‘Christmas Time’ and the Struggles for the Household in the Countryside: Rethinking the Cultural Geography of Migrant Labour in South Africa

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In this paper, I take advantage of a space of interdisciplinary research that has emerged at the intersection of human and social sciences since the advent of radical revisionist scholarship in South African Studies in the 1980s. Within this space, I argue for a rethinking of the geography of cultures of migrancy. By focusing attention on rural (rather than urban) contexts of the cultures of mobility that accrue with migrancy, I argue that we can look at migrant labour as a constellation of cultural arguments in much the same way that recent scholarship has analysed media such as radio, newspapers and schooling, all of which similarly connect the ‘local’ with the national and the global. In particular, I look at how a gendered culture of migrancy, reflected discursively, materially and performatively, orchestrates struggles over the household.

Umam’uyandirobha, uthath’imali yam My mother robs me, she takes my money;
Utat’akandithandi, uthand’inkomo zodwa My father does not like me, he only likes cattle;
ubhut’akandifuni, usis’akakhathali My brother does not want me, my sister does not care;
gomsonnye ndiyakhwela, ndibheka eBenoni The day after tomorrow I ride off to Benoni.

(Olive Alexander and the Blue Notes)

Prologue

By the end of June 1976 news about the Soweto uprisings, which had been trickling into Cancele in bits and pieces for about two weeks, had begun to coalesce into a somewhat coherent (if inevitably inconsistent) narrative. Three social institutions or media were primarily responsible for disseminating this knowledge about the wider world of national politics into the ethnicised rural enclave of Cancele. The first of these was Radio Transkei

1 Cancele, where I grew up, is a rural settlement in the district of Mount Frere in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The ethnography in this paper derives from interviews carried out in 1996. The time frame of this material dates from 1976 at the peak of migrancy in this area. I also use contemporary material where necessary. A larger project that I envisage will look more closely at the time span between the 1970s and the present.

2 Radio Transkei (formerly Radio Xhosa) was one of several ethnic language radio stations broadcasting under the auspices of Radio Bantu, which was launched in 1961 with the aim of serving ‘the Bantu peoples of the country, according to the nature, needs and character of each, and … to strengthen national consciousness.’ Quoted in Rob Nixon, Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond (New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 65.
whose news reports were often used by Transkei politicians to justify ‘independence’ for the homeland, arguing that the strong-handed response by the South African police to the protesting students demonstrated the futility of entrusting black people’s future on white South Africa. Second, we overheard conversations among teachers, most of whom commuted between the school and the local town of Mount Frere where they had access to shortwave radio channels and other sources of international news reports. Third, we often managed to retrieve old copies of *Imvo Zabantsundu* from the teachers’ outhouse where they were recycled as toilet paper.

In regard to their complex implication in the politics of subject formation and transformation within and across localities, these agencies and media (radio, newspapers and intellectuals) have received a fair amount of attention in social theory. They have, for example, been theorised variously as state institutions of social control, as instruments of ideological struggles within civil society whose control is never completely determinate, and as mediators of cultural globalization. Within South African studies similar concerns are reflected in studies of print media as a site of contestations over the terms and politics of constructing modern selves; in recent work on ethnic language radio stations where it has been shown that this media’s goal of ‘restoring quiescent acceptance of the dominant social order – nationally and globally – among (their) listeners’ was soon compromised by the ‘multiple cultural forms that began to have a place in (their) airtime;’ and in the literature on education whose range spans from early studies of ‘culture contact,’ through complex theories of cultural reproduction, to recent neo-Gramscian notions of schooling as a site of struggle. This diverse body of literature has shown how radio, newspaper and schooling not only circumscribe the parameters of public self-presentation but are also implicated in cultivating social consciousness that in

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3 I have the embarrassing memory of a poem I wrote at the end of that year, entitled ‘No More June 16s’, in which I paid tribute to K.D. Matanzima, the first Prime Minister of Transkei, for winning us the independence that saved us from a June 16 experience.

4 *Imvo Zabantsundu* was launched in 1884 by John T. Jabavu to become the first African-owned paper in the country. As Cancele is 30 km outside the newspaper circulation area we relied on commuting teachers for access to this medium.


turn may be partly responsible for a growing disjuncture between identity and location in our own times.

In this paper I explore another medium whose own role in both generating ‘new centres of consciousness’ and enabling novel ways of understanding the local/national/global complex deserves, I argue, more attention in South African scholarship. This medium is constituted at the confluence of the persons of migrant workers and the narratives (performed, spoken and adorned) that accrue with their sojourns in the worlds of ‘work’ and ‘home.’ In the case of Cancele, for example more dramatic, even if notoriously idiosyncratic, narrative exegeses of the Soweto events mentioned above were to wait until ‘Christmas time’ – roughly a two-week period from about 20 December to 2 of January, when local migrant workers would be home for the holidays.

The main question that the paper seeks to address is what sorts of local social subjectivity (instead of the unmarked cosmopolitan subjects that most literature reviewed below posit) were at stake in the set of conflicts, conversations and practices that constituted Christmas time at Cancele? Implicit here is a three-pronged argument: First, that there was an articulation among the composition of migrants, their different ways of representing the world and themselves in it, and the material goods and styles of body decoration accompanying their persons; second, that the culture of mobility, which this heterogeneous group of people, things and ideas crystallised, was shaped by, and in its own turn gave new accent to, ongoing local struggles; and third, that these local struggles (with their modalities going back to pre-capitalist times), were carried out within, and over, imagined parameters of propriety delimiting the household. In phrasing the problematic this way I am hoping to suggest a rethinking of the cultural geography of migrant labour in South African studies. Where most literature on migrant cultures has tended to focus on the experiences and activities of migrants in their urban environment, for example, ‘Christmas time’ shifts the focus to the countryside. The countryside here, however, is neither merely an aspect of the conditions of reproduction of social labour, nor a frontier of traditional resistance against capitalism. This view reflects a ‘modernist teleology’ in which the countryside represents pre-modernist lifestyles in the process of

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14 I use the concept of conversation here in more than its immediate verbal communicative sense to embrace extra-discursive practices and performances the economy of all of which is to influence social relations within a particular location. I owe this concept to the work of Comaroff and Comaroff who use it to thematise the nineteenth century encounters between Nonconformist missionaries and Tswana natives. See J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. I: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991), chapter 6.


transformation by a progressive modernity. This modernist teleology, according to Dirlik, stems from:

a historical consciousness that identifies civilization and progress with political, social, and cultural homogenization and justifies the suppression of the local in the name of the general and the universal.\(^\text{19}\)

On the contrary, I view the countryside as the heterogeneous spaces of settlement within which discourses of migrancy – as embodied in commodities, new consciousness of space and exotic narratives – feature in ongoing struggles over the internal form of local households. In these struggles, constructs such as ‘family’, ‘tradition’, and ‘home’, become mobilized to naturalize certain patterns of social divisions over other possible ones.

At one level, therefore, ‘Christmas time’ can be seen as a constellation of the sorts of struggles whose outcome gives form to changing patterns of migrancy. At another level it was these same struggles over the maintenance of this form,\(^\text{20}\) and the stabilisation of its ideological import for local social relations,\(^\text{21}\) that in turn gave shape and content to ‘Christmas time.’ It is in this sense that I propose to use ‘Christmas time’ heuristically to talk about struggles over the household at Cancele along three related lines – discursive, material and performative. The discursive aspect was largely shaped by, inter alia, exotic accounts by migrants about the outside world and their place in it. The material aspect turned on the symbolic and economic value accruing with the commodities and techniques with which the migrants overwhelmed the village during Christmas time (hair straightening and dyeing procedures, skin lightening creams, new clothing styles, plastic Christmas trees, furniture, Primus stoves, new dance styles and music genres). The performative aspect implicated both the discursive and material aspects in a domain of normative performance dominated by feasting and household strengthening rituals. The effect of these discursive and material encounters was to alter, if only temporarily and incompletely, the normative contours of the local cosmogony, distending the horizons of people’s self-imagination beyond the ideological parameters of their local universes. Indeed, one can picture these conversations as having had the effect of loosening up certain local truths (hegemonic knowledges), and reducing them to contestable arguments (ideologies). This internal revolution, however, did not amount to what is called ‘dissolution’ of traditional lifestyles and their replacement with ‘secular, urban culture’ embodied by the migrants. On the contrary, the political economy of ‘tradition’ betrayed its complex relation of ‘supplementarity’\(^\text{22}\) to wage labour (modernity) at the very same time as modernity (embodied in money, commodities and human mobility) acquired its own disenchanting grip on the life world once it became transformed into local currencies of symbolic value.\(^\text{23}\)

This notion of ‘Christmas time’ calls for another look at the ‘domestic struggles’ of

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20 At Cancele, for instance, this form would refer to the way in which migrancy is generally associated with men and manhood and is often articulated in the idiom of a wild space of hunting versus the domestic sphere of female activity.

21 The ideological import of the above form at Cancele is that even though women participate increasingly in various kinds of migrant labour, they are still largely conceived of as unproductive and the proceeds of their labour as merely supplementary to that of men.

22 Jacques Derrida has exposed a rhetorical contradiction in philosophical assertions of the primacy of speech over writing by pointing to the ambivalence of the concept of supplementarity in which what is supposedly merely secondary (writing for instance) is also by implication that without which a primary term (speech for instance) remains incomplete. See J. Derrida (trans. G. Spivak), *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). In other words it is not enough to see ‘tradition’ as an invention of capitalism (as in articulation of modes of production thinking) because it is also through the lenses of what is locally regarded as ‘tradition’ that capitalism acquires its socially recognisable value.

23 Habermas, following Weber, has developed a progressivist notion of purposive rationality rising on the ashes of mythical thought. See J. Habermas (trans. T. McCarthy), *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume one: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1984). My suggestion here, however, is that
which recent migration patterns within South Africa are at once a part and an outcome. Such a task requires, in turn, an interdisciplinary approach that takes into consideration some new developments in social/critical theory. In this paper I offer only a crude introductory first take on this important task. I proceed by identifying a growing space of interdisciplinary work in social/critical theory and South African studies and suggest ways in which a theoretical framework emergent at such an interdisciplinary space could help broaden the field of migrant studies to encompass themes not traditionally treated in the literature. I will then apply this framework in an interdisciplinary analysis of the household and argue both that scholarship on migrant labour has unwittingly reproduced local discourses of kin dissolution and that such discourses do in fact buttress – rather than mirror – the consequences of current patterns of migration. As an illustration of this local discourse of kin dissolution I will offer a reading of the song ‘eBenoni’ quoted at the beginning of this paper. Made popular by Olive Alexander and the Blue Notes in the 1960s, eBenoni provides a poignant popular culture perspective on migrant labour, one that implicates it in the local generation of imaginations of alternative forms of subjectivity unleashed by, and in turn fuelling, gender and generation-inflected domestic/local struggles. In the final section of the paper, where I deal directly with Christmas time, I argue for an anthropological use of the concepts of desire and imagination, which, with few exceptions, have been monopolised by psychoanalysis and literary studies.

Migrant Labour Studies: An Interdisciplinary Framework

In a review essay published over ten years ago, Patricia Seed identified ‘an extraordinary interdisciplinary moment’ that had been emerging at the intersection of history, anthropology and literary studies since the mid-1980s. This interdisciplinary moment resulted, in part, from attempts to think beyond what Seed calls, following Comaroff and Comaroff, ‘simple equations of domination and resistance’. In the wake of the new ‘revolution in the tools of analysis’ arose a creative space of research in which disciplinary boundaries were transgressed in the search for fresh methodological and theoretical insights. The resulting diagnoses of disciplinary ‘crises’ embracing history, geography, anthropology and

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it is perhaps analytically limiting to view myth and rationality as only belonging to successive historical stages. Rather, modernity disenchanted some aspects of the life world as it enchanted others.

24 An earlier call for this rethinking of patterns of migrant labour movement in South Africa was made by Bellinda Bozzoli. See her ‘Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies’ Journal of Southern African Studies, 9, 2 (1983), pp. 139–171. It is a space opened by this work that I seek to expand on in this paper.


30 A classic text here is James Clifford and George Marcus (eds), Writing Culture: The Poetics of Ethnography (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986). For recent theoretical extensions and ethnographic applications
literary studies have themselves sparked a variety of internal responses ranging from cautionary revisionism, articulations of a postmodernist poetics, to outright dismissal of what some saw as a new regime of intellectual closed-mindedness. It was in the midst of these ‘culture wars’ that a significant amount of interdisciplinary work was undertaken under various rubrics ranging from colonial discourse and postcolonial studies, to gender and regional cultural studies. In these studies the old oppressor/oppressed and resistance/capitulation binaries yielded to more complex understandings of power at both micro and macro levels of social life.

Within South African studies, the initial thrust of the new interdisciplinary moment coincided roughly with the advent of a second generation of revisionist scholars who found the structural Marxist paradigm of the 1970s both reductionist and analytically limiting. Methodologically indebted to the kind of social history associated with E. P. Thompson and theoretically given to a neo-Marxism of the Gramscian variety that found its earlier exposition both on the pages of the New Left Review and in the ethnographic publications of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the new revisionists sought to substitute ‘a series of intermediate concepts’ for the ‘broad, internally consistent, abstract theory’ favoured by earlier Marxists. This critique of the grand narratives of structural Marxism paved a way for the return of the social actor (particularly in the form of a black woman), and a shift of focus from the total context to local scenarios, from organized resistance and formal ideology to the mundane and disorganised consciousness structured by everyday experiences of individuals and groups. This gave rise to the era of life-history

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31 The ‘crisis of representation’ in literary studies, as well as attempts to come to terms with it, has grown into a deep archive since at least the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books, 1979). For a brief synopsis of the issues involved and an attempt to bridge the gap between literary and cultural studies (very much like Nugent and Shore above are trying to do for anthropology) see Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (London, Routledge, 1991).


monographs that drew historians, literary critics, anthropologists, geographers and sociologists closer together around a common set of methodological commitments loosely informed by ethnography. 43 Indeed, where in 1980 there were still strong defences of the ‘traditional criticism’ associated with Anglo-American New Criticism in South African literary studies, 40 only three years later Pechey would declare, albeit with a bit of pessimistic qualifier, that ‘(t)here can be no doubt that the time is ripe for a collaboration of the new radical historiography and the criticism of South African literature.’ 41 This departure from the ‘master narrative’ approach of traditional criticism in favour of ‘exploring the cultural event-seme as the basic unit of knowledge,’ 42 led to a particular focus on life-narratives, co-authorship, biography and what Dorothy Driver calls ‘ethnological autobiography.’ 43 While throughout most of this period South African anthropology remained, for the most part, in ‘disarray… bordering on the pathological’ 44 there were appreciable indications of methodological fluidity in the discipline, 45 particularly through the works of scholars who, by training and commitment, were inclined to poach across disciplinary boundaries. 46

This brief literature review points to a productive space of interdisciplinary research spearheaded by a set of internal debates within South African studies, particularly since the 1980s. Belinda Bozzoli’s 1983 article on Marxism and Feminism in South African studies is an excellent example of this type of work and provides one of the best entry points into the interdisciplinary space I am suggesting here. 47 In questioning, and then seeking to


45 This fluidity is particularly reflected in the work of the Rhodes University Migrant Labour Project whose participants employed a complex concept of culture in their studies of migrancy in order to shift focus from political economy to the ‘people trapped in the system’: Philip Mayer (ed), Black Villagers in an Industrial Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Labour Migration in South Africa (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1980).


47 Bozzoli, ‘Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies.’
account for, the ongoing gap between gender and social theory in South African studies. Bozzoli’s work made it possible for others to collapse some basic binaries that South African scholars had taken for granted between, for example, ‘family and factory’, women and migrant labour, and town and countryside.\(^{48}\) The use of the concept of ‘struggle’ in this work has helped denaturalise current gender patterns of migration. Even here, however, there is still a tendency among some to view the rural household as a unit pitted in a protracted struggle against the rigours of capital. In other words the struggles involving the household are conceived of at two levels; an internal struggle within the household and about the terms of its ideological constitution, and an external struggle between the household as a unit and the world of capitalist exploitation.

Extending on the concept of struggle, I argue here that in places such as Cancele, the household never quite attained the status of a unit,\(^ {49}\) but merely existed as a site of struggle over an imagined form of the household, a form whose realization was perpetually deferred in practice owing to a combination of historical transformations (regional political instabilities in the nineteenth century, the rise of oscillating migrancy and the demographics of segregation) and attendant internal structural fluidities (for instance, constant movements of large sections of people, circulation of dependants across kin circles, and adaptation to new physical and cultural environments). In this context, then, ‘Christmas time’ becomes an enchanted moment in which resources of all sorts are at once mobilized and expended in a ritualized drama to approximate imagined households. Here, the analytical import of concepts such as discourse, textuality, imagination and desire, can be effectively mobilised to interrogate anthropological constructs such as ‘domestic’, ‘traditional’, ‘modern’, ‘household’ and ‘kin’, recasting them as fields of discourse rather than natural categories. In the following analysis of migrant labour, I view narrative, practice, and material objects semiotically, as elements in social struggles to stabilise meaning and naturalise relations of social difference by linking them to apparently timeless constructs such as ‘family’, ‘home’, ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’.

Migration and the Myth of a Household Unit

One of the central tenets of functionalist anthropology is the principle of solidarity: solidarity of the sibling group, solidarity of alternate generations and solidarity of lineage.\(^ {50}\) Most important among these is the solidarity of the elementary family (consisting of siblings and parents), for it is from this basic unit that the structural principles of the whole kinship system derive. The elementary family becomes, in this respect, a metonymy for the whole social organisation. Despite this tradition having been contested in recent years, a litany of morally tinged criticism of migrant labour as responsible for the dissolution of the black rural family or kinship structure has derived from it. Hence the tendency noted above to portray the black rural family in South Africa as, on the one hand, a site of resistance in which some pre-colonial traditional values are jealously preserved and, on the other, a site of capitulation in which a secular urban culture is progressively replacing traditional lifestyles.\(^ {51}\) According to this point of view, the unity of the rural elementary


\(^{49}\) I use the notion of unit here in a loose sociological sense to depict a self-articulating collective in which hegemony is, at least momentarily, complete.


\(^{51}\) A classic example of this view is Philip Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Urbanization in a Divided Society* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1962). A more recent manifestation of this thinking is the very perceptive work by M.C. O’Connell in which he is ‘concerned with the influence of migration on the “urbanization” of Nzongisa youths and the settlement in which they live’. See O’Connell, ‘Xesibe Reds, Rascals and Gentlemen at Home
family – and thus the structural logic of the whole social organisation – is the victim of the migrant labour system.

It is striking how the song ‘eBenoni’ quoted at the beginning of the paper appears to confirm the above point of view in its articulation of family disunity in the opening three lines. Estranged family relations in the song, conveyed by images of extortion by the parental group (second person, present indicative, active verb ‘robs’) on the one hand and, on the other, by images of indifference or displaced affection within the sibling group (negative form of the verbs ‘want,’ and ‘care’), appear as the raison d’être for migration (line 4). This picture of a quasi-causal relation of kin dissolution to migration, however, masks the belatedness of this imagined riding ‘off to Benoni’ (line 4) by previous similar departures; a belatedness that is nonetheless betrayed by the implied appropriation of the proceeds of the narrator’s labour (money and, perhaps through it, cattle) by the parental group (lines 1 and 2). There is sufficient reason to conclude, then, that the song merely reverses the chain of causality, and that it is the migrant system itself that has a causal relation to household dissolution. Such a conclusion, however, does not exhaust the signifying import of the household idiom in discourses of kin dissolution expressed in the song and in places such as Cancele.

Dating these ‘dissolutions’ to the onset of migrant labour betrays a modernist stereotype in which pre-colonial African societies are presented as self-contained ‘windowless monads’, whose social conflicts and their outcomes are structurally generated and resolved. A historical geography of southern Africa that takes seriously the politics of spatial consciousness would need to explore how pre-colonial cosmologies, particularly in their gendered distribution of social subjects in public and private spaces, featured and continue to feature in domestic struggles over the terms of constituting the household. There is no evidence that the conditions under which pre-migrant labour rural black families took shape were not conducive of experiences (appropriation by the parental group and disaffection within the sibling group) similar to those expressed in the song. This is particularly the case in places such as Cancele whose population was part of the ‘second wave’ of migrations following the nineteenth century upheavals conventionally described as the mfecane. Indeed, at the onset of migrant labour, the homesteads in this area of Griqualand East were hardly a hundred years in place. There is thus no reason not to suppose that the discourse of dissolution expressed through the idiom of migrant labour is not a continuation (by other means and at another time to be sure) of earlier domestic struggles.

Consequently, then, the motive for migration was, perhaps, not so much to run away from local patriarchies as it was to seek alternative means of being local. Nor did the

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proceeds from migrant labour necessarily go into conserving pre-existing household forms, as they went into an arsenal that would serve to alter and reinforce ongoing struggles for the imagined household. This cycle of departures predicated upon, and in turn anticipating, other departures in a simulacrum of exits with no clear beginning or end was, indeed, stretching the horizons of local identity and contesting the terms of its constitution. In this cycle, the household itself becomes at once the beginning (an object of desire that is cast in the negative in the discourse) and an end (an ideal whose realisation Christmas simulates).

Christmas Time and the Cosmogony of Patriarchy

With a population of about 1,500 people, Cancele is one of the smaller settlements in the district of Mount Frere in the north-east of the Eastern Cape Province. The area was settled by bands of refugees, later called amaBhaca (refugees), in the course of the 19th century ‘Mfecane’ upheavals. The Zizi of Cancele are one of the smaller clans of refugees whom the powerful Bhaca chiefdom took under its wing. Since then Cancele has gone through a number of other changes that have affected the stability of its social institutions. The first major transformation followed the annexation of the Bhaca chiefdom to the Cape Colony in 1876 and the formation of a magistracy in the new town of Mount Frere. Through the arbitrary logic of colonial governmentality a small Mpondomise settlement across the river from Cancele was incorporated into the administrative ward of Cancele under its Zizi subchief. This resulted in several violent skirmishes over the boundaries of the community and the jurisdiction of the chiefly court. The second major transformation came with the cartographic intervention of betterment schemes in the 1960s when, in an attempt to rationalise rural settlements, the government reshaped many parts of the country’s periphery by separating domestic from grazing and agricultural areas through a grid of fences. In the process, the Cancele settlement was moved 6 km from its previous location. In 1976, the area became part of the independent Homeland of Transkei. When the homeland collapsed in 1990 and became reincorporated into South Africa as part of its Eastern Cape Province, several people began moving their homes back to their pre-betterment sites. New homesteads are still being erected in this area.

By the middle of the 1970s Cancele had reached a peak of roughly 250 migrants. In 1976, the category of migrants included a group of men who worked mostly in the Orange Free State, Transvaal and Natal in diamond, gold and coal mines, respectively; a group of men and women who worked in domestic service, including hotels and private homes, in places such as Johannesburg, Durban and East London and two women who worked in building construction in Durban. By the second half of the month of December, the population of Cancele increased dramatically. Students in boarding schools outside the community would be home during this time, and relatives from other parts of the country, particularly those permanently settled in urban areas, would occasionally come for the holidays. By far, however, the most economically important group among these Christmas time visitors was migrant workers.

The seasonal presence of these people in the village made December a convenient time for organising important rituals such as the unveiling of tombstones, wedding ceremonies,

56 A position mostly articulated in relation to this region in the Rhodes University Migrant Labour Project already mentioned, and in innumerable other studies in different parts of southern Africa.
negotiations of bridewealth, and initiation rites for boys.\textsuperscript{58} In this section, I offer a preliminary analysis of the ensuing symbolic and material drama that marked Christmas time as a vicious struggle for the household, a struggle that was, like most rituals, doomed to repeat— even as it sought to explain—the failure of previous Christmas times to realise the imaginary household.

**Christmas Time and the Moral Discourse of the Household**

As I indicated in the introduction, the discursive aspect of Christmas time consisted largely of narratives recounting the ‘experiences’ of migrants in the outside world. Unlike ritually situated formal speech acts, these narratives took the form of mostly spontaneous and random anecdotal interventions in ongoing conversations. Before I go any further, however, it is as well to anticipate here a possible objection to my use of the concept of discourse in relation to social struggles. The objection is partly a reaction to a critique of humanism inscribing earlier theories of communication and symbolic interactionism,\textsuperscript{59} which led some structuralists and post-structuralists to conclude that discourse itself is ‘the only starting point.’\textsuperscript{60} The idealist undertones of this conclusion, as well as a suspicion that current studies of discourse tend to privilege representation over practice and mimesis over reality, continue to raise eyebrows among materialists of various sorts. It seems to me that most of this objection is premised on an assumption of a dichotomy between representation and practice. As Rabinow has pointed out, however, ‘representations are social facts,’ and as Keane has further emphasised, representation is ‘both action and objectification.’\textsuperscript{61} Utilising the works of Volosinov and Bourdieu,\textsuperscript{62} among others, some scholars have thus continued to argue for the materiality of discourse by linking language use to the politics of bodily techniques or subject positionality. It is this notion of discourse that informs this paper. Most anthropological monographs in this regard have focused on formalised speech situations such as ritual and political oratory.\textsuperscript{63} As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, however, the migrant anecdotes from Cancele did not have the character of ritual

\textsuperscript{58} There is no initiation rite for girls at Cancele although some old people talk about intonjane, a coming of age ritual for girls that must have been borrowed from other Xhosa communities. Even this, however, is no longer practised here. For an account of intonjane elsewhere in the Eastern Cape see Laura Cloete, ‘Both Sides of the Camera: Anthropology and Video in the Study of a Gcaleka Women’s Rite called Intonjane’ (MA thesis, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 1996). For an account of initiation rites for boys at Cancele see Z. Ngwane, ‘“Real Men Reawaken their Fathers’ Homesteads, the Educated Leave them in Ruins”: The Politics of Domestic Reproduction in Post-Apartheid Rural South Africa’, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, 4 (2001), pp. 402–426.

\textsuperscript{59} In his study of Symbolic Interactionism, Norman Denzin notes how ‘(I)nteractionists have persisted in believing in the presence of a concrete, real subject … (whose) presence in the world is given through subjective and objective reports about personal experience and the interaction process.’ See N. Denzin, *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies: The Politics of Interpretation* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), p. 2.


speech or formal political oratory. Nor was this informality a deficit for it was precisely in this guise that the anecdotes managed to avoid the constraints of the social protocols regulating time, place and agency in ritual speech. Because they could be invoked anywhere and anytime, the anecdotes could be strategically deployed to punctuate any ongoing conversation; and because they could be invoked by anyone, the anecdotes, after a while, detached from their primary ‘experiencing’ subjects and became a stock in trade of local legend. At these moments, then, migrancy itself ceases to refer to specific individuals and instead crystallises a universe of moral discourse. Both as first hand experiences and as legend, the anecdotes construct a picture of the world whose fundamental relations of social hierarchy have fallen apart as a result of a prior breakdown of households as elementary units of social organisation. They invoke a world whose restoration rests on reactivation of some traditional forms of discipline.

For the sake of consistency I will use anecdotes related to the events of 16 June 1976. Examples here included stories in which someone thwarted an attack by revolting pupils with the use of a simple stick, in which someone saw school children stoning an old Zulu security guard and rushed to the rescue (again with the use of a stick); in which someone had to give up his bed to a man whose son had kicked him out of his township house because he refused to join the march, and so on and so forth. These narratives painted a vivid picture of tired miners emerging from another world of economic production to find a self-cannibalising society in which generational power relations were reversed and children were in charge.

No matter that our later knowledge of geography was to place Carletonville, where most of the narrators worked, at an impossible distance from Soweto. No matter also that our subsequent knowledge of history was to throw doubts on the heroic self-representation of the migrants in these Christmas time narratives; their truthfulness lay entirely elsewhere. Indeed, their very incredibility begs an important question: what was it about Cancele and their location within it that made this form of telling such narratives important both to the tellers and their audience? As I have already pointed out, these narratives were significant as value-laden interventions in local ideological struggles where they provided a discursive foothold from which the local universe could be periodically shaken and the ideological terms of its social relations shifted about. In this guise, the narratives were interruptions both literally in their randomness and symbolically in utilizing symbols from outside to shape internal conversations.

The most remarkable thing about these anecdotes (and one that proves the point argued above) is that they were told exclusively by males – even though there were four women who worked in the suburbs of Johannesburg and lived in Soweto at the time of the uprisings. Nor did these local female migrants ever appear in these men’s anecdotes. Urban women, on the contrary, featured considerably. Their representation, however, had an almost poetic sense of defamiliarisation, in which they were cast in behaviours completely

64 I am thinking here of what Austin refers to as ‘conditions of felicity’ for speech acts, particularly in regard to appropriate time, place and agent. See J.L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 12–24.

65 ‘Intonga nje’ (simply the stick) features in many local discourses of order and restoration and one sometimes sees this in practice during Christmas time as when an errant wife is ‘beaten back to her place.’

66 In some published accounts of the protests, migrants appear, at best, as having been left behind in the organisation and prosecution of general protests following the 16 June events and, at worst, as having actively participated in attempts violently to suppress ensuing strikes and work boycotts. See A. Brooks and J. Brickhill, Whirlwind Before the Storm (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980); A. Marx, Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960–1990 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 69.
unimaginable for the women among whom we grew. Indeed, the picture of rural household
dissolution reflected in this essay’s epigraph received its urban counterpart in the represent-
tations of urban women by the male migrants. Where local men, sometimes with the use
of the ‘simple stick’, always emerged in a constructive light or otherwise as victims, urban
women – almost always with the use of their bodies and tongues – were cast in destructive
roles. Examples would include a man who killed his own brother over an unfaithful woman
and a local man who was robbed clean by a gang of women after watching him
unsuspectingly taking a drink that they had surreptitiously laced with poison. The love of
money by women did not only conduce of these acts of violence and promiscuity but also
tended to blur the distinction between town and country womenfolk. When, in 1980, a
miner who had gone to sleep in his hostel bed in Carletonville, woke up in the middle of
the night to find himself naked at the outskirts of Cancele, there was talk of how he had
been squeezed inside a loaf of bread and transported home by a cartel of local and town
witches. All of the money he had saved over the years was lost and everything he owned
disappeared.67

The absence of local migrant women from the male narratives was no accident. There
were hardly any conceptual resources that would have enabled us even to imagine
differently. The very category of ‘migrant worker’68 in local nomenclature excluded
women. Their conceptual relegation to the urban kitchens meant that we did not have to
stretch our imagination beyond what we had come to know as a ‘woman’s place’. In a way,
then, even though they had left the village like the men and, for all we knew, were doing
the same jobs as many of them, they still remained somewhat familiar and local. This
means that only male migrants had the capacity to transform as a result of the experience
of migration while women remained the same.

More research is needed in order to get a broader picture of women’s own anecdotes
about the outside world. I was able to talk to only three women who had been migrants in
1976. What was striking was not so much the difference of their own representation of 16
June from the men’s, but how this difference itself seemed to complement the general
morphology of the men’s narratives. All three women spoke of being scared, staying at
home and fearing for their jobs. Their accounts painted a picture of a wild landscape with
danger lurking everywhere. It was the same picture of the world as the men’s, and men and
women occupied places in it that were familiar to our own world.

After all, the cosmology of these narratives had a prior model, or a complementary
counterpart, in the folktales that we listened to as we grew up. The world of most of these
folktales was mapped through binaries whose prototype was that between wild and
domestic spaces. Gender and other social differences were superimposed on this ‘natural’
division of the surface of the earth, and it was this ‘nature of the world’ that in turn ordained
as natural the social norms that prescribed and proscribed modes of inhabiting and moving

67 When I talked to him in 1996 about this incident he told me that his suspicion of local involvement was based
on the familiarity of some of the voices he heard in his sleep during the transportation: ‘they were talking about
my family’.

68 In local slang, female migrants – whatever they do – are often homogeneously referred to as ‘Oonokhitshini’
(kitchen workers) and ‘Nonkomponi’ (compound dweller) is reserved for males – even though some of them turned
out to be domestic servants.
across space. Compare the following characteristic opening of a typical folktale with the opening lines of the song ‘eBenoni’:

In the village where the twins lived, the men used to hunt, the boys used to look after the livestock, and the women and girls used to cook at home and, in the proper season, till the lands with hoes, sow the seed and hoe the ground again to clear away the weeds.69

It is this world that is the object of desire in the song ‘eBenoni’, a desire expressed in the negative as the absence or breakdown of the household. The interesting thing about folktales, however, is that they thrive on precisely the sorts of stumbling blocks that lie in the way of desire coming into possession of its object. It is here that imagination is stretched to its limits as it seeks to smooth over these contradictions in a ritualistic cycle that both prefigures its own failure and authorises its repetition. The resulting deferment of closure or resolution gives the folktale its problematically dialogic sense.70 After all, in this world in which men hunted and confronted dangerous animals while women cooked and gossiped there were always criss-crossings made possible by the necessary forays of women beyond the boundaries of the domestic space – for instance, to work the fields, to fetch water and to haul firewood. It was on these excursions outside that women would meet, negotiate and even connive with wild beasts and cannibals – with socially negative consequences.71 A different combination of the elements of the folktale’s universe, in other words, does not constitute a different universe but illustrates the internal indeterminacy of its structural relations.

In short, then, the discursive intensity of Christmas time at Cancele, which was dominated by migrant narratives, did not land on virgin ears on our part. The cosmological contours of these narratives had been the stock in trade of our own consciousness, shaped as it was by folktales and other media. It was in relation to this cosmological scheme that the narratives about the outside world made any sense. Here the cultural politics of oscillating migration should be seen as a complex continuation or redramatisation – at different levels and with different materials each time – of precisely the sorts of local struggles that had given a specific form to migration in the first place. Both that form and its implications for social relations are never complete – hence the struggles.

**Christmas Time and the Material Basis of Household Struggles**

In a study of rural households and their differential vulnerabilities to poverty, Sharp and Spiegel mention the unreliability of remittances from migrants in the course of any year,72 a situation which, according to Cloete, has led many rural women to adopt strategies such as taking in lovers in order to sustain domestic economies.73 Looking at the value attached

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69 This is from a version of the tale ‘Demane and Demazana’ as retold by A.C. Jordan in his *Tales from Southern Africa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973), pp. 34–54. One of the widely told tales in the Eastern Cape, and one with many versions, Demane and Demazana, is a story about a set of twins who have to leave home because, according to another version, they were ‘being poorly treated at home’ to stay in the forest where the sister remains locked inside a cave while the brother goes out hunting. (This imagined alternative household in the wild is in fact a moral commentary on the selfishness of the parental group.) See ‘Demane and Demazana’, in Roger Abrahams. *African Folktales* (New York, Pantheon, 1983), pp. 35–37.

70 Here one is putting together a theoretical concoction with a mix of the Formalist analysis of folktales typical of Vladimir Propp and a materialist theory of language typical of Volosinov (see Volosinov. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*).

71 On the contrasts between male and female migrancy and the non-heroic forms of expression that women use, and also on how women migrants are often blamed as immoral creatures hell-bent on the dissolution of the homestead, see D. James, *Songs of the Women Migrants: Performance and Identity in South Africa* (International African Library, London, 1999).

72 Sharp and Spiegel, ‘Vulnerability to Impoverishment in South African Rural Areas’.

to a migrant’s wallet during Christmas time at Cancele, however, one can almost appreciate a migrant’s reluctance to make non-agentive money transfers in the course of the year. It is interesting to note some gendered differences among Cancele migrants in regard to their use of this material aspect of their lives.

For the men, the ‘wallet’ set in motion two sets of social practices – one based within the home and the other in the public sphere. The sheer act of underwriting the material transformation of the home by their wives – whitewashing the buildings, and reinforcing the floors and walls with fresh mud, for example – is a gesture of distinction that sets apart the house of a working man. Women migrants, on the other hand, tended to have these modifications of the physical plant taken care of before they came home by sending ahead what is called ‘eyamalungiselelo’ (money for preparations), to pay for fixing the buildings. This is a practical necessity because women migrants rely for this type of work on the labour of other non-migrant women who would be otherwise occupied in their own homes during Christmas time. For men, on the contrary, the concentration of their wives’ energies on these basic domestic tasks during Christmas time seems to acquire a value of its own. For a start, it amounts to a ‘re-domestication’ of the women who otherwise spend most of the year in the public sphere – haggling with the chief over something or other, re-negotiating a credit line with the local store owner, attending parents meetings at the local school, or killing a goat for meat. During Christmas time there is a general withdrawal of women from this sphere of public negotiations with the result that, for the most part, domestic economies themselves often come to a standstill, to pick up only in the new year.

The ‘wallet’ also set in motion social practices based in the public sphere, especially for male migrants. Here, a migrant derives value from walking importantly about the settlement with ‘cattle in his pocket’. A migrant reinforces this perception by strategically sponsoring an occasional consumptive event (sending a child to buy bottles of beer for an impromptu assembly of men, for example), which in turn calls attention to his ‘wallet’. Women migrants, on the other hand, are expected to receive people in their homes rather than go out on public self-display. In this way, their money was perhaps seen as being better spent on the inside of the house – on new furniture and new utensils, for instance.74

Another material aspect of Christmas time consisted of items of bodily décor that flooded the village at this time. These ranged from skin lightening creams, hair jellies and exotic coiffure styles, to new clothing styles.75 Unlike in the neighbouring Xesibe and Pondo areas, where studies have shown that clothing styles accounted for social distinctions among amaqaba, amanene and iindlavini,76 there are practically no traditional strictures that regulate the modification of the surface of the body at Cancele. Indeed, the very categories of red, gentlemen and rascals did not exist here even as far back as 1976. Of course, there are clear gender and generational distinctions but only class distinctions tend to express themselves clearly through clothing styles.77 This makes the area of the configuration of ‘the social skin’ available for individual experimentation and aesthetic choices. Terence Turner uses the concept of social skin to talk about how the clothing or other decoration of the surface of the human body both separates the biological from the social person, and creates

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74 This latter conclusion cannot be generalised even in the context of Cancele, however, because it is based on only two homes with women who were migrants in the 1970s.
75 Mining overalls are a specialty here unlike, for instance, in neighbouring Mount Ayliff where they seem to have been preferred only by a section of migrants. See O’Connell, ‘The Xesibe Reds’, p. 257. At Cancele they seem to be icons of productivity, signs that someone is a worker and, therefore, a local man.
77 In 1976, women did not wear trousers but could have stretch trousers under their skirts if they were not going out in public. This has all changed and now clothing more closely regulates the relative exposure of the woman’s body. Married women still generally avoid wearing trousers.
a social skin upon which social conventions inscribe markers of difference – for example, in terms of age, gender and social status. The impreciseness of these conventions at Cancele meant that within the vaguely defined parameters of decency, individuals remained free to innovate. In this act of innovation, local aesthetic conventions remained fluid, allowing for an embodiment of global cultural flows. Thus, the same local subjects could simultaneously be walking billboards for American beverage companies, sports clubs and music stars.

The Performative Rituals of Christmas Time

The last aspect of Christmas time I will consider here implicates both the discursive and material aspects in a ritual performance. There were two components to this ritual aspect. In the first place, the resources of the homestead were expended in acts of public feasting that approximated a Bataillean state of ‘unconditional expenditure’. Critiquing the utilitarian leanings of classical political economy in which production and accumulation emerged as the goal of human nature, Bataille posited a human propensity toward loss as an end. To be sure, Bataille’s economic anthropology cannot be unproblematically applied to the case of Cancele, but the image of investment in people’s stomachs, without regard to the logistics of capital reproduction that his work implies, has some analytic purchase in this case. Here too the sheer disproportion between expenditure and income, which contrasts Christmas time to the poverty that characterises the rest of the year, makes no utilitarian logic.

There are, of course, empirical reasons for feasting during Christmas time when men, the de jure owners of stock, are at home: to celebrate a child’s passage to a higher standard in school, to cull some old or sick animals, to provide meat for Christmas, and so on. There are also random feastings that are usually centred round brewing and drinking of traditional beer, and extending to the production and serving of food. The amount of cooking and serving that women do and the sheer abandon with which men eat and drink hardly reflect the poverty and general shortage of resources immediately preceding, and sure to follow, Christmas time. Indeed, this excessive consumption does not mirror its own moment of scarcity but seems to conjure up a previous time of plenty that emerges in nostalgic reminiscences among men during Christmas time. Here again, as Hylon White said, ritual (re)creates a time before the troubled present, and the political economy of commensality imprints on the present an ideal set of social relations that conduce with the household of those ‘times.’ The past here does not seem to correspond to any particular historical moment. It is a past that has always been such for any particular moment; a kind of moral framework.

The second ritual component of Christmas time can be considered ritual proper and consists mostly of performances regulated by conventions such as weddings, circumcision, lobola negotiations and the unveiling of tombstones. In this section I will limit my remarks to events that are directly connected with Christmas time, such as homecoming, farewell and homestead strengthening rituals. In a series of articles published in the 1980s, McAllister wrote of rituals associated with migrant labour in another part of the

80 Hylon White (as in footnote 57).
He offered these rituals as a form of resistance by ‘Red conservatives’ of Shixini against incorporation into the ‘secular, urban influence’ that threatened traditional culture based on ancestor worship. One of these rituals, umsindleko – a beer drink in which ‘a newly returned migrant is incorporated back into the community’ – is a good comparative case of the ritualisation of Christmas time at Cancele. McAllister points out that the aim of umsindleko is ‘socialization and resocialization into a particular view of the relationship between migrant labour and country home’, a view that is coded in oratory during the beer drink where the migrant:

is told not to waste money at work on Western consumer items or ‘town women’, but to save his money to invest in livestock and other things which will benefit and build his home and ensure that his family is well cared for.

A loosely parallel ritual at Cancele is called ihambidlani (what one was eating on the journey), a drinking that the migrant sponsors during the first week of arrival into the community. At Cancele, however, there is no category of ‘Red’ people and ‘Conservatism’ is a heuristic device to characterise a general commitment by many people to a set of social relations crystallised by the household. This beer drink is thus not organised by elders and involves no admonitions (iziyalo) as is the case in the Shixini material studied by MacAllister. Ihambidlani is actually volunteered by the migrant her/himself as a form of greeting to the local people. What links this ritual to the struggles for the homestead is the manner in which its contents and form focus on work – migrant work – as a possible condition for the making of a home. At this moment, of course, the maker of the home is the person of the migrant. The gender politics of the ritual is just as interesting because, in the two cases involving women migrants, the focus of the performance was less on them but on their fathers whose homesteads they were thus ‘reawakening’. Both women were unmarried and had children that were being raised by their parents. In the rhetorical structures of the beer drink they occupied a place homologous to that of unmarried sons.

Less practised nowadays, but still prevalent in the 1970s, were departure rituals in which the migrants solicited the blessings of ancestors and prayers of the community as they were leaving home. Nowadays, people perform this ritual when there is a problem, such as going back to work after being home as a result of an accident. One ritual that remains strong today is called ukubethelela or ukufaka isikhonkwane (to hammer or to put in a nail, respectively), which is performed towards the end of Christmas time before the migrant leaves for work. Besides the usual drinking and eating there is an interesting performance here in which a ritual expert walks the length of the yard, driving potent ‘nails’ at strategic places along the boundary markers. Aimed at strengthening the homestead against evil spirits during the absence of the migrant, this ritual performatively culminates Christmas time, itself a very ideologically intense period. All of the ideas and conceptions about proper households that were produced in the course of Christmas time become now driven into the ground as seed. Again, interestingly, none of the women migrants seemed concerned about this ritual. The strengthening of the homesteads, they said, was their fathers’ responsibilities and they did not need to be present for such rituals as long as they contributed money towards it. For the men, however, presence during this


82 Ibid., p. 5.

83 Ibid., p. 6.
ritual moment was clearly crucial. Not only were they the ritual agents, but they were also the visible heads of the households then being symbolically hammered into place.

**Epilogue**

By the end of the 1970s there had been a dramatic demographic shift in the migrant population of Cancele. The first shift occurred in 1977 when the chief, on an official visit across the river, was killed by the Mpondomise who threw him in a big drum of boiling water. A number of miners, who had to leave their jobs in order to participate in the ensuing fight with the Mpondomise, were never re-employed. A second shift came a year later when the new chief ordered a local stock thief to be burnt to death. Ten ‘volunteers’, seven of whom were miners, assumed responsibility for the murder in order to protect the chief and were later each sentenced to five years in prison. They never worked again. These incidents, together with the progressive loss of jobs in the whole country that followed the downturn in the economy in the latter half of the 1970s, meant that, by the middle of the 1980s, there were only about a dozen men working in the mines. At the same time, the number of women migrants had increased significantly and this number was to increase even more in the 1990s when a new black middle class in surrounding towns provided more domestic jobs for rural women. With fewer men at work and even less luck from rural agriculture, the struggle for the household at Cancele has continued into the 21st century. Be it in the form of increasing reorganisation of the interior of rural houses (and the attendant transformation of modes of occupying this space) as a result of investment by women in furniture, in the concomitant reduction of cattle byres into firewood, or in alarming rates of violence against women (‘beating them back to their place’), contested desires for a proper household as a unit have yet to come to the possession of their objects.

I began this paper by arguing that some of the same conclusions reached by scholars about media such as radio, newspapers and schools can be reached in regard to migrant labour. In other words, migrancy as a constellation of people, ideas and practices plays an important role in linking localities to the world at large. In this respect, the study of migrant labour can offer a perspective on recent debates on globalization, particularly at a time when the local is receding into the background of concerns with the ‘non-places’ of global culture.84 My focus on a local context of the cultural politics of migrancy seeks not only to reinsert the local into globalisation debates, but also to remind us that the material and cultural resources of globalisation featured prominently in local struggles long before globalisation itself became the obsession in scholarship. The prevalence of satellite television in places such as Cancele and the language of self-representation that this medium has made available to young people continues to expand the horizons of the local cosmology while also offering new resources for articulating the terms of belonging in the local. I have argued, therefore, that the imagination of exits – as buttressed by discourses of household dissolution – was itself nurtured by inherently contradictory ideas about being properly local.

This commitment of migrants to the local notwithstanding, it is also important to point out that the same migrants mediated a consciousness of space that had some secularising effects on a view of the world formerly shaped by the Church. Until she died in the early 1980s, my grandmother who was born in 1899 and who was a devout Methodist, always

ended her prayers with the following words: ‘God let now your Word spread till it reaches Zululand’. She was reproducing a typically Eastern Cape stereotype of Zululand as the frontier of civilisation, that end of the known world, which, in medieval maps was populated by dragons and other supernatural beasts. In our own worldview there were cannibals at the edges of the Xhosa-speaking world. While the discourse about the Zulus, Shangaans and Nyasa that began to filter through the narratives of the migrants was still as exoticising as that of my grandmother, it nonetheless began to humanise the netherland. Indeed, within the migrant narratives, these places, these people and their strange ways became materials for talking about the local; their powers of magic were what we lacked while the promiscuity of their urbanised women and the lack of discipline among their children mirrored anxieties over changes in local social relations.

It is almost impossible to delimit the local in rural South Africa and that is the case in regard to Cancele as well. The reason for this difficulty is at once historical and political. Historically, people in this part of the Eastern Cape have been in motion for a long time even prior to the onset of migrant labour. In the course of the twentieth century itself, while migrancy was in full swing, betterment schemes and other forms of forced removals reordered the spatial grid of rural South Africa such that whatever ideological mappings of the wild versus the domestic that continue today hardly correspond to the actually lived space. These ideological maps do, however, find ritual articulation in local struggles over the structuring of social relations. These struggles are centred round a notion of the household as a unit that faces dissolution. The discourse of dissolution reflects an anxiety deriving from a certain form taken by the household in places such as Cancele in the last 200 years or so. This form is one of indeterminacy, which means that the household has remained an ideal rather than a real social unit. The ‘fluidity’ of the household that Spiegel has noticed in Matatiele, and others have noted elsewhere, is also almost the norm at Cancele, and here there is no reason to suppose that it originated with migrant labour. Migrant labour intensified these shifts as well as complicating the means by which they were to be made sense of. During Christmas time, then, modernity and tradition collapsed in a repetitive imaginative realization of a utopian household.

During this time, the very domestic economy, which depends on women tilling the land and castrating the bullocks, came to a standstill as women withdrew from some of these public spheres into the hearth where their energies were spent on the production of immediately consumable value. Christmas time is not about production but expenditure, to use a Bataillean concept. This material expenditure, however, underwrites the production of another value, a value whose own material possible conditions were being elided in ritual. It would be after Christmas time that domestic economies would resume, usually at a great deficit. I have also sought to problematise the masculinisation of the category of migrants and argued that this is less an empirical reality than a construction whose resilience is accounted for in part by a cosmology perpetuated in folktales, personal narratives and other cultural institutions.

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85 A. Spiegel, ‘The Fluidity of Household Composition’.
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