

# All you need is Love? The courting gift in 20<sup>th</sup> century KwaZulu-Natal<sup>1</sup>

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In its first year of broadcast, 2002, the TV show *All You Need is Love* regularly attracted 2 million viewers in South Africa. The programme centres on the delivery of messages of love and the recording of recipients' responses: "*Lost Love, Long Distance Love, Unrequited Love, Looking for Love, Fragile Love, Forgotten Love, Star Crossed Lovers...you name it, All You Need Is Love will find it and try to fix it.*"<sup>2</sup> The question on everyone's mind is whether love can prevail. Will a touching message of love surmount the problems faced by the couple? At times the answer is no and the camera awkwardly dissects the reaction of the rejected suitor. But more often than not the audience is able to cheer - the loudest applause being set aside for when a man publicly proposes marriage to his girlfriend.

TV programme such as *All You Need is Love* exemplify an optimistic, post-apartheid, media culture where the 'miracle of democracy' symbolises the achievability of almost any dream. The romantic love ideal it communicates, however, wavers uncomfortably under reports of how many sexual relations in South Africa are driven by the more pragmatic pursuit of money and gifts (for instance Stavrou and Kaufman, 2000; LeClerc-Madlala, 2001; Hunter, 2002). HIV prevalence rates are thought to be around 3 times as high for young women than young men, a fact often attributed to younger women securing older, richer, boyfriends.<sup>3</sup>

The pervasiveness of relationships where money and gifts are strongly linked to sex has been noted by many people whom I have interviewed since I began my research in Mandeni in 2000. Thandi, 21, one participant of a recent focus group I conducted in Sundumbili Township, confirmed that many young girls were forced into

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from [www.allyouneedislove.co.za](http://www.allyouneedislove.co.za)

<sup>3</sup> One voluntary testing study in KwaZulu-Natal found that nearly three times as many 15-19 year old girls (43%) were HIV positive than boys (17%), and that while female prevalence rates peaked at 25-29, male prevalence rates peaked ten years later. Figures from the Department of Virology, University of Natal, and reported in Desmond, C (2000).

relationships with multiple boyfriends for money. She related the terrible social conditions that she, like many young South African women, face - a recently lost parent, a child to support, and no work. Nevertheless, unlike other young women who depended on local boyfriends, Thandi maintained that she preferred to "*dayisa umzimba*" (sell her body) as a prostitute in Durban. "Boyfriends" wouldn't wear condoms whereas she could insist that clients obliged.<sup>4</sup> Thandi's story demonstrates the centrality of gendered poverty to the AIDS pandemic but also raises a number of additional questions. Why, when sex and money are so often inextricably linked, as they are in Mandeni, has this apparent commodification of sex on the whole taken the form that it has, namely multiple-partnered "boyfriend"/"girlfriend" relationship and not prostitution, with Thandi forced to work in Durban and sex workers virtually unknown among Mandeni's 150 000 population? And how can "love" be sometimes more persuasive than money in convincing women to engage in sex without condoms?

Such apparent contradictions are rarely given sufficient historical context because AIDS research is so dominated by narrow time frames entrenched in epidemiological and biomedical perspectives. Seeking to address this bias, historians have drawn important parallels between HIV and previous STDs and questioned the newness of many sexual practices reported today such as multiple-partnered relationships. They have convincingly demonstrated that the HIV pandemic is rooted not in "African promiscuity" but in the complex social changes wrought by colonialism, industrialization and apartheid.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps because of the urgency of the pandemic, however, those who focus on sexuality today have been less successful in teasing out *discontinuities* as well as *continuities* with the past. It is vital that we learn the lessons of history. At the same time, we must always critically examine the shifting social context of sexuality as well as the continued relevance of influential models that elucidated previous STD epidemics. The connection between male migrancy and STD infection, for instance, brilliantly highlighted by Kark (1949) to describe the syphilis pandemic in the first half of last century, and still widely drawn upon today, fits rather uneasily with the changing social landscape of the last two decades, including the increased unemployment of both men and women and the greater mobility of women.

This paper explores the connection between gifts, sex, and love in an attempt to periodise changes in sexuality over the last century. To grasp fundamental changes in relationship patterns over this period, and note the specificity of sexuality today, it is necessary to conceptually separate *multiple-partners* from *casual partners*, two terms that can often be conflated. It is relevant to note that, despite racist stereotypes of

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<sup>4</sup> A recent study of sexual exchanges in 3 areas of Durban, Point Road (where formal prostitution is common), near a truck stop (where men frequently return to the same partner), and a township (where male partners are usually positioned as "boyfriends"), also showed that condom use was inversely related to the commodified (and loveless) nature of the relationship (Preston-Whyte et. al., 2000). Of course, sex workers typically have a much large number of sexual partners and are frequently at extreme risk of violence and consequently HIV prevalence rates are very high among this group.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Jochelson (1999, 2001), Marks (2002) and Delius and Glaser (2002, 2003) for South Africa. Setel et. al. (1999) provide an historical overview of STDs and HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa while Setel (1999) is an excellent historically rooted ethnography of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania. In South Africa, the April 2001 AIDS in Context Conference organized by the History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand was a very important initiative aimed at providing historical context to the pandemic. See the special edition of African Studies in July 2002 edited by Peter Delius and Liz Walker.

“African promiscuity”, there is in fact no word in *isiZulu* for “casual lover” if we define “casual” as a short term, non-prostitute, affair (in English the association is an easy one for instance through the phrase “casual sex”). The nearest approximations to casual lover in *isiZulu* are *isidikiselo* (literally “the top of a pot”, implying secondary lover), *ishende* (secret lover), or *umakhwapeni* (literally “under the armpit”, meaning secret lover), and other related terms. These words more accurately imply secondary lover, or secret lover. While such relations can be casual, lasting for short periods of time, they can also extend for a long duration, for instance when a male migrant’s wife takes a secondary lover (by way of contrast, there is a relatively clear temporally based *isiZulu* word for casual work, *itoho*). A major aim of this paper is to examine the contemporary dynamics within which multiple-partnered, and very often today more casual, relationships are embedded among unmarried men and women. It argues that pivotal to such relationships is the strong connection between money and sex, and central to this materiality of sex is chronic unemployment.

In a climate of great poverty and gender inequality, exacerbated by market reforms in the post-apartheid period, sexual relations have arguably today become increasingly commodified in a Marxian sense – women’s bodies being more readily exchanged for money or gifts. But this framework captures only part of the story and itself must be made relevant to the local South African situation. I argue that sex and money have become linked in a gift culture that requires Mauss as well as Marx and, additionally, a gendered history of love as well as an analysis of the country’s changing political economy. Marcel Mauss’s innovation, based on research in Melanesia, was to demonstrate how the exchange of gifts produce *obligations* and *relations* between people, a finding usually contrasted to the exchange of *depersonalised commodities* (you exchange money for goods in a fruit market but do not consider from whom you bought the fruit, but gift exchange involves reciprocal obligations).<sup>6</sup> Luise White (1990) has shown how the particularity of the colonial migrant economy fostered a form of prostitution that often encompassed duties of cooking, cleaning, and providing other “comforts of home”. In contemporary South Africa, many unmarried men and women exchange obligations that include, but are not limited by, sex and money. These types of arrangements, however, extend well beyond the relatively small number of prostitute/client transactions discussed by White in the case of colonial Nairobi into a significant amount of more everyday affairs.

Yet this “materiality of everyday sex” operates through a culture of love that has woven its own unique path through society. The securing of multiple partners is at one level the exchange of multiple obligations, creating not simply sexual networks but fragile networks of broader commitments, and at another level often the search for a partner with whom a longer term relationship based on “true love” may be sought. Indeed, even if at first sight many relationships appear to be instrumental, they usually draw from categories such as “boyfriend”/“girlfriend” forged through and not necessarily in opposition to a love culture. While poverty undoubtedly frames many relationships, the gift culture must also be understood within a wider, historical, context that incorporates the changing ways that men become men, that women become women, that partnerships are formed and that relations are ended. The tools that we use to conceptualise such complex relations are of vital importance. When one prominent

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<sup>6</sup> Mauss (1925) and for useful discussions on “The Gift”, see Gregory (1982) and Piot (1999).

strand in AIDS research today associates risky sexual behaviour with shortfalls in “social capital”, it is highly ironic that multiple-partnered sexual relations can operate as conduits for “cohesion” and networking, notions so greatly revered within the social capital framework.<sup>7</sup>

I have lived in Mandeni my research site for approximately 18 months in total since 2000 in an informal settlement surrounding Isithebe Industrial Park. I also stayed for a month in rural Hlabisa. Between August 2000 and December 2003, around 300 interviews were conducted, mostly in *isiZulu*, and about 90% have now been transcribed in *isiZulu*. This paper also draws from government papers, civil and criminal court cases, and past ethnographies. Further background to the Mandeni area and my PhD project can be found in Hunter (2002; 2004).

## Love and money in KwaZulu-Natal

*Yadlula iminyaka ngingaliboni (it's been years since I have seen him)*  
*Yadlula iminyaka ngingaliboni, isoka lam (it's been years since I have seen my boyfriend) ...*  
*Uzongithola ngiblome emlanjeni (you'll find me at the river)*  
*Uzongithola ngiblome emlanjeni, isoka lam (you'll find me at the river, my boyfriend)*

Emlanjeni, Mafikizolo, Kwela CD, 2003 (reworking of traditional song)

According to sociologist Ann Swidler (2001), Americans hold seemingly contradictory views about love. On the one hand, they subscribe to a “mythic” movie image culture of love, seeing it as irrational, singular, and everlasting. On the other hand they are highly sceptical of such representations and embrace a self-conscious “realist” understanding of love, seeing relationships as fragile and in need of constant nurturing. The structural reality behind the first culture of love is marriage - you are either married (thus in love) or you are not - while the patent insecurity of marriage, as demonstrated by the high rate of divorce, has given the second greater resonance in recent years. I will attempt to argue throughout the remainder of this paper that choosing a partner - falling in love - has similarly been both irrational and impulsive as well as a carefully designed process in KwaZulu-Natal.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Although it contains a wealth of useful information, I find Barnett and Whiteside's (2002) recent book on AIDS and globalization problematic when it embraces “social capital” and “social cohesion” as explanatory variables for the AIDS pandemic. One danger is that this continues a long tradition of positioning the “Third World” as “lacking” something and in social chaos, despite the authors' emphasis throughout on the political economy roots of the pandemic. Linking “social capital” to HIV/AIDS also bears uncomfortable similarities to the way that “social disintegration”/“detrribalisation” were connected to the syphilis epidemic in Africa during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (on the social construction of syphilis, see Jochelson, 2001). More broadly, social capital/cohesion are such slippery concepts that classification can often appear extremely arbitrary (if religion is one route to social cohesion, as the authors' say, why is there more social cohesion in the UK than in the much more religious South Africa or Botswana?). Critiques of the “social capital” framework in the development literature can be found in Fine (1999) and Mohan and Stokke (2000).

<sup>8</sup> I believe that Swidler's concepts of “mythic” and “realist” love resonate well enough with Zulu 4

The high levels of sexual violence reported today may well lead some to consider “love” to be a poorly chosen emphasis. Nevertheless, the contention here is that love is not an irrelevant, superstructural, phenomenon, but very much part of the everyday material world, including gift exchanges. Male power, never unified or unchallenged, and intersecting with structures of race and class, is embodied in desires, passions, and expectations, as well as in more obvious acts of coercion, material and physical. This argument is hardly new - Simone de Beauvoir (1949) gave much attention in her famous manuscript to love - but it tends to get forgotten today when such devastating consequences are attached to sex. The remainder of this section will briefly summarise my argument.

The paper begins by arguing that choice and passion were prominent features of pre-colonial society, despite representations to the contrary. Indeed, nineteenth century Zulu society may well have had a more “modern” understanding of courting intimacy than the European colonialists who saw *isiZulu* speakers as “primitive” and “lewd”. The culture of romantic love, circulating today in South Africa through movies, magazines and other media images, must be seen as a contemporary expression of a “mythic” culture of love with a long history in the region.

Realist love, interlinked with this mythic love, relates to the more calculated ways men and women secure and maintain a “good” partner. Until relatively recently, this realist dimension to love was rooted in the practicalities of building an *umuzi* (homestead or, in an urban context, home). To some extent, a young man sought out and aimed to fall in love with a hardworking and respectful partner and a woman wished for a reliable and prosperous husband. Consequently, during the courting process an unmarried woman sought primarily not gifts from a boyfriend but signs that her suitor would pay *ilobolo*. In the post-war period, opportunities for work greatly expanded for both men and women. Co-habiting became relatively common in urban areas, although marital rates remained high. The sharp rise in unemployment beginning in the mid-1970s and the turn to the free market from the mid-1990s, however, produced tremendous economic uncertainty and expanded inequalities, including gendered inequalities. Most female school-leavers today find themselves unemployed, unable to secure economic independence, and unlikely to marry. The combination of growing female unemployment and geographical mobility, rising female/male earning differentials, and a continued shift away from marital relations, has forced “realist” love to take on a new dynamic whereby a good male lover is frequently seen to be one who will bestow gifts.

This “materiality of everyday sex” emerged in uneven and ambiguous ways. To historicise the varying moral and institutional contexts for sex/gift exchanges the paper draws from the concept of “spheres of exchange”.<sup>9</sup> Changing patterns of sex and gift

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society for them to be flexibly and cautiously applied, though I don’t believe that Swidler herself sees these ideas as necessarily universal. I am restricting my scope in this paper to *isiZulu* speakers, though examinations of the history of love and courting gifts among other groups in the area are also important projects.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of “spheres of exchange” was popularized through the work of Bohannan (1955). For a critique of the ease with which Bohannan saw money dissolving differences between spheres see Bloch and Parry (1989). For a critique of Bohannan from an African studies perspective see Guyer (1995). Unlike much of the literature on “spheres of exchange” I give specific attention to the spatiality of exchange relations since sexual transactions operate in very different ways over varying geographies. 5

exchanges in KwaZulu-Natal are examined over 4 periods, from the pre-colonial to the present. The first two periods sketch out the dynamics that underpinned sexual exchange in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods. At the turn of the century, I acknowledge how money and sex became linked in certain spaces but argue that colonial officials were mistaken to see courting gifts such as *umnyobo* as evidence of the widespread commodification of pre-marital sex. Indeed, throughout the paper I am critical of teleological accounts of how “money” dissolves morality and view the many references to “prostitution” among both government officials and African people not simply as social “facts” but as powerful, gendered, metaphors for societal dissolution and, in particular, for women’s uncouth “rebellion”. The bulk of empirical material concentrates on the third and the fourth periods, from the 1930s to today. Here the paper traces the materiality of sex as it moved from limited socio-spatial “spheres of exchange” to become a much more general, although by no means all-encompassing, phenomenon, particularly from the 1980s. Such an argument necessitates a critical engagement with urban ethnographies. Rich in detail and groundbreaking in their break from “tribal” ethnography, these were nevertheless sometimes quick to emphasise “prostitution” and social breakdown to the neglect of countervailing forces for stability. Though recognizing the profound way in which urban spaces reshaped sexuality, the paper argues that there is little evidence, even in urban areas, that until quite recently money played a dominant role in fuelling sexual relations involving young unmarried women – the group today worse affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

### **Pre-colonial society: Zulu society as Loveless? Sex as freely exchangeable?**

That colonialism operated through and propelled depictions of Africans as “promiscuous” is now widely acknowledged (see, for instance, Vaughan, 1991 and McClintock, 1995). Rather less documented is how African society could be represented as bereft of “love”. Colonial officials demonstrated outrage at the “uncivilised” practices of forced marriage, polygamy, and the apparent trading of women through *ilobolo*, representations that neatly coincided with interventions to push “idle” men into the labour market.

For sure, the centrality of marriage to the forging of social alliances and to economic production could restrain young peoples’ choices. As in European society, parents encouraged marriages that might cement important alliances. And the tight control of marriage by the Zulu King was a requirement for the successful operation of the *amabutho* system, whereby young unmarried men were collected in age-set regiments to conduct military service, a practice which reached its zenith under Shaka. Yet sometimes in flagrant revolt to such constraints, men and women could be seized by an irrational, mythic, feeling of love. The most well known such case was when the *inGcugce* age-set of girls flouted King Cetshwayo’s order to marry an older regiment and ran away with their sweethearts, only for many young rebels to be captured and brutally killed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jeff Guy (2003) recently reviewed court cases relating to the *inGcugce* girls to emphasise the power of love in 19<sup>th</sup> century Zulu society. The episode has also been considered within the context of generational and gendered struggles by Ben Carton (2000). In Mpondoland, Monica Wilson (1936:189) describes a cliff called *iNtombi nenDoda* (the girl and the man) named after a the tragedy of a girl who, being

Courting rituals also demonstrate the considerable spaces given too, or perhaps carved out by, young people in the way that they practiced sexual intimacy and choice before marriage. Indeed, courting desire and choice are strongly reflected in the *isiZulu* language. The Zulu verb *ukushela* describes a man who proposes love to a woman and literally means “burning with desire for” and the Zulu verb *ukuqoma*, which describes a woman’s acceptance, also means simply “to choose”.<sup>11</sup> While love potions were contrived interventions, their consequences were not necessarily at odds with love being seen as a powerful and spontaneous emotion.<sup>12</sup> Among unmarried men and women, intimacy was expressed through non-penetrative forms of sex (*ukusoma* or thigh sex), an activity relatively freely practiced since it was fertility and not sexuality that faced the greatest controls.<sup>13</sup> Non-penetrative sex was understood as primarily youthful sex play and there is evidence that not simply men but unmarried women could have multiple-sexual-partners and at times relatively “casual” *soma* liaisons (see Hunter, 2004).

Such reports of apparent sexual candidness suggest that sex was not imbued with the same associations of guilt and sin as it was in Western society. But does this mean that it could be readily exchanged for gifts, as suggested for instance by the Caldwell’s (1989)? Evidence for such a view might be found in Mpondoland, where *amadikazi* could benefit materially from sexual relations, including with married men. Monica Wilson (1936: 208) described this group, whom she believes predated colonialism, as the “artists of the community” although she says that they never explicitly traded sex for gifts. However, we need to be sensitive to the social and geographical context of such practices. The *amadikazi* women - divorced, widowed, or mothers without husbands - were by definition seen as largely ineligible for marriage, and thus set apart from other women. What’s more, divorced or widowed women from KwaZulu-Natal appear to have had much less sexual freedom, at least compared to the *amadikazi* from Mpondoland.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it is important not to overgeneralise the exchangeability of sex or, as Heald (1995) points out, to confuse non-Western morals with an absence of any morals around sex. Powerful concepts such as *isifebe* (a “loose” woman) suggest that there were important moral boundaries surrounding sexuality, particularly women’s sexuality; sex could be exchangeable in certain “spheres of

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forced to marry a man she didn’t love, bound herself to her true lover and flung herself over the edge.

<sup>11</sup> Bryant (1905) and Doke et. al. (1990) (compiled in the 1940s and 1950s).

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of love potions, particularly men’s practice of *ukuhayiza*, over the last century see Parle and Scorgie (2001).

<sup>13</sup> See Guy (1987) for a theoretical outline for the centrality of fertility, and not necessarily sexuality, to pre-colonial society that influences this section. Kohler (1933), Krige (1936), and Bryant (1949) all concur that there was great openness around sexuality in Zulu society. See also Rex v Gumakwake (Durban Archives, RSC II/1/42, 85/1887), Rex v Ulusawana, RSC II/1/44, 45/1888 and testimony of Ndukwana in *Stuart Archive*, Vol.4. Schapera’s (1940) *Married Life in an African Tribe* is probably the best book length account of intimacy in African relations.

<sup>14</sup> There seems to be important geographical differences in the expected behaviour of widows and divorced women. Mayer’s (1971) account of *amankazana* among *isiXhosa* speakers bears close resemblance to Wilson’s description of *amadikazi*. Colson (1958: 293) suggests that a Tonga widow in Zambia was “free with her favours”. In KwaZulu-Natal, however, informants suggest that rural widows were expected to remain chaste, though of course many would have had sexual relations. Thembeke Mngomezulu, a nurse and Masters student at UND who grew up close to Mpondoland and then married into a Zululand *umuzi*, contrasts sharply the freedom of the *amadikazi* of Mpondoland to the expected chaste behaviour of widows in KwaZulu-Natal.

exchange” but not universally. Among young unmarried women, a chaste demeanour, public acts of deference, not to mention an ability to cope with gruelling work, were expected and closely monitored attributes.

Pre-colonial society was by no means therefore characterised by an attitude of “anything goes” in the sexual sphere as the Caldwell’s sometimes suggest, although there was a permissiveness that Europeans found hard to fathom and Christian influences undertook to crush. Certainly, the exchange of gifts or favours for sex was not automatically seen as an absolute moral wrong although women’s independent accumulation was difficult in the absence of money and, in an agrarian setting, when women had a limited ability to exist outside of men. Indeed, it has been frequently noted that prostitution, the impersonal exchange of casual sex for gifts, was unknown in pre-colonial society.<sup>15</sup> All this was to change with the birth of towns.

### **Late 19<sup>th</sup> century - 1930s: Prostitution and early male migration**

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Zululand, and earlier in Natal, government taxes had forced many African men into the colonial labour market. *Ilobolo* payments, previously embroiled in complex obligations crossing many generations, were being transformed into shorter term transactions progressively paid in money and not cattle (developments described in Guy, 1982). If the productive capacity of African society was being eroded, more and more men were engaging in work, and *ilobolo* was losing its meaning as an exchange gift for women’s reproductive capacity, what effect did this have on sexuality? One obvious consequence was the increased demand for prostitution in both urban areas and along migrant routes. These exchanges were facilitated by the fact that in pre-Christian society sex was not seen as an absolute moral sin, although fathers and chiefs certainly railed against women’s “immoral” behaviour.<sup>16</sup> Persistent complaints were also directed against white men who could entice African women through gifts or money in urban and rural areas.<sup>17</sup>

To some in both colonial and African society, prostitution was a powerful metaphor for social decay and money seen to be breaking open a disciplined tribal system. In Natal, these perceptions shaped the way that courting gifts were understood and I explore such gifts to examine the extent that pre-marital sex became commodified in the early colonial period. Around the turn of the century there was an outcry over payments such as *umnyobo* which could be given by a courting man to his girlfriend’s father. In a few instances, chiefs requested that young women secure similar payments from their boyfriends. To colonial officials, these seemed to suggest that men and

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<sup>15</sup> See for instance Colson (1958) in Zambia and Testimony of Ndukwana, James Stuart Archive, Vol.4. in KwaZulu-Natal.

<sup>16</sup> On women and prostitution in South Africa see Van Onselen (1982); Bonner (1990); Jochelson (2001). In other parts of Africa, see Powdermaker (1962), Bujra (1975); Schuster (1979), Bledsoe (1980), Obbo (1980), Parpart (1988), MacGaffey (1988), and White (1990). See Barnes (1999) on how access to housing could shape sex exchanges in colonial Zimbabwe. Standing (1992) provides an excellent anthropological review of how narrow notions of “prostitution” can be inappropriately applied to Africa.

<sup>17</sup> The enticement of African women by white men near a shop in Umzinto and by a white post-cart driver are described in the testimony of Qalizwe, James Stuart Archive Vol. 5, 233-234. Ben Carton first alerted me to this reference. See also complaints in the 1906-7 Natal Native Commission 1/NCP/8/3/76 on white men luring African women, evidence Angus Wood, J.P



chiefs were trading the sexual (*soma*, thigh sex) services of their daughters.<sup>18</sup>

There is certainly evidence that the cash economy bestowed in men, often young men, new powers, including over women. Nineteenth century rape cases contain many references to money - women claiming that they had been offered money in exchange for sex before being raped and men defended themselves by declaring that money was agreed for sex.<sup>19</sup> Young, wage earning, men, as Ben Carton (2000) has shown, were becoming increasingly rebellious and money gave men a powerful basis for challenging conventional customs around courting, marriage, and love. Certainly these themes can be found in the case of Unkala, a young man recently returned from Durban who in 1885 killed his fiancé in frustration at her father's reluctance to speed up customary marriage practices and allow his daughter to establish an *umuzi* with him.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, Moore and Vaughan (1994) warn against interpreting money as simply breaking open "tribal" society. They describe how the Bemba custom, whereby newly married men worked for their fathers-in-law, waned as young men became employed in the colonial economy. Nonetheless, the money with which they returned replaced tribute labour relatively smoothly as a sign of commitment and for its material value. I would add similar caution to claims that money was breaking open Zulu society and commodifying sex through *umnyobo* payments. Fathers and chiefs were undoubtedly trying to cash in on young men's earnings, especially since the government had restricted *ilobolo* payments to 10 head of cattle, and since rinderpest had devastated cattle holdings.<sup>21</sup> Yet *umnyobo* and other payments were also central to maintain courting as a public affair. Monica Wilson (1936: 181) stated that they preceded colonialism and quoted an informant who says that when *umnyobo* was abolished by the colonial administration it actually got rid of a sanction for good behaviour, making *umumetsha* (*ukusoma*, thigh sex) more secret. To see such monetary payments as simply buying sexual services, as colonial officials sometimes did, is to strip them of their meaning as signs of public commitment that, in fact, could limit sexual behaviour. For sure, a relatively small number of women prostitutes were exchanging sex in a new "sphere of exchange" that ultimately hinged on the colonial cash economy and a heavy demand for sex within particular spaces. Work and money helped to give young men new power, including over women's sexuality. But money was also a symbol with multiple meanings, one of which could ironically be young

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<sup>18</sup> I first learnt about this colonial sources on courting gifts from Mike Mahoney and followed up the references given in Mahoney and Parle (2003). They may not agree with my interpretation. I have relied on records in SNA 1/4/8 Confidential papers 1-117, 1900; SNA 1/4/11 Confidential papers. No. 59, 1902; SNA 1/1/385, Minute Paper 3553-3679, 1907; SNA 1/1/399, minute papers, 1908.

<sup>19</sup> Rape case where woman claims that a man frequently asked to have connection and offered a cotton blanket for her consent: Rex v Umvenyana (Durban Archives, RSC II/1/78 104/1898). Rape case where man is alleged to have offering one pound for the woman to stay quiet: Rex v Umunyu (Durban Archives, RSC II/1/64, 28/1895). These themes persist well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Rape cases where man claims that money was agreed: Rex v Joyini Sibiya (Durban Archives, RSC 1/483 19/1959). Rape case where man is alleged to have offering five pounds for women to stay quiet: Rex v Sidlile Cele (Durban archive, RSC 1/495 133/1958).

<sup>20</sup> Rex v Unkala alias Nkokana (Durban Archives, RSC II/1/35, 72/1885).

<sup>21</sup> On fathers' attempts to circumvent limitations to *ilobolo* by introducing fees such as *invulamlomo* (literally "open the mouth", paid to instigate *ilobolo* negotiations) see Braatvedt (1927). On *umnyobo* as one form of "excess *ilobolo*", see SNA 1/4/8 Confidential Papers, No. 59, 1902. Asst. Magistrate, Pinetown, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1911.

men's commitment to "traditions" such as *ilobolo*.

## 1930s – 1970s: The male breadwinner, urban growth, and working women

### Part 1: rural romance

In the 1930s and 1940s, the period that I begin to probe in detail through oral interviews, South Africa was still a predominantly rural society though urban areas were expanding rapidly. The African population of Durban, Natal's biggest town, had grown from 19 000 in 1911 to 111 000 in 1946, with the proportion of African women increasing from 6% in 1911 to 27.7% in 1943-4.<sup>22</sup> Fifty years before, many men would have secured *ilobolo* through the patronage of their fathers. By the 1930s and 40s, however, the tax burden and associated rural failure had left unmarried rural men with effectively no choice but to work in order to *lobola* their girlfriends. Once married, the growing dependence of the rural *umuzi* (homestead) on men's wages, and women's reduced economic role, meant that men began to assume the position of "breadwinners", a status further pushed along by Christian notions of male economic responsibility and female domesticity (Francis, 2002; Silberschmidt, 2001). This was a precarious social arrangement. By the mid-century, a man's constant shifting too and fro from work was both a condition for family survival and a conduit for conjugal instability (Murray, 1981).<sup>23</sup>

Supporting the claim that a passionate culture of "mythic" love is not new to Zulu society, many men and women born from the 1920s-1950s vividly describe how love arose unpredictably from their hearts and could drive a man to *shela* (propose love to) a woman and a woman to *qoma* (accept) him. According to Doke et. al.'s (1990) dictionary, *inhliziyo* (the heart) has significance in Zulu as the seat of emotions and, as mentioned, *ukushela* has a connotation of burning desire. There are obvious similarities in these accounts with the romantic love culture dominant today, although a major difference is that non-Christian men at this time were permitted to court more than one woman. Since all oral histories are constructed through the present, we need to be careful in reading testimonies uncritically, although dictionaries and records from the time certainly suggest that a love culture has not been simply re-invented.

What is undoubtedly clear is that mid-century courting practices were undergoing something of a revolution through the institutions of schools and churches. In 1962, around 70% of Africans were in Lower Primary or Std. 1-3, 25% were in Standard 3-6.<sup>24</sup> The huge popularity of love letters, part of a school love culture, filled the new desire for private courting in a "modern" way and signalled a much greater role for women in initiating love.<sup>25</sup> Some women drew from these Christian notions of love to challenge unpopular Zulu customs such as *ukungena* (the 'entering' of a deceased husband's brother into marriage arrangements with the widow). However, women's

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<sup>22</sup>Figures taken from Department of Economics, University of Natal (1950). See Walker (1990) for an account of women's migrancy up to this period.

<sup>23</sup> Marital instability through migrant labour is a heavy theme in civil court records, see Eshowe civil Cases (uncatalogued) 50/54; 38/55; 65/55; 70/55.

<sup>24</sup> SA 1964 statistical yearbook, taken from Simons (1968: 276).

<sup>25</sup> On love letters in Southern Africa see Breckenridge (2000).

deployment of the symbols and institutions of modernity - schooling, church, and work – could be met by men’s dismissal of independent and rebellious women as simply *izifebe* (loose women/prostitutes)

Narratives of being seized by an irrational “mythic” feeling love were intricately blended with more prosaic-realist accounts of selecting a “good” partner. Central to the practical, realist, notion of love was the building and then maintenance of *umuzi* (homestead) – itself a fluid and contested project. Having recounted how love came irrationally from the heart, many men would follow this by saying that they also chose and loved their wife because she was *khutele* (hardworking) and respectful, these generally being seen as more important attributes than beauty. By the same token, women recalled searching for a boyfriend who was hardworking, serious about marriage, and showed potential for supporting the *umuzi*. Expectations of a husband as a “breadwinner”, and the centrality of wages to *ilobolo*, meant that a man often had to begin work before he could secure a lover. The words of Mrs Ndlovu, 73, provide a good example of how an irrational “arrival of love” could be blended with more prosaic calculations:

MH: Why did you like him (husband she *qoma*’d)?

Mrs Ndlovu: I don’t know, love just arrived

MH: Were there other people who were *shela*-ing you

Mrs Ndlovu: yes ...

MH: when women started to *qoma* a man what were the promises he would make, like maybe I will marry you?

Mrs Ndlovu: I could not love someone if I did not know what they were going to do with me [the connotation, taking into account the rest of the interview, is clearly paying *ilobolo*] ... if a boy would come to me and tell me that he loves me I would ask him what he can do for me since he says that he loves me. Some would tell me that they responded some other day and then they would never return ...

...

MH: What would happen if a man had to choose between a hardworking or a beautiful girl?

Mrs Ndlovu: Everyone would notice a girl who worked hard at home and the boys would place great value on a hardworking girl who respected her parents.

The phrase *vusela umuzi kababa* (build up/maintain father’s kraal/lineage), mentioned by Mrs Mthembu, 74, is typical of the forthright claims of marriage a man made when *shela*-ing a woman:

MH: How did you meet your husband?

Mrs Mthembu: He was *shela*-ing me at the river and shop ...

MH: What did she he say to you?

Mrs Mthembu: He said that I love you and I want you to *vusela umuzi kababa*.

Though Christianity, education and migrant labour, were undoubtedly transforming sexuality there is little evidence, even as late as the 1940s and 1950s, that gifts between boyfriend and girlfriends played an important role in driving rural courting relations. In the Valley of a Thousand Hills Vilakazi (1965: 49) reported great shock when asking about courting gifts because “*To give gifts at this stage would be improper among the traditionalists, and the boy would be accused of trying to gwaza (bribe) the girl to love him ...*” The use of the word *gwaza* suggests that courting was a domain where gifts (to influence the outcome) would be seen as improper, even immoral, interventions. Gift giving, if occurring according to Vilakazi, was more common among Christians. My interviews suggest very strongly that, for unmarried women, Christians and non-Christians, much more important than any short term gifts a suitor may provide her with was his commitment to marriage and building an *umuzi*. While some of my informants said that gifts were given from boyfriend to girlfriend they were adamant that a woman would not abandon a man if these gifts were not forthcoming. The language associated with gifts reflects this. *Umkhonzzo* was one word used. To *khonza* is to pay respects or send compliments (you *khonzela* a chief to show that you are under his authority). Mr Bhengu, 64, suggests that the potential for marriage was more important than any such presents:

MH: When the boy had a girlfriend was it expected that he give her presents?

Mr Bhengu: It was sending his *imikhonzzo* (regards) like maybe through a bandana. Also the girl maybe she would buy a gift for her boyfriend at Christmas

MH: Was the situation like now that to get a girlfriend you must have something?

Mr Bhengu: [then] the *isoka* would take the girl to see his home and she would notice that he was from a wealthy family

Wealth could attract women, but it is very important to recognise that rich men could have more girlfriends than poor men not merely because they had a larger amount of disposable money for gifts (as arguably is the case today) but because they had a greater ability to marry, demonstrated by their father’s well-stocked cattle kraal or their success in finding work. Besides, a young *isoka* (boyfriend or successful man with women), was expected to lure women through his wit, charm and persistence and not through “bribes”. The centrality of marriage to dominant masculinities was embedded in the phrase *isoka lamanyala* (*amanyala* means “dirt” or “disgraceful act”), which denotes the *isoka* masculinity gone too far. An *isoka lamanyala* was chastised not simply because he had too many girlfriends but because he wouldn’t, or couldn’t, marry his multiple partners (Hunter, 2004).

Arguably, money and gifts played a greater role in relations involving married women and widows. In rural KwaZulu-Natal women’s extra-marital relations were talked about through the metaphor of the pot (*ibhodla*) and the top (*isidikiselo*), the pot being the main man “who had paid cows” and the top the secondary lover. An *isidikiselo* was usually described as being more morally defensible than *ishende* (secret lover) because of the sometimes connivance of the man’s family in securing an *isidikiselo*. Mrs Ndlovu, 73, compares an *ishende* to an *isidikiselo*:

It wasn't *ishende* before because when the father left to work in Jo'burg there would be a man who would look after his home so that if there is something wrong, may be in the kraal, he must help. That man became *isidikiselo*. When she was pregnant she used to have to go to visit her husband in Jo'burg and sleep with him so that when he returns he will find her pregnant from his child - and yet really the baby belongs to *isidikiselo* who was looking after the family

These types of *isidikiselo* relations operated in an ambiguous moral space. Though a woman was married and expected to remain faithful, her husband's absence for long periods meant that the meeting of her sexual and monetary needs could in fact be seen as congruent with the maintenance of an *umuzi*'s integrity. They, like the *bonnyatsi* relations described by Spiegel (1980) for Lesotho, were one important route through which migrants' earnings were diffused within rural communities. Overall, extra-marital affairs probably increased as a consequence of migrant labour, although they were certainly not uncommon in pre-colonial society (see Delius & Glaser, 2003). Even so, it would be a mistake to see marriage as having collapsed in the mid-century - "never married" rates among the young remained low as did overall divorce rates (see Appendix 1). Perhaps the greatest sign of change was the sharp rise in illegitimate births, although too sweeping generalisations about social breakdown could be sometimes gleaned from this trend. In the Keiskammahoek study, Monica Wilson et. al. (1952: 103-4) incisively noted that many illegitimate births resulted from semi-permanent and not necessarily casual relations. Transient relations had increased, she observed, though many examples of women engaging in such relations related to their time in urban areas.

We may conclude that in certain situations casual relations became more common, particularly in towns, as discussed below. For married women in rural areas, however, the continued centrality of marriage, both morally and materially, meant that secondary lovers when they occurred could sometimes be relatively long term. At the same time, although unmarried women were much more likely to become pregnant than in previous generations, this should not blind us to the fact that certain restriction on unmarried men and women had in fact tightened. Reports from the pre-colonial period suggest that unmarried women, like men, were able to have more than one sexual partner and yet by the mid-century, as Christianity became more influential and absent men demanded chastity, this practice was frowned on as an act of *isifebe* (a loose woman) (Hunter, 2004). There were also countervailing tendencies that affected men. The visibility of money in rape cases is just one example of how work could give men greater power over women's sexuality. But the money economy was not simply an acid that indiscriminately destroyed social morals and gave young men unlimited power. Some women would not *qoma* a man until he was employed and had the ability to save *ilobolo*. Unlike in the pre-colonial period, a man's capacity to secure rural girlfriends was hindered by the necessity of work. Teleological accounts of "social breakdown" fail to capture the ambiguous and contradictory path of social change in rural and, as I argue below, urban areas.

## Part 2: Urban legends? Instability and Stability in South Africa's Towns

Urban life came abruptly to Mandeni, a rural area just North of the Thukela river, with the decision of SAPPI to open its second paper mill here in 1954. Although Mandeni has its own distinct trajectory, many of the socio-economic changes sweeping through South Africa in the post-war period were reflected in this area: the growth of secondary industry largely employing semi-skilled men, of which SAPPI was a part; the development of formal township housing aimed at married couples, seen in the construction of Sundumbili Township in 1964; the enlargement of women's formal employment opportunities, seen in the building of Isithebe Industrial Park in 1971; and from the 1990s, the erosion and casualisation of female jobs at a time when women's migrancy was proceeding apace. The decline in male employment from the 1970s was moderated somewhat in Mandeni through the expansion of Isithebe Industrial Park but by the 90s male employment was being particularly severely hit.<sup>26</sup>

In Mandeni in the 1950s and early 1960s most SAPPI employees stayed in single-sex hostels though there were a small number of two roomed houses for married men and their wives. Mr Khuzwayo was very critical about the early generation of men to the area in the 1950s and their irresponsible attitude towards women:

MH      These relationship how long did they last?

Mr Khuzwayo:    It seemed as if they are going to do the proper loving until they were about to get married, but it never happened like that ...

MH      [The reason no one got married] was it because the lot of the men who came to work at sappi were already married in rural areas?

Mr Khuzwayo:    Some came here while they had wives already at home. When they came here they acted as if they didn't have wives, they were just joaling. The lady never realised that this man doesn't like me to marry me he only want my body. She only discovers late when she is pregnant ... he said no i've got my wife now. [So] she start joaling with another one ...

The main complaint of Mr Khuzwayo, who grew up in a rural area upon which the township was subsequently located, seems to be that many male migrants were having relatively long term relations with local women but not marrying them. However, what was perceived as irresponsibility – engaging in relationships with concubines – has to be interpreted within broader geographical parameters. The dishonour of abandoning a

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<sup>26</sup> It is futile to attempt to find a research site that is entirely “representative” of a particular society; the over-used metaphor “microcosm” is highly misleading. Though unique dynamics exist in Mandeni, the processes I focus on – rising unemployment, women's increased movement and weaker position in the labour market, the relationship between money and sex – are present to varying degrees in all parts of South Africa. Much of my research was conducted in Mandeni although my decision to spend time in rural Hlabisa, where many migrants to Mandeni moved from, was taken out of recognition of the inextricably interconnectiveness of different places and the benefits of seeing Mandeni from the perspective of another location. On “locality” studies in the geographical literature see Massey (1994). On “global ethnographies” see Burawoy (2000). On cultural reworking within a global political economy see Pred and Watts (1992). For a recent application of geographical theory to South Africa through a two-sited, ethnography see Hart (2002).

rural homes (*ukubhunguka*) ensured that many married migrants looked for relatively stable urban relations. Migrant associations certainly placed considerable pressure on men not to act irresponsibly, including by having many girlfriends (see also Mayer, 1971; Delius, 1989; Moodie, 1994). Although, without doubt, new urban meeting spaces, including the many shebeens that sprung up to serve working men, could facilitate transient sexual relations, each drinking place had its unique culture and not all welcomed women who might wish to attract men.

Access to housing was critical to the way that relationships unfolded in Mandeni as in all of South Africa's urban areas. With the building of Sundumbili in 1964, Christian women were the most successful in persuading their husbands that they must move from the rural areas to live as husband and wife. Less permanent relations arose from men's quick marriages to a girlfriend for the purposes of attaining housing. A further group of workers produced marriage certificates to obtain housing but then invited girlfriends to *ukukhipita* (co-habit), leaving their wives to mind the rural *umuzi*. Mrs Mkhwanazi was one such urban concubine who, after living with her partner for some time, welcomed, with some trepidation at first, his rural wife when she came to visit. She recalls respectfully making up the bed for her partner and his wife and herself sleeping in the lounge. The two women became friends and the man eventually married his town concubine polygamously. Mrs Mkhwanazi still visits the first wife in Nongoma to this day, despite her husband's passing away. Many multiple-partnered relations were not so conflict free, though this example suggests a certain stability around concubine relations that was often not captured in accounts of urban areas.

Ellen Hellman, Ray Phillips and Laura Longmore – all pioneers of urban ethnography in South Africa and more specifically the dramatically expanding Witwatersrand – were concerned to highlight the social cost of segregation and industrialisation on African residents.<sup>27</sup> One theme in their classic texts was the pervasiveness of short term sexual relations. Longmore's fascinating ethnography of East Native Township is particularly speckled with references to "prostitution", a term she employs extremely broadly. Yet her framing of social change in such terms arguably does not do justice to the nuance of her empirical material. An example of her rich findings is that, while many married and co-habiting women had affairs with men for money, and some unmarried women could be driven into such relationships, there was also a trend whereby young *unmarried* women could give gifts to *unmarried* men. In contrast to many testimonies today, she shows how these transactions could fuel *men's* desire for multiple-partners:

He is proud that girls furnish him with clothing, that he has a number of girlfriends simultaneously. He is fully prepared to make use of them, to live off them by eating the food provided in the backyard rooms of his girls who may work as domestic servants; by accepting gifts of clothing from his girls if they are factory hands (p.26).

In an East London township, Pauw (1963) notes that gift giving was generally reciprocal and multiple-partnered relations were often avoided since women feared boyfriend's denial of paternity and men were concerned about losing control over relationships. Similarly, Levin (1947: 22) discussing Langa township reports mainly

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<sup>27</sup> See Phillips (1938), Hellman (1948), and Longmore (1959).

reciprocal gifts: “During courtship men try to win the favour of girls by giving them presents such as slabs of chocolate, jewellery, and scarves. Women, in turn, are said to give their boyfriends presents, such as ties and socks.” Where material liaisons involving young, unmarried, women were recorded in other parts of Africa they are often said to take place among relatively well educated and professional urban African women (for example Powdermaker, 1962 on the copperbelt; Schuster, 1979 on Lusaka; and Dinan, 1983 on Ghana).

Longmore, among others, emphasises the weak economic position of urban women. Forced removals pushed women out of informal settlements and often the only route to housing was through a man. In the wake of an accelerated segregationist agenda following the Nationalist’s 1948 victory, women’s mobility was also restricted by the extension of pass laws to cover both males and females. Yet an important mark of the post-war period was the large growth in women’s formal work. By 1960 15% of African women were economically active (as compared to 56% of African men). In urban areas such as Durban, domestic service, formerly a male occupation, offered by far the biggest source of employment, particularly for better educated Christians.<sup>28</sup> Through their access to housing, these women had some leverage over men and for the first time a man could become dependent on women for accommodation. In Sundumbili, though women were largely dependent on men for housing in the 1960s, by the late 1970s, women were beginning to win property rights and buy plots.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, around the corner from Sundumbili township, Isithebe Informal Settlement was mushrooming on tribal land adjacent to the new Isithebe factories and many of the first inhabitants and employees such as Mrs Khumalo from Nongoma “bought” a plot of land from original owners – with the *inkosi* and *induna* taking a fee - and built their own mud, wood, and stone houses. Mrs Khumalo was able to use her property as a small shebeen during times of unemployment. Between 1980 and 1991 in Mandeni, female employment expanded from 1 159 to 11 160 and women’s employment rose elsewhere too in South Africa.<sup>30</sup> Still marginalised, and facing greater state coercion, many women were gaining important economic independence.

Though marriage was seen to be irrevocably breaking down from the 1930s, and African society plunging into a spiral of promiscuity, census data shows little change in the proportion of Africans who were married in 1936, 1951 and 1960; indeed a slightly higher proportion of people were recorded as being married in 1960 than in 1936. (see Appendix 1). There was a steady decline in marital rates from the 1960s to the present but this suggests that, in terms of marital patterns at least, we see the mid-

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<sup>28</sup> Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, April, 1964 and Population Census 1960, taken from Simons, 271 & 273. Preston-Whyte (1981) on the status of domestic workers.

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, this was influenced by the KwaZulu government readiness to prioritise women’s rights through a reassessment of the Natal Code of Natal Law. An Inkatha resolution on women in 1975 aimed to end the “mental and legal slavery” based on the Natal Code which denied women property rights. Ulundi Archives, G/34/6/2 (Resolutions of the extra-ordinary session of the general conference of the national cultural liberation movement (Inkatha), Bhekuzulu College, Nongoma, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> July 1975). The legislative assembly also commissioned a select committee report on the legal disabilities of Zulu women (Ulundi archives 6/1/2/18/9 – 6/4/3/6).

<sup>30</sup> See Posel and Todes (1995). In Isithebe these were mainly clothing jobs though a smaller, but significant, number of women were employed in traditionally male jobs such as in the metal sector providing evidence for a broader feminization of work to increase flexibility and reduce costs suggested by Posel and Todes.



century more as a turning point than as a period itself of absolute crisis. In rural areas, I have argued that sexual relations were not dramatically commodified, though pre-marital pregnancy had become much more common. In towns, the instability of *ukukhipita* (co-habiting) could be exaggerated but it certainly did provide a new precariousness to urban relations. Love was faster, supervision lighter, and spaces for sexual mixing more apparent. Yet despite the persistent cries of “prostitution” to describe African society, gifts among never-married men and women in both rural and urban areas appear to have played a comparatively minor part in courting.

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## Images of Gifts and Love



**Left: A group on their way to a wedding ceremony in 1928 bearing gifts. The exchange of gifts between families was an integral part of African marriage, with *ilobolo* the central gift from the man’s family to his girlfriends’. In this period, gifts directly from men to their girlfriends did not form of central part of relationships. Source: Killie Campbell Africana Library (d07-145).**



**Left: Responding to the many gift relations entered into by young women today, this Love Life billboard promotes the “gift of love”. Chocolates – closely associated with romance - are an attempt to place gifts within a romantic love paradigm where they are valued as being unique and thoughtful and not simply for their material worth. But, with unemployment in some areas running at 60 or 70%, how many South Africans can afford to eat expensive chocolates? Source: Love Life.**

## 1980s-Present: Love and gifts in the era of chronic unemployment

In the 1970s, the South African economy, along with much of sub-saharan Africa, plummeted into recession. Outside of South Africa, the optimistic language of independent women “entrepreneurs”, used by Bujra, Obbo, White, MacGaffey when discussing sex workers in an earlier period, became markedly replaced by accounts of “survival sex” (see Schoepf (1988) on Zaire and Callaghan and Bond (1999) on Zambia). In South Africa, one initial consequence of the recession in the 1980s may have been a partial turn to female labour in order to cut costs. But by the 1990s Casale and Posel (2002) argue that women’s growing participation in the labour force was driven by the increased supply of labour rather than by women being absorbed into the formal sector. Whereas women’s movement for work is nothing new, most women now entering the labour market, often relocating to do so, find themselves in badly paid, informal, work, or facing unemployment.<sup>31</sup>

Since the 1960s, marriage rates have been declining as work gave women greater economic independence (linked to rising education levels), *ukukhipita* (co-habiting) relations became more common, particularly in urban areas, and men became increasingly unable to secure *ilobolo*, especially from the 1970s, when unemployment rose sharply. Many young school leaving women whom I spoke with in rural Hlabisa scoffed at the thought of staying *emakhaya* (at home or in a rural area) to wait for a man to *lobola* them, rejecting with equal vigour the prospect of working for R10 a day weeding sugar cane alongside their uneducated mothers. The group of young women who tolerated long waits in the rural areas while their lovers *lobola*’d them – evoked in the Mafikizolo song quoted earlier – has, if not completely vanished, been reduced greatly in numbers. Relationships linked to gifts are now very common in rural areas.

Another dynamic, propelled by mounting rural poverty caused by HIV/AIDS, is the quickening pace of female movement in and out of rural areas. In rural Hlabisa, data from the Africa centre shows that rural women actually move around more than men, contradicting the longstanding image of migrant/moving men and passive/waiting, women (appendix 2). Much movement appears to be circular, although aerial photos show an astonishing increase in the density of housing in Mandeni’s informal areas at Isithebe, despite a drop in employment in the industrial park from approximately 23 000 in 1990 to 15 000 in 1999 (see appendix 2). According to census data, the population of the informal settlement surrounding the Isithebe factories increased by an extraordinary 300-400% between 1996 and 2001 alone. In Mandeni, the quickening of arrivals coincided with the ending of spatial subsidies for “decentralization zones” and, from 1994, the relaxation of trade tariffs that left the site exposed to the harsh wind of global competition. Jobs became more casualised and salaries when I first visited in 2000 were as low as R65 a week for some women, though the men in larger firms, usually metal, could earn as much as R1000 a week. These sharpened gendered earnings differentials in the post-apartheid period are tracked at a national level by Casale (forthcoming, 2004). The sum result is that,

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<sup>31</sup> Between 1995 and 1999 the number of economically active women (searching for or securing informal or formal work within the labour market) increased by 2 millions, twice the increase in female population of working age (Casale & Posel, 2002). The percentage of migrant workers who are women increased from 30 to 34% between 1993 and 1999 (Posel & Casale, 2003).

compared to their predecessors, the new generation of female migrants to Mandeni from the 1990s were usually less able to buy land, faced higher rents, had less chance of securing formal work, and survived on often lower pay. For this group at least, the government's embracing of free-market principles had proved disastrous.

Economic benefits, however, do not provide the only attraction for migration. Co-habiting is rarely allowed in rural areas and, with marriage such a rarity, migration can give rural men and women the ability to live intimately as lovers. This struck me one night in Isithebe Informal Settlement close to my family's house when men and women were entangled in intricate ball room dancing moves, a popular and "modern" recreational practice in the moonlight outside the *imijondolo* (one room rented accommodation) of the informal settlement. Some of these women dancing the Waltz may be supporting their unemployed boyfriend though a much larger number are dependent, or partly dependent, on men, including multiple men. Some relations are long term, though love is often talked of as a short term phenomenon. The combination of rich men and poor women, accentuated by economic decline, is central to the exchange of sex in the informal settlement as this longstanding resident notes:

Mrs Ndlela: I don't know how they survive ... younger women are living in a bad situation, many have children, when they don't find work they end up ... er ...

Nonhlanhla: Go on say it, selling their bodies.

Mrs Ndlela: Before, people didn't rely on anyone, they were having money, now they have to rely on other people ... some see this man today, this man tomorrow, and that man the following day ... some men are working in factories, some outside like taxi drivers ... Today the situation pushes them to this thing ... they are scared [of AIDS] but sometimes they just say that there is no such thing, they just ignore it ...

Love and relationships vary widely across even small distances and only a few kilometres from Isithebe Informal Settlement in Sundumbili Township the proliferation of TV and magazine images provokes distinctive debates and contestations over love. Love culture in contemporary South Africa is powerfully shaped by global images of romantic love, but these work through meanings rooted in longstanding forms of "mythic" love, described above. Intertwined as they were with notions of modernity, Christian understandings of love have long been employed by women to challenge customs such as polygamy and *ukungena*. Though the TV is usually coded as a modern influence, there is certainly no contradiction in women and men watching a glitzy soap opera and then following this with a discussion about whom in the local community has been *dliisa*'d through love potions. Indeed, my interviews, in agreement with Suzanne LeClerc-Madlala's (1999) research, suggest that there is at least a perception that women are using love potions increasingly to *dliisa* men.

As is common in other parts of the world, men are more likely to equate love with sex while women are more likely to see abstinence as a sign of "true love". Nonetheless, though there are certainly important gendered differences in understandings of love, out of 20 replies from township youth to the question "what is love" the initial, first response from men and women – of love as irrational and from the heart – was remarkably similar. Simphiwe's response was typical: "*It comes from the heart and goes from one person to another person and it and it is to wish the one you love hapiness.*" The rest of this section will focus on the strategies of women but

it worth noting that male violence and men securing multiple partners, persistently reported practices, are not necessarily incompatible with men holding ideals of romantic love. Masculinities that celebrate multiple-sexual-partners, such as the *isoka* masculinity in KwaZulu-Natal, have taken on an added impetus in the last three decades precisely because men have often been unable to secure manliness through work, marriage and conventional realisations of loving and protecting.<sup>32</sup> Male power, embodied in and reiterated through such masculinities, is in part the product of male weakness in other spheres.

The longer quote below, taken from a workshop attended by three young township women in 2003, shows how romantic love is intertwined with realist notions of love and how closely, but always through great tension, love and gifts are connected. Not all women secure men for money and very often when women discuss the gift culture it is possible to sense unease, discord and sometimes apparent contradictory views. This can be seen most clearly when Hlengiwe and Qondeni defend the ideal of “money” as contaminating “love”, although in other parts of the interview it is clear that the “number one’s” inability to provide support can lead to another man becoming the primary lover:

MH: Do boyfriends give their girlfriends anything?

Dumazile and Hlengiwe: Yes

MH: What do give them?

Dumazile: Money and clothes

MH: Do sometimes women have more than one boyfriend so that they can get lots of things?

Dumazile: There are some that say this one will buy me clothes, this one will buy me cosmetics and this one will give me money.

MH: But it never work’s like that though does it? They say that but really men give them money isn’t it?

Dumazile: Yes, this one gives her money and she will go and buy the things by herself. Some women do these things because they have no money. She loves the one who is already her boyfriend, but the problem is that he does not do anything for her. Then another boy will *shela* her and she discovers that this one has money, so she will love him too.

MH: But do the boy’s know that what the girl’s say about them, namely this one is for food, this one is for clothes, do the boys know that?

Hlengiwe: They do not know, it is your secret

Qondeni: I don’t think there is a boy who would accept the fact that you have many lovers and yet say nothing about that situation. When he comes to me he will ask if I am involved. Then I will either tell him that I am single or that there is someone I am involved with and that he will be the second one. Then to the third one I won’t say that he is the third I will say that he is number two...

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<sup>32</sup> See Silberschmidt (2001) in East Africa on how economic crisis has undermined the provider role of men and how this drives masculinities that celebrate multiple sexual partners. See Hunter (2004) on reworking of the *isoka* masculinity in KwaZulu-Natal in the era of chronic unemployment.

MH: The men don't mind not being the number one boyfriend? Is that the case, most women have a main boyfriend, then an *ishende* is that how it works?

Qondeni: There are some that do mind the fact that when he arrives there is already someone else before him. Some girls tell the second that she will see by the way he behaves if he loves me. Then if he does love me there will be no need to continue with the first one.

MH: What is the difference between the number one boyfriend and the other boyfriends?

Qondeni: Boyfriend number one is the one you love the most, as he is the one that you tell other men about. But sometimes you will love boyfriend number one and he will not do anything for you. Then the second will come along and he could be working and he will *shela* you and you will *qoma* him. Then the third one will *shela* you and then you will *qoma* him and call him number two. O.K, sometimes you will truly love number one, the reason that you will love number two is that he is a working man ...

MH: Let's say number one was working and lost his job would you still love him, or would you make him number two and make number two number one because he is working?

Hlengiwe: There is nothing that can do to change because if you really love the number one boyfriend truly, there is nothing that can change because you love the other's for their money only and there is nothing that can make swap them.

MH: What are the reasons someone might split up with number one?

Qondeni: When boyfriend number two comes boyfriend number one will already be there. Then the second one will love you very much or maybe he will do everything for you. Then he will tell you that we have been loving for a long time he will ask you to choose between him and number one. Maybe if you ask number one for money he will say that he will see, unlike the second boyfriend who does not hesitate to give you money. The girl will assume that as he does not give her money then he does not love her and will carry on with the second one.

Dumazile: And sometimes the one you love the most, number one, he started having many girlfriends and then you realise that he doesn't love you anymore and carry on with number two ...

MH: It seems that love is linked with money like if the person is loving you a lot he must give you money is that true?

Qondeni: Ya

MH: Why is that?

Qondeni: It depends on whether they do everything for you at home, then you will not focus on money as you will love for the right reasons. But if you notice that they do not do anything for you then you will love the one that helps you.

The differentiation between a first boyfriend (sometimes referred to in Zulu as *uqondile*, or *istraight*) and secondary/secret boyfriends has close similarities to the rural practices of *ibhodla* (pot, main lover) and *isidikiselo* (lid, additional lover) mentioned earlier. Without the comparative permanence of marriage, however, the "number one" man is in a much less stable position than a husband. A man who has "done nothing", not even starting to pay *ilobolo*, is owed a much reduced level of commitment. One can compare the pot/lid metaphor, which still suggests respect for the pot, to some

contemporary township women's description of multiple boyfriends as the "minister of finance, minister of transport, minister of entertainment". Boyfriends who haven't started paying *ilobolo*, the majority, are derisively called my "O". Many were unable to tell me the source of iO, but one said that they were taught at school that O meant Zero, nothing, and that the men these days are useless because they can't *lobola*, or adequately support, a woman. In contrast, the term "sugar daddies" can be used quite positively by young women, some remarking that these relationships are at least straightforward in their demands and expectations. For their part, a township man might call his girlfriend *iCherry*. A young man may call a one night stand *iFree Kick*. Hovering above all these concepts is men's power to label certain women as being *izifebe* ("loose" women/prostitutes)

The constant drawing on idioms of love, however, warns us not to interpret relationships along too narrowly instrumental lines. For a start, not all relationships involve gifts. Some men "come clean" and inform their girlfriends from the beginning of the relationship that they don't have money for gifts. Even when relations are heavily driven by money the culture of romantic love dictates that true love might always appear "from nowhere". A critical juncture may be pregnancy. A man's response of either rejection or acceptance fits neatly with a love culture that positions love as an either/or dichotomy. What's more, while women may discuss men in instrumental terms most women would rather be positioned by her "boyfriend" as a "girlfriend", than someone who is just after men for money (an *isifebe*). Equally, a real *isoka* (successful man with women) should attract women through his charm rather than his wallet. He may support a woman as a "breadwinner" but he should not exchange sex too crudely for gifts.

Constructing relations within a love paradigm also allows women to position sex as aimed at mutual pleasure rather than at men's sole satisfaction, though men may expropriate this irrational, passionate, dimension of love to explain their violence towards women and, additionally, the importance of "flesh to flesh" sex as an expression of true love. Finally, the flexible sexual networks leave room for men and women to make different demands – financial, sexual and emotional - from a number of lovers, sometimes in different places, when the need may arise. Indeed, the rules of exchange are deliberately ambiguous and do not preclude women demanding sex and men demanding gifts. The complexity of these networks, combining both trust and mistrust, love and instrumental demands, raise important questions about the appropriateness of applying crude categories such as "social capital" to the South African social situation.

## Conclusion

In 1990 less than 1 in 100 South Africans were infected by the HI virus. Now the figure stands at 1 in 4. The urgency of the AIDS pandemic can obscure important conceptual differences critical to understanding sexuality, for instance the distinction between multiple-partners and casual partners. Models of transmission for previous STDs, such as the male migrant model, can be uncritically relied upon.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the tragic pace

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<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the common presumption that male miners acquire HIV through prostitutes and then pass on 22

of funerals and the close association between sex and illness can nullify the fact that relationships often embody emotions, dreams, compassion and love. Profoundly local and intimate, these relationships are also forged in a global political economy of rising inequalities and greater connectiveness which has diversified and deepened bodily commodification.<sup>34</sup> Yet in South Africa, these sexual gift exchanges are not on the whole characterised by impersonal prostitute relations but by (more Maussian) exchanges incorporating broader obligations. “Globalisation”, as some suggest, does not dissolve and commoditise all social relations but can force certain relations to become more personal (Williams, 2003). In today’s uncertain economic and courting climate, the securing of multiple partners is also simultaneously the exchange of multiple obligations - creating not simply sexual networks but networks of broader commitments.

Conflating very different periods, the Caldwells have implied that sex in African society has always been outside of any moral domain and freely exchanged. Arguing against such a crude understanding of morality and towards the need to periodise transformations in sexuality this paper has asserted that the courting gift among unmarried men and women today constitutes a relatively new “sphere of exchange”. Multiple-sexual-partners have a long history in South Africa, and the onset of towns and the migrant economy made them more transient (though this could be exaggerated). Nevertheless, one important dynamic embedding casual multiple-partnered relations today is a gift culture that must be seen as a relatively new phenomena.

In its examination of such changes, this paper has largely focused on poor black South African women, marginalised by both race and gender structures and forming the largest group of women in South Africa. Not all of these women will engage in relations with multiple partners. Not all men want to attract women through gifts; in fact many outwardly abhor the close connection between money and sex that makes it difficult for a poor man to secure a girlfriend. Moreover, in the post-apartheid period the growth in numbers of middle-class African women provides scope for a culture whereby gifts are only accepted when they demonstrate deep “meaning”, such as flowers, chocolate, and jewellery. Democracy and discourses of women’s “rights” too have opened up new spaces for gendered struggles, although ironically at a time when economic pressures have placed many women in great poverty.

In 2000 a glossy *Drum* article was entitled “Ngeke nisasithenga ngokusikhipha nangokudla okumnandi” (You’ll never buy us by taking us out for nice food. *Drum* 27 July 2000). The piece, like the Love Life billboard displayed earlier, makes a powerful case for woman to resist men’s gifts and search instead for “true love”. Yet the enormous inequalities in South Africa ensure that while many whites and a small, but increasing, number of blacks prosper, most young African people today have little hope of work and economic independence – perceiving South Africa as a place where the ideal of “All You Need is Love” can rarely be realised.

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the virus to their partners in the rural areas was recently questioned by research conducted at Hlabisa, Northern KwaZulu-Natal which found that in 40% of relationships when only one person was HIV positive it was in fact the woman and not her mining partner who was infected (Lurie 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Evidence for this can be found in the rise in trade in children for sex (Seabrook, 1988) and the global trade in body parts (Scheper-Hughes, 2001).

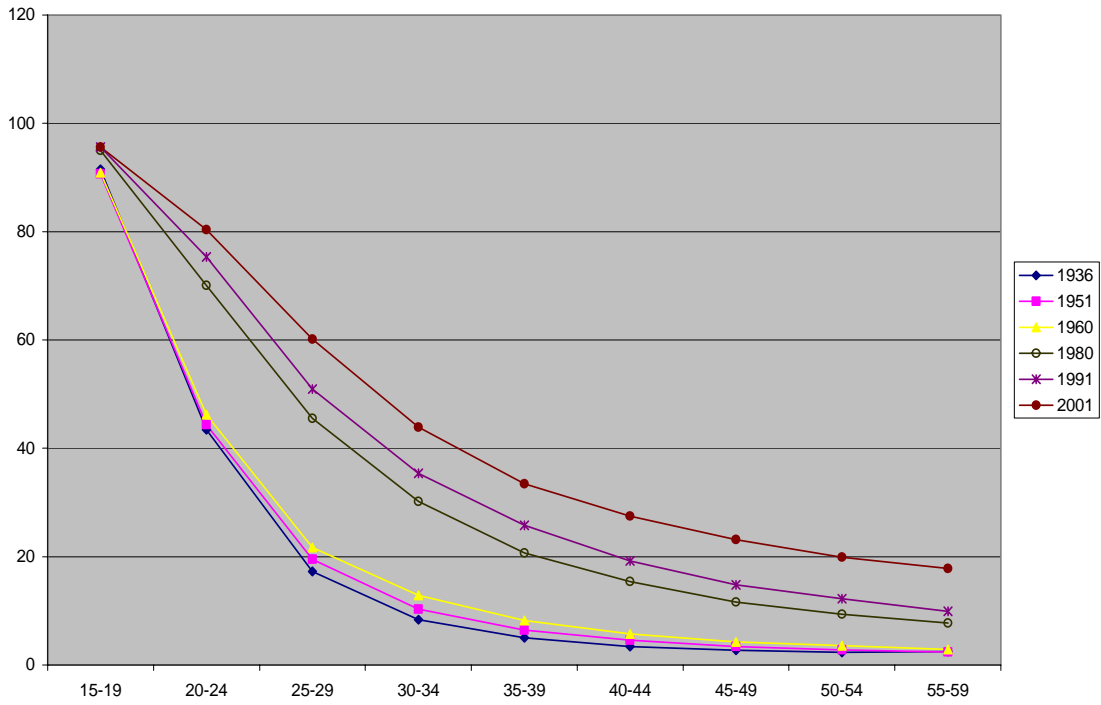
## Appendix 1: A Note on Marital Trends

The simplest way to track changes to marriage is by scrutinizing marital rates. Unfortunately, however, such figures, are available only for Whites, Indians and Coloureds. This leaves the Population Census as the principal statistical source for African marital trends. From 1936, marital status was collected (with slight difference over years) under the following categories: never married, married, living together (as if married), widowed and divorced. It should be noted that the 1985 and 1991 censuses excluded Africans in “homelands”, creating a potential urban bias (although the significance of this should not be overestimated since, with the exception of “living as married” figures which are larger in urban areas, according to the 1996 census marital rates do not appear to be significantly different in rural and urban areas). Despite this qualifier, the census figures do show very consistent themes. Below, Chart 1 shows the percentage of women who are “never married” by age group and year. What is particularly interesting is that there seems to have been very little change between 1936, 1951, and 1960 and yet from 1960 there is a sharp drop in the number of people who are married which continues until the latest census in 2001. Age breakdowns are unavailable for the 1970 census. Chart 2 shows overall marital trends for the whole population and includes 1970 figures, demonstrating a decline in marriage from the 1960s. One can also see from this chart the slightly different marital categories employed over the course of the decades. The actual decline in marriage rates is probably somewhat tempered in this chart as a result of significant demographic changes, notably the increased life expectancy of elderly people and the large amount of recent AIDS deaths among groups of never-married adults.

Ethnographic accounts from the mid-century help to explicate some of the trends observable through statistics. Pauw’s (1963:109) study in East London notes how men and women often remained unmarried up until their 30<sup>th</sup> year, although stating that after that only a minority remained unmarried. The Natal Regional Survey (1959) study of Baumanville in Durban also noted that younger men married at a later age and, through looking at age at marriage for different cohorts, drew the conclusion that delayed marriage was a relatively recent phenomenon. In a rural setting, the Keiskammahoek rural survey (Wilson et. al., 1952) also showed a progressive latening of marriage for men and women. All of these examples from the mid-century suggest delays in marital ages but not necessarily rates, consistent with the census findings. Family trees from my elderly informants also suggest that most people in the 1950s married, although there were some, and probably an increasing amount, who did not. Among my informants, the most noticeable drop in marital rates was among the cohort who came of age after the 1970s. At a time of increased unemployment, this group reported the greatest difficulty in marrying particularly because of men’s inability to secure *ilobolo* (*ilobolo* rates are still largely 11 cattle in KwaZulu-Natal, a figure set in 1869 and discussed in Hunter, 2004). Certainly today, qualitative and quantitative data suggests that marriage is extremely rare in South Africa. An approximate quantitative measure for this is demonstrated in migration data produced by the Africa centre in rural Hlabisa. Out of nearly 14 000 migrancy events captured within the “data surveillance areas” since 2000 only 103 were noted as taking place because of marriage. Much more analysis is needed on marital trends but I present below some charts derived from the Population Census data as an introduction.

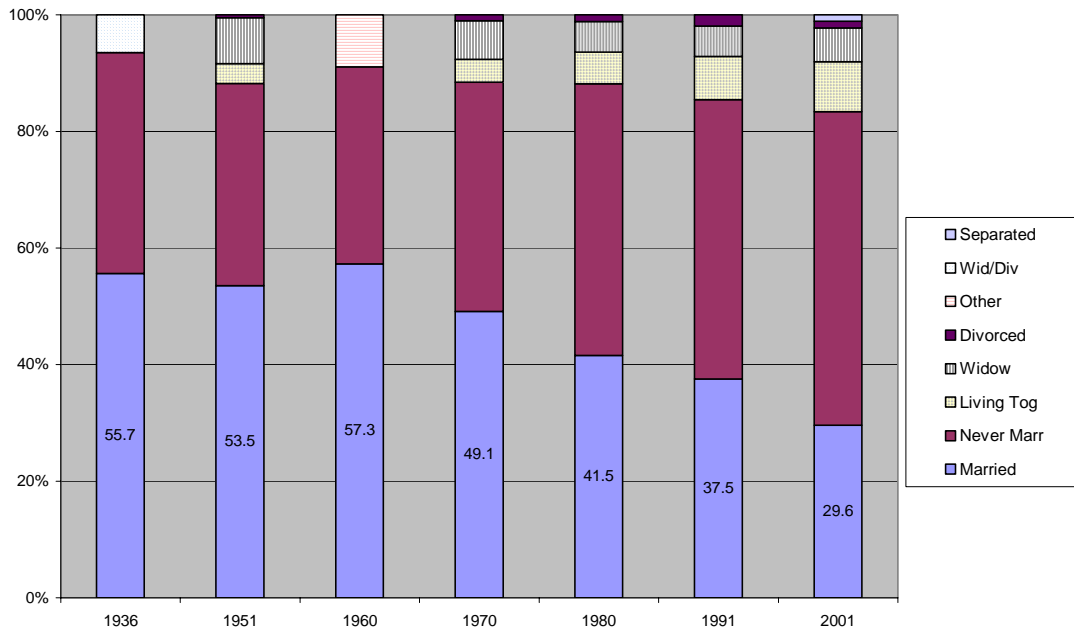


**Chart 1: % African women never married by age**



**Sources.** 1936: Simons (1968: 71); 1951: population census, Vol XII table 8; 1960: population census, report no.8, Table 4.4; 1980: population census, report no. 02-80-12, table 2; 1991: population census, report no. 03-01-22, table 3.5; 2001, personal communication, Statistics South Africa, Pretoria

**Chart 2: Marital Status for African pop > 15**



**Sources.** As for table one but additionally: 1970: South African Statistics 1974 (yearbook). In this source, however, the 1970 marital figures are presented only for the total population. To calculate the “above 15” figures I had to draw on population data for the under 15 population and assume that all persons under 15 were “never married” (statistics from 1960 suggest that less than 1 hundredth of a percent of people under 15 had ever married).

## Appendix 2: Increased Mobility of young women



**Figure 1: 1981**



**Figure 2: 1989**

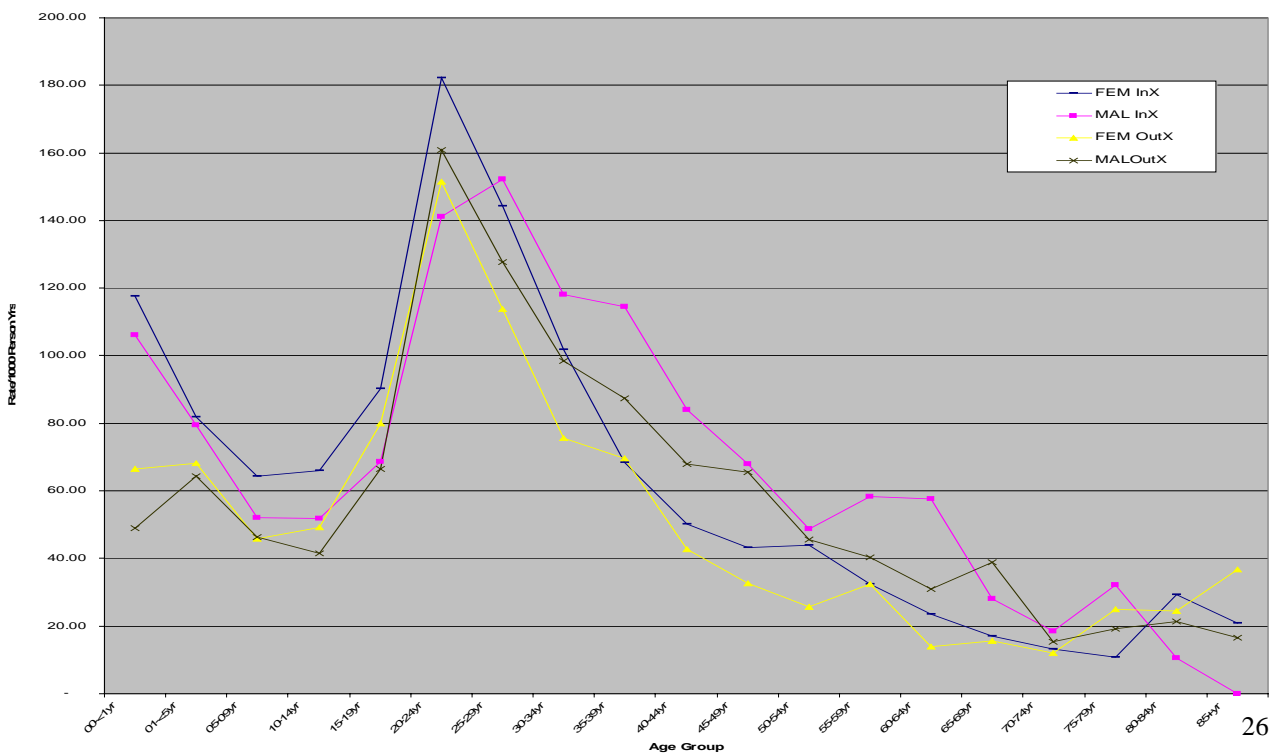


**Figure 3: 1999**

**Figures 1,2 & 3:** Isithebe Industrial Estate and Informal Settlement. Between 1989 and 1999, in particular, the informal settlement surrounding the park grew tremendously, particularly through women’s migration, despite the shedding of thousands of jobs.

**Below:** Chart 3 produced by the Africa Centre, Hlabisa, shows the rate of migration in and out of the “demographic surveillance area” in rural Hlabisa, which has a population of approximately 90 000. Noticeable is that women are moving in and out of the area (and other data suggests within the area too) more than men, with peak ages of movement being around 25 (the top line is female in-migrants, the second line is male in-migrants). For more details on the Africa Centre data set see Africa Centre Population Studies Group (2003).

**Chart 3: External Migration Rates, Africa Centre DSA, Hlabisa**



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