

# **FOOD, FARMING AND SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE: WOMEN'S VOICES FROM U-MHLANGA VILLAGE, EASTERN CAPE**

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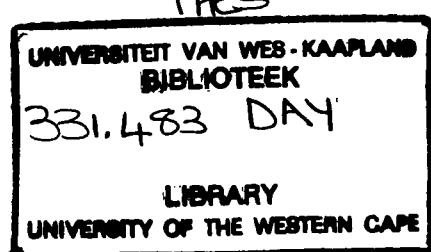


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**18 June 2003**



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**Nomvuyo P. Skota-Dayile**

**KEYWORDS**

**Agriculture**

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**Farming**

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**Households**

**Land-ownership**

**Poverty**

**Rural**

**Subsistence**

**U-Mhlanga**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Using a qualitative feminist methodology grounded on post-modernist and post-colonial framework, this research represents an attempt to determine the factors influencing the farming and subsistence agriculture strategies used by rural women of U-Mhlanga village, in the Eastern Cape in the past and the present. It also explores what these women perceive to be their successes and highlights obstacles they encountered in the past and the present in farming.

The Eastern Cape has one of the poorest populations of South Africa, and the poorest of these are women. Despite access to land, people are going hungry. This study explores this rural poverty that is feminized and goes on to highlight the social, political and economic issues related to ability or inability to utilize the resources that are accessible. The most prominent problem highlighted by these women goes back to colonial and apartheid times where discrimination in terms of race was used as a determining factor to accessing resources, and how these continue to play out today. However despite the obstacles, my informants still believe that the local agriculture and farming can sustain rural communities.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that: Food, Farming and Subsistence Agriculture: women's voices from U-Mhlanya village, Eastern Cape is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of a Masters Degree in Development Studies. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

NOMVUYO PRETTY DAYILE

18 June 2003



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SIGNED..........

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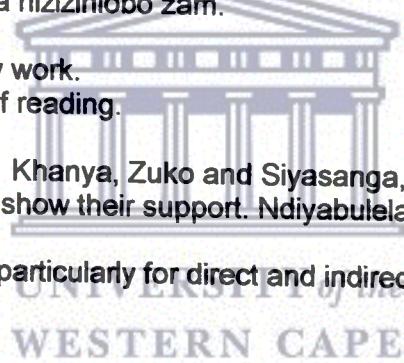
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## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my mama, u-Mandamane, u-Matilda Tilly Skota, who dedicated her life to farming and subsistence agriculture but never got recognition; and to Radie u-Mntomdala, us'Nompi, who spent all her life serving others, including me and my children, and received insignificant rewards in return.



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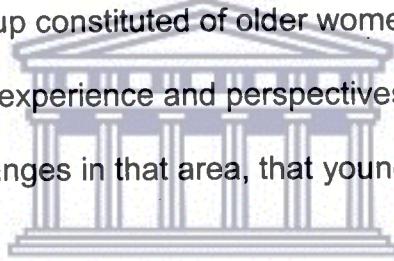
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# **INTRODUCTION**

This study explores subsistence agriculture and farming practices by women in U-Mhlanga village in the Eastern Cape. U-Mhlanga village is about two hundred kilometers from Queenstown. The village is near a small rural town called Lady Frere in the Glen Grey District, and this village is also situated between two small towns: Indwe, on the east and Dordrecht on the southwest, facing the Drakensberg mountains in the far north.

I used a qualitative feminist research methodology to find out about women's lives and experiences in subsistence agriculture in U-Mhlanga village. In order to do this, I used a focus group constituted of older women because I thought that elderly women have the experience and perspectives of the past and the present developments or changes in that area, that younger women would not have.



My data was analyzed by drawing on discourse analysis, which considers language as an important tool that creates meanings and understandings of the lives lived by individuals and groups at particular times. While I had expected to focus primarily on the present farming and subsistence agricultural situation, my participants talked a great deal about the past and how things have changed. These I record in chapter 3, where the discussions focuses on how the communities of this village managed to farm in the past through collectivism mainly. From their views this was maintained through sharing available resources, honouring verbal agreements among themselves and willingness to work the land. In chapter 4 contemporary issues related to farming practices are

explored. My participants portrayed these as having social, political and economic dimensions that result in increasing poverty and hunger. To improve the present situation my participants came up with some suggestions and these are explored in chapter 5. In the same chapter I also gave a conclusion to this study. However, I acknowledge that this study is not an absolute account of U-Mhlanga women's farming experiences, and for this I provided some questions for further research as one of the appendices.



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **RATIONALE AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

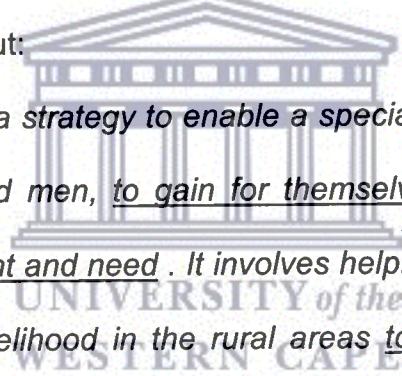
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In this chapter I shall project the rationale of this study by highlighting the significance of poverty in the Eastern Cape. I shall also outline an overview of research questions as well as strengths and limitations of literature that I came across in this topic. Lastly I shall motivate my reasons for the relevance of this study.

### **1.1 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM**

My interest is in getting an understanding of factors influencing the escalation of poverty in the Eastern Cape particularly among women and women's perspectives on food production in that province. Recent research proves that the provincial poverty gap between citizens is highest and widest in the Eastern Cape (71%). Poverty is concentrated among 61% of Africans, 43% of whom are women. The poverty rate among female-headed households is 60% compared to 31% for male-headed households (National Department of Agriculture, 1996). Also research studies prove that there is a large proportion of women engaged in subsistence farming compared to men. For example, in a document published by NDA-SA (1997), in a rural survey conducted in former homelands in June 1996, findings show that 64% of women in the Eastern Cape are engaged in subsistence farming. With this picture in mind, a problem for me is the continuous devaluation and exclusion of women as farmers, ignoring their farming experiences, and coping skills in dealing with poverty and hunger in that province.

Secondly, in terms of policies for rural development and poverty eradication strategies, South Africa does not seem to understand the depth of hunger and poverty in that province. I say this because the emphasis on poverty eradication programmes seems to lie on cash crops rather than encouraging women farmers to grow crops to feed their families first and then sell any surplus. The Member for the Executive Council (MEC) of agriculture in the Eastern Cape in his speech at *The Female Farmer of The Year 2001* held at the Regent Hotel, East London yet again put more pressure on women farmers to grow cash crops and become top exporters, top producers for national and informal markets. (Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, 2000 & 2001). This campaign is in contradiction with the development that Nyerere (1961) and Chambers (1983) speak about:



*Rural development is a strategy to enable a special group of people, the poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. It involves helping the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas to demand and control more of the benefits of development. The group include small-scale farmers, tenants, and landless. (Chambers, 1983: 147)*

Nyerere and Chambers are trying to highlight crucial issues of involving the rural poor in identifying their needs. This should start by valuing rural women and men as farmers in their own right, learning from them, and assisting them by giving them access to resources so as to take control of their development.

Thirdly, it seems that the “new” South African government has also forgotten that the majority of people in this country are poor, and that this is the result of historical processes. Recently (September 2000) the Eastern Cape MEC for Agriculture, spoke generally about subsistence and smallholding farmers as if they can access farming opportunities in the same way that commercial farmers do. He seemed to have ignored the reality of the problems faced by subsistence and smallholding farmers in accessing resources. His department has made available big lump sums of money, the purpose of which is mainly to support small and beginner farmers to purchase land and equipment for farming and agriculture. However, for one to gain access to these funds, s/he must have a credible credit record. Women, particularly African women (and many men) have two constraints in accessing such funds: the first is the high market value of agricultural land. Many women do not have such capital to make big loans. The second constraint is that the poorest women (and men) are frequently unable to give surety of property, having no quality property to assure. Ignoring obstacles to access seem to assume that the majority of that the South African society is well off, and lives above the poverty line, which is not true. (NDA-SA, 1996:11-12; Department of Agriculture, Media and Land Affairs 8 March, 2001 and 15 May, 2001)

Today's inequalities reflect the history of South Africa. The poverty of the Eastern Cape is mainly reflected in rural areas. When one travels through the small Karoo to KwaZulu Natal in winter particularly, big empty, dry fields cannot be passed unnoticed. The bigger part of the province looks poor, except in small towns or some selected parts where one observes green patches, which

show some sense of life. Livestock too, in those villages look thin most of the time except those in the small green areas, where pastures are sometimes of good standard. According to Budlender (1996), the Eastern Cape is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa. As the 1996 Census Report confirms, only 5,7 million out of 10 million people who live in that province are economically active, and of these, women form the majority of the economically inactive citizens. Budlender (1996) notes that African women tend to be poorer than men and that African women are more disadvantaged than white, coloured and Indian women. In addition, women-headed households are generally worse off than other households. (Statistics SA, 1996: 2.6 & 2.30; Budlender 1996:249)

The poverty of the Eastern Cape is a relatively new phenomenon. In the words of Colin Bundy (1979) cited in Coetzee and Graaff (1996), in the past, Africans who lived in the Eastern Cape were farmers and grew crops and kept livestock. Bundy points out evidence of the rise of a wealthy African peasantry from 1830 onwards evolving out of the pastoralist economy. He also contends that these farmers employed new farming technology for example, using the plough, which was neither used nor available in their traditional ways of tilling the soil. Bundy claims that African farmers moved even further than just producing staple food for consumption but diversified their production from grain to vegetables, tobacco and wool, in particular areas of the Ciskei and Transkei (both in the Eastern Cape). He quotes a traveler to Glen Grey District in 1880 having commented that:

*... the Kaffirs of these parts are better farmers than the Europeans, more careful of their stock, cultivating a larger area of land, and working*

*themselves more assiduously.* (Bundy quoted in Coetzee and Graaff 1996: 377)

Bundy continues to argue that the Eastern Cape became poor because of the purposeful promotion of white farmers over black farmers. He claims that poverty and underdevelopment in the rural Eastern Cape and other parts of Southern Africa like Lesotho was an active and purposeful strategy to "underdevelop" the rural areas in order to serve the needs of capitalist development. Bundy contends that:

*Both mine-owners and white farmers desperate for labour petitioned the government to intervene. The result was taxation, pass laws, vagrancy laws, location laws and restriction of African access to land, culminating in the 1913 Land Act, all aimed at undermining the independence of black farmers and making them wage-labourers ... By contrast, white farmers benefitted from substantial state support in the form of subsidies and improved transport facilities. (Bundy, 1986: 53- 55)*

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The legacy of this divide turned profitable African farmers into poor peasants. By the turn of the twentieth century, Africans had lost their land for farming and had become partly or wholly dependent on wages for survival. No longer agricultural producers, they were transformed into wage labourers on farms or in urban townships. The decade between the 1913 Land Act and the end of World War II saw the situation deteriorate further in the Eastern Cape: growing impoverishment in the African community was increasingly apparent. This was due to many factors including the 1913 Land Act, which restricted Africans to the reserves, the most remote and unproductive areas in the Eastern Cape (and elsewhere in South Africa). Another important issue was the commercialization

of agriculture resulting in the increasing inability of the Eastern Cape (and Free State) subsistence farmers to produce enough foodstuffs to feed their population.

But as difficult as the circumstances were for the poor, particularly women, they patiently tried hard in those remote pieces of land to provide food for their families and trade in small ways among themselves and/or locally. For these reasons, I am interested in getting their perspectives on food production in that province, and its apparent decline since that time (Bundy, 1979: 53; Bundy, 1986: 111,122-123)

## **1.2 THE RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY**

I have chosen this particular village in the Eastern Cape for its being close to my family's heart because my mother used to tell me of how good it was to live in rural areas, and how her family lived comfortably through farming and subsistence agriculture. She would speak of her mother's central role in food production. From what my mother and Bundy (1979) said, farming and subsistence agriculture was the means of survival for Africans in South Africa. It was not clear to me what brought about so many changes, what demotivated women in that province from continuing farming, and why they are now poor and hungry if they are still involved in farming.

I began this study by assuming that women of U-Mhlanga village, as part of women folk whose efforts and experiences in food production are acknowledged by many writers, are also food producers. Literature, which

supports this statement about women in Africa as farmers will be dealt with in depth in Chapter 2. The writers and theorists support each other in the notion that women's contribution in food production is significant, legitimate and cannot be ignored in the process of poverty eradication. The history of the Eastern Cape shows that the majority of men used to, and still continue to leave their homes for the big cities seeking jobs, while women remain behind. I believe that it is these women who had the responsibilities of keeping the fires burning, tilling the land, growing crops and trading in their own ways. Based on these facts about women's experiences, I think that the food production strategies and survival efforts of women of U-Mhlanga village need to be listened to and heard. Their life experiences are essential to give insight to strategies to bring about change in subsistence and/or commercial agriculture and farming for the benefit of the province.



I decided to work with elderly women between 60 and 90 years of age because I thought these women have the experience and perspectives of the past developments and/or underdevelopments in that region. Although some elderly people are forgetful and some are biased towards youth and new developments, older people have a longer history with which to judge or assess change. What I have noticed in the process of working with adults is that elderly people are more at liberty to share their life experience and have few reservations. What cannot be denied or ruled out, however, are people's biases whether young or old. I hoped the elders would be the group that could give me substantial information with "minimal" biases.

### **1.3 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question, which I plan to attempt to throw light on, is: What is the status of subsistence agriculture and farming amongst women of the U-Mhlanga village, and the women's views about what could be improved and how? Through this question I hope to understand whether the women are still food producers, and if not, why not. I hope to find out what has facilitated their role as food producers, and what barriers they have experienced. It is important to me that I seek answers to this question through their perspectives rather than simply through historical events or secondary sources. As already stated, I assume the women of U-Mhlanga village to have been important food producers in the past for the reasons given in the above paragraphs. It is therefore a concern for me to understand why and how this situation has changed.

I prepared basic open-ended questions, which I was going to use as a foundation for the focus group, which will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2. The questions were about the kinds of crops they cultivated now and in the past, and their agriculture and farming practices. I was interested in knowing who farms, whether all farmers had or have equal access to farming resources, and whether resources are sufficient. I was interested in finding out their perceptions of obstacles hindering their prosperity in farming and agriculture, and their solutions to problems. I also wanted to explore the gender dimensions of farming, and whether women perceive themselves as able to compete with men in farming. Finally, I hoped to identify reasons why they should be taken seriously as farmers, if they see themselves as farmers at all.

In this section I have presented an overview of why I decided to do this study on women and subsistence food production strategies in U-Mhlanga village in the Eastern Cape. I also stated why I decided on older women who were born in the first half of the twentieth century (1900 to 1940). I have also presented a summary of the research questions. In the next section, I shall focus on a survey of literature relevant to the area of my research and identify the limitations I found in the literature.

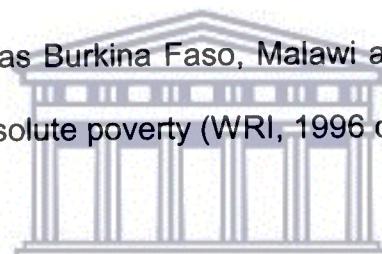
## **1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section focuses on what has been written about the perceptions of poverty and its root causes in the rural areas, and the debates around appropriate poverty eradication strategies. In this literature review and through this study of rural women subsistence farmers, I try to highlight the gaps in and limitations of the literature that tries to explain why rural women in Africa and globally are hungry and poor. This I try to do by revealing how studies of this nature have tended to fail to take account of the complex nature of individual, geographical, historical, and political perspectives of poverty in time and history. In doing so I am not trying to pretend that the literature I came across is comprehensive on the issue at hand, but I assert that it is substantial. I will start by discussing important issues raised in the literature, followed by what I see as gaps and finally give my reasons for what I see as the relevance of my study to the body of literature.

### **1.4.1 SURVEY OF RELEVANT LITERATURE**

According to the literature, rural areas are the poorest parts of Africa. The Food

and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has calculated that between 1988 and 1990, 786 million people faced chronic under-nutrition in developing regions worldwide and highlighted that this number shows the dramatically increased numbers in poverty and hunger. This tragic reality is confirmed by the United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and Least Developed Countries (OSCAL, 2000) for Poverty Eradication in Africa. OSCAL however, suggests the level of poverty and hunger in Africa is even higher than the figures given by the FAO. OSCAL sums up the nature and impact of poverty in Africa as being predominantly rural, except in a few countries such as Tunisia. It is estimated that about 66% of Africa's population is rural, and that 50% and above of this rural population is in absolute poverty. These findings also reflect that in some countries such as Burkina Faso, Malawi and Zaire, up to 90% of the rural population are in absolute poverty (WRI, 1996 cited in OSCAL, 2000).



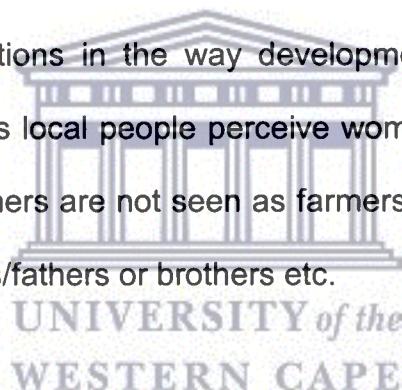
Seven main groups of rural poor have been identified by researchers as being: smallholder farmers, the landless, nomadic pastoralists, ethnic indigenous groups, small and artisanal fishermen, displaced/refugee populations and households headed by women. Researchers are in agreement that the biggest group comprising more than half of Africa's population, is smallholder farmers, and the welfare of the rural population depends largely on general prosperity in agriculture. The majority of these smallholder farmers are women. It is for this reason that in his opening address, Ismail Serageldin, Vice President of the Environmental Sustainable Development and Chairman of the International Conference on Overcoming Global Hunger held in Washington, D.C in 1993, pronounced words of embarrassment to the international community saying:

*That a sixth of the humanity goes hungry in a world where food is plentiful is an abiding disgrace. That hunger persists despite the many conferences and initiatives organized to overcome it is a profound challenge to the development community ... Most often the hungry and poorest are women. Women's role is crucial and core in any sustained action to deal with poverty and hunger ( Serageldin & Landell-Mills 1993: v).*

There is an abundance of research proving that globally, women are poor and hungry, particularly those living in Third World countries, even though so many women are involved in food production. Many development theorists and specialists agree with Serageldin that there is an abundance of food in the world. The issue is access to food, and this is mediated by patriarchal and racial/ethnic power and control, both in the First World countries in the North and the Third World countries in the South. The impact of these forms of power and control is reflected in the "feminization of poverty" particularly in Africa, where poverty and hunger is disproportionately severe for women, even though they produce much of the food. Women, and African women in particular, face a bewildering array of social, economic, racial/ethnic, cultural and religious discriminations. All these impact heavily on access to political participation, which in turn helps shape access to economic and other resources (Graaff & Coetzee, 2000; Bundy, 1979; Budlender, 1999; Boserup, 1989).

Globally, researchers, writers and theorists acknowledge women's contribution in food production. They highlight that one of the core factors which forms the basis and the cause of poverty, in relation to women and food production specifically, is gender discrimination. Ester Boserup (1989), Jeanette Koopman

in Visvanathan et al (eds) (1997), Hansen & McMillan (1986), Crehan in Bernstein, Crow & Johnson (eds) (1992), Whitehead in Wallace & March (eds) (1991), Young (1993), and the FAO (1998) present strong positions on the problems encountered by women in food production. They claim that many of these problems are characterized by male domination, where, for example, land and communal areas are "normally" assigned to men. So access to resources and land ownership as well as rights to cultivation are almost exclusively ascribed to men who tend to have absolute control of what should be grown, where, when and for what purpose. An example is whether priority should be given to cash crops or crops for consumption. According to these authors, the impact on women of limited access and ownership of land and other resources is crucial, for it has implications in the way development agents, local and national authorities as well as local people perceive women agriculturalists. In many instances, women farmers are not seen as farmers/agriculturalists but as "assistants" to their husbands/fathers or brothers etc.



There are two basic assumptions embedded in this kind of thinking: one that the male household head will take care of all household agricultural needs. Another one is that all households have males as household heads. As a result of these assumptions, households headed by females tend to be excluded in agriculture and farming plans, hence female-headed household are the poorest. These writers claim that access to land and land ownership is fundamental in that it qualifies or disqualifies one from getting access to other resources related to agriculture and farming. Women, without or with restricted access to land, tend to also be excluded from training and learning new techniques in agriculture and

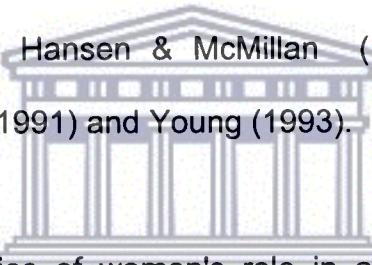
farming. Sometimes they are excluded because they are small farmers and training concentrates mainly on larger scale farmers Boserup (1989), Koopman (1997), Hansen & McMillan (1986), Crehan (1992), WRI (1996), Whitehead (1991), Young (1993) and the FAO (1998).

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (1998) has thus called for serious consideration of ways for the inclusion of women in poverty eradication strategies globally. Kate Young (1993) has focused on policy makers in particular, and advises them to include women if they are to make a difference in the process of poverty alleviation.

Jeannette Koopman (1997) has tried to expose male control of land and other resources in rural households in order that women are recognized as farmers in their own right. In this she is supported by Kate Crehan (1992) who takes this issue further by saying that society has a mythical understanding of households, by working on assumptions that all households have male household heads and that all male household heads are responsible, and all take care of the needs of all household members. Anita Spring in Hansen & McMillan (1986) sums up the researcher's position by saying:

*Women are extremely important in African agriculture, both as labourers and as decision makers; yet research and development are guided by mistaken Western beliefs about "a farmer and his wife" which serves to block women's access to information and other resources that would help women increase their effectiveness as farmers* (Anita Spring cited in Hansen & McMillan, 1986:331).

The researchers note that access to credit, in the form of money to work and maintain farming, as well as buying new equipment is virtually unavailable to women, because it is also influenced by the fact that women in most cases are not property owners (Koopman, 1997). As a result of inability to access credit, the implements that women use to work on the land are often labour intensive and backbreaking. It is also claimed that in some countries, women lease land but these leases have to be renewed every year (FAO, 1998). Linked to this is the fact that the land allocated to women by the community authorities tends to be far from the village and of poor quality. In addition to all of the above, another problem cited by these writers is women's low literacy levels which are an obstacle in understanding some policy issues, which could be to their advantage Koopman (1997), Hansen & McMillan (1986), Crehan (1992), Boserup (1989), Whitehead (1991) and Young (1993).



Research findings from studies of women's role in agriculture from a large sample of African countries show that women contribute between 60% and 80% of labour in agriculture or food production. April Brett (1991) is supported on this issue by Jeanette Koopman (1997), Kate Grehan (1992), Okedi (1997) and OSCAL (2000). They all contend that African women have been and are key players in food production, food preparation and food management. In the production and processing of food crops, they say that African women's responsibilities and labour inputs normally exceed men's, although the depth of women's involvement is different from country to country. Where there are clear distinctions in food crops, women are generally responsible for the production of

most staple and other foods, while men concentrate mainly on cash crops. Anita Spring in Hansen & McMillan (1986) says:

*Women cultivate crops, care for livestock, and process and prepare food for all rural families; they are involved in food distribution at the family, local, and regional levels. Crops must be produced and this production entails preparing the land, planting, weeding, harvesting, and other operations ... Sub-Saharan Africa is one area where farming is part of the definition of women's role in society. African women contribute 60 to 80% of the labour and management in food. (Spring, 1986: 332-333)*

Despite the studies proving the active involvement of African women in food production, and that in some countries women spend more time in the fields than men do, poverty and hunger has hit African women hardest. The very poorest of the rural poor include those in isolated or remote areas where it is extremely difficult to get access to goods and services. Most reports, however, clearly state that women and female-headed households tend to suffer poverty and economic marginalization more acutely than men and male-headed households. As Ester Boserup's research (1991) suggests, the reality is that the majority of poorest and hungriest households are those which are female-headed.

In the case of South Africa, recent findings indicate that 80% of rural African women depend solely on agriculture for their livelihood. Like elsewhere, South African women today have inherited a set of constraints that are similar to those confronted by women on other parts of the continent. It is not clear in the South African government's agricultural plans whether opportunities in agriculture and farming, training and education will be open to boys and girls, women and men,

black and white farmers, and whether priority will be given to women and girls. Unless active measures are taken to eliminate the inequalities rooted around gender, opportunity divides will be maintained. Given the statistics of poverty, some kind of affirmative action policy should be implemented for women.(Sadie, 2001).

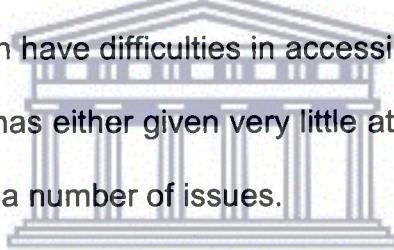
Yet in *The Strategic Plan for South African Agriculture*, (2001) it seems that the core focus of the South African strategic plan is "... to generate equitable access and participation in a globally competitive, profitable and sustainable agricultural sector contributing to a better life for all". In other words this focus speaks more about commercialization of agriculture than it does of feeding the poor and hungry and this is problematic because exporting food becomes the first priority instead of feeding local people. Secondly it remains unclear whether the disadvantaged landless individuals of whom women form the majority will be given a chance to own land and/or access to other resources necessary for farming. In a report compiled by Fair Share (2001) at the end of the fifth year of its "liberation", the South African government remains tardy with land redistribution and has managed to allocate only 2% out of 30%. There is an uneasy tension between fair land redistribution to all versus commercialization of agriculture, which does not favour the poor, and women in particular (Sadie, 2001; Agriculture and Land Affairs, 2001; Fair Share, 2001).

Given the above evidence to confirm women's active involvement in farming and subsistence agriculture worldwide, it is a concern that women are faced with poverty and hunger despite their substantial participation in food

production. The writers and theorists I consulted also supported each other on the point that women's hunger and poverty results from patriarchal power and lack of control of resources such as land as well as facilities to work the land. As a result of gender inequalities, women are frequently excluded from planning, training and advancing in farming and agriculture. The above realities cannot be denied; however, there are other factors, which I have identified which these writers do not address. I will deal with them in the next section where I identify gaps in the literature.

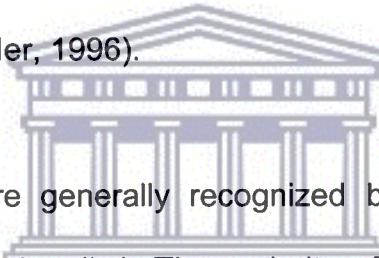
#### **1.4.2 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE**

While the literature emphasizes gender imbalances through the "feminization of poverty" and that women often have difficulties in accessing resources including land, I find that the literature has either given very little attention to or has given insufficient explanation about a number of issues.



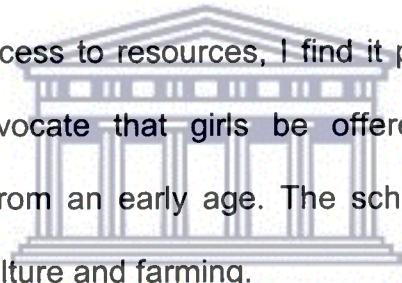
Firstly in South Africa we have "racialization of poverty". Colonization is mainly achieved through land dispossession, and until this issue is addressed as one of the most important factors contributing to poverty in Africa, the strategies for poverty eradication will be inadequate. Contemporary problems of land ownership or landlessness, access or lack of access to economic and other resources important to agriculture and farming, emerge from the historical experiences of ethnic/racial discrimination in many of the colonized countries. Collin Bundy (1986) for instance reflects on the evidence of rising wealth in the African peasantry in the 1830s which evolved out of the pastoralist economy. One of the factors which demotivated African people in agriculture and farming

was racial/ethnic discrimination, which is hardly addressed by researchers such as Boserup (1989), Koopman (1997), Crehan (1992), Whitehead (1991), most of whom are white feminist researchers, who have tended to privilege gender oppression over race. It is my position that along with gender, racial/ethnic discrimination directly influenced rights to land ownership and access to other resources. The impact affected both males and females of the group "different" from the ones which were privileged politically and economically by colonization. These writers claim that poverty and hunger is rural, and feminine, but fail to mention that in Africa, poverty and hunger is rural, feminine and racially/ethnically *African*. In multi-ethnic societies it is not all women who are hit hardest by poverty and hunger but the majority of those who are hungry are rural, African women (Budlender, 1996).



Secondly, African women are generally recognized by academics as food producers (farmers and agriculturalist). The majority of these academics and writers are probably foreign to Africa; some might be of European or American origin. The women they write about and identify as farmers are often not recognized by local and national or even development agents as fully-fledged agriculturalists or farmers, and because of this they remain neglected. So although it is clear that academics acknowledge women's role as farmers, it is not as clear that local communities, governments or development agents do. In addition, it is not clear whether these women food producers see and acknowledge *themselves* as farmers and agriculturalists in their own right.

Thirdly, most writers allude to the problem of women's exclusion from farming and agricultural training while at the same time women are highly involved in food production. It is clear that not all male food producers have formal qualifications, skills or knowledge but those that have studied formally, are at an advantage. I find the writer's cry for women to get access to training and new technology problematic in that this issue seem to be problematized later in the lives of women farmers instead of addressing exclusion of girls from education and training in farming in the early years of schooling. Such "opportunities" for older women might subject them to fail if they are to compete with men, some of whom might have formally and/or informally studied agriculture and farming from a young age. If women's low level of education and training creates more barriers for women to get access to resources, I find it problematic that these writers do not strongly advocate that girls be offered access to formal qualifications in agriculture from an early age. The school syllabus needs to address issues around agriculture and farming.



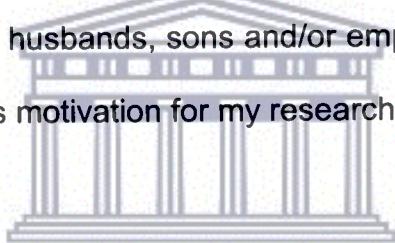
The fourth gap I identified relates to writer's silences on the issue of globalization and industrialization of food production which has put pressure on Third World countries. On this issue writers who have prioritized gender have said less than they might. Some writers such as Martinussen (1997) and others criticize the pressure from development economists and Western researchers in general, who see Third World farmers as being "irrational" for concentrating on the food they know and can use, instead of taking opportunities to make more money by concentrating on foods and products that they can export. In his analysis, Martinussen is trying to bring to the attention of other writers and the

global community the different focuses in food production in different location. An example is that the Third World women's major concerns are to produce food to feed their families, first and foremost. Writers like Koopman (1997), Whitehead (1991) and Crehan (1992) fail to address global industrialization of food production as one issue leading to poverty and hunger in the Third World countries (Martinussen, 1997: 135).

Another issue that is privileged by academics, governments and other agencies is the agenda to eradicate poverty. The whole world seems to be concerned about poverty. Liberals argue that poverty and hunger can be alleviated, but that it is not possible to eradicate it. Socialists think that it is possible to eradicate poverty. Both groups have developed empirical strategies based on what happened somewhere else (Allen & Thomas, 1992). The expectation is often that those strategies will work as well in African countries, even if the context is different in many ways. An example is the assumption that what works for the hungry and poor in Brazil will work for the hungry and poor in Africa. Most of the time projects based on these kinds of assumptions have resulted in failure. What seems to be lacking is the connectedness of the North with the South with regards to poverty alleviation strategies. The North seems to dictate the agenda for poverty alleviation in the South. The poor and underdeveloped countries do not have autonomy to plan independently as to how they will deal with their problems internally; their local, national and regional plans seemingly must follow the international guidelines on poverty alleviation. This has huge implications for the people of the South, African women particularly, because if women in the North are not involved in food

production, researchers and development agents might find it difficult to conceptualize appropriate poverty eradication programmes. It implies that the imagined needs of women in the South are determined by the needs of women in the North (ILRIG, 1999).

Although the high number of women involved in food production in the world is undeniable, another reality that cannot be denied is that globally, women remain poor and hungry. What is not so clear from the literature is whether women themselves are trying take the opportunities around them by demanding their rights as farmers, or even seeing themselves as farmers. Or are they just accepting being "invisible", working hard as "assistants" to often absent male counterparts, fathers, uncles, husbands, sons and/or employers. These gaps in the literature served in part as motivation for my research.

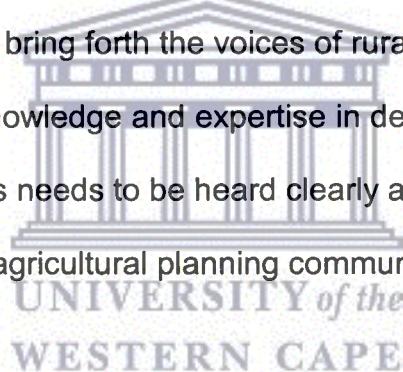


## **1.5 RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY**

Although considerable transformation has taken place within the South African legal and social system since 1994, change is thus far mainly constitutional. Although there are visible changes in many of the policies and laws governing the country, the pieces of legislation confirming the government's good intentions for a democratic and healthy society seem hard to implement. It is difficult to determine the extent of obstacles hindering the implementation process. On the one hand, the government has problems of delivery, on the other, delivery is meaningless unless it is taken up by potential "recipients".

This study aims to explore the constraints and limitations facing a group of "recipients". Given the history of South Africa, individual and group members of the society are not equal despite the legislation. Equality is therefore far from reality. In order for the South African government and society to move towards equality, there is a need to find ways and means in which individuals and groups can fully participate in the transformation process.

In this research, I hope to address some of the gaps in the work of earlier researchers by focusing on the combined impact of gender and race on farming and agriculture. I want to try to acknowledge the food production work African women have done in the past, and the ways in which they still manage to produce food today. I want to bring forth the voices of rural village women to the centre of the debate. Their knowledge and expertise in dealing with poverty and related issues on a daily basis needs to be heard clearly and made visible to the academic community and/or agricultural planning community.



In this chapter I began by outlining the aims of my study, before presenting a survey of selected literature relevant to my area of study. I also discussed what I perceived as the limitations of the literature I read. Lastly I stated the relevance of this study at this time in South Africa, particularly in the Eastern Cape. In the next chapter I shall focus on the methodological framework within which my study will be conducted, the aims, the method, research procedures and processes and lastly how I intend to analyse my data.

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **METHODOLOGY**

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In this chapter I shall try to specify the methodological parameters within which I worked. I shall outline the theoretical framework within which I located the study. Lastly I will discuss my methods such as selection criteria, research field data collection and how I intend to analyze the information I gathered.

### **2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

For this study I used a feminist qualitative methodology informed by discourse analysis located within a constructionist paradigm. Its suitability is derived from its ability to acknowledge the individual voices of rural women participants. Rural women, in most cases are excluded in development processes, hence post-colonial and post-modernism feminist approaches become suitable in informing qualitative research because they address issues of exclusion, discrimination and shifting identities of women (Barrett, & Philips, 1992; Spivak, 1996).

Post-colonial feminists like Chandra Mohanty (1996); Trihn T. Minha (1991); Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (1996), Guha & Spivak (1988) demand that women should not be excluded and pushed to the margins by virtue of their gender, race/ethnicity, social class or any other identity. A qualitative feminist enquiry tries to bring women to the centre by giving them a chance to speak for

themselves. In the process of information sharing, language is used to construct meaning, hence a post-modernist approach is appropriate. Post-modernism assumes that "Language contains the most basic categories that we use to understand ourselves ... In language we draw on shared patterns of meaning and constructing ways of speaking ... discourse repertoires" (Burman & Parker, 1993: 2). By combining a post-modernist and post-colonial feminist approach to explore women's farming practices, I hope to reveal the worldview embedded within their understanding of their experiences.

In particular (but not exclusively) feminist qualitative social research focuses on women's experiences and attempts to contribute to ending women's unequal social positions. In other words, feminist research, as I understand it, is trying to challenge the social structures which exclude or minimize women's social and economic experiences. For this reason I think feminist research is therefore political in its purpose, because it tries to correct the distortions about women's experiences so as to end women's unequal social position. My study tries to privilege the voices of previously unheard marginalized rural women, and is thus feminist. Feminist research methodology purposes and goals should be considered as socially transformative because of their commitment to empower women, to share their life experiences and stand up for their rights.

Feminist researchers such as Finch (1984), Oakley (1981), Wilkinson (1998) cited in Madriz, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) believe that traditional quantitative methods are alien and inappropriate to reflecting the voices of population groups who have been traditionally marginalized. Therefore in their research

discussion of methodology and methods, they attempt to lessen the dichotomy that traditional quantitative research imposes between thought and feeling, between the personal and the political, between the observed and observer, between dispassionate or objective research and passionate or subjective knowledge.

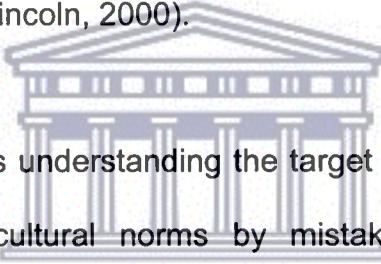
I find that quantitative research seems to try to detach researchers from reality, for it emphasizes objectivity over subjectivity. I think it is not possible for researchers to remain objective hence reflexivity becomes necessary to take into account one's own biases. In the process of information gathering, one needs to consider and be sensitive towards other people's ways of doing things, language, culture and so on. Most of the time, research is done by complete strangers who have little understanding of the place and the people they intend to work with, and who often end up treating these people as objects. More often, the questions asked and reasons for asking those questions only make sense to the researchers, who either cannot speak the language of the targeted group or have little time to explain the gains of the study to the community in question. As a result of these problems, community people often become reluctant to speak (Barrett & Phillips, 1992; Olesen, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

According to Dr Badal Sen Gupta (2001), my concerns are valid and are not only mine. He contends:

*Many people from poor, disempowered and marginalized communities in South Africa and elsewhere in the world have had bad experiences when it comes to research. As a result they don't trust "research" and don't*

*think it is important in their lives and their struggles. They have experienced research as something that is done to them by "experts" who treat them as "objects" in a survey, rather than human beings capable of participating in their own development. Research is experienced as something that always raises expectations, but leads to nothing* (Sen Gupta, 2001: 17).

In this, Sen Gupta is supported by many feminist researchers from other parts of the world who have documented the reluctance of some Latinas, African Americans and some women of colour in Africa to participate in survey research and other studies. These researchers claim that the reluctance is especially strong among undocumented women who do not speak or are not fluent in English (Madriz, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

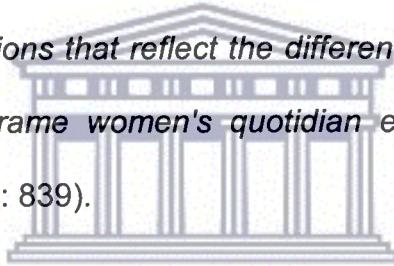


Crucial to any area of study is understanding the target group's culture so that you do not overstep any cultural norms by mistake. Linked to cultural understanding is an issue of representation. Women in communities, like in any other groups of people, have dynamics. Communities can become suspicious of researchers (who are usually strangers) as well as the participants identified and selected for the study. It therefore becomes imperative to bring people in to participate so as to address issues of representation, and create space to build trust with the participants and their community. This is one of the reasons I have chosen a focus group for information gathering in terms of inclusivity, and a focus on multivocality. Another advantage is that focus groups enable one to gather large amounts of information in a set amount of time. I believe that the focus group method, that allows multiple voices to speak, is an appropriate approach to information gathering rather than an individualistic research method

for this study. I feel it is especially appropriate with these groups of women because I feel they are marginalized. In addition, focus groups can provide a safer space to speak, include more people and help involve the broader community in the project.

Olesen (1994, cited in Madriz in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) points out the necessity to uncover women's daily experiences through collective stories, and recommends focus groups because, as she says:

*Group interviews are particularly regarded as suited for uncovering most women's daily experience through collective stories and resistance narratives that are filled with cultural symbols, words, signs, and ideological representations that reflect the different dimensions of power and domination that frame women's quotidian experience* (Madriz, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 839).



Feminist researchers claim that focus groups are useful in trying to retain the authenticity of women's accounts by allowing free expression of ideas, and encouraging the members of the group to speak up, while also trying to minimize the distance between the participants and researchers. I also believe that by listening to stories of participants successes, problems and concerns, and acknowledging their efforts, they may become *active participants* and feel a degree of ownership of the process of their development. Randall, (1980 quoted by Madriz in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) claims that:

*'Multivocal conversations' have been used by women for generations in the form of exchange (of knowledge) with their mothers, sisters, and female neighbours and friends.... these dialogues have traditionally been*

*a major way in which women have faced their social isolation and their oppression. Thus testimonies, individual or collective, become a vehicle for capturing the socioeconomic, political, and human challenges that women face.* (Madriz, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 842)

Besides, multiple views offer more nuanced meanings because I believe there are different ways of seeing things. In other words “there is no one truth”, and having many voices would permit multiple truths to emerge.

One other advantage of focus groups cited by feminist researchers is that they can be useful in exposing and validating women's daily life experiences and survival strategies as individuals as well in groups. They say that perceptions, attitudes, feelings and views are contextualised in accordance with the social realities existing in a particular social setting, not in isolation. Because of this Finch (1984), Oakley (1981) and Wilkinson (1998, as cited in Madriz in Denzin & Lincoln 2000) and many other feminists, post-colonial and post-structuralist in particular, encourage collective methods as empowering vulnerable women particularly women of colour who have often been silenced in many research projects.

What I have learnt from my experience of focus groups as an adult educator is that they give participants the space to slowly build trust with each other and the researcher. Once this happens, participants feel freer and safer in the group and start asking questions, and even critiquing the agenda. After some time in a larger group, some of them may even raise points overlooked and demand responses from the facilitators. Madriz supports the idea of focus groups as

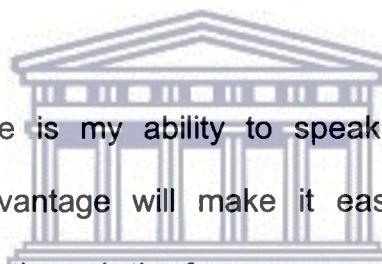
giving some sense of ownership of data gathering to participants as well as researchers. She says:

*Focus groups minimize the control the researcher has during the data gathering process by decreasing the power of the researcher over research participants. The collective nature of the group interview closes the gap between the researcher and the participants by tilting the balance of power towards the group, empowers and validates the voices and experiences of participants (Madriz, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 837).*

Lastly, I believe strongly that focus groups can advantage researchers in that they can gather larger amounts of information in a limited period of time without losing the quality of discussions, provided they have good facilitation skills. The facilitator must have experience in facilitating focus groups, be flexible with the agenda but maintain a clear focus on the subject. All of this heavily challenges the researcher's listening, observation and communication skills during the data collection process. As an adult educator, my experience in planning, designing and running formal and non-formal workshops using Popular Education was an advantage to me in the process of information gathering, because I have experience in listening to multiple voices from different social, political and ethnic backgrounds.

Focus groups as a way of gathering data for qualitative research, like any other methods, has some limitations. In my experience, getting down to the focus of discussion is time consuming. One needs time for climate setting, letting participants build trust in one another and it can be very difficult trying to separate simultaneous voices. The researcher's listening skills can be extremely challenged if one is a novice to focus group interviews. For trust to be

built, in order for participants to share their intimate feelings, it is also important to select people from almost the same level, who have fairly similar life experience or understanding of things. because there may be cases where there may be strong disagreements or hostility towards some members of the group. Another serious limitation of focus groups pointed out by Madriz (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) is that focus groups are inappropriate when the researcher needs to be able to generalize from the research results. I do not want to make generalizations, as I am studying a particular case and so this last point will not be a problem confronting this study. Having acknowledged the problems, I still believe that a focus group was the most appropriate method to use in this study.

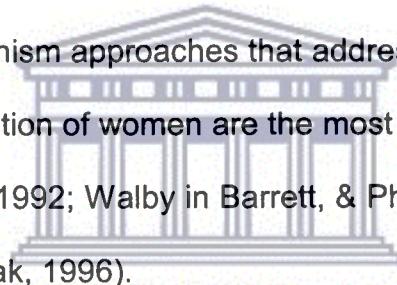


Another advantage I foresee is my ability to speak the language of my participants. I think this advantage will make it easier for me to collect substantial quality information through the focus group within a set limit of time. Language is important in that it is a manifestation of culture. Language carries empowering or domesticating words. Words create meanings, and words are part of language. If the researcher's language carries more power than that of participants, it may paralyze, or even silence those who cannot speak it, and this could be a barrier to participation. Participants may find it difficult to share crucial information with the researcher and translation could retard the process even further, and therefore it is pretty crucial to understand language nuances.

## **2.2 ASSUMPTIONS**

The assumption that I am making is that a feminist position is particularly

appropriate in the case of the women of U-Mhlanga village, whose stories are not shared with other people except among themselves, as if nothing can be learnt from them. Hence I prefer to take a feminist stand which places women in the centre and respects marginalized women's voices and life experiences. While my focus is on their experience of farming, I also need to keep reminding myself that while women in that village might share experiences of hunger and poverty, their experiences may also differ, reflecting differences in social status, marital status, age, levels of literacy, cultural backgrounds, values etc. For this reason, the diverse experiences need to be recognized since they cannot be homogenized by assuming that they are one. Multiple voices are important for the widest expressions of the problems I hope to uncover. Therefore feminist post-colonial and post-modernism approaches that address issues of exclusion, discrimination and representation of women are the most appropriate (Pringle & Watson in Barrett, & Philips, 1992; Walby in Barrett, & Philips, 1992; Olesen, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Spivak, 1996).

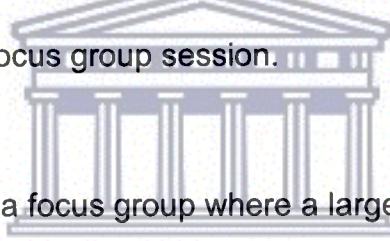


I suspect that like rural women elsewhere, women in the Eastern Cape have been marginalized, ignored and not acknowledged for the social and economic contribution they give to society at large. I therefore assume that they have almost certainly been excluded and "othered" by their male counterparts, elite women and men, local authorities and development agents and many other groups who might have supported them in their endeavours. People have spoken, and more are still speaking on their behalf, silencing them because it might be assumed that they cannot speak rationally. Post-colonial feminists like Mohanty (1996), Trihn (1991), Spivak (1996) and Guha & Spivak (1988)

demand that marginalized women be given a chance to speak for themselves. By taking a feminist position in this study it is hoped that the voices of the women of U-Mhlanga village can be heard, and that through this study their voices may help to offset the silences around rural women's lives.

## **2.3 METHOD**

Due to the nature of this study (and my status as a student), the plan was that I go to the Eastern Cape and get permission from the gate-keepers, and then identify, select and organize the participants myself. I had an understanding of the district because I had kept links with my relatives in Lady Frere, where my sister-in-law works. I also relied on my language understanding and my experience in organizing the focus group session.



As stated earlier I decided on a focus group where a larger sample of participants would be appropriate because I had limited time to obtain as much information as possible. In addition, the focus group method offered many other advantages which I have discussed above.

### **2.3.1 PARTICIPANTS AND SELECTION CRITERIA**

The participants I identified as offering the most insights for the purpose of this study, were between 60 and 96 years of age. I thought this group would represent the views of women in that village well, for they would be able to provide a range of view-points across different generations. I decided on elderly women because these women have witnessed the changes in that district from as early as the 1920s. They have past and present perspectives of

development and/or underdevelopment in that area. From what my mother told me and from what Bundy (1979) said, agriculture and farming has been the means of survival in the Eastern Cape for centuries.

I also chose that particular group because elderly people are able to remember the things from their youth yet they are often less afraid to speak up about their lives. What I have noticed is that generally as people grow older they have more liberty to speak their minds. So my reasons for choosing these women was two-fold: I wanted their experiences to be acknowledged and at the same time I considered them to be the best source of data for my study.

### **2.3.2 REFLEXIVITY**

Although I was born in the Eastern Cape, I was reluctant to disclose this information to my participants for two reasons. The first is that I wanted to appear as far as possible, as academically objective. Secondly, I wanted preparations based on community structures rather than getting things done on the basis of kinship or other networks or relationships. At the back of my mind there was a desire to do things independently. Some general knowledge of the area, language and culture I reckoned would offer certain advantages in terms of access and so on. I felt however that I had to be careful not to take too much advantage of my familiarity with the area, language and culture. In order to produce a solid piece of research which yields significant results, I needed to try to be as impartial as possible. I needed to recognize the distance and proximity between my participants and myself.

As an African woman, I think I have knowledge and understanding of the cultural norms and values of Africans, particularly as practised by those who live in South Africa. Understanding culture(s), values and beliefs is key to every society because embedded in culture are the unsaid things that one can only understand if one is familiar with those cultural practices. People use their own frameworks to describe their own experiences. I was able to draw on my own culture to understand the said and unsaid things as well as to pick up group dynamics hidden in body language that a non-African researcher might have missed. I felt welcomed by the participants, not perceived as an outsider trying to invade their territory. While I used this to my advantage, I also wanted to remain an outsider. I therefore had an insider-outsider status (Beoku-Betts, 1995:430).



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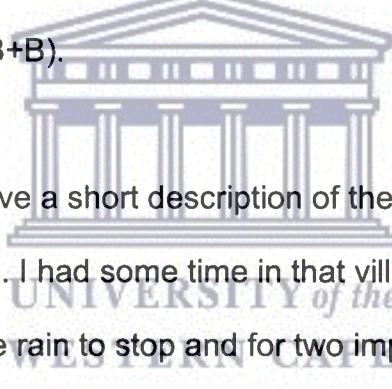
I also realized that I was privileged in my position as an "academic", researcher, and that I was younger than my participants. At some points, these privileges led to my being "othered" by participants, and this is evident in some of the discussions that follow. I tried to utilize my strengths, for example my facilitation skills, to minimize discomforts and blur the boundaries between myself as a researcher and my participants as the researched. In this regard, strong objectivity and flexibility is what one needs as pointed out by Harding (1996), which calls upon critical examination of the researcher's social location. From time to time the researcher would need to apply reflexivity so as to continuously decrease power dynamics between researcher and participants (Burr, 1995).

Reflexivity has been characterized as the most distinctive aspect of qualitative research, particularly as an alternative method of validation. While research findings are central to any research topic, reflexivity encompasses a degree of self-reflection, which might be based on assumptions and understandings gained before the research process from literature, stories or prior knowledge. Reflexivity also seeks to evaluate the research process and the role of the researcher in that research. It allows for partial identification with participants through self-exploration, and accepts that “value-free” research common in quantitative research processes is difficult to achieve (Mies, 1991).

For this reason I had to be cautious of my role as the researcher with its underlying advantages and disadvantages in the process of information gathering. Validation compels one to confront one's own role in the research process. The researcher has to acknowledge the assumptions that one has which shape the manner in which questions are set and the research topic is approached. For example, my long borne familiarity with the area created some assumptions based on a few things I could remember about the area and the people. I expected that my participants would respond in a particular way. I had to confront this assumption throughout the research process. Imagining that as a researcher I would be completely detached, and uninvolved during information gathering process was going to be impossible, hence I needed to maintain neutrality through validation and reflexivity. Harding (1987) points out that it is impossible to view the world from no position at all.

### **2.3.3 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH**

When I left Cape Town on Sunday September 8 2002, the weather was fine; but on my arrival in Port Elizabeth, it was raining. I travelled by bus and I was going to hire a car in Port Elizabeth. I was only hoping it was not raining where I was heading. In the whole of the Eastern Cape, the soil showed evidence of heavy rains. This year the snow fell twice in the Eastern Cape between June and August and some damage was incurred; this was media news and was easily observed. It was, however, the only time I could do field work. From Port Elizabeth I went via my mother's house in Mdantsane, 30km from East London. The following morning I drove to Dordrecht, about 14 km from the village of study. This is where I had booked myself to stay for ten days or more, in a homely Bed and Breakfast (B+B).



I think it would be proper to give a short description of the place of my study and my observations of the village. I had some time in that village because I had to wait for about five days for the rain to stop and for two important villagers to assist me with organizing participants. During this time I observed, listened and learnt a few things about the village and the people.

When I arrived in U-Mhlanga, the grass was green because of the heavy summer rains. I also observed that about 90% of the fields were not cultivated. The fields had grass growing on them, but one could still see the difference between grazing land and agricultural land. I think it has been about ten years or so since these fields were last used. There were, however, very few of these fields that had any crops growing, mainly maize. What I also observed were

gardens. These gardens were different in size, some bigger than others. Most of these gardens had maize and pumpkins and a few grew vegetables like potatoes, turnips, peas, beans, and spinach. In the village grazing lands, there were cattle, goats and sheep, on a very small scale though. I saw a woman looking after a herd of cattle, about fifteen of them; and a flock of sheep (60-100). I also saw five horses in the whole village, and only one medium size black pig. Although in many homes there were chicken, these birds were kept in tight security.

#### **2.3.4 MEETING WITH THE GATE-KEEPERS FOR PERMISSION**

Dordrecht, as already indicated, is a small town where many U-Mhlanga residents do their daily shopping, unless they prefer to go to Indwe, which is 30km from Dordrecht. I was told that because of the rain, the situation on the roads was really bad, particularly if one wants to reach the village homesteads. I could not do anything the whole of that week until Friday 13 September. I spent those days learning and getting more informed about the village and the people of my study. I was informed that there were nine village board members at the first level of village authorities, then the headman. After thorough investigation, I was advised to approach a board member in one part of the village called eMayaluleni or Uitkyk because the B+B owner knew him. On the 13 September when I was driving through the village, I approached two men who showed me a white house where they said "tat'uBhodi"<sup>1</sup> lived. Two men were standing outside this white house.

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<sup>1</sup> Father board member, board member being the first level local authority

Before stopping, the two men who were standing by the white house came to my car. I got out of the car. I greeted them respectfully in their language. Their responses told me that I was welcome. A rain of questions and comments came asking me where I was from and where I was heading.

*Oh! a woman driving a car, on your own? Ntombam<sup>2</sup> [I was 49 already].*

*Where do you come from? Have you lost your way? Are you married?*

*Where is your husband? Why would he let you drive yourself up here as beautiful as you are? What is your clan name? I would like to have you for a wife. [I guess not an official wife but a wife to benefit ownership of the car].*

I humbly started with my name, my clan name, my mother and grandmother's clan names knowing very well that this is the way to introduce myself so as to gain their trust. Stating my cultural identities was not in any way trying to reveal my family connections in the district but a cultural way of introducing oneself. I also explained that I was going to be in that village for a while and would like to speak to persons in authority. Enthusiastically Mr Bhatyi said, "You are lucky, you have come to the correct place. You are meeting one right now. Where are you from again? You said you are maRadebe or is it your mother?" I started explaining myself again and before I finished speaking I was referred to as "niece" because my mother's clan name is Radebe, and my mother's surname (which is mine too) was traced to be part of this authority's family. What a coincidence! It felt great and I felt at ease. It felt good to speak to people who

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<sup>2</sup> My girl

could spontaneously identify with you. I was honoured for having brought fine weather with me.

After explaining briefly where I was from and what I wanted to do, we set up time for a proper meeting, because Mr Bhatyi felt that the matter needed serious consideration. Apparently the two men were rushing to a family meeting across the valley where Mr Bhatyi's brother had died. I was asked to come into the house to be attended to later. In his house his daughter and common-law wife received me. After another long explanation, these two women also welcomed me and offered tea. I was left with the girl (Nokhoni).

After three hours, Mr Bhatyi came back and again I had to narrate the reasons for my being there. He asked questions for clarity which I answered. Thereafter he gave his comments, highlighting that although the project sounds good, he cannot make decisions on his own. He gave me the history of his family, how their grandparents came to live in that village, who the authorities are, and the kinds of developments that had taken place in that village over the years. Lastly he told me that everyone in that area calls him Tat'uBhodi. As Village Board members, they are accountable to their local communities, to each other, to the headman who oversees everything for that village and to the regional/district office in Lady Frere. The headman, on the other hand, he said, is accountable to the village community and to the head office in Lady Frere. There are ten areas (sub-villages) in that village, two of which are under one local authority, which makes nine sub-villages and therefore nine board members under one

head-man in U-Mhlanga. I asked about local councillors. He laughed irritably and said:

*From the time I was born this has been the local authority structures in the villages. The counsellors are just here to enrich themselves. We elected one but that girl hardly comes to our meetings. E-Machubeni (neighbouring village in the same district) there is some progress, new things have happened, tap water and electricity is installed already.*

We started talking about food availability in that village and the neighbouring villages, which created a controversial debate between him and his daughter.

He asked me to work out my times clearly so that we could give the headman specific dates and times. His advice was that we should not waste time but get to the headmen's house that day as I indicated to him that I would like to have my work done the following week. With the transport available we drove to the headman's home, five kilometers further down the village; but it felt like 50 kilometers because the road to the headman's house diverted from the public road by two kilometers and it was very bad. Mr Bhatyi introduced me to the headman "Tat'uSibonda"<sup>3</sup> Mr Xhalisa, who comes from amaYira clan.

Mr Bhatyi explained to the headman, that I wanted permission to do research in that village with the elderly women. The headman also asked me to tell him the story from the beginning. He later asked questions for clarity. He asked Mr Bhatyi's opinion on the matter. Mr Bhatyi refused to give his opinion for fear of anything that might go wrong and that he might become implicated as the

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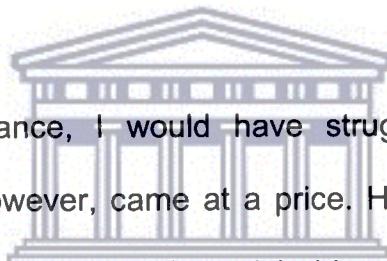
<sup>3</sup> Father, headman, the local authority above board members

person who brought me to the headman's home. I was asked to leave the room for about two minutes or so.

The headman called me back and apologized, claiming that he is old and would like to resign from his duties. It is true, the headman is old (about 88 or more, he said later). Both men agreed that the project sounds good, provided I was who I claimed to be, and coming from where I claimed to be coming from, and that I would stick to what I said I came to do. He asked Mr Bhatyi to monitor the process and give him feedback before the village general meeting. They said that in their village, they do not want people who come and create havoc by promising to do things they cannot do, particularly things to do with money. The process of obtaining permission was tied to my identity as an African woman with close cultural and ethnic links to the people whose lives I wished to explore. I was clear from this stage that my familiarity with the culture, language and the people had given me privileged access to the community. I was helped by these gatekeepers to identify and approach the participants. These gatekeepers also gave me a community member to "witness" the process of organizing participants and preparations for the research meeting as described below.

After consulting with Mr Xhalisa and Mr Bhatyi, we decided that the focus group meeting should be on Friday 20 September, and that participants would be fetched by organised transport. Mr Xhalisa and Mr Bhatyi offered me a central venue that they usually use for broader village meetings, Rietspruit Higher Primary School. Mr Ndiyeza, a board member in the village where the school is

located, was going to be tasked by the headman through Mr Bhatyi to secure the venue and to arrange the time and leasing with the principal of the school. Mr Xhalisa and Mr Bhatyi immediately identified women within that age group living near Mr Xhalisa. They suggested two or three from each board member's constituency, scattered across ten villages, and came up with about 24 names in total. I wanted us to start with making contacts there and then, but I was told that I would need someone known by the villagers, failing which I could be ignored. I asked them to help me in this and Mr Bhatyi told me that he could assist me only if I was prepared to start organising my participants on Monday because he had a death in his family. I thus had to wait two more days before meeting my participants.



Without Mr Bhatyi's assistance, I would have struggled to complete my research. His assistance, however, came at a price. He was quick to claim a family relationship. Whenever he wanted a quick drive around, to do business, he would ask me "ntombam or mtshana<sup>4</sup> can you please take me to ..." I guess I was a *God-sent resource* the family needed at that time to quickly do what needed to be done for funeral preparations, but I could not help feeling exploited. On the Saturday of the funeral, my task was to transport three sick elderly people to church and closer to the family graveyard. After the meeting with the headman, we went to Mr Bhatyi's family where I was introduced to the family members.

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<sup>4</sup> My girl or niece.

"became a little anxious about time, having to wait again, but I was relieved by the fact that the process of contacting the local authorities of U-Mhlanga village to ask for permission to conduct the study with women in that village was faster than anticipated. I did not have to write to them and wait for their reply.

### **2.3.5 FOCUS GROUP MEETING PREPARATIONS**

Mr Bhatyi and I met again on Monday, when he advised me to transport another person, a lady (Noqothole Sigadla) who happens to be the secretary of their local burial society. He said that she is familiar with two other areas where we needed to visit to locate participants. The assistance from Mr Bhatyi and Ms Sigadla was enormously helpful, as I would have battled to locate participants within the time limits. That day we worked very hard; we covered six areas: Ntlanjeni, Chenkcele, Bankini, Siphongweni, Zwelitsha and Kaalfontein. At times we had to leave the car behind and walk long distances because the conditions of the roads were very bad. Later I learnt that they did not think I would be able to do such long and strenuous walks, and it is true that it was not easy. The second day we covered the remaining four areas: Mayaluleni, Nxomfu, Xhumabhokhwe and Tafile. We did not find the targeted people in the last two areas and had to go back on the third day.

I needed between 8 and 20 women, but we decided to invite more (23) because I know that with people of their age, there are no guarantees that all of them would make it. In general these old ladies showed interest and willingness to share their past and present farming experiences. They were even more willing

when they learnt that they only needed to make themselves ready by eight in the morning to be assisted by the local transport to the venue. They were also told that breakfast and lunch was going to be served.

Noqothole, the woman who helped with participants' recruitment, was also going to help me with catering preparations. We decided to bring on board another woman to help with cooking and other catering tasks. Mr Bhatyi took on the task of arranging transport with relevant local taxis, who were told who to collect from each sub-village. It was also their job to convey participants back to their homes. Mr Bhatyi appreciated that I confirmed everything I was doing with him. I relied on him and I could see that he was committed and trustworthy. He knew a lot of people and he seemed to be a respected official. Whenever we needed person power, he would call upon someone and the task would be done in no time.



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While on the one hand, as a researcher, I had more power in the research process, Mr Bhatyi was a powerful agent in the preparation process. From the time he listened to my request, he was clear about his roles as a community leader, a liaison officer and played his part effectively. As already indicated, the community people responded well to his call. Power inequalities were evident in other forms too, for example, in the course of my research I was amazed by different perceptions of what a university was. To some it was a school for higher education, for some it was part of a government department or programme, while some perceived it as an important section in parliament. Trying to correct these perceptions did not help much, because the people saw

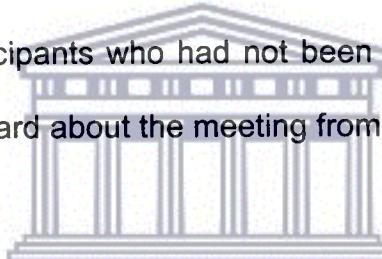
very little difference between higher education institutions, parliament and government public services. I remained a "government higher official" up there. I felt embarrassed by these perceptions, and I made it my business to correct them. I want to believe that Mr Bhatyi held his perceptions too, but he was also aware of his position of power, which he used to manipulate me whenever it suited him.

### **2.3.6 FIELD REALITIES: ANXIETIES AND EXCITEMENT**

On Friday 20 September, very early in the morning, we loaded my small car with all the things we were going to need for catering and the focus group. There were four people in the car, my assistant researcher, the two cooks and myself. Mr Bhatyi remained behind as he wanted to go with the participants so as to see that everything was going according to plan, and almost immediately it seemed, things began to go wrong. On our way to the venue we were stopped by one Mr Ndiyeza (a board member for Zwelitsha and Bankini) who had been asked to secure the venue. Mr Ndiyeza apologised and told us that he did not manage to do the task; he was very busy with his father's funeral arrangements. Then he spotted the chairman of the School Governing Body walking down the fields and called him. He pleaded with him to accompany us to the school and asked him to use his influence and authority and to apologise to the principal. He (Mr Ndiyeza) promised to go and rectify the problem with the principal on Monday. I was shaking with disbelief, and confused as to what to do. I think it was all written on my face, because Mr Ndiyeza said repeatedly, "Don't worry, you have the chairman with you. Where is Bhatyi? It is ok, don't worry". That was the first disappointment and I was relieved when it was sorted

out within thirty minutes.

The next problems emerged when one taxi driver who was also a taxi owner did not convey the participants to the venue. This man did not pick up participants from six of the ten areas. We waited until 9h30 when my assistant researcher and I decided to go back and check what the problem was. By the time we reached Mr Bhatyi, he was very upset with everyone including us for not coming back earlier. This incident nearly created chaos. We had to go to Dordrecht, 14 kilometers from Uitkyk, and about 20-23 kilometers from the venue, to organise more transport to fetch these participants. Some of them were patient with us while some had opted to go about their business. At the same time, back in the venue, more and more participants who had not been personally invited were coming because they had heard about the meeting from others.



We were finally ready to begin at about noon. The weather was fine and we decided to hold our meeting under a big palm tree. I had to start afresh and explain the process and the procedure. Questions were asked and younger participants of less than 60 years of age had to leave, but were given refreshments because they had come from afar. They were also invited for lunch. We ended up with fifteen elderly women, the sixteenth participant, about 73 years of age, arrived an hour late, having walked to the venue.

Once my participants settled down, they were informed that participation was voluntary and that there would be no incentives of any kind. They were also briefed about the research purpose and that their task was to give information in

as much detail as they can remember. It was emphasised that it must be their honest memories of events. The participants were also made aware of their rights to withdraw their participation should they wish to do so, but were asked to respect the privacy of the research proceedings. Each participant was given my supervisor's name and telephone number and the name of the institution where I am registered for accountability reasons. Questions of clarity were taken and answered before the process began.

The participants were also asked for consent for their participation in writing. I also confirmed confidentiality and that their inputs were going to be protected by means of a code of ethics, that we were going to develop together as a group. The code of ethics stipulated confidentiality and that nobody (assistant researcher included) from the area was allowed to take out of that space what was discussed by the group. The code of ethics that we developed was a verbal agreement between the participants and researchers. It was also used as the guide for a written contract, during and after the research process, and was signed by all those who could. The code also stated that the discussions and deliberations in that space were not owned by anyone of them, except me as the researcher because I would be using the discussions for a specific study; therefore there was no one person or group who should make a claim on the data.

Most participants were unable to sign the agreement form and authorized me to sign on their behalf, by putting an X; they said they used this way of signing when getting their pension grants. There is a very high level of illiteracy in that

province, because out of sixteen participants only six could sign the consent forms for themselves. In a country that has about 11 millions of functionally illiterate people, it did not come as a surprise that more than half of these participants (ten out of sixteen) could not sign for themselves. It was also a good thing that I decided to ask them to sign before the proceedings, because I was able to identify illiteracy challenges, and became sensitised to the situation as an adult educator/researcher.

## **2.4 DATA CAPTURING**

I needed to plan my questions carefully so as to get the best from my participants. The first tool that I thought was crucial to the study was the kinds of questions I intended to ask, and the way I was going to ask these questions. This is because the method of enquiry shapes the quality and kind of data collected. So I had prepared the questions I was going to ask my participants, although they only formed a base from which to start. As the researcher, I wanted to be free to adjust the questions, rearrange and rephrase them for coherence and clarity so that I could explore in depth the issues raised by participants. It is for this reason that I prepared semi-structured open-ended questions.

Semi-structured questions seemed more appropriate for this study, because questions are adapted to the position of the participants, and not bound by standardization. In that way they give opportunities for qualitative data collection. They also enable exploration of people's views, feelings, perceptions, opinions and experiences because of their flexibility (Burman, 1993). Another

advantage of semi-structured questions also highlighted by Burman (1993) is that these types of questions allow people to respond in their own terms, from their own social frameworks of reference. Participants' points of view are also given priority and space is provided for perspectives not usually represented or anticipated.

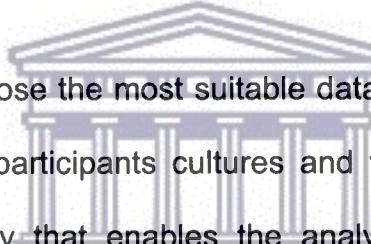
The second tool I used for the study was a tape recorder. Drawing from my adult education experience in dealing with multiple voices in class, I knew that when discussions get heated, the participants get excited and start speaking at the same time. In times like these it becomes important to have a tape recorder to allow for sensitivity to all voices including the ones that are in the background of discussions. The tape recorder was a useful tool that recorded simultaneous multiple and lowest voices. Simultaneous talking, of course, has to be discouraged by setting up a code of conduct with participants that will commit them to giving each other a chance to speak and respect one another's input; but adult responses can be difficult to control at times, hence a tape recorder becomes a necessity. I was pleased that I had one because I later managed to pick up the very lowest voices during transcription.

Thirdly, I knew that the facilitation role demands one's concentration, eye contact and ability to read body language. I needed to look at the participants all the time, not only during discussions. I had to look at each participant when they were giving their inputs so as to show them that their inputs are valuable. I was also trying to keep the situation as comfortable as possible, making them feel free and give more. This is where an assistant researcher (Jeffrey) as a tape

recorder operator played an important role, while his presence also enabled me to take a moment to write on my note pad. Once I had finished the data gathering, I kept the notes and the tapes of the proceedings safely.

Although I was satisfied with what I had achieved, I kept wondering whether I had covered everything. I was anxious. I spent the night playing and listening to the tapes until I fell asleep. Again the following morning, the first thing I did was to listen to the proceedings. When I felt satisfied that all my questions were covered and answered, I prepared myself to transcribe the tapes.

## **2.5 DATA ANALYSIS**



It is not only important to choose the most suitable data collecting method and to understand the field and participants cultures and values; what is equally important is the methodology that enables the analyst to develop a more comprehensive study. Since I was seeking to understand women's social life experiences in farming from their perspective, the most appropriate method of analysis available to me draws on discourse analysis and grounded theory.

Discourse analysis considers language as an important tool that people use in projecting their understanding of the world around them, and their construction of themselves and their attitudes. Language, in other words is seen as creating meaning. Meaning is not static, but continually changing, in other words variability in individual's discourse is not exceptional. Contradictory statements or utterances serve to bring to the fore what the person's beliefs, values and attitudes are; hence Burr (1995:64) states "each individual's account serves a

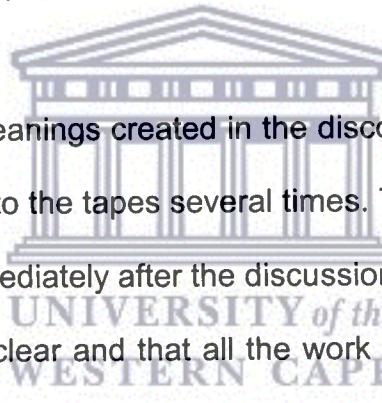
purpose for them at a particular point in time". If language creates meaning and both language and meaning are socially constructed entities, this implies that the multiple voices derived from using focus groups will permit the articulation of multiple experiences that will generate multiple meanings (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

Linked to discourse analysis another understanding has shaped the theoretical foundation of this study, that of social constructionism which views all knowledge as culturally and historically specific (Burr, 1995). People's view of their world involves the construction of realities through interaction with each other within a particular context. The way people think of and about themselves and others, the very words they select and categories they use, provides a framework of meaning for them. In this study emphasis is placed on individual experiences but individuals are viewed as active agents and constructors of their social world who are linked to others through a variety of discourses.

Individuals have multiple personalities, differing and sometimes similar experiences and thus different understandings of the world. Individuals remain representatives of heterogeneous realities, hence language plays a fundamental role in how these realities are constructed (Stanley and Wise, 1993).

Discourse analysis implies that meanings are inseparable from their social context and this understanding informs the analysis presented later in this study. Understanding the reality that all knowledge is socially constructed, one must also acknowledge that all research is socially constructed, and what it

strives to expose are different realities based on different ways of knowing at a particular time in history. Pringle and Watson (in Barrett & Phillips, 1992: 65) refer to Foucault's work in which discourses are perceived not only as constructions of knowledge, but include social practices as well. There cannot therefore be any generalised interpretations of experience within constructionist thought. Burr (1995: 162,167) on this notion says the ability to extract the richness of the various discourses of social being's life experiences becomes even more important when doing analysis. In this study, social life is understood as constructed, as interwoven within a series of events in the world of those researched at any given time; hence discourse is a representation of how individuals understand their world.



In order to understand the meanings created in the discourses of the women of U-Mhlanga village, I listened to the tapes several times. The anxiety pushed me to start playing the tapes immediately after the discussions. I was most anxious to check whether they were clear and that all the work was covered according to plan. I played them again and again, listening to patterns and key words that came up more often during discussions. From these patterns I drew out themes or key discourses.

## **2.6 TRANSLATIONS**

My participants' discussions were in their mother tongue, isiXhosa. While I was facilitating the discussions, it was easy for me to identify the words and phrases that I did not understand or know, and I would ask for explanation and clarification of the term. Because isiXhosa is also my first language, it was not

an effort to understand the discussions and explanation. I also did not find it difficult to understand their body language, and in many cases the meaning was held in the tone of voice as well.

I decided to transcribe their discourses from the tapes into isiXhosa because I did not want to lose their direct words. But written words do not necessarily carry the tone of voice with them. This is one factor that distorts meaning through translation.

There were some words and expressions which I found very difficult to translate into English particularly. Unsaid words reflected on facial expressions, emotional sighs, movements and other forms of body language. Some of these expressions were lost in the process of translation which encourages written language. An example is "really?" in English which tries to confirm the reality of what is being said. This word could be translated as "nyani?" in isiXhosa whereas words like "Mmh? mmh-hh and oh!" can mean the same thing depending on the tone of voice. Another issue about these words is that it is difficult to write them down.

Other expressions that I found difficult to translate are silences. Silences after a question were understandable but some silences were confusing. One example was a silence after giving two main crops "maize and wheat" then silence and then the addition "pumpkins, melons, beans and sorghum". This I have noticed throughout their discussions. I think it might be a result of what Allister (2000: 9) says about the Eastern Cape subsistence farmers:

*Maize is seldom grown alone, a variety of other crops occupy the spaces between maize plants ... Looking at a field or garden when the maize plants have started to grow creates an impression that the land is badly farmed ... the advantages of leaving spaces between maize plants are that it leaves plenty of space for secondary crops, such as cow-peas, beans, sweet potatoes, pumpkins and melons.*

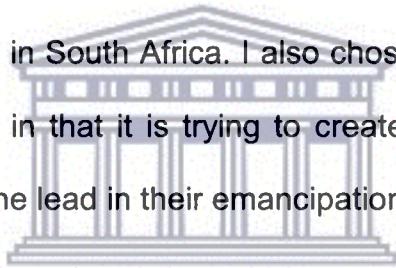
It is only through the understanding that pumpkins and melons are secondary crops that I understood the pause, but it was difficult to translate what the pause meant before reading Allister.

Another factor that I think distorts meanings is translating from one language into another, for an example, from isiXhosa into English, no matter how fluent one is in both languages. In the process of translation, it was difficult sometimes to find suitable words or vocabulary. In some cases I had to decide whether I should translate to give meaning to the content or use the speaker's own words. Using their direct words, "their voices" is what the study is about, and this is what I did. In some cases this worked well but some translations of their own words did not work so well. They did not give clear meaning.

One other point of importance is that some concepts available in isiXhosa were also available in English, such as sharecropping which made work easy. However there are some concepts which do not translate directly and need explanation so as to create an understanding. Some concepts carry different meanings as a result of different understandings and the use thereof. Such concepts may bring about some discomforts between those involved in the

project, the researched, the researcher and the academic community. An example of such a concept is collectivism. This term does not always imply collective work efforts, "imithabatha/amalima" in isiXhosa. Collectivism on the other hand although informed by collective work efforts means "ubunye or intsebenziswano".

With regard to this study, which aims to explore the social and economic status of women farmers in a particular rural setting, I have taken a post-modernist and post-colonial feminist approach. Through the political nature of feminist research, I was able to acknowledge the existence of an invisible group of rural women trapped in poverty and hunger, in the same way that the larger majority of women are world wide and in South Africa. I also chose this approach for its transformative characteristics in that it is trying to create space for women to voice their feelings and take the lead in their emancipation.



My data analysis was informed by discourse analysis and focused on exploring how rural women construct their farming and agricultural realities. Again in participant selection, I tried to take into account issues of representation. Gatekeepers were met for permission to enter the community and participants were recruited based on the ethical statement drawn up for the study.

In the next chapter, I shall provide the historical context in which my informants were rooted. I have chosen to present this context or history as they themselves see it, the stories of their lives as told from their own perspectives.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FARMING AND SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE: THE ELDERLY FEMALE RESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE**

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In this chapter I shall try and trace food production strategies, specifically farming and subsistence agricultural practices in the Glen Grey district generally, and in U-Mhlanga village particularly. This will include the earliest memories of my informants beginning in 1920s to the 1950s. This covers farming and agricultural practices as remembered by my informants, most of whom grew to adulthood over this period in this district. In order for me to do this, I listened over and over again to the tapes, carrying their testimonies. The themes I drew from their discussions are divided into two categories: one that describes their past experiences in farming and agriculture, and the other that describes the present period. The first period is up to the 1950s, while the second category describes changes over time. The second period started late in the 1950s and continues to date. It was not easy for my informants to be specific about times. Some remembered events only, although a few could remember some times and events.

The themes which represented their past experiences were: self-reliance; sharecropping; pride in farming and working the land; access to resources and land ownership. The themes which emerged in discussion of their present

farming and agriculture status include: damage of schooling; the destruction of African peasantry; the impact of natural disasters; the government and white farmers; rural and urban lifestyle politics and loss of moral values such as respect for life, increased individualism and greed. The latter cluster is dealt with in the next chapter while the first group is presented and analysed in this chapter. In trying to do this analysis, I have tried to contextualise what my participants said in relation to against ideas raised in the literature.

From the onset, exploration through open discussions with this group was not difficult. I began by asking them to try to remember their youth days, everything about their lives as young women in that village or district, to recall the best times, the good things they were doing as young girls in the village; the activities they were engaged in, the foods they ate and life in general. There was a big laughter (a chorus) and then silence and laughter again. Later a number of responses came, one after the other, some coming at the same time.

*O! there was life when we were young (Nomzi), real life (three voices).  
We were doing everything ... we were assisting our mothers, our parents (Zingiswa) we had time for ourselves, singing, dancing, going out to youth gatherings, we were doing things, creative things, (two voices) imitshotsho, (Nositshilo) singing real songs, singing in traditional weddings etc. (Nomandla). Young people did not die except on accidents. These days young people die, they die of TB. We are going to have six funerals this week-end, young men are dying of chest diseases (Zinyelwa) ... we were working the land along with our parents, our fathers and mothers mmh.mmh, producing food. (Zameka) Why does it have to be us you asking these questions? Some say we are witches, we are very old yet still alive while young men are dying of TB? They are forgetting something, we worked very hard from childhood but selective*

*in what we ate. We heard that there is food here prepared for us, are you intending to poison us? (Nonkomose, then laughter).*

It was a mouthful, not only social, and economic issues but political too. I needed to tease the information out a bit. I sympathized with the situation of people dying of TB. It was difficult for me to use the TB angle for the study, although I felt it was directly linked, but because my task was to be informed by them, their voices, their opinions were the ones that counted. I asked the question again, using their responses to rephrase it a little bit. I became more specific; I expressed my interest in their roles in food production. I wanted to know how exactly they assisted their parents. There were different responses detailing day to day tasks like: food preparation, food production, collecting firewood, cleaning and caring for the young and sick as well as their husbands, and everything necessary in their individual families. "Sasixhomekeke kuthi,<sup>6</sup> umzi nomzi uzimele<sup>7</sup>, jaa, mhmh." Having listened to their discussions I became aware that self-reliance is key to their constructions of their past farming and subsistence agriculture. I asked them to tell me more about self-reliance. The following sub-headings are trying to bring across what my participants perceived as abilities of U-Mhlanga village women in farming and agriculture from the beginning to the middle of the twentieth century (or earlier).

### **3.1 SELF-RELIANCE**

According to my participants, U-Mhlanga communities generally sustained themselves with farming and agriculture in the early to mid twentieth century.

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<sup>6</sup> Individual families were self-reliant or self-sustaining

<sup>7</sup> Each household had independence

They were farming with cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, chicken donkeys and horses, although on a small scale with the latter two. The main crops in that area were maize, wheat, pumpkins, melons, beans, potatoes and sorghum. They also had fruit trees, peaches and prickly pears on a small scale. There was no mention of other vegetables until one woman arrived later (Nonkomose), who claimed that she grew cabbage and spinach as well. This was because she was living near a Catholic mission where she learnt about these kinds of vegetables, which she called "soft food for elderly people". This idea was not supported by any other woman, and it was passed by.

These women said they specialized in growing two basic crops in that village, namely: maize and wheat. In addition, the majority planted pumpkins. These crops were basically for domestic consumption and exchange. They would prepare the soil, plough, weed and harvest manually. Some people had cattle and a few had donkeys and therefore oxen spans were most commonly used to work the fields in that district, they said. In some cases they worked the land by hand using hand hoes for weeding, rakes, spades, and self-made equipment. Harvesting again was done manually, until the early 1960's when machines were used for separating wheat only, but they continued to harvest maize and sorghum, beans and other things manually. Martinussen (1995) and Bozzoli (1991) agree that at the beginning of the twentieth century there were no harvest machines.

The women of U-Mhlanga village asserted that starting from field preparation, planting, weeding and harvesting, not only women were involved; women and

men as well as children participated actively. Everybody had something to do, to sustain their families, they said. Bozzoli (1991), and Snyder & Tadesse (1995) confirm that both women and men were equally involved in agriculture and farming. They might have been carrying different responsibilities at different times, but farming and agriculture does not appear to have been gendered in a negative way at some time in history. Women in particular, excelled in organizing systems to benefit all community people, these writers claim these systems to have been destroyed by colonialism through the introduction of particular kinds of division of labour within the family, which did not sustain families and/or communities.

*Colonialism equated 'male' with 'breadwinner' and as a result introduced technologies to men and recruited men for paying jobs which often took them off the farm ... For generations women established some form of collective actions to increase group productivity, to fill-in socio-economic gaps ... but despite such organized efforts, colonialism and its market economy continued to revolutionize the family division of labour and the family itself* (Snyder and Tadesse, 1995: 22-23).

## WESTERN CAPE

My participants also claimed that food preparation was also done manually. They remembered grinding maize, wheat and sometimes sorghum with their hands, using grinding stones to produce home made mealie-meal and flour. From maize-meal they would make porridge, *umphokqo*<sup>8</sup>, *isidudu sethanga nesomxoxozi*<sup>9</sup>, bread, and African beer. From wheat they would make the same dishes. *Umphokqo* and bread could be eaten as is or with milk or sour milk. They did not rely on machines or money to buy food; they prepared their own

<sup>8</sup> A crumbled maize-meal porridge eaten with sour milk.

<sup>9</sup> Pumpkin or melon mixed with maize meal

meals with crops from their own fields and gardens. From their cattle, sheep and goats they could get milk, make their own butter and get meat. They also could make quick meals with chicken, for visitors mainly. Pigs were only slaughtered in winter.

They claimed to have worked and organized the things they relied on such as food for their families. Food was also shared as much as possible. In those days if one had slaughtered a goat, sheep or a cow, the family would share the meat. Their explanation of family did not involve one's household members only but the "extended family" as well as close neighbours. No matter how large one's family, neighbours would not be forgotten when crops were ripe or when there was meat available. In fact the same neighbours might have been the ones who helped look after these animals, and the fields. Nomarhe and Ntombizakhe echoed each other with a claim that kept coming:

*Neighbours are like family, we work together, look after livestock together and sometimes they are more than family (Nomarhe) but some neighbours are not that good these days (Ntombizakhe). In fact in those days you could not eat in the presence of another person without inviting her to come and eat with you; there was enough food. Passers-by were called to come and drink sour-liquid from sour-milk (Nokwayana).*

Bundy (1979), Bradford (1987) and Bozzoli (1991) as well as other historians and writers speak about this period in a similar way as the period of "wealthy peasants". Bundy particularly writes about such a period in the Eastern Cape while other writers claim that this happened elsewhere in South Africa. Bozzoli (1991) and Bradford (1987) for example cited similar practices in the Transvaal, when the peasants produced their own food manually, had herds of cattle,

flocks of sheep, goats and other home based animals. In many ways they confirm that at a particular time in history, African peasants were self-sustaining. Bundy states that the period of wealthy independent African peasantry lasted until the early 1930s, when its dissolution was intensified by the Depression. Bozzoli supports the notion that there was a time where food was in abundance, and report one informant as saying that:

*We got used to drinking a lot of milk that ultimately it didn't act as a purgative. We gained a lot of weight through drinking milk ... When you open the clay pot you will find that it is full of butter. You then have to spoon this butter into a container and continue with the task at hand ... What remains is buttermilk ... Cattle were not easily slaughtered; they were my father's pride but not our food ... During those days, people were strong enough to stand against diseases because they used to eat a lot of cucurbits and edible herbs...milk...vegetables and pumpkin mixed with porridge (Bozzoli, 1991: 49-53).*

My participants said they were self-sustaining in that they grew and prepared food for themselves and their families and would keep the harvests for later use. Buying and selling food was something they were not familiar with, they said. Exchange between them was happening but they did not produce crops for cash. I assumed that what they produced was used that very same year, but they explained that it was not the case. In those days, they said, the people had their own ways of keeping and storing the surplus for difficult times. Some people had enough houses (rondavels) that they used for storage, which were cool, and these houses were not used for any purpose other than storage of food. Some people would dig deep trenches in the kraal "izisele"<sup>10</sup> and put

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<sup>10</sup> deep trenches in the kraal well covered with clean materials for food storage

mainly maize or sorghum “*iziswenye kaloku*”<sup>11</sup> (Nositshilo confirmed) in those trenches. *Iziswenye* would have a bad smell. It would be used long after the harvest when food kept aside for consumption is finished. Those not familiar with *iziswenye* would not think it was for consumption because of its smell. Some knew that maize stored this way could be dried in the sun and used safely for all dishes previously described. The fermenting maize was good for brewing *umqombothi*<sup>12</sup> particularly, they said.

The assertion of self-reliance seems to be an important issue in their understanding of the purpose of farming and subsistence agriculture. Self-sustenance created self-pride, independence and community togetherness.

The assertion that “we never knew that we could buy food” as well as the assertion that “hunger and starvation was uncommon” reinforces this self-reliance. They also claimed to have put their energies into food production and this they did from early childhood, although they were not taught farming in school. This by implication means that they did not get “formal” farming and agricultural training. Instead they learned the skills from their peers, relatives and parents.

My participants affirmed that the crops they produced in the first half of the twentieth century were mainly for domestic consumption. In discussing farming practices, the women of U-Mhlanga also emphasized collective efforts and share-cropping as the factors that brought about good returns in many cases,

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<sup>11</sup> raw food stored in trenches in the kraal

<sup>12</sup> African beer

because not all villagers had access to resources like land. This brings us to the next sub-topic in the discourse of the past, how the people of that village maintained themselves through sharecropping.

### **3.2 SHARECROPPING – IZAHLULO**

The concept of sharecropping, “*izahlulo*”,<sup>13</sup> encompasses a range of understandings such as contractual arrangements and values. To understand this discourse more deeply, I asked whether all of them had access to land and other resources needed for farming.

According to the women of U-Mhlanga village, there was enough land at the beginning because of the population size. They said, “in the past the situation was far better compared to the present”. They started mapping the dispossession of African people of their land and livestock and later the government’s legal take over of some open sections of land around them. I suggest that the latter was the 1913 Land Act policy and its subsequent amendments. The women said that some people owned land, some did not have land depending on the time of their arrival in the village. People who had land were prepared to share with those who had none. Household heads, be it women or men, would identify landowners who were trusted to do sharecropping or inter-cropping with. In most cases they sharecropped with either the relatives, friends or trustworthy people close to the husband, wife or

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<sup>13</sup> A verbal agreement between household members to form a “cropping team” that year

their relatives. A chorus

*No! not all of us had land. It was not all of us who owned land and cattle.*

(Chorus) (One old lady, Nomzi) affirmed this: *our fathers or our husbands owned land. In my case I had land because my husband (uBhele) had land. His land was mine until I gave it up to my sons not long ago because I am old.... So we did sharecropping with those who owned land.* (Ntombizakhe)

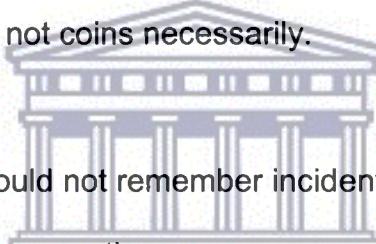
They said that, in the 1920s in their communities, those who had decided on sharecropping would come to *an agreement* as to when work would start and who was to contribute what. From the initial meeting day until work was completed none of *the partners* would be reminded of their roles and responsibilities. It was not the men's responsibility to identify or ask for sharecropping, both men and women were equally responsible. An agreement would be made in the presence or absence of the any of the partners, male or female, but the partner would be informed. All members of all households forming partnerships would be equally involved in the soil preparation, planting, weeding and harvesting process. In some cases where there was much more work to be done during harvest time particularly, the partners would come together and think of other ways of making work easy without having to pay those who might have to come to assist them. They said the partners would call for *umthabatha or ilima*<sup>14</sup>. This is what they called a one to two days collective effort where village people, young and old would be called to help. The partners would have to prepare enough food and brew African beer. Those who had

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<sup>14</sup> Emergency collective work effort for a day or longer, based on willingness to help those in need of labour, not only applicable to farming.

enough livestock would slaughter a sheep or a goat. The harvesters would start working from dawn until eleven in the morning according to their times and resume again from two in the afternoon until six. Thereafter they would enjoy themselves for a job well done, singing and dancing until late.

I asked again whether there were any payments or incentives in terms of money. A big chorus in rejection of payment came: "Payment? while doing community collective work effort? no! no! no!" Yet in some parts of the country it seems later, in the 1960s people had moved away from *free* collective assistance, and this is stated in Bozzoli as well (1991: 43) where wealthier peasants had to hire people from poorer families to help with harvest or planting, in exchange for food, not coins necessarily.



These women said that they could not remember incidents of unfairness in sharecropping in that village because there was co-operation. Having said all the positive things about sharecropping and how well the *partners* treated each other, my participants did not deny that in many cases the people who tasted the first fruits of the fresh harvests were the owners of land, not the whole group. After some probing questions for clarity of partnership arrangements in sharecropping, they explained to me that there was very little negative impact on the whole harvest through land-owners using the fresh harvest. They said, "it was small amounts, really, one would not use most of the fresh harvest because it had to be used immediately and people had no refrigerators".

Their interest in sharecropping, it seems, was basically in the final harvest. The owner would have declared generally how much his/her piece of land would

make under normal conditions, and harvesting would be a public affair. It seems there was some kind of competition between sharecropping groups. The better the quality or more bags the group gathered the prouder the land-owner became, because it meant his land was fertile and his team was reaping the fruits of hard work. They told me, "You would identify the people you want to sharecrop with, the people you trust". What seems to have governed the times was trust. I also believe that it was possible to work in trust with one's relatives particularly in a small village like that one. In that village, it seems that people know one another well.

My informants also asserted that after harvesting and cleaning the crops, the group would decide how much each would get based on contributions made by each household. When real harvest time came partners would stick to decisions made, but in most cases the land owners, of course, received "the lion's share". For other sharecrop group members who owned no land, that posed no problem at all for the reasons stated above. What seemed to be the area of focus for these village communities was to curb poverty and hunger through collective efforts and cooperation. "*Kwakukho imvano noxolo*"<sup>15</sup>, they said.

My informants remembered that as the times went by and families got bigger, there were more cases of people who could not get *izahlulo* opportunities to sharecrop. These people had to go and ask "other people" from other villages

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<sup>15</sup> There was cooperation and peace.

or even go “*ngaphakathi*”,<sup>16</sup> which literally means, the fenced land. These people were mainly males, but females also went, depending on whether one was a household head or not, and the age of the children. They said that this is when the problem started, the problem of unfairness in sharecropping. Some owners, particularly the white farmers, did not honour the decisions made between them and their partners.

I wanted to know whether sharecropping was between Africans only. There were different responses. Some said “yes” and some said “no”. Some of these women had never done sharecropping with other racial/ethnic groups while some were involved in different ways. Others perceived those who were involved in sharecropping with white farmers as nothing more than white farmer “labourers”. The use of an African word “*iqheya*”<sup>17</sup> is even more demeaning and created discomfort.

*How could you sharecrop with your boss? (there was a big laughter).*  
*You thought too much of yourselves, you were only labourers (Nomvula).*  
*You were receiving food supplies by the baas. (Zameka). You had nothing to share that is why you got the job (Zingiswa). They could not come to youth traditional occasions because they needed permission from die baas (Zuziwe and more laughter).*

This issue divided the group between those who had no experience of inter-racial sharecropping and those who had. Those who grew up in the villages seem not prepared to accept the fact that the concept, sharecropping, was supposed to work the same if the explanation both groups gave was the same.

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<sup>16</sup> Farms owned by white people.

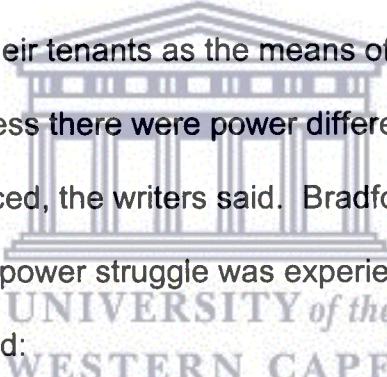
<sup>17</sup> Farm slave labourer living only on food given by the farm owner/master

What I identified and felt was a dividing factor between the women who grew up in rural villages and those who grew up on farms owned by whites or worked closely with them. I felt a dividing cold and it scared me; my facilitation skills were challenged. For a minute I felt the biases of “us” and “them.” The body language too clearly reflected the difference of “us village girls” as *better* than “you farm girls” I wondered whether it had been appropriate to ask the question. I had to diffuse the divide of *us/them*, not the contradiction necessarily, by asking the group to explain the meaning of *izahlulo*. A quick and unexpected response came from Zingiswa:

*Whatever Sisi. But we all know white people are arrogant. They could not do sharecropping with us, employ them as farm labourers, yes, but they must not lie to us and say they did sharecropping with them (Zingiswa). We all could have sharecropped with white farmers too, they had help from the government ... and got better harvest like the white farmers ( Zuziwe). True! true! (Chorus).*

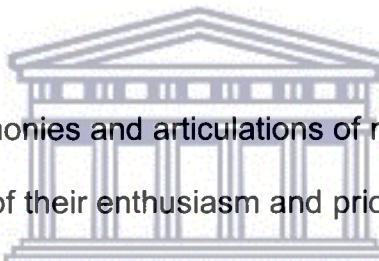
I decided to divide the group into two: one that should explain what sharecropping means and the other was asked to state whether they had the experience of sharecropping with other racial/ethnic groups. Only three had experience of sharecropping with white farmers. They explained the idea in similar terms except that it was the “baas” who made decisions as to how much each will get after harvesting. Most of the time, depending on the fairness of the farmer, they would get their share according to what he decided. But in some cases the white farmer would make excuses and give some sharecroppers less. Again a chorus followed, “Do you call that sharecropping?” .

It was quite an experience to hear different voices translating the meaning of one concept into different viewpoints influenced by social conditions and geographical location. Although the rest of the group (me included) might not have accepted or understood sharecropping as inter-ethnical/racial in South Africa at that time, Bradford (1987) and Bozzoli (1991) confirm these realities. They state that sharecropping countrywide was not only between Africans but it was also done across racial/ethnic boundaries. The difference was that the decisions were sometimes taken at different levels and the white farmers were arrogant in the distribution, but sharecropping procedures were supposedly done in a similar way. These writers say that the groups who opted for inter-ethnic sharecropping were mainly struggling white farmers or absent landlords who depended on their tenants as the means of production. Such arrangements would work unless there were power differences where some unfairness would be experienced, the writers said. Bradford also gave an example of an incident where power struggle was experienced through racial/ethnic divisions. She said:

*In the western Transvaal there was almost certainly an entire district that in 1927, black peasants produced 75 per cent of maize ... These peasants protested because the spans of oxen were theirs, labour was also theirs, but a white farmer got two bags and they only got one bag each (Bradford, 1982: 36).*

Bundy (1979, 1986), Budlender (1999) and McAllister (2000) also write about sharecropping in the Eastern Cape. They support the assertion of the women of U-Mhlanga, that share cropping was one other strategy that enabled African peasants to survive, in spite of land shortages or scarcity of resources.

What my informants highlighted in this section is that the people of U-Mhlanga village were able to work with what they could access in a productive way for the benefit of all. They said that not all the village inhabitants owned pieces of land and oxen span, but those who had land, oxen, and other resources were prepared to work with those who had time and energy, and treated each other as “partners”. They described it as the time in history of goodwill and cooperation. It seems the resources were shared between those who had and those who had less or none. They also said that all members of the community, young and old, males and females, were considered to have a contribution to make to curb poverty and hunger.



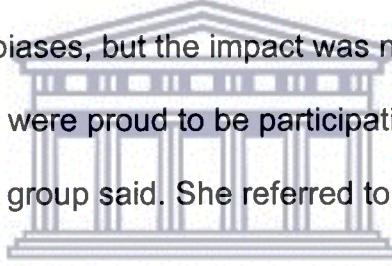
Listening to the positive testimonies and articulations of my informants about sharecropping, I got a sense of their enthusiasm and pride, derived from their claims of their abilities to do things themselves from tilling of soil, planting, harvesting and food preparation. This brings us to another element of their discourses that they said carried them as rural women in the early twentieth century: pride in being rural women. In the course of this section, the gender roles in the farming activities of U-Mhlanga will be explored.

### **3.3 PRIDE OF RURAL WOMEN**

When the majority of them were still young, in the 1920s and/or early 1930s, all people were involved in farming and agriculture, they said. They said there were no learned or qualified agriculturalists who obtained school certificates in their communities, for education had not advanced so much. The local schools

did not teach agriculture as a subject until in the 1960s. In many cases all youth, boys and girls from an early age were taught farming and agricultural skills by their parents, peers, and relatives “informally” through practicing. Farming work had no gender stereotypes. These women were proud that they could farm just like boys who were their peers. Bozzoli (1991), Rao (1991) and Snyder & Tadessa (1995) saw women’s work as neither private nor public, but both. In some communities and in some families, girls and boys would cook, herd the cattle, and work in the fields. Stereotypes about gender roles were introduced by the market economy, these writers argued.

My participants said that ownership of land and resources to work the land, like cattle ownership had gender biases, but the impact was not negatively experienced. As women, they were proud to be participating in farming. Nositshilo confirmed what the group said. She referred to the “wise words” from their parents, and said:

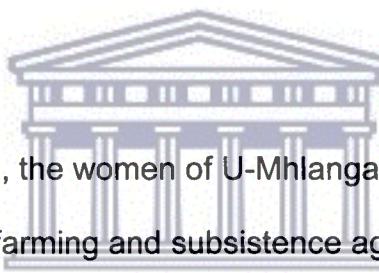
  
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*If you are not prepared to have chicken, pigs; or you are not prepared to work or ask for sharecropping or inter-cropping when you have no land of your own ... if you are not prepared to work hard your children will die of hunger ... With our chicken we could exchange/buy goats, sheep or even cattle. By the time your husband comes back from the city you have made him proud that he also owns cattle just like other man.*

Although they did not own the land and the livestock like cattle, sheep, goats, horses and donkeys, they said their role as farmers was equally valued in their families and in the community as a whole. They said they felt valued in that they were not forced to get involved in these activities, but did them voluntarily. They felt valued again because they were the heart of agriculture, always around and

willing, “*sithababetsala phambili kaloku*”<sup>18</sup> (Zinyelwa). We were forerunners in agriculture. In fact they grew up in that situation, “we learnt it from early childhood”. My informants confirm what Bozzoli (1991) says about women starting and finishing ploughing with cattle span:

*We are farmers, (chorus). We have been farmers from early childhood. We were taught farming by our fathers and mothers (Nomzi, to handle the plough (Nomandla). By the time you got married all of this came naturally (Nompozolo). You would see your mother doing it and it was never a disgrace. As a newly wed you would come to your new family knowing very well how to fasten oxen with rope, by yourself, one rope on the head of the ox and the other on the body, waist line (Nokwenzani, Nompozolo). We did not know that we could buy food. (Nondyebo) You had to be prepared to work to have food, and that we did with pride. (Nositshilo).*



In addition to working the land, the women of U-Mhlanga village, claimed to have played a leading role in farming and subsistence agriculture. They said under normal conditions, men and children were also involved in these activities “everybody had something to do” but women were more involved. In addition to working the fields and food gardens with men, they would grow beans, peas and pumpkin which they said men did not see as important crops. They also said that the role played by men seemed to have been limited to outdoor activities with the exception of a few, but women’s roles extended to literally feeding their families. They seemed proud to have been doing all these things with their hands. Zameka, Nompozolo, Nomarhe, Zingiswa & Nositshilo claimed:

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<sup>18</sup> By the way we were forerunners

*We prepared food with our two hands (Zameka, clapping her hands together) for our children, for our families; our husbands (added Nomarhe ). We raised our children with sour milk not with tea or coffee. (Nositshilo). They were beautiful and healthy children. We never claimed for child support from the government or maintenance from their legitimate/illegitimate fathers. Our families would help us raise our children whether they were legitimate or not. (Nompozolo & Zingiswa). Our parents too were never part of the long queues for pension grants, there was a belief that if you take that grant you'll die quick (Nompozolo) Nyani, inkam-nkam iyabulala<sup>19</sup> (added Nomzi)*

As women, they said they were prepared to learn the skills to farm and work the land for their families. Learning these skills started while they were still very young, "from early childhood" they said. I wanted to get more informed about how learning happened. I assumed that learning took place from home and continued in the school, directly or indirectly. I wanted to get clarity as to whether they ever had any formal or informal training, and asked who taught them farming skills. The chorus said: "our parents, relatives and peers". I asked again whether they got any training from schools or some formal short courses on skills training. Body language spoke louder than words. A chorus again. "Schools? What about them?" There was some background talking, showing some discomfort. Nokwenzani and Ntombizakhe came up strongly, they said:

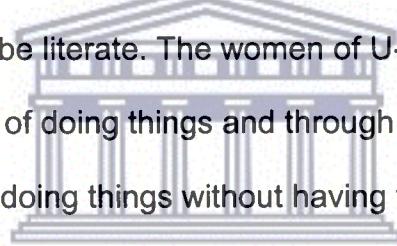
*School do not teach farming and agriculture, schools teach books knowledge ... If schools were teaching agriculture and farming, our children could have been the best farmers, considering the years children spend in schools. We never got to school, yet we are farmers. (A different voice, Nomvula apparently a lady teacher, pensioner) I did, but I did not learn farming from school, only later did school teach agriculture*

<sup>19</sup> True, pensions grants kill/take you to the grave young. [Explained to be a demotivation to accepting government grants, but to work the land instead]

*as a subject. I did all the other things that other girls did like holding a plough; I learnt them from my elder brothers and sisters just like other children.*

The different contexts and levels we spoke from amazed me. Subconsciously, I perceived learning as taking place through schooling and in other ways, but not solely from practical training in the family.

Their public claim of being farmers and that they said this with pride, despite the fact that they did not learn from school, was the difference between their understanding of learning and my understanding. Prinsloo and Breier (1996) confirm that to impart farming and agriculture skills and to be a farmer , one does not necessarily have to be literate. The women of U-Mhlanga said they developed their own systems of doing things and through trial and error they eventually became perfect in doing things without having to read or write.

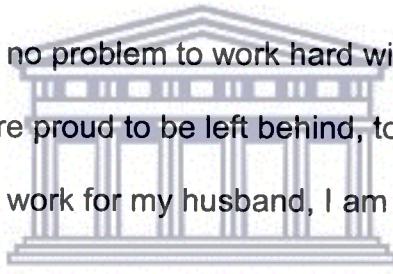


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My informants seemed to be proud of themselves as rural women. As women they said they were prepared to farm and produce food, and work hard for their families. It does not look like these women were dependent on their husbands or their husband's salaries either. For them money was used for other things, such as paying taxes Bozzoli (1991). To support this assertion, Nositshilo said:

*We did not know that we could buy food (mhh, mh, a chorus). We did not know coffee until we had children. You had to be prepared to work to have food, and that we did with pride. We saw very little use for money... (Zingiswa). With money I bought soft foods, fat, soup and the like (Zameka).*

Another element of pride came from the fact that they were rurally based. They did not encourage women to go to the cities with their husbands or rural men/women to marry urban partners. Whether this motivation of women to remain rurally based is fair or not to all women, the women of U-Mhlanga seemed proud of being rural women. I assume that when their husbands were away, they could use the space and time to do as they chose to, probably without any directive or control from male household-heads. As rural women they were also concerned that they made their husbands proud of them. As indicated in the above paragraphs, (under the section on self-reliance), they said sometimes they would exchange their chicken for goats, sheep or even cattle just to make a husband "proud that he also owns cattle just like other men". It seems to have been no problem to work hard with and for their husbands or fathers. They were proud to be left behind, to keep "the home fires burning" and raise children. "I work for my husband, I am his child, that is the way it has been".

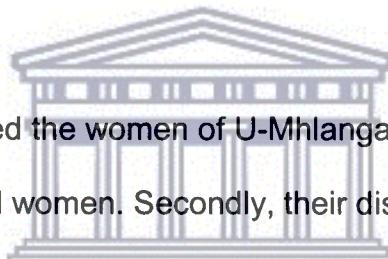


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These claims felt uncomfortable. It was as if my informants were unconsciously accepting being subordinate, however, my task was not to judge them but to learn from their experiences. I needed to take note of contradictions resulting from what I perceived as shifts in their identities. I also needed to reconcile issues within their stance: on one hand my participants were proud of themselves as rural women and claimed to be forerunners in farming and subsistence agriculture, and could also make decisions; on the other hand, they felt it was acceptable to take a subordinate stance and work *for* their husbands

and reduce themselves to a *child* 's status, because culturally "that is the way it has been".

Bradford (1983) comments on this simultaneous notion of "oneness" or equality and subordination of women and men in the middle of the twentieth century. She asserts that by the 1930s men seemed to have been clear about hierarchy of gender roles. My interpretation of what my participants said was that they concentrated strongly on food production irrespective of gender inequalities, and what did not stand in their way to produce food was immaterial. Their greatest motivation and passion seemed to have been in farming for their families, particularly their children, and this was the driving force.



In this section I have presented the women of U-Mhlanga village claiming to be proud of their location as rural women. Secondly, their discourses revealed that they were highly involved in the process of food production to an extent that they saw themselves as "forerunners" in food production and this made them proud of being rural workers. They claimed their position as farmers and strongly affirmed that they started farming from an early age. My informants also said that their roles were not only restricted to food production but were extended to preparation of food, and this was all done manually. With pride they raised their children into good health while not forgetting to make other members of the family happy. These life experiences were shared with great enthusiasm.

We went back to the question of ownership of land. I did not feel that we had exhausted discussions on this topic. Subconsciously I thought land ownership would have rendered them effective as farmers. However to them, food production and cooperation was key, irrespective of who owned what, as they have said in the discussion of sharecropping. Discussions on ownership continued for a while. I probed for more information on land ownership and their access to other resources to work the land. The following section explores their construction of land ownership in more depth.

### **3.3 OWNERSHIP AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES**

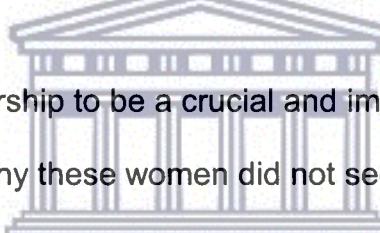
My participants stated that some people did not own land, particularly those who settled in that village later than others. Some people also arrived with livestock while some had none. They said the two important things that one needed to farm and grow food were land and livestock. That some people in the village had both entities and some had none, that is one of the reasons that people in that district opted for sharecropping, so as not go hungry. They said that their fathers were land owners not their mothers. "Izibaya"<sup>20</sup> were controlled and owned by their fathers and husbands, however farming and subsistence agriculture was everyone's responsibility including children. This suggests that there was collectivism and less individualism, along with respect and cooperation. Many writers such as Bradford (1987), Bozzoli (1991), Hansen & McMillan (1986), Rao (1991) and Snyder & Tadessa (1995) generally agree that not all people had land and/or livestock and that the reasons for that are historical- mainly political and economical through dispossession and

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<sup>20</sup> The kraals

segregation laws and practices; hence communities opted for sharecropping and employment later. On this notion, Bundy (1986), Budlender (1999) and Allister (2000) wrote about similar experiences in the Eastern Cape where sharecropping was done mainly to the benefit of those who had no land. My participants in their own voices said:

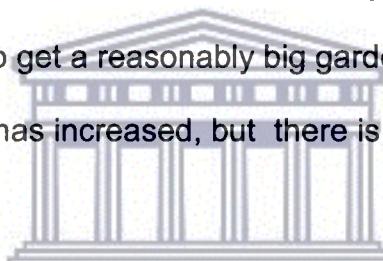
*Not all people in this village owned land and/or livestock, some people owned land, some had cattle (Nositshilo) but some had both while some had free time, (Zingiswa) some had their labour power, (Nondyebo) skills to do planting and harvesting as well as brewing African beer some would organize food, firewood and cook for workers, while some would look after children and others as shepherds of livestock (Nomvula). Everybody had something to do (Chorus). Yes everybody had something to do, even children had something to do, not like children of today (Nomvula added).*



As I had reasoned land ownership to be a crucial and important issue, it was a bit difficult to conceptualize why these women did not see their lack of ownership as a problem. I had to pause and reflect in order to listen to their voices and push aside the assumptions I was operating from. From their explanation they stated that in the past, there were no particular criteria for one to qualify for a piece of land, except that those who owned the land were males. In many cases, these landowners were the people who arrived before everyone else in that village and identified good pieces of land for themselves. There were no chiefs or any kind of authority in that village.

Later in the years, they were not sure when, they said maybe in the 1940s, the office in Lady Frere called *eBhungeni* took over land allocation and created structures where chiefs, headmen and local board members had to monitor the

process. The office gave each household between two and five acres depending on the number of dependants in that household and whether there were more boys than girls in that family. Land allocation was done once in a long while (no specific period stated). Those who owned land were given papers as proof of ownership such as title deeds. Later on, by the 1950s or 60s (they were not sure), the livestock of each household was counted. It had to go to be dipped and this is where it was counted and owners of livestock were given papers of ownership. In some instances, the local authorities were given powers to allocate land to people, but they had to account to the (head) office in Lady Frere. They highlighted unfair practices that local authorities sometimes carried out during the process of allocation of land. They said what is happening right now is that it is difficult to get a reasonably big garden as well as a piece of land because the population has increased, but there is no land increase.



The fact that land was allocated to men not to women in the past did not seem to be seen as a problem by my participants. In addition, that later the office in Lady Frere made the decision as to how land should be allocated in terms of gender, did not seem to be a problem either. What became a problem later was the increase in population size, which influenced the size of the pieces of land allocated. What I heard my participants complaining about is that the land around the villages is owned by white farmers. In their own words ownership of land seemed more of a racial than a gender issue. My participants contested that these pieces of land were huge and they could have been divided to include those who had no pieces of land. They asserted that local authorities were not allocating land fairly, and that the unfairness was racial rather than

gender based. My assumption is that they were not satisfied with the office allocation system when they said:

*The office did not see it fit to ask oSitshwana aba (a white farmer nearby, not his real name) to cut-off some parts of the big pieces of land they owned. We had to divide amongst ourselves the land that was not taken by the white farmers ... Some of the local authorities were biased, they gave their relatives more land and allocated big gardens for themselves yet they had other pieces of land (Zuziwe)*

My informants said that the women in the past were not owners of land and livestock in their families. Even that which was rightfully theirs, was not registered on a woman's name, unless her husband had died. My participants also said that landlessness and/or lack of ownership of resources was not unique to women: there were some men who were household heads who also did not own land, livestock "not even a chicken". This was followed by laughter. On the death of the husband, a married women in many cases inherited all that was her husband's. The wealth was not automatically transferred to their sons but the sons would inherit after their mother had died, they said. All those who were not married by implication did not stand a chance of being owners at all. What could not be denied was that in the past (as in the present), most male children were the second in line in the hierarchy of ownership in families. These women also kept speaking about their sons, not their children, boys and girls, as their heirs. I wondered what was likely to happen in a family with girls only, but I did not get there.

However I understand their argument about some sense of indirect ownership entrenched in the family relationship between the father/mother, husband/wife

and the children. This could explain why the women were not anxious about personal land or livestock ownership, because they were secure in the knowledge that they were second in line in the hierarchy of ownership. Access, rather than ownership was an issue. That they had to wait until the male owner died did not seem to be a problem to them.

*Livestock was not registered in my name but between me and my husband there was an understanding that those cattle, sheep or goats that my father gave to me when I got married to him remained mine (Nokholeji) ... I could hire someone to either build me another house or give him a sheep in return (Nositshilo)... however my livestock could not be used to perform rituals in that family (Nomvula)*

By implication this woman had had substantial power to hire people for labour in field work, she could take a goat without having to ask the man for permission; the very fact that she could decide to build another house, somehow suggests indirect ownership, or influence over resources. What remains unclear is whether a woman could take any animal irrespective of whether it was owned by the husband or wife. I understood the assertion of verbal agreements or understandings versus "legal" written documents, because of the culture they came from. I think that one of the reasons was that in the first half of the twentieth century, many Africans could not read or write, and therefore would not be able to sign a document, hence verbal agreements carried substantial authority. Legitimacy seems to have been based on cooperation and trust rather than written documentation.

Another issue that my informants highlighted was power imbalances besides those related to ownership. This is related to ownership and use of resources like livestock. This gender imbalance of power in the use of livestock is culturally and/or traditionally linked. Livestock owned by women, like cattle and goats for instance, could be sold in exchange for something or services, could be slaughtered for meat or could be a tribute in a traditional practice “*ukulobolelana*”<sup>21</sup>. However women’s cattle and goats could not perform an important cultural ritual in that family, like “*imbeleko*”<sup>22</sup> they said. So perhaps, women lost interest in ownership of resources such as livestock, maybe because these animals had very little cultural power attached to them by virtue of their being “owned” by women. I think psychologically and practically, the reduction of value attached to livestock owned by women is both cultural and informed by the patriarchal divide. I think this is one of the reasons that made these women feel that having cattle as a woman was worthless because their value was less than those directly owned by males. What seems to have been a concern was getting access to other resources.

What seemed to have been important for my participants was being prepared to share the resources available between themselves and men, and being prepared to work the land for the sake of their children and families. The pride

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<sup>21</sup> Traditional bride introduction and welcome into the bridegroom's family.

<sup>22</sup> Animal slaughtered to introduce a newborn to the living and the ancestors.

they projected about themselves as rural women, their involvement in working the land, their potentials and abilities in doing as much as men, clearly reflected their commitment to food production. The systems set in place by their communities to access land and other resources available to all villagers did not seem to be construed as placing them in inferior positions.

In this chapter I discussed aspects of the experiences of the women of U-Mhlanga village in farming and subsistence agriculture up to the 1960s. From these women's discussions, I gathered the kinds of crops they specialized in and the livestock they had in that village. They also articulated with pride that they were self-sustaining, partly through sharecropping. What they also specified was that farming and food production was everybody's responsibility, women, men and children. Although these women did not explicitly deny men's status as superior to women's, it seemed to evoke very few negative feelings or impact when weighed against the family gains of women and men working together. They felt valued and appreciated as farmers, by their families and perceived themselves as farmers. That they communicated with men and could make decisions as well, made them *equals* and/or partners with men rather than *competitors*. Collectivism seems to have been the driving force that sustained rural African communities in the early to mid twentieth century. This was achieved through cooperation and respect. I also gathered from what they said "the more harvest and the better the quality the more pride the land-owner became" was what I would call *positive competition*.

In the next chapter, I shall present an analysis of factors they said contributed to the present situation, which looks completely different from the past. These women highlighted the change of situation as being the result of different factors over time, ranging from political, contextual, behavioural, economic and environmental. What follows are their ideas to explain their present farming and agricultural situation as stated at the beginning of this chapter.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE PAST AND PRESENT TIME, PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**

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This chapter explores the changing society into which the women of U-Mhlanga were born. It examines the implications of the social and economic experiences of these women after they have grown into adulthood. In it I shall try and bring forth what they testified to be the factors that contributed to the escalation of poverty and hunger in U-Mhlanga village in recent years. Many people in the village seemed to be getting food from the small towns around them, in Dordrecht and Indwe rather than growing it themselves, as they had in the old days. There is public transport to towns around them every day except for Sunday. A bus to Lady Frere, which is the office where the villagers pay tax, goes once a week. They buy food in these towns.

I asked what was in their fields and gardens at present, because I did not see much growing. About 90% of the fields were not cultivated, and I wanted them to feel free to tell me why there was very little in their fields. I asked them teasingly, saying that they should prepare me two provision baskets full of fresh maize, chicken, homemade samp, beans, wheat and any other thing that is fresh harvest. A chorus came, and there was moaning, groaning and

movements “*Hu-u asinanto asisalimi njengakuqala tu*”<sup>23</sup>. Even on an extremely small scale, people are struggling to do farming. The following sections are what they repeatedly indicated as the main causes of change from what they called “ better than the present times”. The reasons they said varied, and are social, economic and political. In this chapter I shall try to present these factors, which affected their farming and agriculture abilities negatively. One of the things they mentioned that brought about change in their lives was formal schooling.

## 4.1 SCHOOLING

It was in the late 1930’s and early 1940s, they claimed that things started to change. None of them was very clear about the underlying political reasons, but they said there was an increase of rural population, people coming from different places looking for space to build homes. This could have been the impact of the 1926 Land Reservation Act, but I have no evidence for this. They said before the war (must be World War II), more and more people were Christianized and more churches were built in the district, by Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian groupings to name a few. Christian children got new names like NomaRoma, NomaWesile, Mthetheli, Sikhumbuzo, Nontshumayelo and the like. Christianity brought *civilization* and that resulted in changes in rural life, for mission schools were also built in the same yards. Nonkomose explained it better:

*We were divided between amaggobhoka and amaqaba (those who were church goers and promoted schooling and those who were not interested*

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<sup>23</sup> O! no we have nothing, we are not cultivating land like we used to, not anymore.

in both). At the beginning, children would take turns between going to school, farming and looking after livestock. Many rural teachers understood this, as it was rural life. (A chorus alluded to the assertion), Yes, the teachers then understood ukubolekisana, mhh, mhh ewe nje<sup>24</sup>. (Zinyelwa continued): They would run their programs in such a way that children get released from schools during planting and harvest times. At a later stage attending school was given priority to family and community needs. Then how do we live, tell me? Siphile ngantoni, xelela mna?<sup>25</sup> How should these children live if they are not farming tell me. Books do not give one cattle. (laughter and additions). It is true, very true.

In the early days it seemed to have been a normal practice to have both boys and girls to help with planting, weeding and harvesting; they said they also did that while they were young. Children were however encouraged by their parents to go to school. This led to one controversial debate. One of my participants had been a teacher. She felt it had been necessary to send children to school for a better future while others argued strongly that schooling was bad because it did not teach their children farming but turned them into "amavile ezizintwezi".<sup>26</sup> My participants also claimed that their children, the boys particularly, preferred school to farming. Roux (1944) and Bozzoli (1991) agree that schooling tended to disorganize African family life and sometimes turned children against their parents. One of my informants (Zameka) explained why boys schooling impacted negatively on agricultural practices. She said:

*In our homes it is normal practice that the first thing in the morning a man or a boy would go and relieve himself by the kraal. In that way they would be able to see whether all goats, cattle and sheep were home. These*

<sup>24</sup> Taking turns going to school

<sup>25</sup> How do we survive without farming? you tell me.

<sup>26</sup> Lazy, useless, things.

*days our sons wake up in the morning, urinate against the wall, get into the house and wash, rush to school and come home hungry. (Laughter, then chorus) It is actually true, you know?*

There was much debate about the advantages and disadvantages of education. Some women said there were positive things about education, things like information acquisition, marketability of educated people; easier and healthier life lived by educated people (with me again cited as an example, having a car of my own etc, not knowing that it was hired). Some agreed but others argued that there needed to be a balance between schooling and the demands of their everyday lives. Zinyelwa contended in a shaking tone of voice:

*All I want to see happening is that my children and great grand children sustain their families. They need to take care of their livestock. We are African people; we perform rituals with our cattle and goats. If children concentrate on schooling only, our families will die and the nation will lose its dignity.*

According to my informants there has to be a balance between school education and community or family life. Yet it seems that there was great and fierce competition between schooling and farming. I gathered very little positive input about schooling. The teacher, who might have said good things about schooling, was unable to state how schooling benefited the communities of U-Mhlanga in relation to farming and agriculture. What these women clearly believed was that through prioritizing schooling, their children gradually lost interest in farming and agriculture. In the process, families and communities

lost generations of self-made potential farmers and agriculturalists. All of them said, “farming and agriculture, they were taught by their parents and relatives, not in school”.

The political reality about the South African education system throughout the twentieth century was that for many Africans there was little or nothing in the schooling system that built onto traditional or community knowledge. The commitment to keeping children in schools did not seem to benefit African people, according to my informants, and that is historical. What seemed to have been blamed on schooling by my informants is the long times that their children stayed in school which did not give the children the opportunity to learn subsistence agriculture and look after livestock. My participants felt that schooling deprived their children of learning from their parents so that these children and their grand children could continue to perform African cultural practices. “If children concentrate on schooling only, our families will die and the nation will lose its dignity.” What cannot be denied however is that the links to indigenous knowledge were rejected as primitive. Education for Africans at that time was for domestication not for empowerment: Roux (1944), Bradford (1982) Prinsloo and Breier (1996), and Bozzoli (1991) confirm the hidden agendas of education.

Formal education seemed to have had negative and positive impacts on the lives of my participants and their families. While some perceived education to be an advantage somehow others rejected the notion. The majority of my participants saw very few positive developments that happened in their lives as

a result of education. Some of them also argued that because of education, farming and subsistence agriculture were not prioritized. Schooling, they asserted, destroyed African systems based on cooperation and schooling promoted labour through a wage system, which was not familiar to Africans. What was familiar to them was collective work and willingness to assist each other at no cost. The following discussion presents my participants' perspectives on how family systems and structures around shared labour began to decay.

## **4.2 DISTORTION OF FAMILY SYSTEMS**

In the same way that formal schooling denied children training in subsistence farming, my participants argued that it drew them into a state of temptation and rejection of family value systems. From as early as some could remember, they said, their husbands and sons had to go to find jobs in the big cities because of drought and because they had to pay taxes as well as other reasons. To some, the hardest period began in the mid 1950's. About half of these women became quiet when I asked their opinions about their men having to go and seek jobs in the big cities. There were some contradictions arising from the fact that not all households needed to pay taxes for livestock and/or land, but droughts were a reality that affected everyone in the rural areas. As some said, their partners had to go and work in town because "our children were starving because of drought mainly". First (no year stated) it was African men mainly who went to find work either on the farms or big cities, and later women, particularly those who were household heads, or the first children in the family, they said.

My informants came out with strong accusations of working people who later adopted an *urban lifestyle*. They say these people had forgotten the purpose of going to the cities. They said:

*Lately working people do not care whether there is livestock or not, whether there is anything growing in the fields. Only when they are leaving you'll hear them asking: Oh! MaNgcwabe you do not have any chicken anymore, for provision mama?' You do not know whether this is done to make you feel guilty or what, mhh (Chorus, simultaneous voices) Guilty of what? No our time is over, it is their responsibility now to continue with farming, we are old (Chorus and laughter) can you imagine me holding a plough, No! No!. (Nomadla continues), You ask them to go feed the pigs they moan, to check your goats, they moan (Nomandla). Even those who are not employed do not care about farming, very few do care, most of them 'just roam around'. (Nokwayana) Maybe they thought they would be teachers like you (Nositshilo, pointing me, and there was laughter again)*

Later my participants came to an agreement that whether paid employment in the urban areas was for taxes or other reasons, it was not better than subsistence farming by any means. They also agreed that wage employment has age limits, whereas farming does not. In rural farming and subsistence work, as discussed in the previous chapter, they said, "everybody, young and old had something to do". It seems all people were valued for the contributions they made for the benefit of the family and other community people. It seems there was no age restriction and all work was done by individuals at any age. Looking after livestock, for example and working in the fields were valued. What is not clear is whether these tasks were seen as equal in value but it seems that all work was valued. I witnessed this when I was still organizing my participants.

I found an old woman (about 80+ years) called mamYira busy working one part of her garden. She told me that this small piece she had worked with her hand-hoe. The sun was baking but she was working out there in her garden.

*This is where I stretch my muscles. I still have a desire to grow things, pumpkins, beans, potatoes. (There were some potatoes growing, that I saw) This is where I spend the day, you cannot just sit inside the house like that, ... we were not raised like that.*

Some U-Mhlanga village women were still determined to cultivate land despite their age, on the other hand, with paid work, it seems age determines whether one gets a job or not, they said. In line with this, my participants pointed out that farming and agriculture does not end whereas paid employment comes to an end.

*Work is life my dear, if you do not want to work your children will starve, you work until you die (Nokwayana). ... No you do not understand, I mean as a farm worker the farmers would ask you to leave his farm once you get old and he replaces you with the young ones (Nokwenzani) Oh! you mean that? (Chorus)*

There was a controversial debate about whether people leaving for towns, or working in farms owned by white people were better off than those who depended on subsistence agriculture and farming particularly in rural villages. The perception that going to town was better was rejected strongly by those who lived and grew up in the village saying that they did not remember anyone getting rich from working either in the gold mines or on the white owned farms. One woman opposed this, claiming that one man from a farm by the name of Nongoloza "came out of a farm rich".

*He was coming from ngaphakathi and he was rich (Nositshilo). A strong rejection from a chorus) Compared to whom? To you? (Zuziwe). Or other farm workers? (Nokwayana). Compared to whom? (chorus) "makatsho" (she must say). He was not rich to the standards of the Ndamanes and Nqamanes who lived in this village (Zingiswa). Mh mmh, tell them (chorus).*

There was contradiction on how *richness* was measured, whether moral values were attached to the meaning of the word, because in the case of the man who was mentioned, some claimed that he did not accumulate his wealth while working on the farm but actually took away some livestock after a disagreement between him and the white farmer. "Theft is not good, no wonder these boys steal so much... they learnt it from ... (Zameka). No! no! please! Zameka" (Nomvula). Again the geographical area of growing up created a divide in my group. Because those who seem to have spent more time on the white owned farms were fewer, their voices seem to have been dominated by the big group who spoke from the villager perspective. Eventually on this point my participants came to an agreement that:

*Generally speaking, people do not get rich from working in the gold mines or in the farms (Zingiswa). True (chorus). Especially these days these boys come home by car, by the time they go back the so called car is standing motionless by my house, eventually it becomes a place for chicken to roost. They do groceries for a week and leave me with nothing. Instead I am left with embarrassment of keeping a "skoro-koro"<sup>27</sup> in my yard (Ntombizakhe).*

My participants seemed to suggest that those who go to the cities and neglect farming and subsistence agriculture, had nothing to fall back on when

employment came to an end. They said this is because employment has age restrictions whereas community farming and agriculture values individual contributions irrespective of age. Again they said that it cannot be proved that mine workers and/or farm workers got rich to the level or above that of the people they knew in that village. In other words my participants saw very little advantage in going to work in the cities in comparison with working the land. The worst disadvantages were seen as disrupting family systems and rural lifestyle in preference to urban lifestyle.

In the way my participants reflected on schooling it seemed to have prepared rural people for wage labour rather than imparting to them skills and expertise in farming. At the same time employment was not for life, it was time bound. Both schooling and wage labour seem to have contributed to the change of African status from wealthy or well-off peasantry to poor communities. Both entities seem to be political and economic in nature. Other fundamental factors which gradually changed things for the worse, were things beyond their control. These were cited as natural disasters resulting from bad weather, the very cold climate, droughts and heavy rainfalls. The next section focuses on such natural disasters.

#### **4.3 NATURAL DISASTER**

Natural disasters like droughts, hail storms, floods, snow and very cold weather were not uncommon in that area. My informants said that weather was an

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<sup>27</sup> An old car that can no longer be driven.

important element of their poverty. Sometimes farmers would not produce as much harvest as they wished to because of bad weather. Some of these times were worse than others.

My informants said that such weather does not give them the opportunity to plant wheat or maize because it either rained non-stop, or because it was extremely cold or there was drought. They said that this year (2002) in that region, it snowed twice and it was difficult to get anything planted even in the gardens. Cattle, sheep and goats had died, they said, and the few remaining were extremely thin. These animals needed to live on supplementary food, they said. That I did not doubt because I had witnessed it myself. I think 2002 was one of the worst years. The grass was hard and pale brown. A sheep I bought in preparation for my participants was very thin, fat had to be added and it had to be cooked longer, they said.

*It was never like this while we were young. There has been a time when harvest was not so good but nothing close to this. The weather has definitely changed. The cold and snow this year killed the few cattle, sheep and goats because we do not have feeding scheme nor safe places to keep and feed these animals in winter so as to save them from cold and hunger (Nositshilo). Some people keep their animals in the same huts they use because of cold. (Nomandla) You cannot even eat the dead animals, they are not edible, and you have to throw it away. It breaks your heart (Nompozolo). Mmh, mmh, ja (chorus).*

My participants also remembered some other times, more or less as bad as 2002. They mentioned a drought in the late 1940's, Zingiswa said "In 1949 and one in the very late 1960s". I guess these droughts affected different families differently, hence some could remember some and not the others. Hansen and McMillan (1986) describe some periods of drought and that such bad conditions occurred in 1940s, 1970 and 1980, the latter being the longest and most severe in this range (1981-1984). Hansen and McMillan support the assertion of the women of U-Mhlanga, highlighting a severe drought between 1981 and 1984; but Bradford (1983) recorded the drought that occurred between 1932 and 1936 as the worst in the history of South Africa. My informants said that bad weather forced the majority of the poorest in the village to go and seek employment particularly on nearby farms owned by white people or on the mines. Many of those who still had livestock opted to sell the animals at very low prices. Bradford (1983) supported by Marais (1998) and Lipton (1986) supports my participants' assertions about bad weather forcing many African farmers to seeking employment either on the farms or gold mines citing in particular the drought that occurred between 1932 and 1936 as the "one that turned African peasants into cheap wage labour" (Bradford 1983: 55; marais, 1998:10; Lipton, 1986: 88).

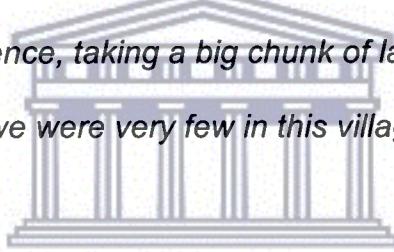
I then asked a question that raised emotions. It was an honest question. I wanted to know whether these droughts and hail storms affected those on *this side of the fence* only but not the white farmers. The difference between the white owned farms and African farms is visible and cannot be ignored. This

question brought us to an emotional discussion of the past governments and the white farmers.

#### **4.4 THE GOVERNMENT AND WHITE FARMERS**

Emotions ran high when I asked how these droughts affected African farmers in that area, because one cannot avoid seeing good looking cattle and sheep on the other side of the fence, on land run by white farmers. The women of U-Mhlanga took me back to the time and history of land and livestock dispossession.

*Do you see these farms oRorwaba, oBhota no Mepeni (Catherine, Botha and Rossouw) were not here when I was born. They came at broad daylight and put the fence, taking a big chunk of land. Nobody lost land at that time because we were very few in this village (Nomzi).*



With this question I had touched a nerve. The discussions were heated and this time they were full of bad memories unlike when they proudly remembered working for themselves and their families as farmers. I allowed them to speak haphazardly for a while because I felt I had touched the most sensitive ground. What came across clearly were the women's perceptions of the divide between white and African farmers. With that kind of atmosphere I felt at the same time unsure as to whether I had asked an acceptable question or not. After about three minutes or so, one lady (Zameka) said emotionally and loudly:

*Ndiphaph'amanzi nyana<sup>28</sup> Oh! bantu myekeni lo mnt'ana akazinto<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>28</sup> Pointing at , and asking my assistant researcher for water.

<sup>29</sup> O! people, let go of this child ( referring to me) she is ignorant.

*She will not understand, leave her big sister, she does not know anything, she is a child.*

My participants then went on to talk about white farmers being helped by the government, given money, crops and everything they needed after the droughts because “yayingurhulumente wabo kaloku”<sup>30</sup>. A chorus echoed her: “mh mh, ja, ewe, yayingurhumente wabo mmh”.<sup>31</sup> I asked for clarity and Nomzi said:

*In the past, (time not specified) nobody cared about us. I doubt if officials knew anything about U-Mhlanga or Lady Frere for that matter, except counting our livestock and forcing us to take our cattle to the dip. The government officials would come and assess the disaster caused by the droughts, snow, rain or something ... These officials would go and assess damage in small town and white farms but will never get here, nothing about us in the villages (Zameka) Who are we (Zingiswa) Yes! there are no people in the villages (Nomvula) ... but we are people just like white farmers, we are also farmers. So the government would give white farmers support but not us (Nomzi)*

After these deliberations there was dead silence.

This assertion about the support of the previous governments (from the 1920s to the 1990s I guess) to the white farmers is a political one and cannot be denied, as there is a wealth of literature to prove it. Bradford (1983), Bundy (1979), Budlender (1996) and Marais (1991) to mention a few, discuss it.

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<sup>30</sup> It was the white people's government.

<sup>31</sup> Yes it was their government.

The assertions made by these women were very intense. For a while I was taken aback. When I was silent they raised more issues about the government and the white farmers in explaining what they meant about the government only helping white people. They said that they are finding it difficult to explain to me that their husbands had to go and work for white farmers or in the gold mines.

*If the government cared about all of us we all could have been assisted just like white farmers. Please do not tell us that you do not know anything about African suffrage. [My insider status, being African was challenged]. When drought killed our cattle and destroyed our fields the government did not help us as it did with white farmers in this country there were no laws protecting Africans, their property and their land* (Nomvula).



There has been a great deal of research exploring the ways in which colonial segregation and apartheid disadvantaged Africans. Marais (1998) and Roux (1944) show that past governments assisted white farmers and capitalists to the detriment of Africans, by creating laws and policies that targeted the dispossessed peoples of Africa to make them even poorer.

Some of my informants who had experience working for the white farmers shared some bad experiences of being farm labourers with their children. They lived on the same farm for years and left the farm when old with very little to survive on or nothing at all. They had to endure this bad treatment because they were poor and had no other options, they said. Even those who tried to sharecrop with white farmers would not get a fair deal. Whether farm workers

lived all their lives on white farms, they would not be allowed to accumulate as much livestock or food as they could. There were restrictions, they said:

*In some cases farm workers would be woken up in the middle of the night and asked to leave just because their children attended school during oestyd (harvest time). You go and lay a charge the case is not taken seriously and you lose all that you worked for and promised to get (Nomarhe)... we were also not allowed to possess more than four cattle, no sheep, no goats but we were allowed to have chicken and one pig per household (Nondyebo).*

There is an abundance of literature that supports these strong assertions as indicated in the previous sections about having to work in unbearable conditions because of hunger and poverty (Bradford, 1983; Bundy, 1979; Bozzoli, 1991).

My informants had specific experiences of colonial segregation and apartheid that they remembered clearly. Although it was difficult for them to remember the exact dates, some like Nomvula (the teacher) reminded the others about 1910 when the Union of South Africa came into being, the 1913 Native Land Act and 1940 "the year of darkness". Zingiswa added 1948 is when the Boers took over. My participants also remembered an incident in their village particularly strongly. They said the government wanted to move the houses situated north and further south to form what they called a *trust* on the west, as it was claimed to be part of village "development" as informed by the local authorities. In their explanation of the *trust* they described how they were requested to reduce the number of animals so that each one had fewer, because they were going to live *in location like houses*. This was because it was said that the population had increased and space was needed for other people to stay. Because of the

population, grazing land had decreased, hence they had to cut down on livestock. Indeed they were expected to pay taxes for all the animals they had, including dogs.

*We learnt to defy the authorities. As for Matanzima when he came here in his black car, we told him that “we will not leave our land and our fathers’ graves, never”. Eventually he left us alone when he could not force us to move down there anymore. He put the wire-fence around our fields so as to protect our fields from wandering livestock and thieves. He became nice to us (Nomzi). Strange enough Matanzima and the Bhunga office in Lady Frere said nothing about the neighbouring white farmer’s big pieces of land and lots of livestock (Nomandla). They sell us sheep for Christmas (Nokwenzani).*

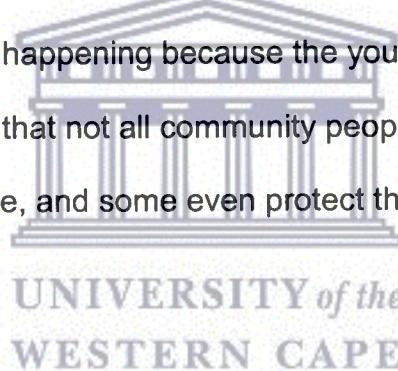
The issue raised in this session does not only reflect the political history of South African economics based on racial discrimination but also highlighted the racialization of poverty. That the government would only help white farmers after disasters and that the legal system would not prosecute white farmers for any wrong doings worsened the African’s life experiences. It was a depressing discussion.

I felt that all the problems I was given by my participants thus far were pointing to causative factors for their poverty which they had no power to change. I also needed more information on things I thought they could manage on their own without the government’s help, like vegetable gardens. I wanted to know why they would not continue growing food in their gardens. Some said they were old, (they are really old), but some highlighted a number of other reasons including demotivation, lack of family support and youth not interested in farming and subsistence agriculture. Multiplicity of problems was mentioned

such as arrogance of people in general, jealousy, individualism, violence and theft and such problems. They seem to be circumstantial changes of value systems. This brings us to the present situational problems of changing values.

#### **4.5 THE CHANGING VALUE SYSTEMS**

At present one of the major problems they said they were confronted with is violence. They said that they are trying to farm, as old as they are, to continue farming with chicken, goats and pigs, but it is difficult. They explained that there is arrogance, theft and violence which they believe is done mainly by the youth. They pointed out that it is those who came back from the cities in particular, because they cannot find jobs. They said that theft did not happen while they were young, these days it is happening because the young lack discipline and respect. They also asserted that not all community people are committed to ending violence in that village, and some even protect their children when punished.

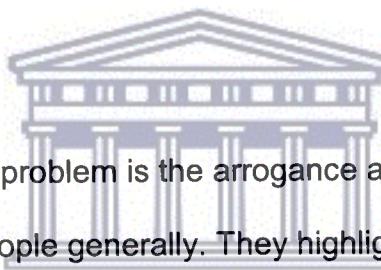


The discussions were hot and created some tensions. The tension was possibly because the present is much closer to them, it concerns some of their family members, mostly their children, their grandchildren or the children of their relatives. Such problems in most cases create divisions in the communities. My participants however recommended that something needs to be done to change the mind set of the young, to stop stealing, particularly those they said were unemployed and were roaming around. The youth they said need to learn not to take without permission and must learn to work hard, just as they did when they

were young. An old lady (Ntombizakhe) who looked troubled by stealing raised her voice above others and asked me directly:

*Am I making sense/saying something stupid my child? Please teach us you are the ones who have more knowledge about these things now. Something has to be done . We taught them good manners but I think they need something else, something better. They have to be kept busy, doing what? I do not know. Please help us you are coming from the government, the government should have some advice.*

I felt her despair and pain for a better society. I explained again that I was not coming from the government but from an institution of higher learning. I had come there to learn from their experience. My explanation was rejected, and I was a little shocked.



Another aspect of the same problem is the arrogance and lack of respect for life on the part of community people generally. They highlighted this arrogance as being a result of hunger and jealousy, and they called it "ubundlavini bokubhuqiswa kwamasimi<sup>32</sup>

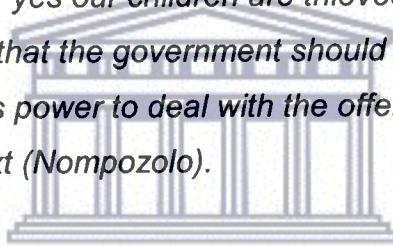
They explained that some people were feeding their cattle with the crops that others had struggled to grow. Sometimes people who have no cattle will hire a tractor to put maize or wheat in the soil. People would pray that the bad weather will save them and they will try to take care of their crops. However, some people for some reason lead their cattle in the middle of the night, cut the fence around the fields, and feed the cattle with the crops which were expected to feed and make change in some family lives. My participants said such

<sup>32</sup> Literally meaning hooliganism and arrogance aiming to destroy other people's crops at night.

arrogance is the worst thing happening in that village, and it has never happened before. The collective spirit seems to have broken down. I felt that their language to describe society is infused with their identity as farmers. They said that the people now are cruel, jealous that some manage to hire tractors to work their fields when others do not have money to do so.

They said (in different voices):

*It is not that we do not know who they are, it is our children<sup>33</sup> and our friends. The government does not protect the weak and the poor (Nompozolo). Hayi bo! What do you want the government to do? Your children cut the fence . Now you want the government to give you food in addition to the pension grant? Your children are thieves (Nonkomose). My children are not thieves (Notest) How do you know? Our children are thieves (chorus). Yes, yes our children are thieves (Nokwenzani). What we are suggesting is that the government should give our local community authorities power to deal with the offenders in the ways relevant to our context (Nompozolo).*



What seemed to be a bone of contention were the strategies to deal with the offenders. They claimed that some of the "new" structures set up by the new government "aziphucukanga".<sup>34</sup> Instead of dealing with offenders, they give more power to the offenders, hence these troubles continue. I asked them to explain how should the government help them to deal with arrogance and these criminal acts. Some said offenders should be sentenced to longer in jail, some said they should be beaten up, some said they should be asked to leave the village. The debate became more serious and tense. Some seemed to need to protect their children and grandchildren, while others wanted to see them

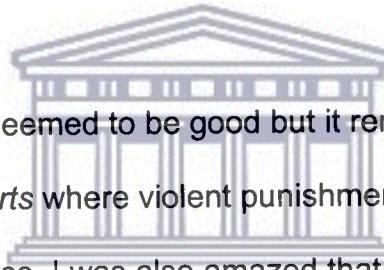
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<sup>33</sup> Children in a broad sense including grand-children

<sup>34</sup> They are not genuine

punished severely. Some of them were very quiet almost afraid as if I was about to pass a severe judgment. Eventually they supported each other on alternative punishment to jail.

*Jail does not teach discipline and good manners (Zinyelwa). If one is found letting his cattle feed in one's field, one of his cattle should be given to the victim or the offender should pay a heavy price close to an ox (Zuziwe). Yes, yes (Chorus). Yes, but not all victims have livestock, I think if it is youth found stealing or doing anything bad like that, they should be forced to work under strict guard to hand plough all elderly women 's gardens. In that way the punishment would benefit the people instead of going to jail and learning more criminal acts (Nomvula).*



The sound of the proposal seemed to be good but it reminded me of what was referred to as *kangaroo courts* where violent punishments were perceived to be a solution to stopping violence. I was also amazed that such acts of violence and lack of respect were taking place in rural villages too. The other element linked to arrogance they referred to as "*ukunyoluka*"<sup>35</sup>.

In the previous discussions I showed how the residents of that village seemed to have been enabled to survive by the communal life style. In the past these rural communities survived hunger and poverty through cooperation, trust and collectivism. But in the present communal life based on fairness, trust and mutual obligations seemed to be deteriorating and disappearing very fast. My participants saw the change as caused by a variety of factors.

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<sup>35</sup> individualism and greed

Some said it is due to population increase. They blamed it on people coming from urban areas, while some said people coming from the farms come with "labourer values". They think they are better farmers than those who lived all their lives in the villages. Some perceived individualism as coming from everything and that all people could be selfish sometimes. Some even brought out issues of selfishness and some children assuming automatic take over after the death of a male parent. They explained serious legal conflicts where there seemed to be misuse of power. They said that some local authorities (headmen, board members, local councillors as well) allocate themselves or their relatives big plots with huge gardens, so big that they could feed many families. In some cases, they said, these leaders would allocate land to people who are not living in rural areas nor interested in farming and agriculture.

Nomandla quoted one authority as saying:

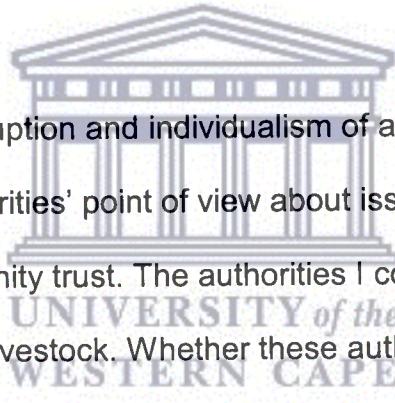
*My children will come back one day, I want all of them to build their houses around me, feed their children and their grand children, here in my father-land. I have to think about my children. That I am a board member does not mean I must throw my family in the bin, in fact I should start with my family ... (another voice) Ja, it is true, they like to start with themselves ...like, that councillor who has forgotten about the people who elected her*

My informants also pointed out something about weak local or community authorities. They accused some of these authorities of not being able to address the needs of the people or give fair judgments. In most cases they said,

such uncertainty occurs when the authority is either related to the accused or the accused is coming from a well-known or well-off family. There were some contradictions about this issue. Some felt the situation is bad because of dishonest villagers not the authorities.

*lish! suka wethu<sup>36</sup> Nokwayana! It is us who are not honest. You want to subject the authorities to danger?. These hooligans are dangerous, they can stab you to death. When the authorities pass a fair judgment we blame them for being hard on these boys (Nomarhe). Or bail our children out if arrested, to come and commit more crime (Zameka). But authorities too are very fair with the thieves, you cannot deny that*

(Nomarhe)



The discussions about corruption and individualism of authorities went on. One would like to hear the authorities' point of view about issues concerning their responsibilities and community trust. The authorities I consulted do have visible gardens, kraals and some livestock. Whether these authorities allocated themselves these properties, I did not ask. What seems to be a reality is the population growth in relation to land. This brings us to one last issue which they said has resulted in their fields not being cultivated: their children, the sons particularly, who seem to have lost interest in working the land and farming.

#### **4.6 GENERATION GAPS AND CONFLICTING INTERESTS**

It is hard to deny that there is a difference between rural and urban life styles. Rural life, in my understanding, is mainly based on the ability to work the land,

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<sup>36</sup> O please! Leave us alone

farm and the like. In most cases, rural life is lived by people in villages, and farms. The urban life style on the other hand is basically living in the cities and or small towns. The urban areas specialize in markets, commodification of goods and wage labour as a means of survival. For me both worlds have advantages and disadvantages. However, contradictions arise when one group undermines the other as being a problem.

Earlier on my participants had indicated that they had encouraged their children to go to school. The impact was that these children missed out learning the skill to farm and land cultivation. Schooling they said, prepared their children for wage work, and ignored farming. "Schooling was bad because it did not teach our children farming but turned them into lazy, useless, things "*ngamavile ezizintwezi*<sup>37</sup>. My participants argued that the children perceived schooling as "lighter work " compared to farming hence the children opted to schooling.

In addition to this, my participants complained that their sons had become involved with town women and this is one of the reasons that their sons had lost interest in farming. My participants voiced their reservations about "town girls" saying that town girls do not know and have no interest in rural life.

*Town girls have different values and norms, which are not rurally based. Sometimes they do not even want to learn rural culture or purposely defy it. In our times we would be left behind while our husbands went to the gold mines. Why should one be her husband's purse? What will happen if he dies in the gold mines, how would you raise your children? If you want to build your household you had to do everything: raising children, growing crops and farming (Nositshilo).*

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<sup>37</sup> These children (boys mainly) are lazy

Earlier on however, my participants had indicated that their sons were lazy even to go to the kraal. When they had no jobs they would roam around instead of working the land and looking after livestock. This notion left me unclear as to who wants to be whose "purse".<sup>38</sup> What I wanted to know was whether it was only young women and men who were tempted to go to the cities, and whether only urban girls were to blame, or whether urban men were also an issue.. There were different responses to this issue. It is not clear therefore whether the problem of deserting the rural area in preference for urban life is caused by getting involved with "town girls"; or is it rural men themselves who prefer town life; or have rural men and women lost interest in farming, or it is all of the above. Trying to draw threads together is not at this stage possible, and I do not have answers to all these questions?



In this chapter I have presented the views of the women of U-Mhlanga village on the changes they have experienced in the resent times; the barriers to their efforts to continue with farming and subsistence agriculture. Many of the reasons they gave were social, economic and political. The political and economic reasons for their poverty, they said, were based on discrimination against subsistence farmers who were mainly African, and support of commercial farmers who were mainly white. This discrimination was founded on colonial and apartheid ideologies of segregation and racial discrimination. This, they said, is reflected in the acts of the past governments assisting white farmers after natural disasters like droughts, while on the other hand neglecting the subsistence farmers. One other socio-political factor they identified as

contributing to the present situation is schooling which their children had to attend, which seemed to have disrupted their agricultural systems. In addition, the pressure on their men and young, to go to the cities seeking jobs resulted in some of these men and boys losing interest in farming. Lastly my participants said that in that village at present, they are faced with social problems that discourage farming and subsistence agriculture. They cited things like theft, arrogance and jealousy which results in division and individualism in the community as opposed to the cooperation and communal life they used to live earlier in the twentieth century.



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<sup>38</sup> Literally meaning being in one's pocket, going wherever he is going.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROSPECTS**

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While acknowledging the limitations of a small study like this, this chapter presents my participants' recommendations in relation to the problems that the women of U-Mhlanga village experience in farming and subsistence agriculture at present. It also provides development indicators for what they see as future prospects. Within this chapter I shall also give conclusions on my analysis of the women's food production, farming and subsistence agriculture practices, and the present lessons learnt from the findings.

### **5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROSPECTS**

U-Mhlanga village women still hope that the present situation can be changed for the better. In the recommendations they put forward, my participants claimed that possible ways of living without poverty and hunger still exist. As subsistence farmers they said for centuries farming and subsistence agriculture has been the only way of life that they knew of in that village and still recommend subsistence agriculture.

The first recommendation related to access to resources such as land, and equipment to work the land. My participants said that although access to resources was not a problem in the past, it is now because of the greed, arrogance and selfishness mentioned in the previous chapter. They therefore recommend "new ways of land allocation that would benefit the communities".

They said that it would be appreciated if “all people must try and work together like before *bethuna*.<sup>39</sup> So the government officials, development workers and local authorities should work with local communities and families. This initiative they said, might bring back cooperation and harmony in that village.

Linked to the land allocation issue, my participants had a special recommendation and plea directed to the government. They said that the government should act now and try and resolve the issue of land redistribution. They made an example about two neighbouring white farmers who now have resorted to cattle farming instead of mixed farming, and whom they said now have “unused” land which was previously used for growing crops like wheat, wheat-germ, lucern, maize and the like. Such land, they said could be allocated to other people who want to do “serious land cultivation and farming like the old white farmers did”. Some suggested that previous farm workers were the group that could best benefit from such a scheme, but others rejected the notion, saying that it is dividing. On this particular point, some unpleasant divisive comments were passed, like “farm labourers turning into farm owners”. However a positive indicator they came up with was that many people in that village could own land. “All households will have a piece of land to cultivate irrespective of one’s relationship with local authorities”.

My participants pointed to another way in which they said they would need the government’s support: this is to engage village people in water works programmes for irrigation in the villages so as to take care of the times of

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<sup>39</sup> Good people

droughts. They complained that the weather has changed. If the crops survive all other problems, it gets destroyed by very cold dew, snow or drought. Irrigation schemes could help them to bring in a better harvest.

Another important issue they raised is related to natural disasters. They said that subsistence farmers cultivate the land through manual work using oxen spans and human labour. As a result of cold weathers like snow, the animals for their spans die and “without cattle there is no food”. They also said that the money they earn from government grants is not enough for many of them to hire tractors to cultivate the land “*ukuvumbulula nje umhlaba, sizenzele emva koko*”<sup>40</sup>. They said that maybe some outsiders can facilitate the process of collecting money from their grants to hire the tractors to cultivate their fields. This issue raised difference of interests and contradictions. However, they seemed to be committed to making some efforts to hire tractors but they seemed scared to trust local people with their money.

*Money should be collected, bit by bit, so as to hire the tractors, that we can do as village people (Nonkomose). Those should be trustworthy people (Zameka). Not anyone from the local people (Nomvula). True, not anyone from U-Mhlanga (chorus). Someone from the government (Zinyelwa). No! Yes (different voices).*

I did not make a follow up as to what was the criteria they were going to use to test ‘trustworthy’. What was important was the recommendation about other ways of land cultivation other than oxen span, and that was identified as using tractors.

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<sup>40</sup> Initial use of tractors in land preparation at least followed by manual

The last recommendation my participants made depended on the local authorities of their village. They said that local authorities should invite knowledgeable people to come to the village and teach their children the advantages of farming. This they said would be an advantage if all youth were taught about farming and agriculture from an early age. Schools too should be involved in such programmes, they said, so that children see parents and teachers working together. My participants suggested that all people should try to work together and learn to have respect for decisions made by the community.

There were other two points which were raised by my participants but which were left unattended. One is the issue related to community leaders who are seen as "unfair and/ or weak". My participants could not come to an agreement as to how one could identify how fair/unfair or weak/strong a person will be before s/he is supported into a position of power. Also it was difficult to state what fairness or unfairness is. It was the same with whether the authority would be weak or strong.

The second point was about parents' role in motivating their children to start appreciating what their parents have been doing. They felt paralyzed, desperate and helpless.

*Our children do not listen to us. We are old and sometimes they make it as if we are completely insane. Am I making sense, my child?*  
*(Ntombizakhe). It would be better if from here you could call a meeting*

*for our children and their children and talk about farming and agriculture...(Nositshilo).*

Linked to the recommendations are what they perceived to be the measures of successful efforts in the future prospects for farming and subsistence agriculture in that district. My participants said that self-reliance through production of their own food like in the past seem to be an alternative measure of their future farming development.

They said that an overall positive indicator would be independence from government (child) grants and feeding schemes through production of their own food. "We told you, we never knew that we could buy or sell food ..." They said that if they can start producing their own food then the community members will start raising their children through their own efforts not through government child grants. By doing this, they will not only be sustaining themselves but also contributing to the economy of the country. "The government could save the child grant money for something else (Nomvula) ... For tractors maybe" (another voice). They said that there may be some things which they may not be able to do without at present, but would like a situation where starvation would come to an end.

My participants brought in another point that they claimed was another highlight of self-reliance they said that it motivates people to do things for themselves, in other words it creates confidence. Communities in the past, they said, were

independent and built community churches and schools sometimes. They said other things like these undertakings are possible and could be done by communities. "Self-reliant communities can do things themselves, *abahlupheki kaloku*<sup>41</sup>.

They also said that in the past, good harvests were not brought about by hard work only, people also had good moral values, respect, cooperation and good will. "If people could be motivated to work hard, they might be busy and find no time to do crime, particularly here in rural areas, we will live in harmony again" (Nomvula).

This chapter presented the recommendations of the U-Mhlanga village women in relation to the future needs for farming and subsistence agriculture. Although my participants had experienced difficulties mostly towards the end of the twentieth century, many had not stopped farming and growing crops to feed their families. They still believe that producing their own food is the only way to curb poverty and hunger. For them, wealth is not measured in terms of money but in having livestock, cultivating the land and getting a good harvest. My participants said that the revival of farming and subsistence agriculture in that district would bring back life to many. Also presented in this chapter is my participant's arguments as motivations for why they should be helped to start farming again. They have given elements of things that they thought would

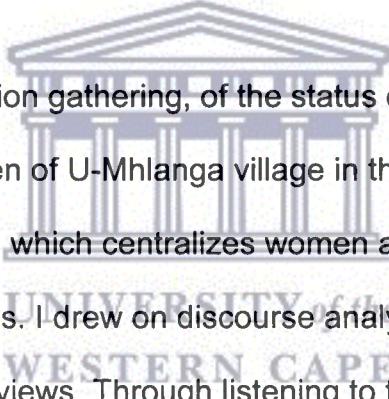
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<sup>41</sup> they are not only about their survival.

provide some measures for success of their development, which seem to be based on what they perceived as their successes in the past.

Lastly, the recommendations they made to address poverty and hunger they are facing at present are open, in the sense that they invite other development agents: educators, development workers and government, to bring their expertise, in order to the benefit of the villagers. I was impressed by their recommendations which projected some willingness to do what they believed could help them to fight poverty and hunger.

## 5.2 CONCLUSION



In the process of information gathering, of the status of farming and subsistence agriculture from the women of U-Mhlanga village in the Eastern Cape, I have taken a feminist approach which centralizes women and encourages them to share their life experiences. I drew on discourse analysis in order to understand their construction of their views. Through listening to the elderly women of U-Mhlanga village narrating their farming life experiences I found that they construct their experiences around two major narratives: the “good” and the “bad” times. They centered the “good times” around the period between 1900 and 1950 and saw the “bad times” starting from the 1960s and continuing to date. They characterized these “good times” as more than just individual survival; it involved the whole household, the neighbours and the larger community. In a process of conducting food production collectivism, based on cooperation and respect for life was key. They projected the later years as

characterized by hunger and, poverty, individualism, violence and racial discrimination against them (women and men).

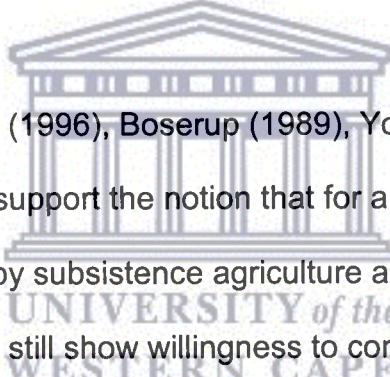
My participants pointed out from the onset that there was no difference in farming opportunities between themselves as women and male farmers. They also highlighted, however, that in the Eastern Cape, in that village particularly, there have been people (African) who were better-off than others in terms of resource ownership.

The findings supported what Bundy (1979) had said about the poverty of the Eastern Cape being the product mainly of its political history. I embarked on this research holding an assumption that villagers, women in particular, were lacking in initiative and creativity to use the soil or land around them, or were being "lazy". Through speaking with the women of U-Mhlanga village, my assumptions were changed. I learnt that early in the twentieth century, the communities of the Eastern Cape were independent and confident farmers. They stated that the shift from being wealthy peasants to poor labourer status is the result of social, political and economic factors, as well as environmental issues, which are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

My findings confirmed that subsistence agriculture has enabled rural communities to survive. However racialization of access to resources resulted in Africans, irrespective of sex, remaining poor and many families hungry. Their construction of gender within the farming context contradicts the issue raised in some of the literature. The study highlights the racial/ethnic face of poverty

rather than that of gender. Bundy (1986) and Budlender (1996) support the assertion that it is rural African people who are poor in South Africa, of whom the majority are African rural women. They referred to both males and females as farmers.

Another issue that came out of the findings was that the women of U-Mhlanga village characterized themselves as independent in the past. Through farming and subsistence agricultural efforts, they recognized that they were contributing to the country's economy directly or indirectly, in that they were not dependent on government grants. This to me is one of the most significant lessons that I learnt from my participants and about this group of rural people.



Bundy (1986), Budlender (1996), Boserup (1989), Young (1993) and Bozzoli (1991) and many others support the notion that for a very long time rural people were enabled to survive by subsistence agriculture and farming. I found that this group of rural people still show willingness to continue farming, despite considerable difficulties. In order to facilitate this my participants recommended collective efforts by the government, development workers, and local authorities to develop and systems and projects in motion to develop what is in effect a potential source of livelihood for rural communities.

The research participants are not simply resisting change or wanting to return to old times. They identified that new knowledge and skills would need to be developed in rural areas, but they should be relevant and benefit rural

communities specifically. Verhelst (1987: 25) on this notion also rejects development that does not benefit the rural people that it is aimed for.

Although the women of U-Mhlanga highlighted problems in land allocations, it seems that they place priority on small initiatives like producing food for themselves, and do not even talk about commercial agriculture. I think they have no expertise in large-scale farming and commercial agriculture and such expertise people could be learned over time. Opening up opportunities to potentially small initiatives could lead to a revolution of small-scale farmers giving birth to small-scale commercial farmers. Martinussen (1997) thinks it is possible to gradually develop small farmers into co-operations and commercial farmers. For this reason I think subsistence farmers should be assisted because they have a significant role in society as indicated above. Subsistence farmers, women in particular, could be developed into self-sustaining farmers because they have skills and expertise in farming, particularly under difficult conditions. It has to be these communities who identify their own needs, state how they should be assisted, and start doing things themselves. In so doing they would gain confidence and strengthen their skills.

One challenge that lies ahead however, arises from differences of interests between young and elderly people. If farming and subsistence agriculture is an important aspect to decrease poverty and hunger, the challenge is to develop common ground on how it should be done in a way that will attract the younger generations too.

In conclusion, an important point that arises from this research is that poverty is political, social and economical in its nature. Most of those who are poor and hungry concentrate their potential on day to day survival. In most cases their efforts are not acknowledged or recognized. Unless poverty is addressed holistically by addressing all its root causes some communities will remain starving. Agricultural food production is an obvious strategy for rural African women. Poverty and hunger affect society at large as it is the case in U-Mhlanga village where violence and arrogance have superceded respect and cooperation. I think that until access to food is acknowledged as a human right, the factors contributing to poverty will be superficially addressed and poverty eradication will seem impossible.



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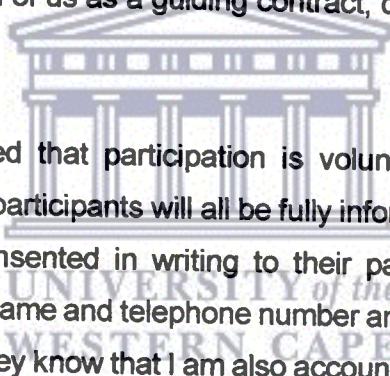
WESTERN CAPE

## **APPENDIX A**

### **ETHICAL STATEMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT**

My understanding of community entry processes is that there are local authorities be it traditional or civics. I will contact the local authorities in U-Mhlanga village and write a letter asking permission to conduct the study with women in that village.

Once I have permission I will make contact with women of the village and explain that their identities and inputs will be protected by means of a code of ethics or a code of conduct. The code of conduct will stipulate confidentiality in that nobody (assistant researcher included) will be allowed to take out of that room what will be discussed by the group. It will also be stated clearly that discussions and deliberations in that room are owned by all of us and no one person or group should make a claim on them, except me as the researcher because I will be using the discussions for study analysis. The code of conduct will be signed by all of us as a guiding contract, during and after the research process.



Participants will be informed that participation is voluntary and that there are no incentives of any kind. The participants will all be fully informed about what they will be asked to do, and have consented in writing to their participation. I will give each participant my supervisor's name and telephone number and the name of the institution I am registered with so that they know that I am also accountable for anything I say or do with them. In addition to this, the participants will also be made aware of their right to withdraw their participation should they wish to do so, however they will still have to respect the privacy of the research proceedings.

I will assure them about the safety of the tapes, that will keep in a safe lock-up place. I will also do transcriptions myself. The results of the research findings will be shared with the participants on request but cannot be used as reference if not published.

## **APPENDIX B1**

### **ISIVUMELWANO**

Mna Nomvuyo Dayile, ongumfundi kwicandelo leNtlalo nophuhliso (ISD) kwisikolo semfundo ephakamileyo I-University of the Western Cape (UWC) ndeza uphando ngeendlela-ndlela amakhosikazi aziphilisa ngayo wona neentsapho zawo. Lemfuna -lwazi imalunga nezinto ezisetyenziswa ngamakhosikazi ekuveliseni zonke iintlobo zokutya nendlela eziveliswa ngayo izixhobo nendawo ezisetyenziswayo ukuvelisa ukutya. Ndenza oluphando phantsi koGqirha Lindsay Clowes okwase UWC.

Esi sisivumelwano phakathi kwam nenkosokazi nganye eyakuthatha inxaxheba emva kokuyifundela nokuyicacisela ngenjongo yalemfunalwazi.

Mna.....

Ndiyazithandela ukuthatha inxaxheba kuphando oluzakwenziwa ngu Nomvuyo Dayile. Ndiyazi ukuba:

- Ndingaroxa nanini na ndithanda ngaphandle kwesohlwayo
- Izinto eziyakuxoxwa kolophando ziyakuba zezasekhusini zaziwe ngabalapho kuphela
- Amagama abo bayakuthatha inxaxheba nezinto abaya kuzithetha ziyakukhuseleka
- Lingxoxo eziya kurekhodishwa ziyakunqatyiswa ukuze kungabikho bani uchaphazelekayo.
- Akukho ntlawulo, yimfunalwazi nje.

Isandla sothatha inxaxheba..... Umhla: 20 / 09/2002

Isandla sownenza uphando .....Umhla 20/09/2002

Indawo : **U-MHLANGA VILLAGE, LADY FRERE, EC**

## **APPENDIX B2**

### **CONTRACT STATEMENT**

I Nomvuyo Dayile, a Masters student in the Institute for Social Development at the University of the Western Cape, under the supervision of Dr Lindsay Clowes will be conducting a research study with women of U-Mhlanya village in the Eastern Cape. The aim of the study is to explore aspects of strategies available to and used by these women in food production. I am interested in what women farmers have to say about themselves as 'farmers' and what they think this means in terms of women's claims upon resources, training services and other farming facilities.

I.....

Agree to participate in focus group interviewees by Nomvuyo Dayile. I understand that:

- I can withdraw my participation whenever I want to and that no punishment will be forthcoming.
- Everything that will be discussed in the focus group interviewees will be confidential.
- Participants names will be confidential
- Tapes with interviewee deliberations will be confidential.
- Participation is voluntary and no payment will given in return.

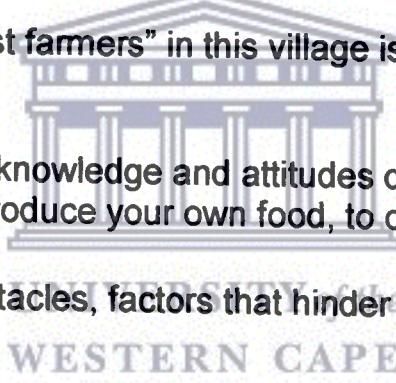
Participant Signature..... Date:20 / 09/2002

Researcher Signature.....Date...20/09/2002

Place: **U-MHLANGA VILLAGE, LADY FRERE, EC**

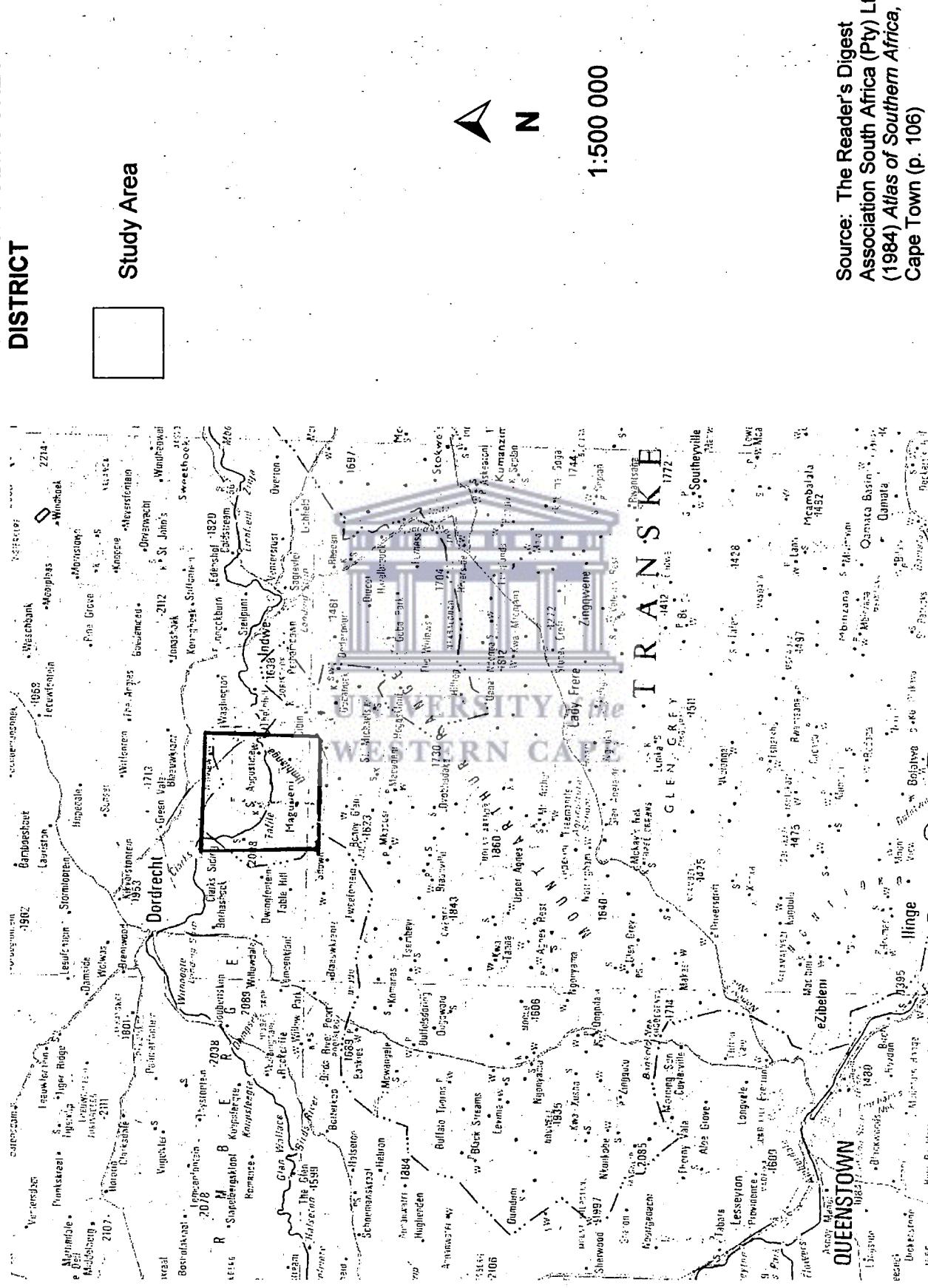
## **APPENDIX C**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS**

1. What kinds of foods do you have?
2. What kinds of crops do you cultivate, grow and produce?
3. For what purpose are the main crops produced?  
(for consumption, for the market or both)
4. Do you have enough resources, (if not, why not) explain
  - (i) land,
  - (ii) water
  - (iii) other necessary equipment for farming
5. How and from where did you learn farming?
6. Who are the “best farmers” in this village is it men or women?  
Why?
7. How much skills, knowledge and attitudes do you have that motivate you to produce your own food, to continue farming?
8. Are there any obstacles, factors that hinder you to excel in this field?  

9. What have you done about these obstacles so far?  
(their coping mechanism and strategies to improve the situation)
10. Do you have recommendations for the identified problems?  
(where, how do they think should be done to change the situation, by who)
11. What yardsticks would you use to measure the improvement from where you are now to where you would like to be in the future?
12. Do you think your farming contributing to social and economic development in this village and/or elsewhere in this country, how?

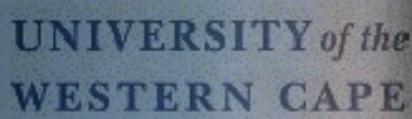
## **APPENDIX D**

**UMHLANGA: GLEN GREY  
DISTRICT**



Source: The Reader's Digest Association South Africa (Pty) Ltd (1984) *Atlas of Southern Africa*, Cape Town (P. 106)

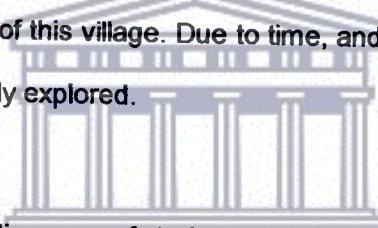
## APPENDIX E



## **APPENDIX F**

### **SOME QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

I found that my study was limited in that it did not cover the history of the district or that of the village. This issue kept coming in the form of comparisons "between them as African farmers/white farmers" I had to listen more to this issue, particularly when we were dealing with problems encountered in farming in that area. One old woman (Nomzi) asserted that after the War (she did not specify which war), that area was given over to black people who took part in the war. However before that, the area belonged to no one in particular. This elderly participant also claimed that the whole area was allocated to for African people before some white farmers decided to put up a fence, cutting some parts of the land for themselves. This assertion is substantiated by the fact that there are white farmers who have big pieces of land, forming the borders on the northeast and south of this village. Due to time, and the limitations of this study, this history, has not been fully explored.



What I also found an interesting area of study, which has not been fully investigated, was the difficulty posed by the generation gap. I think it would need a lot of effort to try and close the gap in relation to needs. The generation gap reflect conflict of interests between the youth and elderly people and how issues should be dealt with in a holistic way. Linked to this, it might also be interesting to have the similar study done with the youth and compare rural (village) life paradigm shifts.

Thirdly, one other area for further investigation might be district and/or village needs analysis, specific to poverty eradication. Research could undertake on the kinds of things they need to learn based on the skills they have, so as to project advantages of and disadvantages of community development options to U-Mhlanga farmers.