RELOCATION IN QWAQWA, BETTERMENT IN MATATIELE:
RESOURCES AND RESPONSES

by

Andrew D Spiegel and John S Sharp

I Introduction

In an earlier paper we compared the consequences of different forms of relocation for people's vulnerability to impoverishment in a Transkeian betterment village (in Matatiele district) and in a Qwaqwa closer settlement. (1) It was asserted that detailed comparative work, dealing with variations within and between regions in the periphery, is important because it provides greater insight into people's diverse experiences of the continuing development of capitalism in South Africa and of the unfolding complexity resulting from the single policy of separate development; it also gives a clearer perspective into the nature of people's responses to these factors. This paper focuses on one particular set of responses, namely the ways in which people deal with interruptions in, or the ending of, flows of income to domestic groups. There are significant differences between Matatiele and Qwaqwa in this respect, and the comparison between these areas illuminates the particular responses in each area in a way which, as we demonstrate below, would not have resulted if they had been dealt with separately.

The main locus for the organization of consumption based on remitted income is, in all labour-supplying areas in southern Africa, the household: a localized group of co-residents plus their associated (but absent) wage earners. Murray has offered a definition of household which accords with the above, but is entirely functionalist. For him, the household is the group in which are concentrated flows of income and expenditure. (2) From this basis, Murray proceeded to examine the impact of labour migration on the household in Lesotho, also using the common distinction between de jure and de facto household composition but explicitly excluding any normative component in his definition of the de jure household. (3) Although he noted a considerable degree of change in household compositions over time, his insistence that there was no normative component to the term de jure meant that he was unable to explain the significance of these changes. (4) The result was that he was forced to deal with networks of relationships amongst households only by considering the functionality of such relationships. (5)

The present discussion is based on research which devoted considerable attention to the problem of "household" in the two areas. Fieldwork was done with the explicit intention of recording changes in household composition over a period of time. The same residential sites in each area were thus revisited on several occasions.

In both Matatiele and Qwaqwa we found considerable movement of people into and out of particular households over time, and much of this movement was consequent upon fluctuations in flows of income to domestic groups. In Matatiele there was a
great deal of movement of people between households in the same locality. Moreover, one or two households actually dissolved in the course of fieldwork as a result of the ending of the flow of their domestic income and the dispersal of their members. (6) But, despite this, it was clear that the notion of "household" and of local networks of kinship remained of crucial importance to all the people involved. The movement of people into other households had the added effect of reinforcing the perceived efficacy of these relationships.

In Qwaqwa, on the other hand, there was hardly any movement of people between households within the local area; on the contrary, what dispersal there was tended to be out of the immediate locality and, indeed, across the borders of the bantustan. There were also many instances where people made it clear that the members of their specific households needed to get out of their impoverished surroundings but were unable to do so. (7) In these circumstances, as we argue below, both dispersals of and inabilities to disperse kin tended to undermine the significance for people of the notion of inter-household networks (of kinship or neighbourliness), and indeed of household itself.

II Locating the Differences between Matatiele and Qwaqwa

The most obvious differences between the two areas is the extent of local resources - specifically, but not exclusively, for agriculture. Matatiele has, in relative terms, extensive arable and pasture lands available to its inhabitants; Qwaqwa does not. But the clarity with which this difference can be seen directs attention away from another, more important point of difference, namely the characteristics of the wage labour market in each area.

The people of Matatiele have a long history of involvement, since the nineteenth century, in the industrial and commercial wage labour market. The district's population has been relatively stable, with only internally generated growth and virtually no relocation from the common area. (8) Qwaqwa, by contrast, is an area of mass relocation which began in the 1970s, the vast majority of relocated people coming from white-owned farms in the Orange Free State where they had only limited experience of labour migration and no experience of the conditions of work-seeking through the bantustan system of labour bureaux. (9) Since arriving in Qwaqwa, moreover, their experiences have been of the corruption and inefficiencies of the labour bureau system rather than of success in finding secure jobs.

Today, many workers from Matatiele, particularly men, have relatively secure jobs in industry or commerce. Many of the district's workers have qualified for "permanent" urban residential rights, although they continue to visit the district regularly and to remit to kin in the district. These people provide contacts for oscillating migrants from the district to obtain employment in jobs which are better than those offered, when there are requisitions at all, through the labour bureau system. Many Matatiele migrants also work on the mines, their numbers having increased in the mid-1970s when the Chamber of Mines' labour recruiting arm, TEBA, stepped up recruitment in the Transkei in order to minimise reliance on workers from Malawi and Mozambique. (10)

TEBA recruits relatively few workers from Qwaqwa, however, because recruitment from its so-called "Sotho area" (i.e. Maseru, Thaba 'Nchu, Bloemfontein and Qwaqwa) was rationalised in 1980 to give Lesotho workers, who were assumed to be "better miners", the lion's share of the opportunities (although these have declined in total since then). (11) In both areas, opportunities for employment in other sectors, available via requisitions or direct recruitment, are similarly undesirable - poorly paid and insecure - and, characteristically, jobs which residents of the common area will not do. The difference between the areas is that most Matatiele
workers avoid such jobs most of the time, whereas most Qwaqwa workers are forced to take them, because, given the factors mentioned above, this is the only option they have.

The implications of these differences are that, on average, Matatiele workers earn and remit larger amounts and remit more regularly than do Qwaqwa workers. This is because Matatiele workers have greater security of employment: many middle-aged men in the area reported that they had worked continuously for one employer for the duration of their working lives. (12) By definition, this is not true of any workers from Qwaqwa’s closer settlements. Indeed, ever since their relocation, most workers in Qwaqwa have experienced recurrent unemployment interspersed with a succession of low-paid jobs.

Many households in Matatiele have a more reliable flow of income over time than those in Qwaqwa. Moreover, this is not used simply for consumption purposes, as is mainly the case in Qwaqwa. Agricultural and other local production activities are still possible in Matatiele, and many households invest some of their returns from migrant labour in these.

Our work in Matatiele concentrated on a betterment area in which some 40 per cent of the households had no formal rights to arable land in 1982. But, despite this, betterment has not had the effect of depriving large numbers of people of access to land: many have indirect access via a variety of inter-household links. (13) It is important to stress, however, that this situation is not static: in the particular area where we worked, betterment - implemented only in 1977 - froze land allocations and prevented any future subdivisions. This is likely to result in increasing formal landlessness in the future. For the purposes of this comparative paper we concentrate, however, on the present situation in which most households have at least indirect access to some arable land.

Currently, Matatiele district comprises 214,000 ha., with a total of 100,000 people recorded as present in 1980. (14) Qwaqwa, by contrast, covers 48,000 ha. with a population of in excess of 400,000 in 1983, compared with a census figure for 1970 of 25,000. (15) This massive population increase reflects the process of mass relocation into Qwaqwa during the 1970s. Some people relocated from common urban areas have been settled in Phuthaditjhaba, Qwaqwa’s only proclaimed town. But the vast majority of those relocated, including all those from farms in the Orange Free State, have been sent into the extensive closer settlements which have grown to swamp the arable and pasture lands of pre-1970s inhabitants. (16)

III Responses to Interruptions in Income Flows

Matatiele

In Matatiele, there is scope for the maintenance and reinforcement of local networks of kinship and neighbourliness and for the household to assume a pivotal role in these networks. It is not merely the highly visible availability of agricultural land which is important, but the combination of land with the means, derived from wage labour, to realise its significance.

We came across several cases of Matatiele households which no longer had direct access to migrant remittances. These included households comprising the aged, widowed or single women and their children, and working age males who were incapacitated or temporarily unemployed and their dependants. Some old people received the meagre state old-age pension, but the important point is that these pensions were not simply funds for consumption by the aged but resources which entered the networks of inter-household relationships. Younger men and women, and
indeed also children, worked for others, either for a wage or in co-operative undertakings between households whereby the cash resources of one household were put to use to activate combinations of land, labour, animals and implements held by several. This covered not simply work in the fields or with livestock but also a range of activities commonly discussed under the "informal sector" heading: these included collecting firewood and brewing beer, both for sale.

Such wage and co-operative relationships are frequently not simply between households as separate entities, paying and receiving wages or sharing products. Sometimes the members of households without remittance income are taken in by others as part of the wage and sharing relationships. During the period of fieldwork there were several such examples. In one instance the young son of an injured miner, KHM, was taken into the household of a local shopkeeper to herd the latter's livestock. KHM and his wife were thus relieved of the need to provide for him and were also paid a small sum (R10 per month) which they added to the subsistence fund for other members of the household. They had no land rights, but did have a few goats which were sold off piecemeal during the first part of KHM's period of unemployment. Various members of the household also worked in the lands of KHM's brother in return for a small share in the produce. None the less, by 1984 two more children had been dispersed within the area to the households of relatives who could support them, and the son had left the shopkeeper and was now placed as a herder in the household of KHM's brother, a long-employed post-office worker with a secure job. This arrangement brought R20 per month to KHM, his wife and their remaining children in the household.

Other instances of dispersal involved not merely children but also adults, who were taken in to care for children in the host household. Indeed, there was a variety of forms of these "taking in" relationships. Diversity in the forms of "taking-in" relationships reflected the characteristics of differentiation in the district, as the case above shows: local entrepreneurs such as shopkeepers and brick-yard owners were keen to take people in, in order to control their labour force as fully as possible. On the other hand, the exploitative value of the "taking in" relationship was hidden where the hosts were kin of those they helped, and where the relationship was perceived as an expression of obligations of reciprocity anchored in agricultural activities.

Qwaqwa

In Qwaqwa, however, there are no agricultural resources in which to anchor such a perception of obligation. Unlike Matatiele, where kin are concentrated by virtue of their long residence, the extended families of Qwaqwa residents have been torn apart by the experience of relocation. The result is not simply that people must try to maintain networks of obligation under difficult circumstances, but that they have to struggle actually to construct a neighbourhood from scratch.

Previously, we have discussed people's desperate attempts to invest relationships between strangers thrown together in one place with an idiom of obligation. (17) A major stumbling block to such an effort is the lack of both agricultural and other resources useful in informal sector activities. Without regular remittance inflows of more than just a bare minimum amount, these resources cannot be found.

The number of households which had one or more members unemployed for at least part of the period of fieldwork was very much larger in Qwaqwa than in Matatiele. Moreover, because a great many Qwaqwa workers were in low-paid insecure jobs, their remittances were not necessarily sufficient to meet even the basic subsistence requirements of their dependants. This meant that the dependants of both unemployed and poorly paid workers were making desperate attempts to find alternative and supplementary sources of income locally. But the fact that these
were often unsuccessful and of short duration makes it necessary to look not merely at what people did but also at what they were trying to do to supplement their income.

A major barrier to their efforts was that, within the closer settlements, there was very limited differentiation. In relation to the vast numbers of inhabitants there were few local shops and other business enterprises. Moreover, many of these were owned not by local people but by entrepreneurs from Phuthaditjhaba who frequently brought their employees with them from town. (18)

The few closer settlement households which had securely employed migrants (mine-workers, railway employees) amongst their members used the income from these sources mainly for their own consumption: they had no use for the labour of people surrounding them. Indeed, some adopted strategies to reduce the claims which indigent neighbours could make on them. (19)

The remaining people in the closer settlements, who lived either in the expectation or the reality of recurrent indigency, attempted to constitute savings-clubs to brew beer for sale, and to secure loans from neighbours. It was clear, however, that most savings-clubs collapsed almost as soon as they were established because members were unable to meet their commitments. Moreover, people were unable to borrow precisely when they most needed a loan. (20) Relationships with such a flimsy material underpinning were a poor basis upon which to construct enduring obligations of neighbourliness. (21)

Since there were so few significant co-operative relationships between households in the closer settlements, there was little scope for the "taking in" relationships characteristic of Matatiele. This meant that dispersals, which had to take place across the boundaries of the bantustan, were measures of last resort because they involved relationships which were not, by definition, underwritten by current reciprocities. There were several cases of actual dispersals but many more where people needed to disperse members of their households but were unable to do so for lack of the necessary contacts outside the bantustan.

In one instance, the children of a deceased household head, CM, were sent out of the bantustan by his brothers, who lived nearby, after his death. CM had been in Qwaqwa for six years and had secured only one contract job in that time. He died after two years of continuous unemployment during which his brothers provided occasional gifts of food and fuel for his household's subsistence. After his death, however, the brothers baulked at the prospect of taking his dependants in permanently, and they arranged for the children to be sent to their mother's parents in a Free State farm. This kind of dispersal is a last resort: before his death, CM refused to countenance sending his children away because this would have been an admission of his inability to find work and to be a proper father.

Some people are, however, willing to send one child away if the stigma of inadequacy can be avoided by retaining others. In another case, MS, who had been ill with TB and unemployed for over a year, tried desperately to make contact with a brother who had remained on a Free State farm. He planned to place one of his seven children, a daughter ill with pellagra, temporarily with the brother. His household was in dire straits: only one son was employed during 1983 and five household members had diagnosed malnutrition-related diseases; and MS and his wife had exhausted all possibilities for borrowing from their neighbours. In mid-1983 he stressed that he needed only temporary relief; but by year's end he had still not succeeded in making contact with his brother, who, he surmised, must have moved off the farm.
The nature of differentiation in the two areas is reflected in the characteristics and implications of dispersals of household members. The form of differentiation in Qwaqwa means that members of domestic groups without direct access to remittance income cannot easily be dispersed in the vicinity. People taken into domestic groups cannot generate wealth for their hosts by productive activity; nor can their presence free others to generate wealth; their only possible usefulness is to relieve others from the drudgery of domestic tasks. All of these are possible in Matatiele, but in Qwaqwa's closer settlements, as noted, very few people have the resources to generate wealth, let alone pay for relief from drudgery. The tension between migrant husbands and relict wives is also at issue here: the latter would like to be spared some of the grotesque drudgery and loneliness of domestic life in a closer settlement, but the former are reluctant to support an additional consumer in the household.

In Qwaqwa, the dispersal of people marks the failure of attempts to create local networks of obligation. In Matatiele, on the other hand, dispersals within the local community are in fact part of these local networks. Because, in Matatiele, households are able to bear the burden of taking people in and to utilise their presence, the demise of some households provides opportunities for the importance of the idea of household to be realised.

It is therefore of fundamental importance to give attention to people's normative perceptions of who should and can legitimately constitute a household. We have mentioned above that Murray did not do this because he chose a functionalist definition of the de jure household.

It is his simple de facto/de jure dichotomy which is problematic, as the data from Matatiele and Qwaqwa show. In both areas "de facto household" refers to the people actually living together at any one time. Furthermore, in both areas we find a second level of perception referring to an aggregation comprising de facto members of the household plus those who are absent but contribute to, or draw from, the household's income. This is what Murray calls the "de jure household". But in neither area can we find a normative component to this perception: the perception arises out of common practice in a situation of oscillating labour migration.

There is, however, another level to the perception of the household which is crucial for the understanding of the very different forms of inter-household movement in Matatiele and Qwaqwa. (22) There is a common perception in Matatiele that a range of people can legitimately become members of a given household. It is here, rather than at the level of Murray's "de jure household", that normative prescription is significant. (23)

These norms derive from the functioning of households as the loci in which resources from migrant wage earners and local agriculture are brought together in local production activities. People who are taken in as members of households must be able to participate in these activities which, despite their essentially distributive function, are focussed around apparently productive resources. The perception of the household as a production unit is thus reinforced. Moreover, this perception resonates with older people's past experiences of households as production units and gives meaning to the notion of "household" as an institution of "tradition" or "custom".

In Qwaqwa, however, the same cannot be true, precisely because of the lack of both local and remitted resources: households have extreme difficulty functioning for distribution and certainly cannot be perceived as production units in any sense. Moreover, the past experience of people in the closer settlements was...
one in which the functioning of domestic groups as discrete production units (i.e. as tenant households) was long subject to farmers' endeavours to turn labour tenancy into wage labour. Despite the emergence of the individual as the entity which farmers increasingly employed, labourers on white-owned farms retained a sense of "family" unity because, until quite recently, some farmers still employed families rather than individuals. (24) But, at least since the end of the period of tenant farming, their households have not, in any sense, even resembled production units.

In many senses the persistence of "household" in Matatiele reminds us of Wolpe's argument that a major characteristic of the bantustan period was the maintenance of a "modified form (of) the structure of 'traditional' societies African industrial labour force in or near the 'homelands' ... by the political, social, economic and ideological enforcement of low levels of subsistence". (25) Despite Wolpe's vague formulation and his implicit understanding of "tradition" as the structures of a by-gone era, the perception in Matatiele of "household" as "traditional" along with its social reproductive functions clearly resonates with his argument. On the one hand, the household in Matatiele is, and remains, an adaptational resource through which people respond to the exigencies of dependence on labour migration. On the other, it can be viewed as part of the battery of "traditional" structures whereby, in Wolpe's terms, capital and the state effect control in the bantustans through ideological means.

People now in Qwaqwa have, however, had virtually all such adaptational responses cut away from under them. There are few, if any, strategies for survival left open to people within the closer settlements, and certainly no local traditions which either have a substantive contemporary material basis or can draw on past practices for their legitimacy.

This suggests, however, that the ideological means of control said to operate in the bantustans cannot any longer be effective, and the ever greater use of cruder methods of coercion in relocation areas such as Qwaqwa is an indication of this. (26)

There are two implications of the above comparison: firstly, if Wolpe's characterization of the bantustan era is taken as applicable to the Matatiele situation, then there is clear indication that Qwaqwa has passed beyond the bantustan era. This has been overlooked until now precisely because so much of the work on bantustans has been concentrated exclusively on the Transkei, the "model bantustan" for both the creators of the policy and for its critics. (27) While so much of the literature on the development of the regional political economy has been "Rand-centric", its counterpart on the bantustans has been "Transkei-centric".

The relocation areas, indeed, represent the achievement of the state's objective to remove "surplus" people into remote areas. But the fact that the ideological means of control in such areas has been nullified may well lead in the future to a sharper recognition by these people of their common oppression, and, given the stimulus of some kind of organisational base, to collective action giving expression to this recognition.
Notes


(3) cf Murray, Families Divided: "De jure household membership includes temporary absentees, while de facto household membership refers only to those persons actually resident in the village homestead at any one time. The use of de jure in this sense implies no normative statement about who ought to belong to a household." (p 49)

(4) Murray's recognition of these changes was none the less a considerable advance over surveys which simply asserted that household composition remained constant over time.


(8) cf A D Spiegel, "Transkei: cases of relocation from East Griqualand", GRC Newsletter 3 (1985), Grahamstown Rural Committee.


(11) Ibid. (1980-84); Interview, District Recruiting Manager, TEBA Qwaqwa 4/7/83.

(12) Their plaint was that, despite such long periods of service, they could not be sure of any form of pension (other than the meagre state pension) once they retired.

(13) Many other studies of betterment merely record the high rates of formal landlessness which follow from its implementation: see, for example, J Yawitch, Betterment: the myth of homeland agriculture (Johannesburg, 1981). But cf A J Segar, "Food and Health-Care in a Betterment Village", BA Hons dissertation, University of Cape Town (1982), who suggests that betterment and relocation on to a Trust farm brought with it access to better fields than had been held before the move.
of A D Spiegel, "Spinning Off the Developmental Cycle: some comments on the utility of a concept in the light of data from Matatiele, Transkei", Social Dynamics 8, 2 (1982). About five per cent of the district's land is freehold; another 249,000 ha (approx) of consolidation land has been added recently: none of this is likely to become location or betterment land.

Sharp, "Relocation and the Problem of Survival ...", loc. cit., p 145.

The Witzieshoek rebellion was an indication of what was already too great a pressure of population on the reserve's land: cf S Moroney, "The 1950 Witzieshoek Rebellion", Africa Perspective 3 (1976); T Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983). It is interesting to speculate on the degree to which the experience of the rebellion led agricultural officers in the 1950s in Matatiele, as elsewhere in the Transkei, to soft-pedal the implementation of betterment in areas where the chief and people were opposed to it.

Sharp and Spiegel, "Vulnerability ...", loc. cit., p 145.

The entrepreneurs had set up in the closer settlements because they had been displaced in town by the entry of big business interests.

For instance, two relatively well-off brothers belonged to a highly exclusive religious sect which apparently demanded their total social commitment. cf N Long, Social Change and the Individual (Manchester University Press, 1968).

cf P Hill, Dry Grain Farming Families (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

We have previously referred to the "as if" nature of kinship and neighbourhood in Qwaqwa's closer settlements. Sharp and Spiegel, "Vulnerability ...", loc. cit., p 145.

The fact that Murray did not recognise this led directly to his difficulties with understanding residential turnover not directly related to labour migration. Thus, reflecting on the changing nature of household composition in Lesotho over a five-year period, he says: "... small households either disappeared, amalgamated with other households or remained relatively stable (while) ... larger households ... exhibited such regular and unpredictable residential turnover as to make it very difficult, in some cases, to identify de jure household membership with any confidence." Murray, Families Divided, pp 56-57.

These norms do not specify any particular category of people - kin or otherwise - who may belong. They function in an area in which many neighbours are indeed kin, but they do not prescribe that only kin can legitimately be household co-members.

These norms do not specify any particular category of people - kin or otherwise - who may belong. They function in an area in which many neighbours are indeed kin, but they do not prescribe that only kin can legitimately be household co-members.


Reports of naked coercion abound from relocation areas such as Winterveld, the Ciskei, Kwandebele, among others. cf P Green and A Hirsch, The Impact of Resettlement in the Ciskei: three case studies, SALDRU working paper 49 (Cape Town, 1983); L Platzky and C Walker, The Surplus People (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1985). Another measure of this comparison lies in the contrast between the legitimacy of chiefs and headmen in our two research areas: differential
availability of resources, specifically land, is reflected in popular perceptions of local-level political structures. The limited control Matatiele chiefs and headmen still have over access to land and pensions gives them a degree of legitimacy. In Qwaqwa, by contrast, there is no land to control, partly because the residual agricultural land and consolidation land are in the hands of Qwaqwa's development corporation. Moreover, many pensioners continue to collect their pensions in the common area and others deal directly with the Phuthaditjhaba bureaucracy. People in the closer settlements explicitly equate their headmen with the mine compound or factory induna whom they know from their workplace; on the other hand, Matatiele chiefs and headmen have long been associated with administration of rural resources. Cf W D Hammond-Tooke, Command or Consensus: the development of Transkeian local government (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975).