Chapter 8

Conclusion

Social reproduction in the woman-headed family

*It is not the primacy of the economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of the totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method, which Marx took over from Hegel and transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science.* (Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, 1968)

8.1 Introduction

This study investigated the nature of social reproduction in single-black-woman-headed families in post-apartheid South Africa, through an in-depth case study of woman-heads of families in the Bophelong Township in Gauteng. Once the research evidence was accumulated, based on a preliminary analysis, the data concerning woman-heads was organised into three generations of woman-headed families – the Grandmothers (the Survivors), the Mothers (the Liberators) and the Daughters (the Pragmatists), in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively. Although the woman-heads live contemporaneously, they differ in terms of age, lived experience, historical experience (they grew up in different periods of South Africa’s political economy) and they were mothered by different generations of women. These differences have enabled internal comparisons within one family form. In the conclusion I revert to the woman-headed family as a single and unified family form in contemporary South Africa.

In the conceptual framework (see Chapter 2) I concluded that social reproduction consists of two coterminous moments: the physical reproduction of labour power and the reproduction of social relations. This informed the discussion on social reproduction in each generation of the woman-heads. Each chapter (5, 6, and 7) was organised into three sections: Section 1 included brief biographies of the women and
the path they took to become heads of their families. I also historicised and contextualised the women within the South African social formation. This section also focused on their attitudes to men and their self-concept as woman-heads of families. Section 2 focused on the physical reproduction of labour power in each generation, based on four aspects: the composition and structure of the family, the nature of work, the sources of income, and the patterns of consumption. Section 3 focused on the reproduction of capitalist social relations, and this included five aspects: the division of labour within the home, decision-making, authority, associational life, and culture and patriarchy.

The conclusion therefore sums up social reproduction in the woman-headed family form as a totality, as a single and unified family form. The internal variations or differences that occur within this family form, expressed in the concrete lived experiences of the women, and informed by their historical context, biography and social agency, are treated and discussed as moments of this single totality.

The conclusions drawn in this chapter are however tentative, bearing in mind that the nature of this qualitative study was based on a particular type of the woman-headed family, a sample based in one township in South Africa. While the aim of the study was to enable black woman-heads to speak for themselves, the conclusions are tentative and point to the need for further engagement and research.

8.2 The peculiar nature of social reproduction in woman-headed families

In almost all social formations\(^1\), and in capitalism and its various regimes of accumulation, social reproduction has a two-fold character – the reproduction of the present and future generation of workers, and the reproduction of social relations. In previous (capitalist) regimes of accumulation, for example, under social democracy, the role of the ‘income-earner’ on the one hand, and the caregiver, immediately and directly involved in the work of social reproduction, on the other, was separated. Within the nuclear family the male tended to work and earn a wage while the role of

\(^1\) This of course excludes hunter-gatherers where no separation between production and reproduction occurs.
caregiver was assumed by a woman, a ‘housewife’, with responsibility for the daily functions of social reproduction, and who remained in the home. The position of the male as the head of the family was defined by, or was coterminous with, the role of being the income-earner.

The role of the male worker and husband as a theoretical breadwinner or income-earner was underpinned by the ‘family wage’, which was set at a level that made it possible for the male worker to provide adequate means of subsistence for his family. The ‘family wage was further supported by a social wage that supplemented the supply of services – like education, health, transport and various other social services.²

In South Africa, capital accumulation did not provide black workers with a ‘family wage’ or a ‘social wage’, and to the extent that this existed it was provided to white workers. Historically, the social reproduction of black family-households in both rural and city/towns was characterised by a daily struggle (see Chapter 2).

We have seen that in the current regime of accumulation the work of being an income-earner and of being a caregiver is made all the more difficult by the fact that the woman-heads, as black women, occupy the bottom rungs of the labour market and perform the most unskilled and lowly paid jobs in South Africa. While this has been the position of black women for decades, the post-apartheid context has not changed their situation. This had meant that the woman-heads are not in a position to earn levels of wages that are comparable to that historically paid to male income-earners. As the social services like education, health, transport and others have been privatised, the costs of these services have been shifted onto the working class, and in particular to those who are responsible for the daily functions of social reproduction – in this study the woman-headed families.

The rise of the woman-headed family has fused the role of income-earner and that of caregiver, responsible for the daily functions of social reproduction. This has raised the levels of stress in the woman-headed family, and the family-head now has to

² This discussion relates to the one in the conceptual framework, in Chapter 2.
confront the difficulties of finding work in a difficult labour market, and to also deal with the difficulties of the daily functions of social reproduction. Fundamentally, this is the meaning of the concept of the crisis of social reproduction.

The women therefore begin their role of headship with a double disadvantage: unlike the male-heads in nuclear families, they have to assume both the role of income-earner and of the daily responsibility for the functions of social reproduction.

8.3 Towards an understanding of the woman-headed family form

8.3.1 The objective and subjective potential of the woman-headed family for social change

The woman-headed family form arises from within a capitalist patriarchal society, and their mere existence objectively undermines patriarchy. While family ‘heads’ are associated with black men – under conditions of capitalism in South Africa this was often discontinuous especially given the intermittent rise of women-heads (see Chapters 2 and 3) - their role was to mediate the family’s relationship to society and the state. The women’s position as family-head, and their role and location in society that derives from their role as head, turns the role of family-head ‘on its head’. In South Africa black women are socially and economically the lowest strata of the working class, the poorest of the poor, and do the most menial work, despite their widespread democratic rights. Objectively, black women’s location is informed by many social determinations - colour, skill, gender, access to social opportunities and poverty – that intersect and deepen their oppression. While they are relegated to the lowest social rung within society, as family-heads the women are cast into leadership roles.

The woman-headed family now directly mediates relations within their families, with males, with family kin, and with their communities and society. This objectively changes their position within the overall social structure, and in turn these institutions are obliged to interface with the woman-heads on a range of issues, including those concerning their sons and traditional culture (for example lebollo); areas that are
historically and traditionally the domain of males. This objectively undermines the acquiescence and the ‘alliance of masculinities’ that has generally existed in society. Extending democratic rights to women, including the franchise, is one thing; but when women are objectively located within positions of power there are no guarantees how the women will appropriate and use that power, particularly in relation to patriarchy. The woman-headed family therefore objectively threatens capitalist patriarchy, because of black women’s location within the working class, their relationship to power, and the powerful positions they hold as ‘head’. While woman-heads have emerged within South African history, from time to time, South Africa’s democracy formally recognises them and they have democratic and juridical rights.

The women are different to male-heads in the choices that they make as family-heads. The woman-heads’ approach to their role in social reproduction is different to male-heads, they reorganise the way in which social reproduction occurs in their homes at the general and specific levels. For instance, the reproduction of material life was implemented in a relatively egalitarian manner, in support of all their children, and all children were treated with equity. For instance, all children received food, clothes and access to school. Despite difficult conditions and very low incomes, every child’s needs within the family was equitably catered for, sometimes on a rotational basis because of scarce resources. The boy-children did not receive preferential treatment to girls.

The reproduction of social relations within the woman-headed family and the choices that the women made about how decisions were taken, and their response to traditional culture, did not reflect a submissiveness and a general acquiescence to a patriarchal culture. While the women would like to practice certain aspects of their traditional culture (more so amongst the older women, but not exclusively), they were also painfully aware of the dangers the re-entry of men represents for them and their families. This is not to argue a romantic view of the woman-headed family, but it was apparent that despite the conflictual nature that issues sometimes assumed within their families, violence was never an issue or a means to resolve issues. In fact, many of the woman-heads (Rowena, Kedibone and Margaret) associated violence with men and acknowledged that now they were living without violence – without male partners.
Sometimes serious disagreements occurred within the woman-headed families, between the women and their daughters, between siblings, between grandchildren and/or the women and their sons, but violence was always avoided. In general the woman-heads fostered co-operative relations within the family, and this was a different experience of ‘headship’ that has ramifications for authority in the workplace and society, and in particular a substantial section of the new generation of workers. The children were not being habituated to authority.

The woman-heads made these choices despite their widespread conditions of poverty. In fact, the pervasive conditions of poverty in which these women live highlight their agency (Bozzoli, 2004). Nothing just ‘happens’ to the woman-heads passively, and even though emergencies arose, the women tend to respond collectively, drawing on their social network, which although informal, contains within it the underlying perspective of a more socialised response to key aspects of social reproduction such as childcare, illness and death.

In this study, the woman-headed family form itself represents a particular socialised and solidaristic response to the crisis of social reproduction as they care for those who are ‘marginalised’: the orphaned, the elderly, the infirm and the unemployed, in the absence of state support services. Perhaps this is a particular form of solidarity based on ‘family’ or kin, nevertheless, it explains why even the family structure in single woman-heads is different from single male-headed families. Where Dungumaro (2008) indicates that the latter tend to be smaller and confined to the immediate family, the woman-headed families tend to be ‘fluid’ and extended. To the extent that the woman-heads are ‘open to assist’, especially in times of social crisis, they provide an alternative to what should exist, in this case, what the ‘family’ should look like. In this sense the woman-heads are potentially transformative. Even in cases of serious economic hardship, woman-headed families tended to respond positively to calls for help from family and friends, even if this meant stretching already meager resources.

The woman-headed family form therefore represents potential indices for a transformative family form. The women are curtailed by deep levels of poverty, an often inaccessible state, and often they act within the isolation of their families. To
fulfill their potentially transformative tendencies, the isolation of the woman-headed family needs to be broken, and their social networks need to be organised more self-consciously. In particular, this requires the rise and activism of a broadbased women’s movement.

8.3.2 Becoming a woman-head

The woman-heads are obliged to undergo a struggle to become the heads of their family, given their objective locations as black women, and the required need to reposition themselves as a key mediator within their family, and between the family and society and the state. Black women’s own social reproduction (their nurturing and upbringing) did not prepare them to become woman-heads. As the woman-heads struggled to reposition themselves, there was necessarily a struggle within themselves (to confront their own habituation and socialisation), and a struggle with family, male kin and patriarchal society.

Historically, the struggle and the transition to become woman-heads started under apartheid, since migrant labour became the pervasive form of labour, and therefore the woman-headed family predated the democratisation of South Africa in the 1990s. A key feature of the woman-headed family under apartheid was the struggle and the transition of women from being the ‘head of the household’ to being the ‘head of the family’. As heads of household for many years the women acted as the surrogate head on behalf of the (absentee) male migrant (see Chapters 2 and 3). While the woman-headed household or family already emerged in the 1930s (Van der Vliet, 1984), there were structural factors associated with apartheid that inhibited and prohibited their growth. These included influx controls, pass laws, together with low wages and inadequate housing. These were strong factors that induced both cohabitation and fragmentation (Beittel, 1992). The woman-heads re-emerged in the 1960s, and Pauw (1962) explains their rise and demise in relation to apartheid, the forced removals and the state’s patriarchal policy of placing houses on the names of sons, even though women were the heads. These strong factors that influenced cohabitation and fragmentation (Walker, 1990a), and the precariousness of black people’s relationships (Murray, 1987), shaped the lives of black women, black families and family forms. In particular, this meant that the woman-headed family as a family form was submerged
or hidden during the apartheid period, and its significance could therefore only be appreciated in the post-apartheid period.

Despite their pursuit of conventional relations with men, and notwithstanding apartheid conditions, by 1985 the growth of the woman-headed family form was significant (Beittel, 1992), indicating this family form’s resilience. The influx of women into apartheid’s cities unleashed the pressures that led to the relaxation of apartheid’s influx controls, abolition of the pass laws, and the demise of these restrictions were the first palpable gains of the liberation struggle against apartheid.

Women’s decisions to live as single woman-headed families were triggered, propelled and underpinned by structural violence that underlined the different regimes of capitalist accumulation in South Africa. For all the woman-heads in this study, one or many different forms of violence and abuse was the reason that the women left husbands or partners or never remarried. For most of the women ‘structural violence’ was not just an abstraction, it was the lived experience of their daily life: they endured emotional and physical violence from their partners (Margaret, Rowena, Kedibone and Lena), as well as the rape of their young by partners (Rowena). Even in cases where there was no direct experience of abusive male partners, the overall context of violence against women influenced the women (Rakgadi, Janet and Sara) to live on their own. And so when Rakgadi, Janet and Sara chose to preserve the memory of their loving relationships with their deceased partners, they were in effect holding them up as counterpoints to the widespread experiences of abuse and violence against women.

Both the Grandmothers and the Mothers became woman-heads in the 1980s, although the former were in their 40s and the latter were in their 30s. The difference in age was linked to the historical context and the accompanying ideology in which the different women grew up. Already, the enabling environment of the 1980s, the decline of apartheid, provided the basis for the rise of this family form. Besides the importance of material conditions such as jobs and accommodation, the 1980s also provided an ideological context (as much created by the women themselves), that coincided with ‘freedom’ and the liberation struggle, and which created the psychological predisposition for the women to leave abusive relationships. For the Grandmothers,
the 1980s represented an important contrast to the strong ideological imperatives – from Christianity, traditional culture and resistance organisations such as FEDSAW – that had reinforced the maintenance of conventional families in the face of apartheid’s structural and deliberate fragmentation in the 1960s and the period before that. It was during the liberation struggle in the 1980s that the traditional chiefs were discredited for their collaboration with apartheid (Harries, 2005). In the course of a mass based struggle the role of traditional culture as a source of resistance, was also replaced by the development of a secular liberation movement, that included women’s liberation.

During the 1960s the Grandmothers (and their peers) were themselves dutiful to the dominant family form, but they also steeled a new generation to struggle against apartheid. For the Grandmothers, it was the convergence of their own personal experience and the generalised experience of violence that black women experienced (including womanising), that impelled them to live on their own as woman-heads.

The Mothers, on the other hand, grew up in relative stability with both their parents (and especially supportive fathers), even though this was under apartheid. This, together with the mass struggles of the liberation movement in the 1980s infused them with a consciousness of equality, women’s rights and freedom. Their fathers, together with the mass struggles, were extremely significant ideological influences on the liberators’ decision to leave abusive relations.

All the women pursued and struggled for conventional relationships with men in the context of structural violence associated with different apartheid regimes of accumulation. These struggles explain why the woman-headed family form predates the democratisation in the 1990s, and is not a new phenomenon, having risen and waned through these different regimes of accumulation. However, during these struggles the woman-headed family form became socially acceptable. The fact that the resurgence of this family form (Beittel, 1992) converged with the beginning of the end of apartheid was therefore not coincidental. A by-product of the experience of apartheid was the acceptance of different forms of relationships, including cohabitation or ‘vat en sit’ (‘common law’ relationships). The precarious nature of black people’s relationships as a result of apartheid’s tendencies towards cohabitation and fragmentation of families, together with women (and men’s) pursuance of loving
relationships, resulted in children from different fathers (and mothers). For the women in this study, and for many others, paternity increasingly became irrelevant.

The struggle of the women as heads of households, in the reserves and in the cities, and their transition to becoming heads of their families, prefigured the rights that were later enshrined in the South African Constitution in 1996. These gains were concretely achieved through black women’s (and men’s) daily struggles, throughout this country, in particular the struggles of single woman-heads of families. Here one is not referring to participation in formal organisation and mass struggles (although that has its own place and importance), rather, one is referring to the daily struggles of working people, black women (and men) to live together, and for their children to be recognised and not discarded as illegitimate. It was these struggles and the de facto rights claimed, that prefigured South Africa’s democracy. In contemporary South Africa, the Constitution recognises all forms of cohabitation whether civil, customary or common law (including same sex relationships); all children have rights and there is no longer the ‘illegitimate child’, amongst many others. These legislative rights are important ‘gains’ that are now transferred to all women and society as a whole, and they strike at the heart of patriarchal bourgeois rule. In particular, these rights subvert important aspects of capitalist patriarchy in relation to property rights, rights of inheritance and the patriarchal control of women and children; and should therefore not be underestimated. The formalisation of these rights, framed within South Africa’s Constitution, has been an important advance at the level of society, and internationally. To this extent traditional bourgeois rights have been undermined, and dealt a severe blow.

The formalisation of women’s rights created the enabling conditions that Blumberg (1978: quoted in Chant, 1991: 22) notes, with regards to women’s rights as individuals and as workers. Concrete access to housing and income, albeit in the form of the social grants and RDP housing, underpins the prevalence of the woman-headed family form in the 1990s, despite state policies that promote the nuclear family.

---

3 (see the Constitution, (RSA, 1996b).
4 Without reducing the important gains that the South African Constitution represents for women, both nationally and internationally, Benjamin (1996) argues that despite women’s widespread participation in public life, patriarchy and/or gender inequality has seeped into social structures; and the presence of men is not necessary for the reproduction of gender inequality and male dominance.
(Amoateng et al., 2004). Since the 1990s, women do not have to engage in a struggle to ‘become’ woman-heads as this had become concretely experienced and generalised. This explains why woman-heads were getting younger, and in the 1990s they were on average in their 20s, and the tendency is for this latter generation not to have married before they became heads of their families. In contradistinction to the generations that came before her, Lerato (the Daughter) makes a choice to be on her own ‘because she was not ready’ for co-habitation, and thereby lives, concretely, the promise of women’s rights contained in the Constitution.

However, under neoliberalism structural violence and poverty has increased. Violence against women has increased (MRC, 2009), but this is also the basis for transactional sex and the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Hunter, 2002). In contemporary South Africa women’s freedom and independence is underpinned by the absence of choice, in particular poverty and food insecurity. Although the younger women did not have to engage in the struggle to ‘become’ a woman-head, in the absence of an environment that is conducive to women becoming full citizens they are engaged in a daily struggle for survival. Transactional sex masquerades as ‘sexual freedom’, a twist of irony, concealing the widespread conditions of unfreedom, where women’s work is so low paid that to prevent their family from falling into abject poverty, many engage in transactional sex. This places young woman-heads objectively in the path of self-destruction – the danger of contracting HIV/AIDS - very often for the love of the family and their children (like for instance, Lerato).

The road the women in this study travelled to become heads of their families, raises critical and important questions about the link between poverty and the absence of choice on the part of women. Most discussions that seek to understand the phenomenon of violence against women, and in particular why women stay in abusive relationships, have put at the forefront of explanation the link between women’s poverty and how this creates the imperative for staying in abusive relationships.

The rise of the woman-headed family form challenges this now conventional view. Here we see women who are very poor, like Janet, who are able to take the bold step of raising children on their own (‘While I was sitting there [at the clinic wanting to have an abortion] I realised that I am not the first person to bring up a child on my
own’), or Lerato’s decision to fetch her siblings from the orphanage notwithstanding the weight of responsibility in the context of poverty. Indeed, all the women in this study, and the millions more woman-heads that they represent, presents us with the possibility for an historical break in poverty’s role as a ‘structural force’ promoting cohabitation in the face of violence and abuse. An understanding of the conditions that enable women to break the link between poverty and cohabitation needs wider discussion within the social movements and the social sciences, as it opens up new areas of discussion in the search for strategies that will reduce and eliminate the scourge of violence against women in South Africa and other countries.

8.3.3 Self concept and attitude to men

The struggle to ‘become’ a woman-head informed the women’s self-concept and their attitude to men. Given their struggle, once they became woman-heads, all the women were extremely happy to live on their own with their children; and had developed a distrust of men. None of the women was bitter towards men.

The distrust of men was born out of the women’s personal experience of violence and abuse, and of violence as part of the generalised experience of black women. This was especially relevant for those women who had good relations with their husbands but were later widowed, and who remained single as a way of preserving their husbands’ or partners’ loving memory, free of violence. It was extremely interesting that this occurred in all three ‘types’ or generations of women – Janet, Sara and Rakgadi.

That most of the women started out in pursuance of a conventional relationship with a man, either in customary or common-law relationships or some form of partnership, reflected their own socialisation, their own social reproduction, and a particular self-concept at the time. Only once the promise of a loving, albeit conventional relationship, with a man was no longer likely, did the women decide to live on their own. The women’s struggle to become a woman-head therefore included a change in their self-concept as women. All of them learned to live on their own, once they made the decision to leave abusive partners or to remain single.

5 See Chapter 7.
That the women overcame their hurdles and became woman-heads was expressed in various ways. For instance, Mosotho encouraged her daughter who had a traditional marriage to become a ‘co-head’. In the context of traditional culture, this is subversive, given men’s pre-eminent position as ‘head’ of the family. Margaret supported her daughter’s struggle to choose her own job, and thereby break the pattern of daughter’s literally replacing their mother’s in the kitchen. This was also a self-conscious decision as a ‘head’, to act in the interest of her family. Despite the threat of unemployment, Margaret refused to do ‘live in’ work as her absence was detrimental to her own family’s wellbeing.

The women’s self concept was also expressed in their attitude to men. The woman-heads were not opposed to, or anti-men. Notwithstanding some variations in their attitude to men (related to age, their specific historical formation, biography and agency), the underlying theme in their attitude to men is one of caution, independence and a struggle to control their sexual relations with men.

The older woman-heads, once they realised that the ‘promise’ of a conventional loving relationship was over, withdrew from men completely. Partly, this was influenced by fear, trauma and disappointment, and their own cautious and conservative upbringing. Interestingly, one of the Grandmothers who had experienced a very positive and fulfilled relationship (Rakgadi), decided to have ‘sex on the side’. This possibly reflected her relatively positive and healthy relationship with her husband, although she decided in the long run to live on her own, and appropriated the lived experience of the women around her.

In contrast, all the women, the Mothers, who had good relationships with their fathers, not only left abusive partners but also pursued the search for a loving relationship with a man. This occurred against the backdrop of the liberation struggle and contending ideologies of equality and liberation that undermined the traditional, Christian and conventional relations, and women’s conventional role in society. These woman-heads were also aware of their physical needs, and could mean them having children from different fathers. However, once they decided that men were not to be trusted, they lived alone. Like Rakgadi, Sara had an extremely good relationship with
her husband and after she was widowed, she retained a controlled ‘sexual’ relationship with a man.

The younger women’s attitude to men was very pragmatic, in relation to what men could provide for them in the context of their poverty. While transactional sex was underpinned by poverty, it was to some extent an expression of their perception or internalisation of the women’s rights discourse, ‘women’s independence’ and ‘freedom’. At the same time there was an awareness of the specific limitations and the way men were socialised. For instance, one of the woman-heads, Lerato, expressed sympathy for men, who, when they discovered their HIV/AIDS status, were unable to speak about this. This was also mediated by Lerato’s role as a counselor, but it also expressed an analysis of men’s role in society.

However, amongst all the women there was a distrust of men, and a clear recognition of the potential dangers should men re-enter their homes and their families. The women were even circumspect about appealing to male kin to assist them with their sons where issues of authority were raised, as they feared that male kin might resort to violence to resolve issues. While all the women were self-conscious in their attitude to keeping men at bay, or in controlled sexual relationships, one of the younger women, Lerato, who is also ‘positive’ (in terms of HIV/AIDS), decided to live with a man and had a child with him. This occurred after a long process of self-clarification within her own life, a battle with HIV/AIDS, and was probably also influenced by youth and issues of fertility. What is important in Lerato’s turn to co-habitation with a partner is the manner in which she assumes control and even leadership in setting the terms on which the arrangement of cohabitation will be conducted. Her discussion and engagement with her partner about lobola, and her views on her partner’s traditional beliefs demonstrate the self-conscious independence that characterises her relationship to men.

8.3.4 The Structure and composition of the woman-headed family

The study of woman-headed families in Bophelong reveals 3 key features of the structure and composition of woman-headed families. These are the variety in the
form of the family, variety in headship, and the fluidity in the composition of this family form.

### 8.3.4.1 Variety in form

The woman-headed family has shown an ability to respond and adapt to its surrounding in the context of a rapidly changing social and economic context. The crisis of capitalism, the rising unemployment and in particular male unemployment, revealed the weakness of the nuclear family as a family form. The rigidity of the nuclear family form in the face of a mounting crisis of social reproduction meant that it was not able to respond to the crisis. The crisis of social reproduction has thus also become a crisis of the nuclear family form.

The woman-headed family, on the other hand, has shown a wide variety of forms. In this study we found different forms of the woman-headed family (in all three successive generations): the single woman and children, the multi-generational family consisting of three successive generations, the missing or ‘skip’ generation (the grandmother and the grandchildren), the single generation, the ‘youthful peers’ family (like Katlego’s family), and different forms of the extended families. As mentioned earlier, the structure of the woman-headed family was in contrast to the single male-headed family form that tended to be nuclear, smaller, and to focus on immediate family members (Dungumaro, 2008).

There is therefore no fixed or predominant form or structure to the woman-headed family as the composition and structure varies. The key aspect to this family form is that it is woman-headed; paternity is irrelevant, and one’s own biological children do not necessarily constitute the center of the family form.

In contradistinction to the nuclear family, the woman-headed family’s variety of form allows it to continually adapt to the incessant restructuring of social relationships that has been underway since the 1970s. The variety in structure mirrors the shifts and

---

6 As noted in Chapter 3, the woman-headed family form emerged significantly in the 1970s (see Beittel, 1992, 2007). The term ‘the feminisation of poverty’ is also traced to the 1970s (see Wennerholm, 2002).
uncertainties of capitalism in crisis, but it also prefigures the long-run collapse of the social hierarchy that has come out of a crisis that is marginalising the traditional role of the male income-earner.

8.3.4.2 Variety in headship

The nuclear family form, even in the cyclical absence of the migrant worker in its South African form, was rigid with respect to the relationship in which the ‘head’ and patriarch stood to the members of the family. The patriarch was husband to the adult female, and father to the children in the family. Even in cases where the family is ‘extended’, the core of the nuclear family is the patriarch, his wife and his children. In contradistinction, the position of head of the family in woman-headed family varies widely. The position of head of the family in woman-headed families can be occupied by the grandmother, the mother, the sister to the members of the family, the sibling who takes responsibility as head, and the relative. In addition to the variety in form, this variety in headship also allows this family form to adapt to the changing conditions under which families have to exist given the crisis of social reproduction. This also explains the often shared and consultative headship.

8.3.4.3 Fluidity in composition

The woman-headed family form is also defined by the fluidity of its composition. Unlike in nuclear families, where the composition of the family is stable, rigid and predictable, the composition of the woman-headed family undergoes constant change and reconfiguration. New members join the family at different times, and existing members also leave the family, with the result that the boundaries of this family form are constantly changing. For instance, after Mosotho’s daughter left with her two children, her unemployed son and his family arrived. After Rebecca’s niece died, she was left with four children to care for. When Lena moved from the farm to her RDP house, her first ‘break’ from working was short-lived as her son and daughter’s death left her with three teenage grandchildren to care for.

The shifting boundaries of the woman-headed family also account for the wide variety of forms and the variety in headship. This fluidity in composition is a
reflection of the adaptability of this family form to its social environment. The fluidity of this family form enables this family form to respond to the constant pressures emanating from the crisis of social reproduction.

8.3.5 Work, income and patterns of consumption

The work of the woman-heads remains predominantly within the informal sector, reflecting the continued location of black women as the poorest and the most unskilled sector of the workforce, dependent largely on gendered and casual forms of labour. While the Grandmothers were retired, they worked as domestic workers, indicative of the continuity of black women’s work from one generation to another. This is the work associated with black women for generations. For the women who were fortunate to have employment, hold one or two jobs, the wages are so low that the women qualified for state social grants on the basis of a means test.

Under neoliberalism domestic work was restructured and casualised, beginning in the mid-1980s. Many single-woman-heads are unemployed, and make up a significant section of the unemployed in South Africa as whole. That the younger women worked as ‘volunteers’ in home-based care, is a reflection of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, to which some of them have themselves succumbed (Fayers, 2005). There has been no significant change in the status of black working class women, in job opportunities or training. However, democracy did provide Margaret with the space to exercise her agency and support her daughter’s (Karabo’s) choice of work, hence breaking the pattern of daughters replacing their mothers in the workforce, or the kitchen. However, while this ‘replacement’ is no longer direct, it is now mediated by ‘choice’, and Margaret’s daughter’s ‘choice’ to work in a restaurant rather than be a domestic worker. While the choice of work is important, this is relative and must be understood within the severe constraints of post-apartheid South Africa. Margaret’s daughter was unemployed for three years after she passed matric, and then ‘chose’ to work in the restaurant rather than a private home. Similarly, Katlego was unemployed for five years before she applied to ASEDI to work as a ‘volunteer’. Both Karabo and Katlego were young women, both had passed matric and searched but there were no training and job opportunities so they ‘chose’ the jobs that were available. This epitomises the concrete limitations for black women in South Africa. This is the irony
of women’ rights, their hope in the predominant discourse on women’s rights that accompanied the new democracy, that ‘women can do it for themselves’. Many women, especially the younger woman-heads still reflect the hope in the promise of democracy, of opportunities for women, women’s independence and in contrast to their material reality and the absence of job creation and any meaningful training. This contrasts with the constant mantra of the ‘the need for skills’ to grow the economy: women at their most productive age are unemployed, tied to childcare and have no training opportunities.

The woman-heads’ family incomes were extremely low, for both those who were employed, and those whose income derived from a state grant. The working women’s wages were so low that they qualified for a social grant, and passed the required means test. The grant assisted the household with income to survive. This affected a significant number of single women in South Africa. A bizarre situation existed where older woman-heads on old age grants had more income than younger woman-heads, some of whom were employed. The issue of age, income and poverty is being reconfigured, and it is no longer invariably true that poverty increases with age.

The children of single woman-heads who qualified for the state’s grant were differentiated and penalised compared to children on the foster care grant, who received three times more. The foster care grant is a form of marketised childcare, whereas the CSG relies on the biological mother to provide her labour for the child’s care for free. Besides the old age grant recipients, the younger women do not receive any state grant, for their own upkeep, and because of the cost of childcare they cannot afford even the state’s subsidised childcare (crèches). Many woman-heads (Janet) were therefore tied to childcare in the absence of any other family support, and it was difficult for them to even search for work. Woman-heads such as Kedibone did not receive any state support, and despite their work, they lived in poverty. For many woman-heads the state’s social grant provisions was inflexible in responding to their needs, and ensuring a floor below which no one fell. While the state is aware of the significance of the woman-headed family form (Amoateng et. al., 2004), no specific support has been extended to these women. The grants are important in preventing hunger for whole families; however, they do not and cannot enable people to break the cycle of poverty (Meth, 2002; Van Driel, 2009).
The woman-heads’ low family income was indicative of widespread poverty, a daily struggle to make ends meet, and food insecurity. This occurs against the backdrop of extreme wealth and inequality in South Africa, a highly charged and consumerist society that promotes private housing, flashy cars, branded clothes and the latest cell phones. These contradictions were played out in the woman-headed families, for instance the struggles for branded clothes (both Margaret, Kedibone and Rowena’s children). Yet families were generally unable to participate in traditional associational forms such as stokvels and funeral societies as their incomes were too low, except for older woman-heads concerned about their own burials. The younger women, with less income, were understandably focused on survival. Some families did not have a television or a cell phone, an indication of the family’s general impoverishment. The issues of the rights and equality propagated within South Africa, were major contradictions in relation to the actual consumption within the woman-headed families, and the daily struggle for survival.

8.3.6 Division of labour, decision-making and authority

In the struggle to become ‘heads’ the women all learned to reposition themselves within their families and within society. However, the women’s location within the society and their position within the family continued to be a factor that influenced the way they lived the position of head of the family. The woman-heads generally organised and promoted egalitarian, consultative and co-operative relations within their families. However, when it came to housework, some of the woman-heads (the Mothers) were gendered in their approach and adopted patriarchal modalities in their leadership style. This reflected some of the contradictions within the woman-heads, rooted in their own social reproduction. For instance, the Grandmothers were particularly egalitarian whereas the Mothers harboured a gendered approach to housework; this was particularly interesting as the former did not have as strong an anti-patriarchal identity as the latter. Factors influencing the Grandmothers, at a particular point in time in their life-cycle, included age, illness, fatigue and generally maintaining a more relaxed attitude to negotiating possibilities. In contrast, the Mothers were much younger, and were also determined to assert their authority and control. Although some of the woman-heads were gendered in the division of labour
in their homes, their treatment of their children was not gendered in that they catered for the needs of all of them and paternity was irrelevant.

While leadership of the family and taking responsibility was one aspect of authority, even amongst those woman-heads who tended to resort to patriarchal forms of leadership, and who struggled with issues of authority, an authoritarian atmosphere was not perpetuated. For instance, although the Mothers tended to indicate clearly their leadership position, there was no habituation to authority associated with the traditional male-headed family. The children disagreed with the woman-heads and an unquestioned hierarchy did not exist within the woman-headed family. While the Mothers adopted patriarchal leadership styles, this was asserted rather than based on instilling fear and abuse of children, who often disagreed with their mothers; and acted contrary to their mother’s wishes. In the woman-headed family the children were not habituated to authority, and abuse and violence were never instruments of control. This is potentially transformative if a significant section of the new generation of workers is not habituated to authority in the traditional way.

The need to assert their ‘authority’ differed amongst the women and to the extent that this became an ‘issue’ was related to their relationships with their maturing children, especially their sons. As sons matured, their search for identity together with the generalised patriarchy within society tended to lead to conflictual relations within the woman-headed family – the experience of Rakgadi, Sara and Margaret. In the case of Sara, her son wanted to take over the mantle of the ‘man’ of the house, a direct challenge to her leadership. The woman-heads try to resolve these conflicts themselves without resorting to other males, even kin, as it may just lead to violence. At times the conflicts within the family did result in a woman-head resorting to male kin for assistance – Rakgadi turned to her eldest son to assist her with her youngest son and Sara turned to her brother to assist her with her son – however the women were all self-conscious that this was not the solution, and that they needed to deal with issues themselves. The problem was that the women were often forced to resolve issues within the isolation of their own homes, whereas these were social issues, posed by the woman-headed family coming into conflict with (patriarchal) influences at the level of society. The woman-headed family form needs support at the level of society, to buttress the internal tendencies that undermine patriarchal authority.
These woman-heads have the potential to produce a generation of workers who are not habituated to authority, or at least one that does not readily accept patriarchal forms of authority; and tends towards more co-operative relationships of men and women to each other. A major stumbling block is that this family form lives under conditions of abject poverty. Notwithstanding, glimpses of this could be seen in various instances where men and boys were prepared to accept a share of work within the home, and where they were open to a woman’s leadership of their families or households. We saw this in the relationship between Pule and his Mother (Kedibone), Pule’s attitude to doing housework, and Rakgadi, Janet and Sara’s relationship to their husbands. This could also be seen in the fathers’ support for the women in the Mothers’ generation, and their struggle against gender-based violence in the (Mothers’) home. There is nothing inherent in men, precluding them from parenthood and caring for children. The example of the fathers indicates that socialisation and habituation can never be absolute. The examples of Janet, Sara and Rakgadi’s husbands, and Kedibone’s son, Pule, demonstrates that men are not captives of their habituation. However, this cannot only depend on the role of the individual, but points to the need to alter radically the way in which society is organised, since it confines women and men to different roles. This dehumanises men and denudes them of their humanity and exploits women and prevents them from exercising full citizenship and fulfilling their talents and their capabilities.

The weakening of civil society, the absence of a women’s movement, and the inconsistency of a state or government’s commitment to equity, relegated this social struggle to the isolated woman-head. Despite the transformative and egalitarian potential within the woman-headed family, this needs to be supported at the level of society as a whole, if it is going to be sustainable. Further, in order to realise this egalitarian potential, new models of leadership have to be discovered and struggled for. The women in the Mothers’ generation remained captives of patriarchal styles of leadership, and this undermines the potential of the woman-headed family to consistently develop alternatives.
8.3.7  **Associational life**

Religion remains a strong source of social support for the woman-heads, although this is also mediated by age. The older women have a longer association with the *umanyanos*, particularly because of their work as domestics. (Lena, who worked on a farm, did not have this experience.) In general, the women were not involved in community-based organisations, and this indicated the level of depoliticisation within contemporary South Africa, especially amongst the younger women ‘volunteers’ who did daily home-visits but who did not understand their work as ‘community’ work.

Widespread poverty was a factor in the decline of the traditional forms of associational life that had developed partly as solidarity and forms of resistance under apartheid. This is consistent with the Bophelong Survey (2007) findings (see Chapter 4). For example, only one woman belonged to a stokvel, and two women belonged to funeral societies. In the context of a particularly poor township, Bophelong (see Chapter 4), the commercialisation of these traditional forms of associational life - stokvels and funeral societies - that has occurred may account for low levels of participation in Bophelong.

The existence of an informal social network – in the church and within the neighbourhood – is important for all the women-heads. In the absence of state support, the women turn to each other, women in similar positions, for myriad forms of assistance. While further research is needed on these informal social networks, they also represent the potential units of community-based and socialised forms of support.

8.3.8  **Traditional culture and patriarchy**

Within all the woman-heads traditional culture was questioned, as more egalitarian forms of organisation were implemented within the family, and men or boy-children were not adorned with preferential treatment. All the children were treated equally. However the extent to which some of the women promoted a gendered division of labour undermined this. Traditional culture together with the pre- eminent position of the patriarch was questioned, and was vociferously confronted and opposed by the
very women who supported the gendered division of labour. This contradiction was especially strong amongst the Mothers, who were in between the Grandmothers and the Daughters, who supported aspects of their traditional culture. On either side of the Mothers’ generation, support for traditional culture was low and in some cases non-existent (Lerato). So although the Grandmothers began their lives under apartheid seeing culture as a normal part of their lives, they came to question this as their experience of becoming heads of their families shaped their attitudes to traditional culture.

The critical issue around which the woman-heads attitude to traditional culture was tested was that of male circumcision or lebollo. Lebollo became an issue as sons matured – both from the sons themselves and from male kin. Over and above the dangers of contracting HIV/AIDS, the women did not trust men to care for children, the sons. However the women did not have control over this given the way traditional culture, especially lebollo, was practiced. The practice of lebollo marginalised women and allowed patriarchy to re-enter the worlds of woman-headed families. The women responded differently, the Grandmothers recognising their limitations were prepared to negotiate with male kin so that lebollo occurred after the grandson (or son) completed his education (Lena and Rakgadi respectively). The Mother (Margaret) directly confronted her son, firstly through trying to raise awareness about the dangers associated with it (HIV/AIDS), and then she tried by all means to prevent lebollo from taking place. Despite a polemical and engaging battle, violence was never resorted to. Although Margaret lost the battle, this indicated that the terrain on which traditional culture is being fought has shifted, and the position of woman-heads places them objectively at the centre of decision-making, including issues related to traditional culture. In this context, the men themselves are in fragile positions given that they are unemployed, and it is at the level of society that patriarchy, including traditional culture is being pursued. But within the family, the home, women’s role is crucial in the decision-making. Struggles like the one between Margaret and her son are important in eventually shifting the terrain. This is a concrete expression of the potentially positive role of the woman-headed family, in relation to traditional culture.

However, the women would like to practice certain aspects of their traditional culture, with regards to funeral rites, birth, and thanking their ancestors. The critical question
is how will their anti-patriarchal orientation, and their co-operative and consultative practices within the family, shape and transform these traditionally patriarchal practices, or will their continuing attachment to these aspects of traditional culture prove to be a source of regression that leads to a reversal of the transformative possibilities of this family form.

8.3.9 Woman-headed families and state patriarchy

Within the single-woman-headed family, black women are largely responsible for children, and the social reproduction of the new generation of workers. Black women’s role as mothers and nurturers is being reproduced, and their emotional relationship to their children, together with their labour, is being exploited.

Life under conditions of poverty habituate children to scarcity, with a predisposition to subordination and to their being dominated by poverty in South Africa (Van Driel, 2008). Despite their struggles to maintain the family, to keep children at school, to ensure that children (sons) complete school before they are taken for male circumcision, the women realise that the situation is bleak. Unemployment is high and the changes of employment for their children are few. Available jobs tend to be within the lower segment of the labour market, where the demand is for those with very little skill and low wages. Growing up in this social environment curtails children’s social expectations of themselves, for themselves; the nature of the work they expect to have; and the lives they expect to live. The tendency to drop out of school, teenage pregnancies, and involvement in criminal activities and drug abuse (Webster and Von Holdt, 2005: 31), are products of children’s low self-esteem. In this context it is not surprising that HIV infection rates for youth are high, given the absence of hope for the future. This explains why young people’s search for meaning (for instance, Bame), even though backward-looking, includes traditional male circumcision that puts them potentially at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

On the one hand, therefore, the state has shifted the burden of social reproduction onto single women and their families; on the other hand, neoliberal policies together with the economic crisis in South Africa denies the woman-headed families access to the resources needed to carry out this role of social reproduction. In a context in
which this widespread impoverishment objectively threatens the social reproduction of the new generation of workers, the state has been forced to intervene in the interests of guaranteeing the reproduction of the regime of accumulation as a whole. Although the state’s role under neoliberalism is limited, studies indicate its widespread interventionist role in the support of the conditions of capital accumulation (Fraser, 2008). Through the social grants, in particular the CSGs and subsidies to crèches, the state supports the reproduction of a new generation of workers. The state’s intervention is focused and controlled, so that it does not fundamentally change the social relations within society. While the state seeks to ensure the continuing reproduction of future generations of labour power with particular characteristics – in particular low skilled and cheap - the state has to ensure that in intervening to guarantee this reproduction it does not raise the cost of doing so for both individual capitals and for the state itself.

Hence the state withholds any financial support to the woman, the caregiver, and the grants are targeted for the children only. The coincidence between the CSG amounts (R210) and the Stats SA minimum levels required for a starvation-averting diet per capita (R211) symbolises the tendency towards ensuring a generation of workers that is habituated to poverty and to a low social status in society. In post-apartheid the state takes on the ‘responsibility’ of looking after the child without the responsibility of looking after the mother of the child. The social reproduction of the caregiver is left to the caregiver herself. In this way the state as patriarch also controls the women through confining them to childcare.

With the state assuming the role of patriarch, the alliance of masculinities is completed: in a social and cultural context in which the patriarch claimed as the source of his authority his status as ‘providers’ to both wife and children, neoliberalism both destroys and restores his authority as a patriarch. Through its large-scale destruction of jobs neoliberalism destroys the basis of the patriarch’s authority in the home, and finally drives him from the home. On the other hand, Through its various interventions, such as the grants, the dependence of the women is shifted from individual patriarchs to the state as patriarch. Without the provision of

---

7 Muthwa’s (1994) study argues that the increase of woman-headed families is linked to men’s unemployment.
social support – education, health, transport, decent housing and so on – the women’s ability to provide sustained social alternatives for their families is severely curtailed. As Refilwe and Kedibone are so painfully aware, ‘if only the state could provide education for their children’, this would ensure that the alternatives open to families would be radically improved.

The role of the state as the proxy patriarch extends to a range of aspects in the lives of the woman-heads. In their struggle against patriarchy in the form of ‘traditional cultural’ practices, the woman-headed families also confront the state as patriarch. While both women’s rights and therefore the rights of women to become heads of their families are included in the constitution, the opposite of these rights, the rights of traditional leaders and the right to practice traditional culture are also included. As to which right prevails (women’s rights against the rights of traditional leaders) depends on the social balance of forces. In the context of the generalised demobilisation of civil society, of the weakness of progressive forces, this balance is tilted against woman-heads of families. This is expressed in the patriarchy that is prevalent in society at the level of the state and its organs (the police, the schools etc) and its myriad tentacles and influences; and reflects the substantive inequality that women experience in concretising their rights as ‘lesser citizens’. And so many of the woman-heads have to engage in a constant struggle against a schooling system that condones the exercise of violence by ‘men’ against ‘boys’. It is therefore at the level of the state, the media and society, that patriarchy is being reproduced, and that women are being subordinated to men.

The struggle that is being waged within the woman-headed family against patriarchy is being undermined by the patriarchy that is being reproduced at the level of the state, and this in part accounts for the contradictions within the woman-headed families themselves. Notwithstanding the forces ranged against the anti-patriarchal tendencies within the woman-headed families both from within and without the family, the woman-headed family remain both subjectively and objectively subversive against patriarchy. This struggle, however, must be buttressed at the level of society if sustainable emancipatory gains are to be made.
8.4 Struggle, organisation and the emancipatory potential of woman-headed families

In her study of the way that the rise of neoliberal democracy in Latin America marginalised women from active political life, Nikki Craske (1998) looked at how the advent of democratic politics has led to the ‘remasculinisation’ of politics. Some of the indices of this remasculinisation are the ‘implementation of poverty alleviation projects (PAPs) and the rewriting of political discourses, especially the public-private, Left-Right, social-political, which serve to separate and contain political activity’, the rising importance of the role of NGOs in the implementation of these projects, and the demobilisation of women’s struggles in the process (Craske, 1998: 1). Neoliberalism rose on the back of the defeat of the working class, and it reproduces itself on the basis of this defeat.

In this study of woman-headed families in Bophelong, a similar process observed by Craske (1998) seems to be underway. The women in all three generations indicate consistency with the Bophelong Survey (2007), in that religious affiliation (71%) is the most popular form of associational life. Eunice is the only one who is active within the disability centre. Although to the extent that the others participate within the community (Katlego and Lerato), it is depoliticised and is viewed as ‘community work’. However, this depoliticisation of life in the townships and the decline in the mass organisations that were associated with the anti-apartheid struggle confirms the demobilisation of civil society since the mid-1990s (Desai, 2004; Lehulere, 2005).

The ability of woman-headed families to break their isolation and realise their potential for social change will depend on the extent to which they link up with, and build movements of resistance against neoliberalism that can reinforce this family form’s egalitarian impulses. These movements, however, will have to avoid the trap of ‘remasculinisation’ of left politics that has been a source of stagnation of left politics for the last couple of decades (Craske, 1998).

---

8 Even though Lerato is passionate about her HIV/AIDS work it has no relation to the TAC, for example, and the important struggles waged, which she herself advocates.
8.5 Concluding Remarks

Woman-headed families represent important social spaces where the struggle for alternatives and progressive family arrangements is taking place. The women find themselves in contradictory positions within patriarchal society, given their own socialisation, the daily struggle to reproduce children physically and the need to transcend traditional patriarchal social relations, including the challenge to appropriate egalitarian forms of leadership and avoid becoming proxies for patriarchy.

Within their families the woman-heads have exercised their agency and organised the social relations within the family differently. While conflicts do occur, and their sons contest their leadership, and they struggle with daughters to contribute to the family’s expenses, domestic violence is not a form of resolution. Woman-headed families tend to be egalitarian, encourage co-operation with housework and engage in consultative decision-making. To the extent that housework is shared, this begins to undermine gender stereotypes. This is different to the traditional role of male-heads within families, associated with the patriarch, and to this extent the woman-heads provide an alternative form of family leadership.

The very existence of woman-headed families objectively threatens patriarchy. Despite their daily struggles, woman-headed families in their myriad forms represent an advance towards alternative egalitarian forms of family life. Will capitalism try to ‘restore’ the man to the family as it did under social democracy? The current economic conditions seem to point to the woman-headed family as a significant form for the present and the future, both in South Africa and internationally. However, this does not preclude other egalitarian forms of families such as co-headed family forms, which embrace an egalitarian ethos, or other co-operative family forms emerging.

Although this emerging family form has a long way to go to win the struggle against the hegemony of capitalist patriarchy, it is important to recognise that the woman-headed families will continue to represent important progressive impulses within society: they represent in substantial ways the family as ‘the shelter’ (Horkheimer, 1949) or as ‘the alternator’ (Picchio, 1992) to the repressive, alienating and patriarchal influences within society. To move from this role of shelter and alternator
to emancipator, it is necessary that their struggles within the family are anchored and supported by the struggles for egalitarianism within society as a whole. In particular, this means struggles anchored and supported by a radical, grassroots and dynamic women’s movement.

8.5.1 Some considerations for social policy

Bophelong is a particularly poor township, way below the statistics within Gauteng, and more typical of the poorest provinces, the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Kwa-Zulu Natal. It is therefore far more representative of the lived experiences of especially woman-heads than only Gauteng. A number of key pointers for social policy would therefore be more widely applicable.

While the provision of RDP has made a difference in people’s lives, especially women, the lack of social amenities, jobs and sustainable development, undermines democracy and the potential of all human beings, ordinary men, women and children. Besides important statistics, the lived experiences point to a serious assessment of people’s living standards.

Woman-heads are prevalent in this country, constituting 38% of all households. The form of the woman-headed family is varied, and its prevalence is indicative of the need for government to vary and extend its relevant policies to respond to the specific needs and conditions of this family form. In particular, this family form highlights the plight of black women and children.

A recognition of the woman-headed family is important in acknowledging this family form as a result of the democratisation of South Africa, an indice of people, in particular women, exercising their choice to live alone with their children. Linked to this is the need for public recognition of the women-headed family form and their specific needs. For too long woman-heads were forced to live within the shadows of South African society. This recognition will assist in the struggle for gender equality and making women’s position more public, and more acceptable. This will enable women and men to accept woman-heads more readily, including their sons.
While the grants make a difference in women’s lives, and make a difference when combined to low salaries of working women, many women are excluded from accessing a grant as they do not qualify for a CSG (their children are too old) or an OAP (they themselves are too young). Accessing a social grant would make a difference to the absolute poverty levels of woman-heads, and ensure a floor beyond which no one fell.

Specific training programmes for woman-heads, and job creation needs to be considered, and this needs to include provision for childcare to ensure that these are real options.

Woman-heads receive no preferential support, yet they are responsible for the social reproduction of a sizable number of children. Particular support, catered to the needs of woman-heads is absolutely vital. This should include especially provision for education of the children of woman-heads.

The work, together with the working conditions of black women, in particular home-based care, needs urgent attention. In particular it highlights the state’s role, and complicity as ‘employer’ and as ‘guarantor’ of women’s rights.