Charting Women's Migration from the Eastern Cape, South Africa: A Perspective from the Village

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Introduction

This work offers a distinct perspective on women's migration in contemporary South Africa, illuminating the experiences of rural women as they seek out opportunities for movement. Poor black South African women have found space for resistance, engagement, and expression of agency; however, they have also encountered constraints amidst economic insecurity and social precarity. In focusing on their experiences of movement and migration, I hope to explore these tensions, and disentangle some of these complex narratives.

My research centers on the movement of young women from a cluster of rural villages in post-apartheid South Africa. These villages—Zithulele, Lubanzi, Putuma, Zidindi, and Khotyana—are located in the O.R. Tambo Distinct of the Eastern Cape, part of a region known as the former Transkei *bantustan*, or homeland. In this space that was rhetorically independent between 1976 and 1994, yet deliberately restricted, "separate development" constrained women's movement. Though many families retained land, cattle, and other livestock, agricultural production declined. Male labor migration, as a defining feature of the region, has long been woven into the fabric of household relations and production. Since the country's political transition in 1994, the Transkei has become reintegrated into South Africa, its residents legally free to move and work where they wish. But the O.R. Tambo District remains one of South Africa's poorest. A recent study of women in the area revealed that one third of the fathers of their children were away working or away searching for work, and another third were not working at all (Zibfus 2014). Over one-half of households recorded a monthly income between R1000 and R3000—between about £55-£160.

The women whose accounts informed this study did not deliver one dominant narrative of movement; their stories reflect competing and sometimes contradictory motives. My interviews, guided by two overarching questions—why do these women move? And what do their movements look like?—began as studies of female migrancy in the two decades since apartheid. However, they emerged in a different light. Charting movement in this way means understanding how women perceive their own mobility; it necessitates a deeper engagement with the circumstances they face, and the decisions they make within a limited space. This thesis speaks through these stories, stitching together individual life narratives to create a map of what is possible for these women, and what is not.

Most women spoke of migrating to find work, or to visit husbands or boyfriends. Inherent in each interview was a sense of economic insecurity in the rural home, one that women sought to alleviate or counterbalance by moving. The way that women told their stories of movement in light of this insecurity revealed an important calculus. They were deeply influenced by men, and children, in how they envisioned possibilities for movement. Underpinning many of their testimonies was a paradox: an acknowledgment that they had to move, but that they risked the further fragmentation of the home in the process. How women perceive their own negotiating power, and limitations, shapes how they pursue movement, and create and enact visions for stability or security.

My informants were temporary, or circular, movers—women who had left, and returned home—and I interviewed each woman in her home village. This approach differs from the existing scholarship on women and migration in South Africa, whose

practitioners have adopted a decidedly urban focus, studying women away from their rural homes (Phillips and James 2014, Posel and Marx 2013, Lee 2009). Of my informants, some had returned permanently, while others were planning upcoming journeys. This wavering movement positions them on the margin of rural and urban spaces, traversing worlds instead of switching one for another. However, perhaps because I interviewed women at their rural homes, these sites emerged as central to their stories of movement. In incorporating married as well as single women, my work includes voices overlooked in literature on contemporary movement in South Africa (Hunter 2010a, Akileswaran and Lurie 2010).

These women discussed their perceptions of movement, and their stories captured a key tension in how they framed, and responded to, "traditional" expectations. Many women held firmly rooted ideas of what constitutes "tradition" and what exists outside of it. Roles within marriage were essential to the concept of tradition. My research assistant described, during a conversation with her married cousin, her own comparative freedom.

> If you are a girl like me, [and] you're not married, you are free to wear shorts, leggings, to do the hair, do the nails, do the lashes, and be beautiful.

Her cousin explained that many husbands disapprove of their wives working or even leaving the house, wary of someone else "catching" them. These same women acknowledged the reverse when it came to personal and family security: a working husband, even if away, signified consistency and providership, whereas a single woman might have many men but lacked guaranteed support. Ideas of "tradition" shaped possibilities for movement: women might operate within traditional bounds, or around

the edges of them, but they acknowledged “tradition” all the same. Throughout this thesis, “tradition” refers to these parameters as perceived by my informants.

In her work *Women of Phokeng,* Belinda Bozzoli argues, “the facts of alienation and oppression have meant that the ordinary person has infrequently been drawn into a vision of herself as capable of exerting power beyond a certain limited sphere” (1991:2). Discussing a “moving equilibrium” between agency and structure, power and limitation, Bozzoli emphasizes how unequal social relations shape the framework in which the disempowered can assert themselves. Even within this “limited sphere,” my informants recognized that “tradition” could be stretched to incorporate new definitions or implements, or to respond to new realities. Women discussed their roles as heads of households, many declaring, “There’s no one to depend on but myself.” Almost all women acknowledged government grants as significant sources of income, especially if men in the household were unemployed. Wives left homesteads to visit husbands, stepping out of the confines of the homestead in the process. Murray (1981) documents a similar process of flexible tradition in Lesotho, as many mothers took over their children’s bride wealth negotiations in their migrant husbands’ absence. My informants’ own visions of autonomy or constraint within tradition reveal the space that they see as accessible and the movements they project as possible.

Mark Hunter presents a compelling explanation about the movement of women in contemporary South Africa; focusing on similar types of rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal, he proposes women’s movement as a response to a crumbling homestead (2002, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). Traditionally, a man would demonstrate his capability as a provider by earning wages and heading his own homestead; he would

later be able to negotiate *lobola*, or bride price, in the form of cattle and wages. Marriage signified a promise of mutuality, as women generated labor power for the homestead in productive and reproductive roles. Because of growing, chronic male unemployment in the past two decades, most men are unable to afford *lobola*; Hunter argues that traditional marriages have declined, and modes of social reproduction exist unevenly (see Posel, Casale, and Rudwick 2011). Men's roles are modified, and while they still "provide," they do so outside marriage, on a more short-term basis, and with multiple women (Hunter 2010a). Women also seek out multiple attachments, and more frequently raise their children as part of their natal homes. Outside traditional unions, economic insecurity drives women to support themselves and their children in alternative ways, and migration from home presents an opportunity.

Underlying Hunter's explanation are three main assumptions: that women move alone, that they move into urban peripheral spaces, and that they enter into transactional relationships with men. Specifically, he contends that pension grants have indirectly freed up young women who can leave children at the homestead, and come and go much more easily than they could before. He writes,

> "In a situation where marital bonds are no longer common…rural women can pivot multiple movements around their rural home (sometimes where a child is left), a fairly flexible arrangement allowing for women's frequent movement, the transfer of resources through sexual liaisons, and the redistribution of state benefits, especially pensions, often through the presence of a rural grandparent" (2010a:149).

Women rely on rural foundations, yet their movement away is also a response to the homestead's dissolution, their decisions thereafter an attempt to carve new spaces and construct support systems. Grants may make migration possible, while acting as a ballast for the rural home.

I suggest that Hunter is too quick to assume that "traditional" attachments have ceased to act as constraints. In this thesis, I emphasize two central tensions: between women as agents, and as constrained, and between women as subjects of tradition, and as flexible around it. Married women, too, may seek flexible arrangements in movement, and we must think more critically about how women engage with nodes of support in their lives. Rural women may approach what they see as "traditional" attachments to men, and homesteads, with a degree of flexibility—they may move to render relationships or marriages mobile, or may exit the domain of the homestead to be able to better support it from afar.

Secondly, despite the appeal of women's movement as part of a flexible rescripting of the homestead and its attachments, I wish to emphasize the idea of rural insecurity, and perceptions of limitation. Women also rely on movement as a strategy in situations of constraint. I argue that while these "traditional" attachments may be flexibly "moved around" to some degree, and may facilitate women's temporary migration from rural areas, most women's movements are ultimately contingent, and thus constrained.

Specifically, I hope to revisit the centrality of attachments in women's accounts of movement, analyzing how they relate to men and children in negotiating means of provision. Themes of support, and providership, encompass only one element of

movement, and of traditional relationships; however, they provide a valuable lens to consider how women frame their own stories, and how attachments persist.

Domestic struggle: women moving within a history of "tradition"

Hunter's theory builds on a powerful historical claim—that the rural homestead, once seen as the ultimate patriarchal institution, is no longer able to contain women. Many scholars, investigating the historical roots of patriarchal power, emphasize the control of labor as the key to the homestead's survival (van Onselen 1996, Guy 1987, Bozzoli 1983). Wage labor threatened the homestead's fundamental relationships: migrancy to the mines became a rite of passage into adulthood, wages a means for young men to challenge the authority of elders (Beinart 2014, Livingston 2005). Yet in many ways, migrant labor integrated into traditional systems, and renegotiated relationships. Wages became embedded into the very "traditional" foundations of the rural homestead, facilitating financial stability and "ownership" in a time of disenfranchisement and political flux (Breckenridge 2012).

Women, "left behind" by migrant men, assumed responsibility for maintaining the homestead, and "sustain[ing] the cultural autonomy of rural systems too" (Bozzoli 1983). Murray, analyzing Basotho families, notes how the married woman occupied a central yet marginal role (1981). She is powerful, as a bridge between two homesteads and a producer of labor, yet is subjugated to household responsibilities. Bozzoli introduces evidence from Monica Hunter's fieldwork diaries from the 1930s, which reveal women bearing a disproportionate amount of the burden of labor in relation to men. Bozzoli adds, "It was not simply the men's absence that placed the burden of

domestic and agricultural labor on the women; nor is it just that male tasks had been undermined by the destruction of the African states; it was also that these societies possessed a capacity to subordinate women's labor" (1983:151).

Instead of reading social and economic shifts in a linear way, we must be aware of the dynamic relations within the domestic sphere, what Bozzoli calls "domestic struggle," or "domestic negotiation" (Phillips and James 2014). Women, as homesteaders and migrants, have long contested and recreated their roles as designated by patriarchal and capitalist systems. Beinart provides evidence of *amatshawe*, or *amadhikazi* as important figures in 1930s Mpondoland, in the Transkei: these terms "[refer] to a formerly married woman, or woman with children but not husband" (2014:398). Sometimes these women were entrepreneurs in local beer-brewing operations; others were urban migrants. Scholars of colonial Africa and apartheid South Africa captured stories of African women migrating throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries, predominantly as domestic workers, underpinning apartheid's informal domestic economy (Cockerton 2002, Gaitskell et. al. 1983, Bozzoli 1991). Bozzoli's *Women of Phokeng* (1991) charts the lives of migrants from one area, gathering their life histories to consider the consciousness they formed as women, migrants, and mothers. These are mere glimpses of how women have moved within and against "traditional" roles and in the context of social attachments. Women have moved for decades, and have engaged in a renegotiation of their roles for even longer.

Contesting "tradition" and exploring spaces for agency

How can we bring the idea of domestic struggle into the visions of movement that women share in these stories? While some individuals respond to immediate needs, most engage in a more complex projecting and predicting of future possibilities in migrating (Vigh 2009). They may weigh ties to home and ties to urban areas differently depending on their immediate circumstances. Do most women move because they see no other choice, or because they see opportunity in movement? How do social landscapes further ground or destabilize them?

Alongside Hunter's explanation of rural women's movement in post-apartheid South Africa, a number of other scholars speak to ways that women have mobilized their attachments in flexible ways. In studies focusing more specifically on urban women's experiences, authors emphasize an underlying social acceptance of movement (Lee 2009, Akileswaran and Lurie 2010, Hunter 2010a). Lee, mapping three generations of rural women migrants to Cape Town, observes that while older women have disruptive or coercive connotations with such movement, their granddaughters—born in cities, in the late apartheid era—view it as an exercisable freedom. In the mining settlements surrounding Rustenburg, Akileswaran and Lurie find that women describe migration as part of a "search for autonomy" that allows them to take responsibility for themselves and their families (2010:182). Detailing processes of "anchorage" (Lee 2009) and "pivoting" (Hunter 2010a), scholars underscore the flexibility that many women exercise in relation to their rural homes.

Others focus more broadly on how women exert autonomy over their bodies by entering transactional sexual relationships in urban spaces. Entering unions where they

can exchange sex for gifts or money, women engage with ideas of commitment in less economically secure contexts (Cole 2004, Hunter 2010a, Hunter 2011, Leclerc-Madlala 2003). Scholars have sought to disentangle these complex relationships from prostitution, or mere day-to-day survival. These arrangements reflect changing needs and expectations of both men and women; they are often grounded in intimacy and romance, in a way that reiterates men as providers for women's material, as well as romantic and sexual, needs (Hunter 2002, Akileswaran and Lurie 2010). However, women can also view these relationships as a means of empowerment, in which they can fulfill an active role in providing for themselves. Seizing on the rhetoric of democratic South Africa, women may frame these relationships in terms of rights—claiming the right, and the ability, to provide for themselves and their families (Hunter 2010b). The intersection between physical and sexual autonomy is increasingly important for understanding how women make decisions about movement, and how they analyze their prospects for relationship and resource security in strange environments.

Underlying these ideas of movement and rights is a social infrastructure that facilitates women's migration. Government welfare grants have revolutionized rural household support networks, and an efficient distribution system has diminished the severity of rural poverty in recent years. Between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of South African households receiving at least one grant increased by *half*: in the Eastern Cape, almost six out of ten households received at least one grant in 2013 (Stats SA 2014). In the poorest fifth of South African homes, child support grants account for more than half of total household income (Woolard, Buthelezi, and Bertscher 2012).

Grants have become woven into the social organization of rural life in many ways, alleviating extreme poverty but also rearranging incentives and relationships. Cluver et. al. (2013) suggest that the child support grant provides an important counterweight to young women engaging in transactional sex out of desperation. Furthermore, Gibbs (2014) contends that the state has in many ways assumed the economic role that the employer once did, and that less reliance on migrant remittances has realigned relationships of provision.

This infrastructure also extends to urban networks; Neves and du Toit (2008) demonstrate that many rural homes seeking a degree of stability resort to building urban linkages. Examining trends of co-resident and not co-resident mothers, Posel and van der Stoep (2008) find that mothers who do not live with their children are more likely to be in the labor force. Akileswaran and Lurie (2010) emphasize a more extended, informal type of infrastructure, describing how women utilize networks of "home girls" to access information and assess risks regarding migration, and to receive support upon arrival in a new place. Relying on social and household infrastructure as well as more distant networks, women—who in a 2008 study, comprised 37% of black labor migrants—are able to make decisions based around certain "knowns" as they weigh prospects for migration (Posel 2009).

"Traditional" and logistical constraints to movement

Although women may renegotiate their positions in movement, they also remain subordinated, especially those women who are poor, uneducated, and live far from urban centers. Even with general acceptance of female mobility, there are still limiting

social and financial factors, and moral connotations, to this decision. The act of moving may be seen as a defiance of patriarchal societal foundations. Migrant women may be seen as selfish for leaving behind their children, or as a particular "type" of woman who shuns rural tradition for urban conveniences. Brettell (2003) notes how migration often relies on a complex calculus at the household unit. Balancing between individual and household needs may prove difficult for a mother who is migrating. Among households in less destitute situations, temporary migration may be seen as a way to balance necessity with longer-term goals; however, the most impoverished households may not be able to plan far ahead, or save enough to finance a family member's long journey.

My research also centers on a common, and important, counter-narrative in this setting, one that Hunter largely neglects—that of movement home. The decision to leave and the decision to return may encompass two distinct experiences of migration, but both operate within the margins of flexibility and constraint. There is arguably more at stake for women navigating in a context of social flux, where movements or actions may require a certain deliberateness, where there is a smaller margin for error. Bozzoli (1991) construes older women's homecomings after decades away as positive. Should we view younger women's movement home as a flexible strategy, or an admission of defeat (Akileswaran and Lurie 2010)? Do perceptions of movement change depending on the context and the individual? As my research suggests, migration can be more of a temporary solution, a decision that contains competing obligations and motives. Many of my informants undertook multiple short-term movements; some returned home from carefully planned journeys, others from disillusioning urban experiences.

In relationships, Hunter emphasizes "intense gendered conflicts—a kind of structural distrust" (2010b:5). Although women can broker access to resources in transactional relationships, these arrangements also reproduce and reinforce patriarchal structures, further subjugating women (Hunter 2002:101). Equal access to resources, financial and other, is not a given, as men continue to leverage social and gender power over their partners. Even grants, central to the survival of homestead members, and distributed to many more women than men, provide a bare minimum. Female-headed households earn on average just over half the income of their male counterparts, revealing that this differential access to grants has little effect (Stats SA 2012). Remittances from migrant men or women offer significantly more security, and a chance for upward social mobility, than do grants.

However, sources of provision, including from migrant men in the mines, may be unreliable. Reported remittances to rural areas have fallen in the past two decades (Posel 2009); Hartford (2012) explores these tensions, emphasizing the "double economic burden" that many men face as they divide their wages between supporting a rural homestead, and an urban girlfriend. "Living-out" allowances have allowed men to supplement their meager wages in search of accommodation outside the mining towns, adding to their disposable income, yet also shifting economic expectations. Routine service delivery protests and strikes over wage increases have contributed to violence, culminating in the killing of 34 miners in Marikana in 2012. Hartford's analysis of economic insecurity in the mines portrays women as far less autonomous and independent actors, and may, theoretically, counterbalance Hunter. In revealing some of the distinct pressures threatening male migrant laborers, Hartford raises questions

about women's roles in this context. Even if women to some extent may occupy more pivotal roles in sustaining households than they have before, the strategies women employ or the arrangements they fashion are likely to be less stable, and more temporary, than those erected by male migrant labor.

Methodology and women interviewed

My research methodology centers on the village: I was interested in exploring the experiences of women who had returned from time away, or were in transition between places. I focused on interviewing "networks" of women—sisters, sisters-in-law, or neighbors—across five neighboring villages, to investigate the similarities and differences in their stories. Initially, I had hoped to pursue further interviews in urban settlements, connecting to women in cities through their rural family and neighbors; however, this task ultimately proved difficult, because these urban contacts were dispersed, with varying availability, during my short window for research. Because of this village focus and particular accessibility, my sample of women is in some ways biased. My interviews seemed to just graze the edges of other women's stories, for example, sisters who were away in cities for years, who I was unable to incorporate in my research.

I worked with a research assistant, Ntombizine (Zine), who was 23 and single, and has a three-year-old daughter. We identified participants predominantly from Zine's contacts and networks in her home village, and expanded from this initial group of women. We also relied on my former colleagues at a local NGO to connect to women. Most of my informants were in their mid 20s to early 30s. Of the total 44 women I

interviewed, half were married or ever married, and half single. All but three of the women had children, and they had an average of 2.7 each—many had just one, and some had six or seven children. Based on prior surveys in the area, my sample reflects a slightly higher proportion of married women than occurs in the population, although this is also age dependent. I have chosen to include material from 19 of these women as more direct interlocutors for this thesis.

As a young, foreign, white woman, guiding each interview through translation, it is likely that I introduced bias into the responses. Zine was instrumental in connecting me to women, translating both literally and contextually between English and isiXhosa. I interviewed women in their homes, and our conversations lasted for about 20-25 minutes, although some were longer. By relying primarily on interviews, I had to take women at their word; the material I collected more accurately reflects how women perceive their own situations than it does a definitive account of the social and economic landscape they confront. However, firsthand testimonies are the only way to investigate these types of questions, and this method also closely resembles most existing research in this field.

Although these interviews would not have been possible without Zine, I also recognize that, because she lives in the same spaces as the women we interviewed, her presence or her opinions about informants' experiences may have influenced the evidence I collected. Her commentary, in many ways, drove the conversations; in representing unmarried women, I believe she added important nuance and context to each conversation positively. In the process of translation, and as Zine summarized my

informants' explanations, quotations are her translations, not necessarily informants' exact words, although I use them as quotations throughout this thesis.

I do not seek to generalize about migration by all women in South Africa, but rather discuss the scope of movement available to the women I interviewed, predominantly women from poor rural families. I first focus on gender roles, and how women assess movement with regard to these roles; I then analyze the household, and how women move around it. In thinking about how women position themselves, and the spaces in which they move, both gender and household provide central sites where tensions emerge around agency, constraint, and tradition. My informants communicated the difficulties of relying on migration as a solution for economic insecurity, casting urban spaces as contingent amidst other considerations of rural connections and traditional roles. While my thesis examines how these women negotiate movement, it also reveals their insecurity and constraints on movement.

Chapter 1: Gender Roles and Negotiability in Movement

As my informants shared stories of movement, they relayed inherent perceptions of their roles as women. How do understandings of gender roles and expectations translate to creating space for women's movement, or restricting it? In marriages and many relationships, women discuss positions of social and economic subordination: men exert control over how their money is spent, and over women's labor and behavior more broadly. Historically, these norms are rooted in control of women's labor for the productivity and survival of the homestead (Bozzoli 1983). My interviews revealed tensions around women's interactions with men, reminiscent of the idea of "domestic struggle," especially where women relied on men as their chief providers. Women could often choose whether or not to buy in to being a traditional wife. Yet once women did so, they were only able to exercise movement in particular ways.

In return, through describing their relations with men, women shared their perceptions of their own negotiating power: how they see their prospects for movement. While women describe "traditional" roles as often constraining, they also use these understandings and experiences as a baseline for evaluating movement. There are situations where they see themselves as able to leverage their relationships with men, and situations where they do not. Their stories of movement, and of gender relations more broadly, reveal important contestations and "domestic struggles" within questions of flexibility, constraint, and tradition.

“Negotiating” mobility

Many of the women I interviewed named visits to husbands or boyfriends as motivating their movement. Migration in these cases was not a solitary venture, but a process intricately tied to relationships and gender roles. Women used the term *negotiate* frequently, which implied competing influences at stake. Some women had an active role in deciding these visits, while others waited until their men communicated a plan to them. In most cases, men would transfer money to their partners’ accounts to facilitate a trip.

Almost all women married to migrant workers made these journeys annually, and their visits might last anywhere from two to eight months. The negotiations they described might align with “traditional” expectations, as a mutual kind of duty or commitment to one another. They could also reflect a woman’s attempt to exercise her rights in the relationship more flexibly—an accountability mechanism of sorts if an unfaithful husband was misappropriating earnings.

Within marriage, migration to visit husbands, and other family members, was allowable and expected, while other movement was generally not. Single women generally enjoyed more latitude if they were moving on their own and if they had enough money, but those visiting boyfriends typically fell into a similar pattern of negotiating and brokering mobility. Sibulele, who married her longtime boyfriend in 2010, conveyed how her mobility had changed:

> When I was single, I was always visiting Cape Town, but now I have to stay [in the village] and visit my husband [in Limpopo]. Cape Town was great, I was living there

> from 2007 to 2010…I thought that for the rest of my life, I'd be in Cape Town, but things changed, I'm back now and got married. [It was difficult] but I accepted it.

Once married, women had to respond to relationship expectations as related to movement; they had to negotiate their way "in" to their migrant man's space. My hour-long conversation with Zine, Saphokazi, and Vuyiswa revealed a particular balance of marital obligations, as they explained:

> You have to negotiate, due to the custom, you have to obey your husband's rules…it's him who is the leader of the house, so you need to have the instructions from him. You can't say that 'yoh, I'm just coming today, I'm in the bus station.' There's going to be a fight…You have to discuss, and plan.
>
> ["What about surprises?" I asked.] *Hayi*! [No!] Our men, they don't like the surprise, oh no—they will beat you, *where do you come from*? Surprises, ah! You have to say, why does she want to surprise him?[1]

Other women added to this impression, discussing a process of communication that often took time. Even if women were free to express their desires to visit, their ability to move was often restricted, as they relied on men to provide funds for a journey. Nompazamo described her frustration as she waited for her boyfriend, in East London, to sort out the matter of an upcoming visit:

> He was supposed to deposit cash this week, but there is a burial that has delayed the visit. Usually I plan, but it's not necessary to plan. If I feel like I want to go to him, I usually go. [But it's] depending on him, his cash…he has piece jobs. I'm struggling, suffering here, so I decided it's better to go and stay with [him].

---

[1] I use italics to indicate words said or imagined to be voiced by others, and I use single quotations when women paraphrase or quote their own words. Occasionally, I add my own questions to better structure the quotation.

Onesimo also explained a process that was more flexible, yet challenging because of her husband's living accommodations:

> It's hard because my husband is staying in a hostel for the mines, then we have to rent and I have to buy new things all the time because we don't have a proper house…I don't like that, I just want my husband to have his own house to stay, it's harder because I have to negotiate to try for a place to stay. [But] it's negotiable, I have the right to say, 'I want to come visit you, on this day,' and then my husband says *no man, you must wait a few so I can settle things out.* Otherwise it's not depending on the man.

Upsetting this balance of negotiation was unusual; however, Nobonke, now widowed, recalled one visit to the mines with a hint of a smile:

> My husband was a rugby player. I would watch him in the game [when I visited him]…he was madly in love with me, but he was a people's person, he was taken by other girls. I popped in without telling him I was coming, and saw he was staying with another woman…I *beat* that girl, my husband had to make us settle, I decided to throw [her] out.
>
> It's unusual to just go, [he would ask for time] so that he can organize some things, so now you just say 'I'm just now here,' there's going to be a fight, because you don't see, what does he do there? And now you see him, with the other girls. But I suspected something.

In negotiating mobility, or managing it on their own terms, women revealed a sense of flexibility in their relationships. By rendering relationships mobile, and viable outside of the traditional homestead, and by inserting themselves into new geographical spaces, women were to some extent able to reshape how relationships

with men might be maintained. Beyond the act of negotiating, women's experiences in urban spaces allowed them to step outside homesteads and assume modified roles in some instances, as I discuss in my final chapter.

However, anecdotes about negotiating power opened up a broader conversation on roles—how negotiation could be delicate, and how men sought to more fully control the flexibility that their women exercised. In particular, ideas about economic power and spending emerged as central concerns, revealing a tenuous power struggle that shaped the ways that many women imagined possibilities for movement.

Explaining roles

Traditionally, when women marry, they become part of their husband's homestead, gain a new first and last name, and are expected to follow a clearly defined set of rules as a *makoti* (newlywed). In contrast, single women, many of whom have chosen to remain unmarried, are attached to their natal home, and have more freedom of movement and expression. Zine often used the term *ntombazana*, or girl, to discuss unmarried women, the social connotation being that marriage ushers women into a respected stage of adulthood. Many women described the expectations they face as carefully categorized, within or outside traditional frameworks. While most marriages are traditional, some are also registered with the state, recognized by the courts. Typically, women will undergo a traditional ceremony first, and sometimes will then legally marry; the reverse is unusual (Zibfus 2014).

Social and economic expectations emerged from most interviews. Saphokazi explained her own security within marriage, and her satisfaction with it, "because you

have your own man…I'm committed to one person." Zine shared her own perspective, biased against married life:

> If you are new, *makoti*, even if the sun is so hot, you're wearing the blanket [over your shoulder], these sorts of clothes. You do the home chores, go to the forest, go to the wood, to the river…you need to serve the full house, cook, while others just chilling, *wena*, you have to be there all the time because you are new…You know, they say, it's tiring to be the *ntombazana* like me, because you have many guys. That one, this one, maybe [they] cheat on you, it's tiring to be the girl. So they [gesturing] think it's much better to be married.

Laughing, they relayed stories of their husbands and boyfriends, describing firmly ingrained gender roles: Vuyiswa recounted giving her husband a Valentine's Day gift, only to be told it was childish and "not for African men."

> They don't even eat chocolates and yogurt. *No, I'm an African man, no man! Just buy me brandy, not this, it's for a baby*…they fighting with us. *What others will say, when they see me with chocolate? Don't play with me!*...At least you must buy maybe shoes, brandy, they love brandy, or a nice straw hat…something that is proper, big.

While a man could dictate what was a "proper" gift for him, he could also influence more broadly how his wife spent "his" money. Buying perfume and spending money on hair were questioned as "Western" conceits that had no value for a married Xhosa woman:

> They just fight even when you buy a table, Tupperware, dishes… *Why did you buy this? You're wasting my money, what are you going to do with this? It's expensive!*
>
> [Zine added:] Even husbands, don't want them to wear short things, they say *you are a girl, man!* Even a nice lingerie, nice sexy, *hey, what is this now!* Certain ideas, about what

> is acceptable—there are *rules*. If you're not married, don't need to follow any of these rules.

Yet men might expect their girlfriends to have these same "Western" things. In a subsequent interview, Zine relayed a contrasting story of Nompazamo's return from a visit to her boyfriend:

> Usually the girls talk, say it was so nice, they see her looking beautiful when she's coming from East London.
>
> [Zine added an aside:] My boyfriend would always say, *You look so beautiful, I know it's my money*.

These anecdotes reveal a disconnect between established rules, and more abstract roles: how women discussed their roles linked closely with men providing, and women fulfilling particular types of dictated social roles.

Challenging authority

My informants also conveyed deeper divisions between how men and women interact, especially with regard to authority in the relationship. This authority pervaded stories of negotiating visits, as well as women working or undermining their partners' masculinity. Anecdotes of women challenging their partners' autonomy—leaning into a more flexible, peripheral space surrounding "tradition"—ended with men attempting to subjugate women again.

I spoke with Khanyisa and four neighbors she had gathered, all wives of mineworkers, about some of these difficulties. While they gossiped and joked about

their husbands' behavior, they also explained what happened if they challenged male authority:

> They make us to be ashamed to be their wives, because they are doing bad things, they drink too much.
>
> But if the woman says please stop, the man says *I will kill you, you don't have respect, it's not a good way to talk to me like that. Look at me, I'm* some*body*.

Although these women talked about desperately looking for work, to no avail, they also indicated that Xhosa men feel threatened by wives who are employed, a sentiment echoed in a number of subsequent interviews:

> First of all, the man doesn't like the working wife, you have to obey his rules…[there's the idea that] if you let your woman go to work, you'll end up [being] treated disrespectfully, because she's having money now, she won't treat me as a man.

Saphokazi and Vuyiswa also shared these same conceptions of a man establishing parameters for his wife as a means to maintain control over her, specifically with regard to studying, or working.

> They didn't even want us to study…didn't even want us to get education, because they think, *they will be higher than me*.
>
> Even if they don't earn money themselves, if you are the wife who is working, the wife has to say, *baby this is the money, I earn 500 rand, what we are going to do with this 500 rand?* Wait for the orders from this one who is not working…
>
> I don't know [why he doesn't want me to work], maybe he's scared that I will be catched by others.

Other women referenced men's fears of others "catching" them, as if women leaving the homestead or exercising autonomy might signal the unraveling of traditional respectability.

Yet although none of my informants explicitly discussed women's extramarital affairs, Zine would often reiterate, "a car can't go without a spare wheel," indicating that many women, even married, search for extra security through an "under-the-arm" lover (*makhwapheni*). Contrasting to the Zulu *isoka*, a concept of a man with multiple lovers who embodied masculinity, Hunter draws on the historical *isidikiselo,* or secondary lover, men who looked after women as "caretakers" while their husbands were gone (2010b). However, these concepts were not seen as entirely equal; Hunter points to tension around these figures, just as my informants avoided discussing even the potential of other lovers.

Contradictions in providing

As men dictated rules for women to follow, they were said to enjoy their own code of conduct. Women shared fears of migrant husbands cheating, and posed visits to husbands as a means to alleviate these fears. Saphokazi talked about the "lovesick feeling" she and her husband shared for one another, but in the same breath explained:

> We are worried that [our men] may be cheating, because the men have got money, and those girls that stay there [by the mines], they want money…If you phone, today maybe he's with a girl, maybe it's only lack of signal or electricity, but if the phone is not ringing, it's off…and then if you ask him, *hayi, it was a thunderstorm*, then he was cheating.

Khanyisa and her neighbors spoke more blatantly about husbands stepping out of provider roles, visiting girlfriends and inconsistently remitting.

> Our husbands say, sometimes, they deposit the cash, but sometimes there's a problem with the work, so we don't get the money. ["They make the excuse?" I asked.] Yes.

Zine explained:

> They are a little bit nervous [when they visit]…They are not fully aware of that place, even, if the husband is not phoning or writing a letter, it's stressing. So they might think that hey, maybe he's taken by someone else. So it's stressful. Yoh! They're frustrated, better to just go. [When they arrive], it's better, now see my husband is not doing anything, just staying, alone.

"And for Easter," I asked, "are they coming home?"

> Some are going to stay there with their cheats, and then some won't come because of their strike, some will just go to visit another area to see their other girlfriends…Our husbands are saying, *You are killing me with the love!* Our poor men, usually standing in a bus [stop], say that I'm making some funny things up.

One of the women, Nosapho, said her husband "has been taken by others," meaning that she could not rely on him for remittances. She explained,

> I have to look after my kids without the support from the father…I'm struggling to raise my own kids…I have to work, I ask the neighbors to do home chores to get a bit of cash. [She gestured at her apron.] Look at me, I'm *full* of mud!

As my informants shared stories of mistrust and desperation, they revealed an underlying contradiction in how "traditional" roles are broadcast, and performed.

Subverting forms of support

Unreliability from men pushed women to seek alternative means of securing support; however, men were also said to react to women challenging their power over their money, even for purposes of child support. Zine told me that some men resist the idea of grants from a pride perspective: "*It's like I'm weak, for my kids to be raised by government. It makes me to be weak, man.*" Although almost all of my informants had grants, most registered them as providing only a basic level of support. A few interviews revealed tensions over women expecting men to provide for them or their children unequivocally, especially when relationships dissolved.

Khanyisa and her neighbors, when I asked, "Is it possible to get divorced?" responded, yes, yes, and relayed stories they had heard. Zine, however, explained how men threaten women's ability to undermine them:

> You know what happens? They didn't want to marry [officially], if you go to the magistrate [to divorce], you see your husband is already married to the Shangaan girl or…
>
> [The women interjected:] We are like the *girlfriends* now—we are not the wives! Just staying here…but you are not computerized to the legal wife, it is impossible to get divorced legally…
>
> We [the wives] want [to be legally married], but our husbands don't want to…'Husband, can you please marry me?' They will be like, *no, you want to kill me! And take my money*.

Zine explained to me her own story of seeking support from her child's father through "the magistrate," or courts:

> He [first] had to go pay damages, R3000 to my mother…to buy the baby things like warm clothes, a baby carrier, formula…But I decided to go to magistrate when [the baby] was nine months old, to get help from Phindile. I wasn't ever scared. [He] had to pay R600 each and every month [indefinitely]...He was taking advantage of me, wasn't doing things in a good manner, I had to talk and talk and talk to get something.

Phindile had not supported Zine for over a year, citing his current unemployment. Yet, she noted,

> He says he has no money, but he has been buying new things, a brand new [Toyota] Avanza, a mobile fridge, even a machine for cutting meat…

Not all women readily sought court-ordered support. While speaking with Lindeka, who had left home and been unsuccessful in her search for stable work, Zine relayed her qualms about going to the magistrate:

> She said she's afraid. That's what is happening here, each and every woman, they are struggling while their boyfriends are working. And then asking [the women], 'why didn't you take them to the magistrate, where there's going to be a negotiation,' they said I'm afraid, because…if you take a man to magistrate, the man sometimes threatens to kill you or kill the child. [The man will say,] *You want to eat my money! Because my kid is so young, he doesn't know about money…it's you who's going to take that money.*

Khuziwe, whose husband had initiated a divorce after eleven years of marriage, described her own difficult predicament. When I asked if she received child support grants, she responded,

> No, because my husband is employed by the government…My husband doesn't pay child support now, he doesn't pay any money or send any to the kids. He's staying in

> Mthatha…sometimes he said that I must just borrow him the kids to visit him only. I just went to the magistrate…they said that by this 31st [of March], he must firstly hand in the money to the magistrate office…but he doesn't even do that. So the government must take that out of his pay…
>
> You have to say what amount you want from them. 'Okay, I want R1000' [per month], they have to calculate some daily expenses. Are you traveling far? And then they said *no, you are living nearby the school, so each kid must have R500*. And then my husband said that *no, I will only give them R400 a month*. It's crazy, for me it's bad. I was young at that moment, he said, *I want to marry you*, but now he's doing crazy things, won't support the kids. It's terrible.

Zine added, "If this woman was not working [at the clinic], just imagine what that would be like then. She has a salary of R2000 in her job now—it's not enough." Within channels designed to protect women or give them a degree of flexibility vis-à-vis men, women sometimes attempted to challenge these firmly conceived roles. This evidence shows how men reacted to such challenges, reasserting dominance in their relationships. It also frames a motivation for movement more clearly: if men are unreliable as providers and other support systems compromised, is migration for work a logical, or necessary, next step?

Embedded in stories of movement, women explained their social and economic positions, and revealed a more precarious, inflexible kind of relationship dynamic. In turn, women's relation to "traditional" roles shaped the types of constraints they encountered, and the kinds of movement they saw as possible. Yet even women intent on remaining independent faced contested situations with men, over questions of

provision and mobility. How do women conceive of the space available to them in a rural society that can be described as persistently patriarchal? Should any negotiability surprise us, given these defined ideas of women's roles? If men are modified providers for multiple women, as Hunter suggests, are they perhaps less invested in long-term commitments or even in child support? These questions cast the very relationships designed to sustain the rural homestead as insecure and unreliable.

Chapter 2: Flexible Household Arrangements in Movement?

As women discussed intersections between gender roles and movement, they also identified household obligations as central to their stories. For most women, the core of these obligations is raising their children, and movement becomes a way to seek support for children (Hunter 2010a). Even women who refused to marry recognized an element of "tradition" and responsibility in caring for children. I draw on narratives of mostly single women to investigate how Hunter's explanation compares to these accounts, and how accounts of male unreliability impel movement along certain motives. My informants seemed to enjoy the "fairly flexible arrangements" that Hunter conceives, and in their movements, relied on a constellation of factors. Some women alluded to distant relationships, and all of my informants relied on households—welfare grants and mothers specifically—as key support structures as they "pivoted" around multiple sites and negotiated attachments. Many women spoke more explicitly about searching for work and remitting, or about family members engaged in these roles; their movements were guided by obligations to children, characterized by a balance of support and reliance.

These narratives are also fraught and uncertain. Although their movements reflected a degree of flexibility and creativity, reconfiguring prescribed roles or reappropriating household resources, my informants still indicated moving within a confined space. Grants and other sources of income were not enough to propel upward mobility, or make possible relocation to urban spaces. Women migrated within a search for security, far more often than to advance education or pursue a stable career. And all

of these women had returned home at some point, which revealed in their narratives an element of constraint or obligation.

Support at the homestead for migrant women

Women discussed households in terms of children and extended families, more than as a physical place. Lee (2009) suggests that the attachments urban-based women form may be less physically rooted in the land and more mobile, manifesting as connections to individuals. At the same time, my rurally based informants also conveyed their strong "home attachments" rooting them in the Eastern Cape. Crush et. al. (2010) argues that migrant women's connections may be more complex and that they remit more frequently or consistently than do men. As women discussed both the physical and relational attachments they form during periods of staying and moving, many of them revealed a deeper process of negotiating their own place within the household, as well as their stake in its future.

Most of my informants relayed a dilemma—that women were expected to raise their children, and often wanted to, but that migration for work was sometimes the only option to support their children. Because so few jobs existed in the area, migration and work often became synonymous, women required to "reposition" themselves to fulfill their roles. As Lindeka explained:

> It's difficult [living here], because I'm not working and there's no source of income. I'm struggling to raise my own kid, that's why I decided to go away.

In some ways, this predicament echoes that of migrant men; supporting a rural homestead in divided, capitalist society required leaving it and creating a life elsewhere.

As women's commitments to sustaining households take on mobile dimensions, a similar, parallel type of support network based in the household has emerged (Posel and van der Stoep 2008:8). Reinforcing these complex decisions, grants and consistent family support facilitate women's movement, providing a kind of "infrastructure" in a mother's absence. Paradoxically, the sustenance of a household beyond the basic level of survival may depend on women's movement, yet movement is impossible without at least some basic infrastructure in place.

Mothers and mothers-in-law (*amakhulu*) in most cases took responsibility for caring for their grandchildren, reappropriating their monthly pension grants to this end. Often, smaller child support grants (CSGs) supplemented their incomes. In many cases, cousins and siblings were raised in the same household. Women who left seeking work often went alone; those making visits would often bring their "small one," up until the child was old enough to have to pay for transport, which was usually at about age four. Often, the children staying at home were school-age, and could continue in their hometown school, cared for by a *makhulu* or extended family, although they occasionally moved to stay with family in other villages.

Women explained their decisions to leave their children behind in various ways, yet their narratives all reiterated that there was support at home, and a lack of support away. Noneka talked about challenges that convinced her to leave her children at home:

> It's hard when you're not working [in the city] to look after the kids. [If I went again], the small one I would take along, but [would] leave the other kids here to attend school, they are in Grades 5 and 6…[It's] quite easy to raise kids here in the home, unlike there,

> because of the support of family. If there is a problem with the kids, my mother [tells] me, *no, it's going to be okay*.

Nonkonzo described this dilemma in her own terms:

> It's hard to support five children. My mother and father were working at that moment, so it was easy to go, [for them] to raise the kids…my mother gave me the transport [money] to take a bus from Mthatha. I was nervous to leave, I didn't know that place, or what will happen to me…
>
> Being away from my children, I was thinking about them: even if I'm eating something, I'm thinking about my kids, what are they eating now?…All those kinds of feelings. It was nice work, no problems with the job…there I was having, saving money weekly, unlike here. I don't even have money, I'm struggling to get something…I have the thought, I think I must go, looking for work, I'm thinking about the kids though. Where I'll keep them [if I take them along], who will take good care?
>
> Health problems brought me home…No one else is there. [I thought,] Who is going to cook, look after me, visit me? So I decided to go back home, here there is my mother.

In this way, matriarchs often provide vital support, in a way similar to how Murray (1981) discovers women taking on new roles within Basotho migrant families. This support was sometimes vital for women migrants themselves; just as Nonkonzo relied on her mother when she was sick, Onesimo shared the sense of family support that she enjoyed while living in the village:

> I don't have that intention [to relocate to my husband]. Here, my [husband's] parents are close by, they usually support me, unlike there…there's no one who will support you there, no one will assist you with everything, it's a kind of security here.

A *makhulu* might provide necessary support to allow her daughter to move, yet sometimes tried to rein in this movement under the same pretenses. Bukiwe recounted telling her mother when she first became pregnant while living in Pretoria:

> I had a boyfriend on that side, then I got two kids [with him]. It was hard, I had to explain this what happened to my mother. I decided to tell her that I'm pregnant, why, because I was afraid to just [arrive] with the baby, I had to firstly tell my mother. We just had a quarrel, she said *oh no, you are too far from me, who's going to look after you when you have that baby? But it's okay, because I won't change the situation, you're already pregnant now*.

Bukiwe's mother, aware that urban spaces could not provide the same support, called for her daughter's return, but was unsuccessful until a few years later.

Stretching support structures

While women portrayed this household infrastructure as reliable, small strains could also overstretch these support systems. Women could position themselves too flexibly around the home, relying on others to fulfill their obligations in their absence, or failing to weigh the demands of the household in a desire to enjoy some freedoms. Although Akhona had been to visit her boyfriend once in Marikana, where he worked, she typically stayed home and helped her mother care for her sister Nolitha's four children. Nolitha was in Rustenburg with her boyfriend. "If you travel in the future," I asked Akhona, "will you bring your kids?"

> I'll leave them in the home. I want to be alone [with my boyfriend] and will leave kids with my mother. My mother has a pension grant…it's helpful. But there are many of them [children] so there's just a little bit for each. There are six total, if I leave mine.

One pension grant might easily be stretched thin in attempting to feed so many mouths, especially in cases where boyfriends, like Akhona's, only sent remittances occasionally. Nomaxabiso, reflected more thoughtfully on what leaving children at home meant. Speaking for the group of neighbors with whom she sat, she told me:

> We prefer to go and visit for short time, because our families are here, our children are here—we prefer to stay here. We leave our kids at home, [but] it's hard because we have to employ the babysitter who's going to look after the kids. We can't just go and let the kids stay alone. Sometimes, it depends, [they can] stay with the *makhulu*.

We also met with a young woman, Thandiwe, who was looking after five young children in a poorly maintained rondavel. There was a crying toddler lying on the bed, sores on his body exposed, flies buzzing around him; Thandiwe, holding her own tiny, crying newborn, was hesitant and uncomfortable when we tried to initiate a conversation. After leaving shortly thereafter, Zine noted that two older sisters had been away in Rustenburg for a few years, "but you wouldn't know it." She also voiced the concern that the children were "not being looked after in the same way," that Thandiwe attended to her sisters' children less than her own. While families generally supported women migrating to earn money for the homestead, this situation uncovered palpable tensions, suggesting that urban movement for some women was an escape from the duties of childrearing in a rural homestead, or that migrating and settling might only happen at a cost.

My informants' flexibility and mobility in part rested on this home infrastructure, especially in cases where they felt otherwise unrestricted by husbands or boyfriends to make plans and decisions around movement. Yet while households provided necessary support, my informants' stories reveal more precarious situations that emerged when these networks became overstretched. The idea of "flexible arrangements" is useful and relevant, but requires a more careful analysis of the balance upon which such temporary movement depends.

Keeping the household "together": migrating to support children

Alongside relationships of reliance on households, women played roles in supporting their homes from afar. Considering gender expectations, and conceptions of "tradition," as possible constraints on women, we must also acknowledge instances where men have exited their roles as providers and left women struggling for support. Ideas of "tradition" may preclude women's movement in certain ways, or encourage it as a contingency plan. In the absence of a committed partner or a willing ex-boyfriend, many women described stepping into this vacancy to provide. Women may seek work, or enter into transactional relationships; they may also rely on distantly employed family members when they return home, creating a kind of rotating schedule of working and remitting that allows mobility and childrearing in parallel.

The accounts Khululwa, Noneka, and Bukiwe shared indicate how dispersed family members and varied types of support created a broader network within which women could move between places more flexibly. Khululwa, who had never left her

village and expressed no desire to do so, spoke about her sister Philiswa, who was away searching for work:

> It's hard to just go and look in another area to look for work, because you don't know that particular area, you don't know those particular people who are staying there, it's because they are desperate for work, so it's the only choice to go far to get some job.
>
> The kids' fathers are not paying a cent, we are being helped by child support grants…our parents are not working, and don't have pension grants…I've been watching [my sister's] child the whole time.

In similar ways to a *makhulu*, some women at home would take on the responsibility of an extra child or two, caring for them alongside their own. Philiswa had been away for about four years and was currently staying with her aunt outside Johannesburg. Khululwa and others discussed the availability of far-reaching support networks in urban spaces, a distant infrastructure of sisters, friends, extended family, or contacts that helped facilitate settlement, even if temporary. In the absence of a boyfriend to visit, women named sisters, uncles, and even neighbors, who provided them with assurance before they left home, and support while away. While Philiswa struggled to find work, she enjoyed some stability from distant connections that at least allowed her to search.

Noneka echoed this approach in her account of leaving and returning home. She detailed how her three children's fathers had limited roles in their lives:

> I just have a little bit of support from the fathers. My firstborn was staying with the father, but he doesn't have a job now, so I decided to take the baby back and stay with

> us. Second born, I have to talk [to the father] in order to get something…and even the little one, her father is not working.

Yet Noneka's family situation reflected a flexible yet balanced dynamic: her sister in Soweto was employed, as were her mother and sister in the village, and she worked a piece job while also taking care of her own children and sister's children. With all women supporting the family collectively—"there's a few families like that," she mentioned—Noneka enjoyed some guarantee of support despite the unreliability of her children's fathers.

Bukiwe, who lived in Pretoria making and selling dresses, talked about coming home from time to time, aided by her own income and most likely by her urban boyfriend's income, too:

> I was crying a lot of the time [when I first arrived]. When I phoned home, I was homesick and crying, pleading to come back…My children were home, [there were then] three of them. They were young at the time, staying with the *makhulu*…
>
> It wasn't difficult to come and go, [it] was so easy…My boyfriend was supportive of my [two younger] children, but now he has passed away. So I decided to come home, to look after my mother, and even for the kids.

Bukiwe described a shift in modes of providing and caretaking, as she assumed more responsibility when faced with a partner's death and a mother's aging. The ability to leverage support networks and make decisions about leaving and returning enabled these women to be agents in a way, even in cases where they decided that being at home was the best option.

However, Lindeka lived a very different experience. As the only potential breadwinner for her son, she was forced to seek out opportunities on her own. She described her one journey to East London, arranged by a neighbor:

> On the road I felt so nice, but when I was there I didn't stay well. There was a little bit of abuse, and then I just stayed for three weeks and returned home, it was bad…I had to hide that I'm going somewhere because my mother didn't like me going far from home, so had to hide myself and then go…I called her from [the nearest town]. She said *it's fine, when you feel bad you must come home, you're always welcome*. She didn't want me to go because I was going to meet a stranger's family, didn't know them…she was afraid of me going, [that it was] dangerous.
>
> I was a bit scared, who am I going to meet? What kind of place? What kind of family am I going to stay with? I get there and see, it's very bad, I was feeling scared of what is going to happen now…[My employer] was yelling at me, shouting, in control of the food. When I'd wake up, [she] didn't even give me the food, said you must work and then get given the food maybe at 3pm, all the day we are standing there. It was terrible.
>
> ["Would you try to go somewhere else in future?" I asked. "Would you try again?"] I want to go, but have a terrible feeling that hey, I might fail again, have the same thing.

Nonkonzo shared a similar story of expectations unsettled, in her case, upon her return home:

> I was sending money home, depositing to my mother. But when I arrived, I didn't see anything being done by that money. There were some groceries, maybe school things, but I see my kids not having anything, money's only buying some food.

Reflecting on households divided, women described uncertain circumstances, contingent on their success in navigating unknown spaces. Even in situations where

they leave home with a plan, their expectations may be upset, their remittances misspent or less effective than hoped.

These narratives reveal how women, still tied to household obligations to a large extent, actively engage with questions of reliance, and support, in their movements. Using movement as a strategy to alleviate rural insecurity, women can position themselves flexibly in relation to the rural homestead, and family members, too, redistribute resources or time to facilitate this goal. Yet this process is not straightforward. Leaving rural homes requires a careful calculus, where decisions must be deliberate but are often made without full information. In movement, women paradoxically identify possibilities for stability and security: there were some situations, however, where homes seemed fractured and insecure, with problems that migration could not alleviate, or even situations exacerbated by the absence of a family member. As I demonstrate in my final chapter, these core obligations to households and children specifically shape the types of urban experiences women may have, even when they are further from the hold of "traditional" expectations.

Chapter 3: Urban Experiences, Urban Ambivalence

Women may move within relationships with men to attempt to secure support, or they may shoulder responsibility themselves in providing for children, relying on home infrastructure to facilitate these moves. In both types of positioning, however, these women assume that movement, and urban spaces, may provide some type of solution to their rural insecurity. In this final chapter, I transition from a focus on how women move, and how they perceive their own positions, to how they experience and relate to urban spaces. I consider experiences of urban living and circular movement, as my informants described them, to engage with their perspectives on economic security and "traditional" attachments in context.

Many women discovered, upon arriving in urban spaces, that they were less constrained by rural "tradition," in their roles as wives, or how they were able to interact with others. Some of their accounts even intimated that the further the distance from homesteads, the more flexible homestead duties, or adherence to "tradition." Single women, too, encountered possibilities for distinct lifestyles. While not all women were "outward" oriented, or convinced that urban spaces were better than their homes, their experiences at the very least opened their perspectives to the idea of what urban life might encompass. Yet alongside the sense of novelty and exposure, their urban lives were contingent, and temporary. While movement may open women to new possibilities and alternate lifestyles, these experiences also force them to confront limitations if they remain in relationships and remain connected to their rural homes.

Urban novelty, opportunity, exposure

When I asked my informants about their impressions of urban places, they repeated the same phrase—"*kumnandi*" (it's nice)—yet, when prodded, shared a wider breadth of experiences. Most notably, women engaged in a constant comparison, a division of "here" and "there," that allowed them to make sense of their experiences by positioning them in contrast to their frames of reference. For almost all of these women who migrate to urban spaces, their experiences are confined to townships or shantytowns on the urban periphery, although some informants described encounters with the central business districts or town centers where they stayed. Many women used "Rustenburg" or "Gauteng" as a catch-all for referring to any of the surrounding mining towns to which they traveled; similarly, "Cape Town" often included places far from the actual city, such as Hermanus.

Some younger women depicted their trips to the city as experiences of opportunity, and relative luxury. Nandipha described going to stay with one of her sisters in Carletonville, where she worked in piece jobs for over a year before returning home.

> Here in the village, it is dark, there's no electricity. When I passed Mthatha, I saw some beautiful big lights, even some beautiful homes, and when I got to Gauteng—beautiful! And full of lights! Their lifestyle is not the same like ours…Life on the other side, you just sleep all day long, wake up by 10 o'clock, wash yourself, look after yourself, watch TV the whole day, go to the shops, go to window shop, shopping spree, all those things.

> There's not much opportunity here. Even if I can get a job here, I'm stuck in one place, so I just want to go forward, I don't want to be stuck in one place…It can't be too difficult,

> because I'm having my hands. If I have money to move, there I will start to make something…because I'm having my hands, if I don't get a job. Then I will do something, then after, keep my money, keep my money…

She spoke about braiding hair as one such job that could get her situated, seeing urban spaces as brimming with potential that was not present "here."

Akhona, having stayed with her boyfriend, reflected on the prospect of living there permanently:

> If I was in an RDP [government-built] house, I would go [permanently]…I stayed in a shack in Marikana…Our food style, way we living, it's different than that side. There was nice food, nice things, nice shops—quite different.

While married women moved within different channels, and under specific pretenses, they too encountered a degree of novelty, and flexibility, with respect to their typical duties while away. Onesimo described a relaxing experience, centered on a few household chores:

> My first time in a city, I was excited, not nervous, I wanted to see what kind of a place [it was]. It wasn't strange for me, it was what I was expecting to see. We stayed in a block, [with] flats in various blocks. Each day there [in Rustenburg] was a relaxing moment for me. I was staying alone, cooking for my husband, waiting for my husband to come home from work, washing myself, I was like *pretty*, it was good for me…there, everything is in the house [electricity, water], unlike here.

Nomaxabiso, one of Khanyisa's neighbors, echoed this idea:

> It's nice and enjoyable to go that side. For us, it's a resting place, because there's lack of work, unlike here...[here] we have to work, doing some home chores…Even if there is an

> occasion, we have to go and prepare for the occasional wedding or burial. There, you just cook for your husband.

Both Onesimo and Nomaxabiso explained that they also brought new clothes and gifts home each time, and that their relatives at home expected these items. These accounts reveal cities as perceived places of opportunity and novelty: where women would not be "stuck," and where wives could relax as their husbands worked, their relationships maybe more stable in one place.

These experiences also allowed women to relate to a broader context, and become exposed to new cultures and people. Saphokazi explained how her first visit enabled her to imagine another kind of life for herself and her children:

> [The first time,] I was interested to see how my husband was doing, where he was staying, is he far from town or near the town, all those things…I have many friends there, and neighbors. On weekends, my husband takes me to Maponya Mall, the big mall…We usually go there and spend time together, braaing the meat, having drinks…I prefer the urban space to live in—sanitation, toilets. It's difficult here with no water, you must *ukusinda* [apply fresh cow dung to the floor of one's hut]…
>
> I know that my kids will love that place, will love to watch TV. It will be enjoyable, [they] can explore new things.

Nosakhete, spent nine years with her children and husband in Hermanus, about an hour outside of Cape Town. She spoke to me in a mix of Xhosa and English, describing how migrating had allowed her, too, to envision an alternate life.

> It was like, I didn't have that dream to go far away, I was saying, 'it's just my place, I was born and bred here,' but then things have changed…Cape Town, it has jobs…[Western Cape] is the best, best province.

Noneka also discussed her experience in terms of novelty, and meeting others:

> My sister told me, *You'll see the actors on normal days you're in town, the actors in the soaps.* I saw some…Usually I was mixing myself [with others] while my sister was at work.
>
> [Zine added, with flair:] Then—obviously!—you will meet a boyfriend.

Although Noneka did not elaborate on her urban boyfriend, she went on to list the people she encountered in Orlando, the multicultural area of Soweto where she had stayed: Zulus, Tswanas, coloureds, and others. These women generally found this "mixing" exciting, although not all women shared their enthusiasm.

Urban ambivalence

Some women relayed a more complicated relationship to these unfamiliar spaces. My informants conveyed a general sentiment of urban living as contingent, and often, difficult to sustain; speaking from at home in the village, they assessed temporary movements as more realistic, given their circumstances. Specifically, these feelings of ambivalence might stem from an understanding of the urban periphery as a place of hardship and economic insecurity, its own version of the rural homestead, without any of the guarantees. Other times, women communicated a sense of missing home or feeling out of place. Themes of support and belonging intertwined with narratives of movement and urban spaces, exposing tensions that women experienced.

Vuyiswa described visiting the mines with her husband when they were first married, using the experience to convey own complicated relationship with urban living:

> My husband said, *we're going far, there's no bedroom there, we'll just use the mat, cardboard*…When we arrived and saw the shacks, the houses made with the corrugated iron, [I said,] 'Where are the rooms, I need the proper rooms man, how I am staying in this? Tomorrow I am going home.' But we didn't. My man was teasing me, when we arrived I saw the bed and the tables and the other things, and [after] some time, we go to the shop and buy a TV and fridge to have a proper house, it became *mnandi* [nice].

> [That place] changes…even the same place, more people, bigger, more houses, quite a huge place with busy people. It's nice for the short time, and when I want to go home, I want to go home…I want to stay with my husband sometimes, better to just *go* [to Rustenburg] maybe, and other times where I want to just be here.

While some women seemed to perceive urban spaces as "better," they also weighed their own experience in terms of social and economic constraints, and costs. Often urban spaces differed greatly from their initial expectations. Khuziwe admitted,

> I was expecting to see something better than the shacks, but I saw, oh, they are living in the shacks, it was bad for me…You have to be careful because the shacks are nearby, so you have to be sure about the direction. Maybe you can get lost if you don't know exactly where the shack is that belongs to you, so you have to be careful. It took me a long time to absorb that place.

Other women shared their impressions of living in a shack in briefer, but equally descriptive terms: "when it's hot, it's hot, when it's cold, it's cold, when it's raining, it's wet."

Social navigation, and language barriers, also presented their own challenges, especially when women sought to settle into a routine, or thought past short-term visits. Saphokazi and Vuyiswa explained to me that in Rustenburg,

> It's quite difficult due to the language. The Tswanas and all those kinds of people, they want us to talk Tswana or Sotho, or Shangaan, so it's difficult for us to interact, and relate, because these people don't speak Xhosa…[but it's] interesting too, when we come back, we catch a little bit of other languages.

> If you're staying there, [and you hear] someone talking Xhosa, you usually bond, have a relationship.

Within periods of coming and going, Onesimo conveyed a sense of unsettledness about adapting.

> It's difficult because I don't even speak their language or stay for a long time. So it's just when I'm trying to learn, then I'm home, and when I'm back, doesn't even [remember] how to speak.

The fragmented nature of her visits prevented her from settling into too familiar a place; in this sense, the idea of women having "multiple footholds" in different places is accurate, but individual experiences reveal certain disconnects.

Economic and employment insecurities

Contributing to this sense of ambivalence in social interactions and temporary movements was a presiding anxiety over money, and finding adequate funds for living. Women who relied on themselves or their sisters for support acknowledged how short-term piece jobs, or unforeseen circumstances, destabilized them. Wives of miners generally seemed more confident in their husbands' earning capacity, yet also shared stories of distress and uncertainty about mining strike activity, and gaining a foothold in an industry with physical fitness as its only requisite. Mines have long been the sites

of strikes in South Africa, a country with strong unions; recent strike waves have continued intermittently from 2009.

Nandipha spoke about the economic uncertainties that made her stay in Carletonville difficult:

> I didn't make it to get the real job, [just] small piece jobs. Sweeping at the shop maybe, if there's other people who are not working at that time, then I start working…[We were] staying in the suburbs there in the mining houses. No boyfriends or husbands, we were on our own…My older sister was employed permanently at the mines, now it was closed because they say that the owner took the money and ran away with [it], so the mine was closed, she has no job now…I want to go there someday, but I don't know how long, because [she's] not working, so I don't know when.

Noneka, too, shared this frustration, over her three years in Soweto:

> I was searching for work, didn't find any. I would usually go to church, stay cooking and cleaning while my sister was at work, visit some cousins…

Male employment was also volatile, as miners' wives intimated in their anecdotes of urban visits and experiences of "the strike." Beyond Marikana, their stories referred to a broader spectrum of strikes, based on timing of visits and diverse geographical locations. Zine explained to me how migrant men were forced to navigate a difficult network**:**

> You just go to the mines, and then search. Even others have to bribe, 2000 rand, to get work, they get money searching from parents, brothers…you have to bribe each and every department.

Saphokazi shared her own experience and perceptions of the risks of mine work, clarified from her visit:

> My first time in an urban area, it was so nice from the beginning. Then the strike happened there when I was on that side. It was bad, I was afraid that I might die…those guys were doing the door-to-door for the ones who were not attending the strike…My husband was with me in the house, he was striking also…
>
> It's dangerous work, the cage gets stuck or has to stay underground for so long. There may be big rocks falling, people dead under rocks and [it] takes long to find them. Many women are nervous about their husbands, if they are late…I usually speak to my husband by phone, all the time.

Vuyiswa, too, conveyed her concerns over strike activity and its consequences:

> I was at home when it was happening, I was worried and saying, 'you must come home.' My husband was saying, *I won't come until we resolve this thing,* but I was worried, because many people died there [in Marikana].
>
> [The strike was] two months…the owners of the mine said to stop, fired them. So now my husband's searching for work, for four months now. I'm getting a child support grant, but it's difficult still…I can't go [visit] soon, no money up there. If you are there, it's money first everything you do. If there's no money, it's difficult.

Nomaxabiso shared her own perspective on urban experiences and the contingent nature of employment in the mines.

> I was there last year, during the [four-month platinum] strike…[The men] were always on the ground, negotiating about their rates, police officers came and said after fifteen minutes [they] would be arrested, so they had to clear out, had to go.

These anecdotes revealed a few interrelated considerations—how men's safety is threatened through both their jobs and their political involvement, and ultimately how contingent urban wages, and remittances, can be, regardless of the earners.

Some reflections on homecoming

Most of my informants dealt with these benefits and downsides in equal measure, portraying their experiences away from home as multidimensional. Some women spent a few months away, others several years, carving out space for themselves in urban peripheries: yet those who returned to their villages described a number of reasons for their return. While not all were returned home permanently—many women merely saw this time as temporary—they each shared stories of homecomings. My informants, in their stories, reflected on movement away, and how they managed tensions between traditional roles and expectations, between opportunities for agency and measures of constraint. They also revealed these themes in their stories of return.

Women who were married, or were invested in homesteads of their own, discussed their responsibilities to maintain the home in the long term: many said to me, "who's going to take good care of the home?" There were also doubts about the durability of alternative household arrangements, women reiterating they had to get home "because of the kids," and that children might be best off with a more stable upbringing. Sibulele told me that despite her wish to bring her children to relocate in Limpopo,

> My children are still at school—it's difficult for them to be up there, also for the language barrier. They have [to learn] the Sepedi up there [in urban schools], not English, so it's better for them to study here.

Nosakhete explained how she left a job and urban life behind when her husband found a job with a better salary:

> My husband got a job in Free State, it was too far for me to stay in Cape Town. I can't live in Cape Town whilst my husband is working [far away], and we are earning a little cash…now he says I must stay at home [in the village]…It's difficult, and bad, it's very bad. He sends money home every month, but it's not enough.

Despite financial insecurity in the village, being there might offer a stronger sense of security in other ways, and to Nosakhete's husband, a guarantee of traditional relations.

Other women felt that there were few other options, or that a return might be best. Nompazamo recounted her return from Cape Town, away from a challenging relationship:

> I had a quarrel with my Cape Town boyfriend, which made me leave Cape Town…that man cheated on me, so I decided to come back…I felt like I might come home, feeling *I want to beat this guy*, usually have a fight, but [I was] thinking some evil things now, so I want to go.

Noneka discussed the strangeness of acclimatizing to a rural lifestyle after being away for so long:

> Sometimes here in the home, it felt strange to adapt, because of money…on that side, you have to buy each and every moment. Even when you are going to cook you have to buy something, not like here. ["Do you miss being there?"] Yes! [She laughed.] [I asked,

"Why did you return?"] I was homesick. And when I returned, I got a piece job for the whole year.

Khuziwe, recently divorced, did not foresee herself traveling or migrating now that she was unattached again:

> The kids can go and explore the world. But I'm fine here.

These testimonies extend from the village to the urban periphery, and back again. Women deliberate their options for moving, assessing the potential for flexibility against their limitations, and urban experiences add texture to these considerations. While women may see urban spaces as places of greater agency, allowing more flexible renditions of "tradition," we cannot assume they find these spaces preferable. Women's movement between and among these spaces, and their decisions about their own roles and identities, are far more complex; considering children as key responsibilities, they may be less inclined to settle or fully renounce their traditional obligations. Despite hopes or plans of staying, or returning, their experiences reveal a more contingent existence.

Can we view these experiences as undermining the strength of traditional institutions or controls? And are they as equally relevant when women return home? We might suggest that the very understanding of urban life as more complex and contingent renders these women less powerful actors. Over a longer history of rural-urban movement, we can identify a more concerted pattern of urban migration and settlement; yet my rurally based interviews reveal a different undercurrent. My

informants' temporary lives in urban spaces may reflect a more temporary contestation of perceived limits, rather than a concerted effort to abandon one life for another.

Conclusion

This study, while limited in scope, illuminates central tensions that rurally based African women confront as they move. By focusing in on the stories of 19 women living in the former Transkei, I offer a more nuanced perspective on women's migration from rural South Africa. Mark Hunter advances an explanation of women moving in search of flexibility and autonomy, and accessing resources through transactional relationships and a state-driven welfare system. While my informants reproduce these arrangements in certain ways, their stories reveal more constraints than Hunter depicts, and more limitations in how they negotiate their movements. Their narratives revolve around the paradox I introduced in my opening paragraphs—that women felt compelled to move to mitigate rural insecurity, yet in this movement they risked further fragmenting and destabilizing the rural homestead.

How can individual experiences contribute to broader narratives, and analysis? Beyond the content of each of my informants' diverse accounts of movement—the negotiation of a visit, the sight of shacks greeting them upon arrival, the economic difficulties that brought them home—they conveyed a deeper sense of actively contesting spaces, in weighing options for alleviating insecurity. As Nonkonzo told me at the end of her interview, "If I could, we would already be gone [to] Cape Town." Considered collectively, these interviews reveal the ways that moving makes women more acutely aware of their own flexibility and agency, as well as of the constraints that confront them.

Returning to Bozzoli, we see that these women engage in "domestic struggles" of their own, negotiating their positions within their families and society, claiming new

responsibilities and opening new spaces in the act of movement. They may consider hopes for urban futures, but most of them take seriously their obligation to their partners and children, and this commitment grounds them in particular ways. Moreover, while women may be flexible in certain circumstances, their roles are not entirely malleable, their systems of support still guided and shaped by a dominant orientation towards their perceptions of the constraints of "tradition." And while tradition provides a framework for their understandings of their roles and their freedom of movement, more immediate factors shape the actual paths that rural women might follow in leaving, or returning home—family support networks, monthly grants, inconsistent remittances, or a child on the way.

Following themes that emerged from my informants' accounts of movement, I have focused on gender roles, household obligations, and urban spaces as both conceptual and physical "sites" where women experience these tensions. While analytically useful, these distinctions gloss over some of the contradictions that my informants communicated. Women may have to accept male infidelity to ensure support for their children. They may have to engage tradition in different ways when transitioning from single life to becoming a married *makoti*. Even Zine conveyed the difficulties of her own position. Confident and independent, she did not want to have to rely on men for support: yet she also found herself in a predicament, trying to adequately provide for her daughter and simultaneously find the means to help her pursue her own goals of further education and employment. These experiences form different strands of the same testimony, yet they come together to form a more complete picture of a women's life in these villages.

My dissertation has proposed some routes to qualify Hunter, Lee, Akileswaran and Lurie, Cole, and others who promote an image of expanding freedom for women, and has also elaborated on the notion of "domestic struggle" in a particular context. It explores individual women's accounts to weave together a more complete understanding of the social landscape they inhabit and encounter; it also points to some unanswered questions for further research. Despite the broad reach of the government's grant system, women struggle to support their families beyond the basic level of survival that it affords. Additional research may illuminate ways that women orient themselves in relation to grants, and how they identify opportunities for upward mobility. Further interviews investigating the effects of education and family support networks might provide a clearer understanding of social mobility in recent years. A more complete map of networks and relationships, bridging urban and rural spaces, as well as "movers" and "stayers," could produce a more textured perspective on women's experiences and motivations. Women will continue to move within a trajectory, carving out new spaces or renegotiating traditional roles; their voices and stories deserve to be heard, as they inspire an important narrative within this scholarship.

Oral References

Saphokazi: 26, married, with one child. She is Zine's first cousin. She lives in Putuma, and has traveled to Rustenburg three times to visit her husband, the first time in 2011.

Vuyiswa: 33, married, with two children. She is Saphokazi's neighbor in Putuma. She has been to Rustenburg many times over the past decades, visiting two or three times a year.

Lindeka: 24, single, with one child. She is from Lubanzi. Last year, she pursued a job arranged by her neighbor outside of East London; however, she faced an abusive employer and returned after three weeks away.

Nonkonzo: 31, single, with five children. She is Lindeka's neighbor in Lubanzi. She spent two years in Franschoek, working on the apple orchards, between 2007-2009. She returned because she fell ill.

Akhona: 24, single, with two children. She stays in Lubanzi. Akhona left for four months in 2013 to visit her boyfriend (and father of her children) who is a mineworker in Marikana.

Nandipha: 23, single, with one child. She lives in Putuma, near Zine. She spent one year in Carletonville with her older sisters. She returned when her sister Khayakazi lost her job when the mine where she worked was closed down.

Khululwa: 31, single, with two children. She is from Putuma, neighbors with Nandipha and Zine, and has never migrated. She is currently employed in the kitchen at the local school. Her sister Philiswa is away looking for work; Khululwa watches her child.

Nompazamo: 32, single, no children. She stays with her sister in Zithulele. She has lived in East London with a boyfriend, whom she now visits, but left for two years between 2005-2007 to stay with another boyfriend in Cape Town.

Noneka: 28, single, with three children. She lives near Nompazamo. She lived in Soweto with her sister, who is employed in the mines, from 2010-2012. She currently has a piece job at home, and looks after her sisters' children also.

Khanyisa: in her late 30s, married, with seven children. She lives in Zithulele, and has gone yearly to visit her husband, who is employed in Bleskop Mines, since 2000. She is employed with a local NGO as a home health worker.

Nomaxabiso: 30, married, with three children. She is Khanyisa's neighbor. She first visited her husband in Rustenburg in 2006, for two months, and has returned a few times since.

Nosapho: 46, married, with six children, also a neighbor of the other two women. She did not give details about her visits, but spoke about fears of her husband being "taken by others."

Nobonke: in her mid 40s, with two children. She visited Mpumalanga, where her husband was employed. Since his death in 2010, she has moved back to her natal homestead in Zidindi, and visits her sister in Klerksdorp sometimes.

Sibulele: 31, married, with four children. She lived and worked in Kraaifontein, Cape Town, for four years with her boyfriend; in 2010, she returned to Zidindi and they married. She was heading to Limpopo the following day, where he has worked in a mine since 2012.

Onesimo: 22, married in 2011 and lives in Zithulele. She has no children yet, and has visited her husband twice in Northern, where he is employed. She lives in a house on her husband's family homestead, and her brother-in-law is a local headman.

Bukiwe: 39, single, with six children. She is from Khotyana, and lived in Pretoria between 2001 and 2005, making and selling dresses. Her boyfriend worked in Cullinan mines, and they had two children together; she returned home when he died.

Nosakhete: 35, married, with three children. She lives in Khotyana. She lived with her husband in Hermanus for nine years, and returned when her husband got a job in Welkom.

Khuziwe: 28, divorced, with three children. She is from Khotyana, and visited Rustenburg in 2004. Over the past year, she has been experiencing a difficult divorce and battle for support. She works at a local clinic as a home-based carer.

Zine: 23, single, with one child. She is from Putuma, and lives with her four sisters and mother, and their children. She has visited places for various purposes, and hopes to migrate more permanently at some stage.

Not interviewed but referenced: **Thandiwe** is in her early 20s and looks after five children, at least one of whom is her own. She lives in Putuma. Her sisters had both been in Rustenburg with boyfriends for some years.

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