

**GROWING A PERSON: POVERTY, POWER AND FREEDOM IN POST-  
APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

By

Tracy Margaret Ledger

(8601964D)

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Supervisors: Dr Hylton White

Dr Ivor Chipkin

## ABSTRACT

**Thesis Title** Growing a Person: Poverty, Power and Freedom in post-apartheid

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Dr Ivor Chipkin

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### **Abstract**

Household food insecurity and malnutrition occur in South Africa at levels much higher than national economic data would suggest. Own production of food has been proposed as a solution to both hunger and poor nutrition, and is widely advocated. However, this policy glosses over the fact that there are a considerable number of food-insecure households that have the opportunity and means to produce their own food, but are not doing so. Mainstream economics' strict assumptions about how individuals will react under a particular set of circumstances effectively denies the possibility that people have, and choose to exercise, agency in adopting alternative responses. The underlying aim of this thesis is to investigate manifestations of the disconnect between the assumed reality of mainstream development policy and practitioners, and the lived reality of target beneficiaries, and to propose an alternative explanation, based on a theory of meaningful action in everyday life. This thesis

investigates choice and decision-making in the everyday lives of two groups of community gardeners in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. It aims to provide some insights into apparently paradoxical behaviours – namely, that poor persons often make decisions that appear to be at odds both with the predictions of utility-maximising models and the expectations of development practitioners and policies. This thesis asserts that even very materially poor people not only have much more agency than mainstream development discourses assume, but that they continually exercise that agency in resisting the stereotypes of poverty that development officials are so keen to reproduce.

**Key Words**

Food security, narrative identity, community gardens, South Africa, everyday life, development discourse, agency, Paul Ricoeur.