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MISSING MEN?

THE DEBATE OVER RURAL POVERTY AND WOMEN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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MISSING MEN?
THE DEBATE OVER RURAL POVERTY AND WOMEN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Abstract. Migrant labour in Southern Africa has been historically associated with rural poverty and a high incidence of women-headed households. Poverty alleviation approaches to social policy ask whether in this context rural women-headed households are poorer than those headed by men. Ample research from the region shows that the answer is no, not always, a fact once more confirmed here in an analysis of the Botswana case. This case suggests, however, that the wrong question is being asked. The incidence of both women-headed households and rural poverty has increased with the polarisation of agrarian production and the exclusionary restructuring of the migrant labour system. We need to ask not whom to target but what should be done when capital no longer needs the labour that it pulled from rural households over so many generations.

INTRODUCTION: GENDER, HOUSEHOLDS AND RURAL POVERTY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

A rich and complex literature on women-headed households in Southern Africa emerged in the 1970s out of strategic concern with agrarian transformation in migrant labour systems. It was backed by theoretically sophisticated anthropological case-study research, the first income and expenditure surveys, and a political climate that gave both feminism and socialism analytical space. It showed both the central importance of women in farming and the systematic difficulty that many women-headed households had in improving their agricultural production for want of labour and the regular cash-flow needed for investment.

Since the 1980s, the literature on women-headed households has attained broad recognition in the world of development agencies, but in doing so it has come to focus narrowly on the relationship between women-headed households and poverty. Emphasis on the feminisation of poverty reflects in part recognition that the real and growing misery of women and children in many rural households in Southern Africa must be addressed today; confidence that poverty will disappear with the revolutionary transformation in the countryside has been lost.

Yet the poverty focus also reflects acceptance of the terms of structural adjustment programmes under which the state should programmatically seek to reduce its role in social provisioning to "target" only the poorest of the poor. These are defined as the structural poor - those who cannot enter the market under favourable terms - women, children, the old and the invalid. The literature on women-headed households has thus been both integrated and technicized in World Bank-sponsored studies on the social dimensions of adjustment. The principal question

has become: Will assistance channelled to rural women-headed households reach the destitute, all the destitute, and only the destitute?

The debate on women-headed households in Southern Africa is part of a much broader ideological discussion. As Henrietta Moore [1994: 26] has pointed out, global patterns of accumulation have meant high levels of unemployment for unskilled workers, a corresponding decline of the male breadwinner role, and discrimination against women both in the labour market and in the organisation of public transfers. Moore argues forcefully that the contemporary debate around the family is really addressing and reshaping people's conceptions of the appropriate roles for the state, the market, public institutions and the family in social provisioning. In Southern Africa, structural exclusion from stable, unionised, wage employment of many rural people - women and men, young and old - is not exclusion is not from the market *per se*. Rural livelihoods are based on patterns of consumption that imply both regular wage income and rural production. The programmatic neo-liberalism of international financial institutions denies to states the right to challenge global structures of accumulation and relegates to the family responsibility for dealing with their economic and social consequences.

In this paper I try to extricate the debate on poverty and women-headed households in Southern Africa from neo-liberal discourse and its stereotyped set of policy recommendations on targeting and market-led growth. I argue that both rural poverty and the high incidence of women-headed households, derives from exclusionary and polarising structures of accumulation. I begin by examining the critique that has been levelled against earlier structuralist work on the relationship between migration, poverty and household organisation in Southern Africa. I suggest that in deepening our understanding of gender relations, agency and diversity we have somehow lost sight of class, accumulation, structure and the historically general. I then attempt a rapprochement through analysis of the relationship between poverty and women-headed households in one of the countries of the region, Botswana.

I have chosen to focus on Botswana for two reasons[1]. First, these are issues that require both qualitative and comparative quantitative data; anthropological case-studies, household surveys, and conceptual debates on women headed households in Botswana are particularly rich[2]. Second, Botswana appears to be a regional anomaly that requires explanation, combining political stability and an atypically high rate of economic growth with a very high incidence of women-headed households.

On the basis of the Botswana case, I argue that although it is true - as the literature on household organisation in Southern Africa suggests - that we cannot assume that women-headed households are more likely to be poor than are those headed by men, they are poor in different ways, perhaps more vulnerable and certainly less likely to be rich. These are not entirely trivial

results. Yet if we take existing households as our frame of reference for understanding rural poverty, we miss the point, for women and for men. In the context of long-term structural unemployment, some men disappear analytically because many poor men do not form households at all. Agrarian class polarisation and the marginalisation of smallholder cultivation drive poor rural households, whether headed by men or by women, towards a common level of poverty. Deciding which group is poorer may be an important policy issue for those who take poverty as a given to be "alleviated", but an entirely insufficient focus for public action to address the contradictory transformations of migrant labour systems in Southern Africa today.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON MIGRANT LABOUR, POVERTY AND WOMEN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The high quality of the discussion around poverty and women-headed households in Southern Africa reflects the engagement with strategic political concerns of those engaged in the debate and the centrality of the issue within the region. Despite sharp disagreement on the methods for measuring the actual number of women-headed households and their relative poverty, there is no doubt that there are many, and that many are poor[3]. Policy debates around land redistribution in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe have focussed on the position of woman-headed households, as has the debate over pension reform in South Africa. World Bank financed poverty studies discuss whether income support or food subsidy schemes targeted to reach women-headed households in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Malawi will reach the poorest of the poor.

Here I am concerned with Southern Africa as a regional labour system and focussing principally on Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Southern Mozambique, and South Africa, thus including the former Bantustans and those countries that have ongoing contract labour agreements with South Africa[4]. The broader region has a great deal of historical and cultural unity. Languages, systems of production and property, and pre-colonial political institutions are similar. Cultural boundary crossing is relatively easy, and there has been a great deal of intra-regional movement in the last two centuries. Peasant production has generally been based on integrated systems of rain-fed cultivation and raising of livestock, particularly cattle, with use of oxen for ploughing prevalent since the 1920s. Commercial settler farms or plantations took over most of the prime irrigable agricultural land. Land reserved for African peasants was administered under communal tenure by chiefs within a dualistic political system. Exchange of cattle as bridewealth links marriage to political and economic process within formally patrilineal systems.

Historically, however, the unity of this region has been defined by labour accords, rather than its political or cultural boundaries. As the South African mines emerged as the main employer

of wage-labour within the region, accords between mining capital and colonial powers early in this century set the twenty-second parallel as the boundary for formal contractual recruitment of migrant workers for the South African mines. This line cut across Mozambique and Zimbabwe, establishing the northern boundary of the South African labour reserves.

Within this region, over several generations, families were systematically divided as young men were recruited from rural areas for contract wage work on South Africa mines and plantations, leaving young women and the middle-aged and elderly to farm. Rural women were responsible for basic food provisioning and for the care of the young and the old. It is thus generally accepted that historically the high proportion of women-headed or divided households in Southern Africa (whatever the importance variously attributed to pre-colonial forms of domestic organisation and property, cultural images of marriage, children and sexuality), is the heritage of the migrant labour system.

The debate around women-headed households in Southern Africa is therefore not over whether there is a relationship between migrant labour and the composition and organisation of households, but rather how to think about this relationship and its dynamics. Not only the academic literature but also strategic political debates have focussed on the relationship between poverty, gender, class, household organisation and social welfare in migrant labour systems. Different positions reflect changing approaches to the migrant labour system itself, and these changes are rooted both in wider ideological shifts in social analysis and to real changes in the migrant labour system over the last three decades.

Work done by structural-functionalist anthropologists in Southern Africa at the end of the colonial period was progressive in that it challenged the idea of traditional tribal rural Africa. It traced the ways in which the movement of migrant men tied together two apparently different worlds. It tended, however, to emphasize the functional, even equilibrated interdependence of capital accumulation and rural livelihoods in the migrant labour system. Colson, for example, [1962] argued that the periodic absence Tonga men in migratory labour in Zambia opened up new areas of autonomy and control for women both in their agricultural work and in their social lives.

Within this tradition, both the prevalence of women-headed households and their relative poverty were viewed as a phase in the overall life history of households. The concept of the developmental cycle of the domestic group described a dynamic process in migrant labour systems:when a man is working as a migrant wage-worker, the rural households barely produces its own subsistence; when the migrant returns home after investing his savings to buy cattle and a plough, and to build a good house, the household becomes a surplus-producing, apparently typical, peasant household. Within the developmental cycle of the household, it is normal that there will be a time when women are *de facto* heads of household. Thus if we take a cross-section

of households at one point in time, the proportion of women-headed households may appear to much higher than if we compare household histories. Structural-functionalist anthropological studies also emphasized the range of domestic groups in Africa, with conjugal units embedded in extended families and lineages. Thus the fact that a woman is living with her children without a conjugal partner need not signify that the household in which they live is poor.

Marxist work done on migrant labour systems in the 1970s and early 1980s [*cf.* Wolpe 1972, Legassick 1977] similarly observed the systemic relationship between rural and urban life established by male migrant workers, but saw the system as contradictory and hegemonically capitalist, leading eventually to the undermining of any autonomous production of subsistence in rural communities. It emphasized the violence of laws used to take men out of agrarian production, to keep women in it and to drive down wages. It captured the reality of passbooks, forced removals, landless households, overgrazed pastures and high rates of infant mortality in many of South Africa's Bantustans. Further, applying Marxist work on the development of capitalism in Europe, it saw commoditisation leading to polarisation of the peasantry, though development of an indigenous capitalist class was impeded by the political weight of settlers. It focussed on the emergence of a proletarianised rural stratum without any real alternative to wage-labour.

Within this tradition, the conceptual distinction between women who are heads of household in their own right (*de jure*) and those who are heads only in the absence of men (*de facto*) assumed greater importance. Where *de facto* responsibility is vested in women, whether or not the rural household is poor will depend on two things: what income migrant men earn and whether or not they contribute to the sustenance of the household and invest earnings in its resources. Given the low wages paid to black workers under the apartheid economy, however, it is reasonable to expect that a high proportion of households headed *de facto* by women would be poor. When women are *de jure* heads of household, before their own sons are grown, they miss the labour of men, regular wage remittances, and legal access to resources in patriarchal systems of local authority. Thus these households would almost certainly be poor.

Much of the research on migration and household organisation in southern Africa in the 1980s was motivated by or responded to the structuralist paradigm of the 1970s. Though theoretically diverse, even eclectic, it makes a common indictment of earlier structuralist Marxist work, namely that it is totalising and reductionist - tending to see all development as a uniform working out of the logic of capital accumulation. There are four main points to this critique: first that structuralist approaches reduced gender to class; second, that they minimised the importance and complexity of rural differentiation; third that they ignored regional specificity, and fourth that they imposed a rigid teleological model of proletarianisation. Under the force of this critique, the analytical homogeneity of women-headed households has crumbled: we no longer assume that all

within women-headed households have equal access to resources, nor that the economic position of all such households is essentially the same, nor that the *de jure/de facto* distinction is sufficient to capture the major differences between them.

- **gender**

In focussing on women as those forced to stay at home by capital to reproduce cheap labour, structuralist analysis minimised the importance of contradictory gender relations within rural households and communities The division of families was derived from the logic of capital accumulation; hence the contradictory gender dynamics involved in migration, return and remittance were analytically ignored. In historical research on women migrants Bozzoli [1983, 1991] argued that women faced and resisted different kinds of domination - by chiefs, husbands and brothers as well as by employers and pass-laws. She showed how different forms of gender hierarchy together shaped who migrated and who stayed at home, and she saw resistance in women's migration from rural areas [see also Izzard 1985]. Following Bozzoli, Van Driel [1994], Jackson [1996: 492] and other feminist writers have emphasized that women-headed households are often a product of women's own initiative and that, as Colson [*op cit.*] pointed out so many years ago, women living in women-headed households may appreciate their relative autonomy.

These studies in Southern Africa were harbingers of the emphasis on agency within contemporary feminist theory, and rejection of the women/poverty couplet implicit in the WID approach to development. Jackson [1996] points out that the focus on women-headed households in the poverty and development literature is a manifestation of a deeper tendency to reduce gender to poverty, as if anti-poverty programmes will somehow necessarily improve the position of women. Geisler [1994], has used the experience of a typical WID project in Zambia (in which potential beneficiaries had to guarantee that they either were unmarried at the time or intended to remain so for the duration of the project) to mount a polemical attack against schemes targeted to improve the efficiency of women-headed households. She argues that such programmes do not address more fundamental gender issues within households, and suggests that rather than concentrating on improving the efficiency of women farmers, programmes should look at the reasons for the inefficiencies of men farmers, including their protected priority in property rights.

- **differentiation of rural production**

Marxist structuralist work on Southern Africa emphasised that capital refashioned rural households by pulling cheap labour out of them, thus ultimately undermining agricultural production. It did not give much importance to the ways in which wage remittances led to the differentiation of rural production itself and thus did not easily admit the possibility that differentiation of labour markets could lead to significant differentiation in the organisation of rural livelihoods. The underlying worker/peasant opposition in analysis of rural class structure did not adequately sort out the complexity that researchers found in micro-studies of rural areas.

Work done by Cooper[1979] and others for Botswana's National Migration Study in the 1970s rejected rural/urban dualism, showing that people with regular high-wage income were investing in rural production. Similar findings emerged in Murray's [1981] moving household histories from Lesotho, from the work histories of miners in Southern Mozambique [First 1983][5], and from the Swaziland Rural Household Survey [*cf.* de Vletter 1983, Low 1986, Russell 1993]. Low [*op cit*], for example, argued that investment and cropping patterns of households reflected not only input costs, the relative prices of food and cash crops, and the labour available to the household, but also the position of different household members in labour markets.

- **regional specificity**

Structuralist work on migrant labour tended to take South Africa as its point of reference, but motivated a wave of new regional research on the impact of migration in rural areas. As the results emerged, it became clear that there was a great deal of regional variation in the working of the migrant labour system and the position of women-headed households within it. Peters [1983, 1984], for example, in her debate with Kerven [1983] over women-headed households in Botswana, argued that one had to recognize that the ways in which crop production, livestock-keeping and wage or self-employment interacted would differ between Lesotho and Botswana, and between different regions of Botswana. The Carnegie Commission studies on rural poverty in South Africa documented substantial regional variation in the organisation and impact of migrant labour within South Africa itself [*cf.* Sharp 1984]. With a broad range of regional research, we are now more prepared to see how differences in systems of political regulation of labour movement, in agrarian production and rural settlement patterns, and in patterns of industrialisation and urbanisation are reflected in patterns of migrant labour and household composition.

Political regulation of labour mobility has functioned differently for different groups of migrants and over time. Mozambicans were recruited on contract, without the right to bring their families with them; hence it was difficult for Mozambican women to migrate to South Africa. Women from the former Bantustans, Lesotho and Botswana did, however, find jobs, particularly as domestic workers, in South African cities, until the tightening of influx control and sharpening border controls in the 1970s made it particularly difficult for rural women to migrate. The end of apartheid has meant the demise of the Bantustans and rights of free movement for South Africans within South African territory. Bilateral treaties between South Africa and the governments of Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique governing the movement of migrants on a temporary contract basis have, however, been maintained; thus most documented workers from these countries still remain temporary migrants. As lower-skilled mineworkers and farmworkers, they must be repatriated when their contract expires, they do not qualify for permanent residence or citizenship, and they cannot bring families with them [South Africa, 1996]. Whereas large

number of elderly rural people in South Africa, both men and women, receive pensions, former migrants from the neighbouring countries do not.

National and sub-regional labour markets reflect different kinds of agrarian structures, shaping the organisation of labour markets and the working of the migrant labour system. The extent to which peasant production has constituted either an alternative to migration or even a subsistence safety net varies across the region. In South Africa, almost all prime commercial land was appropriated by settler capital or the state, sharply limiting peasant production and turning many rural families first into tenants and then into resident farm-workers. In southern Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, much irrigable commercial land was appropriated by plantations and settler farms, and rural wage-labour developed, but absolute landlessness is less common than in South Africa. In Swaziland the buying back of commercial land by the Swazi nation after Independence renewed peasant production. Lesotho has no settler farms, but the defining of its boundaries left no land reserves so that both soil exhaustion and absolute landlessness have compromised peasant production. In Botswana control over water, and hence accessible grazing land, determines who among the peasantry can survive the risky vagaries of mixed cropping and commercial livestock production.

Differences in the agrarian basis of rural communities are reflected in vast differences in settlement patterns, which in turn themselves affect the basis of rural livelihoods. In some parts of the region, people still live in dispersed homesteads or small hamlets, within good walking distance of fields and pasture. Others live in large sprawling settlements like the "urban villages" of Botswana or northern Transvaal, or the communal villages created in the Limpopo Valley in Mozambique after Independence. Here fields are often distant, land scarce, and a large part of the population dependent on non-agricultural sources of income, including the service jobs that markets in such settlements create - brewing, hawking, house-repair, tailoring.

Industrial development also shapes variation in the working of the migrant labour system, providing some workers, including women, with alternative wage employment, and has made skill and education an advantage in labour markets. With the development of manufacturing in South Africa, the mines depended on cheap contracted foreign labour, whereas migrants from the Bantustans were more likely to find permanent jobs in urban industry. Port-work and industrial development in Maputo in the 1950s and 1960s provided an alternative to oscillating mine migration for workers, some women as well as men, from Southern Mozambique. Swaziland, and, less effectively, Lesotho, expanded jobs for both men and women in import substituting industries in the 1970s. The development of new diamond and mineral mining complexes in Botswana, and the subsequent growth of new urban centres has similarly led to the growth of wage-labour employment within Botswana itself.

- **historical specificity**

The studies of the 1980s criticized structuralist theories for working with a teleological model of inevitable proletarianisation[6]. that could not recognize the significance of historical change. It is no longer assumed that the Southern African labour force has followed a continuous homogenous pattern of increasing proletarianisation based on the cheap labour policies of apartheid, or that the decline of non-wage contributions to household subsistence is inevitable [Martin and Beittel 1987]. Murray [1987: 239], reflecting on earlier work on regional labour migration, argued that it did not take sufficient account of the emergence of a relative elite of professional mine labour migrants and a generation of young and middle-aged men engulfed by structural unemployment, and overlooked the importance of the developing peri-urban informal sector[7] .

Perhaps the most dramatic shifts within regional industrial labour markets have been in the South African mines themselves [de Vletter 1985; Taylor,1990; Crush *et al.* 1991, Davies and Head 1995]. For complex political and economic reasons, the mines have turned increasingly to the recruitment of skilled, relatively permanent workers. This has meant stagnation, or even some retrenchment in the overall size of the mine labour-force, growing internalisation of recruitment, and the transformation of the Lesotho labour force into a commuter labour-force. Mozambican miners in the higher grades have been kept on, but there is little recruitment of novices. The stagnation of mine recruitment, and particularly the sharp decline in the recruitment of young foreign recruits, does not mean migrant labour has declined in importance. Young men from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and other countries of the region continue to go to South Africa, but now they are undocumented workers, their numbers unknown and the terms of their migration uncontrolled by formal contract agreements.

The last two decades of regional conflict have also shaped people's experience within the migrant labour system. Larger numbers of Mozambicans fled to South Africa and were formally registered as refugees in the Bantustans; others remained unregistered and sought employment on farms and in towns. Some young Mozambicans without access to formal wage employment found an alternative in the armies fighting on both sides of its civil war. Others, detained as undocumented workers in South Africa, were channelled into Renamo by the South African security forces. Mozambicans today have a special and politically contested position in South Africa's "informal sector".

Recent changes in the context of migration are reflected in variable relationships between labour patterns, rural livelihoods and the organisation of rural households. Out-migration of women from rural communities is important in many areas, though both men and women face increasingly hostile labour markets in South Africa, the major regional employer of migrant labour. Remittances from women's wages and pensions are important sources of income for rural

households in many areas while many male migrants fail to maintain links of support with rural households. Rural livelihoods are derived from a highly diversified range of off-farm activities, carried out by women as well as men, including self employment as well as wage-labour. It is not sufficient, therefore, to assume that the patterning of household composition in the region can be derived in any direct way from the classical model of the divided family under oscillating migration.

From this perspective, many of our generalisations about women-headed households have broken down. There is no single adequate model of the developmental cycle of domestic groups in a migrant labour system [Murray, 1987], nor can we assume that there is necessarily a tendency towards an increasing number of women-headed households or that all women-headed households are poor, or that all poor households are headed by women. Kennedy and Peters [1992], for example, looking at women-headed households in Malawi, found that households where the migrant husband was working in South Africa had highest per capita expenditure. Similarly, household surveys carried out in 1991 and 1993 in Lesotho show that households headed *de facto* by women are distinctly less poor than both those headed *de jure* by women and those that are male headed [World Bank 1995: 24]. In Botswana, Kossoudji and Mueller [1983] argued that it was not so much the gender of the head that mattered for poverty concerns, but how many adults of prime working age contributed to household income. Thus although most studies show that many households headed *de jure* by women are among the poorest of the poor in Southern Africa, the two are not coterminous. Indeed the distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* women-headed households is too rough a tool to capture the diverse trajectories of women headed households [Murray 1987: 289].

What then have we left? If our old assumptions that migration is a system of provisioning of cheap labour and that women-headed household are the locus of its reproduction no longer hold, have we nothing to say about the relationship between women-headed households and poverty except that 'it depends'? Challenging the assumptions underlying structuralist approaches to migrant labour in Southern Africa has framed new and important research on rural households in general and women-headed households in particular, but there has also been an analytical loss. We have moved so far towards attending to agency that we can no longer see structure, so far towards looking at relations within and between micro units that we can no longer see macro patterns, and so far towards appreciation of the diversity of historical experience that we can not longer see clearly the importance of structural change.

If we separate gender from class and agency from structure, we encounter a series of analytical problems that seem to me much more serious than seeing women as reproducers of cheap labour, which, among other things, they often are in migrant labour systems. It becomes difficult to understand why it is that for women initiative and autonomy so often mean raising

children on your own, or to envision the ways in which migration as a system can create new gender conflicts as well as provide areas of autonomy for some women. Further we can put so much emphasis on households as a locus of gender conflicts that we overlook the ways that relations of generation and class interact with gender in determining the changing composition, organisation and activities of households.

The strong central insight of structuralist work on migration was that the patterning of poverty and household composition in Southern Africa was the outcome of a system of capital accumulation, not a confrontation between modern market society and the drags of tradition. It showed that people who appeared to be only marginally part of markets - like women cultivating subsistence plots - were in fact deeply engaged in the production and consumption of commodities. This insight seems to me still fundamentally true and important, no matter what theoretical revisions we may need to make.

The end of *apartheid* as a formal political system in Southern Africa raises the issue of how this system of accumulation should and can be transformed.It is addressed in a range of political debates across the region about the reform of local government, land redistribution, immigration controls, wage regulation and social provisioning. Yet the ideological intrusion of neo-liberalism in these political debates is so powerful that the concept of structure has been appropriated by market discourse: structural adjustment is to promote growth based on the existing structure of accumulation; structural poverty is poverty based on exclusion from the market, not on terms of participation in it. The focus is on a targetable few rather than on the structural processes that continue to make rural livelihoods dependent on regular wage employment which is no longer either imposed or on offer.

What is at issue in the debate around poverty and women headed households in Southern Africa thus goes beyond the terrain where, per Moore [*op cit.*] normative conceptions about the respective roles of the state, family and community in assuring social well-being are being renegotiated. The excluded question, the underlying issue in the debate, is alternative paths of accumulation: what should be done, not just who should do it. It is a debate about the causes of poverty, not its alleviation.To show that beneath the diverse trajectories of women-headed households in Southern Africa are common structural processes that raise general issues about strategies of accumulation and the nature of poverty, I will look in a more detailed way at the case of one country, Botswana, not because it is representative, but because it is revealing.

POVERTY AND HOUSEHOLDS HEADED BY WOMEN IN BOTSWANA

The specificity of Botswana

Within the great diversity of Southern Africa, Botswana is a particularly special case. Though large in area, much of the land lies in the sands of the Kalahari and the swamps of the Okavango delta. Its small population (1,326,796 according to the 1991 census, compared with South Africa's estimated 1995 population of around 43,500,000) is settled principally in the east, along the border with South Africa. In the period of the British Protectorate from 1885 to 1966, Botswana, then Bechuanaland, was essentially a South African labour reserve, but the development of mining after Independence has made Botswana a wealthy country.

Diamond and copper-nickel exports have supported the growth of new urban centres[8], the expansion of domestic employment, the widening of government social provisioning and the development of bureaucratic and professional strata. Commercial meat production, oriented largely for export to Europe, supports a cattle-owning bourgeoisie, based in a small ranching sector and free-range grazing [*cf.* Mazonde, 1994], and historically tied to the ruling political party. Though much land is administered by regional land boards under forms of 'communal' tenure, in practice private control of water, grazing rights and arable commercial land has increased since the 1970s [Peters, 1994; Solway, 1994]. According to the 1991census [Central Statistics Office, 1993] about 30% of Botswana's rural population now lives in 'urban villages', large sprawling settlements where under 25% of the population is employed in agriculture.

Wage income in Botswana is no longer tightly dependent on oscillating migration to South Africa. Recruitment of novices for the South African mines has been sharply restricted [Stahl, 1982; Taylor, 1990], while domestic growth has created new jobs within the country for women as well as men. According to the 1991 census [Central Statistics Office, n.d.], 22.2% of the female economically active population and 44.7% of the male active population were employed in wage-positions. Only 1.9% of the female population and 5% of the male population were registered as being migrants abroad. Table 1, comparing Botswana's national male/female ratios for the central work period between the ages of twenty and forty-five in 1971 with those in 1991, reflects these changes in the regional organisation of migrant labour.

Table 1 Number of men for 100 women by age-group, Botswana 1971 and 1991

age	1971	1991
20-24	54	87
25-29	59	83
30-34	67	83
35-39	68	85
40-44	77	93

Source: Kossoudji and Mueller [1983: 282], Central Statistics Office, n.d. (Botswana 1991 Population Census)

Distribution of income in Botswana is sharply uneven, nationally, within rural areas, between regions and between Tswana and non-Tswana groups, often within the same communities [Good, 1993][9]. This unevenness appears to have widened over the last ten years, as Table 2, taken from the report on the Botswana 1993/1994 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, indicates[10].

Table 2 Percentage of income held by different income groups

Income Group	85-86	93-94
poorest 40%	11.6	10.7
Next 40%	29.1	27.8
Top 20%	59.3	61.5

Source: Central Statistics Office, 1995: 6

Poverty, women-headed households and policy debates in Botswana

Among the poorest 40%, a considerable number are members of households headed by women. How many exactly, and what this figure means, have been the focus of a large corpus of policy-oriented research in Botswana[11]. The debate around how many women-headed rural households there are and whether these are poorer than those headed by men dominates many anthropological case studies, imposing itself both through the reality of rural life and the polemics of policy debate within Botswana[12]. The ways that policy debate has addressed the poverty of rural households headed by women have changed over time, once focussing on impediments to agricultural investment and growth, now dominated by issues of public morality. One cannot find a more compelling example of Moore's [*op cit.*] argument that in the debate on the family the respective roles of the state, the market, domestic groups and communitarian institutions in social provisioning are being ideologically redefined.

Though post-colonial land policy has consistently favoured the development of large-scale commercial cattle production, in the 1970s, with the decline of migrant jobs in South Africa and rising domestic urbanisation, the Botswana government became concerned with rural unemployment and rural/urban income differentials. A rural income distribution survey conducted in 1974-1975, and migration and household income surveys carried out in 1978/79, highlighted the poverty of many rural women-headed households. Lipton's [1978] programmatic report, emphasizing a broad-based strategy of labour-intensive growth, with less emphasis on cattle, drew the attention of the Botswana government and particularly of development agencies to the problems of smallholder cultivation [*cf.* Mayende, 1990]. Bond [1974] had already described the centrality of women's work in agricultural production and to the particular difficulties confronted by women who hoed without assistance from men in women-headed households. Brown [1980,

1983], who traced the impact of migrant labour on women's organisation of agricultural production, emphasized both the poverty of women-headed households and the barriers they confronted in developing their small-holder production.

Researchers focussed on rural women-headed households, however, soon led to sharp debate over the extent to which their poverty was generalised. Peters [1983, 1984] cautioned against generalisations on the situation of women-headed households. She argued that many rural households in Botswana were headed by women in particular phases of the marriage process and would in time become male-headed households, while others were embedded in larger kinship based groups which provided economic and social support. Kerven [1983] retorted that at a policy level the poverty of women-headed household was so generalized as to make Peters' concerns academic[13]. Others [Kossoudji and Mueller, 1983; Watanabe and Mueller, 1984] pointed out that differentiation among households headed did not depend solely on whether or not there was a wage-earning male head of household attached; some women-headed households receive regular remittances from migrant brothers, sons and daughters[14].

Drought relief measures in the 1980s gave the debate over the poverty of women-headed households new meaning. Botswana is subject to cyclical drought, but the sustained period of severe drought in Southern Africa from 1982 to 1987 further undermined small-holder cultivation and sharpened conflicts over land and water access for cattle-herds. With its own budget resources and large amounts of food aid, the government of Botswana responded with a major programme of drought relief. After criticism of a direct feeding programme in 1979-1980, the government moved toward targeted relief for the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Children were fed a meal at a school; a food ration was distributed to pregnant and lactating women, children under ten not at school, the destitute and the malnourished; labour-intensive public works programmes created low wage casual employment, particularly in rural areas; and free seed and access to draught animal was given to poor farmers [*cf.* Hay 1988; Valentine, 1993, 1994; Morgan, 1991, Drèze, 1995].

Much of this drought relief assistance (DR) was directed towards women and children in women-headed households in rural areas. The ALDEP programme set up to support the development of small-holder cultivation in theory was concerned with women-farmers, but in practice few could satisfy its conditions for loan security [Hesselberg, 1985; Mayende, 1990: 11; Solway, 1994: 490]. The free distribution of seed and access to draught power under the DR programme was, however, extensively used by women farmers [Van Driel, 1994]. In rural areas most of those employed under the public works programmes were women [Van Driel, 1994: 141; Ingstad, 1994; Valentine, 1994].

The Botswana DR programme has been favourably evaluated by the World Bank [1990:97] for both its coverage and efficiency, and has been judged by some to have prevented sharpening income differentiation during the drought years [Valentine, 1993; 1994]. Others have viewed parts of the programme, particularly free seed and draft-power distribution more skeptically, arguing that it did not confront in any serious way the problems of women farmers [van Driel, 1994:223], and in fact financed the expansion of large tractor-owning commercial farmers [Solway, *op cit.*]. The Drought Relief Programme was phased out between 1987 and 1990, after the good harvest of 1987, but school feeding and distribution of food to the vulnerable remain part of Botswana's general social security programme, and are essential to the government's political support in rural areas.

What remains at issue is both the coverage of vulnerable households by this system of social transfers and its efficiency. Some contend that many of the apparently most vulnerable are women-headed households integrated into larger domestic groups and covered by traditional inter-household transfers. Solway [1994] maintains that such traditional ties of dependence were weakened by drought relief, at least in part through deliberate policy of officials wishing to establish a modern state-based system of social security. Motts [1994] argues that government policy is predicated on the existence of traditional ties of dependence, but that in fact they no longer exist.

Within Botswana the increasing proportion of women-headed households is taken by many as a sign of crisis in public morals. It is attributed to teen-age pregnancy and appeals are made for better sexual education for adolescents, for the strengthening of moral institutions, and, (by some) for improved access to contraceptives [*cf.* Mugabe and Kann, 1992]. Yet existing research does not seem to confirm that control of sexuality is the central issue, at least in rural areas. In her survey of women who had their children outside of marriage in Kanye, Molokomme [1991:102-3] found that over half had planned to have their children, indicating that for this group at least failures in sexual education and contraception were not a problem. Ubomba-Jaswa [n.d.:3], looking at past census data, observes that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the rate of teen-age pregnancy has been high and relatively stable in rural Botswana for many years; the proportion of teenage girls with children was 15% in 1971, dropped to 12.1% in 1981 and rose to 14.3% in 1991.

The gender and poverty questions

The debate around poverty and women-headed households in Botswana has become increasingly ensnared in the discourse of poverty alleviation and targeting.Three intertwined questions with implications for policy on agriculture, social provisioning and public morality dominate the literature [*cf.* Van Driel 1992]:

- How many households are really headed by women?

- Are these households poorer than households headed by men?
- Have traditional security systems based on inter-household relations broken down leaving women headed households to cope on their own?

Although much of the research that addresses these questions is focussed on households headed by women, they are also questions about men and thus could be asked in a different way. Have men nothing to do with their children, or does the marriage process eventually bring them into households? If men are permanently missing, are they missed? That is, does their absence mean that the household is poor, or do ties of kinship and community provide a network of support for women-headed households? It is particularly important to put men's lives under sharper scrutiny, since their physical absence from women-headed households has often led to their analytical absence.

As we shall see, no one of these questions has a straightforward conclusive answer in Botswana. Each raises methodological and conceptual issues and confronts lacunae in existing research. Perhaps more importantly, trying to answer these questions raises new issues that push beyond intra and interhousehold dynamics to the the causes and consequences of changing patterns of household organisation, to long-term issues of class, accumulation and structural change in migrant labour systems.

- **How many households are really headed by women?**

Answering this question requires comparative household survey data, which, as Peters, [1983] argued, do not capture easily the characteristics of household organisation in Botswana. The surveys do not trace the same households over time, and thus cannot see a household headed by a woman at one time and by an man at another. They treat households as discrete units and thus cannot handle the overlapping ties that make a woman and her children in some situations part of an extended household and at other times a unit on their own[15]. Assuming, however, that these are constant problems, and that ways of defining households have been more or less similar between surveys, it is nonetheless possible to treat changes in survey data as approximate indicators of change in underlying patterns of household organisation.

What the survey data seem to show is that the proportion of women-headed households in rural Botswana has continued to rise over the last twenty-five years, despite the decline of oscillating contract migration to the South African mines. In 1971 about 40% of rural households were without adult male members, and in a rural income survey in 1974-75, 43% of households identified themselves as being headed by women [Kossoudji and Mueller, 1983: 832]. Moreover at a national level the proportion of women of reproductive age who have never married increased steadily in all age-groups between 1971 and 1991 [Ubomba-Jaswa: 8][16].

As Table 3 shows, there is, however, no evidence for a recent general increase in the proportion of households headed by women in Botswana; the increase is in rural areas. With increasing urbanisation, the proportion of households headed by women in urban areas has fallen.

Table 3 Proportion of households headed by women

Survey	% of urban households	% of rural households	% of national total
1985-86 (HIES)	44.65	47.38	46.69
1991 (Census)	44.90	49.88	47.09
1993-94 (HIES)	35.60	50.11	45.76

Source: Botswana Central Statistics Office [1995:28], Botswana 1991 Population Census, Valentine [1994: 122]

Within rural areas, the proportion of households headed by women is particularly high in areas classed as urban villages, settlements where under 25% of the population is employed in agriculture - there 54.97% of households are classed as headed by women, as compared with 47.73% in other rural areas [Botswana Central Statistics Office, 1995: 28][17].

In systems of oscillating male migration, the cyclical formation of women-headed households in rural areas is predictable. The interesting question that emerges out of this data is why the number of rural women-headed households should continue to increase when oscillating migration to South Africa was being cut back and when opportunities for the migration of both men and women to urban areas in Botswana increased.

Varley [1996: 505] points out that discussions of women-headed households are often based on a stereotyped image of a single mother with young children to the detriment of others, such as elderly widows, who in fact head a large proportion of women-headed households. In Botswana there are also numerous middle-aged women heading their own households and caring for their grandchildren [Ingstad, 1994]. A high incidence of women-headed households may thus have as much to do with separation and male mortality as with birth; tuberculosis, emphysema, AIDS and mine disasters have been important aspects of the migrant labour experience.

Nonetheless the contingent link between having children and marriage seems to be the key determinant of the *rising* incidence of rural women-headed households in Botswana today. Although there is no solid comparative survey data on men's and women's conjugal histories, case-studies emphasize that some men and women have children with many different partners, without ever establishing a stable marital union with any one of them [Gulbrandsen, 1986; Solway 1990; Molokomme, 1991; Ingstad *op cit.*][18]. What we need to explain is why the link between marriage and having children has loosened; why it is that an increasing number of women finish their reproductive lives without ever marrying at all.

To understand what is changing, it is important to look beyond sexual practices to the changing meaning and organisation of marriage in Tswana society, to what has been termed the dissociation between marriage and reproduction [Gulbrandsen, 1986; Solway 1990]. This is possible to do because sexuality, marriage, and reproduction in a migrant labour society were already major social issues in the 1930s when Schapera began his ethnographic work [Schapera, 1940, 1947]. Schapera emphasized the processual nature of Tswana marriage, a point still noted in all anthropological work on the functioning of customary law. He described Tswana marriage as a series of steps, involving bridewealth exchanges, rather than a single moment. Schapera's work also made clear that migration had been fully integrated into the bridewealth system, such that men did wage labour and invested in cattle as a condition for the establishment of households. It was within this kind of marriage process that the concept of the developmental cycle of domestic groups so powerfully reduced variation to a common pattern.

The payment of bridewealth in cattle by the family of the husband to the family of the wife continues to be a key part of the marriage process in rural areas, necessary for the affiliation of children to the husband's lineage, and a representation of the household's place in the community. According to Peters [1994:100] marriage and building a herd are part of a single social process in Kgatla: 'Livestock are the symbolic and practical means for ensuring the social reproduction of the family and society.' This normative image of social reproduction now excludes, however, many rural domestic groups. We must ask how and why the bridewealth system, which links the formation of households to wage-labour and investment in cattle, has changed.

In part, the change must represent, as Bozzoli [*op cit.*] and others have suggested for other areas of Southern Africa, improvements in the relative postion of women. Van Driel [1994: 103] points out that the increase in the number of women-headed households in Botswana begins after Independence in 1966 when women were finally allowed to vote, to occupy political positions and to hold land in own names[19]. Single women can establish an independent household apart from fathers or brothers because they have the right to obtain a plot of land for cultivation and to establish their own compound[20]. Urban growth and improving education gave women employment opportunities and thus a capacity to sustain families on their own which they had not enjoyed before without migrating to South Africa. They also gained easier access to employment with the growth of towns. Izzard [1985] pointed out that some rural women-headed households were formed by a woman and the children of her unmarried migrant daughters, a point which has been elaborated by Ingstad [1994] in her study of the central role of the grandmother in sustaining children in rural Botswana.

There is, however, a good deal of continuity in the lives of rural women and the ways they form domestic groups [*cf.* Townsend and Garey, 1995]. Women continue to bear and care for their children, on their own, with men, or within larger familial groups. Many women begin their

reproductive lives as their mothers and grandmothers did, remaining with their own parents in three-generational households, but given the already high incidence of women-headed households these are often headed by grandmothers, not grandfathers. The more dramatic change in the organisation of rural livelihoods is thus the existence of a substantial group of men who, unlike women, never form domestic groups at all.

To understand the development of women-headed households, then, we need to ask not only what is happening to women, but what is changing in the lives of men. Why do some remain permanent minors, with only a peripheral relationship to their children? Many men no longer complete nor even initiate this process of payment of bridewealth payment. When children remain outside of a marriage process, Molokomme's [1991] "children of the fence", they are not affiliated to their fathers' lineages; they remain legally within the lineages of their mothers, though not always with status equal to those affiliated through their fathers. Their birth brings new dependents to their mothers' households, while their fathers do not contribute to their support. There is no inter-generational contribution of wealth by male wage-earners either to their own lineages or to those of the mothers of their children towards the payment of bridewealth. There is no social transfer, either of cattle or of the diffuse social obligations implied by a marriage process, between lineage groups within the community. In short, there is rupture in the ways in which wage-income has been linked to immediate subsistence, contingency funds, investment in agriculture, and social support within and between households.

What are the reasons for this rupture? Some argue that the cultural importance of the father is declining in Botswana, as reflected in the development of matrifocal families [cf. Izzard, 1985] and disinterest in marriage on the part of men. In Paje, the community studied by van Driel, there were few *de facto* women-headed households; almost all were headed *de jure* by women, without any link to an absent male head. From this Van Driel [1994: 204] concludes that marriage seems to have lost its practical value in Botswana. She attributes this to the growth of wage-labour after Independence and hence to the fact that women's labour lost its significance for men as a source of income. This is a very instrumental theory of marriage and indeed dismisses both the weight of rural unemployment and the 52.6% of Tswana households headed by men. Molokomme [1991: 102-103] found that most women did not have a negative attitude toward marriage; rather they just did not assume that it would happen and did not envision postponing childbearing until it did.

There seem to me rather two fundamental structural reasons for the deepening rupture between marriage and the bearing and raising of children over the last twenty-five years. The first is the polarisation of agrarian production in communal areas with the expansion of commercial ranching and farming and the marginalisation small-scale subsistence production, which has made farming labour of little return not just to men, but to women themselves. The second is not the

growth of wage-employment after Independence but its relative loss, the scarcity of jobs for unskilled workers resulting from the restructuring of migrant labour in Southern Africa.

Peters [1994] traces how the setting up of local land boards under the Tribal Land Act of 1968 and the demarcation of fenced ranches under the Tribal Grazing Land Policy in 1975 cleared the way for individualisation and privatisation of land and water rights with the consolidation of large commercial ranchers and farmers. Scarcity of arable land is an issue in some areas of Botswana, particularly in the periphery of sprawling urban villages and in areas with access to water and for those Sarwa who were previously denied rights to land for cultivation or grazing under customary law. About a quarter of rural households have no land for either cultivation or grazing[21] [Central Statistics Office, n.d.].Commercial cattle-production provides substantial income for some rural households, but it takes at least 40 head to be considered prosperous and twenty head are considered to be the minimum for a profitable commercial herd. According to the 1991 census, one-half of rural Botswana households own no cattle at all[22], and a fifth own no livestock of any kind.

The polarisation of agrarian production has meant that small-holder crop production has become increasingly marginal as a source of either subsistence or cash for the vast majority of rural people. Alverson [1979] estimated that costs exceeded returns for almost all crop-cultivating households[23]. Hesselberg [1985], in a study of two different villages done before the drought years found that half the households did not produce enough food to sustain themselves throughout the year. Solway [1994: 480-1] observes that although total yield has not declined dramatically in Botswana, the amount produced by smallholders has. Whereas in 1978 the largest harvests of sorghum in Kgalagadi were forty bags, by the 1980s some harvested 140 bags while most produced under ten bags.

Severe structural unemployment has also reshaped rural livelihoods - the systematic relative decline in the number of wage-labour jobs open to rural migrants both in Botswana and in South Africa. Despite the development of diamond mining and urban jobs, domestic employment cannot absorb all rural job-seekers and official contract employment in South Africa has been severely restricted. There is evidence since the early 1970s of increasing rural unemployment and falling rural incomes, inclusive of transfers and remittances, despite the boom in industrial earnings [Drèze, 1995: 521]. Rural case-studies speak of very high rates of unemployment among the young [e.g. van Driel, 1994; Ingstad, 1994]. As shown in Table 4, the 1991 census registers relatively low unemployment, but shows both men and women actively seeking work in rural and urban areas.

Table 4 percentage of active labour force seeking work, 1991

	men	women
urban	9.24	8.96
rural	6.99	4.15

Source: Central Statistical Office, 1995 (HIES), Population Census 1991

More precise and differentiated data on unemployment are available in the he report on the 1993/1994 Botswana household income and expenditure survey [Central Statistics Office, 1995]. It distinguishes three categories of residence: urban, rural and urban villages - the nineteen rural agglomerations where under 25% of the labour force is employed in agriculture[24]. The HIES shows that in general unemployment rates are much higher than estimated by the 1991 census and emphasizes that children under fifteen years are employed in wage-labour. As Table 5 indicates, unemployment is a problem for men and women under thirty in both rural and urban areas. In the age group from 20-24, for example, unemployment stands at 31% for women and 34% for men in urban villages. Rates of unemployment for rural men remain high through the prime years of their working lives.

Table 5 Unemployment rates by age, sex and residence

Age group	Urban		Urban Village		Rural	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
15-19	16.72	12.52	17.38	17.11	10.55	12.53
20-24	25.89	22.21	31.03	34.39	22.59	25.85
25-29	14.72	16.24	21.79	23.08	15.48	28.57
30-34	8.98	7.37	17.84	23.70	13.82	27.78
35-39	6.34	5.37	13.85	16.72	6.56	22.86
40-44	5.75	6.29	6.52	22.21	5.19	7.96
45-49	4.53	7.53	2.02	21.83	1.95	9.07

Source: Central Statistics Office 1995 (HIES 1993/1994)

The HIES also draws attention [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 115-116] to the weight of underemployment, the large number of people who work less than 35 hours per week and said that they would like to work more. In Botswana most of these said that they did not work more because there was no work.They are usually people working on an hourly wage basis with low earnings - craft-workers, the unskilled, and agricultural workers.

The absence of jobs does not means that people can or do retreat into subsistence cultivation in rural areas. Both young women [cf. Izzard, *op cit.*] and men continue to migrate from rural communities in Botswana, but the organisation of livelihoods and child-raising still make migration a more likely option for men than for women. The sex ratios prevailing in rural

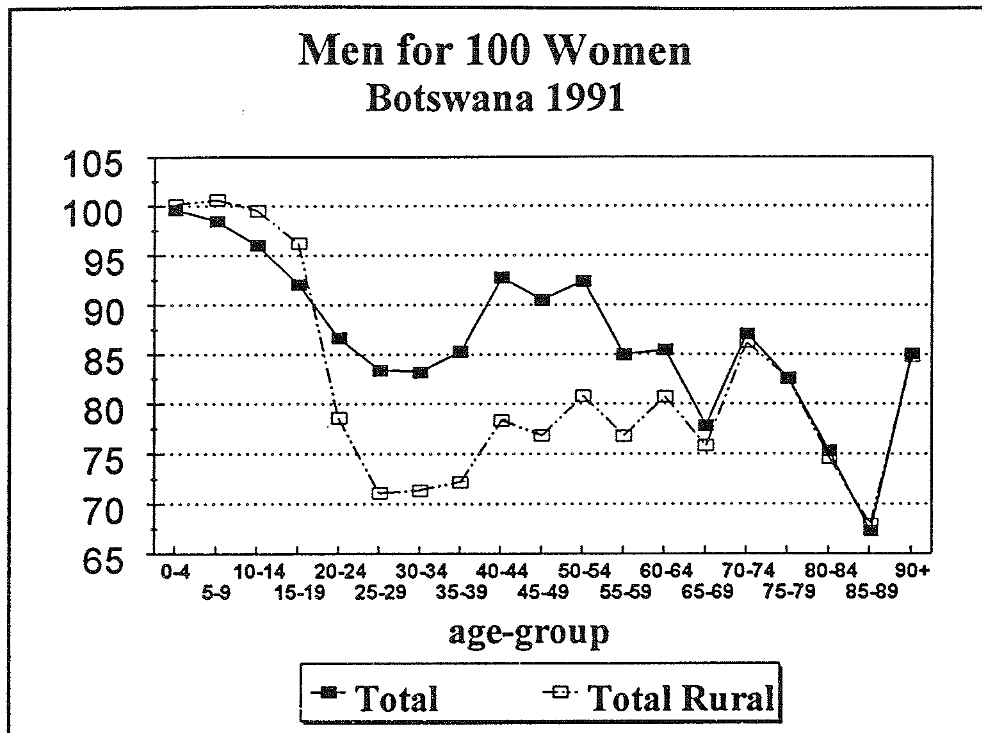

Figure 1 Male/female ratios, Botswana Population Census 1991

communities indicate that in Botswana the outflow of young men of working age is still much higher than that of women. Growth of domestic employment has not meant a fundamental break with the migrant labour system. Men recruited from rural areas for jobs in the new mining towns live in hostels that are not organized for family life, while work on the South African mines remains important in certain districts. Figure 1 traces male/female ratios by age-group for the population enumerated nationally and in rural districts in the census of 1991[Central Statistics Office, n.d.]. The deep dip in the age-groups from 20 to 45 shows the continuing importance of male out-migration. The fact that this dip is also evident at a national level suggests that out-migration from Botswana also continues, though to a much lesser extent than twenty-five years ago.

It is clear that there are many missing men in the census data, not only among the elderly, where higher rates of male mortality may explain part of the difference, but also among men from twenty to forty years. Some of the missing are probably in South Africa, but given its restrictions on immigration from the former labour reserve countries, it would seem likely that many of these missing men are undocumented workers and work-seekers, facing job insecurity and low wages. We do not really know enough about their lives to see how they fit into the pattern of women-headed households, but in this context, it seems to me more reasonable to assume that many men and women do not marry and establish common households because they cannot, not because

they do not wish to do so. Their inability to marry both reflects and contributes to the erosion of diffuse bonds of intergenerational and communal solidarity.

- **Are households headed by women poorer than those headed by men?**

Does it make a difference to household livelihoods that the head of the household is a woman rather than a man? There is a good deal of historical and ethnographic evidence that would lead us to expect that the experience of poverty is differentiated by gender in rural Botswana. Rural communities mediate class relations through hierarchies of gender, rank and exclusion [*cf.* Good, 1993; Peters, 1994: 200-201]. Customary law gives women rights to productive assets principally through men [Molokomme, 1987; Griffiths, 1987]. The normative gender division of labour makes women responsible for reproductive work and most farming tasks while men are to care for cattle, clear fields, earn money and do politics.

Whether or not gender hierarchy and difference translate into income disparities between households headed by men and those headed by women is, however, a separate though related question; households headed by women under migrant labour systems often include men whose work contributes to a common livelihood. In asking whether households headed by women are poorer than those headed by men we are thus really trying to determine whether the contributions of men are missing from women-headed households and whether such contributions are missed. The 1993-94 Botswana HIES report provides comparative income and employment data for male and female-headed households, while data from the 1985-86 HIES also allow us to ask whether disparities in income between households headed by women and those headed by men are narrowing or widening[25].

Table 6 summarizes the mean disposable monthly income (taking into account production, wages, and transfers in kind) of households headed by men compared with that of households headed by women in the 1993/1994 Botswana HIES. It shows that on average, households headed by women are indeed poorer than those headed by men everywhere in Botswana, but that the difference is least marked in rural areas. Comparing the HIES data from 1993/94 with that from 1985/86, the disparity in income between male and female headed households has declined (as we might expect) since the height of the drought, though less in rural than in urban areas.

Table 6 Ratio of mean disposable income of households headed by men to that of those headed by women: 85/86 and 93/94

Location	1985/86	1993/94	
urban	2.82	2.24	
rural	1.49	1.35	1.56 (urban villages)
			1.27 (rural areas)

Source: Valentine, 1994, p. 122; Central Statistics Office, 1995 (HIES 1993/94), p. 57

Qualitative studies suggest, however, that poverty itself is differentiated, with women-headed households predominating amongst the poorest of the poor. Table 7 uses the two different poverty lines set by the HIES for mean monthly disposable income, households earning less than 200 Pula per month and those earning less than 750 Pula per month. Here again the disparity between households headed by men and those headed by women is marked in towns and urban villages but not in rural agricultural areas.

Table 7 Proportion of male and female headed households with average monthly disposable income under 200 pula and under 750 pula

Location	Male headed households		Female headed households	
	% <200P	% <750P	% <200P	% <750P
urban	5.5	24.1	14.2	38.2
urban village	10.8	56	14.6	69.4
rural	21.7	70	22.2	74.4

Source: Central Statistics Office, 1995 (HIES 1993/1994) Table 27, pp. 92-96

Qualitative case-studies on rural Botswana, emphasize, however, the range of rural incomes - a small group of rich farmers and a large mass of poor households, which means that averages may be deceptive. If we look at medians, it appears even less possible to generalize about the relative poverty of rural women-headed households. Median disposable income of male headed households is 1.3 times that of female headed households in urban villages in the 1993-94 survey, but slightly lower (.98) in rural areas [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 57]. Gender differences between household heads are more significant for household income in rural areas for the *rich* than for the poor. The monthly disposable income line that defines the upper ten percent of male headed households is 1.4 times that for women-headed households in rural areas and 1.7 times that for women-headed households in urban villages [*Ibid.*].

Case-studies suggest that regular cash income is central to establishing a secure rural livelihood in Botswana, both for the purchase of basic subsistence and for investment in agricultural production. One might expect that women's subsistence production would balance overall household income, but that there would be a disparity between male and female headed households in disposable cash income. This would imply greater vulnerability of households headed by women if not necessarily greater poverty.

Table 8 Ratio of mean disposable and mean disposable cash income of households headed by men to that of those headed by women: 1993/94

Location	disposable income	disposable cash income
urban village	1.56	1.66
rural area	1.27	1.45

Source: Central Statistics Office, 1995 (HIES), p. 56

Overall, as Table 8 shows, disparities between the disposable cash income of women-headed and male headed households would appear to be significant and greater than those reflected in total disposable household income. Again, however, median disposable cash income is exactly the same for male and female headed households in rural areas, though that of male headed households is 1.6 times that of female headed households in urban villages [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 56].

Rural ethnography also leads us to expect that income differences between male and female-headed households would vary over the developmental cycle of the household. Table 9 shows that gender disparities in household income do vary with the age-group of the household head. The disparity is less for the young and the old; the mean disposable cash income of male-headed households is even slightly lower than that of women-headed households in the under 30 age-group in rural areas[26].

Table 9 Ratio of average monthly household cash income of male-headed households to that of female-headed households by location and age of household head

Location	<30	30-39	40-49	50-59	=>60
urban	1.75	2.37	1.76	4.64	1.37
urban village	1.18	1.91	1.93	2.67	1.29
rural	0.96	2.05	1.72	1.73	1.55

Source: Central Statistics Office, 1995 (HIES 1993-94),Table 3, p. 32

From the HIES survey data, then, it would seem that poverty is a leveller of gender difference in household income. Except in old age, employment outside agriculture tends to

accompany disparity in income between male and female headed households. Around 20% of Botswana's rural population is desperately poor, and around 70% are poor. Almost half of these households are headed by women. Even taking into account the different consumption profiles associated with rural and urban life, and the probable undercounting of subsistence production, remittances and transfers of rural households in the HIES, rural/urban disparities in household income make it unlikely that women heads of household in rural areas are comforted by the fact that many households headed by men are also poor.

There are, however, many methodological problems in using the HIES income data to make firm conclusions about the relative poverty of households headed by women and those headed by men[27]. Surveys are approximate tools, and income measures under any circumstances capture only part of the experience of poverty. There may be gender differentiation in the determinants of poverty with consequences for the livelihoods of households that do not appear sharply appear in the income data.

The ethnographic literature draws attention to two major determinants of differentiation in rural livelihoods in Botswana, both of which have a significant gender dimension: the importance of multiple overlapping sources of income, typically combining income from agrarian production, off-farm employment and social transfers; and control over assets. In Paje, for example, when villagers were asked to make a wealth-ranking, they divided households into three groups. Rich households, they said, owned more than 40 cattle, had brick houses, a tractor, a car, a lot of land and access to family members with well-paid jobs. Households that are neither rich nor poor have just a few cattle, some land, and some family members with low paid jobs. Poor households have no cattle, not or just a small piece of land, no family members with jobs and depend for their subsistence mainly on government aid [van Driel, 1994: 141].

In Botswana regular wage-employment remains the most secure way for rural households to assure regular cash income. Mazonde's [1994:134*ff*] case-studies show that even prosperous commercial cattle owners combine ranching with a salaried job. Here there is a marked gender disparity. Among rural heads of household, 41.3% of male heads and 16.5% of female heads are in wage employment [Central Statistics Office, n.d.]. The 1993-94 HIES data (Table 10) show that many rural heads of household, both women and men between the ages of 15 and 49, seek such regular wage employment, though women are much less likely than men to have found it. Given male/female ratios, in urban villages there are actually more women heads of household seeking work than men.

Table 10 Percentage of household heads active seeking work 1993-94 (15-49)

	urban village	rural area
female heads of household	18.44	12.08
male heads of household	22.93	18.66

Source: Central Statistics Office, 1995 (HIES), Table 5, pp. 35-40.

It is not just the employment status of the household head that matters for household income of course; other members of the household contribute wage income. Both households headed by men and those headed by women include other wage-earning members, but if a woman is household head these are generally migrants. Ethnographic evidence does not suggest any consistent gender pattern of remittance. Remittances for acqusition of cattle may be sent more regularly when a man is head of household, but women migrants are considered to be more assiduous in sending home money to their mothers to who are taking care of their children [Ingstad *op cit*], while some men complain that their sons send them nothing at all [Molokomme, 1991: 154]. The contingency of remittance is what makes the employment status of the household head an important indicator of household vulnerability.

For reasons that have to do both with restrictions on mobility and seniority related to childbearing and child care and with sexual discrimination in labour markets, women generally have not only less access to wage-work but also lower wages and less job security. Thus women-headed households often depend more than those of men on irregular and insecure sources of cash income - remittances, social transfers, and casual off-farm work. It should be noted, however, that in Botswana women heads of household have more schooling than men [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 44], and many women migrants are remitting to rural households [Izzard, *op cit.*; Ingstad, *op cit.*]. The problem for rural women is that the kind of off-farm employment available in rural areas is casual low-paid work in agriculture or in the informal sector.

The HIES traced informal sector employment in household enterprises by focussing on 'entrepreneurs'; 75% of such 'entrepreneurs' in urban villages and 72.6% in rural agricultural areas are women [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 90]. The most common informal sectors activities in rural areas are hawking and vending, brewing and selling beer, and property rental. For men the range of such activities is, however, much more varied than for women. In urban villages 57.2% of the women 'entrepreneurs' were brewing and/or selling beer; in rural agricultural areas, the figure was 51.9%. This is work which can be done by the elderly, combines well with child-care and requires little capital [cf. Ingstad, *op cit.*], but it is highly competitive, with many brewers serving the same clients[28].

Farming remains a central component of rural household income, but it is a restricted option in urban villages. Even in rural farming communities, however, the distribution of assets and the organisation of agricultural work in Botswana make it difficult for most women-headed households to cover subsistence needs, let along market surpluses, from small-holder production. Although women's rights to cattle are recognized now by both magistrates and customary tribunals [Griffiths, 1987; Molokomme, 1987], in practice most large herds are owned and commercial marketing managed by men. Membership in borehole syndicates and individual ownership of boreholes (hence access to water) is dominated by men [Peters 1994]. Under customary law, women had land rights only through their husbands, fathers and brothers. Although under present legal practice this is no longer true, case studies indicate [Mayende, 1990; Griffiths, 1987; Molokomme, 1987] that women-headed households have difficulty maintaining inheritance rights to land.

In areas where there is no absolute scarcity of land, households with a shortage of male labour may still have difficulty maintaining agricultural production. Although women do most tasks in crop-production, men do field-clearing, fencing and the tending of draught animals [Solway, 1994: 488]; households headed by women are less likely than those of men to have this labour or a regular cash income with which to hire it. Access to government organized extension programmes is another important determinant of agricultural production in Botswana. Both Hesselberg [1985] and Mayende [op cit.] have shown that ALDEP Botswana's smallholder extension programme did not reach most women farmers. Mayende [*Ibid*: 11] concludes that extension workers tend to ignore women farmers not so much because they are women, but because they are poor. Successful women are usually wives of better off peasant farmers since poor women have no cattle to secure loans. During the years of the drought, the failures of ALDEP vis a vis poor farmers were not so apparent because free seed and access to draught animals were generally available through the drought relief programme [van Driel, 1994: 166].

Given the marginality of their agrarian production, many households headed by women depend on cash income for purchase of basic subsistence. Hence the livelihoods of women-headed households without a regular wage income or other cash flow are particularly vulnerable, but so are those of households where the male household head is unemployed and seeking work. Results from the 1993-94 HIES in Table 11 confirm the increasing importance the importance of cash income as the main source of consumption expenditure for rural as well as urban households.

Table 11 Average monthly consumption (Pula)

Location	amount	% purchased
urban	1443.37	87%
urban village	817.47	82%
rural	590.60	66%

Source: Central Statistical Office, 1995 (HIES 1993/94)

The 1993-1994 HIES report does not discriminate expenditure patterns by the gender of heads of household, but, turning to sources of food in areas specifically classed as rural, Figure 2 shows that as income rises household subsistence depends less on own production and more on food purchase. All expenditure groups obtain food from social transfers, but these are

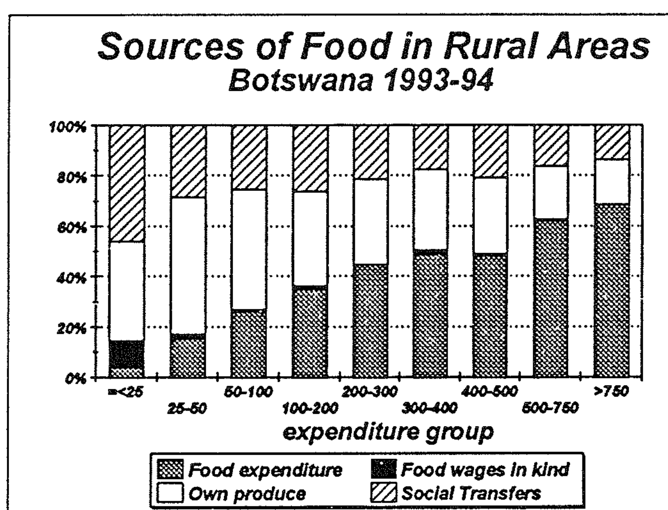

Figure 2

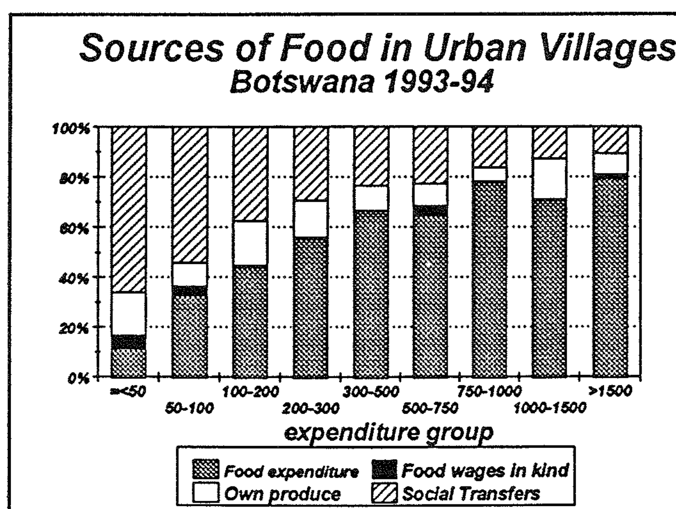

Figure 3

particularly important to the poorest households, who also depend on wages in kind. Figure 3

shows that in urban villages, where access to farming land is limited but the range of off-farm work more varied, poor households produce little of their own subsistence and are even more dependent on social transfers than are those in areas classified as rural.

What then can we say about gender and poverty? Are women-headed households in rural areas poorer than those of men? Are men missed? Neither the HIES comparative household data nor qualitative case material provide a clear positive answer to this question, but they do suggest that the problem lies in the question itself. Rural poverty is so generalised that poor women-headed households do not form a discrete and bounded group suitable for targeted income-support programmes. Rich households are more likely to be headed by men than by women, but most rural households headed by both women and men are poor. The dynamics of gender inequity are tied to the marginalisation of small-holder agricultural production in urban villages. Even in rural areas what poor households - male and female headed - are missing is jobs. They are not able to provide their own livelihoods without the assistance of social transfers.

- **Have traditional systems of social security based on inter-household transfers broken down?**

The importance of social transfers in assuring the survival of the poorest rural households raises the issue of what these transfers are. Have traditional systems of social security based on inter-household transfers broken down, making people dependent on state-assistance, or is there redistribution within rural communities from the rich to the poor? Ethnographic case-studies on Botswana emphasize the importance of mechanisms of redistribution and sharing in rural communities, but they also speak of their erosion. [Motts, 1994; Solway, 1994].

Much of the debate focuses on whether or not households headed by women are excluded from residentially based patrilineage segments, traditionally important units of cooperation and sharing in Botswana. Some case-studies [e.g. Motts, 1994; Ingstad, 1994] emphasize the importance of non-agnatic forms of residence, such as three-generational matrifocal families, suggesting that residence is diverging from the traditional patterns associated with patrilineality. Others argue that women-headed households continue to be incorporated into larger patrilineally defined social groups upon whose resources they can draw, and whose patriarchal structures they must therefore to some extent accept [Gulbrandsen, 1986; Molokomme, 1991: 100-101]. Divergent assessments probably reflect in part real differences in residence patterns between the communities studied, but a narrow focus on the filiation of women-headed households can also be misleading. Despite the continuing importance and flexibility of idioms of kinship, community and rank in rural Botswana, the world they describe has fundamentally changed when thirty percent of the rural population live in 'urban villages,' and when smallholder cultivation is so marginalised that even rural people buy most of their food or depend on food aid and gifts.

There is compelling ethnographic evidence of decreasing cooperation and sharing in agrarian production. Solway [1994] describes how important were field-sharing and the loaning of draught animals in the 1970s for Kgalagadi households that lacked male-labour. She shows that the pay-for-plough schemes of drought assistance undercut these forms of cooperation and financed the expansion of large-scale mechanised farming by tractor owners who no longer lend out fields, preferring to cultivate their land themselves with hired labour. Communal use of grazing and arable land has been eroded by the expansion of commercial farming and ranching. Peters [1994: 197] shows that although Kgatla owners of boreholes may allow others to use their water and adjacent pastures, the definition of dependents is being restricted and that land is being appropriated by a minority of users. Syndicate members refused to recognize the rights of a man to hold cattle for his sister's son, and inheritance of syndicate membership rights is limited [*Ibid.* 124-5].

Perhaps the biggest shift at both an economic and cultural level has been in the ownership of cattle - once the definition of Tswana identity, source of both status and security. Fifty percent of Botswana's rural households now say that they do not own cattle, a status in the past which defined the non-Tswana. This means that neither they nor other households in their lineage segments own cattle or that they make no claim to collective ownership of cattle within the lineage, and that they have no access to cattle through the traditional system of *mafisa* loans. In part this shift in cattle ownership is a result of the increasing tendency toward commercial ownership and management of the national herd, but it also reflects an even deeper change in the organisation of rural livelihoods - the loss of jobs.

Probably the most important *traditional* element in the social security system of Botswana over many generations has been getting a wage-paying job. This was central both for tiding families over periods of occasional crisis in drought or illness and for acquring the cattle used in institutionalized forms of social transfer in the bridewealth system. Bridewealth exchange was a central part of what are referred to by Platteau [1991] as 'traditional mechanisms of social security', transfers between lineages within communities reinforcing inter-generational dependence and providing a living fund of social security. By the time Schapera [1940, 1947] did his research in the 1930s, wage-labour, usually mine-work in South Africa, was necessary for the acquisition of bridewealth cattle by Tswana men. Social transfers of disposable income and secure reserves thus went passed between junior and senior men, through the marriage system.

The crisis of unemployment has inevitably compromised this 'traditional' system. When the marriage process is not completed, or as often today never even initiated, then these social transfers do not take place. Migratory wage-labour and commoditisation did not rupture the bridewealth system but sustained unemployment has. Molokomme [1991] documents the erosion of kinship in her study of the position of women-headed households within Botswana legal

systems; many of the cases involve junior and senior men refusing to recognize social responsibility either to each other or to women and children in marriage and maintenance payments.

It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the importance of continuing links of sharing and cooperation between kin and within communities in rural Botswana. Some arable freehold land is used in communal ways and struggles around land and water have reaffirmed collective rights in many communities [Peters, 1994: 197]. Children move between rural and urban households groups [Izzard, 1985; van Driel, 1994; Ingstad, 1994], often fostered by grandmothers, as do remittances and gifts. The 1993-94 HIES survey data show that even the poorest households give gifts as well as receive them [Central Statistics Office 1995, 82-84]. Although van Driel [1994] speaks of the declining importance of the church, it has been a strong institution in rural Botswana for over a century and still provides some links of support for rural families. Claims to social support based on ties of kinship are enduring but also contradictory; Ingstad [1994: 217] notes that women say they do not wish to sue in customary tribunals for child maintenance for fear that this would result in witchcraft assaults against their children by the father's female kin.

Yet the functioning of such evolving traditional systems of social security is not an alternative to social transfers, and particularly not to state-funded transfers; it is heavily dependent upon them. The drought relief programmes - providing food, jobs, seeds and ploughing - established in the 1980s were understood as emergency and thus transient measures, but became essential to the long-term everyday organisation of rural livelihoods. Solway [1994: 475*ff*] argues that the ways in which drought assistance was organized accentuated socio-economic inequalities and helped to undermine the capacity of rural people to support themselves by undercutting the diffuse organic links between rich and poor. This is probably true, but nonetheless cooperation among the poor, between the poor and the less poor, and between the poor and the rich is now mediated by an extensive system of state-funded transfers.

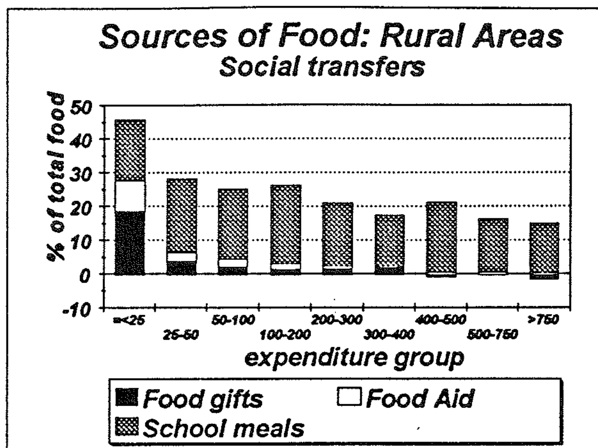

Figure 4 Composition of food obtained through social transfers, rural areas

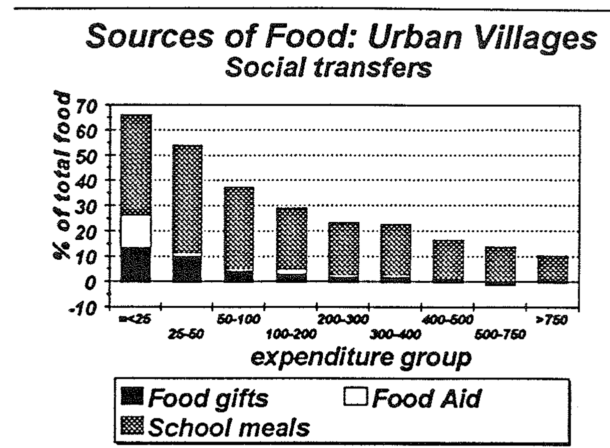

Figure 5 Composition of food obtained through social transfers, urban villages

Returning to sources of food, figures 4 and 5, also drawn from data from the 1993/94 HIES summarized in Table 12 in the Appendix, show the particular importance of social transfers for the subsistence of the lowest expenditure groups in both urban villages and rural agricultural areas. Food gifts from kin, neighbours and church provide about one-fifth of the food consumed by the porest households in rural areas, and one-tenth of the food of the poorest households in urban villages. In both areas, however, the most striking point is the dependence of the poor on formal state-based transfers - food aid and school meals. The school feeding programme benefits all income groups, but appears to be better targeted in rural villages than in rural areas. Food aid is often redistributed within household groups, not necessarily appropriated by dominant men, but also to feed those not covered by targeted schemes. Ingstad [1994: 215] describes how food aid rations are pooled to contribute to the subsistence of the entire family group, how children are sometimes kept out of school so that they receive a ration that can be shared instead of a school meal, how grandmothers may welcome a daughter's new child not only for love but for the ration that comes along.

Similarly, free distribution of seed and draught power made possible the continuing production for own consumption that is such an important buffer for the poorest families, while public works jobs were an irregular but important source of the disposable cash income needed for food expenditures. The non-feeding programmes were cut back after the drought, but this is an issue of political contention in Botswana today. One of the most eloquent women of Paje emphasized to van Driel [1994] that what rural women wanted from the government was jobs. So, as the unemployment figures traced above show, do many young rural men.

Women-headed households, missing men

Underneath the three long debated questions in the Botswana literature on women-headed households lie long-term strategic issues that extend beyond these households to the changing role of state, family and community in the migrant labour system. Changes in the organisation of rural

families and households reflect the sustained social exclusion of men from provisioning for their children and consequently, as Timaeus and Graham [1989] have pointed out, from any expectation of support from them in old age. Dependence on an impoverishing but relatively stable system of oscillating migration has given way to prosperity for some, particularly large commercial cattle-raisers, with persistent under-employment and dependence on social transfers for much of the rural population.

The issues here are much more profound than whether or not targeted social assistance can work by focussing on women-headed households, and indeed broader than Moore's [*op cit.*] formulation would suggest. The debate around women-headed households in Botswana is not just about conceptions of the appropriate roles for the state, the market, public institutions and the family in social provisioning; it is also about conceptions of the relationship between social well-being and strategies of economic growth. The debate has come increasing to take present market-based growth strategies as given and to focus narrowly on the issue of whether or not their effects on the poor can be adequately alleviated by targeting women-headed households. The Botswana case suggests that the answers are not satisfactory because the question itself is misplaced. In short, it is not possible to address the question of rural poverty and household livelihoods without confronting, as Wolpe [*op cit.*] did, structural issues of class and accumulation.

STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The issue of the relationship between strategies of growth and social provisioning brings us back to the wider debate in Southern Africa on the migrant labour system. I recognize the importance of regional and historical variation in the organisation of the migrant labour system, the permeability, flexibility and variation of domestic groups, and the analytical failings of teleological models of proletarianisation. I would argue, however, that the working of this system has nonetheless left a set of common structural problems that pose similar strategic issues for the different countries of the region. Though Botswana is historically specific, the issues we need to look at to sort out the relationship between rural household organisation and poverty recur throughout Southern Africa: the dependence of rural livelihoods on disposable cash income, the sharpening polarisation of agrarian production, structural unemployment, the erosion of social support from kin and community, and the corresponding dependence on social transfers. These are structural issues that underlie the conflicts of gender and generation that have made rural women-headed households, however they are defined and counted, an issue for policy debate and political concern in all countries of the region.

Rural livelihoods are dependent throughout Southern Africa on control of some regular disposable cash income[29], and the source of this income has historically been for most households a wage. The gendered class divide between commercial cattle production and subsistence cultivation is not everywhere so sharp as in Botswana. There are many places where commercial agriculture thrives at different scales of production. But everywhere we find polarisation and marginalisation in agricultural production, with capitalist production dominating commercial land, credit, and marketing channels. Off-farm rural 'informal sector'employment is important but stagnant and highly competitive, with brewing everywhere a major income support for rural women [Sharp and Spiegel 1985; McIntosh, 1991; Preston-Whyte, 1991][30].

The 'traditional' basis for maintaining rural livelihoods has thus been wage employment[31], and usually migration. Unemployment throughout the region blocks access to a regular wage-paying job - but not necessarily migration. Long-term structural unemployment, varying by country and locality, oscillating with business cycles, recently increasing abruptly with public sector cuts under structural adjustment, has nonetheless been growing steadily for at least the last twenty years [*cf.* Murray, 1987]. It represents the growth of the labour force, the dependence of households on wages for cash-income (i.e. the absence of alternative income sources), and stagnation of employment growth in industrial sectors and service sectors.

The extent of unemployment in South Africa is open to debate, but it is clear that it is severe, growing, and particularly endemic among the young and black[32]. The loss of mine employment in South Africa has been particularly important to all the labour reserve countries. Although the immediate impact on rural incomes was partly off-set by wage-rises, this itself sharpened rural differentiation while the burden of unemployment was absorbed by the young who had not gone (and now will ever go) to the mines. Mine employment has continued to decline with technical change and the closure of marginal mines, and regional recruitment even more so. Many of those seeking work are in South Africa, particularly in urban areas, though the nature of undocumented migration makes it difficult to measure. Judging from the number of missing men evinced by sex ratios among people of working age in rural areas in other countries of the region, South Africa is still receiving male migrants. Again estimates of undocucmented migrants, difficult to make and politically controversial, vary in South Africa. Many of the migrants are working somehow or another, but with low wages, uncertain employment and insecure residence. Their incomes are low and their capacity to contribute to household maintenance weak and irregular.

It is these changes in the structure of employment that underlie what Sharp and Spiegel [1985] have called the erosion of kinship and neighbourhood as a social resource, or, as I have argued here, the interdependence of kinship and community support with the existence of broad-based social transfers. South Africa has a grant system for the elderly and a pension system with

at least partial cover in rural areas, deficient and criticized as these are, they are nonetheless the basis of survival for many rural households. Sharp and Spiegel [1985: 142] describe the importance of civil pensions paid to the elderly in the then Bantustans, despite the fact that they were low and difficult to obtain, making the old less vulnerable and dependent on the young than in other parts of the region.

In other countries of the region structural dependence on social transfers is disguised as emergency aid, hence correspondingly uncertain in its political mandate and generally dependent on external funding. Food for work in Lesotho and food distribution to war refugees in southern Mozambique, like the drought relief and school feeding programmes in Botswana, became part of the organisation of everyday subsistence for poor rural families. And, yes, most of those who did food for work in Lesotho [Ferguson, 1990: 126], and those who remain in the refugee camps in southern Mozambique after others have left [Myers *et al*, 1994: 67-68] are women, young and old, with children or on their own.

CONCLUSIONS: MISSING MEN

Now to return to the deliberate ambiguous title of this paper. Men are missing statistically in Botswana. Despite the fact that women also migrate in large numbers to urban areas, in rural areas sex ratios continue to be highly imbalanced in all age-groups. National sex ratios are also imbalanced, suggesting that despite the growth of industrial employment in Botswana and the decline in contracting of Batswana labour for South Africa and officially registered migration, Batswana men, like others in the region, continue to migrate to South Africa, now as undocumented workers facing unemployment.

Second, men are often missing not only from rural households, but also from research on them. We know relatively too much about women in women-headed households in Botswana and not sufficient about gender relations between men and women. Much has been done to document and describe the varied but often desperate situations of many women-headed households, but gender relations need to be more explicitly explored, within and between generations and different class positions, through the phases of conjugal relations, between town and country.

Third, men, or more properly strategic gender dimensions, are missing from agrarian policies that take the poverty of women-headed households as a given to be 'alleviated'. The blurring of the structuralist focus on the relationship between gender, class, and strategies of economic growth, which first gave rise to the literature on women-headed households in Southern Africa, has impoverished the debate both in theory and policy. I object, that is, not only *per* Jackson [*op cit.*] to the reduction of gender to poverty, but also to the reduction of poverty

to a question of distribution. Poverty in Southern Africa reflects inequalities of race, gender and class which are rooted in long-term historical patterns of capital accumulation.

And finally, when men are structurally missing from rural communities and households, yes, they are missed. The absence of men from income generating employment matters for women and children in rural areas and underlies their demographic disappearance, the high incidence of women-headed households, and the poverty of many rural households. I do not question the importance of recognizing women's initiative and power, nor do I think it undesirable that many women find autonomy in households they themselves head. But it seems to me wrong to take as given an economic and social structure that links poverty to autonomy and gives women authority only in the absence of men.

I am not arguing against social welfare programmes targeted to protect the vulnerable. The Botswana case shows how intertwined are 'traditional' systems of social security with public support, and how much the livelihoods of the rural poor depend on social transfers. Indeed in Southern Africa it is quite likely that among poor households those headed by women, whether of two or three generations, need special support because of their role in caring for dependent children. But the analytical focus on the welfare of women-headed households has displaced an earlier but still deeply important strategic debate. What should be done to restructure migrant labour systems when capital no longer needs the labour that it pulled from rural households over so many generations?

APPENDIX

Table 12 Food sources by expenditure group
Source: Central Statistics Office 1995 (HIES 1993-1994), Table 22

1. Rural agricultural areas

	<=25	25-50	50-100	100-200	200-300	300-400	400-500	500-750	>750
Food expenditure	4.52	15.37	26.24	35.61	45.33	49.18	48.7	62.43	68.81
Food wages in kind	10.5	2.21	1.02	1.39	0	1.78	0.51	0.66	0
Own produce consumed	39.23	54.22	47.63	36.78	33.76	31.73	30.33	20.72	17.57
Food gifts received	18.85	4.06	2.41	1.44	1.86	2.12	-0.74	-0.11	-1.36
Food Aid	9.04	2.27	2.18	1.59	0.76	0.41	0.68	0.68	0.32
School meals	17.85	21.87	20.52	23.2	18.29	14.8	20.51	15.62	14.66

2. Urban villages

	<=50	50-100	100-200	200-300	300-500	500-750	750-1000	1000-1500	>1500
Food expenditure	11.79	33.13	44.67	55.9	67.02	65.11	78.71	1000	79.94
Food wages in kind	5.63	3.69	0.43	0.49	0	3.67	0	0.32	1.31
Own produce consumed	16.96	9.27	17.62	14.45	9.81	8.75	5.04	16.13	8.75
Food gifts received	13.69	10.54	4.6	3.58	2.08	1.97	0.99	-1.39	0.64
Food Aid	12.78	1.1	0.81	1.51	0.7	0.68	0.39	0.18	0.1
School meals	39.51	42.26	31.87	24.07	20.38	19.82	14.87	13.47	9.26

NOTES

1. I myself have very limited experience in Botswana and thus draw in this paper almost entirely on secondary sources. The paper emerged in fact out of preparation of a research proposal. Although I criticize aspects of work done on Botswana in the course of this paper, the fact that there is any paper at all hangs on the quality of both anthropological case-studies and survey research in Botswana. As I thought through the Botswana issues, and their similarities and differences to those posed in Southern Mozambique (where I do have research experience), I decided that there are some things already worth saying, at least about the conceptual issues discussed here.

2. The debate over the relationship between poverty and the gender of household heads in Botswana is in part a methodological confrontation: on one side are thosewho argue that if we ask quantitative questions such as 'how many' and 'how much' we have to count; on the other are anthropologists who answer yes, but what you have been counting has no validity - you are not measuring real things.

3. Based on the findings of the recent SALDRU survey, for example, Pillay [1996: 42] concludes that women head *de jure* 26.9% of South African households and 10.5% *de facto*; 37.5% of both groups are deemed to be ultrapoor. In Lesotho, 54% of all households are said to be headed by women, 25% *de jure* and 29% *de facto*. *De jure* women-headed households are the poorest, yet not sharply different to male-headed rural households, which are also poorer than those headed *de facto* by women [World Bank 1995: 25]. In Botswana figures are, as we shall see, discussable, but the incident of women-headed households is around 50% in rural areas.

4. The general issues raised apply, however, to Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi as well, so perhaps integration in the South African labour market is not an adequate criterion for analytical demarcation.

5. Marc Wuyts (personal communication) recounts that Harold Wolpe, when visiting Mozambique after the 1977 miners' study by the Centre for African Studies, was very resistant to evidence of differentiation based on investment of mine wages. I have argued elsewhere [O'Laughlin, 1996] that this resistance was in part a valid concern with the political danger of over-emphasizing the development of a national agrarian bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie in the context of politically dominant settler capital.

6. This critique is not entirely fair. Structuralist work was precisely concerned with why there was so much semi-proletarianisation, why there was not a large landless proletariat, in Southern Africa. Legassick's [*op cit.*] work dealt specifically with the impact of secondary industrialisation on the organisation of migrant labour. Nonetheless the problem was defined in relation to what was considered to be the norm - an irreversible process of proletarianisation.

7. Murray's [1987] review of these issues, and his proposals for analytical alternatives are excellent sources for theoretical advance on this debate, to which I have not done justice here.

8. The population classed as urban grew from 54411 in 1971 to 286779 in 1991[Central Statistics Office, 1993].

9. In Botswana, many Sarwa people, in the past enserfed and still often dependent on ties of patronage and state transfers for survival, are thought to be the poorest of the poor [*cf.* Good, *op cit.*; Wilmsen and Vossen, 1990; Solway, 1994].

10. The 1985-86 survey is not a particularly good base-point for establishing tendencies in changes in distribution of income since was done at the height of the drought, when one would expect that rural poverty would not have been entirely offset by drought relief programmes.

11. The richness of the debate is in part a regional political artifact, product of the cultural boycott of South Africa and of the presence of South African scholars in exile. In terms of regional contributions in this area, however, it is important to recognize the pioneering work done by Murray, Spiegel and Sharp in Lesotho and South Africa [Murray, 1978, 1981, 1987; Sharp and Spiegel, 1985; Spiegel 1987].

12. The other central rural policy debate in Botswana is around the privatisation of grazing land and water rights [*cf.* Peters, 1994]. It focuses on politics, environmental issues and the affairs of men, but is in fact another facet of the relationship between poverty and women-headed households.

13. Although Peters [1983, 1984] in her classic exchange with Kerven [1984] has been accused by Van Driel [1994] of retreating back into the older image of a harmonious developmental cycle, ignoring structural and systemic change, her argument is really a prescient version of the current emphasis on variability.

14. These debates made their way into policy research instruments. The Botswana Household and Income Expenditure Surveys allow one to control for the sex, age, and education of the household head, the number of wage-earners attached to the household and residential location of the household.

15. For fuller discussion of these issues see Polly Hill [1986], Guyer and Peters [1987] and Russell [1993].

16. It would be very interesting to have comparable data on men's reproductive histories, but both census and demographic and health survey methodology focus on women.

17. The 1985-86 HIES did not employ the distinction between rural villages and other rural areas. According to the methodology outlined in the HIES report [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 15], the rural village category employed in the 1993-94 study is a subset of the rural village category used in 1985-86. Thus changes in rural/urban differences should not be an effect of reclassification.

18. Both Gulbrandsen and Solway criticize Comaroff and Roberts' [1981] notion of "serial polygyny", which treats Batswana men's approach to conjugal relations as polygyny in a new form, and thus emphasizes continuity rather than radical change in Batswana culture. I agree with the counter argument that there is a qualitative difference between living interdependently with several mother/child groups and the intermittent at best connections that some men maintain with their children today. Nonetheless, it would be useful to have more information on men's domestic histories to settle this question.

19. Yet most rural case studies of agricultural credit schemes mention that women are excluded because they rarely in fact have recognized independent rights to agricultural land.

20. Yet they may not necessarily do so. In Molokomme's [1991: 100] study in Kanye, only 10% of unmarried mothers had independent households.

21. This is regionally variable, ranging from 18% in the Northwest District to 35% in Ghanzi.

22. The percentage of rural households owning cattle is regionally variable, ranging from 57% in the Southern District to 29% in the Southeast District.

23. The rationale for doing so in the context of a migrant labour system is discussed in Low [1984].

24. The HIES covered private dwelling excluding hotels, army camps and other instutional accomodation. Ngamiland was also excluded. A household was defined as those living together, sharing eating arrangements and if working, contributing to household income, in addition to those vistors (whether friends or relatives) who were not living permanently with the household but were there for at least 15 days of the survey month. Domestic workers were excluded and treated as separate households [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 10-11, 15].

25. The 1993-94 HIES report used, however, the distinction between urban areas, urban villages and rural areas introduced in the 1991 census, whereas the 1985-86 study distinguished only between urban and rural.

26. This is a long-term pattern, noted by Kossoudji and Mueller [1983: 838] on the basis of the 1975-76 Rural Income Distribution Survey. They suggest that it reflects the fact that when young women have children they move out of the

parental household to form separate households only if they have independent resources. Ethnographic evidence is not conclusive on this point with cases of well-paid unmarried mothers remaining in the parental house and contributing to it while others set up households on their own.

27. Some of these might lead us to underestimate the disparities of income between households headed by women and those headed by men, others to overestimate it. Since the Botswana HIES methodology does not attempt to take into account either the developmental cycles of households or the non-discreteness of domestic groups, there may be, as noted by Peters [1983, 1984], an overestimation of the relative poverty of households headed by women. The HIES sets monetary equivalents for all forms of production and transfers in kind. Data on ubsistence production, informal sector activity and gifts, which are relatively more important income sources for households headed by women, are typically difficult to track, leading perhaps to an underestimate of their incomes. The HIES data summarised above present total household income, not *per capita* income.This is reasonable given the shifting composition of households in Southern Africa, but may lead to errors in estimates of relative poverty if household size in the lowest income groups varies with the gender of the household head. Survey evidence is not clear on this, but does show that the dependency ratios of rural households headed by women are higher than those headed by men. Hence there may be an underestimation of the relative poverty of women-headed households. The HIES data do not capture well the insecurity and irregularity of income of households that lack assets, important because women in Botswana do not have equal access to two of the most important rural assets - land and cattle. Generalisations about directions of change are also insecure; the fact that the 1985-86 survey was conducted at the height of the drought may hide long-term structural tendencies toward widening income disparties in general and gender disparities in particular.

28. Rural Botswana households do, however, spend a significant part of their food budget on alcoholic drinks - 21% of monthly expenditure in urban villages and 26.3% in rural agricultural areas [Central Statistics Office, 1995: 88].

29. See Sharp and Spiegel [1985] for a particularly good discussion of this in South Africa.

30. Sharp and Spiegel [1985] recount the illustrative experience of a man in the Transkei who spent his time waiting in labour bureaus rather than trying to hawk vegetables as others did. He had no spare cash for the initial outlay on vegetables and pointed out that there were too many sellers with too few buyers.

31. This point is made by Drèze [1995] in his review of famine relief strategies in Africa.

32. Unemployment was estimated at 22.5% in South Africa in 1982 [Cassim 1988]. Ardington [1984] in a study in kwaZulu found that 46% of households had someone unemployed. Today it has been estimated that 30-33% of the labour force is unemployed, increasing to 64% of the African economically active population between 16 and 24 [South Africa, 1996]. These latter estimates based on studies by the Central Statistical Office and SALDRU are disputed by the ILO which suggests that a recent upturn has led to employment growth, though often of lower-quality, less permanent or less formalised employment [*Ibid.*].

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