livelihoods so that they remained functional to the broader white-dominated economy. From the 1960s, however, with the evolution of the homeland policy, the white nationalist government insisted that all economically redundant Africans be relocated to the reserve areas. This resulted in the forced removal of over three and half million Africans who were hounded into homelands under the banner of separate development. These policies greatly increased population densities in the homeland areas and this served to dramatically reduce the amount of arable land available for cultivation. In trying to accommodate the steady increase in rural populations in the former reserve areas without completely undermining the viability of agrarian lifestyles in these areas, the state introduced a series of agricultural betterment schemes. The main aim of these schemes was to reduce environmental degradation, increase agricultural efficiency, and reduce internal economic differentiation. This study uses the agricultural betterment and cattle culling schemes introduced across Ciskei and elsewhere in the country during the 1950s as our starting point for the analysis of de-agrarianization.

In dealing with de-agrarianization, this study is obviously centrally concerned with the issue of social reproduction. However, unlike many other studies in this field, we do not conceptualise social reproduction simply as a process through which society biologically reproduces individuals. As Henrietta Moore (1994: 93) notes, social reproduction is never only about reproducing biological individuals, or even reproducing a labour force; “it is a matter of producing particular sorts of persons with specific attributes that are congruent with socially established patterns of power”. For Moore (1993), what makes households (or social networks) distinctive is not that they
produce people, and thereby reproduce society, but that they - along with many other institutions - produce specific sorts of people with specific social identities, and particular rights and needs. In exploring livelihood options, this study is not only interested in how people manage to make a living under changing circumstances. It is also concerned with the livelihood practices and preferences which are manufactured by, and in turn reproduce, particular gender, generational and other ideologies, which entrench and perpetuate social differences. The social differences to which this study pays close attention are those of gender and generation.

In this study, we understand gender and generational relations as social relations that are distinguishable from, but shaped by, other relationships in society such as those of race and class and by the multiple meanings attributed to sexual and age differences. We see the difference on the basis of sex and age as constituted in hierarchical social structures and asymmetrical power relations. We would argue that these relations are constructed discursively, through ideology, and non-discursively through struggles over material resources in daily practice. We believe that social discourses of age and gender, as Moore (1994) indicates, are hierarchically arranged and that individuals often elect to choose those that are more highly valued by the socially powerful. The implication of this view is that gender and generational relations in society are not structurally determined, that is, they cannot be 'read off' the structural location of men/women or young and old. Social relationships are made and remade over time as the power and meaning of social difference based on age and gender is constantly renegotiated. Positionality is thus always shifting as individuals and groups move in relation to one another. This idea of changing social positions and identities is central to the analysis presented below, where we argue that gender and generational relations in Mooiplaas have been subject to fairly fundamental changes over the past decade. We suggest that these changes have altered the relational nature of social power and authority in Mooiplaas in a context where established meanings, practices and hierarchies have been contested and even overturned.

By focusing on clusters of relations rather than predetermined social units, we have dealt very cautiously with the ubiquitous household concept, which is widely used but seldom analytically defined. One of the main problems, we feel, with
household research in the livelihood field is that the household is often treated as ‘an individual by another name’, as though it has a logic and interests of its own (Folbre 1986: 5). In other words, individuals and households are frequently merged into one and discussed interchangeably as though they were the same unit. This problem is most evident when livelihood researchers discuss ‘household strategies’ where they imply that poor households operate on the basis of a kind of calculation, rationalisation and cost-benefit analysis commonly associated with the capitalist firm. When approaching making a living, households become hyper-rational strategists, playing a social game of optimal choices. Researchers also too often assume that the behaviour displayed by household members is simply a reflection of household needs and household interests. However, as Diane Wolf (1997) reminds us, for a household strategy to be created, a decision must be made. Since such decisions are made with the collective good in mind, other household members must accept those decisions and carry them out. Individuals must sublimate their own wishes for this larger goal. In general, the rural livelihood literature tends to reflects a romanticised view of the household, where poor families automatically mobilise around common interests. This approach assumes a strategic vision and a level of cohesion and coherence in household relations, which we will argue is seldom found in poor rural and/or urban households in the Eastern Cape in the 1990s.

In this study we consequently adopted a rather different view of households, a view which was able to reflect the reality of internal inequalities, conflicts and power struggles within households. In Mooiplaas, poor households are definitely not safe havens from a heartless world of poverty, conflict and violence. They were very much part of this world and play a critical role in making it the kind of world it is. Here households are not socially closed entities, which are also economically independent of each other. Instead they are socially fluid, demographically unstable and are open to many variations and alternatives. This does not mean that households are necessarily always steeped in conflict and internal struggles for power. It makes no sense to simply replace a consensus model with a conflict model because all households - at least those we encountered in Mooiplaas - embodied some degree of conflict and consensus, of closure and openness, of the pursuit of common household interests and of individual interests. The analytically challenging part is to try to determine what
sorts of households and clusters of social relations create what kinds of livelihood opportunities and social and economic possibilities. In trying to address these complex issues we found ourselves constantly grappling, on the one hand, with ideologies and identities, and on the other, with practices, strategies and tactics. In trying to unravel the changing livelihood patterns emerging in the post-apartheid Eastern Cape we have found that the exploration of the twin themes of gender and generational relations provide compelling axes of analysis for the understanding of social change.

1.3 East London and the Hinterland

One of the reasons why Mooiplaas was selected as a research site for this study was because of its close proximity to the city of East London. East London is a minor coastal city on the eastern seaboard of South Africa with a fragile economy based largely on the food, motor and textile manufacturing sectors. Between 1945 and 1960 the economy of the city grew rapidly, registering annual growth rates in excess of 10%. This growth was based on secondary industrialisation in the manufacturing sector. However, since the inauguration of the homeland policy in the 1960s, which wedged East London between two impoverished, self-governing homeland states, Transkei and Ciskei, the economy of the city has fared less well. Low annual growth rates were recorded throughout the 1970s and 1980s, despite efforts by the apartheid government to shore up the local economy by offering attractive industrial decentralisation incentives in the region. The fragility of the city’s economy is not only based on its regional location, but on the absence of mineral and power sources and its distance from major metropolitan markets. Situated in one of the poorest provinces in the country, East London’s growth has always been limited by a weak local consumer market (Swilling 1987: 140).

The economic prospects for the city have recently improved with the dismantling of the homeland system and the centralisation of the Eastern Cape’s regional government in the nearby capital of Bisho (30 minutes drive from East London). However, the city is still badly in need of major economic investment to cater for its rapidly growing population. During the past decade, there has been a massive transfer of population from rural to urban areas in the Eastern Cape generally.
This occurred as a result of a breakdown of homeland borders, the removal of the influx control laws and the deterioration of agricultural output in the region since the 1980s. These factors have helped to ensure that East London became the target of a sustained wave of rural to urban migration. Dozens of new informal settlements have sprung up all over the city during the past five years, while the established townships within the city limits have become hopelessly overcrowded. In 1990, an Urban Foundation report estimated that 174 000 low-cost housing units would be needed in East London between 1990 and 1995 to keep up with housing demand. The report concluded that East London should aim to “supply housing at the appropriate rate and scale and within the financial means of the poor” (Daily Dispatch 7/11/1990).

On the basis of the available statistics for East London, the rural to urban migration rate over the past decade has been significant. It is estimated that a third of the informally settled population arrived in the city from rural areas - farms and villages - between 1986 and 1996. Many of these individuals come from rural areas like Mooiplaas, Cholumna, Kwelerha, and Newlands on the fringes of the city. In fact, the majority of rural immigrants have moved into the city from farms and villages situated within a 100 km radius. This recent influx represents a significant change from the previous two decades when urbanisation was strictly controlled under apartheid laws. The influx of people into East London from villages in areas like Mooiplaas, was not only a product of geographical proximity, it is also a result of recent political developments. In many of these villages, chieftain rule came to an abrupt end in the mid-1980s when locally elected village committees replaced chiefs and headmen. In East London, a similar process occurred when the state-supported local authorities were removed and replaced by democratically elected civic bodies. This process resulted in the emergence of strong residents associations in both town and country and this helped to strengthen the relationship between areas like Mooiplaas and the townships of East London.

The entrenchment and consolidation of village committees in rural communities around the city in the late 1980s also had important implications for the demography of these areas. As soon as democratically organised residents committees were operational, it was possible for local leaders to exert some control over
population mobility. In the rural villages local residents associations did not open up their villages to new population influx after 1986. In fact, committees limited population influx by controlling the allocation of land and residential sites in the villages. Research in the Newlands location just outside the city has revealed that population growth in established villages has been confined to natural population growth, despite severe pressures being placed on villages to accommodate new arrivals (Newlands Development Plan 1996: 11). The same pattern is evident in Mooiplaas where residents committees have also limited access to new residential sites to control population influx and prevent squatting. It is only on ‘released farms’ that rural population densities have escalated out of control. The ability of rural communities on the fringes of the city to shield themselves against population influx has meant that rural-urban migration has resulted in a net decrease in the size of village populations and served to relieve some of the pressure on agrarian resources.

Map 1: Mooiplaas and Border area circa 1945. Source Mager 1999 p.31
In a village like Ngxingxolo, where most of the research for this project was conducted, there has not been a dramatic loss of land by villagers over the past decade due to population pressure. Instead, arable land is under-utilised. In many instances household fields have been lying fallow for the past decade. One of the main challenges of this study is to explain why this has happened. Why do village residents no longer utilise the agrarian resources at their disposal? How have out-migration and rural agrarian stagnation affected gender and generational relations? What kinds of households remain in the rural areas and how have they responded to the new challenges of the 1990s. Moreover, we are interested in trying to explain how the decline in agricultural output and the restructuring of the rural economy has affected the creation of alternative sources of income generation in this rural area. Has greater access to urban opportunities, since the collapse of the homeland system, increased the economic opportunities for village residents? What is the relationship between the village and the city in the post-apartheid scenario? These are some of the questions that we hope to answer as we located this study within the nexus of rural-urban relations.

Plate 1: View of a section of Ngxingxolo village 1999
1.4 Research Methodology

In 1996 we conducted an elementary household census in Ngxingxolo, a village with a total population of approximately 8000 people. The village was chosen as our primary research site. Research in the village began in January 1997 and continued intermittently throughout that year and into 1998. In total the research team, comprised of Leslie Bank and Linda Qambata, spent approximately 150 days in the village as well as several nights. The researchers worked with a semi-structured household interview schedule which covered areas such as residential and migration history, employment, agricultural production, social and political involvement in village life, gender and generational relations, household ritual activities, and perspectives on the relationship between town and country. Different themes were highlighted in different case studies, depending on their relative importance to the household concerned. In most cases, multiple interviews were held with members of the same households to ensure that we were able to generate different perspectives and interpretations on their shared history. The adoption of a life-history approach was based on the belief that any understanding of the social dynamics of de-agrarianization needed to be based on an historical assessment of this phenomenon as a process.

The household histories were supplemented with the collection of what we called issue interviews. These interviews we conducted with key social and political figures in the village and were orientated towards generating general information about particular political issues, community projects and development schemes that were current in the village. Most of this work was undertaken during 1998 and involved interviews not only with community members, but also with local NGO and government personnel. The project also involved observational work. During the fieldwork phase many hours were spent attending local social gatherings and watching people go about their everyday activities. By April 1998, we had completed the above research, activities to our satisfaction and proceeded on to the final stage of the research, which was to design and administer a 100 household questionnaire. During this phase of the research, a third researcher, Landiswa Maqasho, became involved in the project. She was responsible for capturing the questionnaire data and working with the SPSS package used to describe the data collected. The authors would like to use
this opportunity to acknowledged Landiswa’s contribution. In Ngxingxolo village, we made many friends and received great support and understanding from the community. We would like to thank the community for their support. We would like to make special mention of two individuals, Xolisa Mdingi and Nicholas Matabesa, who supported and facilitated our work throughout.
CHAPTER TWO

BETTERMENT PLANNING, GENDER AND APARTHEID RESTRUCTURING IN THE EAST LONDON DISTRICT, 1955-1990

2.1 Introduction

After 1948, the apartheid government responded swiftly to reports of deteriorating agricultural and environmental conditions in the so-called African reserves by embarking on an ambitious plan to implement agricultural betterment and environmental rehabilitation schemes in these areas. To address this situation, the state felt that agriculture in the reserves needed to be placed on a ‘scientific’ footing with the introduction of more efficient farming techniques and by the reduction of stock holdings in communal areas. At the core of betterment planning, as it evolved on the statute books during the 1940s, was the idea that in order to encourage more rational use of resources it was necessary that all land in the reserves be divided between residential land, arable land and grazing land. The implementation of betterment across South Africa in the post-1948 period brought dramatic social and economic changes to rural communities who often had to accept stock losses, fencing and forced relocation as part of the betterment deal. Given the profound changes to tradition that betterment promised, it is not surprising that these schemes were met with staunch and determined resistance from rural people across South Africa (cf. Lodge 1983; Bozzoli 1991; Bernstein 1996; Beinart, Delius and Trapido 1996).

In the Eastern Cape, the state approached betterment differently in the former Ciskei and Transkei. In the latter region, where the evidence of environmental degradation and over-grazing was unlimited, full-scale betterment planning was slow to get off the ground (McAllister 1979, 1980, 1997). In fact, Hendricks (1989) suggests that state officials and agricultural extension officers here were divided over how best to approach betterment planning in this area. On the one hand, there were
those, following the recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission, who favoured policies that would encourage rural differentiation and cultivate a 'middle peasantry', while there were others within the state who preferred the idea of entrenching the migrant labour system by reducing rural differentiation. Indecision about which approach to follow caused long delays and heated debates, but, in the end, the latter approach won through - frequently more by neglect than intent - with the consequence that betterment served to entrench the migrant labour system rather than rural social differentiation in the Transkei (cf. Hendricks 1989).

In the Ciskei, which was already over-crowded, over-stocked and badly eroded by the 1950s, the state felt that no time should be wasted in 'getting the people fenced' (De Wet 1989; Mager 1999; Lodge 1983). With widespread poverty in this reserve and over a third of the population landless and stockless, the implementation of betterment and rehabilitation was seen as a priority by the state. There was no debate here about the creation of a 'middle peasantry'. Mager (1999) argues that, due to the generalised poverty in Ciskei, resistance and collaboration often emerged as gender specific response to betterment. She suggests that female producers, especially single mothers and widows, were inclined to collaborate with 'the Trust' – the betterment authority - in the hope of securing rights to land for themselves. She reports that this strategy was rewarded in some areas. Men, on the other hand, were more inclined to resist betterment and were opposed to the state creating new opportunities (such as fence building and other public works) for women in rural areas. Mager (1999) suggests that male dissatisfaction with the state resulted not only in a hardening of male attitudes in these rural areas, but also in the feminisation of rural poverty in the decades after 1950.

This is an interesting argument that we wish develop in the case of Mooiplaas in the East London district. The chapter will reflect on how agricultural betterment planning in combination with other urban and rural restructuring measures implemented in the East London district after 1950, not only encouraged de-agrarianization, but also imposed a highly gendered grid on the livelihood opportunity structure of this district. The focus of the chapter is thus not exclusively on the impact of agricultural betterment, but on a combination of urban and rural measures aimed at tightening influx control, restructuring labour market participation, and transforming
rural social and productive relations. We argue that the most important consequence of betterment planning in Mooiplaas was not that it made ‘peasants’ into ‘proletarians’, or that it denied women access to productive resources, but rather that it increased the general level of dependency of rural households on the state. It is this dependency, which was promoted and encouraged by betterment, that we argue ultimately exposed rural households and precipitated a sharp decline in rural production after 1983.

2.2 Betterment Planning in Mooiplaas.

Betterment planning was implemented in the Mooiplaas location in 1958. There was no overt resistance to the betterment in this area, despite the fact that some families lost considerable amounts of land and livestock in the process. Part of the reason for this was that this area was only consolidated into a single location after the 1936 Land Act and therefore did not have a history as a single, united political community. The betterment process in Mooiplaas created 14 villages, each of which were placed under the control of headmen, and each divided into arable, residential and grazing zones, which were fenced. The consolidation of new villages occurred through the aggregation of formerly scattered households into single compressed settlements in which each family was given a certificate of occupation which entitled them to a residential site with a garden, an arable field of 1 or 2 acres, and access to grazing land. The administration of land was left in the hands of headmen who had the power to allocate sites within the village. The headmen were, in turn, responsible to the Department of Native Affairs that held the overall responsibility for implementing and managing betterment.

The oral evidence suggests that betterment planning served to reduce economic differentiation in Mooiplaas by equalising access to land and other agrarian resources. It was thus the better-off farming families in the area that recalled the betterment experience with the greatest sense of loss and regret. Jonas Matebese, a member of a prominent family in Ngxinxolo, for instance, claims that his family lost a great deal through the implementation of betterment. He recalls that his father had 12 Morgan of fertile land. He remembers that it used to take them two weeks to plough the land with two span of oxen, each drawn by 12 animals. In good years, this
land would yield two wagonloads of wheat, which was consumed as porridge, or cooked with beans and used for brewing traditional beer. He claimed that the maize yield would fill three wagons and that they would produce approximately eight bags of beans as well. None of the produce was sold, it was all stored and consumed by the extended family or exchanged for labour. In 1958, when the family was forcibly moved to Ngxingxolo village, Jonas recalls that his father was in a state of disbelief when he was told that the amount of arable land available to the family had been reduced from 12 to 2 Morgan. Jonas said that, until his death in 1986, his father always maintained that betterment only meant one thing to black people - poverty and hunger. This was a view supported by other old men in the village.

Ntobeko Ziyokwana, for instance, recalled that his family also worked enough land prior to betterment to be virtually self-sufficient Ntobeko revealed that prior to the 1950s family members would work in East London mainly ‘for savings’, such as money to buy cattle, farming equipment and luxury consumer items. Ntobeko recalls that his father would only seek seasonal, casual work to supplement their main source of livelihood, farming. The family ploughed about 10 acres of good land located in the flood plain of the Ngxingxolo river and owned state of the art ploughing and threshing equipment, as well as a large wagon. He recalls that in good years they were able to produce a surplus of maize, which was stored in two household granaries. After betterment, he explained that ‘my father got less than half of the land we had before’. He also recalled that they had to loan cattle to relatives to get around the stock reduction measures that were introduced at that time. Ntobeko stated that betterment came as an enormous shock to his family and committed his father and his siblings to a life of drudgery and exploitation in the city. Ntobeko’s father retired as a municipal worker in 1992 after 20 years of service with the East London municipality. He has recently died.

For the majority of the original residents in our sample, however, the experience of dispossession, hardship and poverty dated back well before 1958. Consider the case of Thobela Jack, whose family owned a small field to the west of the village prior to 1958. Thobela remarked that the field had been used continuously by his family since the turn of the century and, by the 1950s, was producing a very irregular yield. He attributed the low output to over-use and soil exhaustion. When
Thobela’s family heard that they would be allocated a new field, they were very pleased and ‘were willing to cooperate with the Trust’. In the 1960s, Thobela recalls that the new field produced the best yields his family had seen in decades. Cases like this suggest that, although the area under cultivation in Mooiplaas was reduced with betterment, there were some households who experienced improved yields from smaller fields. Andrews (1993) confirms this when she reports that:

The relocation of arable land does not seem to have led to any major difficulties. In many instances it increased productivity due to declining fertility and erosion of old fields. However, it may have increased the distance of field from homestead for some households. While the old fields surrounded the village, the new ones [created by betterment] were located in one particular area near the village.

In terms of the allocation of land we found that independent women who had been living in the area all their lives were often denied access to land. Mrs Falase, who was already a widow at the time of betterment, claimed that single women and widows like herself were discriminated against by the Trust, and were not allocated arable fields. The best they could expect, she explained, was a residential site and even this was not guaranteed. Evidence from other rural areas in the region suggests that similar allocation procedures were followed elsewhere. Independent women were accommodated by the Trust, but were generally not given arable land. Mager (1999) notes that in order to compensate single women, the Trust employed them on betterment projects, such a fence building, terracing, conservation projects and the like. She suggests that these interventions were not well received by men because it shifted the control of women’s labour from the patriarchal household to the state. Thus, she notes that ‘the Native Trust undermined the domestic patriarchal order and strengthened the power of the state’ (Ibid). Many women responded to the discrimination and hardship experienced in the countryside by voting with their feet and by heading for East London, where they could find accommodation relatively easily in the 1940s and 1950s.

Some of the women we spoke to complained that the Trust was even prepared to accommodate outside farm families in the villages before them. In fact, it appears
that farm families poured into Mooiplaas at the time of betterment in the hope of gaining access to their own residential sites and arable fields. In the 1950s, people living on the farms between East London and the Kei River were generally known as Red Xhosa or amaqaba (blanket people). They were known for their strong commitment to agrarian lifestyles and for their rejection of Christianity and western influences. On some farms these people were able to retain some access to agrarian resources through tenancy arrangements with the white farmers. The most common form was rent tenancy. In terms of these arrangements, farm families worked on the land in exchange for access to some cash, usually in the form of a monthly wage, but also for access to agrarian resources, such as the right to accumulate livestock and to plant their own crops on an annual basis. For this privilege they paid the farmer rent. The nature of these relationships varied from farm to farm. Our evidence suggests that these arrangements were still prevalent on the farms around Mooiplaas in the 1950s. Some tenants kept as many as ten head of cattle and had access to several acres of land to plough for themselves.

Of the two rights allocated to tenants it was the former that was the most jealously guarded. For the culturally conservative farm Xhosa, the accumulation of livestock was a primary objective. Access to productive land was important, but was considered a secondary concern. Thus, when local white farmers started to enforce reduction in household livestock quotas in the 1950s and 1960s, many farm families grew increasingly dissatisfied with their lot and either tried to shift their livestock away from the farms or decided to leave the farms altogether. In this process, they looked to villages, like Ngxingxolo, in Mooiplaas as a potential base for relocation. The success of farm families in securing sites in the villages is demonstrated by the fact that almost half of the residents of Ngxingxolo village are descended from farm families. It is thus clear from the evidence that farm families not only gained access to the villages at the time of betterment, but were the major source of influx thereafter. Farm families broke into the villages either through direct bribes to headmen who were responsible for the allocation of sites or through the pressure of friends or relatives with whom these families stayed prior to securing a site of their own. It was rare for farm families to get arable land, unless one of the original inhabitants gave up their rights in the village (see case of Mjekula below), but they did acquire their own residential sites and grazing rights.
To explore this issue more closely it is useful to consider the case of Mayekile, who was born on a coastal farm in Haga Haga, approximately 20 kms north-east of Mooiplaas in the 1940s. Mayekile’s father was a ‘rent tenant’ who paid the farmer R100 a year for the right to plough four acres of land and to run 20 head of cattle on the farm. In the late 1950s, the farm on which they lived was sold to a white government official who was determined to transform rent tenants into full-time wage labourers. On the farm, the new farmer was called *nitlalo-mbi*, meaning ‘bringer of hardship’. In response to the pressures brought to bear on tenant families, Mayekile and his two brothers decided to leave the farm and seek accommodation in Mooiplaas. Their relocation to Mooiplaas was a slow and complicated process, which involved negotiation with the local headmen and the gradual relocation of stock into the villages. This was done by placing stock with relatives in Ngxinxolo to satisfy the demands of the farmer for stock reduction. In Mooiplaas, the stock quotas of 10 cattle per household were established under betterment. Not all families could fill these quotas, and so they became targets for farm workers with large herds. Agreements were struck with villagers who would claim to be the ‘owners’ of farm cattle in exchange for access to milk and some of the offspring of the beasts. These agreements were risky for farm families because once their cattle had been registered in another name they were often difficult to reclaim, especially if the relationship between the two parties soured. It was always better to enter these agreements with trusted close relatives.

Mayekile was prepared to take these risks in order to protect his assets from further depreciation on the farm. But this was only a temporary strategy. Eventually, when life on the farms became unbearable, Mayekile and his family moved in with relatives in Ngxinxolo village. After two years, they were given a residential site of their own and Mayekile was now able to register his cattle under his own name. In the meantime, he had travelled to a Chamber of Mines (TEBA) labour recruiting centre in Transkei and secured a job on the mines. This case shows how some farm families were able to make the move into the villages without losing all their livestock. By dispersing his cattle, paying the necessary bribes and securing wage employment soon after arrival, Mayekile was able to hold on to his livestock and protect his most valued assets.
Mjekula was another descendent from a farm tenant family, this time from the Kwelerha area. He moved into Ngxingxolo in the 1960s. Mjekula was born on the farm in 1935 and by the late 1950s he owned six head of cattle and was allowed to plough eight acres of land on the farm. For these rights, Mjekula paid the farmer an annual rental of R100. He recalls that, with access to fertiliser purchased from the farmer, he was able to generate regular yields of over 30 bags of maize, 5 bags of sorghum, 3 x 25 litre drums of beans and about 20 pumpkins. Ox-drawn ploughs owned by tenant families were used for ploughing on the farm. Mjekula said that: ‘the farmer’s tractor was always locked away in the shed, it was not for our use’. By the mid-1960s, the farmer increased the level of mechanisation on his farm and reduced the tenant’s land allocations. Mechanisation and the loss of land forced Mjekula to turn to Mooiplaas as a potential new home. Like Mayekile, Mjekula placed his livestock under the care of his paternal uncle in Ngxingxolo before moving to the village under his uncle’s guardianship in 1965. However, it took much longer for Mjekula than Mayekile to get his own site in the village. It was only in 1972 when a local family left the village for Qhukru that Mjekula was able to secure a residential site with about one acre of land to plough. Majekula explained that the only reason why they secured arable land was because they ‘replaced’ a family who had left the village. In this case the transition from farm to village was very protracted, and this made it difficult for Mjekula to hold onto his cattle which were sold to support his family.

The demands from farm workers for access to Mooiplaas continued to increase in the 1960s as conditions worsened on the farms and changing influx control and labour regulations restricted access to the city of East London. In fact, the impact of betterment in the East London district is difficult to measure without considering the changing conditions in the city townships. For Mooiplaas residents, East London always provided their main source of employment and other services, such as shopping and medical facilities. The historical record shows that a close relationship developed between East London and satellite rural communities, like Mooiplaas, Kwelegha and Chalumna. In fact, the majority of the people living in the city’s townships originally came from these rural locations. Any change in the political economy of the city consequently had a direct impact on the inhabitants of Mooiplaas.
In the section below, we will briefly consider some of the far-reaching changes that beset the city after the 1950s.

2.3 Influx Control and Labour Regulation in East London

After 1945, while betterment was being plotted in the countryside, East London experienced strong economic growth, continuing a pre-war trend in the city. Minkley notes that the period 1945 to 1957 saw the urban economy grow rapidly and make the critical transition from a commercial and small workshop economy to a fully-fledged manufacturing economy. He reports that the number of manufacturing plants in East London increased from 135 in 1946 to 223 in 1958, and the number of jobs for African workers in this sector from 3800 to 8700 (Minkley 1992). One of the key features of this phase of secondary industrialisation was that it was based on the employment of cheap unskilled and semi-skilled male African labour. This meant that there were good prospects of employment for men during the 1950s, although wage levels were known to be 20% below national averages. Low wages and appalling living conditions in the townships, which were described as ‘amongst the worst in the Union’, also fuelled discontent and political agitation, which spilled over into open rioting during the early and mid-1950s. Political problems notwithstanding, East London remained a target for sustained rural influx in the post-war years. Most of the new arrivals from the rural areas flooded into the sprawling East Bank location, which was comprised of residential sections such as Tsolo, Mkeni, Maxambeni, Thulandiville, Gomoro, Moriva and New Brighton.

These locations, which had already been declared as irredeemable slums by two official commissions of enquiry, provided an ideal hiding place for new arrivals who entered the city without the necessary documentation. The densely settled wood-and-iron shack areas in these locations were difficult to police and it was easy for ‘illegals’ to stay there undetected by the authorities. In fact, in the mid-1950s, it was reported that there were only 10 policemen employed to manage 60 000 residents in the East London locations. With police thin on the ground, illegals continued to flood in throughout the 1940s and 1950s. By 1956, one official estimated that a quarter of the African population in East Bank were there ‘illegally’. In 1959, a South African Police report specifically noted that at least 7000 women were now living illegally in
the city. These figures indicate the infamous Influx Control Regulations that were promulgated during the 1940s meant very little in the bustling port city of East London in the 1950s. Africans seemed to be able to enter and leave the city with consummate ease. At the time, Native Affairs officials were issuing about 1000 visiting permits a month. Even in the late 1950s, when African women were expected to carry passes, local officials made no serious attempt to use the pass laws to keep them out of the city. In 1958 alone, 12 000 passes were issued to women in East London. Some of these women were coming to visit their husbands who had found jobs in the growing industrial sector, but many others were moving into the city in search of a better life (cf. Atkinson 1991: 354-75).

By the late 1950s, the ‘unacceptable’ state of urban influx control in the city was now a matter of grave concern to the authorities. The turn-around in urban management and control began in 1958 when groups of senior migrants who were appalled by the rising crime rate and ‘moral decay’, moved through the locations with sticks disciplining youth and beating up criminals. They described their campaign as ukucoco (to clean up). The campaign had the approval of the local police, who made no arrests and apparently even briefed the old men after they had done their rounds. The ukucoco campaign of 1958 was aimed specifically at the criminal male youth, who loitered around the township streets. Informants from East Bank recall that the vigilante campaign forced thousands of unemployed youths back into the rural areas as they fled the city in their droves. The vigilante actions in 1958 laid the foundation for tighter urbanisation control and management in the city. To promote this objective the state appointed Mr F. W. C. Buitendag, an prominent Apartheid bureaucrat from the former Transvaal, to investigate the functioning of East London’s Native Administration Department, and to reflect on the way in which the city might more effectively manage its African population. Buitendag was shocked at the lax manner in which the local African population was managed and what he referred to as the ‘chaotic state of the influx control system in the city’. He recommended far-reaching measures to ‘modernise’ and ‘rationalise’ the functions of Native Administration in and around the city. Buitendag found evidence of administrative corruption and insisted that new personnel be found to enforce influx control and clear the city of ‘illegals’. Buitendag also felt that getting the new labour bureau system working in the Eastern Cape was the key. The Buitendag report of 1960 marked the beginning of
a new era of urban management in East London. It set the ball rolling for the implementation of a new social and spatial regime in East London, which had a profound affect on the ways in which people in nearby rural areas, like Mooiplaas, related to the city.

The new approach was manifested in a number of actions and decisions taken in the city in the early 1960s. Firstly, in 1961, Mr Van Zyl was appointed as the new Regional Employment Commissioner and was stationed in King William’s Town, 45 kms from East London. He declared that the labour bureau system would be used more effectively to control labour in East London. He assured the authorities that employers would not be able to take on labour, as they had done in the past, without following the official procedures. He stated that the aim of this intervention was to try to reduce the large ‘floating population’ of casual labour moving in and out of the city. Secondly, to tighten labour control inside the city a series of new hostel complexes were erected and migrants were now compelled to move out of the shack areas and into this tightly controlled, single-sex hostel complex. The hostels were fenced off from the township and placed under 24-hour guard. Thirdly, local officials declared that women from the rural areas around East London would be prohibited from entering the township. They would no longer be given visiting passes, which were issued in large numbers in the 1950s and were difficult to police. This measure was taken to try to reduce the number of women in the location. Fourthly, and most significantly, the East London City Council approved the creation of the new location of Mdantsane, situated outside East London. In 1959, municipal planners had begun to draft a master plan for the location which was to replace the old East Bank/Duncan Village complex. The plan provided for the erection of 25 000 houses to shelter 125 000 people. In 1964, the forced removals to Mdantsane began.

These measures put an end to the relatively free flow of labour between urban areas and rural locations around the city of East London. Access to the urban labour market was now more closely regulated and rural immigration into the city severely restricted. This curtailed the common practice of ‘target working’ and promoted labour stabilisation in the city. Minkley (1992) argues that the labour stabilisation measures were designed to address the floating population in the city and the tendency
of workers to leave their jobs periodically to attend to responsibilities in the rural areas. These tendencies were, of course, not entirely eliminated with the introduction of a regulated labour bureau system, but it did go some way towards keeping employed labour in town on a more permanent basis and unemployed labour out. The new labour control, especially the fining of employers who gave work to ‘illegals’, put a lid on the tendency of employers to pick up illegals for short contracts and casual work. The lack of opportunities at this end of the job market together with tighter surveillance and control in the city shut out many of the openings that had existed for farm workers and other rural ‘illegals’ to break into the urban labour market. This ruling was designed to prevent the build-up of surplus labour in the city and to force employers to recruit their workers through the labour bureaux rather than at the factory gate.

The tightening up of labour controls and the new labour bureau system also had the effect of distributing a greater proportion of the male labour from rural areas, like Mooiplaas, away from the city of East London. The evidence from Mooiplaas shows that growing numbers of male workers found employment in Cape Town during the 1960s and 1970s. Many older men from Ngxinxolo found work at the Cape Town docks and were housed in municipal hostels in Langa. Recruitment from Mooiplaas to the mines on the Reef was, however, limited because of the absence of a TEBA (Chamber of Mines) recruitment office in the area. Men wishing to go to the mines would have to travel to Transkei for recruitment. Whatever strategies men pursued, the 1960s and 1970s saw a marked increase in the incidence of long distance migration for men. The experience of male workers from Mooiplaas demonstrates how difficult it was for rural men to escape the political economy of labour migration. Even men employed in East London seemed to view themselves more as migrants than commuters after 1960. They were now absorbed into dedicated migrant labour hostels, where they were forced to mingled with other migrants. In the hostel environment, the boundaries between town and country hardened as workers became encapsulated in an ethos of rural responsibility. Our case studies show that men who worked in East London visited their rural homes less frequently during the 1960s and 1970s than they had before and were happy to leave the responsibilities of rural production in the hands of their wives and daughters.
The deteriorating conditions in the countryside and the changing work culture in the city led to a reduction of ‘target working’ which, according to Minkley (1992) had so disturbed urban employers in East London prior to the 1950s. As rural households became more dependent on wage earnings and urban workers more committed to long-term urban employment, so the political economy of the rural homestead changed with the primary responsibility for managing the umzim falling into the hands of women, who stayed behind in the rural areas. Before exploring some of the changes in the household economy in greater detail, it is worth considering how the position of women changed in the East London district between the 1950s and the 1970s.

2.4 The Changing Position of Women

In the 1950s, Minkley states that women enjoyed considerable economic and social power in the East Bank location of East London. In fact, he goes as far as to state that:

...independent and single/unmarried women ‘owned’ the East Bank Location and the men in it. These women were able, over the period, to shape the Location in material, social and cultural ways with a great deal more effect and endurance than men from the location elite, factories and rail-yards, male migrants from the rural areas, or the masters of the local state. ...The community of the location cohered around these ‘matrifocal family structures’, although it was seldom consciously or publicly asserted (1996: 156).

In the 1940s and 1950s, the slumyards of East Bank earned a reputation in the region as being a safe haven for ‘runaway girls’ and ‘unmarried mothers’ who had fled from unwanted pregnancies, authoritarian fathers and cruel, unsupportive husbands in the rural areas. Despite official policy that attempted to keep women out of cities, half of the African population of the East Bank was women in the 1950s. The evidence shows that large numbers of men and women were living as single people. Anne Mager (1999) notes that:
Women entered town independently from the surrounding farms and rural locations such as Kwela, Mooiplaas and Newlands. Ciskeian women tended to settle permanently in town while those from the Transkei tended to return to the countryside. Loose liaisons were facilitated by these patterns of migrancy and in-migration.

Mager goes on to claim that many of the single women in East Bank became the mothers of unwanted children. In the countryside, the practice of metsha, a traditional form of contraception, helped to limit pregnancy, but in the city men did not follow these traditions and consequently greater numbers of women fell pregnant. The combination of poverty and widespread infanticide produced extraordinarily high levels of infant mortality in East Bank. In 1954, it was reported that 406 per 1000 new-born baby girls died, while 353 boys died per 1000 births (Minkley 1996). Location life was rough and hard, but many single women managed to establish their economic independence in the city. By the mid-1950s, there was a cohort of independent women who had become so successful that “70% of the landlords in East Bank were in fact landladies, the majority of whom were described as single and independent” (Minkley 1996: 150). Many of these women had made their way up the economic ladder through informal sector activities such as beer brewing, hawking, money-lending, and prostitution. These women used their savings to gain access to property that they rack-rented to hard-up migrants for a good profit. Mager confirms that “in the [East Bank] shanty town, these women wielded considerable power, derived in part from their economic independence, but also from the necessity of holding their own in a context of shebeen violence and police raids” (1999: 154).

By the mid-1960s, the economic power of single women in the East London locations had been crushed by the state. In the post-1950 era of mass relocation and tighter urban control, city officials made a concerted onslaught on the ‘matrifocal family’. Access to housing in the new Duncan Village township in East London was only given to ‘father-husbands’ and their families. Female household heads were not able to set down roots in the city and were effectively driven out to Mdantsane in Ciskei. The aim of the state was also to break up dysfunctional extended families and to redraw the boundaries of urban domesticity. The matrifocal family was connected in the minds of urban officials to juvenile delinquency and political disorder. And, in
order to cleanse the city of these pathologies, it became imperative that female-headed households are denied accommodation in the city. Even women who were widowed after moving into Duncan Village were quickly removed to Mdantsane and their houses reallocated. It is also interesting to note that at the time of the removals, men were informed that if they took up houses in the Mdantsane township, they would have to relinquish their rights to land in their home villages. State officials made it clear that it was not permissible for men to have property rights in both urban and rural areas. Our respondents recall that many men turned down the opportunity to move to Mdantsane for precisely this reason and took up residence in the migrant’s hostels instead.

During the 1960 and 1970s, Mdantsane became a common destination for displaced matrifocal families from the city. The consequence of removal was that these large, three-generational families were broken up into smaller units and dispersed across the new township. In the process, the economic power of town women, which had been based on rack-renting and various other informal sector pursuits, was crushed. In the post-1950 period the economic imperatives that underwrote the economically strong matrifocal households disappeared. By separating urban matriarchs from their old migrant client-base, the state effectively shut down their access to business opportunities. By the mid-1960s, East London had lost its shine for determined, self-supporting women. The implementation of the influx control laws made it very difficult to find accommodation or work without the necessary documentation. Moreover, the decision to stop issuing ‘visiting passes’ also prevented them from periodically visiting the city for short periods to assess the available opportunities. The best option for independent women after 1960 was to gain access to a house in the new commuter town of Mdantsane, but even here the economic opportunities were bleak. The net effect of the changes outlined above was that they kept women in the rural areas, where they had to be satisfied working for their father or their husband’s umzi.

In the rural areas around East London, the only source of wage employment available to women was seasonal work on white-owned farms. Men refused to do this work which was periodic and very poorly paid. The employment options for women in the villages were thus very limited. In Mooiplaas, we found that live-in domestic
work in East London and seasonal labour on white-owned farms, especially on the pineapple plantations, were the main opportunities open to women in the 1960s and 1970s. A few women from the village did manage to secure jobs at the textile factories that expanded in the East London area during the 1970s. After a period of relatively easy access to urban accommodation and employment, single rural women found that they could no longer enter the city unnoticed and quickly find a means of supporting themselves outside the formal economy. Rural restructuring and urban influx control gave single women little room to manoeuvred and increasingly confined them to the rural areas, where they were wedged between the tightening grip of male patriarchal control enforced through the headmen system and surveillance by the state.

In the betterment era, the state saw rural stability being built on the platform of strong male-headed households who remained loyal to their headmen and tribal authorities. This vision was inscribed in the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, which strengthen rural patriarchy by enhancing the power and influence of headmen at the village level. The idea of a direct chain of command running from Native Affairs through the tribal authority system down to the village headman and ultimately to the household patriarch was fundamental to the thinking behind this legislation. Given this structure of power, it is not surprising that our case studies reveal systematic discrimination against unmarried women and widows, especially in relation to the allocation and control of rural resources. A good example of this is provided in the case of Nonzame Tini whose unmarried mother inherited a site from her late brother in Ngxingxolo during the late 1960s. She was the only surviving heir. At the time Nonzame’s mother was working as a cleaner at the Cecilia Makiwane Hospital in Ciskei and rented a room in Mdantsane. But, despite her urban employment, Nonzame was determined to make use of her land and arranged for cash to be sent home regularly so that her teenage daughter Nonzame, then still at school, could arrange for the three acre field to be planted.

Nonzame said that she would come home as often as possible to help her children out. Nonzame recalls that, although the land was never full utilised, they usually generated a yield of between 5 and 10 bags of maize a season as well as large numbers of pumpkins which she gave to patients at Cecilia Makiwane hospital.
local headmen was, however, dissatisfied with the arrangement. He informed Nonzame’s mother that he would not tolerate a ‘school child compromising her education by devoting so much time to agriculture’. He said that there were responsible men in the village who had no land and proceeded to confiscate the field from her mother. Nonzame and her younger brother were forced to leave the village and took up residence with their mother in Mdantsane. It was only in the late 1980s, after the headmen had been removed from office that Nonzame’s mother was able to return to the village and reclaim her land. This type of victimisation of single mothers was allegedly common in Ngxingxolo during the 1960s and 1970s. In responding to these pressures few women were able, like Nonzame’s, to escape the net of rural patriarchy by securing accommodation and employment in the city. Access to the city, as we have seen, was restricted with the implementation of influx control in East London in the 1960s.

The impact of discrimination against women is also seen in the case of Mrs Mdingi, the wife of an original inhabitant of the village, who was widowed in Ngxingxolo in 1971. Mrs Mdingi realised that, if she was not able to show that she was using her ex-husband’s land effectively, it might not be long before she lost her fields to another family in the village. In order to ensure that the land remained productive and that the headman had no reason to attempt to transfer the field to somebody else, Mrs Mdingi entered a sharecropping relationship with an ex-farm tenant who moved into the village in the 1960s. The ex-tenant had considerable agricultural expertise, but no land to plough. Their relationship involved shared responsibility for production. Her mother would pay half the cost of hiring a tractor and the family would contribute family labour during hoeing and reaping. The cost of the seed and fertiliser, if used, would be born entirely by her partner. The crop would then be shared equally between the two families. This arrangement which was struck in 1970 continued intermittently until 1992, although Xoliswa Mdingi (her daughter) notes that the field was infrequently used after the mid-1980s. In good years, Xoliswa recalls that the land would produce between 30-40 bags of maize on the cob, which when stripped would fill a large galvanised storage tank. The maize would be used for domestic consumption as well as to feed to the household pigs and fowls. She remembers that some of the harvest used to be exchanged for labour. Those who assisted the family during hoeing and reaping would get an igongo (a 25 litre paraffin
drum) of maize. Xoliswa believes that had her mother not entered this type of sharecropping relationship she might well have been put under pressure to relinquish the land.

Plate 2: Xoliswa Mdengi outside her house

Although our case material showed that patriarchy was entrenched at the village level by the headmen who restricted access to residential sites and arable land to male household heads, we did encounter one case where a widow from the farms did manage to acquire a site for herself. Nomayithi arrived in Ngxinxolo from the Komga area in 1971, shortly after her husband died. She recalled that at the time of her husband’s death, the household owned 20 head of cattle on the farms. However, within two years the herd had been reduced to nothing because of theft, amanzi abomvu (Red Fever), and family rituals. Nomayithi said that the decision to move to Mooiplaas was taken by her two sons who said that they had nothing to work for on the farms once the cattle had gone. They persuaded her to move in with a close
relative in Ngxingxolo. For three years (1971-74), Nomayithi and her sons lived as lodgers with their kin, but eventually headman Toti did grant her a residential site with a small garden. This occurred after both her sons had found employment in East London and the household was now on a firm financial footing. This is the only case we recorded where a female household head was able to secure title to land in her own name.

2.5 Dependency and Divisions in the Village

The pressures of a tightening web of social and political control were not only felt by women, they were also felt by farm families who had moved in and out of the city in response to changing conditions on white farms (cf. Mayer 1974, 1980). From the late 1950s, they too were denied access to the city and were left stranded on farms that were beginning to embark on a shift towards more capitalised production. During this period, the state took enormous strides to put white agriculture on a more capitalist footing by bringing various forms of tenancy to an end and transforming farm workers into wage labourers. In the process, farm families lost access to residual agrarian resources, such as grazing rights and access to arable land. In the East London district, many families were even forcibly evicted from the land in the 1960s and 1970s to accommodate new farming practices and labour saving technologies, such as milking machines and mechanised planting and harvesting equipment. The timing of these developments could not have been worse for farm families who were caught between the new betterment controls in the villages and influx control in the city. With nowhere left to go, farm families desperately scoured the countryside looking for white farmers who still tolerated tenancy. But when this failed they increasingly gravitated towards villages like Ngxingxolo where, if nothing else, they would be left in peace.

In the period between 1958 and 1980, the residential population of Ngxingxolo more than doubled as a result of farm immigration. In the early period, as we have seen, many of the new arrivals from the farms still had access to some livestock and were keen to enter cattle loan agreements with stockless families in the village. During the 1960s, many tried to use the village as a buffer to protect against stock loss on the farms. A few succeeded. But the shift from farm to village was
always problematic - stock was often stolen, ploughs and other tools got broken and access to arable land to plough was lost. The best farm families could do after arrival was to set up a sharecropping relationship with landed families. By the 1970s, the pressures on farm workers to relinquish stock and discontinue production had grown to such an extent that most farm families that moved in during this period had little or no stock at all. Many of these individuals told stories of moving from farm to farm in search of better working conditions and ‘older farmers’ with the right attitude to their livestock. But with each move stock was lost and by the time they reached Ngxinge solo many of these families were already destitute. As in the case of Nomayithi, the older generation now looked to the younger generation males in the families to secure wage employment in the cities and remit enough wages home to keep them going. In the period 1958 to 1983, the most dramatic cases of deagrarianization occurred not in the villages, but on the farms where rural producers were systematically stripped of their access to land and livestock.

The steady farm influx families did, however, bring skills, labour and equipment into the villages and these were desperately needed to keep field agriculture alive. The location of household fields away from the main homestead seriously undermined the capacity and interest of some households in field agriculture. Under betterment distance proved to be a major disincentive for investment in farming. For households with regular migrant remittances, no transport and little labour to spare it was simply not practical to cultivate fields located miles away from the homestead. The investment was too great and the risks too high. This is why many landed households tried to engage poor, landless farm families in sharecropping relationships in the 1960s. These families were often desperate for employment on arrival in Mooiplas and they usually had the necessary know-how, labour and equipment to work in the fields. Older farm workers were knowledgeable, experienced and committed. However, they were also not prepared to work for nothing and this is where tension often crept into these relationships. Long-term absenteeism in distant urban areas made it difficult for landed migrants to keep a close watch on how their fields were being used and their cattle managed. Lack of contact and monitoring often resulted in dishonesty and abuse. Ex-farm workers consequently bore the brunt of local accusations concerning stock and crop theft.
In a context of increasing stock theft and over-crowding, the continued arrival of farm families into the villages was a major source of tension in Mooiplaas. Many local inhabitants believed that the villages were already over-crowded and that the headmen should not be entertaining new requests for sites. Households with relatively large numbers of stock were especially opposed to residential expansion because it was their grazing land that was being used to accommodate new residents. Andrews (1993) reports that in one village the allocation of new residential sites consumed one out of three grazing encampments in the village. The headmen were sensitive to these complaints but were also under pressure to accommodate the new families because they were often the immediate kin of existing families. Headmen also realised that their own political ambitions and influence rested on expanding their constituency. These tensions played themselves out throughout the late 1960s and 1970s and contributed to the growing unpopularity of the headmen. Locals argued that the headmen were becoming too corrupt and dishonest and were abusing their control over land allocations to enrich themselves and impoverish the villagers. Ngxingxolo was no exception in this regard and many of our informants recalled the growing disapproval from older inhabitants at the rate at which farm families were being let into the village and were using up ‘their resources’.

Criticism of the headmen of Ngxingxolo in the betterment era was not restricted to their policy on farm immigration. According to local residents, the headmen who presided over Ngxingxolo during the 1960s and 1970s were extremely critical of what they viewed as the ‘unprogressive attitudes’ of Red families living in the village. Many informants claimed that a division between ‘Red’ and ‘School’ or between traditionalist and Christianised people was salient in the village after betterment, and that suspicion among these factions was fuelled by the favouritism that successive headmen showed to the Christian families. Headman Koyana, who held office during the 1970s, was known to be antagonistic towards the Red people. In negotiating village disputes, he allegedly unashamedly sided with the Christian parties. It was alleged that he would go around from door to door in the village threatening to beat children if they did not go to school. With the help of his council, he also outlawed stick fighting in the village, except during initiation, and did everything in his power to persuade Red families to abandon their traditions and to
start attending church. Nolindile, a leading producer of traditional garments in the village, recalled the Koyana era with horror and disgust. She explained that:

Headman Koyana was an educated man who had no respect for our culture. He was opposed to everything traditional in the village. He did not tolerate us wearing traditional dress. He would chase and beat up young men who wore blankets rather than pants. He said that wearing blankets was a sign of laziness. I remember that he even tried to stop young girls, who went to work on the farms as seasonal labourers, from singing traditional songs on their way home. He would say to them: ‘Hurry on home and help your mothers with household chores’. He even tried to stop us from thatching our roofs [a practice which is believed to encourage the ancestors to enter the house], from decorating our houses on the outside with water-paints, and from dyeing our garments with red ochre and lard. He did not like people giving their children ‘bad names’, like Nontlupheko, meaning ‘the one who is poor and always beset with problems’.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the mainstream Christian churches, the village headmen and white agricultural officials all campaigned actively against what they considered to be unprogressive elements in the villages. The headmen’s campaign, as the above quote suggests, was directed at the intimate aspects of people’s everyday cultural life and experiences. It sought to restructure household relations, sociability and identity in the village. By forcing children to attend school, by instructing young working women to go home to help their mothers, and by preventing young men from pursuing traditional forms of recreation, such as stick fighting, the village headmen aimed to inculcate new values within the community and the home. By asking villagers to replace their thatched roofs with tin ones, to erect square houses rather than rondawels, to refrain from holding unnecessary rituals, and to attend diligently to their houses, fields and gardens, the headmen were telling their followers to reconstruct their images of family and society.

By the late 1970s, the attacks by Koyana and his colleagues on tradition had already delivered important results. Recreational stick fighting in the village had ceased, as had traditional forms of youth associations, such as intlombe and
umtshotsho, which stressed the traditional principles of respect for seniority and of broad kin and community-based solidarities. The adoption of square houses with tin roofs and the increasing importance of education as a value in the village also bore witness to the influence of the Koyana era. However, by undermining the social fabric of traditional forms of association, the headmen also undermined older patterns of social co-operation and cohesion that made collective agricultural work possible. Thus while the 1970s was a period where more children went to school and church, it was also a period in which co-operative work parties, collective ploughing teams, and the extra-household labour exchanges in the agricultural cycle began to fall away. The shift away from tradition was also seen at the level of the home itself. Under pressure from Koyana, more and more families opted for square houses rather than rondawels. This pleased the headman, as did the tendency of people to replace their old thatched roofs with tin ones. But these changes did not come naturally to Red families and did not occur without resistance and bitterness in the village. As one women explained: ‘We did these things because we were scared of Koyana, not because we wanted to’. Another explained that while they added a tin roof for fear of what the headman might do, they never actually removed the thatch underneath the tin: ‘so that the ancestors could still visit us in the rondawel’.

By sowing fear, division and suspicion in the community, the capacity for communal agrarian enterprise through the organisation of ploughing teams, work parties and the like was seriously undermined. As old divisions lingered – between Red and School, original residents and new farm families, and between church goers and non-church goers – so the capacity of the people of Ngxingxolo to deal constructively with change faltered. The intervention of the state on the side of the headmen through the provision of agricultural services, such as seed, fertiliser and ploughing equipment, only served to encourage this process. Agricultural extension officers, who co-operated closely with the headmen, also contributed to this process by emphasising the need for new progressive farming techniques in the village. They stressed the importance of self-reliance and the ability of each household to establish their own economic independence in the village. These themes of self-realisation, independence and self-sufficiency were entrenched at the agricultural shows and demonstrations held in the villages during the 1960s and 1970s. Agricultural officers were highly visible in Mooiplaas during this period. One woman remembered that:
They were keen to encourage development and self-sufficiency. This entailed training us in all aspects of self-sufficiency like baking for household consumption and for sale, all types of crafts, home economics and farming. At that time delegates would be chosen from the villages here to undergo training at a training centre at Debe Nek [a small town in the Ciskei]. Delegates would stay at the centre for a week with each day dedicated to learning new skills. On the last day of training we would be taken on a tour of development projects in that area and would see what some farmers achieved under the supervision of teams from the Fort Hare Agricultural School and Fox Cox College of Agriculture. This scheme was for all interested parties until it collapsed in the 1970s.

To suggest that the headmen and government officials were solely responsible for the breakdown of communal farming practices in Ngingxolo after 1960 would be to miss the way in which socio-spatial dynamics of betterment itself worked as an apparatus of modernity. Westaway (1993) argues that the spatial lay-out of betterment villages ensured that they acted as self-regulating environments which imposed new forms of discipline and power on their inhabitants. He argues that the shift from a traditional dispersed settlement pattern to closer settlement on adjoining rectangular sites led to a situation where complete strangers live cheek by jowl and were able to survey each other at close range. This surveillance, Westaway (1993) argues, encouraged people to adjust their own behaviour in accordance with the new standards set by state officials and betterment planners. In the case of Ngingxolo, the visibility associated with closer settlement increased the potential for surveillance and self-regulation and thus helped the state change social behaviour. For those who disobeyed the new rules of village life there was always the possibility that a neighbour might report them to the headman or the local extension officer. The socio-spatial regime of betterment was able to encourage social isolation, conformity and suspicion within the village.

Although our evidence of the size and extent of household yields in Ngingxolo during the betterment period is sketchy, our case studies do indicate that about two-thirds of the households with fields in the sample, used them on a regular basis. Some households still used ox-drawn ploughs and there is evidence of
ploughing companies operating in the village until the 1970s. However, it does appear that as sharecropping agreements began to falter, rural households became increasingly dependent on the state’s agricultural extension services for survival. Many households were not able to plant and reap a crop on their distant field without the provision of government tractors for transport and ploughing, as well as seed, fertiliser and other inputs. The provision of a regular dipping service with ‘free chemicals’ also ensured that livestock remained in good condition and were disease-free. Besides entrenching rural patriarchy, the main function of betterment in Ngxinxolo was to increase local peoples’ dependency on the state and to reduce their dependence on each other for survival. This breakdown of co-operative extended kinship networks, team based agricultural work and communal sharing and consumption practices was one of the most significant legacies of the state’s highly interventionist betterment policy in the Mooiplaas location.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on betterment planning and Apartheid restructuring in the East London district in the post-1950 period. In the analysis provided we have noted that urban and rural restructuring in the district occurred simultaneously during this period and that it is impossible to understanding the impact of the one without reference to the other. In the city, a new phase of urban planning and population relocation was introduced after the political upheaval of the 1950s. Tighter influx control and labour regulation characterised the new urban management approach in the city. Rural men who did not have Section 10 1(a) or (b) permits were now either forced to take up residence in the hostels or move back to the rural areas. Rural workseekers were no longer able to linger in the city until they found work. They had to apply for work at their local labour offices in the rural areas and wait for labour requisitions to arrive there. The effect of this system was that it distributed male workers to all corners of South Africa and broke down local, short-term circular migration patterns in the district.

While men were dispersed, women lost their access to the city. Under the new regime, women were stripped of their residence, power and influence in the city. The old, property-owning matriarchs of Tsolo and Mkeni were now forced out of the city.
They could choose between returning to their home villages, from which they had fled for the freedom of the city, or the new Ciskei township of Mdantsane, which was very short of employment. But it was still a better choice for most women than the humiliation of being sent back to their home villages. This latter transition was often very difficult for women who had made their own living in the city for years, to take. As outsiders in the villages they were very vulnerable and their only option was to collaborate with ‘the trust’ in the hope that they would be given work and some land on which to support their families.

By closing East London off to rural ‘illegals’, the state also made it very difficult for farm families to urbanise. They could no longer filter into the city, but now had to seek accommodation in rural villages, like Ngxinxolo, where they had to compete with locals for access to land and livestock. After 1958, all arable land had been allocated in Ngxinxolo and this meant that farm families were unlikely to secure any land to plough on arrival in the village. In some instances they were able to continue with agriculture by entering sharecropping agreements with landed families in the village. By and large, farm families were lucky to get a residential site and usually comprised the poorest strata of the village population. Their lack of local knowledge, patronage links and experience in the labour market made them particularly vulnerable to poverty. They often had little option but to develop dependency relationships with better-off families in the village who could help them out when times got tough. The fact that families from the farms were poorly educated and culturally conservative (non-church going) did not help them in villages where headmen and agricultural officers were encouraging more ‘progressive’ attitudes.

The only category that seemed to have been worse off than the ex-farm families were the single women and widows who were systematically denied access to resources in the village. It was even discovered that in some cases arable land was expropriated from these women and handed over to ex-farm families. This is why widows, like Mrs Mdingi, did their best to demonstrate that they were using their land productively. Other women like Nonzame’s mother were less fortunate and lost their land. The only local source of employment for single women, besides occasional jobs with the Trust, was low-paid seasonal work on pineapple farms in the area. Without easy access to city jobs, the struggle for survival among female-headed households
was intense. Those with strong local kinship ties fared better than destitute widows, like Nomayithi, who came to the village from a farm in Komga in 1971. Working for a plate of food or for a bunch of vegetables or a few maize cobs was not beyond some of the single women in our sample.

Rural differentiation in Mooiplaas was not initiated by betterment planning. In fact, the opposite argument might be made when one considers the amount of productive land lost by families, like the Matebese’s and the Ziyokwana’s. What needs to be noted here, however, is that betterment has a powerful influence on structuring local opportunities and as such left its own imprint on rural stratification and local processes of de-agrarianization. While these processes are undoubtedly significant, the point we have emphasised in relation to the betterment experience in Mooiplaas was that it not only greatly increased the dependence of rural producers on the state, but it simultaneously destroyed an agrarian fabric that was based on co-operative extended kinship networks, team-based agricultural work and achievement of communal goals and objectives. The implications of these developments will be explored in greater detail in the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER THREE:
RECONNECTING THE VILLAGE AND THE CITY:
REBELLION, MIGRATION, AND YOUTH
IDENTITY POLITICS,
1985-1998

3.1 Two Rebellions

In 1981 the fledgling homeland of Ciskei was granted political independence by the Apartheid state. In an effort to consolidate the homeland into a single geographical unit the South African government announced that several black communities scattered in the Border Corridor area would be relocated to land adjoining the Ciskei. It was reported that one of the locations affected by this scheme was Mooiplaas. The question of the removal of the people living on the Mooiplaas ‘black spot’ had been under discussion since the mid-1970s. In 1978, for instance, Lennox Sebe, the Ciskeian head of state, rejected an earlier offer by the government to clear the area on the grounds that the famous Xhosa Chief Gcaleka has died in the Ngxinxolo river and that the whole area was of a place of special significance to the Xhosa people. However, between 1978 and 1981, the South Africa government had sweetened the deal for Sebe by promising him that all families would be relocated on fully serviced sites and that they would be given more land than they currently had. The state proposed that the new area of settlement would be in the Ncera area to the west of East London and that relocation could begin as soon as it had purchased the relevant white-owned farms. Lennox Sebe and Chief Jolinglanga, head of the affected tribal authority, finally agreed to the move in 1981. (cf. Switzer, L. 1993)

Although people in Mooiplaas were concerned about the announcement, it was not the first time that the question of relocation had been raised and they were also aware that the state did not yet own the land it was proposing to relocate them to. The whole issue in their view was still in the balance. However, the mood in the
location changed very quickly in 1985 when it was announced that the state had purchased 12 000 hectares of white farm land needed and that it was ready to proceed with relocation. Discussion with the government officials also revealed that headmen in Mooiplaas supported Chief Jolinglanga and were in favour of relocation. These developments raised political temperatures in the area and quickly brought the relocation issue to a head as politicised youth in the area began to mobilise villages against the state. One of the strategies pursued by the youth was to force headmen to publicly support or reject the removals. This put headmen under enormous pressure and, in March 1986, resulted in the burning to death of a senior headman and his daughter in Soto village (DD 25/3/1986). In April 1986, further political violence led to the death of a further nine adults, allegedly murdered by ‘comrades’, who were now burning down the houses of all known ‘collaborators’. The state responded by suspending government services to Mooiplaas and by sending in trucks under police escort to evacuate all families that wished to move to Ncera. For many of those who supported the removals, the trucks came too late and they were forced to flee, leaving their homes and possessions torched by the ‘comrades’ (DD 26/4/1986).

By the end of 1986, the South Africa government had abandoned the removals in the face of staunch resistance. This came as a major victory to the anti-removals committee and ushered in a new era of political control and administration in the location. With the headmen out of the location, the anti-removals committee was disbanded to make way for the new political structure of the Mooiplaas Residents Association (MRA). The MRA was a democratically elected committee, which was charged with the responsibility of managing the villages. This was not an easy task given that the state had withdrawn many of the services from the area as punishment for their resistance to removal. It is also significant to note that, unlike the anti-removals committee, which was led by the comrades, the MRA was comprised mainly of older men from old landed families in the area. This is not surprising given that most of those who supported the removals and were prepared to leave Mooiplaas were the ex-farm families who were without arable land, power and influence in the villages. Those who did have a stake in the system were more reluctant to go. They were also the ones that had
been most critical of the headmen and their attempts to allocate land to farm families. It is not surprising then that the land-holding families in Mooiplaas were so eager to displace the comrades with their radical ideas and assert their control of the MRA. They had a vested interest in maintaining the rural status quo and were not interested in entertaining any demands for land redistribution in the area. The sequence of events ensured that the rural rebellion in Mooiplaas in the mid-1980s did little more than reinforce the rural status quo.

In the city of East London the 1980s also ushered in a new era of political struggle as local inhabitants were determined to finally put an end to the protracted forced removal campaign and repressive state intervention in the township. The election of the new Gompo Town Council in 1982, which replaced the old Duncan Village Community Council, became a focal point of political tension when it was discovered that the new council assumed many of the functions and repressive powers of the hated Eastern Cape Administration Board (ECAB). The rejection of the Gompo Council provoked widespread unrest in the township and, in the same as in Mooiplaas, the ‘comrades’ honed in on the illegitimate new councillors by burning down their houses and chasing them out of the township. By 1983, the residents of Duncan Village, like Mooiplaas, had removed the Apartheid local authorities and set up their own democratically elected structure – the Duncan Village Residents Association (DVRA), which like the MRA evolved out of an anti-removals committee. In 1984, the struggle against the local authority intensified when the DVRA launched a rent boycott in East London. This provoked direct police intervention. In August 1984, 35 people, including an 18-month old toddler, were killed by police and the army in Duncan Village. A mass funeral was held on the 13 August 1984, where a number of activists were arrested.

Two years later, on the 12th June 1986, a state of emergency was declared in the country and some 400 people were detained, including most of the DRVA’s leadership. On the 16th June, a further 300 people were arrested for holding a commemoration service on Soweto Day. Police repression now provoked more radical action as mobs of youths swept through the township destroying municipal and Development Board property. These arrests also led the DVRA to launch a
consumer boycott in the city. Although the Duncan Village rebellion was clearly more intense and protracted than the one in Mooiplaas, there are obvious similarities in the timing and the political tactics and strategies used by the comrades in both areas. This is perhaps not surprising given that these rebellions occurred in different parts of the same magisterial district. However, if these two rebellions were similar in political design and execution, they produced two very different results. In Duncan Village, there was no question that the comrades’ struggle would be taken over by propertied interests seeking to maintain the urban status quo. In fact, the comrades quickly consolidated their power by creating a multi-layered political organisation that operated from the street committee level upwards and by establishing peoples’ courts that were directly controlled by them. With no one left to challenge their authority the comrades announced that Duncan Village would be thrown open to people who wished to urbanize but had been prevented from doing so by the Apartheid state. The consequence of this decision was that 12 000 new shacks were erected in the township between 1985 and 1995, doubling the population from about 50 000 in the mid-1980s to over 100 000 in the mid-1990s. Over the same period in Mooiplaas, it is reported that the MRA made no new land allocations. This created enormous pressure in the villages and, as we will see below, had a dramatic effect on migration flows between the village and the city from the mid-1980s onwards.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the changing migration and settlement dynamics between East London and Mooiplaas following the dramatic political events of the mid-1980s. In the previous chapter we reported on the manner in which the Apartheid state was able to control population flows between town and country in the post-1950 period and how this process had a dramatic impact on the settlement patterns and livelihood strategies pursued by urban and rural households. In this chapter, we focus on the unravelling of this system of controls and the way in which people began to redefine their aspirations, identities and livelihood pursuits in this context. The argument we wish to develop here is that the new forms of political activism and identity politics combined with the breakdown of Apartheid population controls in the East London district unleashed tensions and conflicts within rural society. We suggest that these tensions had a
dramatic impact on household relations and on the making of rural livelihoods in the village. In this chapter we will focus specifically on the changing migration patterns, household dynamics and identity politics associated with the reconnection of Mooiplaas with Duncan Village in East London. In the previous chapter, we investigated the consequences of the states’ attempt to disconnect Mooiplaas from the city and to restructure the relationship between town and country. In this chapter, we explore the way in which the urban and the rural were reconnected after 1985 and how this impacted on rural livelihoods.

3. 2 Migration Trends: The 1998 Mooiplaas Survey

In June 1998, a 100 household survey involving 714 individuals was conducted in the village of Ngxingxolo in the Mooiplaas location near the city of East London. The survey followed many months of fieldwork in the area and comprised the final phase of an extended research project into rural social change on the fringe of East London. The survey revealed that one of the most significant developments in Ngxingxolo since the mid-1980s had been the out-migration of young adult men and women away from the village and into the townships of East London. In 1998, over 40% of the absent-migrant population were younger than 30 years. The data also revealed that over 70% of all those away from the village were living in the city of East London. Virtually all of these individuals were housed in free-standing and backyard shacks in the old Duncan Village township complex close to the city centre. This profile of migration shows a strong local preference not only for migration into one city, but for one township complex within the city.

This demographic profile of the village in 1998 is presented in Table 1, where the darkly shaded inner segments represent the absentee population and the lightly shaded outer segments the resident population. The table highlights the age and gender composition of the absentee population. It shows that 45 out every 100 absentee in the village were women and that almost three-quarters of the absent women were between the ages of 20-39 years. This represents a remarkable change from the situation in Ngxingxolo only ten or fifteen years earlier when female out-migration was inhibited by the old Apartheid influx control laws. Absenteeism
among men was, however, more consistent with earlier patterns, although there was certainly a disproportionately large number of males in the 20-29 age cohort away in 1998.

Table 3.1
Age-Sex Pyramid of Total Population
Ngxinxolo Household Survey, 1998 n=717

The main change in the male migration pattern in Ngxinxolo was the preference shown for East London as a migrant destination. Our life history evidence suggests that during the 1970s and 1980s a far greater proportion of the absentee male population lived and worked in other urban centres, notably Cape Town. Indeed, even those working in East London prior to the mid-1980s would have struggled to find accommodation in the city. Prior to the 1980s, most of the Mooiplaas residents working in East London would have been forced to take up residence with friends or relatives in the satellite township of Mdantsane in the Ciskei. They would have had to commute into East London for work every day. Those in Duncan Village would have been accommodated mostly in hostels such as B and D hostel. The data thus raises interesting questions about the age and gender composition of the absentee population and about the migration

1 Our case studies show that large numbers of Mooiplaas migrants were employed at Duncan dock in Cape Town during the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these workers were housed in the Langa municipal hostels in the city.
destinations of these absentee. Why were young people, especially women, living away from the village and why had they chosen to move to Duncan Village in East London rather than elsewhere?

In reflecting on the demographic distribution in Table 3.1, two other observations stand out when considering the age-sex distributions of the village population. Firstly, there are a surprisingly small number of children between 0-9 years at the base of the population pyramid. This suggests that absentee mothers in the 20-29 and 30-39 year age cohorts were keeping their children with them in the urban areas, at least until they were weaned and old enough to be sent ‘home’ to be cared for by grandparents or other close kin in the village. Secondly, it is significant that women outnumber men by two to one in the age cohorts of 60 years and older. This trend was exacerbated by the very low rates of female out-migration in the age cohorts of 40 years and older. These distributions seem to suggest that while younger women were very keen to leave the village in the 1990s, their mothers and grandmothers were reluctant to follow them into the city. This raises important questions about the desire of older female household members to engage in the ‘struggle for the city’.

This tendency was confirmed when we measured the frequency with which women in these cohorts visited the city. Here we found that over 80% of the women over forty had not travelled into the city in the previous six months. Most of the migrant flow into the city among domiciled village residents involved school children visiting their parents in town over the holidays. Very few adults living in the village travelled in and out of the city on a regular basis, unless they were specifically going there to look for work. In fact, we found that women over the age of forty had a strong aversion to going to town and preferred to do all their visiting, socialising and shopping in and around the village. Many of these women feared the city and insisted that, if family visiting was to be done, it was up to those in town to travel ‘home’.

This determination of older women not to travel into the city was coupled with what seemed to be an increasing reluctance of absent household members to
travel home on a regular basis. Despite the close proximity of Ngxingxolo to East London (45km by road or half an hour trip by taxi), only about 11% of the absentee returned ‘home’ on a weekly basis and only 26% on a monthly basis. The remaining 63% only returned home quarterly or less frequently. This indicates that earlier patterns of commuting or circular migration were weakening, especially among younger household members, and that increasing numbers of Ngxingxolo residents were settling permanently in urban areas. In relation to the frequency of home visits it was, however, discovered that young women were twice as likely to return home weekly or monthly than men. This raised important questions about the gender dynamics of local migratory patterns and the role of children in keeping circular migration alive.

The diminishing intensity of circular migratory patterns in the village was also reflected in the remittance rates of absentee. Here, we found that only 6% of absent household members regularly sent more than R200 in cash a month. The goods and cash that did flow into the village from the city seemed to come in the form of discretionary contributions from absentee household members, rather than as regular fixed monetary sums. One of the reasons for this was that almost 40% of those living away from Ngxingxolo in June 1998 were, in fact, unemployed and thus simply did not have any disposable income to send home. But this still does not detract from the fact that only 10% of those with jobs were making a regular and substantial contribution to monthly household budgets in the village. But why were so many unemployed youth staying in the city without jobs? Why were they not returning to the village to assist their struggling kin to build up the homestead (umzi)? What has happened to the old moral economy of household where men and women of all generations worked together to build up the homestead as a social and productive resource?

Trends noted above seem to negate some of the basic premise of household migratory models referred to. Firstly, they suggest that different age and gender segments of the rural population have different urbanisation and migration profiles. Young and old women, for instance, have different views and perceptions of urban life. Secondly, the data suggests that, if the pursuit of material benefits was the
determining force in migration choices, then far fewer rural villagers would have chosen East London over destinations such as Cape Town, Port Elizabeth or Johannesburg, where jobs would have been easier to come by. Thirdly, the data suggests that the tendency of individuals to constantly shift cash and resources across the rural-urban divide to build up ‘multi-sited households’ is limited in this case. In fact, the survey data indicates a hardening rather than a softening of resources flow across the urban-rural divide in this case. In the discussion below we attempt to explain some of these trends using historical and ethnographic data from Ngxinxolo and Duncan Village.

3.3 Youth Identity Politics and the City

In order to understand the exodus of the youth from Mooiplaas during the 1980s and 1990s it is necessary to return to the mid-1980s and the political struggle against relocation in the area. The struggle against the forced removals and the headman system in Mooiplaas was led by rural youth in the villages. In Ngxinxolo village, the youth began to mobilise in the early 1980s by discussing the proposed removals at village sports events, especially rugby matches. This led to the creation of a youth-led anti-removals committee, which was spearheaded by youth from Mooiplaas as well as other affected areas such as Kwelerha, Nxorhuni and Mgwali. The anti-removals committee mobilised youth in all these communities and provided the framework for a unified resistance strategy. It was the anti-removals committee that produced the ‘storm troops’ that prevented the state from implementing its relocation scheme in 1986.

However, after 1986 when the state abandoned the completion of the removals in the face of staunch resistance, the anti-removals committee was disbanded to make way for the creation of a new political structure, the Mooiplaas Residents Association (MRA). The democratically elected MRA was given the responsibility of managing the villages after the collapse of the headman system and the withdrawal of state involvement in the location. By contrast to the old anti-removals committee, the MRA was comprised only of Mooiplaas residents; many of whom were not ‘comrades’, but representatives of landed families in the area. In
the late 1980s, the dominant interests represented within the MRA were those of land-holding families who, in the absence of the headmen, set about protecting their own interests and maintaining the rural status quo. Between 1986 and 1994, the MRA thus made no attempt to affect rural transformation. It did not redistribute land or seize new land for local use. It merely served to protect existing landholders and to prevent any further attempt by the state to effect forced removals.

As far as the MRA was concerned, the political struggle against the state was a defensive struggle by local people to retain control of their own resources. As a result, the transition from the headman to locally elected village council system did nothing to create new opportunities for young men and women to gain access to arable or residential land. Land allocations made in terms of the betterment system in the 1950s were never reviewed by the MRA and no new sites were allocated in the location between 1986 and 1994 (Andrew 1994: 4). Those who required new sites during the 1980s were generally advised to build on their parents’ land. In fact, only death in the family allowed young people an opportunity to gain access to their own residential and arable land. The irony of the Mooiplaas struggle was that it was that segment of rural society, the politicised youth, who had put their lives on the line in the struggle against the state, that gained the least in the aftermath of the rebellion.

In the city of East London, where political struggles against the state also culminated in the collapse of the black local authority system, the political efforts of the youth in bringing down these structures were rapidly translated into real and effective political power for the youth. In Duncan Village, the youth-led anti-removals committee of the early 1980s simply became the Duncan Village Residents Association (DVRA) in the mid-1980s. Here there was no question of the politically conscious youth, the amaqabane, stepping aside and allowing other interests to dominate. They took control of the township. They decided on the allocation of residential sites, they defined acceptable codes of social and political behaviour, they administered township justice, and they alone negotiated the relationship between township residents and outside agents, such as the East
London City Council. In the city of East London youth rebellion was translated into youth power.

It is therefore not surprising that after 1986 the politically conscious Mooiplaas youth increasingly turned their attention to Duncan Village, the citadel of youth political activism in the region. By responding quickly to the availability of new residential sites, Mooiplaas youth were able to establish a presence for themselves in the township’s new shack areas. The reception rural youth received in the city was positive. The urban youth were aware of the political struggles that had been taking place on the outskirts of the city and welcomed the new youth into the city as true comrades, ‘brothers in arms’. The bravery and determination displayed by the rural youth in their home villages had earned them the respect of the urban youth. They were no longer greeted as umxhaka (country-bumpkins), but heralded as amaqabane. The construction of amaqabane as an inclusive social category that referred to all youth committed to the struggle effectively broke down the long-standing social division between urban and rural youth in the city.

Plate 3: Young men prepare for manhood
Ntsebeza’s historical research into youth politics in Duncan Village shows that the division between umxhaka and various categories of urban youth had dominated youth identity politics in the city between the 1950s and the 1980s. The breakdown of this division in the 1980s ushered in a new era of social integration and greater unity among youth in the city. In fact, Ntsebeza (1993) argues that many of the male rural youth flooding into the city during the 1980s embraced an amaqabane identity and immediately set about establishing themselves as fearless comrades in the struggle against the state. He reports that the urban-born youth were often astonished at the willingness of unarmed rural youth to stand up to Caspirs (armed vehicles) and heavily armed riot policemen. During the street battles that raged in Duncan Village between 1986 and 1990, the rural youth established themselves as among the most radical and committed foot soldiers of the DVRA and the ANC.

But their influence on the new urban politics went far beyond these individual acts of heroism. They left an indelible mark on the entire political culture of resistance in the city. The rural youth were, for instance, instrumental in the erection of the new township ‘people’s courts’, which were constructed around rural idioms of popular justice, and played a leading role in instructing the urban youth on how to run the courts. They also helped to inculcate a new respect for the Xhosa institution of initiation, by insisting that proper initiation was essential in the quest for political maturity and manhood. In Duncan Village, the integration of rural values and urban political styles resulted in the creation of a hybrid amaqabane youth political culture which broke a long tradition in the city youth where social identities were constructed around the urban-rural divide.

Inside Duncan Village, the defection of rural youth into the ranks of the amaqabane was a source of great anxiety for older migrants and commuters who depended on the recruitment of new rural youth into their urban-based amakhaya (home-mate) networks in order to attend to their homesteads in the countryside. Migrants and commuters in Duncan Village relied heavily on their ability to incorporate the incoming rural youth into their social networks. Besides the direct support these migrants received from the youth in the form of domestic assistance
in town, they drew on the labour of the youth to drive their ploughing teams, fix their cattle byres, herd their livestock, and to re-invest their earnings in the countryside. To retain the loyalty of the rural youth, older migrants invested a great deal of their time and effort into trying to inculcate a culture of rural responsibility among rural youth in the city.

The increasing failure of rural youth to respond to the overtures of older migrants in the 1980s seriously undermined their objectives and directly affected their own ability to realise their dreams of rural retirement and patriarchal proprietorship in the rural areas. Without the support of the rural male youth, the reproduction of a patriarchal economy of the umz i became difficult to sustain. The transformation of rural youth from umxhaka to amaqabane in both urban and rural areas had profound implications, not only for the survival cultures of migrants in the city, but for the very foundation of patriarchal power and male generational authority in the rural areas. This is a theme to which I will return later.

The analysis above suggests that questions of power, recognition and identity were critical factors in the migration decision of rural youth from Mooiplaas and other rural areas around East London in the 1980s and 1990s. For many rural youth Duncan Village was selected as a migration destination, not so much for the economic benefits it offered in terms of job opportunities, but for the access it gave them to a burgeoning urban-based culture of social and political liberation. This is, of course, not to suggest that economic factors were unimportant in initiating rural out-migration. In fact, the late 1980s were characterised by enormous economic hardship in Mooiplaas. Persistent drought and heavy stock losses due to the outbreak of amanzi abomvu (Redwater) in the location pushed many households to the point of desperation. While agricultural prospects remained bleak the incentives for out-migration were strong. In Mooiplaas, poor rainfall and grinding poverty saw a shift away from the use of household fields, located outside the village residential boundaries, to gardens.

The decision to abandon field production was the result of a combination of financial, political and climatic factors. For many households the threat of
relocation and the uncertainty surrounding the future in the area provided a disincentive to invest in the land. For others, the risks of ploughing and planting during the drought years were simply too great to merit the investment. The withdrawal of state agricultural extension services, especially the provision of government tractors for ploughing, also meant that many lost access to the means to plough their fields, even if they had sufficient capital to take the risk. The combination of reduced workloads for young women and the increasing pressure on households to find alternative sources of cash income, encouraged female out-migration.

But even for young women, who were not as directly involved in politics, there was more to urban migration than simply an escape from rural economic hardship. In the sprawling shack areas of Duncan Village, the youth rebellion of the 1980s had created opportunities for young rural women to participate in a new social and cultural world defined and directed by the youth. It was a world far removed from rural homestead life and offered women access to a range of new opportunities and identities. At the centre of the new socio-cultural milieu was the institution of ukuhlalisana, a social practice that encouraged young men and women to live together without entering into any of the formal obligations of marriage. The willingness of young rural women to respond to these social and economic pressures and incentives was reflected in the increasing dominance of women in the 14-34 year age cohort in Duncan Village, where they outnumbered young men by 3 to 2 by the mid-1990s (cf. Bank 1997).

3.4 Ukuhlalisana and Gender Relations

The counter-cultural tendencies of youth politics in the East London area was not only reflected in the construction of new political identities, it was also enacted through the creation of new social practices and institutions. In the 1980s, youth rebellion in Duncan Village was expressed socially in the prolific growth of ukuhlalisana (living together) households among the youth. Encouraged by the availability of residential spaces, young men and women moved in together in unprecedented numbers, to set up house as couples in the new shack areas. To be
sure, *ukuhlalisana* had existed as a form of domestic practice in Duncan Village for a long time. In the 1950s, the Mayer (1974) reported that these unions were formed when young couples eloped from the countryside as a result of parental resistance to their relationships. They also found that migrants, who generally lived with male *amakhaya* in town, sometimes moved in with their town-based lovers. However, as a proportion of the total number of domestic groups in the 1950s, *ukuhlalisana* relationships comprised only 5% of the total (cf. Pauw 1963: 147). In the mid-1990s, more than 25% of all households in the township were comprised of ‘living together’ units and, in some informal settlements, they made up almost 50% of the total number of households. Our research revealed that this prolific rise in *ukuhlalisana* really only began in the mid-1980s (cf. Bank 1997).

In the 1980s, *ukuhlalisana* became symbolic of the desire of the youth to achieve social as well as political freedom. *Ukuhlalisana* relationships thus emerged as a form of resistance to the strictures and demands of older kinship obligations and conventional domestic arrangements. At a social level, the new forms of domesticity represented the desire of the youth to establish social spaces for themselves within which they could express their own identities, morality and new-found self-confidence. *Ukuhlalisana* as a social form was clearly much more than just another household type; it was a vehicle for the expression and consolidation of new social identities, sexual practices and moral standards among the youth. It was essentially based on the rejection of an ideology of family that attempted to draw its members into the fullest identity with the extended family and subsume individual interests within collective and long-term concerns. In particular, it involved a retreat from the structured obligations of the multi-generational family in favour of more horizontal, dyadic and voluntaristic relationships. The ethos of *ukuhlalisana* emphasised social flexibility and the quest for independence, especially from the demands of the older generation.

But the re-creation of *ukuhlalisana* and the associated rejection of perceived older forms of family structure and obligation did not emerge without social contradictions. Firstly, the impulse towards *ukuhlalisana* came mainly from men. Young men were the first to break away from their parental homes where constant
conflicts and disagreements with their fathers and other male kin had made life difficult in the villages during the 1980s. Young women tended to follow their brothers into town and were initially, at least, more ambivalent about setting out on their own. The political and economic struggles of the 1980s were generally softer on the relationships between mothers and daughters than they were on those between fathers and sons. However, at the same time, young women realised that, if they wished to find marriageable partners and improve their own economic prospects, they would have to accept the risks of moving out and shacking up together.

In Duncan Village, ukuhlalisana was primarily defined by young men and thus emerged as a patriarchal from of domestic power which drew its’ strength less from the economic positions of young men than from their political prowess and assertive masculinity. It was an integral part of the male-led political rebellion of the 1980s. In these units, men quickly adopted patriarchal roles by treating their new lovers as if they were their ‘customary wives’. They would often expect them to behave ‘like wives’ by taking on the responsibility for domestic matters and by tending to their needs and sexual desires. Women in these households often found these demands excessive and argued that, if they were expected to behave ‘like customary wives’, they wanted lobola (bride wealth) to be transacted. The desire of young women to transform living-together relationships into marriage relationships and the tendency of young men to avoid entering into marriage were a source of constant tension within these units.

As the gender imbalances between young men and women increased in Duncan Village in the 1990s, the pressure on women mounted to submit to male demands within these units. It was, for instance, expected for these women to control the sexuality of their male partners, who often viewed sexual conquest as a key component of their assertion of their masculinity. In trying to hold onto their men women’s everyday tactics sometimes evolved into fully blown strategies. In Duncan Village, we found that women went as far as to initiate pregnancies in order to hold their men. In pursuing this strategy young women bore the brunt of the taunt - umntwana akayingo, ‘a child is not a ring’. In this process, young
women always ran the risk of rejection, because young men often shied away from the responsibilities of fatherhood precisely because it brought with it increased pressure from the family to initiate marriage.

The pursuit of pregnancy as a route to marriage, however, failed more often than it succeeded, and significantly, it often spelt the beginning of the end in living-together relationships. The stress and strain brought by the arrival of a child was often too much for these relationships to bear and we found that break-ups frequently occurred shortly after the birth of the child. During the pregnancy men were particularly prone to start looking around for other women and, by the time the child arrived, they were frequently involved with somebody else. As pressure increased for a stronger commitment to the relationship, many young men moved in the opposite direction and took up residence with new lovers. The women exposed to this type of situation found themselves in an extremely vulnerable position. In order to enter an ukuhlalisana relationship in the first place they had often defied their parents’ (mothers’) better judgement by moving out without their permission. This placed their male lovers in a powerful position. Without the support of their close kin, women became victims of domestic violence. In fact, some men even argued that the experience of male violence helped to prepare their women for the hardships of marital life, including witchcraft accusations and verbal abuse from in-laws. They said that by tolerating these abuses while still cohabiting, they would be in a position to take whatever marriage entailed - umfazi uyanyezenza (‘to tolerate hardship of marriage’).

In Duncan Village, it was also extremely rare for men to want to enter a living-together relationship or to marry a woman who brought children from a previous liaison into the household with her. Most men were not prepared to take responsibility for the children their lovers had acquired in previous relationships. As a result, young women had to try by all means to place children with kin to prevent conflict and to ensure that they could gain access to their partners’ income. If men believed that their live-in lovers were not spending their money wisely they would withhold their income. In their desperation to off-load the responsibility of children and re-enter the mating game, young women sometimes took extreme
steps and were even known to desert their children. In one case recorded in Duncan Village a young mother simply left her child outside the shack of a female relative before shaking up with her new lover.

The daily realities of *ukuhlalisana* relationships seldom matched up to the expectations that men or women had of them. Many young men, who were frustrated by their own inability to find regular employment in the city, found it difficult to discipline their lovers, while many young women said that they were often horrified by the unsympathetic and even violent responses of their partners. It was therefore not surprising that ‘living together’ relationships in Duncan Village failed more often than they succeeded. This led young men and women to constantly reassess their social networks. In our research we found that men and women responded differently to the failure of *ukuhlalisana* and this had significant implications for their mobility patterns and their relationships with rural kin.

### 3.5 Absent Men and Urban Survival

At face value, the explosion of *ukuhlalisana* relationships in Duncan Village indicated a shift towards urban permanence among NKhengxolo youth, who flooded into the city from the mid-1980s onwards. This trend suggests a decisive break with older circulatory migratory patterns and the associated commitment among the youth to maintain rural social relations and resources. However, the matter was not quite this simple since, as we have already seen, one of the main problems with *ukuhlalisana* was that it was an extremely unstable domestic form and usually failed to produce stable long-term relationships. This was partly due to the different expectations that men and women had of these relationships. But it was also due to the fact that the desire for social independence among the youth in Duncan Village in the 1980s and 1990s was not economically sustainable. In a depressed urban economy, the desire of young men to achieve economic independence and emerge as the household breadwinner was often no more than a pipe dream. In fact, over 50% of the young adults from NKhengxolo living in East London in 1998 were unemployed. The lack of opportunity in the urban economy and the poor performance of, especially, the motor industry during the 1980s and
1990s, restricted new opportunities in the traditionally male sectors of the economy. Young women generally fared better on the job market as a result of modest growth in the commercial and service sector in the city after 1994. But the overall employment situation was bleak for the youth as the urban labour market was chronically oversubscribed.

As a result of these realities, the majority of the rural youth in the township remained dependent, at least to some extent, on social networks that could supplement their own meagre resources. In the case of the Mooiplaas youth, this usually involved turning to siblings or close kinsmen in the location for support. In fact, it was observed that the failure of an ukuhlalisana relationship frequently resulted in rural youth seeking out siblings or other close kin in the city for support. One good example of this was provided in the case of Dumisane. After completing his schooling in Ngxinxolo village in 1992, Dumisane moved to Duncan Village in search of work. He managed to secure a job with a painting company in 1993 and within six months he had moved into a shack with Phumeza, a young town-born woman in her twenties. However, by 1995, Dumisane had lost this job and was spending his days looking for work. The lack of funds in his household eventually resulted in the departure of Phumeza, who moved back in with her parents in the township.

Dumisane’s financial problems forced him to get rid of his shack and to take up residence with his sister. This arrangement was successful for a period but the presence of Dumisane contributed to tensions between his sister and her common-law husband. After exploring a few other options with friends and relatives in the city, Dumisane was eventually forced to join his mother’s household in Ngxinxolo. He explained that one of the main attractions of moving ‘home’ was that he hoped to find employment with the rural electrification programme being implemented in Mooiplaas at the time. However, by 1998, Dumisane was still not employed and was being entirely supported by his mother, who received a welfare grant. He claimed that he saw no prospects for himself in the village and was planning to return to Duncan Village, this time to stay with his maternal uncle as soon as had enough cash.
There is no way in which Dumisane’s experience over the past six years could be construed as part of a household strategy. He had left the village of his own volition after completing school and, while he was employed in the city, he made no effort to either contact his mother or other rural kin. Even when he was initially unemployed he fraternised with his age mates in the city. It was only when he took up residence with his sister that he once again became interested in his rural network, largely because she kept in close contact with their relatives in town. His sister also maintained a close relationship with their mother, who looked after two of her children from a previous relationship. In fact, when he returned home in 1996, his mother said that she was surprised to see him back in the village. She had not anticipated that he would return home and seemed irritated by the constant demands he made on her meagre welfare grant. She said that she was happy that he would be returning to the city. She herself claimed that she had absolutely no desire to go to Duncan Village, declaring it a dirty and dangerous place which was not fit for a women of her age.

The worlds of Dumisane and his mother were indeed far removed. He showed no interest in village life or in pursuing an agrarian lifestyle, although he did not completely rule out the possibility of perhaps returning to Mooiplaas much later in his life. His mother, by contrast, feared the city. She said that she would visit the city from time to time to see her daughter, perhaps do some shopping or go to the hospital, but this was the extent of her interest. Dumisane’s attitudes were characteristic of many young men of his generation. They felt that the countryside had little to offer them. However, the fact that a few young couples had seized land for residential sites in the village in the mid-1990s and set up their own households ‘illegally’ in the village does suggest that not all youth were as despondent as Dumisane. The dominant tendency was for young men and women to leave the village as soon as possible after completing their schooling and to stay away as long as possible. Some mothers said that they did not even know where their sons had gone. When young men and women did secure employment in the city, there was also no guarantee that they would send any of their earnings ‘home’ to support their parents in the village. By the late 1990s, there was little trace of the old
household culture of rural responsibility and remittance that had been a feature of village life in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1998, only six of the 100 household heads we interviewed in Ngingxolo said that they relied on male remittances as their main source of income. Young people did send goods and cash home, but usually on an irregular basis. Many argued that their ageing parents earned enough from their enlarged pensions and welfare grants to look after themselves. The young men that remained behind in the village also made little contribution to the household economy. They would generally refuse to do agricultural work in the village unless they were paid for it. Some even wanted their mothers to pay them for working in the garden. They spent most of their time hanging around on the streets, leaving household matters to their sisters and mothers. Many older women explained that the behaviour of young men was very unnatural and some blamed amafufenyane (bad spirits) for making their sons ‘lazy’ and ‘uncooperative’.

But it was not only the young men of Ngingxolo who had lost interest in building the rural homesteads (umzi) in the 1990s. Many older men in the city from rural areas, some of whom were already receiving pensions, seemed reluctant to go home and build the umzi in retirement. Jokazi was one such man. He was pensioner from Mooiplaas who had lived in the municipal hostels of Duncan Village since the 1960s. Jokazi’s account of rural life was filled with bitterness and anger. He recalled how his family had been dispossessed of their prime agricultural land in Mooiplaas at the time of betterment. He proclaimed the pre-betterment era as a ‘golden age’ of prosperity for his family and that betterment had slowly reduced his family to poverty and broken his farming spirit. He said that, although he had diligently accumulated livestock for his retirement, he had lost his entire herd during the drought and subsequent outbreak of amanzi abomvu in Mooiplaas in the late 1980s. He explained that he felt that there was nothing left for him in the village and that he would only be embarrassed and humiliated if he returned home empty-handed at this late stage in his life. He complained that things had also changed in the village and that the youth no longer had any ‘respect and discipline’.
In Duncan Village there were many older men living both in the hostels and
in the shack areas who shared Jokazi’s experience. Many of these individuals were
staunch defenders of ‘rural tradition’, despite seldom returning to the rural areas, in
order to resist the demands of rural kin and to hide away in the city. The wives of
these men often took them for dead and this is perhaps why so many defined
themselves as widows in NgxingeXolo in 1998 (cf Manona 1999). In the shack areas
of Duncan Village, some older rural men without a regular source of income took
up residence with unmarried mothers who supported them in exchange for the
presence of a father figure in the house. In these cases, lapsed migrants lived as
kept men, but they had no say in the running of the household affairs. The notions
of masculinity prevalent among these older migrants had clearly shifted away from
the idea that real manhood could only be achieved through patriarchal
proprietorship over an umzi in the countryside, to notions of masculinity that
separated it from the affairs of the umzi. These older migrants were increasingly
constructing their identities around the pursuit of personal survival and self-
sufficiency in the city.

This is, of course, not to suggest that all older migrants in East London with
rural homesteads were engaged in the denial of rural responsibility and withdrawal
from village life. To be sure, one third of the households in NgxingeXolo were
comprised of male-headed nuclear or extended families, in which the male
household head continued to work at building the umzi and distributing his
earnings to take care of his rural dependants. For active male migrants or
commuters who were married with families in the village, we observed a different
attitude to rural resources and opportunities. These men followed a more traditional
pattern of remittance and investment. Those who had employment and remained
committed to supporting their families in the countryside tended to divide their
remittances between the objectives of agrarian investment and household
maintenance. For migrants and commuters investment in livestock, especially
cattle, was still a priority. However, even here few were able to accumulate
sufficient livestock to make stock farming viable. In most cases stock was kept for
symbolic and ritual purposes only. The amount of time and effort that was invested
in maintaining one or two beasts far outweighed the economic return that the men received.

3.6 Absent Women and Rural Retreat

As far as women were concerned, retaining links with the countryside was more of a priority. For young women in the city, rural kin were generally more important than they were for men and it usually did not take them long to establish links, especially with their matrikin in town. This is not surprising given the vulnerability of young women in living-together relationships. In fact, the tendency of these women to seek out their kin was a matter of considerable irritation for many of their male partners who often perceived these relationships as a threat. The foundation for young women’s relationships with rural kin in town was often laid when women arrived in the city. Unlike men, they tended to stay with age mates or siblings for as long as it took acquire a site of their own or to enter an ukuhlalisana relationship. Young women made more contact with their older female kin in town.

These relationships remained important to young women long after they had moved out and they tended to return to these relatives for occasional meals, to borrow food and money and even for lodging when their living-together relationships fell apart. Such networks proved to be a valuable insurance when these women produced children outside of wedlock and were abandoned by the biological fathers. Kin-based networks in the city were critical to young women, who often did not want to send their children back to the rural areas until they had been weaned. For the first few years of the child’s life, young mothers relied heavily on support from their urban-based kin. But after the child was off the breast the unmarried mother usually sent the child back to the countryside to stay with her mother or other close matrikin.

By off-loading children in this way, young women were able to re-enter the city as ‘single women’ in search of a new male partner who would hopefully prove to be a better marriage prospect than the father of their existing children. For some women this cycle was repeated several times before they either accepted their
status as single mothers or found an appropriate long-term partner. The tendency of women to send children born out of wed-lock to be cared for in the rural areas was, at least in part, the result of the refusal of men in the city to take financial and social responsibility for ‘other men’s children’. The tendency to send children home was, however, not restricted to women in these circumstances. It was also common among married women whose economic conditions made it difficult for them to fulfil the role of full-time mothers. For women, children therefore provided a critical conduit for the maintenance of social and economic relations across the urban-rural divide.

The case of Xoliswa provides a typical example of the way in which these relationships evolved in the 1990s. Xoliswa came to Duncan Village in 1984 from Mooiplaas in search of work. During the 1980s, she was involved in a series of living-together relationships that produced two children but did not lead to marriage. Within two years of the birth of both children, Xoliswa’s relationship with their biological fathers had broken down and she was left with no option but to send the children to stay with her mother. She justified her decision in economic terms: ‘I had no choice, someone had to support the children and I had to keep working to raise money for myself and the kids’. In 1998, Xoliswa was 38 years old and held a stable job as a cook in a local catering firm. She lived alone in a one-roomed shack in Duncan Village and at that time had no stable partner. She said that she travelled ‘home’ to Mooiplaas frequently to see her children. She would take cash, usually R50-R100, and some groceries with her in the taxi. Xoliswa’s earnings provided a supplement to her mother’s pension, which was used as a means of supporting the children. Xoliswa explained that, although she missed her children, there was no employment for her in Mooiplaas and no reliable child-care for the children in the city. She said that she felt lucky to have a reliable job and had come to accept the realities of her commuter lifestyle. She also said that, if she did not marry she would almost certainly retire to Mooiplaas at a later stage.

Xoliswa’s experience was similar to that of Dida, another Mooiplaas woman in her late thirties who was living in the Duncan Village shack area. Dida had moved there in 1986 to look for work. She initially stayed with her brother,
who built her a two-roomed shack of her own in 1987. Between 1987 and 1994, Dida focused her attention on establishing a base for herself in the city and became involved in a number of living-together relationships, none of which matured into a long-term relationship. This experience led her to reassess her situation in 1994 and to strengthen her links with her rural home, which she had ignored since 1986. In fact, in 1995, she took on the responsibility of looking after her son and two other Mooiplaas teenagers in the city. The children were brought to town because there was no secondary school in their village. Dida also began to visit her parent’s home more regularly and started building her own home on their site in 1996. By the mid-1990s, it was clear that Dida had begun to shift the focus of her social networks back to the rural areas, where she hoped to retire. She explained that one of her main problems was her inability to secure a residential site of her own in the village. She said that by building on her parent’s site, she had to compromise her autonomy and independence because when her parents died, her older brother would inherit the site. This would mean that she would formally be under his authority, but she said that she had her doubts about his willingness to return to the village in old age because he had already married in town and had recently built a house in the newly-created Scenery Park township.

Rural women, like Xoliswa and Dida, who were in their mid-to late thirties with stable employment tended to focus increasingly on their own wellbeing and that of their children. In Duncan Village, they would use their experience of township life and their economic positions to keep a tight reign on household expenditure and would not allow a new male lover to tamper with their long-term plans. By this stage, as we have seen in the above cases, women were often already trying to build up some resources of their own in the countryside by starting to build a house or moving furniture and other valuables away from the city for safe-keeping at home. By keeping their rural base in view, they were effectively keeping their options open. By the time they reached their forties, the expectation of marriage would have largely vanished and they would have already built up a strong female network – comprised of matrikin, neighbours, and associates in church groups, clubs and societies. For those who remained in the city, a great deal
of this networking would be focused on church groups, grocery clubs, stokvels, saving clubs and burial societies.

Women like Xoliswa and Dida preferred to invest their income in clubs and commodities rather than directly in the rural economy. Pouring money into the faltering agrarian economy was an unattractive and risky business for women in the city. Moving income away from circuits of exchange which women controlled meant that their earnings could fall into the wrong hands. Although older women controlled the rhythms of agrarian life in the rural areas, there was always the danger that the product of this labour would be appropriated by men or invested in rituals that made no direct contribution to the upkeep of their children. But urban women’s reluctance to invest in agriculture was also a result of their own experience of the returns on that investment. Many had moved to the city in the mid- to late 1980s in a context of intense drought and rural poverty, at a time when agriculture was consuming household resources without return. From the vantage point of this experience, female migrants often reasoned that there were better investments to choose from – most notably the urban informal sector and the credit club circuits that would generate far better returns.

The strategies for rural investment and social involvement of active male migrants differed from those of female migrants. Firstly, while women tended to focus on informal sector activities, clubs and churches in town and country, men tended to be more conservative in their approach and directed most of their excess resources into livestock. Secondly, while women built broad social networks in town and country, often through the medium of matrikin links, men paid more attention to the integrity of household boundaries. Investment in concerns outside of the household domain was of limited importance to them. They invested little time or effort in their wider networks of rurally based patrikin. To the extent that economic co-operation existed among male kin in Ngxinxolo, it was the sibling bond which provided the main axis of mutual support and collective strategies. Male siblings, for instance, often worked together to accumulate livestock.
Finally, it is worth comparing the positions of older female migrants with those of male migrants. In Duncan Village, we discovered the appetite for rural retirement was considerably greater among rural women than it was among rural men. By the time these women had reached their mid-fifties their plans for a rural retreat were often well advanced. This is evidenced by the fact that our survey data for Ngxinxolo shows that women outnumber men by two to one in the age band 50-59 and by three to one in the age-band 60-69. There were also six male migrants in these age brackets to one woman migrant. The tendency of women migrants to want to leave the city by the time they had entered their fifties was influenced by several factors. Firstly, there were considerations of security. In Duncan Village, older women were common targets for the activities of *tsotsis* and other criminals. Life in the township was dangerous for single women at the best of times. Even such basic tasks, as going to the toilet at night, were difficult and dangerous for women. Secondly, the labour market in East London also had little use for uneducated women of this age. Women were generally in sectors of the labour market where they did not have access to union representation and benefits. It was generally much easier for them to lose their jobs when they got older than it was for men. It was also extremely difficult for older women with limited labour market skills to find new jobs. Thirdly, state pensions for women are granted at 60 years rather than 65, the age at which men become eligible.

3.7 Conclusion

The analysis provided above raises serious doubts about the analytical validity of an understanding of rural to urban migration in the Eastern Cape as a household-based quest for the city. In this paper, I have argued that far-reaching changes to the social, political and economic situation of Eastern Cape villagers during the 1980s undermined the capacity of rural households in areas like Mooiplaas to operate as effective social and economic units. Scores of young men and women fled the villages in the 1980s with low levels of commitment to the rural homesteads they left behind in the countryside. Many were intoxicated by the politics of liberation and were bitter and angry at the older generation for failing to follow through their political campaigns in the countryside. These youth came to
East London to find jobs, but also to express their new-found sense of freedom and identity, and to seek solidarity with the urban youth, who shared their hopes and aspirations. In the city locations rural youth were welcomed as comrades (*amagabane*) and were able to mingle freely with the urban youth as equals. In this context of heightened generational solidarity and a common political commitment the rural and urban youth merged into a broad social movement that sought to translate political power into a culture of social liberation. At the centre of this youth counter-culture was a rejection of older notions of kinship obligation and responsibility, which further widened the gap between town and country and spawned an explosion of *ukuhlalisana*, the preferred form of domestic practice among the youth of the 1980s and 1990s.

The argument of the paper is therefore not that the collapse of a rural moral economy of the household was replaced by rampant individualism and generalised social disintegration. It is rather that the breakdown of older forms of identity and association opened the way for the creation of a new social order with its incumbent shifts in ideology and identity politics. But the exuberance of the youth in the 1980s quickly faded into disappointment as they came face to face with the difficulties of securing economic independence in a depressed urban economy. Without the means to support themselves, *ukuhlalisana* households were not sustainable and this meant that many young adults were often forced to turn back to established kinship networks in their quest for survival. The diffusion of domesticity, the dispersal of children, and the reconnection with urban and rural kin were all part of this process. This reconnection of urban-based youth with their rural homesteads in the late 1990s should not be misconstrued as a retreat into an older household ideology of rural responsibility and household reconstruction. It should, we would argue, be seen as part of a new social process through which the relationship between town and country is being remade in the Eastern Cape.

The social contradictions and failure of *ukuhlalisana* reopened the apertures of return migration and re-activated social links and networks across the urban-rural divide. In trying to analyse how this process worked I have been careful to point out that this reconnection was not easy for the youth or their rural kin. In the
case of young men we found that they experienced enormous difficulty in reintegrating themselves into their rural homesteads and kin networks. In the village, young men no longer enjoyed the trust of close kin and often behaved like domestic nomads as they struggled to find a role for themselves in rural society. As a result many left the villages again at their first opportunity. Older village women used the metaphor of ‘evil spirits’ to express their deep concern with what they considered to be the anti-social tendencies of the male youth. For rural women, the road back into rural acceptance was easier. Children provided the critical conduit through which runaway daughters could repair damaged rural social relations and created a social platform for rural reintegration. But the experience of these women in the city had brought with it an aversion to male domination and a determination to control their own income and resources. It was for this reason that these women focused their attention on their close matrikin at the expense of others in village society. With the strengthening bonds between women at the village level and the exodus of rural men to the city, it is not surprising that many older rural men had begun to dread rural retirement. The truth was that there was nothing much to go home to and, as a result, some stayed on in the city well beyond retirement age.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the analysis provided here has implications not only for the conceptual models we use to understand migration, but also for the changing nature of rural livelihoods on the Eastern Cape in the 1990s. Firstly, the evidence suggests that the commitment to rural residence and agrarian lifestyles in Mooiplaas and other similar rural communities has declined significantly over the past two decades. The lack of interest and participation among the youth, in particular, in household-based agriculture has had serious consequences for the productive output of households and for the success of land reform initiatives in this province. Secondly, with the deterioration of gender and generational relations in the countryside, the responsibility of rural survival has increasingly fallen on the shoulders of older women, whose pensions and entrepreneurial skills have replaced male remittances as the cornerstone of the rural economy. Thirdly, the weakening of households as a unit of social cohesion has produced new forms of social solidarity. These social realignments and networks are still poorly understood in rural areas and require careful analysis since they
have profound implications for policy interventions in both urban and rural settings. What is, however, clear is that our analyses of rural social change can no longer rely on the old conceptual models and axioms about household unity and social cohesion. This is not to reject the idea that households can and do remain effective units for social reproduction, it is rather to alert us to the role of other networks and institutions in the quest for survival in the late 1990s.
CHAPTER FOUR:

PIGS, GARDENS AND PENSIONS:
WELFARE WIDOWS AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

4.1 Welfare Restructured

While structural adjustment programmes in Africa have been characterised by significant reductions in state investment in welfare provision and an increasing reliance in the market, the situation has been slightly different in South Africa. For the majority of the population, especially the elderly living in rural areas, one of the few tangible benefits of political change has been the gradual deracialisation of the social security benefits. This process has delivered real benefits to black welfare recipients. In the mid-1970s, African pensioners only received 16% of the pay-out received by their white counterparts. By 1993 this had already increased to 85% and, after 1994, black and white pensions were equalised with a newly deracialised welfare system. This meant that the maximum real value of the pension for a white recipient decreased from R430 in 1980 to R234 in 1996, while African recipients received a real wage increase from R132 to R234. (Dabula, 1998). In 1996/7 over R2.3 billion was spent on welfare grants in the Eastern Cape. This constituted 88% of the total welfare budget for the province. The remaining R130 million of the budget was spent on welfare services, such as children’s homes, homes for the aged, drug treatment centres, crisis clinics and the like. The monetary value of a state old age pension will increase again in 1999 from R470 a month to R500. These developments have been highly significant for the residents of rural communities across the Eastern Cape which house the bulk of the aged in the province. (cf. Dabula 1998)

The restructuring of the welfare system has been associated with numerous problems. From the point of view of the aged one of the major problems has been that access to a new social pension has been predicated on re-registration. The registration process has been hampered by technical delays and bureaucratic inefficiency. This has meant that many pensioners can wait well over a year to be re-registered. In general,
the registration process has occurred more efficiently in the cities than in the countryside. In rural areas, located far away from administrative centres, re-registration has occurred very slowly. In the case of Ngxingxolo, which is close to both the provincial capital, Bisho, and the city of East London there have not been many delays in the re-registration process. The presence of a number of NGOs in the area has also saved many of the aged from unnecessary delays. In the villages, pensions are dispensed on a monthly basis, usually at a local school. In Ngxingxolo village, pension day is the most significant day of the month. Welfare and pensions grants are paid out to approximately half of the households in the village. In our survey of 100 households we discovered that 56 household heads were pensioners. In total the households received 68 welfare grants, which is an investment by the state of R34 000 (now only approximately $6000) for every 100 households per month. For struggling rural households, the restructuring of the welfare system has provided a welcome injection of reliable cash income into the rural economy.

But, as we have seen in the previous chapter, while state welfare investment in the rural economy might be increasing, the dominant tendency within villages, such as Ngxingxolo, is towards out-migration, especially among the youth. The new wave of migration into surrounding towns and cities has been characterised by the search for urban permanence as young adults have assumed urban identities and have broken away from their parental homes and the limited opportunities available to them in the village. The most significant consequence of the migration patterns described in the previous chapter is that the flow of migrant remittances from the urban areas into the village economy have been substantially reduced over the past decade. Some of those who had left the village argued that it is no longer necessary for them to remit cash to the rural areas as often as they used to because their parents were now receiving more substantial welfare grants. Others had simply lost interest in the rural economy and yet others had failed to acquire the jobs necessary for them to be able to make remittances. In view of the picture presented in the previous chapter, it would thus be a mistake to assume that the increases in welfare payments have increased the amount of cash in circulation within the village economy. In fact, in real terms, it is fair to assume that cash inflows into Ngxingxolo in 1980, when black pensions were half their current value, were higher than they are today.
From the point of view of any analysis of changing village economy, the significance of welfare restructuring is not so much that it has increased rural income, but rather that it has shifted the control of income and economic power more firmly into the hands of especially older women. Of the 68 welfare grants (59 pensions and 9 disability grants) received in the 100 households we surveyed, 49 of them were paid to women and only 19 to men. Part of the reason for this discrepancy was that women received pensions at 60 years while men had to wait until they were 65 years old. It was also related to the demographic dominance of women over men in older age sets. Moreover, it was discovered that, of the 49 women who were receiving pensions, 46 were heads of households. But perhaps most significant for this discussion of rural livelihoods was that 80% of these women claimed that they were widows. In other words, they were either genuine widows or women who had been deserted by their husbands. Finally, the overall importance of these welfare grants within the village economy was shown in the fact that 45 of the 100 interviewed claimed that welfare grants were the only source of reliable cash income in the household.

In terms of the shifting bases of social and economic power and influence in the village over time, the above distributions suggest that there have been two critical shifts in the distribution of reliable cash income in Ngxinxolo. Firstly, the figures show that there has been a general shift in the control of cash income from men to women. When remittances were the main source of rural cash income, it was the male household head - the earner of that income - that could determine how it was spent. Even if he was absent from the household for long periods of time, he could set the priorities for household expenditure and investment. The threat of the withdrawal of remittances, or at least the reduction of remittances, could be used to ensure that women followed their instructions. But, as we know, without an effective male presence in the house, the wives of migrants enjoyed considerable latitude in the way in which remittances were used. This brings us to the second shift in the control of income, the shift from wives to widows. In the betterment era, village widows were systematically marginalised within the rural economy. They were seen as a threat to the new patriarchal order and to the new ethos of village life. They were thus denied access to arable land and were placed under the close scrutiny of male authority figures in the village. In 1998, by contrast, welfare widows in Ngxinxolo found themselves in a very different position. They now controlled their own households as
well as a sizeable portion of the cash income within the village. The restructuring of
the welfare system fundamentally changed their economic position in the village.

In this chapter we will explore the implications of some of the changes
referred to above on the occupational profiles and livelihood strategies of rural
households in Ngxingxolo. We argue that the repositioning of older women in general
and welfare widows in particular within the village economy effected significant
shifts in livelihood strategies of rural households. In relation to agricultural production
we note a sustained shift away from field-based farming to household gardening as
well as a shift away from cattle ownership to a stronger focus on pigs and poultry.
Both these shifts, we argue, are indicative of changes in gender power relations and in
the role that women play not only in performing labour, but in controlling economic
decisions in the household. In relation to the engagement of rural households in non-
agrarian pursuits, we argue that little progress has been made. Some new women-
centred entrepreneurial activities have emerged over the past decade, but the shift
from on-farm to off-farm occupations inside the village has not yet developed. We
suggest that there are technical and social constraints that have inhibited development
in this domain.

4.2 Household Income and Economic Differentiation

Table 4.1 below provides a breakdown of the main occupation of adults in our
sample. The table includes all individuals who were not identified as scholars or
toddlers. The table clearly demonstrated the importance of welfare payments to the
survival of rural households. With 58% of all adults unemployed and only 9% of the
permanent village residents in full-time employment, it is not difficult to appreciate
the importance of welfare grants to the village economy. This dependence, as we have
pointed out in the previous chapter, is exaggerated by the fact that many of the 45% of
absentees with full-time employment are not remitting income home on a regular
basis. The table below is, however, somewhat misleading since it only records the
main occupation of respondents. Many individuals, however, had more than one
occupation – welfare recipients were also farmers or shebeen operators, unemployed
women were also traders and so on. In a village like Ngxingxolo where economic
opportunities were limited and the income from any one activity was seldom enough
to support the households, individuals were inclined to pursue multiple income
earning activities. To illustrate this point, it might be noted that, while only two of the
household heads in the sample said that they were self-employed, we found that 48 of
the 100 households in the sample were engaged in some form of small or micro-
business enterprise. The same was true for farming. All but six of the households in
the sample were engaged, to some extent, in farming. This is not represented in the
Table below. However, the table does remain useful in providing a broad occupational
profile of the village population.

Table 4.1: Main Occupations of Total Adult Active Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Occupation</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employed</td>
<td>22 9%</td>
<td>48 45%</td>
<td>70 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>2 1%</td>
<td>3 3%</td>
<td>5 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>68 27%</td>
<td>1 1%</td>
<td>69 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>13 5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>152 58%</td>
<td>56 51%</td>
<td>208 56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>257 100%</td>
<td>108 100%</td>
<td>365 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of the occupations of the household heads in
the sample. The table shows that 56% of the household heads were welfare recipients,
all of them pensioners, while 27% of household heads had no independent source of
income. The latter individuals were entirely dependent on absent members sending
home income from the city.
Table 4.2: Occupational Profile of Household Heads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time employed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Profile of the Reliable Household Income by Household

Table 4.3 provides a profile of the amounts of reliable household income in the sample. The table shows that a quarter of the households in the village had a reliable income of less than R400 a month, which is about a third of what a rural household requires for survival. In other words, one in four households in Mooiplaas found themselves in dire poverty. They needed to find two-thirds of their subsistence requirements from other activities such as crop production, livestock, petty trade, occasional remittances, savings or informal transfers. These households were constantly under pressure and were always in a very vulnerable position. Every month
they had a lot of ground to make up between what they could rely on in terms of income and what they needed for survival. Outside of this category of very poor, we found that the majority of households (approximately 65%) had access to a reliable monthly income of between R800 and R1600. These households, which usually included at least one welfare recipient, were living on or around the basic subsistence level (depending on the dependency ratio in the household). If one removed welfare payments from the dependable income of these households, the number of families in dire poverty in the village would have increased phenomenally to between 70-80% of the village population. It is significant to note that only 6% of the households claimed that their main source of income was migrant remittances. This is highly significant given that a similar survey conducted in Ngxinxolo in the 1980s would have revealed that well over 50% of the households depended mainly on remittances for their cash income.

Outside of these two categories, we did discover a cluster of households comprising between 5-10% of the sample who had access to a reliable income in excess of R1600 a month. We found that some households in this category earned a great deal more than R1600 a month and were clearly identifiable as relatively wealthy households in the village. The relative wealth of the household was also measured on the basis of our first impressions on the conditions of houses, furnishing and other material possessions. We worked with three broad categories, elite, average and poor households. In terms of this assessment we classified 10% of households elite, or relatively well-off, 29% average and 61% poor. It is significant to note that about two-thirds of those in both the poor and elite category were female-headed households, while in the average category the households were divided evenly between male and female-headed units. In broad terms, the village had a three-tier system of socio-economic differentiation. The top level was comprised almost exclusively of old landed families, which were socially cohesive and economically strong, the middle level of a mixture of original inhabitants and farm families with reliable jobs or pensions, and the bottom level of mainly relatively recent arrivals without pensions or jobs. The legacy of betterment and the structural advantage it gave certain families was still felt in Ngxinxolo in the 1990s even though many households did not use their fields.
4.3 Household Structure and Composition

Table 4.4 below presents a summary of the social composition of households in the Ngxingxolo sample. The table shows that half of the households in the village in 1998 were three-generational units with the grandmother, parents and children family form being the most common (28%), and only 17% of the households were nuclear families. This high percentage of extended as opposed to nuclear families in the outskirts of the village. By 1998, there was a cluster of about 25 dwellings in the new settlement. Most of the new structures were made of corrugated iron and wood. The relationship between these new households and the village committee was poor at the time of our fieldwork. Members of the new households accused the committee of discriminating against them in the allocation of land and the committee accused them of impatience and disobedience. The result was a stand-off between the two groupings. In the village we detected a growing fear among committee members that the squatting would get out of control and open the floodgates for outsiders to move into the area. Our visits to other villages revealed that similar types of dynamics were evident in these villages as well.

Table 4.4: Household Structure of Village Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>No of Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three-generations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents, parent(s) and children</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather, parent(s) and children</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother, parent(s) and children</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-generations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother and grandchildren</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband, wife and children</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother and children</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-generation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single person</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The break-away group of households remained small because the majority of young adults were looking for residential opportunities in the city rather than in the village. One of the reasons for this was that they were much more likely to get a R15 000 government housing subsidy if they were located in an urban squatter camp than if they were settled in a rural one. These dynamics notwithstanding, it was clear that the majority of those in the middle generation in three-generational households were hoping not to have to live in the village on a permanent basis. This had a profound effect on the levels of coherence and co-operation within rural households. The co-habitation of grandparents with adult children did not necessarily mean that these households operated as cohesive social and economic units. In fact, the reverse was often true. Young men in particular showed little interest in the project of building the *umzi* in the sense of accumulating resources for the homestead that might later be used in retirement. The economic contribution made by the middle generation to the welfare of the household was limited – more limited than it had ever been in Nqxingxolo. Cash remittances were hard to come by for households and the bulk of the economic burden fell on the aged whose welfare grants were the mainstays of the rural economy.

Plate 4: Broken agricultural equipment lies around
The other significant feature about household structure in Ngxingxolo in the late 1990s was that almost 60% of the households were female-headed and that most of these female heads were widows. Table 4.5 below highlights this point, but it also shows that only 4% of household heads in the village were under the age of 40 years, and 71% were 55 years or older.

**Table 4.5: Age and Marital Status by Household Head**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Widowed</th>
<th>Separated</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-90</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dramatic growth in the number of widows as household heads in Ngxingxolo was partly a result of the willingness of the new village committee structures to accept the rights of widows as property owners and household heads. In Chapter Two, we noted that there was great resistance during the betterment era to leaving property in the hands of women. The headmen were keen to keep productive
rural resources under male control. In a context where young men showed little interest in working the land and making effective use of rural resources, old women had moved in to take over this responsibility and in doing so found little resistance from men. In the 15 years since the eviction of the headmen and in the gradual shift from male to female-headedness, the rural economy of Ngxingolo and other Mooiplaas villages had also started to change quite significantly. In the discussion below we begin by looking at the main shifts in the agrarian economy before moving on to discuss the contribution of non-agrarian activities to the survival strategies of individuals and households in the village.

4.4 From Fields to Gardens

If the cash economy in rural households in Ngxingolo had shifted during the 1990s away from migrant remittances towards a much greater dependence on welfare grants, the weak agrarian economy of the village had almost completely shifted away from the use of arable fields to household gardens. This transition, as we have already seen, had been under way in Ngxingolo since the 1970s and had gained momentum during the 1980s when agricultural extension services to the village were stopped and many household fields simply reverted to grazing land. The general poverty of rural households and the sustained drought of the 1980s made it difficult for households with access to arable fields to use their fields effectively. By 1998, we discovered that the use of fields was virtually non-existent. In two of 50 household case studies it was evident that household land located outside the residential part of the village was used on anything like a regular basis. One individual who did continue to use his betterment field on a regular basis was Jonas Matebese referred to in a previous chapter. In June 1998, we were present when Jonas brought in the maize harvest on a small truck (bakkie) he had hired from a local white farmer. After offloading the maize, it was established that there were 17 bags of good maize cobs and 4 bags of bad cobs. Jonas explained that he would wait for the cobs to dry before removing the kernels. He said that it would be easy to strip the good maize, but the bad maize would take much longer because each cob would have to be individually plucked to separate the good kernels from the rotten ones. While Jonas was relatively satisfied with his maize crop, he explained that he had reaped virtually nothing from the beans,
watermelons and pumpkins he had planted. He said that the few pumpkins that did survive were picked and consumed by the family as soon as they were ripe.

Plate 5: Only a few fields are ploughed – notice the lack of fences

Several factors contributed to Jonas’ ability to continue to use his family field. Firstly, as the son of a relatively successful Mooiplaas farmer, Jonas was still very committed to tilling the soil and planting a crop as frequently as possible, even though he was already on pension. Secondly, by virtue of the family’s long-standing involvement in production and good relationships with local white farmers, Jonas was able to get his land relatively cheaply. He claimed that the R50 he had paid to a local farmer for the rental of his truck was very cheap. He explained: ‘I have known this farmer for many years and this is why he helps me out’. Thirdly, Jonas is the head of a household that has access to a number of reliable sources of cash income. Both Jonas and his wife collect state pensions, while two of his six children who continue to live in the household are in good permanent jobs – one is a teacher, the other a security guard – and are prepared to contribute to the household’s farming enterprise. The existence of a moral economy of household built around Jonas’ authority and power as the household head is critical to the smooth functioning of this household’s farming
activities. It is the general collapse of this moral economy as well as the deepening poverty of many rural households since the mid-1980s, as we have argued in the previous chapter, that has played an important role in the dramatic decline of field-based agriculture over the past decade in Ngxingxolo.

In the 1960s and 1970s a number of households engaged in sharecropping relationships in order to spread the risk and expense of working their larger fields. During the 1980s, involvement in sharecropping arrangements had decreased significantly and by the 1990s such arrangements had all but disappeared. A number of people we spoke to claimed that they were still prepared to engage in these relationships during the early 1980s, but during the drought of the mid-to late 1980s these relationships gradually fell apart as the risk of investing in production far outweighed the returns. Xoliswa Mdindi, for instance, explained that her mother’s sharecropping relationship began to falter in the mid-1980s and, while it only finally terminated in 1992, the relationship had been unable to yield a decent crop during the previous decade. Mrs Madidi was another widow who had entered a sharecropping relationship in 1982, but abandoned it only two years later because the cost of inputs on the land outweighed the returns. She claimed that when the total yield of her four-acre field was only seven bags, of which she was entitled to four, she came to the decision that sharecropping was a risky and unrewarding business. Moreover, she explained that since her children have grown up and left home she does not have access to the labour or the cash to re-establish such a relationship.

The reasons for the faltering sharecrop relationships and abandoned fields were, of course, more complex than merely a result of the vagaries of drought. After all, periodic drought is part of the agrarian reality in the Eastern Cape. Thus, although drought was used as a convenient and ‘catch-all’ explanation in local accounts of the shift away from field-based production, the role of technical and social factors should not be under-estimated. An assessment of working agrarian equipment at the disposal of individual households in 1998, for instance, revealed a great deal about the capacity of households to cope with field-based production. The levels of functional agricultural equipment in the possession of individual households is shown in Table 4.2 below. During our fieldwork, we noticed that while household yards were often littered with broken ploughs, planters and sledges as well as one or two tumbled down
granaries, there was little new agricultural equipment on view. As field-based agriculture lost its former significance so did the tools associated with it. The only useful agricultural equipment that households routinely owned were a hoe, a spade and a fork. More sophisticated equipment, as the table below shows, was very thin on the ground 70% of households owned no more than the most basic hand tools.

Table 4.6: Functional Agricultural Equipment by Household, Ngxingxolo (1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Cumulative Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tractor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plough</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain Tank</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building-fencing Tools</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more of above</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at All</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to make use of the available arable land, including gardens, virtually every household was dependent on ploughing services offered by white farmers in the area. The farmers normally charged R80 to plough a small half-acre garden and R160 for a larger one acre garden. Ploughing a 3 to 5 acre field would run into hundred of Rands. Add to this the cost of seeds and of hiring a planter and that the total investment could reach as much as R800 to R1000 – a considerable investment for households whose average monthly income was approximately half of that. Financial and technical constraints overlaid climatic uncertainties to make agriculture a capital intensive and high-risk venture for Ngxingxolo households. Many household heads lamented the loss of their capacity to plough for themselves. They argued that since the non-continuation of agricultural extension services in the village, they were totally at the mercy of local farmers whose services were not only expensive but also
unreliable. They claimed that farmers were prepared to plough their land when it suited them and often withdrew their services before they had completed their work. As one informant explained, ‘in the old days we were able to do everything for ourselves but nowadays we are completely dependent on outsiders’. He lamented that; ‘when the oxen pulled our plough we could look after ourselves’. Other informants supported these sentiments, but said that the solution lay not in a return to ox-drawn ploughing but in the ability of the community to acquire a tractor for itself. This was one of the main aims of the new farmers’ association set up in Ngxinxolo 1996 to do just that.

But the collapse of field production in Ngxinxolo was also a reflection of the changing nature of rural social relations both within and beyond the household. The mobilisation of youth in both urban and rural areas across the Eastern Cape after 1985 not only disrupted community relations, it also had a fundamental impact on social relations at the household level. The youth rebellion of the 1980s, as we have seen in the previous chapter, challenged older forms of generational power and authority. The fact that Ngxinxolo’s struggle against the state was community-based rather than generationally based, as we have seen in the previous chapter, did not detract from the fact that the village youth both male and female, had become increasingly determined to leave the rural areas and seek a better life for themselves in the city. The youth exodus of the 1980s placed severe strain on the rural households in general and on the relationships between fathers and their sons in particular. Intensified drought made it very difficult for rural patriarchs and city migrants to convince younger generation males to invest in the household and its associated social economy. The failure of the remittance-driven rural subsistence economy was all too plain to see, especially in the midst of a serious drought. Young men could find little reason to invest in an increasingly dysfunctional agrarian household economy. They consequently displayed very little interest in agrarian activities and focused on their prospects in the city. For those who stayed behind, political activities consumed a great deal of their time. They seemed to spend all their time away from home, fraternising with friends or on the streets and in the schools discussing politics, sport or listening to music.

The high visibility of the male rural youth in public spaces outside the home was a source of common complaint among adults who lamented the fact that they
were now never around to help fix fences, work in the yard, and support their parents. Older men openly criticised their sons, stating that they had become arrogant, rude and unhelpful, and that they had become a burden rather than an asset to the household. Many older women also complained that the only time they saw their sons was at month-end or pension day when they came home to ask for cash. Others claimed that even the young men who were not in the city, contributed virtually nothing to the day-to-day running of the household. They did very little domestic work and just socialised on the streets all day. Women also explained that, while young men used to do tasks such as fence fixing, building and other activities for free, they now demanded cash for their labour.

While the disenchantment with young men was general among the older generation it is interesting to observe how older men and women attempted to explain the problem. Older men often expressed their feelings by berating the young men for being irresponsible and lazy. They argued that they were a disgrace to the older generation. Women, on the other hand, were more sympathetic. During 1998, many stated the young men in the village were chronically afflicted with ‘amafuluniyana’ (evil spirits) which sapped their strength and made them lazy and idle. While there were certainly unusually high levels of epilepsy among the resident male youth in the village, these explanations show that older women opted for a less conflictual path by locating the blame for young male indifference and inactivity to spiritual disorders, rather than personal defiance. From the point of view of many women the appropriate response to male inertia and irresponsibility was ritual intervention, healing and purification, while for older men what was needed was more discipline and respect. The subtle differences in the approaches of older men and women to the orientation of male youth meant that young men often had much better relationships with their mothers than with their fathers.

From the point of view of young men, investment in the village seemed to be futile in a context where the older generation, which dominated the community structures, plainly refused to create new residential sites in the village and to make new land available. After freezing site allocation for over a decade in the village, many of the male youth who wished to branch off on their own and set up their own homesteads were prevented from doing so by the shortage of residential land. The
social impulses to *ukuhlalisana* evident in the city were also felt in the village where the youth were arguing that they wished to make a new future for themselves with some degree of independence from their parental households. Their reluctance to invest labour and income in their parents’ households was often inspired by their desire to establish households of their own. In 1966, these tensions came to a head in Ngxinxolo when a group of your households broke away from the residential core of the village and illegally established homesteads of their own on grazing land located on the fringes of the village.

Although the number of new homesteads created in this way amounted to little more than a dozen, the move was an expression of the mounting frustrations of young adults in the village. The extent of the tension between the older residential area and the new households was reflected in the fact that we were refused access to this area because of our relationship with the existing Ngxinxolo leadership and their political structures. Our attempts to inquire about the age and status of the breakaway households, however, revealed that they were not all young households and that older landless households and some ex-farm workers had also moved into the area. Our inquiries did reveal that among the new households that established themselves in the new area, it was common for at least one of the two adults to have access to reliable wage employment. The tendency of unmarried men and women with employment to want to break away from their parental homes increased the anxiety among the older generation who resisted granting new residential sites to the youth. They argued that while it was legitimate and inevitable that married men and women would want to break away from their parents, the attempts by unmarried *masihlalisane* couples to break away from their parents should not be supported. By 1998, the size of the breakaway settlement, however, remained small and there was no indication that the village was likely to be opened up to large scale immigration from outside. It seems that the new households were keeping their demands very clearly focused on the rights of young, Ngxinxolo-born men and women to their own residential sites.

The breakdown of male generational relations affected women in a number of ways. Firstly, as we have seen, it encouraged young women to follow their brothers and move away from their rural homesteads in search of new opportunities in the towns and cities. The arrival of young rural women in such large numbers into the
urban areas was a direct result of both rural poverty and the breakdown of the household moral economy. Young women in the countryside who had witnessed the disputes between fathers and sons and between headmen and villagers realised that they could no longer rely on these men to support them at home. And, in the face of strong protests from mothers and mothers-in-law, who wanted their daughters to stay behind to help maintain the homestead, many felt the need to leave the rural areas and start new lives for themselves in urban areas. For those women who stayed behind and were still too young to leave, there was no question that their role in the countryside was to try to assist their mothers in maintaining the household.

The diminishing levels of commitment of the younger generation to rural lifestyles and agricultural production had a profound effect on the ability of households to utilise agricultural resources more fully. Consider the case of the husband and wife whose children have left for the city and do not return except to claim their pension money. Add to this the burden of grandchildren and the situation gets worse.

4.5 Garden Production, 1997-98

With the changes in technical and social conditions discussed above, the reasons for the chronic under-utilisation of agrarian resources in the village in the late 1990s, can be better understood. Virtually all the agricultural production that took place in Ngxingolo in 1997/8 was confined to household gardens and even these were to a large extent under-utilised. The working of these gardens during the 1990s seem to have had much less to do with climatic changes than with the availability of household income and the necessary labour to work the fields. Our household survey showed that out of a total of 100 households, 67 household heads claimed that they used their garden every year, 12 stated that they used them less frequently, while 15 said that they never used them. Only 6 household heads said they did not have a garden. Of the household heads on welfare, the vast majority of whom were women, over 80% stated that they used their gardens every year, while only 60% of household heads in full-time employment said that they used their garden annually. In total, over 66% of the gardens used on an annual basis were used and controlled by welfare recipients. This indicates that the bulk of the agricultural output produced in the
village was controlled by old women. Tables 4.7 to 4.9 show what was produced in these gardens and in what kinds of quantities.

Table 4.7: Crops Produced in Household Gardens, Ngxingxolo (June 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Crop</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maize only</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pumpkins and Maize</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans and Maize</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans, Maize, Pumpkins</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables and Maize</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not plant</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Household Maize Output, Ngxingxolo (June 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maize Output 1998</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half a bag (on cob)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Bag</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 Bags</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 Bags</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet Harvested</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield failure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not plant</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9: Household Vegetable Production by Volume, Ngxingxolo, (June 1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume of Output</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-50kg</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-75kg</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-100kg</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 00kg</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield Failure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not Plant</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the above tables show, household gardens were virtually always used to plant maize in combination with pumpkins, beans or other vegetables (or some combination of these). Gardens were sometimes divided into segments, with each segment being devoted to a specific crop. However, the more common practice was for maize to be inter-cropped with pumpkins, beans and other vegetables. A comparison between household yields and household structure reveals that the households with the largest output were nuclear or extended male-headed households. Female-headed households occupied the middle ground, displaying a consistent output, while poor, small households without a welfare recipient and single parent households tended to perform the worst. In the case of welfare widows and other female-headed households the major constraint on output was access to family labour to keep their gardens in good shape. These women usually had sufficient cash from their pensions to ensure that their gardens were ploughed, but often compromised the harvest because they were over-burdened with domestic responsibilities. Caring for grandchildren was tiring and time-consuming and often left them with insufficient time to devote to their gardens. A number of other factors, such as the age of the grandchildren and their ability to help out in the household also affected output. Some of the best gardens seen in Ngxingxolo were the work of old couples who devoted their combined pensions and labour to ensuring that they were able to reap a sizeable crop every year.
By contrast to welfare household heads, some of the younger household heads in the village took little or no interest in their gardens. Some of these individuals were relatively well-off with good jobs in the city. Their households were sufficiently provided for without using their gardens fully and they often neither had the time nor the energy to pay much attention to the relatively small returns that could be derived from garden-based village agriculture. This is not to suggest that these individuals were disinterested in agricultural production, it was rather a matter of scale. In fact, we were surprised to see that some of the better-off households in the village which did use their land fully joined the farmers association which was set up in 1996. This involvement indicates that they were interested in agriculture but only on a much larger scale than was currently possible in the village. Some of these individuals joined together in an effort to purchase a neighbouring farm. In order for them to secure a government subsidy to buy the land, consensus was required on how the land would be used. This could not be achieved because of the different claims made by different constituencies in the village: older women argued for market gardening and piggeries, young households for access to residential sites and some land for cultivation, while better-off households wanted the land to be used as grazing land for their cattle and goat herds. After much deliberation, the deal fell through and the farm was sold to another buyer. In the process, the residents of Ngxingxolo lost a golden opportunity to greatly expand the agricultural base of the village.

In Ngxingxolo, garden production was directed towards domestic consumption. Very few households ever sold any of the output produced on their land. Only two cases were recorded where any part of the agricultural yield was sold for cash. The first involved a widow who produced tobacco every year and sold it off to old men in the village. The other was a domestic worker from East London who would sometimes take pumpkins into the city for resale in the township. She would, however, only do this when there were too many pumpkins for her family to consume. In fact, we discovered considerable resistance to the idea that garden produce could be sold at all. Most of our informants insisted that if a surplus was produced it should be distributed to neighbours and kin in the village. The idea that this surplus could be transported into the city for resale was negated by our informants, who insisted that it was the responsibility of those in the village to look after one another before they turned their attention to strangers in the city. The lack of interest and concern with
marketing garden produce was, of course, principally a result of the fact that production levels were small, so that even if a surplus was produced it made little sense to transport it 50 kms into the city. The cost of getting it there would probably outweigh the return for the household concerned. But there was more to it than this. There was a strong idea, especially among women, that what was produced in the village belonged to the people of the village and that if produce was to be exchanged it should be incorporated into village level exchange circuits.

Besides the normal practices of gift giving, one of the ways in which the village maize surplus was converted into socially defined circuits of exchange within the village was by converting it into beer or investing it in village rituals. Ngxinxolo, like many other villages in Mooiplaas, had a very active ritual calendar. Almost every weekend there was a beer drink or a ritual being held somewhere in the village. In 1997-98, 33 of the 100 households surveyed held a ritual of some kind. The table below indicates the type of ritual and number of households that performed it over the past year Ngxinxolo village appears quiet and deserted during the week. The only evidence of productive activity is the movement of older women and men about their daily chores of housekeeping, firewood collection, and attending to gardens. Many of the older women, who do most of the work, openly lament the absence of their daughters, saying that they miss the presence of a young makoti or an older daughter to help them out. By midday, there is a heightened sense of activity as streams of young school children criss-cross the village on their way home. In the streets and yards, clusters of young men are seen loitering. They too come and go, but are especially evident at month-end when their mothers get their pensions. Over weekends the situation changes dramatically when villages come alive with the return of commuters, work-seekers and townswomen. Social activities intensify as people move freely between rituals, school meetings, credit club get-togethers, and local beer drinks. By Sunday evening these activities begin to diminish as women and men head for the taxi rank to get back into town for an early start on Monday. Such is the weekly cycle in many of the rural villages on the fringes of Eastern Cape towns and cities.
4.6 From Cattle to Pigs

Table 4.10 provides a breakdown of livestock ownership in Ngxingxolo in June 1998. The table shows that only 15% of households had no access to livestock at all – 10% of the households did not even own any chickens. Among the remaining 85% of households, it is significant to note that, while 34% owned some cattle (often with other livestock), 38% of the household only owned pigs. The shift from cattle to pigs as the main form of livestock in the village has been one of the most significant changes in the village since the 1980s. According to informants, cattle ownership was much higher in the early 1980s when the village was still under the control of the headman. However, between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, there were considerable livestock losses in the village. Drought and disease were the main cause of loss. An outbreak of red fever (xhosa name) had a devastating effect on the village herd in 1988-89. Disease was also abetted by the withdrawal of state provided dipping facilities in the village after the removal of the headmen in 1983. Some leading livestock owners addressed this problem by purchasing their own chemicals to dip their animals. Others did not take these precautions and their stock suffered as a result. By the late 1990s, however, we found that many households had lost their appetite for the accumulation of cattle. Most household heads (especially female heads) said that they felt, while it was useful to own at least one or two cattle because of the extra status it brought the household and because these beasts were always required for rituals, they saw little point in building up large herds. They said that disease, drought and stock theft made them wary of cattle as an investment. Male household heads were still more favourably disposed to cattle accumulation, but even they viewed the whole enterprise with considerable caution.
In terms of cattle ownership then, there were only about a dozen households in
the village that were either seriously interested or able to maintain more than one or
two beasts. In 1997, when the prospects of village residents being able to purchase a
white-owned farm adjacent to Ngxingolo became a distinct possibility, these
individuals took an intense interest in the proposed scheme. The farm under
discussion was a dairy and maize farm and was well suited to stock farming. Some of
the cattle owners represented in the new Ngxingolo Farmers Association were, in fact,
so enthusiastic about the scheme that they proposed to raise an additional R6000 each
to help finance the deal. While other village residents were also enthusiastic about the
prospect of expanding the village, they had other objectives in mind. Many of the
women in the village spoke of the possibilities of market gardening as well as piggery
and poultry project. The youth who were generally much less involved in agriculture
were, on the other hand, more interested in the potential of the farm as a base for
allocation of new residential sites and arable land. They said that access to the new
farm would allow them to get access to the kind of residential and arable allocations
that their parents had received at the time of betterment. The three main interest
groups that emerged during the negotiations were thus the male cattle owners, the
market-orientated women, and the landless youth. As the tensions between these
groups escalated during the second half of 1997, the prospect of reaching the
‘community consensus’ required for the government to purchase the land diminished.
Since no-one could agree to how the land might be productively used, it was impossible for the people of Ngxingxolo to present a viable working plan for the farm to the government. In the end, to the great disappointment of everyone concerned, the land deal fell through.

Plate 6: Cattle graze in unfenced fields

If cattle ownership was less significant to the majority of households in the village than it had been a decade earlier, the ownership and breeding of pigs had grown in importance in the village. One of the reasons for this was the growth in the number of female-headed households in the village. Unlike cattle, which are still seen as the concern of men, pigs and poultry have always been regarded as women’s animals. Thus, the growing importance of pigs as opposed to cattle in the village is, at least, to some extent simply a reflection of the demography of household headship. With more women in charge of household affairs, it is inevitable that their concerns will achieve greater prominence in the village. Two other factors were of critical importance to the new interest in pigs as domestic animals. Firstly, as we have seen, the agrarian economy of Ngxingxolo had shrunk over the past two decades from a general concern with both field and garden to an almost exclusive interest in gardens. The reasons for this are complex and have been dealt with in detail above. The shift from cattle to pigs reflects this overall shift in household agrarian concerns. Unlike cattle, pigs were more sedentary animals. They could easily be managed within the
framework of a garden orientated agricultural enterprise. Cattle, on the other hand, were free-ranging and required that much more of the household labour effort be focused away from the home. For women who were home-based and old, the prospect of rounding up cattle on the range lands was not viewed as a viable prospect. Moreover, with larger numbers of young children now at school on a full-time basis, there was always a shortage of responsible young boys who were willing to look after the cattle. The shift from cattle to pigs was therefore not merely a response to the gender composition of household authority, it was a response to a broader structural shift in the village-based economy.

Plate 7: Pigs are bred in household yards

Ngxinxolo Farmers Association, 1996-98

In June 1996, a Farmer’s Association was formed in Ngxinxolo to address the problem of the under-utilisation of arable fields. The Farmers Association was specifically concerned with the rehabilitation of field-based maize production in the village. The new association was comprised of 22 members, 16 from Ngxinxolo and 6 from the neighbouring Silsha village. The membership from Ngxinxolo was drawn almost exclusively from those families who were granted arable fields at the time of betterment. Most of the members were men in their forties and older, but there were also some widows among them, like Mrs Mdingi and others. The formation of the FA in 1996 seems to have been a response by landed families to three factors. Firstly, it was clearly inspired by two years of very good rains in the area and a general sense of disappointment among land-holding families that they were unable to capitalise on the favourable climatic changes. Secondly, many landed families in the village realised that the persistent claims of the younger generation and other landless families for access to residential and arable land would be difficult to fend off in the long run if
they did not put the productive land at their disposal to good use. In a political climate where land reform was strongly on the national agenda, there could be no guarantees that special privileges secured during the apartheid era would be upheld by the new ANC government. Furthermore, the emphasis in government policy was on the productive use of land. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the decision to cooperate was inspired by the possibility that Ngxinxolo might be able to acquire a neighbouring white-owned farm in terms of the government’s new land redistribution schemes.

After a number of meetings, the new FA decided that its primary objective, at least in the short term, would be to secure access to tractors and other productive equipment to ensure that members’ fields produced harvests in the 1996-7 season. Negotiations were set up with local white farmers to hire tractors and planting equipment for the 1996-7 season. Agreements were reached on prices and it seemed that the FA would get off to a good start. However, the politics of using equipment from neighbouring white farmers was complex. Firstly, many of these farmers benefited directly from the low yields produced in Mooiplaas. It meant that the villagers were reliant on their own produce for survival and that they could generate extra profits at harvest time by selling maize in the villages. Secondly, some farmers located on the borders of Mooiplaas not only experienced constant stock theft, but they also reported that their fences were being damaged and stolen by the villagers. They consequently had little sympathy for the plight of the struggling village populations. Thirdly, one of the farmers who was likely to support the FA had recently put his property on the market in order that he could move to town. This was not necessarily a problem, except that Ngxinxolo village residents wanted to purchase the land via a state assistance scheme. This was a complex process and both parties were not prepared to complicate matters by getting involved in other relationships at this time.

These difficulties notwithstanding, the FA did achieve some success in 1996-7 as a number of fields that had been dormant for many years came under production. Most members only ploughed one acre of land because of the costs involved, but this was one acre more than most had ploughed in previous years. But the limited success achieved by the FA in the 1996-7 season could not be duplicated in 1997-8. One of the main problems was the failure of the pending land deal with a neighbouring white farmer which was to double the size of the arable land in the village. Once the deal had fallen through, relations with surrounding white farmers soured and much of excitement and anticipation which surrounded the formation of the association dissipated. Difficulties in securing technical assistance, membership withdrawals and a shortage of funds resulted in the failure of the FA to secure a deal with white farmers for the 1997-8 season. This is one of the reasons, as already noted, that field-based maize production was virtually non-existent during this year.

4.7 Non-agricultural Pursuits

The gradual shift from fields to gardens and from cattle to pigs brought agrarian economic activity closer to the homestead. But the home was not only a base for farming, it was also used as a site for the pursuit of non-agrarian economic
activities, such as bead-making, dress-making, shebeening, and various other forms of retailing. There were only two households in our sample where self-employment was the main household occupation. However, more than one third of the households in the village were involved in some kind of small business venture or entrepreneurial activity. As in the case of agriculture, women took the lead in the rural informal sector. Older women tended to be involved in beadwork, dressmaking and crafts, while young women were more involved in retailing. The generational distribution of skills was partly a product of the training that women received from ‘the trust’ during the 1960s and partly the result of changing socialisation patterns. Many of the older craftswomen and dressmakers in the village said that they had benefited from the training workshops held by the Trust at Fox Cox. Other older women specialising in beadwork and traditional garments claimed that their skills were not learnt from ‘the trust’, but had been acquired when they were ‘makotis’ (young wives) in their husbands’ homesteads.

Nonasi, a well-known dressmaker in her early sixties, remembers that she was taught her trade by an aunt who used to go to the training courses offered to village women in the 1960s. Nonasi claims that she did not sew much when her husband was alive, but after his death in 1990 she had to find new ways of supporting the family. After the funeral, she used the left over money to purchased a second-hand (foot pedal) machine, a roll of material, needles and thread, bias binding, zigzag, beads and rattling chimes. Nonasi says that her aim was to focus on making traditional garments for women to wear at ritual events. This business has afforded Nonasi a small but steady income during the 1990s. Besides her traditional dresses which she makes for R180, she also makes the following items to order at the following prices: *skhwenkweni* or breast cover (R80); *incebethe* or breast cover (R35); *ixakatho* or shoulder wrap (R80); *iqhiya* or head scarf (R70), and *inxili* or purse. In addition to the garments, Nonasi sells bead anklets, necklaces and headbands. Although the creative work in the business is done herself, Nonasi relies heavily on her three granddaughters who help put the items together. She also sells paraffin, beans, tobacco and matches from the house. When I asked her whether there was any profit to be made from these commodities, she claimed that they merely kept the ‘lamp burning’ and that dressmaking was her main business activity. Although Nonasi is well-known for her skill as a dressmaker in Mooiplaas, she seldom gets work from
outside the area. As a result she must keep her prices down and her profits are small. She stated that she would not be able to survive without her pension, which was the main income in the household. We estimated that Nonasi’s monthly profit from dressmaking was in the region of R300 a month.

Thembeka is one of the few younger women in the village involved in the dressmaking and craft sector in the village. However, unlike Nonasi, she is one of a group of women who have been able to secure a contract to make bead covers for vases, small buckets and umbrella handles for Mrs Metele at the Kei Bridge tourist shop. Mrs Metele collects consignments of work from her every month and gives her instructions about what is required at the shop. Thembeka says that she can earn between R200 and R400 a month this way, but that it is not enough to support her family. She lives with her sister and her three children. Her sister is a domestic worker in East London and sends home between R150 and R200 a month. The family is very poor. To supplement their income, Thembeka also travels into East London over weekends when her sister is at home looking after the children to sell her beads on the Esplanade. This adds some income, but not a great deal. Thembeka admits that her living is very precarious and wishes that Mrs Metele would ask her for more products for the tourist shop. Her connection with the Kei Bridge tourist shop was the product of an Operation Hunger project that was started in the village in the late 1980s. The project, which is simply known locally as ‘operation’, involved approximately a dozen women in making traditional garments and beadwork for Operation Hunger’s national network of outlets. The project gave women access to sewing machines, training and a ready market for the distribution of their goods. The project also served to re-establish some of the skills that women had learnt through the Trust in the 1960s. The project was discontinued in the 1990s, although certain individuals, like Thembeka, did manage to retain links with some of the project outlets, like the Kei Bridge tourist shop.
Besides garment and bead-making, small-scale retailing and shebeening (liquor trading) were other business openings exploited by women in the village. Small-scale retailing took the form of home-based spaza shops that sold a variety of daily necessities such as salt, sugar, washing powder and paraffin. The market for home-based retailing was limited in Ngxinxolo because of the existence of a village general dealer store that sold a wide range of products. But this did not stop women from keeping goods at their home for sale. They felt that if they could sell something they would be helping the household. Households that had electric or gas refrigerators were well positioned to make a small profit by selling ice lollies, cool drinks and perishables. These outlets were open all day and well into the evening giving them a slight advantage over the general dealer which closed at 6pm. In the cases we recorded, the volume of goods sold by spaza operators was small and seldom exceeded R200 a week, which would ensure a profit of about R50. The most profitable spaza outlets were those located on the access routes to the village school.
School children would spend some money on sweets and lollies on the way home. These pennies added up over a period of a month.

Liquor sellers did not do much better than spaza shop operators in Ngxingxolo. The market was small and periodic. In fact, they were often the same people. During the week when workers were away in the city, some women focused on making some money from school children and old women, but when the commuters returned for the weekend they shifted their attention to selling liquor. This way they felt that they could make the most of the weekday and weekend trade. For shebeening, refrigeration equipment was absolutely essential. Workers did not like to drink warm beer. There were also cycles in the weekend trade. Month-end weekends were, for instance, always better than other weekends and weekends on which there were large-scale rituals sometimes offered very good business. When a large ritual was being held in the village, outsiders would arrive for the event and would stay over in the village. This brought in business. However, it was during the ritual that the shebeener made the most money because groups of men always broke away from the proceedings to drink in shebeens. They did this for social reasons, but also because they grew tired of the homebrewed beer (mogomboti) and wanted to drink the stronger and smoother commercially produced beers, such as Castle and Black Label. To keep their outlets supplied with beer, shebeeners had to find transport to collect liquor from the Mooiplaas Bottle Store 5 kms away from the village. Those who were serious about selling liquor thus had to establish links with local taxi-operators. In fact, we found that one of the most successful shebeeners in the village was the wife of a taxi-operator who brought cheap liquor back from East London over the weekend.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the implications of changes in the occupational profile and livelihood strategies of rural households in Ngxingxolo. We have argued that the repositioning of older women in general and welfare widows in particular within the village economy has had a significant effect on livelihood strategies of rural households. In relation to agricultural production we have noted a sustained shift away from field-based farming to household gardening, as well as a shift away from cattle ownership to pigs and poultry. Both these shifts, we have
argued, are indicative of changes in gender power relations and in the role that women play not only in performing labour, but in controlling economic decisions in the household. In relation to the engagement of rural households in non-agrarian pursuits, we have argued that little progress has been made in developing these opportunities. Some new women-centred entrepreneurial activities have emerged over the past decade, but the shift from on-farm to off-farm occupations inside the village has not yet developed fully. One of the main factors limiting the development of off-farm activities is the lack of dynamic links between Mooiplaas and the City of East London.
CHAPTER FIVE:
EMERGING MARTRIACHS:
SOCIAL NETWORKS, RITUALS AND
CHANGING POWER RELATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In her book, *No Condition is Permanent*, Sara Berry (1993) argues that one of the major problems with conventional analyses of agrarian change in Africa is that they have applied formal economic and legal models to the analysis of systems of resource allocation and distribution that are characterised by ambiguity, contention and negotiation. Berry argues that the literature on African economic development is dominated by writers who think in terms of universal models of behaviour and social processes, and are committed to verifying these models through quantitative analysis. These authors, she suggests, are concerned with absolute values, rules and contracts and generally have little appreciation for the insights of historical and anthropological analyses. She argues that more scholars need to recognise that understanding resource access and resource use in rural Africa is not simply a matter of tracing rational actor’s responses to relative factor prices and the rules governing the definition of property rights or the nature and enforcement of contracts. The mobilisation and exercise of power, she insists, have also shaped rural peoples’ access to and use of the means of production, and the terms in which rights and obligations are defined (1993: 3).

In Berry’s (1993) view access to resources in rural African settings are seldom absolute in any legal sense. They are often negotiable and tend to be ‘open-ended and multidimensional rather than single stranded and definitive’ (1993: 13). From this perspective the affairs of households and their relationship to resources are not easily separable from patterns of power, authority and obligation that exist beyond the household domain. According to Berry, in African rural systems it has been enormously difficult for individuals and households to insulate themselves from the
broader cultural and political environment by hiding behind legal fictions or contracts. She argues that it is necessary to recognise that in rural African settings:

...the definition of property rights has been shaped by ongoing debates social identities and relationships. To gain or defend access to land property, it has been necessary for people to participate actively in the politics of rural groups which either hold various rights over land or serve as forums for the mediation of disputed claims. Such groups include not only those of ancient lineage, such as descent groups, villages and traditional ritual communities, or chiefdoms, but also many of recent origin, including recently constituted religious or ritual associations, patronage networks, political parties, co-operatives, and rural settlements created by the state (1993: 17).

The observation that the access and control of resources in rural African settings are always mediated through political and cultural processes is worth remembering in the South African context where analyses of rural power relations and authority structures have been based on more formal models. The observation that women in rural areas are structurally disadvantaged because they are exposed to a customary regime of rural patriarchy is, for instance, too often simply left as a statement of fact. Anthropologists in South Africa have demonstrated that things are not always, as they seem and that over the past few decades women have played a prominent role in the control and management of household resources. This trend has been supported and endorsed by our analysis in the previous chapter. There is no doubt that matrifocal families, that is families that are controlled and run by mothers or grandmother mothers, have become an increasingly common feature of the rural social landscape in the Eastern Cape, especially with the restructuring of welfare payments (also see Manona 1999). In the context of the changes described in the previous chapter, it is interesting to consider whether the influence that women exercise within the household is also reflected by a change in their social and political positions in the public domain. In other words, is there any evidence that women are informally restructuring rural power relations and that they are translating their increasing domestic power into public power and influence?
5.2 Matrifocality and Matriarchy

In the 1950s, the anthropologist B. A. Pauw (1962) observed that the traditionally patriarchal Xhosa family structure and kinship patterns had undergone significant changes in the urban areas. Pauw (1962) argued that new matrifocal family forms had emerged in East London’s townships and that there was evidence that the ‘fatherless family’ had become increasingly common in the city. Pauw (1962) found this significant because the matrifocal families were not common in the rural areas around the city where male authority was firmly entrenched and underwritten by a patriarchal system of power and authority. The system, as we have seen, was strengthened with the introduction of betterment in the 1950s. In the rural areas, Pauw (1962) noted that the status of women and their access to resources, such as land and productive labour, was largely a product of their relationship to the male household head, the link between the ‘matricentral cell’ of mother and child and the wider society. The husband/father and his immediate male kinsmen acted as the politico-jural representatives of the household and, as such, connected it to other social groups and institutions. Furthermore, Pauw (1962) argued that the procreative power of women in the rural areas had to be ‘fenced in’ by marriage in order to safeguard the rights of the patrilineal kinship group. This meant that rural men were keenly interested in controlling women’s fertility and ensuring that children were not born out of wedlock.

By contrast to their rural counterparts, Pauw (1962) argued that urban women in East London were making enormous strides towards securing their own independence. They were seen to be building up their households, pursuing their own careers and accumulating property without male permission or involvement in their affairs. Pauw (1962) argued that the freedom and independence that women achieved was the result of the disarticulation of domestic and public power in the city. In other words, the legitimacy of domestic groups and their access to economic resources were connected to a wider system of patriarchal power and authority. In the townships, where African men were excluded from participation in the broader political system, the husband/father was not essential to upholding the politico-jural status of the family nor to determining access to economic resources. The latter was mediated through the
labour market. This meant that the position of husband/father had become dispensable to the functioning of the household. As Pauw (1962: 162) points out, men were no longer essential to the economic survival of the household in the city:

For their income, households depend mainly on labour, trading and rentals, and none of these are controlled exclusively by the husband-father. Mothers freely take up employment, venture into large- or small-scale trading and can own properties through inheritance or purchase. Even an unmarried mother can manage to rear her own family without a husband/father, and even without her own mother...

The crux of Pauw’s (1962) analysis is that the disarticulation of domestic and public power is critical to the ability of women to develop new roles for themselves and to challenge male authority. Put differently, he is suggesting that a shift from patriarchal customary power to individual civil rights is necessary for the position of women to change. This is an argument recently championed by Mahood Mamdani (1996) in his critique of the African National Congress (ANC) decision to accept tribal power as a component of rural governance in South Africa. In Mooiplaas, where the social and economic power of women has increased over the past decade, it is possible to make a similar argument. It could be suggested that the eviction of the headmen in the mid-1980s and the creation of new village residence structures created new opportunities for rural women to assert themselves both as individuals and household heads. But while this argument is substantially correct it is necessary to point out that the rural rebellion of the mid-1980s was essentially a conservative rebellion, which ended up restoring the rural status quo rather than overthrowing it. Wholesale land reform and the realisation of individual property rights was not on the political agenda of the village committees. As a result, the rural women of Mooiplaas in the 1990s were not yet in the same position as their urban counterparts had been in the East Bank location in the 1950s.

In the East Bank location, Pauw (1962) noted that women could accumulate property – two in three landlords in the location were, in fact, landladies. Many of these women were able to use their control of property to insulate their three-
generational female-headed households from outside interference. These women also used their tight control over property as a lever to control close female kin. The ability of women to acquire and control residential property without male consent was therefore critical to the formation of economically stable, matrifocal households in the city. The situation was very different in Mooiplaas in the 1990s. There were few economically strong and socially cohesive matrifocal families in the village. In fact, the female-headed households we encountered in Ngxinxolo in the 1990s were generally poor and economically vulnerable. They also lacked a sense of unity, common purpose and internal cohesion. Older female household heads struggled to exercise control over the labour and income of their children who had left the villages in their thousands to seek a new lives in the cities. Even their daughters who sent children home to be cared for by their mothers in the village often made little or no contribution to the household budget or labour effort. But it was precisely this weakness that, we argue, forced women to begin to seek alliances across household boundaries and to construct survival strategies that did not respect the integrity of close kinship relations. In a context of poverty and vulnerability, we suggest that rural women increasingly found it necessary and convenient to look beyond their own households in their individual and collective quests for survival.

This process we suggest resulted in a shift away from matrifocality, which we understand to be the process by which households become increasingly female-centred, towards a situation of matriarchy, where women as a class are dominant. The argument we develop below is that, if the trend towards matrifocality in East London was based on a disarticulation of domestic and public power, the empowerment of women in Mooiplaas in the 1990s is built on the opposite tendency. We argue that the softening household boundaries and domestic group cohesion documented in the previous chapters have opened up new avenues for female co-operation and collaboration across household boundaries and has encouraged new social networks and solidarities. We see the growth of female credit and savings clubs, joint economic initiatives and collective involvement in the field of ritual as evidence of this trend. Our general argument is that the trend in Mooiplaas is not towards matrifocality of the kind described by Pauw, but towards matriarchy, which implies a more fundamental restructuring of power. This is indeed provocative suggestion, especially in the rural
Eastern Cape which has historically been a strongly patriarchal society in which customary power and authority has been vested in men, especially senior men. However, the idea that women are becoming socially dominant and politically powerfully as a class in rural villages, like Ngxingxolo, which are no longer under tribal authorities, is one that, we believe, demands serious consideration. The suggestion seems even more subversive in the context where much of the current discourse and debate about land reform and rural restructuring in South Africa is couched in terms of extending woman’s rights and empowering them in rural society. How does the rights-driven policy discourse fit with rural social practice? In making a case for the increasing political, social and public power of women in Ngxingxolo I wish to focus on three issues. Firstly, on the construction of social networks among female-household heads and other women in the village, secondly, on current participation of women in the development process, and thirdly, on women’s role in the appropriation and redefinition of ritual and custom at the village level. The extent to which the observations discussed below can be generalised beyond this Mooiplaas case study, of course, remains a moot point. But whatever the broader significance, the case is nevertheless of interest in its own right, as an example of the possible direction of rural social transformation.

5.3 Women’s Networks and Savings Clubs

In the previous chapter we attempted to show that, while the majority of households in Mooiplaas were three-generational units, most of these domestic groups did not function as strong and coherent economic units. The bulk of the responsibility for household survival, as we have seen, fell on the shoulders of older women who were expected to use their welfare grants and their labour to provide subsistence for their dependent children and grandchildren. In three-generational households, we found that there were very low levels of cash remittances from absent household members and that this contributed directly to the economic hardship experienced by women in these units. In fact, 14% of the households had no middle generation and grandchildren were supported entirely by the grandmothers. In a context where young men showed little interest in working the land and making effective use of rural resources, old women had moved in to take over this responsibility for the household.
In doing so, they met very little resistance from men. Since the eviction of the headmen in the 1980s, there had been a steady shift from male to female control of the domestic economy in Ngxingxolo. Shrinking household agricultural yields and the collapse of field-based production were all indicators of not only the economic weakness of households, but of their social fragility.

The other significant feature about household structure in Ngxingxolo in the late 1990s was that almost 60% of the households were female-headed and that most of these female heads were widows. The table below highlights this point, but it also shows that only 4% of household heads in the village were under the age of 40 years, and 71% were 55 or older. The implication of this situation was that the vast majority of income coming into the village was concentrated in the hands of a cohort of older women, who could allocate it at their discretion. This created the impetus for new kinds of initiatives and projects that involved the pooling of resources. During our fieldwork, we found several striking examples of resource pooling and collaborative work among women in Ngxingxolo. In 1997-8, we noted a keen interest among women in raising and selling pigs and chickens for cash. There was considerable discussion among women about the potential profits to be made through these activities. This enthusiasm was translated into two new projects which involved older women clubbing income together to get commercial pig and chicken farming projects off the ground. Below we discuss the development of these recent new initiatives:

**Case One: The Pig Farming Project, 1997-98**

Mrs Dodo, the wife of a taxi operator in Ngxingxolo, initiated a pig farming project from her homestead in 1997. The idea for the project came to Mrs Dodo, who is also involved in the Ngxingxolo Farmers’ Association, when she was attending a workshop for small business development in East London. Information that became available through the new Farmer’s Association revealed that the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture was supporting the formation of ‘commodity groups’ in various rural areas. Mrs Dodo contacted the department and expressed an interest in launching a pig farming group in Ngxingolo. Her enquiry resulted in an invitation to Mrs Dodo and ten other local women, who constituted themselves as a group, to attend a training session with a departmental official. The training, which was run by former Ciskei government agricultural officials, schooled the women in the basics of commercial pig breeding. The women were taught how to wean the pigs and to feed
them up to ensure that they achieved maximum growth. They were given plans to build a commercial pigsty, which could accommodate commercial breeding.

In May 1997, a group of agricultural extension officers arrived at Mrs Dodo’s house in a white bakkie with their first batch of piglets, three males and two females. The agricultural official explained that the pigs were a high quality breed brought from a government farm, Mountainview, near King William’s Town. The piglets cost the women R50 each. The officials also brought a 100kg bag of what he called ‘weaner meal’ and a 75kg bag of ‘pig growth meal’ for the women. The senior official explained that he would monitor the success of the project by making monthly visits to the village and providing information telephonically if the women needed it. The pigsty used for the project was built at the bottom of Mrs Dodo’s garden to department specifications. Mrs Dodo explained that she envisaged the project would operate from her site until such time as the women were able to acquire a bigger site that could be devoted entirely to the project. The cost of the project was equally shared among the women.

In June 1998 when we revisited Mrs Dodo she reported that the project was still going, but that the expansion had been slower than she had expected. The women in the group had expressed fear that if they moved the operation to a new site the pigs might be stolen, so they had opted to sacrifice growth for stability. Mrs Dodo reported that the project was now generating a steady income and that they had made back all the money they invested in constructing the pigsty in the first place. When the pigs were ready for sale the women sold them off to young female traders in the village who slaughtered them for sale in the city. Mrs Dodo explained that the pigs were also bought for consumption in the village, especially during rituals.

Plate 9: Agricultural official delivers pigs for breeding from the Mountainview farm
Case Two: Poultry Farming Project, 1997-98.

This project was initiated in September 1997. The project was initiated by Mrs Mabhedla, a welfare widow who was also an active member of the ANC Women’s League in the village, and involved nine women from the village, who each contributed R25 as a membership fee and shared the operating costs of the project among themselves. In October 1997, the first batch of 100 day-old chicks was purchased from a hatchery in East London for R200. Mrs Mabhedla recalls that it was a great disappointment to the women that 11 of the new chicks died on the first day. In order to ensure that the chicks were well cared for the group devised a roster where each of the members took turns to clean the run, feed the birds and cut fresh grass to spread on the run floor. Mrs Mabhedla stated that, although the poultry project is also classified as a ‘commodity project’ with the provincial Agriculture Department, they do not receive the same level of support as the pig project. She claimed that the support services promised by the department have not been delivered and that they relied much more on the hatchery for information and advice, than they did on the department. Mrs Mabhedla also explained that they had received support from the local land reform NGO, the Border Rural Committee.

By June 1998, Mrs Mabhedla reported that the project was going well. They were already into their third batch of chicks. She explained that the fully grown chickens were currently being sold for R20 both on credit and for cash to village residents. The project’s most reliable customers were pensioners. She explained that the women hoped to reduce the cost of the birds to local residents by getting the birds to produce eggs as well. This would greatly increase their earnings on each bird and would allow them to sell the chickens more cheaply. Mrs Mabhedla also indicated that the financing of the project was running smoothly and that the women had opened a joint bank account with First National Bank into which all profits were deposited. She claimed that the expenditure on a batch of chickens was approximately R1000, excluding the cost of purchasing them. If none of the chickens died, the women would make a profit of about R800 per batch – that is, if they were all sold for R20. Translated into monthly earnings, it is estimated that the project was currently worth about R50 a month to the club members.

One of the major problems facing the project is the high number of chick fatalities that occur shortly after arrival from the hatchery. The women explained that the problem here was that they did not own the correct lighting and heating equipment to keep the chicks warm enough to survive. They stated that although the village now had access to electricity, the cost of purchasing the equipment was currently far beyond the means of the club. The women we spoke to said that their main motivation for joining the club was to achieve financial independence. They said that they did not want to rely on irregular remittances from the city and wanted to be in a position to have enough money to see themselves through expensive periods in the year, such as Christmas and January when their children and grandchildren required school clothes and books.
In reflecting on the above projects several points are worth highlighting. Firstly, it is necessary to note that the women involved in both projects had pre-existing social links. In the case of the poultry project, all the women connected to the project were also members of the African National Congress Women’s League (ANCWL). The ANCWL did not have many members in Ngxinxolo, but those who were involved were also active in projects like the poultry project. In the case of the pig project, the women involved were all members of landed families, either as the widows of original land holders or as their wives - as in the case of Mrs Dodo who was also active in the farmers association. Secondly, it was noted that the core members of the two associations were widows, many of whom received welfare grants. In the case of the pig project, we noted that, while older women were involved in raising the piglets for sale, many of the pigs they produced were being sold to younger women who worked and lived in town. These women would slaughter the pigs and sell meat cuts at the factories in town at the weekend. This division of labour made perfect sense in the village where older women very reluctant to leave their homesteads and younger women were eager to keep close links with the city. This division between younger and older women was symptomatic of a broader division
within the village where old women focused inwards and took responsibility for village affairs and young women focused outwards and sought new opportunities in the urban areas. The social networks that older women developed were therefore large horizontal networks, which connected them to other women of their own age inside Nqxingxolo and other rural villages in Mooiplaas. The networks of younger women were more geographically dispersed. They fed in and out of the village, but were not nearly as parochial as those of their home-based mothers.

Besides the involvement of women in these collective agricultural projects, we also noted that the 1990s had seen a dramatic increase in the involvement of rural women in starting informal savings and credit clubs (umgelelo). Over the past decade, there has been a steady growth of women-led savings and credit clubs in South Africa generally. It has been reported that there are over 24 000 informal credit clubs with a combined buying power of over R80 million in South Africa’s major metropolitan areas. These authors argue that, contrary to popular opinion, there has been steady growth in savings practices among the poor and that these clubs should be viewed as springboards for development. This trend has been confirmed by research in the Eastern Cape which has shown that there has been spectacular growth in the number of informal savings clubs, especially in the rural areas where involvement in these types of clubs is relatively new. Savings clubs have operated in urban areas in the region for a long time and that over 80% of the members of these clubs are women (Bank 1996). They noted that female household heads have been particularly active in these clubs. Our research supports these observations, but shows that the emergence of these clubs has not only given women savings options but has provided the context where they can come together to share their views and frustrations.

Our research in Nqxingxolo shows that that there were two main types of saving club in the villages. The first type worked on a simple rotation model where all members made contributions to the club on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis and took turns to receive the bonus payout. In one club comprised of six women we found that each member paid in only R50 a month, thus each member would expect to receive a lump sum of R300 every six months. All six of the members in this small club were pensioners. In the second type of club, funds would be accumulated in a
bank account over a period of a year and would then be divided among the members. In these clubs the members’ contributions would be invested in an interest bearing bank account managed by a treasurer, elected by the members. These clubs were sometimes called grocery clubs because the proceeds would usually be spent on the bulk purchase of groceries that were distributed among the members. In Ngxinxolo we found that both of the above types of clubs were popular especially among welfare recipients who had families to support. They offered these women two important opportunities: firstly, access to a periodic bonus that could be used to defray major household expenses and, secondly, access to a network of women who could provide them with friendship, support and advice. By comparison to the urban areas, where the operation of credit clubs was virtually invisible to the outsider, considerable fuss and fanfare surrounded the activities of these clubs in the rural areas. For instance, it was common for larger clubs to have their own banner and special outfits which they wore if they travelled anywhere as a club. The idea of clubs developing a social identity was linked, as we will se later, to their participation as groups in rituals. In fact, the close relationship between rural savings clubs and ritual activity is not surprising given that the desire to perform a family ritual was one of the main motivations for saving in the rural areas.

But ritual was intertwined in the social dynamics of savings clubs in other ways as well. In Ngxinxolo and other villages some clubs would celebrate their achievements by holding beer drinks for themselves and their members. During one visit to the village after dark, we discovered that the woman we had come to interview was in the middle of a savings club meeting. The meeting was taking place in an old rondawel which, judging by cattle skulls and horns strapped up against the thatch, was been the site of many family rituals. On the night of our visit, the rondawel was full of women, about thirty in all, who were preparing for the quarterly meeting of their savings club. According to our informant, who was the secretary of the club, the women had come from all over Mooiplaas to celebrate the good returns that they had made on their investments. Inside the rondawel, the women were seated according to age. The older women sat on benches on the left hand side of the rondawel, while younger women sat on the floor on the right hand side. At the back of rondawel, there were several cases of quarts (750ml) of beer and four bottles of brandy and 2 bottles
of gin. A female *injole* distributed beer and brandy to the members. No traditional beer had been brewed for the occasion. The atmosphere inside was rowdy and excited as the women celebrated the discipline and solidarity that had brought the club success. As the evening drew on, their collective sense of achievement and fulfilment grew and the women became extremely loud and outspoken. Amidst the joking, the women made constant references to the development that was needed in the villages and the impotence of men to provide the leadership that was needed for them to realise their dreams. These women spoke positively about their achievements and about what could be achieved by women working together. After a lengthy evening of drinking and talking the drunk women dispersed into the dark.

Plate 11: Women drink beer to celebrate club success
What was striking about this event was that women had transformed a familiar male ritual, a beer drink, into an empowering experience for women. By transforming a quarterly credit club meeting into a female beer drink, the women of Mooiplaas were using an old cultural script to stage a new kind of performance. In the past, beer drinks of this kind were the preserve of men. They would occur with great frequency at the end of the agricultural cycle and would provide an opportunity for men to reflect on the successes and failures of the season past. Such events would provide important forums for the exchange of information not only about agricultural issues, but also other social and political concerns. Within the matrix of a patriarchal world of male power and authority, the beer drink constituted a critical ‘backstage’ arena where male consensus was forged and male public opinion tested. They were also important forums for the ritualised enactment of generational power and respect, and for the consolidation of other kinds of solidarities such as those between kin, neighbours and clansmen (cf. McAllister 1980). By usurping what was ostensibly a male ritual of power and converting it into an expression of female power and solidarity, the women of Mooiplaas were doing much more than simply sharing a drink together. They were laying claim to a powerful and authoritative tradition.
5.4 Rituals, Women and Tradition

The connection between changing gender roles and ritual activities in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape is clearly a topic that requires careful investigation, not least because of the enormous social importance of rituals within the rural situation. In Ngxingxolo we discovered that a ritual of some kind was performed almost every weekend. These events were sometimes small family affairs, but equally often they were larger social events that took months to arrange and involved a wide spectrum of people from both within the village and beyond. In the case of important family rituals relatives and clan people travelled from as far afield as Cape Town to participate. The majority of these family-centred rituals involved communicating with the ancestors to mourn the dead or to mark a stage in the life cycle of the living. In the 100 households interviewed, we discovered that no fewer than 33 had performed a ritual of some kind during the past year (1997-8). The table below provides a breakdown of the particular types of rituals these households performed.

One of the interesting features about ritual activity in Ngxingxolo during the late 1990s was the extent to which these events seem to be initiated and organised by women. In the case of rituals mourning the death of a male household head we noticed that the wife of the deceased man often took the lead by contacting her in-laws and suggesting that a ritual be organised. However, the centrality of women in the ritual process went beyond the mere contacting of kin. Women, in fact, orchestrated these events by using their social networks to mobilise the people and resources needed to hold rituals. In the 1990s, it was rare for individuals or family to be able to host a large and important ritual on their own. The costs were prohibitive. As a result women called on family friends and relatives who belonged to credit clubs to mobilise support from within their clubs for the ritual. The support came in the form of material items, the provision of funds and equipment such as pots and other items, as well as in non-material items, such as the provision of information and the willingness of women to invest their labour in these events. In return for this support, entire clubs were invited to the ritual. This was taken extremely seriously and we noted that on the day of a big ritual taxi loads of women in their club outfits would arrive from surrounding areas. At the ritual itself they would sit together and participate as
members of their clubs. Although many of the club members had no connection to the families involved, their invitations to the ritual were through their support that their club had provided in the preparation of the event. The ability of women to participate in rituals as members of women’s groups rather than of men’s families gave them the confidence to behave in ways that would in traditional terms be regarded as inappropriate for women. The photograph below shows women of the same club sitting together and drinking together at a ritual in Ngxingolo village.

Table 5.1: Ritual Activities by Type in Ngxingolo, 1997-8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritual Name</th>
<th>Purpose of the Ritual</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukuliza/ Ukukhapa</td>
<td>Terms are used interchangeably: <em>ukuliza</em> to mourn, <em>ukukhapa</em> to accompany. Performed after the death of the male household head and signifies mourning. A cow is slaughtered in the morning and the meat is eaten on the same day. Bones are burnt the following day. No beer is brewed and women wear traditional dress.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukubuyisa/ Ukuguqula</td>
<td><em>Ukubuyisa</em> means to bring back and <em>ukuguqula</em> to turn around. Performed some time after the funeral of the male household head to bring the spirit back home. A cow is slaughtered and has to bellow when its throat is cut otherwise the ancestors will not hear the call. The innards of the beast are eaten on the same day, but the beef is only consumed the following day. Beer is brewed and women wear traditional dress.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imfukamo</td>
<td>Performed when there is a problem in the family (e.g., infertility of a daughter). Precise details of the ritual are often stipulated by a sangoma or witchdoctor. The ritual involves seclusion in a special hut which faces the cattle kraal. Beer is brewed and the healing process involves communing with the river spirits.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intambo</td>
<td>Performed when a family member displays strange behaviour (e.g., bedwetting). Normally performed for women as similar rituals are performed for men at initiation.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukawalusa</td>
<td>Initiation for males. It marks the transition from boyhood to manhood and involves the family in a variety of rituals as the process occurs.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imbeleko</td>
<td>Performed for a new-born child, usually before the child is 10 days old. A goat is slaughtered to make a goatskin blanket for the child. The forequarter of the goat is eaten by the mother alone.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2: Beer Brewed by Households, 1997-8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Beer</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50-100 litres</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-200 litres</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 200 litres</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not brew</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that the most rituals performed during this period were rituals that mourned the death of the male household head. This is not surprising given that there were many widows in our sample. It was important for these widows to perform this ritual in order to appease the ancestors and to establish their own social legitimacy within the village. Delays in the performance of this ritual would lead to questions being raised in the village and could even result in witchcraft accusations, which were often directed at widows. The great social significance of ritual activity to women was seen in the pride they took in their dress for these occasions. It is interesting to note that while men made very little attempt to dress up especially for rituals, women prided themselves in turning out on traditional or club gear. We enclose some photographs taken during local rituals showing women’s dress.

Plate 13: Young girls dress up to dance at an Intonjana ritual
In the villages of Mooiplaas in the late 1990s women are emerging as the new custodians of isiXhosa tradition. They are the ones who organise and plan rituals and social events that appear immaculately attired in traditional dress at these events and they dominate these social performances. Local men tend to take these occasions far less seriously. They arrive late and disappear early to continue their drinking at local shebeens. To be sure, men still preside over ceremonial matters. They attend to the formalities and deliver the main speeches. But for all intents and purposes these occasions belong to the women. It is the women who are always the most punctual, most socially involved, and the most fastidious in their attention to detail. On these occasions, men often appear simply as functionaries, as socially necessary actors, whose presence is required merely to ensure authenticity, coherence and continuity. The extraordinary manner in which women, especially the older ones, have taken control of the ritual cycles in the villages initially seems perplexing since at least at a
formal level these events tend to reinforce patriarchy and male control. However, as Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) correctly point out, ritual processes should never simply viewed as an expression of a received ‘social structure’, they need to be viewed as dynamic social processes which can ‘press fresh associations, fashion visions of worlds yet unborn, deploy the pragmatics of language to invest contemporary practice with new force, or call upon the power of poetics to subvert unfamiliar forms of authority’ (1993:xx).

In the case of Ngxingxolo, it was not so much the invention of new rituals that symbolised the increasing power and authority of, especially older, women than the way in which they were able to appropriate and re-invigorate older cultural forms. One of the strategies employed by women was to elaborate and elevate the expression of female solidarity during these events. In order to demonstrate the manner in which this was achieved it is illuminating to consider the performance of an isizathu ritual, a major ritual involving an offering of an ox to the late grandfather of the homestead, in the household of Novotí Guwa, a widow and female household head whose husband died in 1989. In preparing for this ritual, which was performed in April 1998, Novotí had consulted the male relatives of her late husband to inform them of her intention to hold the ritual. After these deliberations a goat was slaughtered at her homestead ‘to sweep the yard’. In other words to announce the forthcoming ritual to the ancestors. The performance of isizathu was a major undertaking for Novotí’s household and in preparing for the event she relied heavily on the labour and generosity of other women to ensure that the event went off well. On the first day that we visited the household, a group of about eight women had just finished cooking large pots of traditional beer mix, which was set to cool on the hearth where some dry cow dung from the cattle kraal had been spread. Novotí explained that by bringing the dung into the house they were inviting the ancestors into the house to ‘bless’ the beer mixture and to accelerate the fermentation process when the brewing takes place. She explained that the active ‘foaming of the beer’ was an important indication that the ancestors had accepted the ritual. In the days leading up to the big event women from the neighbourhood worked tirelessly to ensure that all the minute details associated with preparing for the ritual received attention.
During the course of the ritual which ran over the entire weekend literally hundreds of people from Ngxinxolo and the surrounding villages visited the house to part-take of the meat and beer that had been prepared. Some guests came from as far afield as East London, Butterworth and Umtata. Our observations revealed that while many of the village men seemed distracted and filtered in and out of the homestead, the local women provided a constant and engaged presence throughout the proceedings. One of the most interesting aspects of the weekend events was the preparation for what was known as the ‘fire extinguishing’ of the ritual. During the course of the ritual the electrical supply to the homestead was cut so as not to irate the ancestors. In order to ensure that the proceedings could go through the night and that the dancing and singing would not have to be stopped, fires were lit after midnight. The following day, after the ritual was winding down and the village outsiders were leaving, all the women who participated in the preparations were invited to the ‘fire extinguishing’ phase, which involved a female beer drink which marked the end of the ritual. Symbolically women were using beer to put out the fires they had started. Women explained that this phase was a relatively new innovation which had become a standard part of most large-scale rituals. In the past, they noted that it would have been common for women in the house simply to cook a pot of *imifino* (wild vegetables) to thank other women for their support. This informal aspect of thank the other women had now been elevated in status to a fully-fledged beer drink organised and run exclusively by women.

At Novoti’s house the women gathered in the main rondawel where beer had been set aside for this event. Inside the rondawel, seating was arranged according to age with the older women close to the door and the younger ‘makoti’s’ at the end of the row. Daughters of the family occupied the left side of the rondawel normally occupied by men where they provided an assessment of how well the ritual had gone. Novoti then gave a speech in which she thanked everyone for supporting her. Thereafter her daughters brought in bottles of whisky, brandy, gin, soft drinks and bottled beer. One daughter then played the role of the *injole* by distributing the home-brewed beer among the women from eldest to youngest. The distribution process followed the progression of age and after a number of beakers of beer had been consumed, the *injole* brought out the ‘hot stuff’ – the brandy, whisky and gin. The
rules and regulations that governed the distribution of beer were followed as the brandy was decanted into glasses and handed to the women. As the injole did her rounds, the women could decide whether they wished to consume the liquor themselves or appoint somebody else to consume it on their behalf. This is where the men came into the picture. While the women were conducting the ‘extinguishing ritual’, a number of older men had gathered outside hoping participate, but they remained excluded both physically and socially from the rondawel and were only allowed to enter if nominated by their wives or other women to take ‘their tot’. This ‘fire extinguishing’ phase of the ‘isizathu’ ritual was a precise reversal of the conventional male beer drinks that have been so well documented in Xhosa ethnography (cf. McAllister 1979, 1980). Although in the case of Novoti the organization of an exclusively female beer drink to thank the women for their support was incorporated into the isizathu ritual itself, we noted that in other cases these drinks were only organised some time – often a matter of week - after the ritual had been completed. They were therefore not incorporated into the ritual, but were held afterwards as a gesture of thanks and solidarity.

Another good example of the increasing way in which women were asserting themselves in the ritual sphere was the reappearance of intonjana, a female initiation ritual, which according to our informants, was now beginning to re-emerge after being largely absent from the areas for many years. This ritual is supposed to be performed when a young girl reaches puberty. It is a family-based ritual that calls on the ancestors to bestow luck and good health on the initiate and to protect her from evil spirits. The ritual involves a period of seclusion from which the initiate finally emerges as a ‘new women’. What was interesting about the re-emergence of intonjana was that it was often performed on older women who did not undergo initiation as girls. The most detailed case study we have of the ritual involved a woman in her early fifties. In her case the ritual was clearly intended as a healing ritual, as much a life-crisis as a life-cycle ritual. From the limited evidence at our disposal it is difficult to provide an adequate interpretation of the significance of the growing popularity of intonjana among especially older women in Mooiplas in the late 1990s. A full account of this intonjana ritual is provided in Appendix One at the end of the report.
By taking charge of ritual and custom in Mooiplaas in the late 1990s, women seem to be doing several things simultaneously. Firstly, they are seeking to authenticate their new-found power by embedding it in a deeper set of meanings, values and activities which locate them at the centre of the community. By creatively manipulating rituals such as male beer drinks and by the re-introduction of older female rituals such as intonjana, women in Mooiplaas redefine their roles in the community. These processes are central to their consolidation and expression of power. Secondly, women’s interest in rituals is clearly associated with their desire to develop and maintain their networks within and beyond the village. Such occasions provide women with the opportunities to keep abreast of community developments and opportunities. They are, as we have seen, the occasions on which credit clubs meetings, poultry schemes, and other social and economic opportunities are discussed and assessed by women. Thirdly, local women encourage regular ritual activity as a means of drawing their dispersed kin back to the village. Information about these rituals circulates within the informal settlements on the fringes of East London and other small towns and encourages all those who have migrated locally to return home to ‘participate’ in the community. The expectation from the side of the women who organise the rituals is that the returnees will bring cash and goods home from the city. The continuous process of organising and supporting ritual activities is an attempt by women to ensure that the social links between town and country remain well lubricated and that those who have left the village - however temporarily - are conscious of their responsibilities at ‘home’.

5. 5 Women and Political Power

The key question that arises from the above discussion is: what influence has the strengthening of female networks had on the women’s political power within the village? It has often been stated that one of the consequences of the migrant labour system in South Africa has been that rural women have become the de facto managers of their households (Murray 1982). It has also been noted that migrant wives were often less subservient and obedient than their husbands presumed (cf. Spiegel 1992; Cloete 1992). In recent years, it has also been shown how, even in the most conservative rural communities, women creatively manipulated
patriarchal ideology to their own advantage (1997). However, there are currently few examples in the ethnographic record of rural women collectively and publicly challenging or defying male authority. In our research we did encounter a number of examples of women actively assuming masculine identities and openly expressing the power associated with these identities. This was seen as we have already noted in the willingness of women to organise female beer drinks in which men played little or no role. At one of these events we noted that men actually queued outside the rondawel in which women were drinking. They were waiting to be offered ‘sips’. This seems a reversal of traditional roles since it is customary for the men to drink and dominate the drinking space and for women to circulate on the fringes waiting for their husbands to allocate them ‘sips’. The public display of a change in customary roles symbolised the increasing power and influence of women in the village and the determination of especially older women to assert their economic power in a very public way. This acceptance that women had the right to speak at rituals was another example of a visible change in gender relations.

The growing confidence of women in the public and political arena was graphically demonstrated to us during April 1998 when a dispute arose in Ngxinxolo between two male taxi associations over their right to service the village. Taxi disputes in the Eastern Cape are bloody affairs. They are usually resolved with the gun rather than through negotiation. There have been hundreds of deaths from these confrontations and the state has found it virtually impossible to exercise any control over this sector. The taxi business in South Africa is male-dominated with a strong macho sub-culture. This is no less true in the rural areas than it is in the bigger cities. Against this backdrop it is highly significant that the senior women in Ngxinxolo were prepared to intervene to seek a solution to the taxi dispute. Meeting under the auspices of the ANC Women’s League, village women discussed the issue and decided on what they believed was a fair resolution to the dispute. They then called the two associations to a meeting in the village and instructed them on how they should resolve their differences. The two associations agreed to the compromise proposed by the women and the matter was resolved. The ability of women to resolve a local dispute of this magnitude without male intervention is very unusual in rural
areas and represents the extent to which women had assumed power and was a clear expression of their social power at the village level.

Plate 15: Men and women dress up for ANC anniversary celebration

At a more formal level we noted that four women were represented on the local village committee in Ngxinxolo. Senior women, like Mrs Dodo and Mrs Mdingi, who were the wives of landholders, were pivotal figures on the committee and did much to keep the structure alive in the village. They played a critical role in discussions about development and land use in the village. But, despite the changes they sought to bring in the field of gender relations, these women were a conservative force in relation to the views and aspirations of the youth. They had little sympathy for the complaints of those younger villagers who had broken away from the main village settlement and set up shacks in the valley. They also tended to favour projects or schemes in which older women could be the main beneficiaries and were often critical of the way in which younger women in the village conducted their business.
5.6 Conclusion

The social power exercised by women in the villages of Mooiplaas is perhaps uncharacteristic of the province as a whole. This community was one of the first in the province to discard Ciskeian-appointed headmen and to set up their own residents association. The residents of these villages have been governed by SANCO structures for the past fifteen years. This places them in a different position to the majority of rural villagers in the province whose residents associations are newer or still live under the rule of chiefs and headmen. However, since Mooiplaas is further down the line of civic governance and village-level democracy it does present an interesting window into the future. The experience of this area shows that the youth rebellion of the 1980s and early 1990s is well over and that the responsibility for rebuilding these shattered and divided rural communities has fallen into the lap of women, especially older women. In trying to restructure rural livelihoods, these women did not turn to their immediate families as much as to each other in the quest for new survival strategies. In this process, they used their extended social networks and kinship links to set up new solidarities that might prove more robust and enduring than those of the ‘household’, especially the typical migrant households as they had been reinvented during the betterment era.

In trying to understand changing livelihoods in the 1990s it seems fruitless for scholars to persist in ‘the household’ as the main unit of analysis. As we have seen from the above analysis, rural households in the Eastern Cape have been torn apart by persistent economic crises and by the internal dynamics of gender and generational conflict over the past decade. As rural communities rebuild their social and cultural fabric in a context where new social identities have been forged and where older social relationships have been seriously damaged, the central nodes of social co-operation and interaction seems to have shifted. The main bonds of co-operation seem to be located in generational solidarities among women, in matrifocal networks and in strong female inter-generational relations, especially between mothers and daughters. The social bedrock of these relationships is the notion of joint responsibility, which is often built around a common commitment to the maintenance of children. But, as we have seen these relationship, are not always confined to individual households, they
are spread across households, villages and even transgress the urban-rural divide. The common involvement of women in building savings clubs and community associations is part of the network building process as is their renewed involvement in organising larger social events and ritual occasions. Whether what we have observed amounts to an emerging matriarchy or not is open to question, but there can be no doubt that rural women are becoming increasingly powerful in their own right in rural communities and this is changing the way livelihoods are made in these areas.
CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to highlight some of the key changes that have taken place in the way rural livelihoods have been made in the Eastern Cape over the past few decades. Our analysis has confirmed that, in line with developments elsewhere in Africa, there has been an accelerated shift away from agrarian lifestyles in the rural Eastern Cape, especially since the 1970s. The process of de-agrarianization has occurred much more rapidly in South Africa than elsewhere in Africa and can be traced back to the country’s early industrialisation and the subsequent emergence of the migrant labour system that integrated rural populations into a sub-continental capitalist economy. To entrench the migrant labour system and to force black labour out of the rural areas the colonial state in South Africa passed the 1913 Land Act, which prohibited Africans from owning land outside of limited number of rural reserve areas. In the Eastern Cape, these reserves were eventually consolidated into the Transkei and Ciskei homelands which became the targets of forced removals as the state attempted to clear white towns and farms of surplus black labour. This long-term process of moving Africans away from white areas and into reserves created the need for rural restructuring.

Our study begins with this process of rural restructuring. We start in the 1950s with the state’s attempt to address the deteriorating environmental and agricultural conditions in the reserves through a national-wide agricultural betterment programme. We have argued that betterment, which was introduced in Mooiplaas from 1958, brought dramatic changes in rural settlement patterns, social relations, migration patterns and occupational profiles. For better-off peasant households with access to land and livestock, betterment was disastrous because it severely restricted the rights to individual households to these resources. For landless households, on the other hand, betterment promised them the possibility of acquiring some land again. In fact, one of the main aims of betterment was to reduce rural differentiation and to encourage male labour migration. Betterment attempted to restore some sense of patriarchal proprietorship over a rural homestead to rural men who were tempted to
leave the rural areas for good. In the 1960s, new policies to encourage ‘rural development’ preceded apace with the consolidated of disparate rural reserves into new ethnic homelands. In the Eastern Cape two such homelands gradually emerged, the Transkei and the Ciskei – Mooiplaas came to form part of the latter. The homeland policy encouraged further de-agrarianization by forcing all unemployed Africans living outside these areas to return to their rural homelands.

In the case of East London, we noted that ‘surplus population’ was systematically removed from the city after 1960 and sent either to Mdantsane, the new satellite town created for the Ciskei homeland, or to their rural villages of origin. For Mooiplaas residents who had moved in and out of East London with relative ease prior to the 1960s, the new era of urban removals and tighter influx and labour controls restricted their choices and mobility. Young work seekers, for instance, found that they could no longer simply queue at the factory gates and simply hang around in the city until they found jobs. Instead they had to go to the nearest labour bureau to wait for an employment contract to arrive. By funnelling work-seekers through a national grid of labour offices broke the historic links between Mooiplaas and the East London labour market. From the 1960s, increasing numbers of local male workers found themselves in single-sex municipal hostels in Cape Town and elsewhere. The contracts that arrived were mainly for men, which meant that women had to stay behind in the countryside. This was frustrating for many women returning from the towns and cities. They had become accustomed to urban life and had embarked on creative survival strategies in the old urban locations and shantytowns (like Tsolo, Mkeni and Gomora). Their expulsion from the city meant that some had no choice but to re-adapt to rural patriarchy.

In explaining the changing institutional framework, we paid careful attention to the role of gender in this process. We argued that the laws and regulations controlling urban and rural populations were specifically designed to reinforce patriarchal control in these communities. In the towns and cities, access to new municipal housing estates was restricted to male household heads in whose name properties were rented and other resources allocated. We noted that it was virtually impossible for women to gain or retain state-owned dwellings outside of the homelands. Even widows were turfed out of their husband’s municipal homes in East
London and told to go to Mdantsane. In the rural areas, the restructuring of the tribal authority system also served to reconstitute patriarchy at the village level as headmen were granted new powers, including the power to allocate land, under the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act (cf. Mager 1999). This meant that women were pegged back in the rural economy and were forced to work for the male household head and under the authority of headmen. The policies that evolved during the Apartheid years consequently had a profound impact on rural household structure. They entrenched a male ideology of family predicated on patriarchal proprietorship over the rural homestead (*umzi*). In this ideology, the notion of womanhood was constructed around safeguarding and maintaining the rural homestead in preparation for the return of the male household head.

Dunbar Moodie (1994) has argued that this ideology of the family was fundamental to the success of the cheap migrant labour economy in South Africa, and that it formed a key component of the migrant cultures that evoked on the male single-sex hostels on the Reef and elsewhere. Entrenched by broader structural and institutional forces, this ideology did a great deal to encourage rural investment throughout the Apartheid years. As Colin Murray (1981) demonstrated so well for Lesotho in the 1970s, male migrants had little choice but to build up their rural resources during their working lives because, if they did not, they would have nothing to retire to in old age. Precisely the same logic applied in Mooiplaas in the 1960s and 1970s. The working lives of most absent migrants was focused on effecting savings in the city in order to create a rural resource base that could sustain them in retirement. To achieve this men needed women to stay at home in the countryside and work for the *umzi*. In this report we have argued that return migration, regular remittances and the immobility of rural women were the key aspects that kept the agrarian economy going in Mooiplaas. In short, as long as this ideology of the household remained in place and women were effectively denied access to the urban economy, households had to continue to plant and reap crops from their allocated fields and to invest surplus household income in the accumulation of livestock. For this house economy model to function efficiently internal consumption and expenditure had to be kept under careful control. This required tight management and high level of internal consensus.
By the 1980s, however, we argue that these tight circuits of exchange and investment had begun to unravel as the ideological scaffolding on which rural investment was constructed began to crumble. In the 1980s, the residents of Mooiplaas were confronted with the prospect of forced removal away from their ancestral homes to another part of the Eastern Cape. The scheme was part of an attempt to consolidate Ciskei homeland into a single geographical unit. The people of Mooiplaas responded to this pressure to smashing the headman system in the location. This unleashed social and political struggles in the villages that undermined household cohesion and social stability. The youth, in particular, wanted change, and when it did not arrive they increasingly turned to East London to escape from the frustrations of village life. East London had been a pressure cooker of political anger and frustration in the mid-1980s and, when the lid finally burst off, rural youth poured into the city to join forces with their urban comrades (amaqabane) to wrest control of the township from the authorities. These developments paved the way for massive youth out-migration from Mooiplaas in the late 1980s. This had serious consequences for the efficiency and coherence of households as social and economic units. Drought also played a major role in encouraging out-migration, but with young men and women leaving the villages in such large numbers it was difficult for those left behind to hold the household together as a social unit. In the late 1980s and 1990s many young men and women left for the city hoping to make a clean break with the village. They were consequently not very good at remitting income home to their families. It was only when things did not go well for them in the city (ie. through prolonged unemployment or the birth of an unwanted child) that they eventually turned back to the village for support. This view of the countryside as a ‘last resort’ was very different from the migrant ideology of the countryside as a ‘first priority’ and had significant consequences for the way households functioned in Mooiplaas in the 1990s.

As younger household members divested from building up the umzi (rural homestead) and left from the city, the rates of rural remittances fell off and the social and economic cohesion of rural households suffered as a result. Without a ready supply of young male and female labour and a serious drought to contend with, the agricultural output of households feel sharply in the late 1980s. Large numbers of stock also died as a result of Red water disease and drought. The withdrawal of state
agricultural extension services during the mid-1980s had a significant impact on agriculture. Without government tractors to plough village fields and a free dipping service to keep livestock disease-free households struggled to maintain earlier production levels. By the time the rains returned in the early 1990s, most households with access to fields were in no position to use them. They lacked the capital, state support and the family labour to work them. This initiated significant changes in the way rural livelihood were made in Mooiplaas. Firstly, there was a shift in the main source household income. By the 1990s, pensions and welfare payments had replaced male remittances as the main source of cash income in Mooiplaas. This change bought new priorities in the productive orientation of rural households. As the final control of household income increasingly shifted from men to woman there was a shift in household investment from large stock (cattle), conceptualised as men’s animals, to small stock and poultry, which were regarded as women’s animals. The speed with which the poultry and pig projects took off in Ngxingxolo in the mid-1990 were examples of this shift in focus.

The abandonment of field production was caused by many factors. The distance of fields from homesteads and inadequate fencing were important reasons. By the 1990s, field-based production had reached an all time low in Mooiplaas. Only a handful of families were able to use the fields allocated to them. Most of those with fields had neither the labour nor the capital to plough them on a regular basis. Some landholding families admitted that they had not used their fields since the 1970s. As a result, agricultural production was increasingly confined to small household gardens, which were run and managed by village women. The gardens were used produced some maize and vegetables for household consumption. The evidence collected for this study shows a steady shrinkage since the 1950s in the size of the agrarian economy in Mooiplaas. By comparison to earlier periods, especially the 1930s when rural agrarian resources were stretched to their limits, the 1990s appear to be a period of dramatic under-use. In trying to explain this accelerating process of de-agrarianization we have argued that the shrinkage in the productive rural economy has principally been a product of the sudden and dramatic collapse of an earlier patriarchal ideology of household’, an ideology which was constructed and entrenched through betterment planning. This happened not as an event, but as a
drawn out process, which slowly starved the rural economy of cash remittances and labour, especially from the youth.

This loss of an agrarian ethos has had a devastating effect on many former homeland areas in the Eastern Cape, especially since there is little evidence to show that people have used their links and experience in urban areas to build up viable alternatives to agriculture in the rural areas. In Mooiplaas off-farm entrepreneurial activities did not provide a sustainable basis for making a living. The vast majority of women involved in the rural informal sector used it simply as a means of supplementing their welfare grants or pensions. For a small minority who were able to move goods across the urban-rural divide some profits could to be realised, but there are very few women who had the inclination to use the urban-rural interface creatively as a source of economic opportunity. In fact, with growing numbers of rural youth in search of urban permanence we found that the once porous interface between town and country had hardened significantly in the 1990s. The 1950s, prior to the restrictions and relocations of the 1960s and 1970s, urban workers and villagers from Mooiplaas moved in and out of the city of East London with great frequency attending to their interests in both areas. This encouraged a relationship between town and country where goods, skills and resources flowed freely across the urban-rural divide, allowing for the optimal exploitation of opportunities in both areas. For instance, crops were planted every year because labour flowed back into the villages from the city to help out. The absence of a dynamic relationship between the city and the villages has reduced flexibility and reduced opportunity. This, we have argued, has lead to the increasing political and social power of women in village society. In fact, we go as far as to suggest that this situation has led to an ‘emerging matriarchy’ in villages like Ngxingxolo, where the villages are controlled by old women whose economic power is based on the welfare grants they receive from the state. 

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Appendix 1:  Field Observations, Intonjana Female Initiation Ritual

According to the respondent this ritual is similar to the initiation ritual for young boys in order to enter manhood though it’s objective is different. The initiate in this case is the married, orphaned niece of the household head who is married with six kids. The ritual was long overdue as she has been sickly at her marital home and having problems with conception as well as when she is in confinement. This ritual is supposed to be performed when a young girl reaches puberty but financial constraints tend to delay it’s performance. The “imfukamo”, “ijaka” or “intonjana” ritual in sequence, follows the “imbeleko” ritual where a newly born child is introduced to the ancestors. In this ritual the family appeals to the ancestors to bestow luck and good health as well as protection from evil spirits on the initiate.

FIRST STEPS OF THE RITUAL

On recognising that the ritual had to be performed the initiate’s uncle who has shouldered all expenses involved convened a family meeting where it was agreed upon the date and other aspects of the ritual. Also discussions were held with their in-laws so that the initiate was released a week before the ritual. During that week preparations involved buying a goat which would be slaughtered on the third day after the initiate had been confined to the initiation hut and brewing traditional beer. Prior to that a group of women from the village had gone to a nearby river to cut a specific type of reed for the erection of the hut as well as a specific type of grass “incaluka” for the floor of the initiation hut. On completion of these preparations the initiate was given all the instructions pertaining to the success and efficacy of the ritual and “avoidances” she had to comply with. She was dressed in a black scarf covering her whole head with her upper body naked and covered only in a blanket. At all times she is supposed to remain in a seated position and has to take small portions of good so as to avoid going to the toilet during the day thus ensuring her seclusion.

The initiate is supposed to whisper when communicating with any one and the only people she has contact with are the young girls from the village who keep her company after school and remain with her throughout the night singing traditional songs. Some women from the village do attend to her during the day and the only males she can have contact with are her brothers. Her food is prepared by older women who have reached menopause or the young girls who serve as her chaperones but have to refrain from preparing her food when they are menstruating. The girls are given strict orders not to serve any sour milk to her during the ritual as sour milk is associated with cattle thus a link to the ancestors. The girls are also supervised by the older women to guard against their meeting boyfriends at night on the pretext of going to the ritual.

SECOND STAGE OF THE RITUAL
On the day of the observation the ritual was entering its second stage where there was prominent involvement of men in as far as slaughtering the goat which marked this phase. Thus throughout the initial stages of the ritual men have remained on the periphery except for the uncle who shouldered the responsibility who has to keep in touch with the family order women on what is required. The goat was slaughtered by the four to five men who were observed in the kraal braaining a portion of the meat for the initiate’s grandfather’s brother who was preparing to leave for his homestead in another neighbouring village. According to tradition the goat has to be slaughtered on the third day of the initiate entering the enclose, and this was adhered to. A certain portion of the goat’s fore quarter “intsonyama” was cut and braised by older women for heron the hearth built on the outer area of the reed enclosure.

The village women who had helped with various chores like fetching water and wood and brewing traditional beer were busy cleaning tripe and intestines which would be shared among them. The only portions allocated to the men were the trotters and the head, the rest of the goat would await the return of the young girls from school who by tradition were in charge of sharing the meat. In that the older women would take a back seat throughout this process accepting whatever portion of the meat has been allocated to them by the younger girls. The men in turn would be given their share of the meat by the older women who would group themselves according to age. After two weeks a big feast, “umgidi” will be organised for the coming out of the initiate where an elaborate meal would be prepared, an ox slaughtered with traditional beer and liquor flowing freely. When funds are available this will be followed by the ritual of “intambo” which entails plucking hair from an ox on the which the ritual will centre and a necklace is made for her from the plucked hair.

THE COMING OUT OF SECLUSION STAGE

After the stipulated four weeks seclusion period, preparations were made for the feast preceding the coming out of seclusion ritual which entailed brewing traditional beer, slaughtering an ox, buying liquor and all the necessities for an elaborate feast. The ritual had to take place at the original rondavel where the forefathers lived, even though plastered and renovated all rituals take place there. On the day of the ritual the sitting arrangement in the hut was such that men sat on the left with women on the right according to seniority. Firstly the household head made an introductory speech explaining to those present the purpose of the ritual where after, speaker after speaker commended him for his sense of responsibility in taking the initiative to perform the ritual. The initiate, as mentioned above is the household head’s orphaned niece for whom they felt the ritual was long overdue even though she was married with six kids. The household head’s wife belongs to a savings and grocery club in the village, thus her club members came in with their presents which included groceries, liquor, (case of beer and bottles of brandy and gin), cases of soft drink and crockery intended for the initiate. The former items were all for the consumption of all the guests at the ritual. Throughout this presentation names and items of presenters were written down to ensure reciprocity in the event of one of them having a ritual or a function. This was done by a daughter in the family for future references.

The floor of the ritual hut had a particular type of grass associated with good health spread all over it to invoke the ancestral good spirits. Barrels of traditional beer were
placed in the upper part of the hut on the male side where dry cow dung from the kraal had been spread underneath and around the, thus bringing in the ancestors to bless the proceedings. Women were smartly clad in traditional wear and some few men had wrapped blankets around themselves with woollen caps on their heads. Also noticed was the fact that only women smoked the long traditional pipes with their tobacco bags hanging around their waists while men smoked the more conventional pipes. The household head and a prominent herbalist in the village were on of the few men dressed in traditional wear simply because they were the ones involved in spearing the ox. Their dress had to be complemented with a multi0string blue beaded necklace signifying the task of slaughtering the beast and blue in this context symbolising goodwill. The rest of the men were clumsily dressed in worn blue working suits (overalls) and worn out shoes. As an outsider, the sitting arrangement was not observed in my case as I sat at the head of the female side of the hut amid the oldest women of the family and clan.

While all the speeches were rendered, bottles of brandy and gin were crossing sides, being dished out by the elderly “injoli” with the same clan name as the homestead. There was no strict emphasis on separation of sexes when drinking as a member of either sex was offered a drink “ukurabulisí”. This was referred to as “umngcamlo” meaning tasting, and the “injoli” had to pour a tot of either gin or brandy on the hearth to give the ancestors a first sip of the drink as a form of respect to them. Prior to that a bucket of traditional beer was poured on the floor next to the barrels as part of the ancestors share. By this time women were getting drunk and were engaged in traditional singing and dancing and had to be frequently reprimanded to keep quiet by the men as their noise was disrupting the speeches. Some were to be observed lying on the floor already drunk after imbibing every round of liquor circulating however before getting drunk they had filled empty bottles of liquor with some of the circulating liquor which they kept in their traditional purses. My share of drinks from all the rounds was demanded by an elderly woman sitting next tome claiming she will drink the liquor the next day to lift off her “bhabhalaza”. Interspersed with the speeches were announcements read pertaining to forth coming rituals around the villages, this included dates, times and type of animal to be slaughtered.

OBSERVATION OF PROCEEDINGS AT THE SECLUSION HUT

Seeing that there was not much to observe at this main rondavel I was lead to the seclusion hut by the female counterpart of the male “ikhankatha” in male initiation. By this time a part of the ox’s fore-quarter was cut by one of the initiate’s uncles and braaid and given to the initiate as part of “umhlonyana” a healing traditional herb used to cure all sorts of ailments. This term is used because the whole ritual of “intonjana” revolves around healing the initiate of all ailments. The process of eating this portion of meat by the initiate was referred to as “ukushwama”. The stringent rules dictating the code of conduct for the initiate were now relaxed as of that morning whereby she could communicate with people softly instead of whispering. The doek which had been covering her head and face since the initial stages of the ritual was now around her forehead and she did not have to keep her head bowed at all times. As she was now entering the final stages of the ritual, she did not have to keep herself busy by sewing traditional garments, a task she had to do during the four weeks in seclusion. On first entering the seclusion hut we were appalled at the
obscene sexually explicit writings and drawings of sexual organs on the wall and on
inquiring about this it was explained to me that issues of sexuality and good health
were central to the ritual.

This became evident at the end of traditional dancing and singing, as the young
dancing girls were lead to the seclusion hut by the “amankazana”, eldest women and
daughters in the family in the age group of 60-70 years sexually explicit songs were
sung. This was also explained as part of the healing process mentioned above. After
all the liquor was drunk at the main rondavel men were seen trickling away, some
staggering home in a drunken stupor while a few women were lying around drunk
inside the main rondavel. Those women who had brought in their presents earlier
before the start of the proceedings had given way to the late arrivals in the main
rondavel. Thus this group of women were congregated next to the fire place
beautifully dressed in their traditional wear. The first impression one would have got
is that they were excluded from the ritual for a particular reason. Around 4.00 p.m.
late in the afternoon, the focus of the ritual shifted to the traditional dance by the
young girls in age groups of 7-9 and 9-14 years, in the courtyard in front of the kraal.
My informant throughout the proceedings was quick to point out to me that there
were difference dance styles for each segment of the community, the division being
based on tribal origin – thus Xhosas and Fingoes. To take the point further she
pointed out to me that the former’s dance style was referred to as “ukungungqa”
while the latter was referred to as “ukusina”. Thus the dance style adopted at this
ritual was the latter as the family is of Fingoe origin and belonged to the Dlamini
clan. Prior to this all the women who had daughters in the age groups mentioned
above had rushed home to dress their daughters and make them up.

It was explained to me that in the olden days there would have been girls aged
between 15-23 participating in the dance, who were still virgins. Also the dance
provided prospective husbands to look for a wife as young men were afforded an
opportunity to sit in the front row observing the dancing girls. A girl who was
already engaged in the tribal sense was conspicuously identified by a black doek
around her neck, thus sending a signal to the prospective suitor that she is already
spoken for. Throughout the dance proceedings mothers would dance into the stage
and adorn their daughters with the multi-string blue bead necklace as a means of
encouraging the daughter to shed any shyness. One of the women pointed out that an
orphan would feel the pain of her status at such occasions as there would be no one to
do this for her. Again the colour “blue” was prominent in the dance stage as
previously mentioned that it symbolised goodwill and good health. Older girls I
spoke to expressed the sentiment that the ritual no longer had a meaning for them as
they were no longer virgins and were already mothers. Thus they would not dream of
exposing their sagging breasts in public and subject themselves to societal scorn and
ridicule. Hence it was the aforementioned age groups which participated in the
dance.

After the dance process the dancers were lead to the seclusion hut by the same elderly
women of the family, the “amankazana” where they would get their share, the bulk of
the meat as the ritual itself revolved around puberty and abstention from promiscuity.
At the same time in front of the kraal, the process referred to as “izizwe” or
“umlawulo” was taking place whereby shares of the meat were issued out to
outsiders. Men from different clan names were seen leaving with large chunks of raw
meat carried in small 5 litre buckets. At the same time a portion of the hind leg of the ox was braaied inside the kraal and served to the elderly men sitting in front of the kraal, what was referred to as “inxaxheba”. This is literally translated as participation. Thus no meal was dished out to all the guests except for the young girls at the seclusion hut who have acted as chaperones to the initiate. After this those few people still remaining trickled away on their way home as they were already drunk and however those who still wanted to drink, liquor was still available in abundance. Men of the family were still braaing some meat in the kraal and from time to time called in the young boys loitering around to offer them pieces of meat. All the men had come to the ritual prepared with traditional knives hanging around their waists in goat skin holsters.

The following day the young girls would continue their fest as some of the meat, samp and vegetables would be cooked specifically for them. The initiate would remain in the seclusion hut for another three days after this ritual and two days prior to that the young girls would go around the village collecting money from villagers to buy coffee, tea, bread and sugar. These will be used for the light lunch on the last day of the ritual where the initiate would be accompanied by the young girls to the river where they would bathe her. Her traditional garments, a tribal blanket skirt, top, shawl and head scarf had already been sewn and were neatly folded next to her during the ritual. The initiate would wear these garments for two days and then revert to her old clothes after which she would be free to got to her marital home. Her sisters-in-law who had been sitting with her on the day of the ritual would pack her stuff and travel with her to Encalueni, her marital home. Also the female overseer would go with them to thank her in-laws for having released her for the ritual. They would leave with freshly made bread and some of the meat which was stored in the fridge as the portion of the in-laws as well as some brandy and gin which was reserved for them. Also included would be the contributions by the villagers of coffee, tea, sugar and flour to ensure that the initiate had something to eat on arrival at her marital home. This also served to prove to her in-laws that her family still cared for her and her welfare even if she is married and that she did not come back from home empty handed.

Linda Qambata, Field notes, 17/03/1998
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