

Chapter 5

The Grandmothers' Generation – *the Survivors*

*'Ek speel guitar in die huis!'*¹

5.1 Introduction

In many South African townships black women in their 60s and even older, are responsible for social reproduction. Their role ranges from being childminders, primary income earners in households and families,² and heads of woman-headed families.³ In this chapter we discuss the role and place of the Grandmothers' generation of woman-headed families in social reproduction in Bophelong. The discussion is organised around the lives of three women in their 60s who are heads of their families.

I have characterised the Grandmothers' generation of woman-headed families as the '*survivors*'. The Grandmothers were born in the 1940s and experienced the full wrath of the National Party's apartheid policies and legislation. These three woman-heads survived apartheid's harsh repression, oppression and exploitation as women, mothers and workers. Under severe conditions the Grandmothers struggled to keep their families together, maintained their children and transferred their resilience to them.⁴ The Grandmothers in this sample are themselves the dutiful daughters of their mothers, steadfast and loyal to their traditions and communities. The Grandmothers are survivors not only because of having survived apartheid, but having successfully steeled and prepared a new generation for the anti-apartheid struggle. However, this generation of '*survivors*' is not without its contradictions.

¹ 'I play the guitar in this house!' (This is an expression in Afrikaans which means that she makes all the decisions, as the head of the family).

² These women are the primary recipients of state old age grants, a significant source of income for township families and households (Hassim, 2005; De Koker *et. al.*, 2006; Tati 2008).

³ See the differentiation between woman-headed households and woman-headed families in Chapter 2.

⁴ The Grandmothers' generation more broadly, participated in the struggles of the day, some resisted (Walker, 1990), and while many struggled to keep families together, others rebelled against traditions (Bonner, 1992).

The three women in this generation are beneficiaries of the state's old age grant. All three women were born on the eve of apartheid, have been domestic workers; and now share similar illnesses such as arthritis and high blood pressure. The Grandmothers are physically exhausted, yet they remain caregivers of children and grandchildren, and are heads of the family with all the responsibility that entails.

This chapter is organised into four parts. Section 5.2 introduces and historicises the three women – Mosotho (62), Lena (67) and Rakgadi (65) – and provides a brief biography of each one of them and describes how they each became the head of their family. I also look at the women's attitudes to men and their self-identity as heads of families. Mosotho's life story forms the basis of the discussion, but is contrasted with Lena and Rakgadi throughout the chapter for similarities and variations. Section 5.3 discusses *the form* of the Grandmothers' families. In particular, I focus on the composition and structure of the families they head, the sources of income in these families and their patterns of consumption. Section 5.4 focuses on key aspects related to the reproduction of social relations – of capitalist patriarchy - within the Grandmothers' families. In this part I look at the division of labour in these families, the process of decision-making, the exercise of authority, associational life, and their attitude to 'culture and tradition'. Section 5.5 sums up the significance of this family form.

5.2 The Grandmothers: Becoming the Head of the Family

5.2.1 Biographies of three Grandmothers

Mosotho⁵ is fair of complexion, a tough 62-year-old woman who has stood by the decisions she has made in her life. Brought up in a woman-headed household, first by her mother and then her grandmother, Mosotho believes that women-headed families are normal. After living in a shack for many years, in one of the informal settlements in Bophelong, Mosotho moved into an RDP house in the same township in 1998. She has four children. Three children are from her ex-husband, and the youngest, a daughter, is from 'the love of her life'.

⁵ All material in this chapter about Mosotho is based on interviews with her during 2007 and 2008 (see Appendix 3).

Mosotho was born in Botshabelo, a township near Bloemfontein in the Free State,⁶ where she lived with her mother and two sisters. She speaks Sesotho and Afrikaans. Mosotho vaguely remembers her father, a migrant worker, who worked at the mines in Odendalsrus. Mosotho's father died of a lung disease when he was 38 years old. Her mother then took her, together with her sisters, to live with their maternal grandparents, in Pietersrus.⁷ Mosotho lived there from 5 to 14 years of age.

My mother's sisters were all domestics, and they also left their children with my grandmother while they worked in Bloemfontein. We were many, 10 children altogether, and my grandmother looked after all of us. The big children helped with the little ones. My grandfather was a builder and came home every two months. He was lovable but sometimes he used the *sjambok* [a rubberised stick] on us.

After school, we worked in [white people's] gardens and got paid 50 cents or were given bread. That time money went very far and we used it for the whole family. We planted our own vegetables. We didn't buy much. The *plaasboere* [farmers] came in donkey-carts and gave us food. This was about 1954. There was no electricity and we used paraffin lamps. At night we listened to my grandmother's stories and sometimes the Sesotho radio.

My grandmother taught us to stand strong in life but I missed my mother. She came home by train once a month with her sisters. I was happy when my mother came. My mother used to bring nice food and nice things [sweets and chocolate]. Then my mother would leave again, to go back to work.

Mosotho's childhood memories provide insight into her habituation as a child living under apartheid, working in gardens for food and meagre sums of money. For Mosotho (and many other children), learning to be strong, included learning to do without one's mother and one's father.

After almost 40 years of work as a domestic, Mosotho was boarded for ill health in 2003. Underneath her long skirts, her knees are wrapped in bandages, to keep warm. The arthritis is painful, even in summer.

⁶ Before 1994 this province was called the Orange Free State, historically one of the two Boer republics (the other being the Transvaal), that later merged with the two British colonies, Natal and the Cape, to form the Union of South Africa in 1910.

⁷ A rural town situated between Bloemfontein and Kimberley.

In April 2008, Mosotho turned 60 and had to transfer from the disability grant to the old age pension. Although equivalent in monetary terms (R940 per month),⁸ it took three months for the conversion process to be completed. In the intervening period she did not earn an income and her daily life became difficult as the disability grant had been her sole income. Mosotho generally struggles to make ends meet, and never has any money to spare.

Lena has olive skin and plump cheeks.⁹ She always wears an apron and a towel tucked around her waist.¹⁰ She is plump and walks with difficulty because her legs and feet are always swollen and painful.

Lena was born on a farm in Heilbron, in the Free State. Both her parents were workers on a maize farm. Lena grew up with her five brothers and sisters, and all of them helped their parents with the farm work. Lena helped her mother in the kitchen and she also cared for her siblings. Lena cannot read and write, as there was no school on the farm. None of her siblings went to school.

My father died when I was 15 years old. We didn't know what to do because the farmer forced us to leave the farm. We went to live with my uncle, my mother's brother, on another farm, also in Heilbron. I don't know what happened to the people I grew up with.

I worked on that farm. Life was hard. My brothers and sisters grew up on that farm. Then I got a job as a domestic worker in Dover, near to Sasolburg, to try and help my mother. I met my husband in Dover; he was a farm worker, and after we were married we went to live on the farm. I had six children on the farm but I never stopped working. I worked with my children on my back. I used to stand all the time. My legs are swollen from the years of hard work, standing for long hours. My legs are bad. I even had an operation on my legs.

We only left the farm when we came to live in the RDP house in Bophelong in 1998. That was the first time when I stopped working and got a break.

The 'break' for Lena was short-lived, as soon afterwards her daughter and son died, leaving her to look after three grandchildren. Lena's body, her face, her hands and her

⁸ All amounts in 2007 values.

⁹ All the material in this chapter about Lena is based on interviews with her during 2008 (see Appendix 3).

¹⁰ This is common amongst women of this age group, reflecting the Sesotho custom of wearing a blanket.

apron are indicators of her hard life, working with a baby on her back. The skin on her face is parched from the sun and her hands are hard and coarsely lined.

Rakgadi looks much younger than her 67 years.¹¹ She has a smooth and even skin. She is not overweight, unlike Mosotho and Lena. Like Lena, Rakgadi grew up on a farm in Heilbron. Her parents were farm workers and all her siblings were forced to help on the farm. The farmer told her parents that the children could not ‘stay for nothing’. From a young age Rakgadi helped her mother in the kitchen. Rakgadi and her siblings had no schooling, and none of them can read and write. When her mother got ill, Rakgadi often replaced her in the kitchen, until her mother was too ill to work anymore. Then Rakgadi worked in the kitchen permanently, and cared for her mother on a full-time basis.

Life on the farm was hard. When I look at my grandchildren playing, at their age I was already helping on the farm and in the kitchen.

I was happy to stay on the farm and look after my parents. But my parents encouraged me to get married. My mother even told me that if I didn’t get married the ‘blood would go to my head’.¹² I didn’t understand it.

When I got married, I came to live on one of the farm plots close to Bophelong. My husband was a security guard in Johannesburg. Later we moved into one of the backyard rooms in Bophelong. I did domestic work in Vanderbijlpark and I had my children.

All three women were born in the 1940s, a turning point in the evolution of South Africa’s political economy.¹³ The early biographies of the Grandmothers are similar, and correspond to the historical and social upheaval that accompanied the transition from segregation to apartheid forms of capitalist accumulation in South Africa (Wolpe, 1972; Legassick, 1974). As the effects of the Land Acts (1913) were felt, many African people – the parents of the Grandmothers – found themselves on ‘white

¹¹ All material in this chapter about Rakgadi is based on interviews with her during 2008 and 2009.

¹² Basically, this was superstition, that if she did not have sex she would go crazy. Ironically, this story may account for Rakgadi’s rather liberal attitude to sex, discussed below.

¹³ As discussed in Chapter 3, by the time apartheid was implemented in 1948, the reserves were dependent on migrants’ remittances and proletarianisation had increased and included black women (Walker, 1990a; Maloka, 2004; Ally, 2009).

land', on 'white farms' as migrants and farm workers.¹⁴ However, this was not without indigenous people's resistance, both individual and collective.¹⁵

Up to the 1940s the majority of African women (70% of the population) lived in the native reserves, but increasingly many of them migrated to the cities (Walker, 1990a: 5); and this was already noticeable by the 1930s (Walker, 1990a; Bonner, 1990; Beittel, 1992).¹⁶ With the breakdown and weakening of tribal society's control on black women, the exercise of direct and coercive state control was needed to bolster the myth of the reserves as 'homelands' and to keep women there (Walker, 1990a: 5).¹⁷ After 1948 this was consolidated under the National Party's (NP) influx controls and pass laws. This ensured the allocation of cheap black labour to wherever it was needed, especially the mines and agriculture, the social basis of the NP's, 'maize and gold' support base, and later secondary industry (Legassick, 1974).

Despite their resistance, through their work on the white farms and towns, black women in the Orange Free State came under state control in the 1930s (Ally, 2009). The employment of black women outside the reserves was in the lowest-paid and least-skilled jobs. Black women worked predominantly in domestic work. Nationally, almost 65% of African women and 85% of coloured women were in domestic service, while others worked in agriculture (19%) and industry (7%) (Walker, 1990a: 14). This pattern of employment continued from the 1920s to the early 1990s (Makgetla, 2004; Ally, 2008a).

¹⁴ The consolidation of land dispossession is discussed in Chapter 3. (See also Magubane, 1979).

¹⁵ African women's resistance is largely undocumented and invisible (Walker, 1982; 1990a). Charlotte Maxeke was one of the women active in the anti-pass campaign of 1913. The South African Native National Congress, forerunner of the ANC, was formed in the Orange Free State in 1912 to oppose the consolidation of land dispossession (Walker, 1982). Similarly, in Van Onselen's (1996) book *The Seed is Mine*, he reveals an historical account of the powerful struggle of Kas Maine, a labour tenant, to remain on the land.

¹⁶ By the 1920s, many black women were living in Bloemfontein: there were 9 330 African men and 8 588 African women, more African women in direct contact with white society than in any other city or town (Walker, 1990a: 15). Black women's increased physical presence in Bloemfontein explains their earlier anti-pass campaign in that city in 1913. Bonner (1990) discusses black women's migration to the cities in the 1930s, especially Sesotho-speakers (discussed in Chapter 3). Ally (2009) confirms that the pattern of black women's work in the cities as domestics stretches from the 1930s.

¹⁷ Ally (2009) explains though that black women's entry into the city was controlled by the state, and differs with Cock (1980) that a relative legal 'vacuum' existed. Although state control of black women existed, the state supported their position as domestic workers, a job done earlier by black men who were later displaced to work in the mines (Ally, 2009). Black women were 'prepared' and taught for their roles as domestic workers in churches (Cock, 1990; Meintjies, 1990) and church hostels (Ally, 2009).

By the time that Mosotho, Lena and Rakgadi were born, the displacement of African people and families was already advanced (see Chapter 3) (see also Bonner, 1990; Murray, 1984). From 1948 the apartheid state consolidated the systematic and structural division of African families through repression and increased influx controls of migrant labour. In 1956 Pass Laws were extended to black women (Walker, 1982).

The lives of the three Grandmothers' strongly mirror these developments. Mosotho never knew her father, a migrant labourer, and her family was separated through the classic pattern associated first with segregation and later, apartheid capitalism. This was the common and at the same time, the unique story of systematically dividing black families (Murray, 1981). Lena's family was forced off the farm after her father's death, and this was not unusual as tenure was linked to the labour of the male-head.

But in this period there were also strong imperatives to keep 'family' together. Mosotho's grandmother became the de facto 'head of the household' (see the discussion in Chapter 3), in which Mosotho grew up and this informed and prepared her for her own role as head of her family more than half a century later. Mosotho's grandfather was the 'head' of the family even in his absence. This expressed the importance of tradition and patriarchy in the family in which Mosotho grew up.

Apartheid consolidated the systematic and structural division of African families through repressive control of migrant labour that came to define and lay the basis for social reproduction under this regime of accumulation.

5.2.2 *Becoming a woman-head of the family*

There are different paths to becoming a woman-head of a family. These paths are the product of structural factors, age, history, personal and collective experiences, choice and agency, and a certain level of preparedness both emotionally and psychologically. But despite the particular path taken towards becoming a woman-head of a family, irrespective of the levels of emotional and psychological preparedness, the process of

becoming a single-woman-head of a family remains a difficult and traumatic one, and it informs the self-identity of the women as heads of their families.

In the early 1960s, after the death of her first child, **Mosotho** left Bloemfontein and found work in Sasolburg, in the Orange Free State.¹⁸

I met Jan while I was working in Sasolburg; we went to the same church. He was a widower with children. I married Jan and went to stay with him. His job came with a house. I only did piecework after I got married because Jan was very jealous. He thought I would entertain 'friends' if I did live-in work. I had three children with Jan.

After I divorced Jan in 1980 I went back to live-in work because I didn't have a place to go to. I couldn't take the children with me so I only saw them on my day off. My money was little but I bought the children clothes and gave Jan money if he needed it. After our divorce we had a good relationship.

I met John a few years later and had a child with him. I loved John but I realised that he didn't care about me. When I was pregnant he had other women. He never maintained the child. Once I went to court to get maintenance, but after a few months he stopped supporting Didi again and I just left him. He hasn't seen Didi for almost 20 years.

I made up my mind to just stay on my own. My madam let me keep Didi with me. But I also wanted to stay on my own so the other children could come and visit me. So I put up a shack in Bophelong, next to the school. We used to get water from one tap and use the veldt for a toilet. The children still stayed with their father, but they used to come and visit me.

Mosotho's choice to live on her own was shaped by her experience of the men with whom she shared her life. Mosotho married Jan, a widower with three children. Mosotho taught him to read and write, helped him to rear the children from his first wife, and they had three children together. Although Jan was a good father, he liked cars and women and he changed them both, constantly. During Mosotho's pregnancy with their second child, her son, she became ill and almost lost the baby. The doctors discovered that she had a sexually transmitted infection.

I was very angry with Jan. If AIDS existed then, both of us would be dead by now because of his unfaithfulness. My son, Lucas, is just like his father, a womaniser.

¹⁸ Sasolburg was discussed in Chapter 4, in relation to the petrochemical industry.

When Mosotho divorced Jan, she left the children with him. Jennifer was three, Lucas was five and Alina was eight years old. Mosotho went back to being a live-in domestic worker. Three years later, she had Didi. During her pregnancy Didi's father had relationships with other women.

As jy verwag, word mans sleg (when you are pregnant, men get funny). If only women were clever, we wouldn't suffer.

Since 1988 I never bothered with another man. That's the year Didi was born. John made me angry and hurt. This was the third man in my life. The first man I left after the baby died because he had other women when I was pregnant. The second man, Jan, also had women. The third man, John, also had women. So I told myself, am I going to have ten men in my body, and from each one a different child? I decided to leave all men alone. I had enough of men. Didi is 20, I was 40 at the time, and that is how long it's been since I've been with a man.

I think that all men have the same manners. *Hulle is almal sleg* (they are all bad). It's like they all have the same father and mother.

Lena became head of her family when her husband died 'long ago'. She cannot remember when, but it was long before the new South Africa. Her husband was a farm worker, and he always complained of headaches. Then he got sick and died. Lena continued to work on the farm. She had nowhere to go, and brought up the younger children on her own. Some of the children got married and left the farm. By the time that Lena came to Bophelong she had been a widow and the head of her family for some time.

Similar to Mosotho, negative experiences of relationships with men influenced Lena's decision not to remarry when her husband died:

I was married with *lobola* [bride-price], in the Sesotho custom. I've been a widow for a long time. My husband drank and had women. I saw it from his wages, and when I found his money, I used to buy food. He used to get cross and hit me. I got beaten regularly; even the farm owner tried to stop him. He was a monster. After he died I said to myself, never again. I don't want another man. Not a boyfriend, nothing. Men, never. No more. He never did anything nice for me.

I wanted to leave my husband because of his beatings, but my mother and my uncle told me that I can't. They said the *lobola* was spent.

Rakgadi was very happily married to her husband, and together they had eight children. One day he was on his way to work when he collapsed and died. He was 45 years old, and Rakgadi was pregnant with her youngest child, a son, who is now 20 years old. After he died, Rakgadi struggled to bring up the children. Four children have since died and four are still alive. Life was hard, “*maar ek het vasgehou*” (but I was steadfast, I did not waver, I was up to the challenge).

Although Rakgadi enjoyed a good relationship with her husband before his death, her decision not to remarry was informed by motives similar to those of the two other women:

I was married to my husband in the Sotho culture. After my husband died I had other relationships, especially sex on the side. But I remembered my husband. I will never get another husband like that again. He treated me well. He educated his children. He brought his money home sealed. His children ate well and went to school. I will always remember him. I decided never to marry again. I had a boyfriend but he used to drink and I was too scared to marry again.

All three women survivors have experienced first hand the harshness of living under apartheid, from the time that they were born. They began their working lives as children on farms and later moved to work in the city as domestic workers. For an important part of their working lives, the women worked hard and long hours for very low wages. Initially, all three Grandmothers ‘replaced’ or assisted their mothers in the kitchen, to different extents.

All three women have been single-woman heads of their families for about 20 years, and their life stories share key features that are common to the generation of women who lived important parts of their adult working lives at the height of apartheid, from the 1950s to the 1980s.

The way in which structural cohabitation and the dependence of women on men was reinforced by apartheid is evident in the life histories of the three women. Black men in the cities also faced working conditions characterised by low wages. Against this background, these were strong forces encouraging cohabitation as an objective means

of survival (Murray, 1981; Walker, 1990a; Beittel, 1992; see also the discussion in Chapters 3).

Lena moved with her husband to the farm where he worked, and she herself became a farm worker. In Mosotho's case, Jan had a job that came with a house. Rakgadi's marriage to her husband provided a means of escape from the hard farm labour she had experienced since she was a child.

South Africa's political economy generated powerful structural forces enjoining cohabitation and also generated forces that undermined such cohabitation '...without creating the basis on which new and viable alternatives could be built' (Walker, 1990a: 42, discussed in Chapter 3).

As discussed in Chapter 3, migrant labour destabilised families, social relationships and sexual and cultural practices (Maloka, 2004). This led to cohabitation and fragmentation as men and women struggled for housing, incomes and survival. Van der Vliet (1984) argued that women were disadvantaged; and Walker (1990) discussed the unequal sex ratios in the towns and the insecurity that undermined African families. From all three Grandmothers' biographies we see how the relationship between men and women was instrumental in their decision to live alone as single women.

These opposing structural forces subverted any stability of relationships, and this became a feature of life as a result of its widespread consistent practice.¹⁹ For Mosotho it was Jan's womanising, for Lena it was her husband's constant beatings and his womanising, and for Rakgadi it was the memory of her husband and the experience of the women around her that informed her decision.

None of the three women, however, began their lives with this view of men and marriage. Like all other women of their generation, marriage was a normal part of life and they were expected to, and in fact did, marry. The cultural context within which

¹⁹ Under apartheid the social disorganisation of family life was synonymous with migrant labour, and the 'loss' of fathers and mothers, wives and husbands, and fathers and children (Reynolds, 1995).

they were formed can be seen in how Rakgadi's parents put pressure on her to get married.

The structural forces militating against the cohesion of marriage among black men and women during the height of apartheid were deflected by the difficulties faced by women who wanted to live alone. Thus, we see that Mosotho's decision to leave her husband because of 'infidelity' drove her back into live-in domestic work because of the lack of access to housing (Harvey, 1994). Similarly, Lena had nowhere to go if she decided to leave her abusive husband, especially as there was no support from her mother and her uncle; and a cultural obligation was also invoked: the lobola had been spent. Mosotho thus became 'invisible' as a single black woman who had taken the decision to divorce her husband and live alone. Indeed, according to Mosotho, her decision to leave her children with the husband she had just divorced was motivated by the fact that she wanted to see her children on a regular basis, something that would not have been possible if she sent her children to live with her mother in Bloemfontein. Her resolve to be part of the life of her children was also apparent in the fact that Mosotho made regular financial contributions to her children's upkeep while she was a live-in domestic worker. While going back to work gave Mosotho the economic means to contribute to her children's upkeep, apartheid's legal and housing situation prevented her from exercising the choice to live with her children as a family, with herself as the head.

The second time Mosotho decided to live on her own, at the end of the 1980s, constituted a turning point in both her life and in the life of the country. This decision facilitated her move out of live-in work, to live in a shack. At this point the barriers that prevented her from making a similar decision when she left Jan had collapsed, with the landmark ruling by the Supreme Court in the case of Mrs Khomani,²⁰ and in the passing of the Abolition of Influx Control Act in 1986 (discussed in Chapter 3).²¹

²⁰ In 1981 Mrs Nonceba Khomani petitioned the Bloemfontein Appeal court to allow her to join her husband in Cape Town. Despite the shortage of family housing there, he was a registered lodger. The court ruled in her favour and this opened the way for women in similar circumstances to qualify to live with their husbands (Kraak, 1993). By 1984, 24 688 people had been allowed into the urban centres because of this judgement (Kraak, 1993: 14).

²¹ The Abolition of Influx Control Act of 1986 amended the 1927 Black Administration Act in order to repeal sections relating to the forced removal of black communities and individual black persons.

So, despite apartheid's structural housing shortages, Mosotho claimed her independence from her employer, and this enabled her to see her children. This coincided with the period noted as the 'slacking' of apartheid', and in all probability informed the collective experience that contributed to it.

For all the women, the tapering off of apartheid towards the latter part of the 1980s, in particular the abolition of influx controls opened up new possibilities for them to exercise choices that they had not been able to exercise during the height of apartheid. Beginning with Mosotho's move to a shack settlement at the end of the 1980s, and the three women's move to RDP houses ten years later, the end of apartheid progressively opened up new spaces for women who wanted to live alone with their families. Women's right to live in the city and to access housing without men was entrenched with the adoption of South Africa's new Constitution in 1996 (RSA, 1996b). The *de facto* situation in which black women had lived as single-heads of families under apartheid became legally acceptable.

For the Grandmothers' generation of women living under apartheid, the path to being heads of families ran through the conventional channels of marriage, economic dependence on husbands, respect for one's customs and traditions, and resilience in the struggle to rear families on meagre incomes.

This generation of women survived apartheid. Apartheid laws, and especially the lack of housing, largely bound women and kept them in subordinate positions. The women were therefore 'survivors' of apartheid, of abuse from husbands and a system that consistently denigrated black women. The Grandmothers not only survived apartheid but they stood steadfast under those conditions and held themselves and their families together, as single woman-heads of their families.²²

The Grandmothers' generation engaged in myriad forms of resistance. Collectively, this generation was transformative in that it steered a new generation who advanced the anti-apartheid struggle to new heights. The radical impulse that led them to take the difficult road of being heads of families as single women did not begin as a

²² The lives of the grandmothers and women of their generation should not be romanticised as they experienced many difficulties and hardships.

rebellion against family and tradition. On the contrary, it was their search for the (conventional) promise of marriage, family and tradition that led them to their present status as single-woman-heads of families. As Mosotho said,

All my life I wanted someone, a man who could stand up for himself. I wanted a man who could look after his children and not just follow women. It is important for children to respect their father.

5.2.3 *Self-identity as heads of families*

In the Grandmothers' generation, what are their self-identities as heads of families?

Mosotho: I grew up with my mother and then my grandmother. So it's normal for me for a woman to be the head of the family. You can't trust men; you must depend on yourself. I told my daughter, it's fine to get married, but remember that you must depend on yourself. Women also have rights in the new South Africa. Men can't beat you like before. You can stand on your own with your children.

Lena: Men are higher than us in culture. Men can be *lelik* [ugly]. They think we have to live with them but we don't. It's not so hard for women to live on our own.

Rakgadi: I had a good life with my husband. I'd rather live on my own with my children. My grandchildren were born in my house and I have looked after them since then.

Under apartheid's migrant labour many women were the heads of households, responsible for the economic, social and emotional well-being of their families while the husband (or patriarch) was away (see discussion in Chapter 2). In this context the women were caretakers for the men who returned and claimed their headship of the family. Mosotho herself grew up with her grandmother who was head of the household, and ensured the well being of the family, of ten grandchildren who lived with her. Mosotho's grandfather would come home bi-monthly, but he was considered to be the head of the family. Although women like Mosotho's grandmother were entirely responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the family, they did not see themselves as the 'head of the family', and deferred to their husbands

(or other males in authority); and neither did the society (including their families and the communities in which they lived), acknowledge them as head of the family.

After Mosotho decided to break off with men altogether, she lived alone in a shack with her daughter; and began the transformation to become the head of the family, deferring to no one, to no male. Mosotho made her own decisions, followed her own path and engaged society. After a few relationships (for sex only), Rakgadi decided to live alone with her children. Similarly, Lena decided from the outset never to have anything to do with men after being widowed. In the context of apartheid many women tended to live alone in the shadow of migrant labour.

In their transition to become woman-heads of families, the women's role as mothers remained an integral part of their identity. Indeed, Mosotho had to make hard choices about leaving her children with her ex-husband in order to continue her role as a mother. In the debate that 'Motherhood is not feminism' but is linked to patriarchy, Walker (1990a: xix-xx), argues that 'women's defence of their maternal role' is not necessarily a negation of their rights as women and a defence of patriarchy (Walker, 1995a: xix-xx). Walker concedes, though, that in the ideology within the resistance movement in the 1950s and 1960s, in particular associated with the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), 'women's domestic role as wife was stressed', and 'wife and mother' were used interchangeably (Walker, 1995a: xix).

In a later debate on motherhood, Campbell and Posel both argued that 'motherhood may empower women but that this empowerment takes place within the confines of patriarchy' (Walker, 1995a: 421). Basically the argument is that women's power within the family is within the realm of male dominance. Walker interrogates the concept of motherhood as a practice (physical and emotional caring), a discourse (various and overlapping, bound up with being a woman and gender identity), and a social identity (involving 'women's own construction of an identity as mothers', informed by the discourse and 'mediated by the practice of mothering, but not a simple derivative of either') (Walker, 1995a: 426). Through their social identity women are agents, and can feel, reflect and act on their subjective role and relationship as mothers, and shape their choices (Walker, 1995a: 426). Therefore, to

simply associate motherhood with patriarchy is too simplistic as women mediate their own relationship with their children (Walker, 1995a).

From the Grandmothers' experience, their work in the town and their participation as independent women in the world of work was important in their transition from women who care for their children to becoming heads of families. Although Mosotho had to resort to live-in work and sacrifice living with her children after her divorce, the income that she earned allowed her to contribute financially to the welfare of her children. As Walker (1990a: 3) argues, women worked in the towns as individuals and not as a family unit, and in the process the extended patriarchal family unit was eroded. Urban black women gained independence and mobility, but this was not a simple development, and they increasingly came into conflict with an ideology that defined them as 'passive, domestic, apolitical' (Walker, 1990a: 3). This conflict is expressed in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century movements to emancipate women from their inferiority to men (Walker, 1990a: 3). This transformation took place within women's consciousness as workers, through processes of urbanisation and proletarianisation.

As long as women were heads of households, dominated by male-heads, and were not heads or co-heads of families, their roles as mothers (the practice and the dominant discourse), were hegemonic and ensured their subordination. An important aspect of the women's transition was their social identity as single-woman-heads of families. When women made the ideological transition to become heads (or co-heads) of families, motherhood remained important, but this was only one of their multiple social identities.

According to Giddens (1991, quoted in Walker, 1995a: 427), 'A person's identity is not to be found in the behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reaction of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*' (emphasis in the original).

An important aspect of the women's transition is not so much that they make the decision (to live on their own), but that the concrete experience of daily living on their own as woman-heads of families assists in their ideological transition to being heads

of families. The Grandmothers' agency shapes their choices (Walker, 1995a: 426) and to simply associate motherhood with patriarchy is too simplistic as women do mediate their own relationship with their children (Walker, 1995a). The Grandmothers did not give up their maternal roles but struggled daily to care for their families. However, they also used their positions as family-heads to develop alternative ways of organising the family, different from the traditional patriarchal authoritarian roles associated with men.

That the Grandmothers remained so long in their relationships (Mosotho and Lena) was because of the material conditions of living under apartheid: jobs were linked to accessing a pass and therefore mobility was difficult. Incomes were also generally low and there was no housing provision for black people (Harvey, 1994). At another important level, strong ideological forces embedded in traditional culture, popular struggles and organisations, Christianity and the resistance movements, reinforced conventional motherhood, marriage and being a wife.²³

Lena was also subversive. Notwithstanding her cultural beliefs concerning the higher position of men in the family, she subverted this belief in the very next sentence by arguing that women could live alone without men – that is, that the role of family head was not the sole preserve of men. Lena is not only a 'survivor', but this represents a breakthrough in terms of her own development and her own feminist²⁴ identity.

In Rakgadi we see a complex dialectic unfold. Rakgadi tried to preserve the memory of her good monogamous marriage and the pre-eminent position of her husband in the context of widespread womanising. In the process she developed a family form in which a woman was the head – a subversion of the memory that she tried to preserve.

All three Grandmothers' transition to head of the family was a contradictory one. Mosotho searched for a good man who could look after his children. Lena accepted

²³ This was a coincidence of traditional family values and the position of women in diverse organisations such as FEDSAW, Christian Churches and the National Party. During this period the *umanyanos* (women's Christian groups) were especially popular amongst black women, especially domestic workers (see Ally, 2009).

²⁴ What is feminism? Lena represents the transformation from someone literally beaten down, to someone who still struggles and in the process has developed a liberating awareness as a woman.

that men held dominant positions in the hierarchy of traditional culture, yet her discovery that women can live on their own subverts this. Rakgadi's defence of the memory of a male-headed family led her to become the head of the family. Despite their attempts to cling to the old, the traditional and the known, their life experiences thrust each of the women into positions of leadership as family-heads.

All three Grandmothers are very different woman-heads despite being of the same generation, with a similar historical background and shared experiences of apartheid. The weight of surviving apartheid – together with their children - has been a heavy burden. The Grandmothers were also mothered by a similar generation of mothers to withstand the blows of apartheid. Their paths to become woman-headed families were different and their self-identity was formed differently, at various stages. But it is in the process of living concretely, that the Grandmothers make the transition to woman-heads, and Lena discovers that “it is not so difficult to live without a man”.

The contradictory character of this ideological transition in the women of all three generations will be further explored in the concluding chapter.

5.3 The Family form of the Grandmothers' woman-headed family

5.3.1 Composition of the family

The composition of all three Grandmothers' woman-headed families is different.

Mosotho: I live with my youngest daughter, Didi. She's doing a learnership programme at the Vaal Technikon. Jennifer, my second youngest daughter, also lives with us, together with her two children.

After Jennifer got married in late 2007, she continued to stay with Mosotho because she obtained a learnership at Baragwanath Hospital (in Soweto) and it was more convenient. In 2008, Jennifer and her two children moved to join her husband in

Secunda.²⁵ Mosotho’s unemployed son, Lucas, and his family then moved in. Lucas has a wife and two children.

Soon after **Lena** moved to her RDP house in Bophelong in 1998, her son and her daughter died. Her son’s 14-year-old daughter was brought to Lena because there was no one to look after her. Her deceased daughter’s children, a boy of 16 and a girl of 14, also live with her.

In 2001 **Rakgadi** retired from work. At the time she lived with her two sons. That year her daughter gave birth to twin boys. While her daughter lives with the children’s father, the twins still live with Rakgadi. The twins are a handful and their mother fetches them one at a time because she cannot manage them both. Rakgadi’s two sons still live at home. The eldest son is 25 years old and he does casual work (gardening) when he can. The youngest son is 20 years old and he is still at school.

The woman-headed families in this generation tend to have different compositions. Mosotho and Rakgadi live in multi-generational families, while Lena’s is a ‘skip generation’ family, the middle generation is missing.²⁶ The three Grandmothers’ households have different configurations, and are crowded (averaging 4.7 persons in each home) into tiny RDP houses.

Table 5.1 Composition of the Grandmothers’ families

Grand-mother Heads	Mosotho I	Mosotho II	Lena I	Lena II	Rakgadi I	Rakgadi II
Children	2 daughters (24 and 20)	1 daughter, 1 son and his wife	1 Son	-	2 sons, 1 daughter	2 sons, (25 and 20)
Grand-children	2 grandchildren (3 and 6 months)	2 grandchildren	-	1 grandson (16) 2 grand-daughters (14)	2 grand-sons (twins)	2 grand-sons (twins, 7)
Total	5	6	2	4	6	5

²⁵ She now lives in another province of South Africa, namely Mpumalanga.

²⁶ Although there are no statistics readily available, Lena’s family may reflect the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In Table 5.1, the columns marked ‘I’ indicate the family members who lived with the women when they first moved into the RDP houses, and the columns marked ‘II’ indicate the family members who currently live with them. Clearly, all three households are fluid and the source of their fluidity is different: death, economic reality and family circumstances.

One of the sources of the changing composition in Mosotho’s family is that before she had the RDP house she was not able to live with all her children, and as result left them with her ex-husband when they got divorced. Once the children grew up, a tension emerged between the children and Mosotho – they accused her of having left them with their father and only wanting to live with Didi (her youngest daughter). Mosotho explained the circumstances under which she left Jan - she had no opportunity to take the children with her given the housing shortage and she did live-in work. Didi, on the other hand, complains about the lack of space in the tiny RDP house. However, it is difficult for Mosotho to say no to any of the children now that she has a home, even if it is tiny, especially if they are in need.²⁷

In Lena’s case, the death of her two children, her son and her daughter, resulted in her living with three teenage grandchildren, all of whom are still at school.

In Rakgadi’s case, her daughter left home to live with a male partner, leaving the children with her mother. A different dynamic resulted in the changing composition of Rakgadi’s family. The changing relationships between members of her family and their spouses resulted in fluidity in the composition of her household.

In the Grandmothers’ generation, the fluidity in the composition of the family-household is influenced by history, socio-economic factors, by threads and layers of family ties, tensions, emotions, and social agency.²⁸ There is therefore no pattern to the composition of the family-household. The Grandmothers’ generation confirms the literature that woman-headed households are fluid, and supports especially Muthwa (1994) and Dungumaro (2008) that woman-headed families tend to be larger because

²⁷ By the time Lucas moved in the research has been completed and there was no opportunity to draw further information about the impact of his arrival on relationships within the family.

²⁸ See the discussion on family fluidity and composition by Ross (1996) in the Western Cape, and Spiegel (1996) in Chapter 3.

they nurture and care for children, grandchildren, the elderly and those who are unemployed.

While further research is needed to establish the number of grandmothers who head families, Lena's family form, with the missing middle generation, is becoming significant as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Tati, 2008).²⁹ The situation in South Africa with regard to the significance of grandmother-headed families is seemingly similar to that of the United States (US), although further research is important.³⁰

5.3.2 Sources of income³¹

All three Grandmothers are retired. They all worked as domestic workers for private employers: Mosotho and Rakgadi worked in the town and Lena worked on farms. Mosotho was boarded in 2003 because of her arthritis, Rakgadi stopped live-out work in 2001 and Lena stopped working in 1998 when she left the farm. None of them have ever had any formal benefits from an employer – medical aid, unemployment insurance, or a provident fund. This reflects the precarious and exploitative nature of their work under apartheid.

After apartheid was abolished the Old Age Grant was extended to all South Africans irrespective of colour.³² Men and women qualify at different ages.³³ The amount as at 1 April 2008 was R940 per month (SASSA, 2009).³⁴

²⁹ We can infer that this number has increased significantly. Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA) was set up in 2001 to help grandmothers whose families were affected by HIV/AIDS to cope in their daily lives. Initially set up in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape, it has spread to Tsolo and Umtata in the Eastern Cape. By 2004 it had 19 home groups in Cape Town and three co-operatives in the Eastern Cape.

³⁰ In the United States grandmother-headed families are increasing in number (Snyder, McLaughlin and Findeis, 2006). Between 1970 and 1997, the number of children in the United States living in a grandparent-headed household increased from 2.2 million to 3.9 million (Snyder *et al.*, 2006: 600). By the late 1990s these grandparent-headed households included 5.5% of all children in the United States (Casper and Bryson, 1998, quoted in Snyder *et al.*, 2006). Most of these children are aged five and under (Thompson *et al.*, 2000, quoted in Snyder *et al.*, 2006).

³¹ In this discussion on the sources of income, the amounts for the different social grants are used for 2009 when the interviews occurred. However, the current updated amounts for the different social grants for 2011 are footnoted appropriately.

³² This used to be called the 'old age pension' but in the language of neoliberalism, 'a grant' is dissociated from 'right', and is really at the pleasure of a philanthropic state.

³³ Males must be 63 years or older, and females must be 60 years or older. A spouse must comply with a means test. From April 2010, all males aged 60 will qualify for the Old Age Grant (South African Social Security Agency [SASSA], 2009/10).

Mosotho's sole income is her Old Age Grant. Her youngest daughter, Didi, does not earn any money from her learnership programme. Jennifer receives a Child Support Grant for one of her children, and is applying for the second child, a baby. As at 1 April 2008, the CSG was R210 a month, and is used to cover the child's expenses.³⁵ When Jennifer moved from the house, however, this income was lost to Mosotho's family.

Lena's sole income is the Old Age Grant. Lena's three grandchildren are too old to access the CSG, and she receives no state support even though they are all still at school.³⁶ The children's paternal and maternal families do not assist her at all.

Rakgadi receives the CSG for her two grandchildren (R420 in total). In addition, her daughter sends her R300 a month to cover food and household expenses. Together with her pension (R940), this amounts to R1 660 a month. Rakgadi's unemployed son gives her 'something' when he does gardening work but this is irregular. Her youngest son is still at school.

All three Grandmothers' struggle daily to cover their families' living expenses. No one in any of the three families earns a wage. Mosotho and Lena rely solely on their Old Age Grant. Rakgadi has a relatively larger income, but she has young grandchildren to attend to, and her adult sons do not provide any reliable additional income. In the absence of wages, state grants, especially the Old Age Grant, is the basis for reproducing the family. The Minister of Social Development at the time, Zola Skweyiya, emphasised the importance of the social grants when he described them "as a trampoline that enables many people in these households to jump over the barriers of economic and social exclusion" (cited in Hassim: 2005: 638).³⁷

³⁴ The current Old Age Pension is R1 140 per month as at 1 April 2011 (SASSA, 2011/12 <http://www.sassa.gov.za/Portals/1/Documents/d54e383b-7e3d-4c96-8aa2-4cc7d32bc78f.pdf> Accessed: 11 October 2011, 21:21).

³⁵ The current Child Support Grant amount is R260 per month as at 1 April 2011 (SASSA, 2011/12 <http://www.sassa.gov.za/Portals/1/Documents/d54e383b-7e3d-4c96-8aa2-4cc7d32bc78f.pdf> Accessed: 11 October 2011, 21:21).

³⁶ Children must be under 15 years of age to receive the CSG, as at 1 April 2008 (SASSA, 2009).

³⁷ The current Minister of Social Development is Bathabile Olive Dlamini (www.dsd.gov.za accessed 11 October 2011, 21:14).

However, given their meagre nature, the grants do not help the family to break the cycle of poverty (Van Driel, 2008), they merely alleviate poverty (Ally, 2009).

The Grandmothers have been among the lowest-paid workers and have not accumulated resources to assist them. Given their age, physical limitations and illnesses, it is difficult for them to find alternative means of survival. Mosotho tried to collect glass bottles for recycling, but this was physically too strenuous for her and she was forced to abandon it.³⁸

According to the South African Social Services Agency, OAG recipients comprise 25% of the total recipients for Bophelong.³⁹ Mosotho and Lena depend on the Old Age Grant as the family's sole income, and it forms the bulk of Rakgadi's family income. This confirms both Hassim (2005) and Tati (2008) that for many old age grant recipients, this is the family's sole income.

The Grandmothers' generation of woman-headed families forms part of the 69% of the Bophelong population who earn less than a R1 000 per month.⁴⁰

5.3.3 Patterns of consumption

Given their position within the family and within South African society, women are generally responsible for family consumption – they buy the food and the commodities necessary to maintain the family's standard of living (Dalla Costa and James, 1975). This is particularly so with woman-head families and households.

Mosotho: In the morning I eat 'slap pap' and then I take my tablets.⁴¹ For lunch, sometimes I take some rice. We eat meat once a week. Sometimes I eat rice with morogo,⁴² or milk or tomatoes. We do not always have enough food.

³⁸ Mosotho said that she had to walk around the township visiting the dumping sites and carrying bottles, which then had to be broken into pieces so that they could be transported easily. Then they had to pay to transport the broken glass to the depot which increased the costs and cut into the amount they earned from the private companies (Interview: Mosotho, 2008, see Appendix 3).

³⁹ See Table 4.14 and discussions in Chapter 4 on Bophelong.

⁴⁰ See the discussion and Table 4.6 (Type of work and income) on income patterns in Bophelong in Chapter 4.

⁴¹ 'Slap pap' is a soft porridge made from ground maize.

⁴² Leafy greens similar to spinach.

Like now, I sent my grandson (Jennifer's son) to his other grandmother because I do not have vegetables and meat.

Every month I get R940 from the government. I pay R250 for transport for my daughter to go to school, R100 I keep in case I need the doctor, and R400 is used for food. We buy a food hamper of mielie meal, rice, cooking oil, spice, sugar, tea and salt. R110 is for meat and R50 is for electricity pre-paid meter. I do not have money to belong to societies, not even a burial society.

When I am sick I go to Bophelong Clinic, or sometimes Johan Heyns Hospital, in Vanderbijlpark. Sometimes I am very swollen from the arthritis and the tablets do not help and then I go to Doctor Pitseng [a private doctor in Bophelong] and he gives me an injection. The Day Hospital does not have these injections. It costs R100 for the medicine and the injection, so I must keep this money.

The community decided not to pay for anything because we do not get any services. Why must we pay for services that we don't get? The RDP house is in my name but the houses are badly built. We moved into the RDP house in 1998. We used to get cold in winter and hot in summer because there is no ceiling. When I was boarded in 2003, my employer gave me a small gift, and I used it to plaster the inside of the house, and closed the space between the roof and the ceiling. This helped to stop the cold coming in.⁴³

I go to the *mashonisa* [loanshark] all the time because we run short before the month is out. If we lend R100, we pay back R150. We go to Lucas, here in the township. Maybe in Vanderbijlpark it is cheaper, but then they want your identity document.

I do have other accounts like Lubners, where I bought a heater and a kettle.⁴⁴ When my daughter got married I had to go to the *mashonisa* for money; I still owe them R500. I bought blankets from the coolies who come sell door to door.⁴⁵ You know, with Sesothos, the girl must take blankets with her to her in-laws when she gets married.

All three Grandmothers buy the same food hampers sold at Ola's, and try and stretch it to last the whole month.⁴⁶ There is always a shortage of food. Food security

⁴³ Mosotho is referring to the conditions and the lack of services in the township: refuse is not collected regularly, RDP houses are not maintained including water leaks, streets are not tarred, and when it rains there are pools of water outside houses and the sandy 'streets' turn to mud.

⁴⁴ A furniture store that sells goods on hire-purchase.

⁴⁵ 'Coolies' is a derogatory word historically used for Indians, but now used for Ethiopian immigrants who sell goods door to door in the township.

⁴⁶ Ola's is a local grocery store that sells food hampers, and Nhlapo's butchery hampers are especially designed for people on the social grants. Many Old Age Grant recipients buy these hampers containing basic food items. For example, Ola's Hamper 1 includes 12 kilograms of mielie meal, 10 kilograms of white sugar, 2 litres of cooking oil, 1 kilogram of washing powder and 10 kilograms of cake flour; it costs R177.95 (Ola, 2007). A small meat hamper contains beef and chicken pieces, and sausage, for R40 (US \$5 at 2007 conversion rates). Hamper 1 and one small meat pack cost R217.95 – more than the CSG (R210) – and excludes basic necessities like vegetables, electricity and medicine.

is a major issue in townships, especially for those on a social grant (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4).

The consumption patterns in **Rakgadi's** and **Lena's** family are generally similar, including the difficulties of having to pay for basic services and having to deal with poor service delivery. With the installation of pre-paid metres, electricity is privatised and people have to buy 'units' before they can use electricity for prepaid meters.⁴⁷

All three Grandmothers reproduce their families on scarce resources. Mosotho uses moneylenders when she needs to 'survive'.⁴⁸ This is significant within the township and was confirmed in the Bophelong Survey (2007), where loans are used for food, school fees and basic services.

Life is particularly difficult for Lena who has to maintain three teenage grandchildren on her pension. She says:

It's very hard to look after children when you are in your 60s. One month I buy shoes for this one, and the others must wait for the next few months. It's stressful. When the food is finished, what must I do? Who do I turn to? What do I give them till the end of the month?

Grandmother-headed families that contain children face more economic hardship, especially if the grandmothers are unmarried (Bryson and Casper, 1999, Snyder *et al.*, 2006: 601).⁴⁹ Woman-headed families spend a greater share of their total income on food, although they spend less per person (Frazao, 1993). While there was no evidence of lower nutrition or poorer health care for children in these families, woman-headed families tend to buy cheaper foods and less 'convenience' foods (Frazao, 1993; Chant, 2002). An important feature of consumption patterns in these families was that consumption between boys and girls is more equitably distributed in woman-headed families (Chant, 2002), and girl-children were less discriminated against (Datta and McIlwaine, 2000). Lena, for example, indicated that she had to

Interviewees spent between R50-R100 (US \$7 to US \$13) each month on prepaid electricity.

⁴⁷ Prepaid meters are a form of privatisation (see McDonald and Pape, 2002).

⁴⁸ High interest rates are prevalent in the township, even though the South African government has tried to regulate this (Du Plessis, 1997). Discussed in Chapter 4.

⁴⁹ The authors here are alluding to the grandmothers' sole-income support.

plan on a monthly basis to buy shoes and clothes for each of her grandchildren, to ensure that each one's needs are met on a rotational basis.

There are more studies on the Old Age Grant than any other grant in South Africa, and this may be because the CSG is relatively new. These studies report that the OAG is also used to pay for costs related to education (Barnes, 2008: 13), emphasising the importance of the OAG for families like those of Rakgadi and Lena, with children still at school.

The Grandmothers are survivors of apartheid, but the struggle continues in post apartheid South Africa. Within the Grandmothers' generation, subsistence takes place on a 'hand to mouth' basis. There is a daily struggle to reproduce themselves physically, on an OAG. There are strong tendencies that habituate children to scarcity, including basic needs like food and clothing, and generally low living standards. The burden of the physical reproduction of the future generation is being placed on women in the twilight of their lives.

5.4 Grandmothers and the Reproduction of Capitalist Patriarchy

Under capitalism, social reproduction includes the reproduction of the new generation of workers to 'fit' into capitalist social relations (that includes patriarchy). How does this occur in the Grandmothers' generation of woman-headed families?

5.4.1 *Division of labour*

Mosotho: My *ouma* [Grandmother] used to cook and we did the housework. She cooked pap from a fire that we made outside. We learned to cook from my grandmother. The boys did work outside.... When I was married my husband worked and struggled with me. He even changed nappies. Men must help their wives.

I taught my daughter Didi to shop so she can make money stretch. I tell her we only have R300 for the month and she must see what food she can get. Didi cooks and cleans on the weekend and I clean during the week because I'm at home.

Lena: Before I used to do everything for my family but I can't do everything any more. The children do the housework. I taught them all. Everyone must help. There's no boy's work or girl's work. The boy helps with housework; he sweeps the house, does the garden and other housework. I taught him. The boy doesn't give me problems but the two girls always fight over housework. They also have different mothers.

Rakgadi: My husband used to cook. Sometimes I went to church and left him at home with the children. My sons help at home with housework; they cook and even dish up food for me. The twins [boys] do no housework; they just play.

Mosotho was reared by her grandmother and learned a gendered division of labour in the home: boys and girls did different work – the girls cooked and did housework and the boys worked outside. Mosotho's own experience with her husband was different – he helped with the children and changed nappies. When asked how this came about, Mosotho was uncertain, as this was the same man who constantly womanised.

In turn, Mosotho transferred important knowledge about housekeeping and consumption (buying and making food stretch for the whole month), to her daughter, Didi. These are particular gendered skills that women have acquired and pass on, thus confirming women's role in the development of gendered subjectivity.

Lena was used to doing all the housework in the home, and it is only old age, illness and physical constraints that have influenced her to change. In Lena's case, necessity – old age and illness – is the imperative that forces everyone to help in the home.

The Grandmothers do not rigidly reproduce gendered patterns of housework. They have objective physical limitations informed by life-cycle factors, such as age and illness. If the Grandmothers are ill, no food will be cooked and this places certain obligations on their children and grandchildren, hence Rakgadi's sons cook for their mother and Lena's grandchildren share the chores. Children tend to be co-operative and share the housework in woman-headed families (Chant, 1997, 2007a), although there was often tensions over housework between some of the grandchildren (Lena's) but that was relatively 'normal'.

This raises important implications for the social reproduction of girls and boys. From the testimonies of all three Grandmothers, it would appear that the male children and grandchildren were not treated in a specifically gendered manner, or at least there was no conscious intention to treat them as proxies for absent husbands or spouses or to allocate specific authority to them. Benjamin's (1990) theory of intersubjectivity is relevant to explain the particular conditions within this generation of women that tends to promote mutual subjectivity. The Grandmothers' physical limitations impose an objectivity on them and their grandchildren that obliges the family-household members to share housework. This contributes to the mutual 'recognition' of each other's role (the Grandmother, the sons and the grandchildren), in the maintenance of the family-household. As Lena herself notes: 'Before I used to do everything for my family', but now she is physically limited.⁵⁰

5.4.2 *Decision-making*

Mosotho: *Ek slaan guitar in die huis!* [I play the guitar in this house!] I make the decisions in this house. We discuss about food and money with Didi and Jennifer.

I am responsible for everything. If there's tension I try to solve it. Didi complains about the space and she must get up and make breakfast for the children and dress them for school because Jennifer leaves very early. Didi must help her sister.

Lena: I discuss with the children. They must understand, sometimes there isn't money to cover what everyone needs. We also talk about not wasting anything, like washing powder.

Rakgadi: I discuss with my sons about everything. But I'm the head of the house. I also discuss with my other children who don't live with me. We plan things, like to make a *mokete* [celebration], and we share the cost because food is very expensive. Everyone works together.

Although the Grandmothers take responsibility and are the centre of decision-making, consultation takes place with children and grandchildren. Mosotho describes the decisions she makes to avoid tension between siblings and to encourage co-operation

⁵⁰ This supports Benjamin's (1990: 38) notion that 'if the mother sets no limits for the child, she obliterates herself and her own interests and allows herself to be wholly controlled'.

between them. Lena indicated earlier that buying consumer goods, like shoes, was planned and staggered because of scarce resources. The nature of decision-making indicates attempts to be fair and equitable in the way Lena treated all her grandchildren. This is supported in Chant's (2002) studies of female-headed households in Mexico. All the Grandmothers reflect a more consultative and sharing leadership approach which tends to facilitate co-operation. This is due both to their experience and their pragmatism about the utilisation of scarce resources in the family.

Woman-headed families, however, are not homogeneous in the way leadership is exercised. Research indicates some differences in the nature of leadership in woman-headed families. For instance, in Botswana woman-headed families emulated male leadership but were not consistently hierarchical (Datta and McIlwaine, 2000:41).

Women have a different way of dominating. When women rule, it is part of their work. They like it when everything functions and the family is doing well. Amassing wealth and earning lots of money doesn't cross their minds. Capital accumulation seems to be a male thing. It's not for nothing that popular wisdom says that the difference between a man and a boy is the price of his toys (Vogt, 2009).

5.4.3 Authority in the woman-headed family

The father is the centre of authority in the male-headed family, and this role is underwritten by the broader ideology of patriarchy (Mann, 1986a). In the South African context this has resonance with the role of traditional culture (Spiegel, 1991) and the role of Christianity (Cock, 1990; Meintjies, 1990) in developing patriarchal norms. In the discussion on decision-making in the Grandmothers' families, I argued that the tendency is towards more consultative decision-making and a more equitable and non-gendered distribution of work within the family. Two of the Grandmothers – Mosotho and Lena – did not have any major issues or problems with the exercise of authority in the family. In particular, no major issues of authority arose with respect to the male members of the family. For Mosotho this was because until Lucas, her son moved in, only women were members of the family-household. Lucas's arrival came too late in the research process for me to observe and discuss with Mosotho. Lena

indicated that her relationship with her grandson was non-conflictual and that even on issues related to housework ‘the boy does not give me problems’.

Of the three women, Rakgadi was the only one who faced issues of authority. There are problems of authority and control with Rakgadi’s youngest son, and at times she turns to her eldest son to assist her with managing the young man. Rakgadi is distraught at how her son has changed in his relationship to her. This is indicative of the gendered nature of authority, especially linked to patriarchy and male dominance, as young boys in woman-headed families grow up and relate to their mothers or grandmothers.

Rakgadi: My youngest son is a problem. [Rakgadi is very teary and uncomfortable.] He takes drugs, mandrax and cocaine. He was even chased away from the school. He is very cheeky. He is the last-born, he’s 18. He is the main problem in the house. He was such a quiet child before. Friends change people. He doesn’t want to go back to school. I don’t sleep at night. I worry about this child. He is out walking around at night. You don’t know what he’s doing. Drinking and drugs, he does both. Sometimes I try to please him. I give him R20 if I got, or R1 or R2 if he asks me. I think that he and his friends put money together and then buy drugs. He’s very naughty. He’s afraid of my eldest son, but when my eldest son is not here, he takes a chance and performs. He becomes difficult to control.

At times Rakgadi’s eldest son has to take on the role of the ‘father’ as the youngest son becomes uncontrollable. Rakgadi prefers her youngest son to listen to her, and not to have her eldest son mediate on her behalf. Often this happens in front of the children, the twins and it is ‘not good’.

As boys get older they tend to come into conflict with their mothers in single-woman-headed families. This is partly a normal process of children needing to differentiate themselves in adolescence from their parents, to develop their own identity. But this is gendered, as it is also about differentiating themselves as men from women, their mothers. While the young men live in woman-headed families, they are also subject to influences from society, school, friends, the community, and the media – mass culture. All these spheres are underwritten by male dominance, which conflicts with their mother’s role in the home. In this context, it also became a gendered issue of

being ‘under a woman’s control’.⁵¹ In the context of traditional culture, there is the additional need to assert themselves as men. This is the struggle that Rakgadi experiences with her son.

In the new South Africa, despite women’s rights achieved constitutionally, the position of women has not changed substantially, to the extent that it mitigates against this kind of conflict arising, and/or the manner in which it arises.

Dalla Costa and James (1975) argue that the home is the ‘social factory’ where social relations are reproduced. It is through ‘mothering’ sons (and husbands) that a particular ideology of women and men is reproduced, that patriarchy is reproduced (as discussed in Chapter 3).

The same repressions, denials of affect and attachment, rejection of the world of women and things feminine, appropriation of the world of men, identification with the idealized absent father – all a product of women’s mothering – create masculinity and male dominance in the sex-gender system and also create men as participants in the capitalist work world (Chodorow, 1979:102).

In contemporary capitalist society the mass media permeates all aspects of life. Certain patriarchal discourses co-exist in schools, the community and society, and these affect all generations of woman-headed families. Similar authority problems arise in the school with regard to culture and tradition. The mothers – or woman’s nurturing role therefore comes into conflict with male dominance in the rest of society.

This is particularly exacerbated in the context – like the Grandmothers - where the woman-headed family is an enclave for gender equity, co-operation and objectively undermines the broader patriarchal context. This produces a conflict that is fed daily as the family interacts with society, the school, teachers, the police, community members, friends, and the media. This is one of the contradictions that the woman-headed family raises, where consistent collective resolution is necessary.

⁵¹ Within the context of patriarchy, being ‘under a woman’s control’ is an insult to men.

5.4.4 Associational life

A key aspect of working-class life and resistance to apartheid was the self-organisation of associational life in townships, such as sport and film (Pauw, 1960), stokvels, funeral societies, and church and women's organisations (Beittel, 1992: 212). The traditional funeral societies and stokvels became a means of solidarity and resistance (Maloka, 2004), and in the process became part of working-class culture in townships, as blacks were excluded from commercial banks under apartheid.⁵² The stokvels (a rotating credit association) (Beittel, 1992: 221) and funeral societies were based on the initiatives of local people, especially women, and became part of the social fabric, of the culture associated with the black working class. One study claims that during the 1970s, about two-thirds of households in one area in Soweto participated in such associations (Masetla *et al.*, 1980, quoted in Beittel, 1992: 221).

Mosotho: There used to be many societies, stokvels and burial societies, but not so much nowadays, because many people are not working.⁵³ In my street we just put R10 from each house if someone dies. I don't belong to any society because I don't have money.

In 2000 I joined the local organisation because things were just getting bad for people. I joined TSEBO and BOCOSFO, but this year there were not many meetings and activities. During apartheid, I was active in the street committees, in the community. People listened to the committees. We used to deal with all the problems in the community. Even when Dodo was alive [in the 2000s], if we had rent or school fees problems, we toyi-toyied [protested] together.⁵⁴

I do belong to my church and attend regularly every week.

Only Lena belongs to a funeral society and pays R110 per month. This is partly due to her fears that there is no one she can depend on to bury her, and her grandchildren are still at school. After a life of struggle, Lena is concerned about her burial in the context of scarce resources. This is also indicative of the pressure under which the Grandmothers live.

⁵² For instance, Maloka (2004) discusses the struggle to bury migrants, to have their bodies found after mining accidents and the struggle to take their bodies 'home'.

⁵³ This is confirmed in the Survey (2007) findings in Bophelong, only 7.5% belong to stokvels, and 47.9% belong to funeral societies.

⁵⁴ Dodo was a local activist who died in 2005.

On the other hand, Rakgadi and Mosotho have commercial funeral policies that their daughters have provided for them. The inroads being made by commercial banks and insurance companies to cover funeral policies is one of the major changes in black townships in post-apartheid South Africa, although it is difficult to quantify how widespread this is. The direct relationship of community members towards each other in the 'societies' is being replaced and mediated by purely commercial relations between individual families and the private companies. This has major implications for solidarity within communities.

Mosotho believes that the community is less organised than before, yet life is more difficult, people are unemployed, and the need for organisation to improve their lives is greater. Rakgadi and Lena did not belong to any community-based organisation in the past. All three of them attend their Christian churches regularly. Since 2002 there has been the emergence of fragile and uneven social movements (Lehulere, 2005; Desai, 2004). These emerging movements are composed predominantly of black women, who are largely responsible for the maintenance of children.

The Grandmothers participated in informal social networks within the townships; and this information emerged during the research when interviews were postponed or delayed to accommodate them. Often the Grandmothers assisted women in the neighbourhood or in the church. Mosotho and Rakgadi belonged to their church's *Rumanians*, and this was historically related to them being domestic workers (Ally, 2009). Lena sews beaded clothes for the Sesotho girls' cultural dancing groups. Whenever there is a funeral or a local celebration for the ancestors, the Grandmothers lend moral and emotional support as is traditionally expected. Often these exchanges were part of an informal network, not necessarily noted or returned, difficult to track, and the arrangements were selective with regard to the neighbours with whom favours were shared.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ This is similar to what Muthwa (1994:6) found in Orlando East in terms of non-market exchanges, and inter-household exchanges (discussed in Chapter 3).

5.4.5 Culture, tradition and patriarchy

In Chapter 2 we discussed the importance of tradition and traditional culture as part of the women's lived experience. Tradition, culture and ideology are powerful means through which the social relations in society are reproduced. In families, men and women are important bearers and reproducers of social relations, including the subordination of women. What happens in single-woman-headed families in the Grandmothers' generation? What is the nature of the culture that is being reproduced?

Mosotho: I had a big wedding for Jennifer. The boy paid *lobola* of R14 000 and my ex-husband was keeping the money because they negotiated with him, the father. There was a signed agreement about how the money was to be used. But when the wedding came near we realised that her father didn't have the money; he spent it. I threatened him with the police and he came and gave me some money every time. But he didn't manage to give me even R8 000 from the R14 000. The boy's parents wanted to go to the police because they wanted the rest of the money. My blood pressure just went up. We promised the boy's family a white wedding. We had to get toilets, a tent, food, everything. I bought blankets from the coolies and the neighbours helped with crockery and cutlery and space for the wedding tables. I had to go to a *mashonisa*. Now we must pay back for the wedding.

Jennifer's father did many things for the wedding, like the *lobola*, because it is men who do this. Even talking to the ancestors – *badimo* – and when you want to make a *mokete* [celebrations held in a tent], you must get men to help you. The men talk to the ancestors, the eldest male.

Rakgadi: I went for my [female] initiation in the Free State and I sent my daughters for initiation. My two daughters are married to Zulus, who don't do initiation. My daughters must decide if their children will go for initiation. My sons went to 'the mountain' for their [male] initiation. My youngest son wants to go but we will need help from his uncle.

But there's a problem, and my son doesn't want to go to school any more. There are two groups fighting; one group went to the mountain [and became 'men'] and one group didn't go. The 'men' want to take away their things, their money and stuff, at school. My son says he's tired of fighting. The 'men' also beat them. The school calls the police when the two groups fight but the police don't do anything. I don't know what to do because if he goes to the mountain, he can get sick [contract HIV/AIDS].

Rakgadi discussed another cultural practice that affected her family.

I was mad. I was very cross. My daughter was kidnapped [a tradition called *ukuthwala*] while she was still at school and taken to the boy's home in Sebokeng. I stayed out of work and went to fetch her from the boyfriend's house and took her back to school. But he fetched her again and she went with him. His family then negotiated with my family, my brother, to pay the *lobola*. They paid half the *lobola*; the rest is still not paid. But he's horrible to my daughter; he sleeps with many girlfriends.

My daughter is now 34. Because the *lobola* is not paid they are not married. She has three children, a boy of 17 and the twins. I look after the twins.

With my husband, we struggled to keep the children at school. Sometimes we didn't have money for transport and they had to walk home. It was dangerous, so I used to walk with them to school in the morning and then walk to work. When my daughter just left school ... I was very disappointed.

Lena: In my family we send the boys to 'the mountain' [for male traditional initiation]. I went for *lebollo*, when I was 13 or 14 years old. My daughters also went. We went to the mountains in the Free State. My children, boys and girls, all went to the mountain.

But when my grandson must go I will have to go and fetch his father's brother to make the arrangements. It must be a man in the family. But the boy gets no support from this uncle, no maintenance. Sometimes the uncle visits, maybe two or three times a year. When I asked them for support he said that I get money from the government so I must use my pension. I struggle with these children on my own. But I told my grandson he must finish his school first and then he can go to the mountain.

In our culture men are higher than women. But I know now that it's not so hard to live on your own. Men can be *lelik* [ugly]. They think we have to live with them.⁵⁶

All three Grandmothers observe traditional culture, to different extents, and it has a different place within township families. Urbanisation and proletarianisation have been strong social forces in the whittling down of traditional culture in general. There is also an increased awareness about the potential to contract HIV/AIDS, (Interviews, Lorraine and Eva: 2007).⁵⁷ Some families already circumcise their sons at local government hospitals (Interview, Miriam, 2008).⁵⁸ The increasing scarcity of resources tends to prohibit many cultural practices, including *lebollo*. *Lebollo* is particularly costly as boys sent to the mountains for a couple of weeks have to be

⁵⁶ Although this quote from Lena has been used before, it was used in the context of traditional culture, and indicates Lena's own transition to a woman-head.

⁵⁷ See Appendix 1.

⁵⁸ See Appendix 3.

provided with food and drink, especially meat, and blankets.⁵⁹ The men who organise these traditional schools must also be compensated.

All three Grandmothers have created alternative families to the traditional patriarchal families in which they themselves grew up. Consultative decision-making exists, a non-hierarchical leadership is deliberately cultivated to engage and foster co-operation, and an egalitarian distribution of resources occurs that ensures that everyone's needs are catered for. However, tradition, culture and patriarchy arise as external pressures on the family. To the extent that these traditional cultural pressures arise, they also oblige men to mediate them as in terms of observing traditional culture, women have no place or no power to exercise traditional culture.⁶⁰ In the light of this, all the Grandmothers are objectively vulnerable, a limitation on their roles as women, and they are aware of this.

The Grandmothers are not necessarily opposed to traditional forms of culture, in as much as they would like to uphold their culture. The Grandmothers have learnt as 'survivors', to compromise in situations they cannot change. However, this objectively contrasts with the (alternative) families they have created. The Grandmothers have limited control as men mediate traditional practices, and the external pressures on them can only be held off temporarily. It is through the external world, therefore – the schools, the friends, uncles and even ex-husbands – that patriarchy and traditional culture (marriage and male circumcision) re-enters and threatens the private space of woman-headed families.

Change is seldom unitary in its effects and almost invariably involves trade-offs rather than unambiguous gains and losses (Coontz, 2000: 291). The marriage of Mosotho's daughter brought about stress related to her ex-husband spending the *lobola*, money meant for the wedding. Despite her own experience, Mosotho supported her daughter's traditional wedding but advised her daughter to remain

⁵⁹ Slaughtering cows, goats and sheep is an important part of traditional cultural practices. Meat is very important as a symbol of traditional male power and patriarchy. In South Africa, meat is a symbol of masculinity, across all cultures and colours.

⁶⁰ The norms of traditional culture specify that men are the primary initiators of its production and reproduction. So for example, unless a woman gets a man to initiate a particular traditional cultural practice, it cannot be observed.

independent (as a co-head), as she could not prevent the marriage. Lena wants her grandson to finish his education before he is circumcised, and she will need to negotiate with his paternal uncle, who never maintains or cares about her grandson, to mediate the boy's traditional circumcision. Rakgadi's son already causes problems of 'authority' for her, through the influence of his friends. If the boy goes for his traditional circumcision, this will increase problems at home and at school where it is a basis to differentiate, bully and exploit the 'non-men'. Rakgadi was opposed to her daughter's *ukutwala*, and struggled to fetch the daughter so that she could finish school but she was unsuccessful. Despite the family 'shelter' (Horkheimer, 1962) the women have created for their children and their grandchildren within the home, the family is not impregnable to outside forces.

Despite women's constitutional rights in South Africa, and despite the fact that the old patriarchal controls are being undermined, there has been an increase in economic and emotional insecurity in women (Walker, 1991: 9). Many men have reacted to women's increased rights, which coincided with fundamental neoliberal changes in the production process, accompanied with retrenchments and mass unemployment; and was a convenient justification for their (male) emasculation. Indices of women's oppression, such as violence remain alarmingly high (MRC, 2009).⁶¹ Women are still very vulnerable as the state's ambiguous attitude to gender equality leaves them exposed and unprotected.

Benjamin (1988) explains how gender has transmuted into the social structures so that gender inequality is reproduced in the spaces of 'neutrality' and men's presence as active agents is not essential. There has been no concerted and consistent national government campaign to underwrite women's rights, to educate and train women, to create jobs for women, to enforce males' responsibility to maintain children and to eradicate violence against women. In contrast, the state has extended the rights of traditional ethnic leaders through formal recognition in Parliament.⁶² This has encouraged what are termed cultural practices such as virginity testing and

⁶¹ In a study in KwaZulu-Natal, boys as young as ten years old were engaged in the rape of young girls (Jewkes, Skewiya, Morrel and Dunkle, 2009:3), see Chapter 3 on violence against women.

⁶² See Chapter 12 of the country's Constitution (RSA, 1996b).

ukutwala.⁶³ The state's ambivalence and even support of traditional male cultural practices and male pre-eminence therefore weaken women's struggles within the home. When the police are called to the school in Bophelong because of fighting between 'the men' and 'the boys', they often do not intervene because some of them support traditional culture. A deep concern for the women is the potential danger of the boys contracting HIV/AIDS and the potential threat of violence.

The absence of a mass women's movement in South Africa as a countervailing force to these 'external forces' further weakens the Grandmothers' position objectively, and often they engage this struggle from the isolation of their homes. Together with constitutional rights for women, a mass movement could potentially and publicly translate the advances of the Grandmothers, into hegemonic public positions. The women objectively find themselves in a difficult contradictory struggle, in relation to these external forces (the friends, the police, the husbands, uncles, the boys, the daughter's demands), the demands made from within their homes (Lena's grandson, Rakgadi's son and daughter, and Mosotho's daughter), and the state.

All three Grandmothers engage in a continuing struggle, aware of their limitations and the need for compromise. This is especially true given the general political and social context that weakens their position. All three indicate their discomfort with certain traditional cultural practices, and appreciate the importance of education. The Grandmothers express conditional support for traditional culture and the male mediators, aware of the potential dangers they pose. While the women maintain their families under difficult circumstances, at key strategic points men intervene to mediate their relationship with their culture and their ancestors. Even though such interventions seldom occur, they are important given their social weight and power. In this way men 're-enter' the family and their patriarchal position, although diminished, continues. This is a fragile basis for male hegemony. In the current context it is often difficult for men to initiate and impose their patriarchal role as they are often unemployed, the remnants of cultural practices still gives them a window through which they can re-enter the privacy of the woman-headed family. The main

⁶³ *Ukutwala* is practiced on girls from poor families. This 'cultural practice' is extremely discriminatory, as the daughters of the chiefs and the rich are protected (CSVR, 2009).

countervailing force within the Grandmothers' families is the alternative co-operative and egalitarian relations that they are developing within their families.

5.5 Summing up: the Grandmothers

The Grandmothers' generation of woman-headed families are the 'Survivors'. These women not only survived apartheid, but also struggled resiliently to rear their children, to keep their families together and to uphold their culture and traditions when apartheid was bent on destroying black families. Walker (1990) notes the dominant ideology of women in resistance organisations like FEDSAW in the 1950s and 1960s when the Grandmothers were growing up. FEDSAW stressed the importance of women's domestic role as wife, and 'wife and mother' was used interchangeably. The Grandmothers were part of a broader generation of women (and men) who engaged in the molecular processes of resistance, quietly steeling a new generation who broke the so-called acquiescence of the 1960s in the mass struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, crucial in this country's liberation.

All three Grandmothers grew up, worked and lived under apartheid and spent many years in conventional relationships or marriage with men. The Grandmothers were socialised for their roles as traditional mothers and wives, their mothers (in Mosotho's case her grandmother especially) had forged them in the struggle for daily survival under apartheid. Every day bore harsh realities, repression, exploitation and abuse (from physical work, womanising, and physical abuse).⁶⁴

The Grandmothers pursued different paths to become the head of their families. It was only when the 'dream' or the 'promise' of her relationships with men (her husband and later Didi's father) were shattered, that Mosotho decided to live on her own. Lena's abusive husband informs her decision never to trust men and not to remarry once she was widowed. The generalised negative experience black women have with men informs Rakgadi's decision not to remarry after she was widowed. Hence all three women chose to remain single, and to head their families despite the

⁶⁴ Especially Lena, as Mosotho and Rakgadi did not experience physical beatings from their husbands.

responsibilities this entails, as the alternative is too risky given their experience of living with men.

Only Mosotho was active in the anti-apartheid struggle and none of the women describe themselves as feminists. Yet, their lived experience informed the women's self-conscious and purposeful actions as single woman-heads. In the different paths that all three Grandmothers took, in the first instance it was important to withstand the comprehensive onslaught of apartheid – the racism inflicted on black people, the systematic attempts to break up black families, and to keep themselves and their families intact. Despite growing up under apartheid in similar backgrounds, the experiences of *the survivors* are different. Yet, in Rakgadi's words, 'ons het vasgehou!' (We were steadfast, we withstood their onslaught). Sometimes this meant compromise with employers on farms or domestic employers. The women also survived rearing children despite apartheid's difficulties.

The Grandmothers survived difficult family situations and humiliation from husbands (except for Rakgadi), constant womanising and beatings. Their lives meant sacrifice and self-sacrifice. The Grandmothers choose to live on their own as single-woman-heads without the knowledge or certainty of whether or when liberation will come, their decisions were motivated by necessity.

Although the new South Africa provided them with RDP housing and an OAP, life remains a daily struggle. The Grandmothers are responsible for the social reproduction of a new generation of workers, their grandchildren, with little state support. The increasing socio-economic burdens are offset onto the Grandmothers, they maintain households that are fluid and fragile and that reflect the continuing pressures of South Africa's political economy. Death, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and changes as a result of unemployment and family relations stretch their resilience, initially cultivated under conditions of apartheid.

The physical struggle to make ends meet and to ensure daily food security demands a heavy toll on the Grandmothers; and all of them suffer from high blood pressure and arthritis. Yet, in terms of social relations within the family, they create alternative family forms to that of traditional male-heads, which they themselves experienced in

their own lives. The Grandmothers develop co-operative, egalitarian relationships in which the needs of all family members are met, irrespective of their gender. This new non-hierarchical form of leadership undermines patriarchy and traditional authority associated with male-headship.

However, it is through external forces – friends, schools and the community – and traditional culture that patriarchy penetrates and re-enters the family. There is no state support in the struggle against patriarchy despite women's constitutional rights and the Grandmothers have to engage with men, uncles, and ex-husbands over marriage, *lobola*, and traditional male circumcision. The Grandmothers are mindful of the potential dangers that the patriarchs will re-introduce into the family, but they are unable to prevent it given their objective vulnerabilities. The Grandmothers draw on their past experience as *survivors* and compromise within the prevailing constraints. The *survivors'* attitude to compromise with tradition and culture is also informed by their own ambivalences to traditional culture: while they have made important challenges as woman-heads they have not broken completely with traditional culture. This is partly due to their generation and because certain aspects of traditional culture were important in uniting family and community against apartheid; and from which they drew resilience. The ambivalence to practice certain aspects of traditional culture is also because of the obligatory, and mediatory role male kin play, and the survivors have no illusions about men.

The absence of feminist or progressive women's movements to counter these external forces, including the state, further weakens their positions, and often their struggles occur in the isolation of their family homes.

The generosity of the Grandmothers is based on affective relations with their children and grandchildren. It is this relationship that makes the struggles possible, despite their illnesses, shortage of resources, and considerations of age. This is about family tied to each other by thousands of threads of love, abuse and difficulties. For all three women, the sanctity of blood, of kin, is important.

The patriarchy of black working-class men rests on a fragile base. Unemployed, men experience feelings of inadequacy and emasculation, and many leave their families as

they cannot support them (Muthwa, 1994). Male self-esteem is reproduced in relation to work and being 'providers', and unemployment presents a crisis for men, for women and for society. Because of their precarious position men cannot impose the 'practice' of traditional culture as they used to. Male intervention is therefore ephemeral and fragile – the basis of patriarchy has shifted in important ways to women. This coincides with the increase in women's rights, and leads to displaced anger and increased violence against women.

The resilience of the Grandmothers to survive apartheid and to head their families cannot be underestimated. This resilience is being passed on to the next generation. As role models in their homes, the Grandmothers are chipping away at the edifices of patriarchy. They are still the ones who make the decisions about when traditional practices take place, which used to be the preserve of the patriarchs. This is influencing social relations within the family, and the socialisation of children. The act of being the family-head, in struggle, has freed Lena, probably the most submissive of the three Grandmothers: 'Now I know, it's not so hard to live on your own. Men can be *lelik* [*ugly*]. They think we have to live with them.'