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WOMEN AND WAGES: GENDER AND THE CONTROL OF INCOME IN FARM AND BANTUSTAN HOUSEHOLDS

by John Sharp and Andrew Spiegel

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Virtually all of the married men to whom we spoke in Matatiele and Qwaqwa were bitterly opposed to their wives engaging in certain kinds of local income-generating activity. The main target of male opprobrium was shebeening, because husbands who were migrant workers were afraid that if their wives sold liquor from their homes they would be tempted into prostitution by their clients. The men were not, of course, opposed to the existence of shebeens, and were happy, when home on leave, to visit shebeens run by other men's wives, mothers or daughters.

Male migrants attempted, despite their long absences from home, to exert control over their wives' activities in this regard. They left strict instructions concerning the disbursal of remittances, often threatening physical violence if their wives 'wasted' the money they remitted on liquor or the ingredients of homebrew. Where possible they also asked other men to check that their wives were not shebeening surreptitiously, and to report any breach of their prohibition.

Women found it necessary to view shebeening differently. To them it was one of the most accessible and convenient ways in which to generate a cash income from the home. It required little by way of equipment, did not demand regular inputs of time and labour, and could be undertaken at the same time as other domestic work. Women also had more personal discretion over income from shebeening than from remittances. For these reasons many women brewed and sold liquor, and some went to considerable lengths to conceal their activity from their husbands. A common strategy was to run the shebeen from the home of a friend in the vicinity - often the latter was a widow, whose marital status and age permitted her to avoid or disregard male censure. Women who did this explained that if questioned by their husbands, they could always say that they were just 'helping out' now and again

for a neighbour.

In both Matatiele and Qwaqwa, male and female images of shebeens were very different. Women stressed that most of the shebeens in their neighbourhood were small-scale affairs, with a limited number of clients at any one time; during the week, moreover, most of the clients were old men - pensioners for whom a visit to a shebeen in a neighbour's house was a means of quiet recreation. Men, on the other hand, painted lurid pictures to express anxiety about their homes being turned into sites of drunken revelry in their absence, with sex and drugs as well as liquor for sale on demand. Both types of shebeen undoubtedly existed in both areas, but whereas male images seemed to represent the kind they most liked to visit themselves, women's accounts were more accurate in the case of the majority of such establishments.

Disagreement about the nature of shebeens and the desirability of shebeening were part of a much broader struggle between men and women about access to income and control over this and other resources within households. This paper examines some aspects of this wider domestic struggle in the particular circumstances of the bantustans, and explores several key differences between Matatiele and Qwaqwa in this regard. The notion of 'domestic struggle' (Bozzoli, 1983: 144-148) is, for two reasons, central to our argument. First, it provides a counter to the common assumption, found in both quantitative surveys and qualitative research (Rogers, 1980: 63-68), that the household is a 'natural' unit for micro-level analysis, and that its boundaries mark out a domestic 'domain' within which there is a simple community of interest amongst household members (Harris, 1981). Such an assumption flies in the face of evidence collected during fieldwork in Matatiele and Qwaqwa, which not only points to the existence of significant conflicts along lines of gender and seniority within households, but also indicates that the forms and content of the relationships involved were different in the two areas (cf. Sharp and Spiegel, 1985; 1986).

The notion of 'domestic struggle' facilitates, secondly, an analysis of these differences between Matatiele and Qwaqwa. Several writers have argued that the source of rural African women's subordination and oppression in the South African situation of institutionalised labour migration lies in their confinement to the domestic domain in peripheral areas, and their performance of non-wage labour which serves 'reproductive' functions for capital (Wolpe, 1972; Meillassoux, [1975] 1981, Yawitch, 1980). These arguments were exceedingly important at the time they were formulated (a point to which Bozzoli gives insufficient credit in her repeated attacks on 'structuralist' Marxism). They are also seriously flawed, however, as many critics have pointed out (Mackintosh, 1977; Harris and Young, 1981); in addition to the much-discussed problem of what they mean by 'reproduction', the Wolpe-Meillassoux theses and their derivatives display an unfortunate tendency to exclude historical and regional variation in the broad system of labour migration from the purview of sociological analysis.

Our opening example suggests the validity of Bozzoli's argument

for 'the existence of unequal relations of domination and subordination between men and women - not only between capitalism and women' (op.cit.:142, original emphasis), even in the extreme circumstances of the contemporary bantustans. But use of the notion of 'patriarchy', as proposed by Bozzoli, is in itself no guarantee of sensitivity to the existence of variation in domestic structures under capitalism (cf. Peters, 1983). Bozzoli deals with the problem of differences in domestic organisation (the 'patchwork quilt of patriarchies', p. 149) by discussing the tension between capitalism's tendency to impose homogeneity in this sphere and the continuation of diverse precapitalist domestic relations. This formulation is particularly appropriate to the period with which she deals, namely the beginning of the processes of proletarianisation in South Africa. We are dealing with a much later period, to which the 'patchwork' notion is still applicable provided that it is not seen as the outcome of vestigial precapitalist relations.

Most people in Qwaqwa's closer settlements have been there fewer than twenty years, having been on white-owned farms prior to relocation (Sharp, 1982). Some people arrived in Qwaqwa as recently as the 1980s. From people's accounts of their past experiences it is possible to derive an approximate picture of the domestic relationships amongst African farmworkers, and changes in the form of these relationships over time in the areas from which they came.

This body of information provides an opportunity to compare domestic forms on white-owned farms in the Free State in the recent past and in contemporary Qwaqwa. The comparison is extended by a consideration of the situation in Matatiele. Most of Matatiele's people have had a long association with the district, where the dominant experience has been of a steady decline in subsistence agriculture, a concomitant increase in dependence on migrant remittances and a long history of involvement in labour migration.

It appears that on white-owned Free State farms there was a gradual process, beginning in the 1960s, whereby women became wage labourers in their own right. Prior to this their work outside the domestic domain, done for the farmer, had not been directly remunerated, but had been part of the 'agreement' between the head of their household and the employer. This emergence of women as wage labourers on farms was, however, part of the more general process by which employers disaggregated farmworkers' households in the context of changing relations of production. Their consequent discovery of the extent of the 'surplus' population on their land led to mass relocation into areas such as Qwaqwa. In Qwaqwa, even more than in Matatiele, there are presently few opportunities for women to be wage labourers. Matatiele's women, however, have never had significant opportunities to engage on a large scale in wage labour and the current situation therefore marks no abrupt experiential change in this regard. On the other hand, they do have access to attenuated agricultural resources which, in the absence of men as labour migrants, they are required to manage. Women in contemporary Qwaqwa have no such access. What are the implications for domestic relationships and forms of patriarchy

of these several differences?

The Free State farms

The memories of the oldest informants in Qwaqwa dealt with conditions on white-owned farms as early as the 194Cs. Their accounts point to the existence of considerable variation in conditions of labour on different farms and in different parts of the Free State. Keegan (1979) has indicated some of the early differences between the southern stockfarming areas and the northern regions of mixed agriculture. Because most of the informants came from the latter, discussion here concentrates on conditions on maize/cattle farms. Informants all agreed that even in the 1940s they were no longer labour tenants: they were allocated fields but did not plough them separately using their own implements, and the product of these fields plus their grazing rights were insufficient to provide subsistence. Hence, as Morris (1976) pointed out, the labour performed by Africans for the farmers was not a rent on land and grazing received, but a disguised form of wage labour which was paid in kind.

Nonetheless, workers did not contract individually with the farmer, but as members of households with which the farmer dealt through their male heads, arranging with the latter the amount of labour required and the forms of its payment. Usually the required labour included the labour of women in the household, who worked, often from an early age, in the farm kitchen and on the farmer's fields. The main payment for all of the labour - by both males and females - comprised the land and grazing mentioned above, as well as a further payment in bags of maize immediately after the harvest. People called this the 'bonus' because its size depended, in part, on the farm's success in a given year. From the farmer's perspective the land, grazing and bonus were all paid to the household as a whole, for which the head acted as intermediary. In practice, however, as women's accounts made clear, the head had considerable control over all this income. This was particularly so in the case of the bonus: often the household head elected to have part of it sold by the farmer on his behalf. He therefore had discretion over whether to turn some of the bonus into cash or use it all for his household's subsistence. The cash gained in this way and from minuscule and irregular money payments was seen by the household head as his personal income, over which his discretion was absolute. Women also had no say in the disposal of 'household' livestock, nor any part in herding them.

On the other hand, women performed the bulk of the weeding and harvesting on the fields given to the household, primarily because males were usually full-time workers for the farmer (Keppel-Jones, 1949). This gave women some leverage over the use to which the fields were put: they had no discretion to market any of the harvest to acquire cash, but they were able to feed

their children day-by-day from the vegetables and green mealies which they grew. To this extent, men's control over the product of the fields was limited.

The extent of patriarchal authority was most evident in the constraints on individual's movements in this period. Farmers were not interested in employing individuals, so that, given the forms of payment in existence, men needed dependants in order to gain employment. It was therefore necessary for men to take dependants with them when they moved from one farm to another, and the fact of a strict patriarchy enabled them to do this. This form of patriarchy was, in part, a function of the difficulty which women had in moving as individuals. The only recognised way for women to move between farms was as the dependants of men: they could move away from their natal household when they married, but only to join that of their husband. Women informants recalled that divorce was extremely difficult in these circumstances, because a woman had to get her own kin to accept that the husband was at fault and to permit her to return to them. An escape from the farms to an urban area was possible, but it was likely, women said, to be final, because kin would be reluctant to reincorporate a woman 'spoilt' in the towns. These restrictions show that the nature of male authority within African farmworkers' households was, in large measure, derived from the characteristic form of the employment relationship.

From the mid-1950s this situation began to change. It appears that payments in the form of rights to cultivable land were affected first: separate household fields were taken away, and farmers granted households access to two or three specified rows in one of their own fields, to allow the picking of green mealies. Initially farmers were wary of tackling the issue of livestock, possibly because they knew of the widespread resistance to cattle culling in the reserves. But by the mid-1960s, people reported, most farmers had introduced limits on the numbers of livestock permitted, which became increasingly stringent as time went by.

Many of our informants lived in a closer settlement in Qwaqwa which was established in 1974; they had arrived in the bantustan at the same time from farms in different parts of the Free State; part of the reason for their coming then was the rumoured increase in mine employment; also important, however, was the fact that their rights to run livestock had all been withdrawn within the past year.

By the 1970s the lump-sum bonus had been transformed into rations, given out by farmers on a monthly basis and calculated in terms of the number of people in a household.

The earlier payment of wages in the form of land, grazing and bonuses had been a tacit recognition by farmers that the internal composition of the household was not their direct concern: hence many aged people lived out their lives in farms on which they no longer worked. Now, with increased mechanisation from the late 1960s, farmers were no longer prepared to carry the burden of supporting people whose labour was not needed. This led to the

decline in the general payments to households as 'undifferentiated entities'. This was accompanied by increases in cash wages to male workers, although men to whom we spoke complained bitterly that these increases had not matched what they lost in kind. Another result of this was that farmers began to pay cash wages directly to women who worked for them in the kitchens and fields. Women informants spoke very positively about this innovation, which gave them discretion over income they had not previously experienced; they talked of being able to set money aside more easily for medical emergencies, school books, and personal clothing (see Whitehead, 1981 for a comparable discussion of the uses to which women put their earnings). But another aspect of the general process which gave women this brief sense of freedom was to undermine the requirements for their labour on the farms.

Mechanisation in this period related to the processes of harvesting and threshing, jobs which had previously been done by women and children (De Klerk, 1984). But now farmers deemed it necessary that men operated the machines. It appears, however, that many farmers had earlier permitted numbers of men to leave the farms to seek work semi-permanently elsewhere. This was allowed on condition that at least one male in a 'family' worked full-time on the farm, and that the relict wives and children were available for seasonal labour. The relict dependants were incorporated into the household of the remaining male worker. Given that a major part of the subsistence for the relict dependants came from remittances, this was a cheap way for farmers to maintain a seasonal labour force. As mechanisation progressed, however, farmers wanted to recall these men, but were unable to do so since the wages they offered did not compare with migrant earnings. Since this was so, they certainly did not want large numbers of relict wives and children, 'hidden' in large households, on their land. This was a major contributor to processes of relocation into areas such as Qwaqwa.

Confronted by their inability to bring their able-bodied men back to the farm, relict household members often elected to leave and make for Qwaqwa rather than face eventual eviction. The decision to leave was not taken lightly, and was often a source of major domestic conflict, between the young and the aged and males and females, which has frequently resurfaced in Qwaqwa in subsequent years. For elderly men the move from the farms marked the end of their authority. Often farm households did not move as a whole to Qwaqwa, because some younger men and women struck out on their own for the towns and took more direct control over their lives. The movement off the farms revealed the extent to which the changes in forms of payment over the preceding years had undermined the earlier form of patriarchal authority.

Women who went from the farms to Qwaqwa soon found, however, that a new form of patriarchal authority established itself, based on the fact that there were few migrant opportunities for women and that labour migration gave men almost unlimited discretion over the wages they earned. In many respects these women came to experience the characteristic predicament of women in the bantustans, but their location in a closer settlement imposed a particularly vicious form of dependence on migrant

remittances.

Our purpose in the sections following is to compare the terms of women's dependence on remitted income in Qwaqwa's closer settlements and in the betterment villages of Matatiele, showing how patriarchal authority in the labour reserve areas is shaped by the local context.

The labour reserves

Matatiele and Qwaqwa are both labour reserve areas, which means that the vast majority of their inhabitants are acutely dependent on income from the wages of labour migrants who work in the common area of South Africa. The general form of patriarchal authority in these areas is closely tied to this common fact. As indicated above, men who are labour migrants have absolute discretion over their earnings and, given the paucity of wage employment for women, considerable power over their wives (and other dependants) by virtue of this. In the first place, the migrants alone decide how much of their wage to remit at any one time or over a given period of time: the social environment of workplace and hostel is probably much more significant in shaping these decisions than the 'objective' needs of dependants at a distant home (Clark and Ngobese, 1975).

In addition men who are migrants have some control over the uses to which remitted income or, more generally, income intended for use at home is put. Fieldwork in Matatiele, with which we deal first below, showed that migrants were setting some income aside for purchasing cattle; they also, where possible, attempted to earmark some for investment in arable production; therefore only a portion was released directly into the hands of dependants, usually a wife or mother, for general day-to-day subsistence. There was an obvious tension here between the various short- and long-term uses of income, which had clear implications for women's access to resources. This tension exists very widely, one supposes, in the various labour reserve areas in South Africa's periphery.

Ferguson (1985) has recently shown how migrants from rural Lesotho attempt to provide for their future retirement while still in wage employment. There is great pressure on them to do this because of the absence of an old-age pension in that country. In seeking long-term security, migrants invest in agriculture generally, but show preference, Ferguson argues, for cattle in particular. This is partly for ecological reasons, but also because relict women cannot get their hands on income which is 'stored' in this fashion. Cattle are men's business; they set money aside to purchase cattle when they come home themselves, and they also manage their animals from a distance, by putting them out with other men permanently resident in the area. Women's exclusion from dealings with livestock is justified on

the grounds of 'tradition', which is itself part of the underpinning of the institution of patriarchy in Lesotho.

Ferguson argues that the dual use of remittances - the attempt to achieve both short-term subsistence and long-term security - marks out 'a domain of contestation between husband and wife, and a frequent cause of disputes and even physical fights and beatings' (op.cit.:656). Migrants' discretion over income and their intention to commit resources to future security means that the household in a labour reserve such as Lesotho is by no stretch of the imagination 'a collectivity of mutually reciprocal interests' (Whitehead, op.cit.:110).

This last point is true of Matatiele as well, where resources for some agricultural activity also existed in the 1980s. There were also, however, aspects of the situation in this area which marked out its specificity within the overall category of labour reserves and, in consequence, shaped the precise manifestations of patriarchal authority and the nature of women's various responses to it.

Matatiele

A complaint which many married women made in interviews in Matatiele was that remittances from their migrant husbands were insufficient and too irregular to permit them to plan properly for day-to-day household maintenance, let alone longer term security. Indeed some women received virtually nothing by way of remittances during the entire period of fieldwork. The latter were often in households which lacked resources in either land or livestock. It became apparent that men from households with rural resources tended to remit more, and more often; and the general pattern of remittances was linked to the existing differentiation in rural resources in the betterment village examined.

Possession of livestock and, in particular, arable land was a motivation for migrant men to remit, in order to 'build the house' (Murray, 1981; Spiegel, 1980) and secure their future status in the rural area. But 40% of the households surveyed had no land in 1982; and given that the betterment programme of 1977 had fixed the number of arable allotments available, most of the landless households were unlikely ever to acquire any. Some of the migrants from households without land were clearly engaged in using their wages to build up herds of both cattle and smallstock. Ferguson's argument applies directly here: men retained control over the income which they subsequently used for this purpose. Where households possessed and used arable fields, however, it was the relict women who managed the activities involved; and in these instances migrant men had to channel remittances to fund these activities (which included hiring tractors and planters, and purchasing seed and fertilizer) to

their wives.

Women who managed fields, using income remitted for that purpose, were able, in consequence, to build up personal networks in the village, particularly with other women. The women worked collectively, but in several distinct capacities, on various tasks such as weeding, harvesting and threshing, and the networks thus formed extended also into other forms of local income-generation and borrowing (cf. Mayer, 1978; Gay, 1980). The women of households with fields engaged in reciprocal exchanges of labour amongst themselves, and sometimes employed labour. But women from households without fields tended to occupy subordinate positions in local supportive networks. They could work on others' fields, but only for minuscule wages in kind (Segar, 1982).

Remittances earmarked for cultivation put resources into the hands of women which were over and above those sent home for day-to-day subsistence. One of these resources was an enhanced credit-worthiness, since these women were able to take out loans from neighbours and local shopkeepers against the promise of future remittances for cultivation. The loans were used in various ways to generate further income with which to meet the obligations to cultivate and repay. These ways included shebeening, participation in stokvels, investment in pigs and chickens (women's property), and also in cloth and other materials for the manufacture of clothing for resale. On the other hand, women in households without access to fields did not receive income directed to cultivation, and were therefore excluded, to a large extent, from these circuits and from the ability to generate income over which they could exercise independent discretion.

What does this differentiated situation tell us about the forms in which patriarchy under a system of labour migration is manifested? It is clear that women in households which had arable land were able to exercise some discretion over the uses to which remittances from their husbands were put. These men encouraged their wives to participate in agricultural activities by remitting for this purpose. But receipt of these remittances meant that the wives were able to engage in a variety of other activities of which their husbands approved less because they appeared to undermine domestic authority. In particular, the co-operative networks between women provided them with a means of coping with their migrant husbands' arbitrariness. Women were able to spend some of the income they generated through these networks and the associated activities to meet personal consumption needs, such as clothing, cosmetics and kitchenware - all items which migrant husbands either omitted to provide for or, commonly, made available only when they saw fit.

It seemed, furthermore, that the resource of women's networks was used, in certain contexts, to provide a challenge to the basis of patriarchy. For instance, in cases where women with established links into such networks were widowed, they were able to use this support to avoid submission to the authority of other men (such as fathers, brothers or brothers-in-law) who would provide some sort of remittance income. Widows encumbered with

children could not avoid this, in which case they were severely disadvantaged because their claim to support was preceded by that of others. But some widows with links into supportive networks contrived to leave their children with other women and migrate to work in town themselves (cf. Spiegel, 1986).

Remittances reaching women in households without fields were primarily for subsistence, and provided few opportunities for generating income through participation in supportive networks. Such women had less scope for discretionary expenditure. and found it very difficult to escape men's authority. They were particularly vulnerable to their husbands' arbitrary decisions regarding the allocation of income and, if widowed, had less chance to escape falling under another man's authority.

The above argument shows that women's experience of patriarchy was shaped by the presence or absence of arable lands in the households of which they were members. It is important to note, however, that the differentiation between households with respect to rural resources at the time of the survey also bore relationship to their respective involvements in the wage labour market over a longer period of time. Many of the men whose households had both land and livestock were not contract workers; often they had held one secure job for twenty or more years and acquired permanent rights to live in an urban area. They were migrants because they returned periodically to wives and children who spent most of their time in the rural area, where their activities gave the workers a vicarious participation in agriculture. Other men in this generation had secured family accommodation in town and taken their dependants with them.

Men in the landless households were often much younger, and had entered the labour market in the 1970s, after the restrictions which prevented contract workers 'earning' permanent urban rights were in force. There was no sense in which these men would become like their elders merely with the passage of time: in 1982 they no longer had any prospect of acquiring permanent urban rights, nor, owing to betterment, of gaining access to arable land. The question of their future access to the labour market and security of employment was, moreoever, complicated by their status as Transkeian citizens. These younger men viewed the years ahead with considerable misgiving, although in 1982 the rate of male unemployment in the village was very low. Despite recession in the national economy and a consequent cut-back in labour recruitment in the bantustans, men in the betterment village were experiencing relatively few problems, because they were either long-service employees or new recruits who had found work outside the official labour bureau system. In this respect the older workers with permanent urban rights were of invaluable assistance to workseekers from the village, providing the latter with contacts and accommodation in town.

Most women in Matatiele struggled in 1982 to extract income from migrant men for specific purposes. The struggle occurred within the form of patriarchy characteristic of a labour reserve and its specific manifestations in the area, and some women were occasionally able to challenge these manifestations of male authority. But they were acting in a situation in which most

adult males were migrants in wage employment, who possessed an income to be fought over.

Qwaqwa

This was the most significant difference between Matatiele's betterment village and the closer settlement studied in Qwaqwa. In the latter no more than 35% of the adult men in the households surveyed worked continuously throughout 1983, and there were high rates of un- and underemployment. The reasons for this situation were touched on earlier: most households in the closer settlement had arrived off farms in the mid-1970s. They had come with few resources and without the extensive urban contacts which their counterparts in Matatiele had built up over years of labour migration. Most of the Qwaqwa men had had to rely from the start on the labour bureaus to acquire employment, and had held a succession of low-paid and insecure contract jobs, interspersed with lengthy spells of unemployment.

Women in the closer settlement were routinely exposed not simply to migrant men's power to direct from afar the disposition of income which they earned, but also to the enforced presence at home of men who had no current income but still insisted on their right to control use of the vestigial resources left to the household. Discussion of the manifestations of patriarchy in Qwaqwa must start with the latter situation, because women experienced it so often.

The main preoccupation of unemployed men in the closer settlement was to find another job outside Qwaqwa, since there was neither land nor livestock with which they could work as an interim expedient. Searching for such work was a costly business, and men argued that it constituted a priority claim on dwindling resources. Although women recognised the force of this argument, there were bitter clashes over the nature of the expenditures which men judged necessary to their search. Women watched children go hungry while men took savings to spend on busfare to reach the labour bureau, on clothes to look presentable to potential employers (and fellow workseekers), and on bribes to smooth their passage through the bureaucracy which attested contracts. Women looked on in frustration and despair when their husbands or sons passed up occasional opportunities to earn a few rand on a local piece-job in order to maintain a steady vigil at the labour bureau, and bore the brunt of the recriminations which followed when men took on piece-jobs and missed opportunities for contract employment in consequence.

A significant number of households stayed in this situation throughout the period of fieldwork. The dearth of employment opportunities, resulting from the manner of Qwaqwa's insertion into the national economy, was obviously the root cause of women's misery in the closer settlements, but their powerlessness

in relation to men served to exacerbate their predicament. Men's grip on domestic affairs was, if anything, strengthened by unemployment and continuous presence at home. Because they were the only ones with any realistic prospect of employment outside the bantustan, men saw their decisions about expenditure as being beyond reproach; on the other hand, their presence at home gave them opportunity for hawk-like scrutiny of their wives' every move, and their own anxieties brought forth bitter condemnation of the least hint of inefficiency or extravagance.

In households where men were in contract employment in 1983 women had more, but still very limited leeway. Most migrants had built up little continuity of employment, and their wages and remittances were therefore generally lower than those of their counterparts in Matatiele. Since none of them had access to land they did not remit lump sums to fund cultivation by relict women. The long-term planning they attempted took forms which excluded women from access to the income set aside for this purpose. Men who were interviewed spoke of plans to buy vehicles to serve as taxis, carrying other migrants and their goods to and from work. Once purchased, the vehicles speedily broke down and then rusted in the back yard, causing the migrants to save yet again to repair them and their wives to curse their inability to intervene to stop a venture they knew to be foolhardy.

Men also spoke with longing of being able to retire from migrant labour and open a shop. Not only would being a shopkeeper obviate the necessity of leaving home to find work, but it would also, as more than one man said, give their wives 'something to do'. This meant, of course, 'something to do' of which men approved. The dream of being a shopkeeper was quite unrealistic, but the men's view meant, amongst other things, that most of the things which women could do in the closer settlement to generate income did not meet with male approval. These included shebeening, as was mentioned in the introduction, but extended also to making goods and selling them, and to purchasing goods and reselling them. Part of the problem was that all of these activities, unlike cultivation, took women beyond the domestic domain as men conceived it, and brought them into contact with others, particularly other men, in ways which absent migrants could not control.

High unemployment, low remittances and the absence of arable land stunted the growth of supportive networks between women in different households. Significant reciprocal exchanges were impossible because there was no material basis for reciprocity, and women in the few households with steady and sizeable remittance incomes had no grounds on which to offer wage employment to others: they could not pay women who lacked remittance income to undertake activities such as weeding or harvesting, and they could not take in the children of the destitute as domestic-cum-agricultural helpers. Several of the women with secure incomes would have welcomed help with tasks such as fetching water and wood which involved inordinate drudgery, and were themselves willing to incorporate children from other households for that purpose. But their aim to help themselves and others in this fashion was vetoed by their migrant husbands, on the grounds that in the absence of land or livestock

additional members would do nothing useful for the household and would merely swell the numbers requiring support from remittances.

In Matatiele households with resources in land and livestock generally received income via remittances which was sufficient to give women scope to act within the interstices of male authority and, on occasion, to challenge it. The larger a given household's resources, the more autonomy there was for the women associated with it. There was also a measure of differentiation amongst households in the Qwaqwa closer settlement, but this was less pronounced than in Matatiele, and the position of those households in the higher reaches was by no means as secure. The men in the latter households were, characteristically, the ones who had been able to plan their families' transition from farm to bantustan: often they had found secure urban employment before leaving the farm and had retained it after relocation into Qwaqwa. Others were men who had gained one of the few mine jobs on offer in Qwaqwa and were included in the mines' stabilisation programme (Sharp, forthcoming).

Women in these households did not, however, derive a like measure of autonomy from the remittance income they received. The income they received put them in a better position to undertake income-generating activities than others in the closer settlement, but these women faced the problem that the more their husbands remitted the more they disapproved of these activities. These migrants said that they could not understand why, given their remittances, their wives should want to run shebeens or walk miles to buy and sell goods to make a few rand in pocket money. Not only were these activities unnecessarily arduous and potentially disreputable; they were also seen to impugn the dignity of the absent migrant as provider. In principle, factory work encountered the latter objection as well; in practice, however, the few thousand factory jobs in the bantustan's town were virtually inaccessible to women from the closer settlements, and migrants' hostility to such employment was therefore hypothetical.

The study in the closer settlement showed that there were several ways in which men exercised authority over women, according to whether the former were employed or not, and in secure employment or not. But, unlike the situation in Matatiele, none of these ways entailed significant variation in the scope for women to exercise a measure of control over their own lives. A measure of this was the inability of widows with young dependents to support themselves without turning to another man and submitting to his authority.

We have focussed in this paper on a limited issue: the question of control over wage income and its implications for gender relationships. The purpose of this limitation was to permit a close comparison of the various manifestations of one set of relationships in different areas and circumstances. The main argument is that one cannot understand the dimensions of women's subordination in different bantustan contexts solely by reference to the common fact of dependence on wage income. The comparison of Matatiele and Qwaqwa has shown that the availability of local

resources was one main factor which shaped manifestations of patriarchal authority.

The point at issue emerges out of our introductory example: both Matatiele and Qwaqwa men objected to the notion of their women participating in shebeening. For women in Matatiele shebeening was only one amongst several activities which gave them scope for manouevre, and men endorsed and provided support for their participation in agriculture. For Qwaqwa women, on the other hand, there were few alternatives of any kind, and none which men supported. Women's bitterness about their difficulties with shebeening in the closer settlement, and more generally about the way in which patriarchal authority added to their hardships, must be seen in the light of the lack of local resources, and also of their past experiences on white-owned farms. Here, as we showed, some women emerged for a brief period as independent wage workers, and gained a limited measure of discretion over their own income. This discretion has been utterly destroyed by the situation in Qwaqwa.

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