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**The dynamics of household
formation and composition in the
rural Eastern Cape.**

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Abstract

Focusing on a specific impoverished region of rural Eastern Cape, this paper examines the dynamics of household formation and composition within post-apartheid migratory networks. While the fluidity, contingency and spatially extended nature of African households is generally understood, the paper focuses on the social relationships that both buttress and flow from these qualities. In conceptualising the notion of the household, the paper also suggests the rubric of the 'household' can be a powerful, cultural narrative for constituting practices of domesticity. Five detailed case studies are presented and the dynamics of household-making explicated in terms of three distinct levels of analysis.

The first is the overarching macro-structural context which includes kinship practices, cultural mores, rural governance and the changing political economy of South Africa's former homelands. The paper argues that the altered material base of rural livelihoods in the last two decades has seen traditional patterns of male circular migration and trajectories of household formation eclipsed by large numbers of economically marginalised workseekers who precariously churn between both urban-rural and within rural areas. These changes have undercut the prospects for traditional forms of household formation and reconfigured the nature of the contemporary conjugal contract.

The second level of analysis includes various intermediate household-level relational factors. Impoverished African households are constituted in webs of intra and inter household reciprocity, however the paper argues that this reciprocity (sometimes characterised as 'social capital'), is seldom symmetrical distributed or uniformly positive. Other intermediate-level factors that effectively mediate the prospects for, and patterns of, household-making considered include a household's urban linkages, internal labour capacity and place relative to the generational-cohort cycle of household renewal.

The third and final level of analysis is the micro-social realm of decision making and individual agency. It is argued that understanding rural households

requires attention to the goals to which they are teleologically orientated. Even the relatively limited number of households presented as case studies are demonstrably organised around an extremely wide and disparate range of objectives. In addition understanding individual decision making requires understanding the parameters and affordances for the exercise of agency by individual household members - processes that are seldom entirely free of resistance and contestation.

The paper concludes by offering up a schematic, yet heuristically useful, three part typology of the options hypothetically open to rural households namely: building urban linkages, consolidating at the rural site (either following urban provisioning or in urban disconnection) or finally dissolve altogether (typically following insurmountable adversity).

1. Introduction

This paper examines rural household formation and composition in the rural Eastern Cape. It aims to capture the dynamics that drive processes of householding, and shape domestic decision concerning residency. Household formation and patterns of domesticity are of significance because they constitute an important backdrop against which marginality and vulnerability can be understood. As rural households are constituted in webs of social reciprocity, domestic relations and the forms they take can simultaneously be a source of insecurity and marginality, or serve to ameliorate vulnerability and enable survival. The present text considers these issues in some detail in order to providing the conceptual underpinnings for a sequence of three interlinked outputs. Two subsequent papers extend its insights in order to, firstly, consider back migration into the rural Eastern Cape (Neves, 2007a) and, secondly, examine how households respond to shocks such as illness and death (Neves, 2007b).

The sequence of the present paper is as follows. It commences by considering the concept of the 'household', and several dimensions of household-making practices, and examining issues of household mobility and migration. Theoretical considerations of household formation, composition and migration are drawn together with a range of data in order to examine impoverished African households and livelihoods in the present day rural Eastern Cape. After explicating the notion of 'decision making' that drives residential choice, the methodology of the study is detailed and the research context of the rural Eastern Cape described. A typology of household types is introduced and five

case studies presented. The concluding section highlights a range of critical dimensions of rural household practices.

2. Rural Households in South Africa

With its widespread and quotidian usage, the notion of the household is conventionally thought of as a relatively stable and autonomous domestic unit, constituted by biological relatedness and subject to change in relatively predictable ways. Early anthropological work often assumed the conjugal couple of a nuclear family to be the norm, and viewed counterfactual cases or divergences thereon merely as permutations or variants on the norm (Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson, 1996). This perspective was moderated by the concept of a normative household development cycle (cf. Goody, 1958; Goody, 1972), which viewed households as constituted in temporality by a heterosexual couple (or a small nuclear family), diachronically expanding with the birth of children who grow to be adults and in turn form their own households, resulting in the shrinkage and eventual superseding of the original domestic unit.

Anthropological attention to oscillating male labour migration in the 1970s examined the manner in which rural African households were spatially ‘stretched’. Further critical materialist work, (see Murray, 1981; Spiegel, 1980; Spiegel & Mehlwana, 1997) changed the picture further. It suggested “variations in domestic group composition were neither variations on a nuclear theme nor simple manifestation of a cyclical domestic developmental process” (Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson, 1996, p.10). Instead, households were shaped by erratic industrial labour earnings, and the imperative to investment in rural ‘safety nets’ such as livestock (Ferguson, 1990; Murray, 1987). Households are therefore not just formed around mutuality, they are consolidated around resources. The material dimensions of domestic life, and the trajectories by which artefacts (such as cattle) are exchanged and acquire meaning became viewed an important part of householding (Ferguson, 1992). Households typically seek to manage the flow of resources in response to both the exigencies of the present and anticipated demands of the future.

Rural South Africans’ householding was therefore constituted in the twin contexts of remunerative urban labour, and cultural mores concerning kin, community and domestic relationships. Critical reappraisals of the household concept at this point highlighted the extent to which households were spatially stretched. Even so households were still viewed as entities with relatively fixed boundaries (Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson, 1996). However later work (see Spiegel, 1986 Ramphele, 1993; Ross, 1993; 1996) suggested it was not only

male migrant labourers who were mobile, evidence pointed to women, children and the aged shifting between quite malleable domestic entities (Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson, 1996). Later commentators have given varying inflection to this quality characterising households as ‘stretched’, ‘fluid’, ‘contingent and hybrid’ (Ross, 2005), in addition to descriptions of ‘double rootedness’ (May, 1996), household ‘regionalisation’ (De Wet & Holbrook, 1997) and ‘rhizomatic’ or ‘many rootedness’ (Du Toit, Skuse & Cousins, 2007).

These analyses decisively undermined the notion of the household as a stable, clearly bounded unit the membership or composition of which could be specified *a priori*. The notion of the household as a supra-individual, somewhat changeful but still essentially coherent unit of analysis and enumeration gave way to the notion of the household as a ‘small open system’, a temporary set of arrangements and relationships embedded within, containing, and overlaid with multiple other networks (Bevan, 2004). Ross (2003) proposes the utility of the household concept lies in its heuristic value, and serves as shorthand for several functional characteristics embodying elements of production, reproduction and consumption. At their most expansive, definitions of households generally incorporate four functional criteria: co-residence in space and time, productive co-operation amongst household members, income-sharing and commensality (Spiegel, 1996). The criteria of co-residence and commensality are of limited applicability in a context of oscillating urban labour migration. The second criterion of production is equally problematic with the erosion of rural households’ productive agrarian base through their incorporation into capitalist relations (see Davis, 2001). Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson hence conclude the “predominant notion of a household in southern African refers exclusively to the criterion of a shared income and expenditure” (1996, p.12) — even if identifying discrete, bounded, stable household units remains difficult in practice.

The difficulty of identifying clear household boundaries, or units that persist immutably in time, does not however mean that they are irrelevant, fictitious or imaginary. Householding as a shared if contested *project*, as a culturally charged *metaphor* or *narrative* that guides central life decisions about residence, and that informs the nature of claims, counter claims and negotiations about access to vital resources, continues to be of central importance in understanding livelihoods and socio-economic practices. Although the members of spatially dispersed households may not be co-resident or engaged in commensality, they typically are jointly committed to the continuation and perpetuation of the household; and even when they are not, that abandonment itself is typically strongly marked and loaded with ideological significance. For example there is a discourse and strong moral disapprobation around the notion of the ‘*tshipa*’ (absconder, non-remitter) in Eastern Cape migrant networks. Householding

practices are hence not only material, they are dialectically forged in the context of powerful socio-cultural mores regarding appropriate kin and domestic relations (Ross, 2005). Ross draws attention to the meanings people attach to the actions as they constitute households over time and approvingly quotes Ngwane (2003) who calls for the consideration of the concepts of desire and imagination in forming the household, and suggests the imaginal dimensions of quotidian domestic projects. Therefore apart from the four functional criteria identified above, self-definitions of who constitutes a household member, and what the household is, can helpfully be included in conceptualising the rules for constituting the household. Householding is therefore both self-evident and theoretically complex; it is forged in the space of political economy and culture, between the force of tradition and the anticipated demands of the future, and the interstices of materiality and sentiment.

3. Migration and householding

As an important driver of household composition and antecedent factor in the relocation of households, migration is of central importance in any examination of householding in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere in rural South Africa. In common with many rural peasantries incorporated into market relations, rural Africans' householding patterns have for over a century been constituted in the context of internal migration between rural villages and urban employment. Accounts of migration, particularly within neo-classical economics, have typically sought to explain it in terms of individual responses to urban-rural wage differentials. Later it was argued the focus needed to be on the household, as decision making concerning migration could not simply be located within the individual. Rural households typically draw on a range of complex strategies, including urban migration to secure resources. The 'household economics' approach posited decision making to be located in family or household units and underscored by the imperatives of risk diversification (Kok, O'Donovan, Bouare & Van Zyl, 2003). Subsequent criticism of the 'household economics' model suggested that it was inattentive to inter-household transfers, particular in the context of intra-household differentiation and relatively fluid household composition (see Gelderblom & Kok, 1994). Other accounts of migration, such as the dual or segmented labour market model emphasise, not the rational choice of actors or households, but the demand side factors which draw workers into migrant networks. Finally decisions to migrate are complex, although often explicable in material factors, they include range of non-econometric factors including values and morality, individual expectations, peer-group status and the need for stimulation, autonomy and affiliation. Decisions to migrate tap into cultural mores, local patterns of social intelligibility, obligations and

entitlements along with received notions of appropriate domesticity. These are considered in detail later.

Parallel with twentieth century attempts to regulate the urbanisation of African households in South Africa has been rural households 'struggle for the city' (Mabin, 1989). By the 1980s this contributed to 'disguised urbanisation' which saw the densification of rural (peri-urban) settlements in the commuter zones, and 'closer settlements' on the fringes of rural industrial towns and homeland areas adjacent to urban centres (Van der Graaff, 1987). Many commentators expected the waning of apartheid-era influx control to precipitate mass rural migration to the cities. Although levels of mobility remain high, Cross and Bekker (1999) estimated that 3 out of the Eastern Cape's 5.7 million residents moved at least once in their lives, post-Apartheid migration has taken on several permutations. The scholarly evidence confirms rural out-migrants oscillate between urban centres, but many migrate proximally to other rural locales within the same or an adjacent district. In the Eastern Cape the intra-provincial relocation that predominated in the 1990s, saw closer settlements established on the outskirts of administrative, employment and transport nodes and a process of 'densification' at these sites (Cross et al., 1999). Unconstrained by the erstwhile homeland governments' opposition to informal settlements, towns such as Butterworth in the former Transkei grew rapidly. In KwaZulu-Natal Cross (2001) estimated approximately three quarters of recorded moves were between rural locales. So while oscillating, long distance, rural-to-urban migration occupies centre stage in much South African literature on the subject, analyses of migration in the post-Apartheid era indicates that rural householding and migration itself cannot be properly understood without considering the fundamental importance of this proximal, intra-regional migration within rural districts.

Rural migration can moreover take on a stepped quality, as some households moved through a trajectory of rural, to peri-urban to urban settlement. A similar trend was evident in the regional migratory system between the Eastern and Western Cape: "as the rural economy in the remoter areas falls apart and the rewards of urban migration also fall away, households are moving towards the smaller centres and secondary cities" (Cross, 2001, p. 118). This migration was not simply driven by the search for jobs. In the dearth of employment opportunities, many households were attempting to access social goods of a developmental and infrastructural nature. Many of the intra-provincial migrants were women, while men continued to ply the more elongated migration routes to distant urban centres. Internal migration therefore continues, but has become informalised, beyond the purview of the state and concern of formal industrial labour recruitment. Evidence also suggests its very gender composition has

changed. A review of October Household surveys suggests not only that migration levels increased throughout the 1990s, but rising numbers of migrants are female (Collinson & Wittenburg, 2001; Casale & Posel 2002; Posel & Casale, 2003).

Finally migrants often maintained links to their rural homesteads, Bank (1997), noted the double-rooted quality to much migration. Approximately a third of the residents of informal settlements encircling the Eastern Cape towns and regional centres had rural homesteads; between half and 80% sent remittance back to this rural hinterland. Although there is evidence to suggest that remittances are declining over time (Seekings, Graaff & Joubert, 1990; Barber, 1996; Bekker, 2001; Posel & Casale, 2003). The reasons for the persistence of circular migration, rather than an urban transition remain of interest. Some speculate that this may reflect relatively low levels of per capita income in relation to societies that have made the urban transition (Mabin, 1990). These links involve the transfer of resources as a social and material safety net in the event of livelihood shocks, and informal provisioning for retirement from urban locales (Collinson, Tollman, Kahn & Clark, 2003). Finally materiality is intertwined with sentiment: discussions of migration ought not to lose sight of the complex affective and affiliational links whereby many Africans' view urban residence as temporary, and rural areas as sites of authentic 'home' (James, 2001).

4. Contemporary patterns of householding

With the proliferation of South African social science research in the last fifteen years, the study of migration, familial relations and households has been a burgeoning area of inquiry (Seekings, 2003). Evidence suggests both continuities and disjuncture with the past. The nature of households is changing, with recent demographic data pointing to a number of trends. Absolute numbers of household units are increasing and the average number of members per unit decreasing, StatsSA recorded 28% of households below its expenditure poverty line in 1995, a number which rose to just under 33% by 1999, an increase attributed to poor households splitting into smaller unit (StatsSA, 2000). The evidence suggests that many of these new 'unbundled' households are female headed, and debate about the extent to which urban African households arrangements are becoming nuclear or remain constituted in a patrilinear idiom (Russell, 1994; Amoateng, 1997; Russell, 1998, Ziehl, 2002). African fertility rates remain high (*vis a vis* other racial groups), although they are declining (Potts & Marks, 2001). High levels of children born to women who never marry point to the erosion of traditional conjugal regimes (both formal and customary)

and there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that less bridewealth is being paid (Silberschmidt, 2001; Hunter, 2004)

5. Household decision making

Rural African households are invariably embedded in networks of reciprocity and exchange that link the individuals within them to individuals in other households. These include local familial, clan and village networks of beneficence, but also spatially extended webs of reciprocity which stretch into urban locales. It is along these that resources and individuals are transferred, entitlements claimed and social obligations honoured. However understanding the household requires coming to grips with the 'life project' (Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson, 1996) or teleos to which its self-identified household members are orientated. Frequently opaque to outsiders in the absence of detailed enquiry and tacit to household members themselves, these projects constitute a lynchpin around which practices concerning household formation and composition are ordered. In the classical economic view of the household as a unitary entity, resources are imagined to be distributed to maximise the welfare of all its inhabitants. This view of the household as has been challenged: "household relations and allocations are not governed by altruism alone and [...] power in the household is not always benevolent" (Posel, 2001, p.168). Household members' seldom have entirely the same interests, and infrequently preside over equal amounts of power and authority. The exercise of power and authority needs to be understood with reference to hierarchies of gender, economic power and age, as well as the norms of reciprocity and entitlements (Sharp & Spiegel, 1985). The gendered division of labour, is upheld by internal controls, social pressure, gender ideology and domestic dependence (Walker 1990, in Posel 2003). In his analysis of decision making within households Murray (1981) invoked notions of *de facto* and *de jure* categories of headship to explain the temporary (often female rural head), versus the distant migrated patriarch, who would be the superordinate authority within the household. There is the largely unexplored suggestion of differences between households where power is clearly centralised or used in consultative ways and households where authority appears to be contested, conflicted or uncoordinated. In this formulation decision making is explicated in terms of the household context, rather than being understood as a product of the disembodied consciousness of the individual sovereign subject. Instead the parameters of decision making are conferred by the specificity of culture, context and context. It is within these parameters that individuals constitute their agency and subjectivity, acting in ways that are understood and judged against prevailing social mores, including the demands of social respectability and reciprocity.

6. Methodology

In order to understand the dynamics of household formation and composition in the rural Eastern Cape this paper draws on data collected over several months from 2005 to 2006. Devoting careful attention to the livelihood activities of each household, the ethnographic fieldwork sought to understand how households survive in the context of widespread poverty and vulnerability. The research also explored the networks of support and resources within which the focal households were embedded by identifying significant external sources and recipients of support (social and material). The households that were the focus of the 2005-2006 enquiry were a sub-sample of an earlier detailed quantitative survey, undertaken in 2002. The use of detailed life histories and recall methods imbued the research with a strong longitudinal element. This was strengthened in the research teams late 2007 returned to each of the 24 households studied in 2005-2006. Entailing at least three points of contact over a period of five years, the research design therefore facilitated going beyond a conventional 'snapshot' approach to understanding the focal households. Instead it contextualised the rich qualitative data within individual and household histories, and introduced a firm dimension of temporality into its understanding of household level dynamics.

7. Context: the political economy of householding in the rural Eastern Cape

Having located the concept of the household, it is useful to contextualise the research in the political economy of householding in the former Transkei region of the rural Eastern Cape. Historically the Transkei was the site of a violent encounter between Xhosa speaking chieftaincies and the expansionary British Cape Colony. Nineteenth century colonial subjugation brought forcible monetisation through quitrent title deeds and various taxes (Beinart, 2001). By the mid 1920s the Native Administration and Development Act rendered all adult males taxpayers, in order to supplying migrant labour in the expanding industrial economy (Redding, 1993). Agrarian crisis driven by the territorial restrictions of 1913 Natives Land Act and mounting population pressure emerged in the first half of the twentieth century and was exacerbated by the dispossession inherent in 'betterment' (compulsory village resettlement) that began in the interwar years. The Tomlinson commission of the 1950's proposed a two stream model of agriculture whereby 'improving' native yeoman farmers would displace agriculturally unproductive residents (Hendricks, 1989). However the spectre of African households displaced into Apartheid's white

urban spaces prevented implementation of the commission's recommendations. Instead the region was a labour reserve, to feed the labour demands of industrial capitalism (Wolpe, 1990).

Despite frequent rhetorical appeal to primordial 'tradition', the chieftaincy in the Transkei was co-opted into British system of indirect rule, and later apartheid-era ethnic governance. Hereditary traditional leaders became, and continue to be, paid administrative functionaries of the state. The first of South Africa's ethnic homelands to attain its nominal 'independence' in 1976, the Transkei state was characterised by Peires (1991) as 'patrimonial'. It was a polity governed through the dispensing of patronage, with its leaders mediating an ambiguous relationship between Pretoria and an amalgam of local elite interests. The waning of apartheid and political transition of the early 1990s saw the rapid dissipation of middle class and military support for the Transkei state and precipitated its reincorporation into a unitary South Africa. Notwithstanding the political transition widespread poverty endures in the former Transkei. Rural development is hampered by a range of institutional, planning and integration weakness which partially reflect the region's chequered and clientelistic administrative history (Bank & Minkley, 2005).

The Eastern Cape also bears the imprint of the de-agrarianisation noted all over sub-Saharan Africa, whereby rural households increasingly rely on non-agricultural sources of income (Barber, 1996; Bryceson, 1996; Bryceson & Jamal, 1997; Manona, 1989). In South Africa these include urban remittances, and, increasingly in the last two decades, state social grants are central to rural livelihoods (Sagner, 2000; Carter & May, 1999). De-agrarianisation reflects the historical legacy of structural underdevelopment, alongside more contemporary developments such as increased monetisation, the penetration of corporate retail, and rising barriers to the participation of smallholders in agro-food commodity chains. The decline of the rural agricultural economy also reflects, and contributes to, complex changes in the social arrangements and cultural precepts that supported agricultural production in the past such as collective work parties and the pooling of draught animals. Evidence of increased rural social differentiation (Cousins, 1996), and the crucial role of external inputs and off-farm income in supporting local agricultural production exacerbate the process further. Questions concerning the place and prospects for smallholder agrarian production endure in the present, often recapitulating the Tomlinson era dichotomy between commercial and peasant producers. Yet despite the inexorable process of de-agrarianisation, land based resources continue to be an important component of many rural livelihoods (Shackleton, Shackleton & Cousins, 2000). There is evidence of much regional variation and some reconfiguring of agricultural production through the abandonment of the large

communal fields and an intensive cultivation of smaller household plots (Andrews & Fox, 2004).

Parallel with agrarian transition in the Eastern Cape has been a process of de-industrialisation. Across Africa economic liberalisation and structural adjustment policies of the 1980's and 1990's saw much of the continent's manufacturing and industrial sector collapse. Despite a very different trajectory of economic modernisation, underpinned by institutionalised racial inequality, similar declines are evident in the Eastern Cape. Much regional industry, previously buoyed by homeland 'deconcentration' initiatives (Nel & Temple, 1992) collapsed, this occurred at the same time as job losses in the mainstays of unskilled migratory industrial employment, in sectors such as mining and the parastatals. The return arc of oscillating male urban migration has been fed by de-industrialisation and retrenchments in the migrant sector, particularly in regions from which mine labour was historically recruited (Bank and Minkley, 2005). South Africa's economic growth path, predicated on integration into a global economy and the imperatives of 'high productivity now' (Nattrass, 2001) has little need for unskilled labour. Furthermore industrial employment was linked to homeland agrarian production through circuits of migration and remittances. Historically homeland 'labour reserves' were intended to augment meagre urban wages with smallholder agricultural production. Cultivation was supported by urban incomes for agricultural inputs and investments such as draught animals. The ruptures in traditional trajectories of urban employment therefore impact on smallholder agriculture: de-agrarianisation and de-industrialisation are ultimately intertwined.

Finally, against the backdrop of changes in political economy, it is useful to highlight that the colonial encounter and modernising project was variously received by the inhabitants of the Eastern Cape. The division between tradition and modernity; 'townsman' and 'tribesman' (Mayer, 1971); 'red' (after the ochre clay and blankets) and 'school' (Christianity and formal schooling) (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991); 'urban' and 'rural' have been key poles in discourse (both official and academic) concerning the region for most of the twentieth century (Bank, 2002). It is perhaps a dated and perhaps overdrawn dichotomy, the 'deep rural' Eastern Cape is thoroughly penetrated by the distribution networks of metropolitan capital, and its trading stores are as likely to be run by Pakistani or Senegalese immigrants as by local entrepreneurs. Conversely, 'traditional' practices and cosmologies continue to inform urban life. However the region and its inhabitants continue to be characterised by the tension – or the *idea* of the tension - between traditionalism and modernity (Bank & Minkley, 2005). It is a critical tension which traverses social and

kinship relations, how individuals constitute domesticity, households and make decisions.

8. Selecting case studies: A typology of households

In previous research du Toit & Neves (2006) developed a typology pursuing a 'medium N' methodology (see Ragin, Shulman, Weinberg & Gran, 2003; Ragin 2000) which sought to understand the nature of a household in terms of its linkages and social embeddedness. The typology sought to order the dataset of 48 households (evenly divided between urban and rural) and clustered them according to four criteria, namely the degree of insertion into formal labour market; scale of informal economic activity; extent of agrarian production, and the quality and extent of the linkages between the focal household and its broader social and kin networks.

The resultant typology described four fundamental varieties or 'ideal types' of household:

1. Urban households connected to a rural base
2. Urban households with no connection to a rural base
3. Rural households with a current or recent connection to an urban base
4. Rural households with no current or recent connection to an urban base.

Despite the rather schematic nature of the above typology, it does helpfully order the sample of 48 case studies. It proves a useful way to differentiate households beyond the limited metric of income, and facilitates understanding of the manner in which livelihoods are typically located in complex systems of reciprocity. Of the rural household types that were sampled (viz. numbers 3 and 4), it is useful to clarify that household type 1 and 3 potentially represent two different faces of the same, spatially extended type of hybrid household form. In the 2006 research the largest and most prosperous of the rural households invariably fell into this category, they had a strong connection to the formal labour market. Conversely rural households without discernable urban linkage or access to urban labour market earnings were generally amongst the most impoverished and vulnerable of rural households. Urban households with weak or broken rural links, on the other hand, seemed to fall into two types: on the one hand, there were households that had successfully made a full urban transition, and who no longer needed or wanted to keep strong links with rural kin; on the other there were deeply vulnerable households that had failed to find an advantageous foothold in the urban economy but who had been marginalised

within or expelled from broader support networks. Finally, a small caveat is in order, the research design invoked on a binary metropolitan - rural distinction. The rural households included in this typology were sampled from relatively isolated rural locales, and not the 'closer settlements' adjacent to towns or urban nodes.

9. Case studies

Five case studies are discussed below and illustrate different dynamics of household formation and composition, and residential choice. These case studies are broadly representative of the main varieties of rural household of the 24 sample in 2005-2006. They can be placed within the urban-connected, non-urban connected binary in the above typology (categories 3 and 4, respectively). In what follows each case is described through a brief case vignette, followed by commentary. Individual and place names are pseudonyms in the interests of anonymity. In some of the larger or more complex households the transition of household membership is tabulated to aid reader comprehension. In all cases, the first listed individual is the nominal, 'household head' identified by household members, and serves as index person in descriptions of subsequent individuals. In other words, all additional listed individuals are designated in relation to the designated household head.

Case 1. Placeholder householding: Chuma Mfako

In the remote village of Phuzayo, Chuma Mfako's household was amongst the poorest and most marginalised the team visited. Her home consists of two modest mud block structures (a cooking and sleeping hut) unbounded by a fence and sparsely furnished with a few items of old furniture. Chuma's sole source of regular income is a single child support grant, which she augments with laborious and low paid informal work within the village. Her small income and the absence of any urban remittances, positioned her amongst the most impoverished and marginalised of informants the research team encountered.

Chuma was noteworthy for her reticence. Most respondents, once their initial apprehension and suspicions dissipate, warm to the task of relating their personal narratives. Despite the social distance between researchers and interviewees, the presence of visitors who travelled from afar and listen with attentiveness, usually elicits surprisingly detailed narratives. Chuma however retained an impassive and distant demeanour over the course of multiple visits.

This passivity infused other aspects of her life, such as her inaction after a tractor struck and damaged her dwelling. While obstinately waiting for the owner of the tractor to repair damage that she herself could easily repair, goats entered the hut and gradually consumed her maize. A similar indifference was reflected in her unwillingness - quite uncommon in the area - to prepare the house in anticipation of a Christmas family reunion. However, understanding the micropolitics of Chuma's place within her kinship network made her inaction comprehensible.

In terms of the history of the household, there was little continuity between the 2002 survey and our 2005 return. Chuma was absent from the household in 2002, which was documented as consisting only of Chuma's three year old daughter, a 15 year old nephew and 69 year old 'grandmother' (actually mother). By 2005, Chuma's actual grandmother died (shortly after the 2002 survey) and the nephew relocated to Cape Town. The sole continuous member in the household was therefore Chuma's preschool aged daughter. In 2005 this young child was joined in at the homestead by her mother (i.e. Chuma) and two siblings (Chuma's nine year boy and one year old infant).

The 2002 death of Chuma's grandmother followed by the 2004 death of Chuma's 'mother' (actually an older sister), were the catalyst for Chuma's occupation of the house. The decision for her to move in was reportedly taken at a family meeting, with her three Western Cape based brothers present. Chuma, however, readily admits to not liking village life, finding it difficult and tedious. Yet with three young children to care for and slim prospects of marriage or urban employment, her designated role was to look after the house. Maintaining the family's foothold homestead in the village, Chuma's brothers were to remit money. It is in the terms of this pact that the seeds of Chuma's current predicament were sown.

Over the course of several interviews, from a range of ancillary sources, two facts gradually became apparent. The first is that her brothers are not strictly speaking her brothers, but rather cousins. The second is that her 'brothers' have reneged on the agreement and are not sending remittances. It is unclear to what extent these two elements are intertwined: Chuma's distant kinship links may perhaps be undermining her claims to support. Chuma is therefore in a position where apart from the sole child support grant received for one of her children (she lacks documents for the other children), she manages to subsist through the erratic and physically difficult work of mud block making and plastering. She also does domestic work and brews beer for a network of village based benefactors, all of whom are female and have long standing linkages to her household - specifically her late 'grandmother'.

The first benefactor was a female pensioner distantly related to Chuma's family via marriage. In terms of village level stratifications her household is relatively comfortable, her husband having worked in the formal economy. This elderly woman was a contemporary of Chuma's deceased grandmother and her family have historically been an important set of benefactors to Chuma, her 'mother' and 'grandmother'. When questioned, she explained Chuma's family have 'always been poor'. She attributed this to the early death of Chuma's grandfather and recalled how by the late 1960s Chuma's grandmother was already widowed and struggling to raise her two children, so this benefactor and her husband paid for the initiation ceremony of Chuma's brother. They also gave Chuma's grandmother a small hut, when she was one of the last households to be relocated into the current village under betterment planning.

The second important set of benefactors to Chuma is the household of the late chief. The chief's widow is elderly member of the village elite, a retired professional nurse. She was friendly with Chuma's late grandmother, with these circuits of patronage enduring in the present. Chuma occasionally does domestic work for her, or helps with preparations for traditional ceremonies. These exchanges are not strictly remunerated and defy easy description. Chuma might be paid for a specific task, but more usually receives the charity of food, household consumables, clothes (old and new) and even an old cell phone. This network of beneficence extends to the daughter of the late chief, a corporate manager then residing in Durban. Speaking approvingly of Chuma as a 'diligent worker', this woman accounted for Chuma's reluctance to repair her tractor damaged house by explaining that Chuma's eldest brother would have first claim to it anyway. It is for this reason she encouraged Chuma to build her own house and even offered to buy the corrugated iron roofing.

The third major benefactor to Chuma is an affinal female cousin and aunt. They clarified that Chuma's biological mother was not the woman who died in 2004, but rather suffered the ignominy of an anonymous pauper's burial far from home many years ago. Chuma's cousins in the Western Cape do not help her, but they assist with childcare, or by giving her maize meal and candles. She reciprocates by doing shopping for them or disseminating news of their traditional ceremonies. They render no other assistance because they are poor, they explained. Although, the aunt dimly recalled, Chuma did give birth to her last child on the floor of this very hut.

	Who (Household head = index person)	Age (2007)	Place of residence in the indicated year		
			2002	2005	2007
1	Mamgazi (h/h head) (1933 – 2002)	Deceased	Phuzayo	-	-
2	Daughter (1965 - 2005)	Deceased	Johannesburg	Johannesburg	-
3	Chuma (¹ Daughter) (unmarried, new h/h head)	31	Durban	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
4	Grandson (child of 8)	20	Phuzayo	Cape Town	Cape Town
5	Granddaughter (child of 3)	8	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
6	Grandson (child of 3)	9	Durban	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
7	Granddaughter (child of 3)	3	-	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
8	Son (son of 1, father of 4)	51	Cape Town	Cape Town	Cape Town
9	Son (son of 1)	35	Vredenberg	Vredenberg	Vredenberg
10	Son (son of 1)	39	Vredenberg	Vredenberg	Vredenberg

The above table shows that the sole continuous member of ‘the household’ is Chuma’s eight year old daughter (row 5). The decision for Chuma to occupy the homestead occurred with the transitions brought about by the death of her ‘grandmother’ and her ‘mother’. The decision for Chuma to return to the village and become the local placeholder occurred at the behest of her brothers. She consented, but had relative weak grounds to negotiate. Here it is important to understand that in communal property regimes, continued claim to residency, or resources such as land and grazing are not secured by disembodied textual artefacts such as leases or contracts: physical occupancy is an important way of establishing and maintaining tenurial claims and possession on behalf of a family. In addition, and partly because the fragile natural materials used (mud, thatch, untreated timber) homesteads require constant attendance and maintenance. In the rural Transkei there is no discernable rental market, and, in an inversion of normal urban practice, absent homeowners will often *pay* someone to occupy a structure and take care of it. Migration to the urban areas often necessitates someone to step into the role of ‘placeholder’, looking after a rural homestead, maintaining and enforcing claims to use the structures and the land. Often pension receiving, unemployed or otherwise marginal kin will perform this function as part of a broader set of reciprocal exchanges. However in the case of Chuma her brothers appear to have reneged on their side of the deal, by omitting to remit money, and leaving her to the charity of neighbours and local kin.

¹ She is the daughter of Mamgazi and sister of the individual listed in row two, but readily described herself as the ‘granddaughter’ and ‘daughter’ respectively, in relation to these two individuals.

There is a clear sense even from taciturn Chuma that she is trapped in the household and village. She is constrained not only by familial fiat, but by a lack of other options. Yet she is simultaneously trapped and insecure, her security of tenure is far from certain and it is widely understood that her eldest brother would have claim to the homestead. Although she is in one sense 'in place' in her family's compound as a placeholder; her tenure there is simultaneously insecure. In many ways, she is at the centre of what one could call a 'residual household', defined in terms of its marginality within broader kinship structures and inability to attach itself to a wealthier household with better access to resources.

The reasons for Chuma's marginalisation within her kinship networks are unclear, and an issue that she was reluctant to speak to. However ancillary informants thought that her kinship status, as cousin rather than sister, was undermining her entitlement. The fact that she is younger than her brothers and confusingly referred to her eldest sister as her 'mother', and mother as 'grandmother', points to the reconstituted nature of her kinship, and that she is the youngest of her lateral generational cohort.

It is also useful to consider how Chuma responds to her marginality. Her tenurial insecurity sees her unwilling to invest much effort in household maintenance, but her defiance can also be seen as falling within the category of the 'weapons of the weak' resorted to by those for whom open defiance or overt challenge is not an option (Scott, 1985). Seldom directly articulated, the research team reconstructs the fundamentally 'off stage' acts of resistance retrospectively, often from the accounts of others. Marginalised within her kinship network and poorly placed to contest her marginalisation, Chuma has abandoned the ceaseless labour of maintaining the mud brick homestead. She negotiated the demands of survival, by falling back on a network of female benefactors. Mostly older woman with long standing connections to her late 'grandmother': kinship mediated interpersonal alliances in the present.

In terms of the typology of the preceding section Chuma's household is a classical example of a household disconnected from both urban and rural networks of support. She has lost her urban connection, a marginality that determines the direct material resources she has access to and also shapes the other livelihood options open to her. Small and atomised, her household has neither the surplus labour, nor the inputs (particularly the money required for mechanical or bovine traction) to engage in agricultural production. Hers is a rural household that grows no crops and keeps no livestock.

Case 2: Compound ensnared household: Bulelani Radebe

In the village of Phuzayo, a two hour drive on an unpaved road from the nearest town is the large homestead of Bulelani Radebe with a cluster of rondavels (circular huts) and a large house. A small solar panel for charging batteries, and store bought furniture are all palimpsests of labour in the urban economy. The household head Bulelani left the village in the 1960s for industrial labour. He married his wife in 1968, with three decades of employment enabling construction of the large homestead. Like many other women in the village, Bulelani's wife made the sun-dried mud blocks; a builder was paid to construct the structures.

Bulelani was retrenched in 1996, and returned to the village with his R105000 retrenchment package. In 2005 the household survived on four child support grants, erratic remittances from the adult children engaged in urban labour markets (fluctuating around R600 a month, Bulelani estimated), and the retrenchment package payout. In 2005 Bulelani reported doing two or three fencing jobs in the village annually. By 2007 he was gaunt, ill looking and breathless, having just returned from three months at an in-patient tuberculosis hospital.

During the five year research period (2002–2007) household membership was relatively fluid. While Bulelani, his wife, two unmarried daughters, and a grandchild have been constantly present, total household residents fluctuated between 10 and 13 members. The transient members have included two married sons, various daughters in law (some co-resident with their husbands) and a shifting cast of grandchildren. Grandchildren have either been co-resident with one or both parents, or are the progeny of distant or dead adults. The table tracks individuals resident at the household during the three blocks of fieldwork.

The table points to the various urban locales between which household members have circulated. An adult son (row 6 of the table) worked in a mine in Carltonville, while his young 'makoti' or bride (row 12) resided at the rural homestead. When he returned in 2007 his older brother migrated to Carltonville in search of work, accompanied by his wife. The household's adult daughters are based in Mthatha, Cape Town and Carltonville. Within a system of patrilineal descent unmarried daughters are considered members of their father's household, while married daughters are counted as members of their nuptial homes. Married daughters were listed as part of the 'extended family' only in response to researcher questioning, with spatial movement 'out' of the household evident over time. In some cases this relocation was to distant urban

locales, but in a single case (row 8) the daughter's move was to the proximal patrilocal homestead ('Elsewhere Phuzayo' in the table), accompanied by her children. Finally of the grandchildren, the twin teenage grandsons (row 23 and 24) born to unmarried daughter (row 3) were unusual for being resident with the paternal family in a village in the North West Province, but in 2007 they appeared in Bulelani's household. Although the reason for their migration was unclear, there was strong suggestion of conflict between their mother and the distant paternal family. One of the Sesotho speaking boys articulated the desire to return to their paternal home for the next school year.

Of his retrenchment package of approximately R105000 Bulelani purchased some furniture, educated the three of his children to matric and paid labola for his son. He also purchased a few cows and goats (most of which have either spontaneously died or been ritually slaughtered). Bulelani explained that they are 'still eating the money' and that in the decade since his exit from formal employment, his retrenchment package has been steadily eroded by the multiple demands on it. Decorum prevented the researchers enquiring precisely how much was left, but Bulelani clarified that 'most' of it had been spent.

In 2005 detailed inquiry revealed that Bulelani's eldest resident daughter (row 3) sources clothes from Durban and earns an irregular income reselling these in the village. By 2007 she diversified her goods to include steel wool (a cleaning product), sourced at a specific Durban outlet. The start up capital for this trading came from the father of one her children, in lieu of child support. Erratic sales, a large number of debtors, a porosity between the enterprise and domestic accounts, and reticence (possibly to appear deservingly impoverished to the researchers), made quantifying the scale of the business impossible. Her regular monthly contribution to an '*umcalelo*' (mutual savings society), suggests a tidy profit of a few hundred rand a month.

Bulelani's recently migrated son, in 2005 was doing agricultural 'piece jobs' in the village, Bulelani and his wife expressing no knowledge of how much he was paid. Both the son and sister seem to have few fiscal obligations towards the household, perhaps reflecting their cash poverty. Unlike Bulelani's generation, the 'join' (formal labour recruitment) has ceased, and along with it the certainty of an opportunity for a man to build a rural homestead. The son was living with his wife and child at his parent's compound, and his lobola (bridewealth) of R5000 had been paid by his father – both practices not uncommon in the present day Eastern Cape where prevalent unemployment makes it difficult for young men to set up independent homesteads and amass enough savings for their own bridewealth. The son's recent migration to Carltonville in search of work may enable him to build his own rural homestead, but his younger brother's recent

relocation to the village reflects the increasingly scarce and tenuous nature of unskilled urban employment.

	Who (Household head = index person)	Age (2007)	Place of residence in the indicated year		
			2002	2005	2007
1	Bulelani (h/h head)	63	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
2	Wife	59	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
3	Daughter (unmarried)	38	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
4	Son (married to 11)	29	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Carltonville
5	Daughter (married)	27	Phuzayo	Cape Town	Cape Town
6	Son (married to 12)	25	Phuzayo	Carltonville	Phuzayo
7	Daughter (married)	27	Phuzayo	Cape Town	Cape Town
8	Daughter (married)	30s(?)	Carltonville	Carltonville	Elsewhere Phuzayo
9	Daughter (unmarried)	33	Phuzayo	Mthatha	Mthatha
10	Daughter (unmarried)	18	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
11	Daughter in law (married to 4)	25	Unknown	Phuzayo	Carltonville
12	Daughter in law (married to 6)	23	Unknown	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
13	Granddaughter (of 4 & 11)	3	-	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
14	Grand daughter (child of 3)	12	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
15	Granddaughter (child of 9)	8	Unknown	Mthatha	Mthatha
16	Granddaughter (child of 3)	20	Phuzayo	Mthatha	Cape Town
17	Granddaughter (unknown)	1	-	-	Phuzayo
18	Grandson (child of 5)	8	Cape Town	Phuzayo	Elsewhere Phuzayo
19	Grandson (child of 5)	10	Cape Town	Phuzayo	Elsewhere Phuzayo
20	Grandson (child of 6 & 12)	5	-	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
21	Grandson (child of 8)	5	-	Carltonville	Phuzayo
22	Grandson (child of 9)	3	-	Mthatha	Elsewhere Phuzayo
23	Grandson (child of 3)	16	NW Province	NW Province	Phuzayo
24	Grandson (child of 3)	16	NW Province	NW Province	Phuzayo
25	Grandson (child of 7)	3	-	Cape Town	Cape Town

The focal household is large and demonstrates high levels of mobility within a fluid 'outer nimbus' of hangers-on around a relatively stable 'core' of household members. As households with resources tend to attract new members (Klaasen & Woolard, 2005), the size of Bulelani's household is to some extent a consequence of his retrenchment package. Over the course of the five year research period various grandchildren circulated through the household, in some cases co-resident with a biological parent, in other cases not. In this case vignette it is Bulelani's adult sons and daughters who are of particular interest and illustrates the changing dynamics of rural householding.

Of the six adult daughters half of them have exited the household through marriage, while the others and their children (viz. Bulelani's grandchildren) remain resident. The specific case of the 38 year old eldest daughter (row 3), and her four children, is illustrative. With few marriage prospects at her age, she has consolidated her position within the household and constitutes a livelihood through a cyclical trading between Durban and the village. Her social position is unambiguous: she is a core member of the household and in cultural terms the liege of her father. Her position might instructively be contrasted with that of her two brothers.

Her brothers, Bulelani's two adult sons, have been unable to exit from their father's household and establish homesteads of their own. They embody the difficulties encountered in the traditionally valorised social, cultural and material project of 'building the homestead' (McAllister, 2001) in the absence of regular urban wages. This is not to suggest that the position of their older two, unmarried resident sisters does not also reflect the changing nature of the conjugal contract. There is however, a generally greater social expectation on a married adult son to constitute his own household: his continued place in the parental homestead is less consistent with social precedent. Although primogeniture allows the eldest son to inherit the parental homestead, it cannot be shared with his brother - the envisaged difficulties idiomatically explained with 'one cannot have two bulls in a kraal'. Besides, social propriety and the demands of agrarian production require he accrue some assets of his own.

The tectonic shifts of South African political economy and collapse of formal oscillatory male urban migration in this example serve to inhibit household unbundling. These less certain trajectories into independent householding, so keenly felt within this particular household, give the case study its nomenclature of 'ensnared'. Faced with this economic and social reality, Bulelani's response is noteworthy. He devotes precious and finite material resources to paying lobola on his son's behalf: an investment in the social respectability of his heir, and the certainty of patronymic grandchildren. Although all of Bulelani's adult

children are caught in the challenges of constituting livelihoods in the decline of urban male labour migration and changing conjugal forms, a new face of rural livelihoods seems represented by the wily eldest daughter. A once-off disbursement from the father of one of her children is leveraged to enable a petty urban-rural trading that is transient, opportunistic and, increasingly, female.

Case 3. Compound springboard householding: Kwanele Ngubane

	Who (Household head = index person)	Age (2007)	Place of residence in the indicated year		
			2002	2005	2007
1	Kwanele (h/h head)	57	Sebokeng	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
2	Wife	54	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
3	Brother	45	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	East London
4	Brother	38	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
5	Daughter (unmarried)	19	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
6	Daughter (unmarried)	17	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
7	Daughter (unmarried)	9	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
8	Son (unmarried)	17	Phuzayo	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
9	Son (unmarried)	31	Cape Town	Phuzayo	Cape Town
10	Son (unmarried)	29	Sebokeng	Sebokeng	Sebokeng
11	Son (unmarried)	27	Pretoria	Pretoria	Sebokeng
12	Son (unmarried)	25	Sebokeng	Sebokeng	Sebokeng
13	Son (unmarried)	22	Mthatha	Mthatha	Sebokeng
14	Granddaughter (child of 5)	2	-	Phuzayo	Phuzayo
15	Nephew	47	Unknown	Unknown	Phuzayo

Kwanele is a tall and imposing man, who displayed an easy social confidence with the research team, as he switched between isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English. The well built homestead he shares with his family consists of several sturdy zinc roofed hexagonal huts and a large, rectangular multi-roomed house. His comfortable home is furnished with a small solar panel powered TV - a rarity in the un-electrified and isolated village. The compound is marked by signs of agrarian activity, a large livestock pen and fowl run, neatly fenced fields of vegetables and maize. A bundle of leather strips ('stroops') being cured, attests to the practice of a declining rural craft.

Kwanele left the village in the late 1960s briefly worked in a gold mine, before securing a job at Iscor (parastatal steel manufacturer). Kwanele recounts how his employment prospects improved after 1994, when he went from a semi skilled labourer to a 'process controller' (a skilled machine operator), and his earnings

peaking sharply at R12 000 a month. He recounted he always 'stole with my eyes' (i.e. learnt by observation), and was ironically dubbed 'the Englishman' within the predominantly Afrikaans dominated Iscor, through his passable English language skills. His vocational ascent was however constrained by his standard 6 education, and dashed in 2004 when he was retrenched.

Busying himself after his 2004 return to the village, his homecoming has not been without tensions. His attempts at commercial farming were frustrated by village logics of communalism and reciprocity; while he hoped to sell his surplus vegetables to his fellow villagers they thought neighbourliness and their neediness obliged him to give the vegetables to them for free. Kwanele is openly critical of what he described as laziness, dependency and drunkenness in the village. With an authoritative air and biblical morality (he is a lay preacher in a local church) he disapproved strongly of his daughter's premarital pregnancy, and exhibited an Old Testament abhorrence of pork and pigs.

The resident members of Kwanele's household have been relatively stable in the last half decade. The residential core consists of Kwanele's wife, a nine year old daughter, three teenage children, and a grandchild born to one of these children. The household has also intermittently been home to the eldest son (now nine), who has learning difficulties and little formal education. While Kwanele's wife thinks the son ought to resign himself to herding cattle in the village, Kwanele attempted to establish him in a shoe repair business. This venture was interrupted by the son's unsuccessful work seeking migration. Also included in this extended household of over ten dependents, are two of Kwanele's adult brothers, one in his mid thirties and the other middle aged, (the latter was visiting family in East London at the time of the 2007 fieldwork). Respectively described as a drunkard and mentally ill, Kwanele has resigned himself to supporting them. They are his brothers, Kwanele explained, he cannot withdraw his support from either of them: "Ek kan nie nee sê, hulle is my familie" (I cannot say no, they are my family). In 2007 a mentally impaired middle aged paternal cousin joined the household, as his elderly mother who previously looked after him had died.

Also enumerated as part of the household were four older sons, all aged in their twenties. Their place of residence catalogues the scattered locales where they have pursued their secondary and tertiary education. In 2005 a son was schooling in the regional centre of Mthatha; a second was at a Pretoria Technikon, the third and fourth were in the Vaal Triangle township of Sebokeng, completing matric and a N6 Technikon diploma, respectively. (They lived with their father when Kwanele worked at Iscor in Vereeniging). In 2005 Kwanele was dispensing R1650 a month to his various sons for their subsistence

needs alone (this is apart from the tuition fees, books and travel costs he paid annually). He and his wife both expressed the hope that their sons would soon secure jobs.

By 2007 the investment in education was starting to yield results. The son with the N6 certificate secured a paid traineeship ('fitter and turner') with a large oil company and summoned his recently matriculated brother from Mthatha, who was accepted into the same programme. A third son completed his Pretoria Technikon diploma in commerce and was applying for jobs. The fourth son, described as less academically orientated, completed a security guard course, but convinced Kwanele to pay for a heavy duty drivers' license. Hence by 2007 two of the older sons had remunerated footholds in the formal economy (traineeships that ought to culminate in solid employment), while the remaining two were progressing towards more certain employment prospects. Reflecting on the changes from 2005 to 2007, Kwanele expressed relief that he was no longer supporting the older dependents. He wanted to concentrate on getting the younger children through school, selling vegetables and improving the bloodline of his small head of cattle. Kwanele and his wife had also opened a small spaza shop at their homestead, to extend their finite income.

In 2005, at the conclusion of a long interview, Kwanele was asked to what he ascribed his relative success. He responded by describing his religious faith, his wife who ran the homestead during his three decades in urban employment, his eagerness to learn, his mastery of languages and the fact he never squandered his money on urban girlfriends. Urban girlfriends, he counselled the three male members of the research team, detract from ones ability to remit money, and undermine the project of building the homestead.

Kwanele's household is another rural household constituted in the aftermath of male urban labour migration, with the retrenchment of the household head. In terms of the typology of the preceding section it clearly can be considered an 'urban connected' rural household, where past urban labour has resulted in a provident fund payout. The household composition appears relatively stable, compared to many others. It consists of a nuclear family, a single grandchild and then two to three patrilineal adult male dependents. The relative absence of grandchildren in this household might reflect the fact that the five eldest siblings are males (if they have any children they would be expected to reside at the homes of their unmarried mothers), combined with the pragmatic difficulties of combining educational migration and matrimony.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy features of this particularly case study is the substantial investment the household has made in the education of its sons. In

2005, the returns on this relatively large expenditure of resources were far from certain: educational attainment does not necessarily correlate with subsequent labour market position. Kwanele and his wife however expressed optimism. By 2007 there was evidence that this strategy was starting to pay dividends. Two sons had solid starting positions within the formal labour market, and another had his tertiary diploma. The value ascribed to education was reflected in the training of the two less academically inclined sons. Kwanele seems determined that each must find an employment niche.

Analytically capturing the manifold dimensions that contribute to individual decision making is difficult, these understandings may even elude informants themselves. However in this particular case Kwanele clearly understood that his employment prospects were curtailed by his low level of education, which he sought to remediate in his sons. In terms of the household's 'life project', the expectation clearly was that once the sons secure footholds in the formal economy, resources will flow back to the homestead. Accordingly the household constitutes a 'springboard' into the urban labour market. It seemed to the research team that part of the relative success of the household is that its actions were relatively co-ordinated, and its nexus of authority uncontested and clear. There were clear plans for educational attainment, less household 'churn' and more stable residence patterns than many other case studies. This ability to order the household and co-ordinate a collective 'life project' or 'ideology of purpose' (Spiegel, 1996) was furthermore not a value-free affair or the consequence of household members abstractly maximising future gain. It was rooted in the person of Kwanele and the stern patriarch with biblical morality, an emphasis on thrift, saving (no urban girlfriends) and hard work.

Finally, the nature of entitlements meant that it was never in question that the household would have a claim to the sons' future wage earnings. But the precise nature of entitlements against the household is of interest. The household has elements of a 'nuclear' presentation, but with an additional lateral system of adult brothers and nephew. Despite his criticism of a brother's substance abuse, Kwanele explained how he was unable to resist their claims for support.

Case 4: Dissolved householding: Joanna Matlasika

	Who (Household head = index person)	Age (2007)	Place of residence in the indicated year		
			2002	2005	2007
1	Joanna Matlasika (h/h head) (1929 - 2004)	Deceased	Kufutshane (homestead 1)	-	-
2	Daughter (married to 5) (1960 – 2006)	Deceased	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	-
3	Great granddaughter (of 6)	10	Kufutshane (homestead 1)	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	Kufutshane (homestead 2)
4	Great granddaughter (of 6)	14	Kufutshane (homestead 1)	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	Kufutshane (homestead 2)
5	Son in law (married to 2)	67	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	Kufutshane (homestead 2)
6	Grandson (father of 3 & 4)	38	Johannesburg	Johannesburg	EC village
7	Grandson (married to 8, father of 10).	24	Johannesburg	Johannesburg	Johannesburg
8	Granddaughter in law (married to 5)	23	Unknown	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	EC village (parental home)
9	Granddaughter (mother of 11)	27	Unknown	EC village (nuptial home)	EC village (nuptial home)
10	Great granddaughter (of 7 & 8)	7	Unknown	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	EC village (maternal home)
11	Great grandson (of 9)	8	Unknown	Kufutshane (homestead 2)	EC village (paternal home)

In 2005 the research team sought out a small household consisting of 73 year old Joanna Matlasika and her two ‘grandchildren’ (actually great grandchildren), sampled as part of the 2001 research. At her homestead (homestead 1, in the above table), two of the huts had collapsed and the third was unoccupied. Joanna had died, the neighbours explained, her great grandchildren had gone to live with their grandmother, on the other side of the village.

The daughter, Mamdi was interview at her homestead (homestead 2, in the above table), with her retired husband working in the background. She explained that her mother ailed and died in early 2004. Although Johanna received a state old age grant and was financially self-sustaining, Mamdi explained that there had been a long standing synergy between two the households. Not least of all Johanna lent Mamdi money, if her husband’s remittance was late. Two of Mamdi’s granddaughters (viz. Joanna’s great granddaughters) were resident at Johanna’s house. They kept her company, helped out with some basic domestic chores and ran errands. The five and seven year old great granddaughters did

not have to do much, Mamdi clarified, as her mother grew frail, the cooking was all done here (homestead 2). The death of the Joanna saw the great grandchildren reabsorbed into their grandmother's household. In addition to the two grandchildren, Mamdi's household, under the nominal headship of her husband, consisted of a 'makoti' (daughter in law), an adult daughter and two additional grandchildren in 2005. When asked what would become of her late mother's homestead, Mamdi replied she was still waiting for her mother to appear to her in a dream. The house would be retained for 'amaskio' (ceremonies and rituals), she ventured.

On returning to Mamdi's homestead in 2007, Mamdi's husband revealed that she had died eight months earlier, in late 2006. In response to her death the household had contracted in size. Although the two granddaughters originally resident in Joanna's homestead were still present at the late Mamdi's homestead, all of the other former residents had moved elsewhere. A daughter in law (row 8) present in 2005, left to temporarily look after her unoccupied natal home. When her husband (Mamdi's adult son) returned from Johannesburg for the December holiday her and her child (row ten) will return to her nuptial home. A great grandson (relative to the index person of Joanna) was resident at Mamdi's homestead because he was born out of wedlock in 2005. Although his mother (row nine) subsequently married his father, the patrilineal, agnatic idiom views children born to unmarried women as members of their maternal household. However the death of his grandmother and absence of an adult female caregiver within the household catalysed his transfer to the paternal home. The loss of Mamdi, the domestic caregiving lynchpin of the household, initiated a process of redistributing the grandchildren, many of whom followed their mothers.

When questioned on who was tending to the domestic needs in the household the late Mamdi's husband indicated that he did the cooking and he and his three young (10 and 14 year old) grandchildren each they did their own laundry. This is unlikely to be widely regarded as an appropriate or long-term arrangement. It appears as though the youngest son and his wife are to occupy and reanimate the homestead in future. When asked what his plans were for the future, the late Mamdi's husband indicated that like his wife he too is ill (she reportedly suffered from diabetes, arthritis, hypertension and died of pneumonia). Perhaps, if we return in two years time, we might find that he too has died, he lugubriously replied.

The above case study reflects the process of two interlinked households successively experiencing deaths of key household members, and the radical changes in household composition this engendered. Joanna's death precipitated the total dissolution of her household and re-absorption of its young members

into daughter Mamdi's household. Following Mamdi's recent death her household has also undergone a significant process of contraction. It is in the process of being reconfigured and relatively plastic at the moment. These changes reflect a contraction phase in the domestic development cycle and the composition of this household is in flux and seems likely to change in future.

In this case study the precise nature of Joanna's household dissolution is of interest. The death of great grandmother Joanna was a distinctive temporal event and precipitated the final dissolution of her household. However her household hardly constituted an autonomous unit, with all of the functional qualities of householding identified earlier. Rather it could be thought of as overlapping with Mamdi's, akin to spheres in a Venn diagram. Relationships between Mamdi's and Joanna's household were co-operative and synergistic. In the period prior to her death, Joanna's household was heavily dependent on Mamdi for its key reproductive functions (such as shopping and cooking food). The process of household dissolution therefore in some respects was an extended process, which followed Joanna's death.

Consideration of the dissolution of the household therefore focuses attention on the nature of the pre-dissolution household. In this particular case Joanna's household was materially enabled by receipt of a stated old age grant. It may have taken on a very different form or not have existed at all, without the grant. Also critical to the continuation of Joanna's household, was the presence of her two young great granddaughters. Although they were recipients of care, the relationship was recursive and the children were dispensers of care and companionship. They also had a clear instrumental value by running errands between the two, commensally linked, yet spatially distinct 'households'.

Case 5. Conflicted householding: Mamtwana

In 2005 at the entrance to the village of Akulyniwa the research team found a homestead compound, with a collapsed 'six corner' (hexagonal) hut. Although mud huts are known to occasionally collapse, the resident household head revealed it had not spontaneously collapsed. It had been deliberately demolished by her estranged husband.

The 54 year old Mamtwana met her husband over 25 years ago in Johannesburg, where he works for the municipality. She was his second wife, bore him five children and reportedly got on well with his first wife. In 2001 Mamtwana's husband was listed as the household head, while she and her five children (ranging in age from 8 to 22 years of age) lived at the homestead. By 2005 the

eldest daughter had left the household through marriage, although her child (i.e. Mamtwana's grandchild) was one of two grandchildren at the homestead, along with the four remaining (teenage) children. The major change between 2001 and 2005 was that, amid acrimony and violence, the precise nature of the relationship between Mamtwana's and her husband became unclear. He insists they were divorced, she maintains they are still married.

Mamtwana explained that her marital relationship deteriorated towards the end of the 1990s, when her husband, who was then resident in Johannesburg, became a lay preacher. He decided that his newly ordained status meant that he should be joined in Johannesburg by his first wife; as a Christian his second wife now seemed to be a liability. After this, his regular remittance to Mamtwana declined and finally stopped. Her efforts to have it reinstated proved unsuccessful and she was unable to feed the children. Inspired by the success of her sister, Mamtwana took her husband to the local magistrates' court and she secured a monthly maintenance order of R800 against him. In response, her husband laid a complaint before the local tribal court. This handwritten complaint (of which the research team obtained a copy) accuses Mamtwana of misbehaviour, including selling his cows, and literally of 'inviting witchdoctors to their house' and 'going around thereby demonstrating that she is having an affair'. The document called her to answer the complaints before the tribal authority, failing which the customary union would be dissolved and the 'dowry' (sic) forfeited. Having secured childcare maintenance in the magistrates' court, Mamtwana was subject to counter-attack via customary law.

In a remarkable act for an illiterate, rural woman, Mamtwana travelled to Mthatha and consulted a legal NGO. They referred her to another lawyer who appeared before the tribal court and contested their authority to dissolve the marriage. (The credibility of Mamtwana's narrative was underpinned by copies of the documents). The matter was referred to the High Court; although it appears the tribal court proceeded and dissolved the union anyway. At this point it became unclear, and contested, as to whether Mamtwana was legally divorced.

Mamtwana's husband then proceeded to strip the household of its only real movable assets. Seventeen goats and ten cattle were taken, an act apparently, sanctioned by the tribal court. Mamtwana consulted her lawyer and the sheriff of the court reclaimed the livestock, only to have them stolen back by the estranged husband. Of the four head of cattle remaining, Mamtwana paid the lawyer, the sheriff and the keeper of the animals each. The sole remaining cow she sold for cash.

At this point in the escalation of acrimony, Mamtwana feared for her safety and moved closer to the road, to occupy her hexagonal ('six corner') hut within earshot of the neighbours. Her husband demanded she vacate the homestead and harassed her by lacing the rain water tank with acid. While she was out one day, her husband, his father and two brothers demolished the hexagonal hut and damaged the 'flat' (rectangular dwelling), smashing the walls, breaking the doors and discarding the household contents in the yard.

Mamtwana hurried to her homestead but was restrained by fellow villagers, who feared she would be killed by her enraged husband if she confronted him. On returning to the homestead the pigs had consumed the household's food, and were rummaging through the household's possessions strewn across the yard. The police arrived the next day, by which time her husband had returned to Johannesburg. His brother and father appeared before the magistrate, who dismissed the case saying it was simply a domestic disagreement. He found it implausible that a man would destroy his own home.

Mamtwana rebuilt the flat, but not the severely damaged hexagonal hut. The husband's actions have divided even his own family, while rebuilding their flat, Mamtwana and her children resided with another one of her husband's brothers in the village (whom the research team interviewed). Some of his family still include her in all the important traditional ceremonies while a splinter group of the paternal family, sympathetic to him, conducts their own ceremonies.

This case study, in which conflict within household member results in the destruction of the common property which in some measure was its material basis, demonstrates the crucial role played by conflict, but it also illustrates something of the regimes of governance within which rural householding occurs. Despite her unfavourable structural position, Mamtwana successfully challenged her marginalisation through civic law, but her victory proved pyrrhic. Conflict with her husband escalated as he attempted to evict her and reclaim control of the household, its assets and the monthly court-ordered deduction from his municipal salary. He stripped the household of its livestock and waged a campaign of domestic violence culminating in destruction of the physical structure of the homestead. Mamtwana's efforts to seek legal remedy, not only ultimately proved ineffective, they were undermined by a customary tribal court.

In the husband's deliberate destruction of the material basis of the household the proposition that household members acting out of a generalised notion of common good is challenged. This is a counter-intuitive lesson that can be difficult to accept: like the magistrate who finds it implausible that a man would destroy his own hut. Household decision making straddles a continuum from

relatively cooperative and cohesive at one pole to violently conflictual, as in the current example, and lends this case study its name.

This case study also reveals something of governance within of South Africa's subaltern spaces, particularly the communal areas of the former homelands. Mamtwana' is unable to secure protection against the brute pragmatics of patriarchal violence from either civic or the customary system. Her husband's charges against her significantly include claims of infidelity and witchcraft, the later, a common idiom in which marital conflict is cast, (Van der Waal, 1996).

The household members remain relatively unchanged in the research period, except for the birth of additional grandchildren. It is the household headship which is contested and unclear. There is disagreement as to whether Mamtwana and her husband are legally divorced; in spite of his violent attack on their homestead she insists that the marriage bond still holds. (To be divorced would undermine her claim to the homestead). If the balance of power in this case study resides in patriarchy, with the connivance of traditional governance, there are ambiguities too. It is perhaps indicative of the egregiousness of the scale of the husband's victimisation, and certainly against the conventions of patriarchal solidarity, that a faction of the estranged husband's family side with Mamtwana, offering her and the children succour.

10. Rural householding: critical issues

This section examines draws together the empirical material and considers the factors that shape processes of rural householding. The research design with its detailed, *in-situ* examination of household-marking practices, illustrates a number of key issues and critical questions. Accordingly, this section does not take the concept of the household as unidimensional or theoretically exhaustive, but rather as a kind of heuristic platform, by which to signpost the larger dynamics and issues that shape to household formation, composition and residential choice, in a particular context.

The complexity and multidimensionality of rural householding sees the discussion here ordered in terms of three levels of analysis. The first tier is the macro-structural context of political economy, the specificity of cultural mores concerning practices of kinship and local systems of governance. The second intermediate level takes the household unit as its focus and considers the relational realm of the social networks in which the households are embedded. This section considers how inter and intra-household relationships and resource flows shape the process of rural householding. This level confers the parameters

within the third level of individual action and decision making takes place: the realm of decision making, both collective and individual. Here we examine micro-level individual roles, choices and agency.

1. The macro-structural context

The broad macro-structural factors that shape rural householding are considered here, and are described in terms of three dimensions. They are the political economy of rural livelihoods, cultural mores concerning kin and domestic relations and finally the context of governance in the former homelands.

The first aspect has already been described, namely substantial shifts in the national and regional political economy. At a national level de-industrialisation has seen a contraction in the traditional avenues of employment for unskilled labour, and a commensurate decline in formal, unaccompanied male migrant labour. At a regional level the decline of much of the Eastern Cape's homeland-era 'border' manufacturing, along with the significant changes wrought by de-agrarianisation have all impacted on rural households. At the same time, the slow collapse of homeland agriculture means that there is not much for failed migrants to return to. These changes have radically impacted on migration: migration cannot neatly be typified *either* as 'circular' *or* as part of a larger process of urban transition: while some older migrants can return to their homesteads after a lifetime of remittances and 'back investments', large numbers of marginalised workseekers seem to 'churn' between rural areas, where they precariously latch on to the peripheries of already established homesteads, and failed forays of job-hunting on the margins of South Africa's formal economy. Many more remote villagers abandon the relative tenure security and the social networks of village life to abide in smaller rural towns where some services and resources can be accessed.

The altered material base of rural livelihoods in the last two decades has served to reshape patterns of and prospects for householding, migration and marital arrangements. The large and (previously) urban connected households of Kwanele and Bulelani illustrate the effects of the shifts in the South African economy and labour markets. These two contrasting case studies also show differential responses to these changes. Bulelani's sons follow the social script of unskilled male labour migration: their commitment to this course is reflected in household investments in traditional conjugal forms and thereby social respectability. Kwanele's household follows a different trajectory. It makes substantial investments in the education of its older (male) members to enable a more favourable insertion into the labour market. By no means a risk free

strategy, Kwanele's sons now stand poised on the threshold of solid formal labour market earnings, from which the household will benefit. Bulelani's sons seem relatively poorly placed to gain a favourable foothold in formal labour market resources. In this case the sense of tenuous urban economic prospects and re-enactment of a livelihood strategy that has been superseded recalls the notion of involution (Bank and Makubalo, 2005).

In theorising the process of economic disconnection in the rural Eastern Cape, Bank and Minkley (2005) draw on Geertz's (1963) notion of involution, the process where previously contained systems of livelihoods becomes increasingly inward focused. In response to mounting internal pressures such as population increase or poverty, and unable to expand its resource base or reorder property relations, the system of livelihood making spirals into greater, overdriven complexity and exploitation. In this way livelihoods systems atrophy, and lock people into systems of shared poverty. Davis (2004) stresses involutions spirally self exploitation and vanishingly small returns. Helpful in characterising aspects of livelihoods in the rural Eastern Cape, involution is clearly evident in the case study of Chuma. Disconnected from any formal or urban labour market resources by her marginalisation within kin relationships, she engages in a wide range of informal, survivalist-improvisation to sustain her impoverished household. The limit of the notion of involution is the manner in which it overstates the degree of disconnectedness of subaltern spaces from the larger economy. Although a staple of development and policy narratives, Potts (2000) argues that the dichotomy between 'committed' farmers and urban 'peasant workers', is fallacious because it obscures the connections between the two sites of livelihood making.

The study also points to the importance of comprehending the reconfigured material contours of rural householding. In several households, such as Chuma's, direct state cash transfers were a substantial source of income. There is an established understanding of the manner in which state old age grants support rural households (Case & Deaton, 1998; Duflo, 2000; Posel, Fairburn & Lund, 2004), along with the way in which households are often constituted in response to the existence of the social protection. Finally the value of the social grants resides not just in the resources they provided, but also for the way in which they enable recipients to transact within their social networks. For example Joanna's helping her daughter bridge her income, while waiting for an urban remittance to arrive served to strengthen the bonds of reciprocity and ultimately her own welfare.

The second macrostructural factor shaping householding is relatively distinct and specific, namely the nature of governance in much of rural Africa's

subaltern spaces. In the former homeland of the rural Eastern Cape, governance is a bricolage of hereditary traditional leadership and democratically elected officials. The region's long history of underdevelopment, patron-client relations and elite-capture means that local administration and governance are often, at best, uneven. Mamtwana's case is particularly instructive, because despite her tenacity in accessing civil law to contest her litany of criminal victimisation, she ultimately proves unable to secure her rights. Violence, or the threat of violence, often underpins governance in spaces devoid of formal authority. Mamdani (1996) characterises citizenship in the post-colonial African state as bifurcated spatially between rural and urban spaces, the former populated by the 'subjects' of customary authority, the later urban 'citizens' of civic law. Mamtwana's case, taking shape in the interface between the formal legal system and the systems of customary law, demonstrates the duality of these systems, and her inability to secure protection from either against the patriarchal violence she encounters.

The third overarching structural factor which shapes rural householding is the nature of kinship systems in the Eastern Cape. Russell (1998, 2003) argues that to apply the template of the nuclear family to African patterns of kinship, is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of African kinship system and risks a greatly impoverished analysis. For rather than the relatively fragile conjugal bond of the Western nuclear family, extended kinship patterns in most of southern Africa are ordered in systems of consanguinal patrilineal descent. There are ample examples of how often tacit notions of appropriate kinship arrangements serve to contour patterns, practices and decisions concerning householding. The research catalogued this with, for example, the substantial levels of mobility and widespread evidence of grandmothers looking after grandchildren. Systems of patrilineal descent offer up flexible options for co-residency, and allow for the distribution of familial obligations - particularly childcare - amongst large pools of kin (Russell, 2004). The agnatic (patrilineal) idiom partially accounts for the precious financial resources that Bulelani chooses to invest in bridewealth to legitimate his son's customary marriage. This is an investment that assures Bulelani of patronymic grandchildren. Kinship systems also allow flexibility around residential arrangements, for example in the late Mamdi's household included a grandchild born out of wedlock to her daughter. Even though the daughter subsequently married the child's father, systems of patrilineal descent view such grandchildren as members of the maternal household. However, following Mamdi's death, and the care deficit within her substantially diminished household, the balance of decision making tips towards this child joining his mother and father at the patrilocal home.

Finally, it is useful to point to the way in which the patterns of kinship and domesticity encoded in culture are mediated by and in turn serve to mediate the

impact of political economy. Africa's unfavourable absorption into capitalist relations for well over a century has often been accommodated within collective historical experiences of domesticity and normative householding practices. This is not to trivialise the disruptive and deleterious effects of migration and or gainsay its human costs, but it is to suggest that within the system and narratives of patrilineal descent, the exigencies imposed on individuals and households by migration could be given a local intelligibility and arrangements that could in time become normative and invested with the moral force of tradition. In this way the very arrangements imposed by the disruption of traditional forms of live and livelihood became the normality against which expectations and identities were measured. Significant political, social and economic changes in South Africa towards the very end of the twentieth century are once again reshaping these historical experiences and provide the new parameters within which contemporary rural household formation and composition is enacted and negotiated.

2. The Household level context

The second locus of explanation in critically considering questions of householding is relational and household level dynamics. Although rural householding is constituted within the structural dynamics describe above, it cannot simply be reduced to this level of analysis. Instead householding practices are constituted within relational dynamics and webs of obligation and entitlement. These are considered in what follows.

Social reciprocity

The first of these factors are the networks of social exchange within which most rural households are located. These networks of reciprocal exchange, within resources are transferred and obligations and entitlements enacted are a key survival mechanism for impoverished African households. Theoretically these networks have been characterised in a variety of ways: sometimes it is framed as 'social capital' (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000), while other commentators have termed it 'proximal social welfare' (Bracking & Sachikonye, 2006), or private social protection. In every case of the empirical material described, there is evidence of these networks and the manner in which they are used to manage vulnerability. These practices are often, but not exclusively constituted in relation to kin, usually spatially extended and provide the conduits along which resources and, in several cases, household members move.

However connective networks of social reciprocity are therefore not only vectors of resources, and opportunity, they can serve to distribute risk and transmit shocks. The logic of social reciprocity therefore also embodies disadvantages. As Sagner and Mtati (1999) have illustrated in their analysis of the politics of pension sharing in Khayelitsha, these reciprocal exchanges, while redolent of *ubuntu* and *communitas* also have a strongly ‘enforced’ character and are often accompanied by significant levels of tension, conflict and resentment. The case of Kwanele illustrates this kind of duality and double consciousness: on the one hand, he is critical of his brother (the drunkard), while on the other, he has resigned himself to the compulsion to support him.

In addition an individual’s ability to transact within these networks is not evenly distributed. Access to and places within networks can be highly unequal, asymmetrical, and traversed by the social fissures of gender, location and age. The case of Chuma shows how she is reluctantly located in a network of familial exchange, and then marginalised. The obligation to be the local placeholder falls on her shoulders, but none of the resources. Economically marginalised, she is unable to leave the homestead, but her marginality within her kinship network means that she cannot press her distant ‘brothers’ for their remittance.

Urban linkages

A second major determinant on rural householding is the nature of its linkages to urban resources, opportunities and job markets. The schematic typology of rural household as either urban-connected or urban-disconnected described earlier suggests the quality of a rural household’s urban connection fundamentally shapes its prospects. Rural households can range from the agrarian bedrock of a diversified urban-rural livelihood system, to being eddies of economic marginality and social vulnerability – and a range of gradations in between. There is evidence to suggest that the most agriculturally productive of rural households were those that could leverage urban or formal labour market resources into agrarian production (Du Toit and Neves, 2006). Whereas the more atomised, smaller and impoverished of rural households typically have a more tenuous or non-existent connection to urban labour markets.

Household labour supply

A households’ composition and prospects are shaped not only by the circuits of social reciprocity, and linkages to urban labour markets and resources, they are also shaped by household labour supply and how effectively the often

considerable demands of social reproduction are managed. Care work and reproductive labour is a burden that disproportionately falls on the shoulders of women and the most impoverished and marginalised of household members. The most atomised and vulnerable of rural households (such as Chuma) typically have limited surplus labour, and are tied down with the demands of social reproduction and substantial care burdens.

Household development cycle

A final notion in understanding rural household is the development cycle. Although limited through its normativising of the nuclear household, and undermined by widespread evidence of household porosity and fluidity, the utility of the concept is that it focus attention on trajectories of household change in the context of ontogenetic (individual) development. An example of this in the empirical material, including the dissolution of Johanna Matlasika's small household with her death.

3. The Decision making context

This third level of analysis examines decision making. Even though it often has clear collective dimension, decision making invariably involves individuals. The sociological construct the 'household' should not be reified and held to make decisions, instead decisions are ultimately made by the individuals within it - even if individuals do not always make decisions under conditions of their own choosing. This paper argued that to understand decision making a range of factors, including the larger 'life project' or 'ideology of purpose' (Spiegel, 1996), ought to be considered. Although most household members in the case studies presented were committed to the continuation of the household, a diverse range of strategies are drawn on in order to attain this goal. In addition, these projects are frequently trans-generational and tacit to household members. They might helpfully be described for each of the five case studies as follows. Households ranged from: reluctantly serving as a placeholder in a residual household at the behest of unsupportive kin (Chuma); reproducing the household through marriage and agrarian back investment (Radebe); springboarding the next generation into the formal economy through investments in education (Kwanele), consolidating the household after death (Matlasika) and finally, wrestling for control of the household in the context of violent conflict (Mamtwana).

These life projects ultimately determine tactics, both relational and material. The relational includes the dynamics noted in the preceding section. Material

investments include provisioning in social standing, housing, productive agrarian assets, education and creating reserves for shocks and retirement. Two further points need to be underscored here.

Firstly decision making is not necessarily co-operative or egalitarian, and very often is not. Decision making can be thought of as potentially ordered along two intersecting axes of centralised or distributed/consultative, alternatively co-operative or conflictual/disorganised. In a household with a relatively unambiguous household head decision making would be relatively centralised and comparatively less contested, in a household where authority to make decisions and adjudicate disputes is more contested, the household is likely to be characterised by conflict and be less organised. Moreover, the ability to assume the household headship, or locus of responsibility for decisions, or even have a prominent voice in decision making, is incumbent on a host of factors including access to resources, gender, age and descent. The manner in which decision making can also be a source of conflict, as is illustrated in the case of Mamtwana, in her domestic battle for the household. Attention to the power individuals are able to marshal, in order to transact within the livelihood system, is therefore crucial in understanding decision making.

A second important factor that shapes decision making is the agency individuals are able to exercise. Although individuals are located in hierarchies of power, they can engage with these hierarchies in a number of different ways. Even the very young (pre-school) great grandchildren within Joanna Matlasika's household embody an instrumental value, and exercise an element of agency within their context.

The exercise of individual agency can also assume many forms: Chuma's failure to repair or replaster the house is not simply an omission, but arguably an act of resistance and non-compliance. It represents her contesting her marginalisation which in turn has its seeds in a much earlier 'family decision' (viz. her brother's decision) that she was to stay and occupy the rural homestead. A substantial part of the exercise of agency can involve securing resources to transact within kinship networks.

Within this context the overriding questions concerning decision making can be thought of in relation to two cardinal issues to which household members often seem to be orientated. The first issue concerns: what claims to membership can or ought to be entertained within the context of the household? The second is: what alliances, linkages and claims can be made against other individuals and households? The nature of the options available, and decision making that households engage in, is ultimately shaped by the entitlements, opportunities and quality of the livelihood options. In thinking of the latter, it is useful to

conclude the discussion by describing the broad strategies open to impoverished rural African households. Although these are perhaps a little overdrawn, their heuristic value lies in describing the options open to often variegated rural households. These include:

1. Build or consolidate a connection to an urban base.
This entails gaining a foothold in the urban economy to enable back investment in the rural homestead. However the migration of household members is not without risk, urban seeking migration may prove unsuccessful and remittances unforthcoming. Even worse, the migrants will become absconders or 'tshipas', thereby eschewing contact, and active membership of, the household.
2. Remain / consolidate in the rural area.
This was the strategy often pursued by households unable to, or having unsuccessfully, engaged in urban migration. Within this category are subsumed two distinctive classes of households: those that are relatively atomised and isolated in the rural area and those with a prior history of urban labour migration, but presently unable or unwilling to migrating. The later were often at a point in the household development cycle where the household head had approached the end of his working life.
3. Dissolve and place household members in other households.
These were households that dissolved, invariably in light of a shock such as illness, the dissolution of a marriage or death. The household would cease to exist as a unit and surviving household members relocated into other households.

11. Conclusion

The determinants on household formation, composition and residential choice in the rural Eastern Cape reflect a complexity of factors, some of which this paper sought to capture. After elucidating theoretical debates concerning household formation and migratory dynamics in Southern Africa, the paper presented a range of five case studies that illustrate various aspects of householding. The paper then described three levels of analysis along which rural householding can be understood. This began with the overarching structural context of political economy, culture, and the specificity of governance in the focal research context. An intermediate tier of household level decision making was then discussed, as was the place of social reciprocity and networks. The final section of the discussion described the microsocial realm of decision making and the manner in which individuals within households act and transact to secure livelihoods.

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