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**“WALKING WHERE MEN WALK” :
THE GENDERED POLITICS OF LAND, LABOUR AND SOILS
IN MARAGOLI, WESTERN KENYA**

BY RITU VERMA, P.ENG.

**Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts
International Affairs**

**Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
August 1999**

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The undersigned hereby recommend to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of this thesis
submitted by Ritu Verma as partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Professor Maureen Molot, Director
The Norman Paterson School
of International Affairs

Professor Fiona Mackenzie, Supervisor

This thesis is dedicated to the women of Maragoli, whose power, generosity and humanity have moved and inspired me countless times... touching my life, and changing it in many profound ways.

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

*Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.*

*Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.*

*Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries.*

*Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.*

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

*Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?*

*Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from the past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.*

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into the daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise*

(Maya Angelou, 1994)

Abstract

In a precarious economic environment heightened by the need for cash, farmers' ability to sustain the soils and meet their broader livelihood requirements have increasingly come under threat. Research in Maragoli, Western Kenya, shows that women are predominantly the farmers and sustainers of the soil and have extensive knowledge and expertise regarding their environments. However, many carry out this role within inequitable gendered power relations. Economically poor women and those in the early stages of marital life are particularly over-burdened by labour demands and increased responsibilities for providing cash to meet day-to-day needs such as paying for school fees, health services and food. Because women are increasingly juggling numerous priorities and occupations, their ability to sustain the soils through labour-intensive practices is undermined. Nevertheless, in an intensively farmed area where there are no options for withdrawing their labour into commercial farms or available individual land, women do not completely withdraw their labour from farming, but invest in soil management practices by strategically placing their labour, efforts and time in micro-niches and enterprises where they control land, labour and its product. Further, they engage in many off-farm enterprises, activities and social relations in order to negotiate space to manoeuvre and diversify their channels for accessing resources to meet both on-farm and off-farm requirements. This case study demonstrates that rather than being a simple function of population pressure and 'ignorance', soil degradation is embedded in social and gender relations at the local level, which themselves are inseparable from broader processes such as Structural Adjustment Policies, and mediated by inequitable North-South relations and 'development' discourse. These broader processes have in fact, escalated gender politics and contestation of local gender relations and have intensified women's struggles over access to and control of resources, and in turn, have shaped strategies of agricultural production and soil management.

Acknowledgements

No thesis is ever written alone and no research endeavour is ever carried out in solitude. I owe my deep gratitude to a great number of people. I would like to begin by saying that without the dedication and commitment of the research assistants involved, this research would not have been possible. Wycliff Ngoda was more akin to a colleague, cultural guide and friend, than a field assistant. His impeccable field interpretations and knowledge of Maragoli culture, people and society enhanced the research immeasurably and provided a compassionate insider's view. Patricia Lugalia, as the primary transcriber, carried out outstanding work, shared important reflections on the research process and added doses of laughter throughout. Leah Mukaya patiently taught me Kiswahili and later joined in the transcribing, along with Nicholas Ndolo and Janet Ojango, who all gave up valuable time from farming and family activities to ensure that the work was completed on time. Knight Olesia kept my life in order and provided a caring environment for me to live and work. George, Mary, Edward, Henry, Rose, Paul, Neha and Mercy inspired me with their friendship, hospitality and warmth, thereby enriching my research experience immeasurably.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) funded this research through a Centre Internship supported by the People, Land and Water (PLAW) Program Initiative and the Gender and Sustainable Development Unit (GSD), and provided invaluable institutional support both in Canada and Kenya. Luis Navarro, Kathleen Clancy, David Brooks, Guy Bessette, Ola Smith, Eva Rathgeber, Wardi Leppen, Joachim Voss, Bertha Mo, and in particular, Don Peden, continuously engaged me in stimulating intellectual discussion and provided a valuable space for critical explorations of development, research and gender. In Kenya, the Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Programme (TSBF-UNESCO), provided institutional and logistical support, and played a key role in supporting the research. Simon Carter shared his home, family and research experiences, as well as continuously engaged and challenged me with thought-provoking debates on 'development' research. Cheryl Palm, Patrick Sikana and Mike Swift provided encouragement, enthusiasm and interest in the research. They, along with Michael Misiko, Katry Okusi, Andrew Khabeleli, Paul Otuma, Meshack Shikanga and Evelyn Wasia generously shared their work, field experiences, insights and knowledge on soil management in Kenya and East Africa, developed over sustained and continual research. Bashir Jama and Amadou Niang at ICRAF provided valuable administrative support from the Maseno Research Station in Western Kenya. Government officials at the Ministry of Culture and Social Services and the Ministry of Agriculture in Western Province provided valuable information towards this research. My M.A. studies were partially supported by the Norma E. Walmsley Award For International Understanding, a MATCH International Centre award for work that furthers international understanding between Canadian women and women of the South, as well as by NPSIA graduate scholarships and teaching assistantships.

In Canada, I am deeply indebted to a group of academics at Carleton University who have profoundly and systematically affected the way I conceptualize 'development'. In particular, Fiona Mackenzie, Villia Jefremovas and Simon Dalby, perpetually challenged me and continuously 'scrambled my categories' which were rooted in the physical sciences,

illustrating that knowledge is a powerful process which requires a great deal of learning, as well as unlearning. They took on a student with no prior social sciences background - who continuously showed up to office hours with persistent (and sometimes existential) questions - and provided the possibilities for thinking about fieldwork and 'development' in a thought-provoking and critical manner. The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs provided an invaluable opportunity for changing fields drastically. Colleagues at Carleton University, including Sam Landon, Alice Hovorka, Cory Huntington, Rob Opp and Eileen Stewart, engaged me in challenging and critical academic discussions on 'development' and made my intellectual journey a richer experience. Abra Adamo shared thesis-writing and fieldwork dilemmas and assisted in pulling me out of seemingly large conceptual and methodological 'craters' on numerous occasions. Susan Lenon has been a keen supporter who read the manuscript of this thesis and offered invaluable advice and encouragement. Peter Joselin and James Ferguson provided input and interest in this research through all of its permutations; and James Ferguson in particular, provided invaluable guidance on certain theoretical questions.

On a personal note, I am indebted to Laura Brian, for instilling in me the power to believe that the world can, and should be, a different place. Larysa and Joachim Voss and Villia Jefremovas shared their home, generosity and kindness at critical times of the thesis and my personal journey. François Nadeau Albert provided space to explore professional, intellectual and personal boundaries through support and belief in me. To my friends, Hiedi, Jen, Cathy, Cyril, Alain and Santo, thank you for your support. Finally I would like to thank my parents: Raj Verma, for providing me with rich, cross-cultural life experiences, including a first hand lived understanding of rural life as a 'Southerner' in the South - which proved invaluable in Maragoli. And Savita Verma Puri, for her boundless love and affection... but most of all for her encouragement to read, photograph, paint, dream and explore the interfaces.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Defficiency Syndrome
CBD	Community Based Distributor
CIAT	Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical
GSD	Gender and Sustainable Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KARI	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
KEFRI	Kenya Forestry Research Institute
KTDA	Kenya Tea Development Authority
PLAW PI	People, Land and Water Project Initiative
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization(s)
NPSIA	Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
NRM	Natural Resource Management
RA	Research Assistant
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
TSBF	Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Programme
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

GLOSSARY

<i>Amasatsi</i>	A local bush.
<i>Asian</i>	Indian.
<i>Boma</i>	An enclosure for keeping livestock.
<i>Changaa</i>	Locally home-brewed beer or alcohol.
<i>Harambee</i>	Local self-help efforts or collections with specific objectives.
<i>Jembe</i>	Hand held hoe(s).
<i>Kanga</i>	A piece of African cloth used by women as sarongs.
<i>Kukus</i>	Chickens.
<i>Kutunda</i>	Barter and exchange.
<i>Mechicha</i>	Brewer's waste.
<i>Mzungu</i>	European, or more broadly, a Caucasian foreigner.
<i>Ngombes</i>	Cows.
<i>Posho</i>	Maize meal.
<i>Shamba</i>	Farm or plot.
<i>Ugali</i>	Stiff porridge, usually made from maize flour; can also be made from cassava, millet or sorghum.

Map 1 : Western Province and Kenya, East Africa

Source : Abwunza, 1997

Map 2 : Maragoli, Western Kenya

PART I : INTRODUCTION

Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself. If the everyday world is not transparent and its relations of rule, its organizations and institutional frameworks, work to obscure and make invisible inherent hierarchies of power... it becomes imperative that we rethink, remember, and utilize our lived relations as a basis of knowledge. Writing (discursive production) is one site for the production of this knowledge and consciousness (Mohanty, 1991a:34-35).

1.0 Introduction

Policy makers formulate soil management initiatives and policy based on the assumption that soil degradation in Sub-Saharan Africa is caused by population pressure, ignorance, and ‘backward’ and ‘traditional’¹ farming practices. They further assume that soil management is a top priority for farmers and that farmers have an endless supply of land, labour and time to carry out labour-intensive soil management practices. But when we look more closely at the local level and at farmers’ everyday realities, it becomes evident that farmers, and women in particular, are juggling numerous priorities in increasingly precarious economic circumstances exacerbated by IMF-World Bank ‘austerity’ measures, which inevitably undermine their capacity to sustain the soils.

‘Austerity’ measures, known as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), negotiated between the World Bank-IMF and the Kenyan state, have brought about drastic changes which can only be described as externally constructed economic shocks designed to ‘adjust’ the Kenyan economy in order to suit the needs of international debtors (Gitobu and Kamau, 1994:58). After a decade of good economic performance following independence, SAPs were formulated to improve balance of payments in order to allow Kenya to service international debt accrued during an economic crisis brought on by an increase in oil prices, droughts, declining exports, falling terms of trade, and inflation (Bigsten and Ngung’u, 1992; Ngugi, 1994). Instituted loosely in the 1970s, and more firmly

in the early to mid-1980s, the primary objectives of the structural adjustment program were to rekindle economic growth and production, control inflation, increase international competitiveness, and increase foreign exchange earnings to repay debt (Ongile, 1994; Kinoti, 1994). These objectives were put into practice through a broad range of monetary, fiscal, trade and institutional policies and reforms including: cuts in government expenditure, public sector employment and real wages; decontrol of price structures, including food and agricultural input subsidies; export promotion and an increase in agriculture prices; introduction of user fees for public services such as education and health; currency devaluation; credit reform through an increase of interest rates; and privatization of parastatals (Kinoti, 1994; Mackenzie, 1993).

While at the level of the macro-economic analysis, economic indicators may suggest positive improvement in the performance of the Kenyan economy by the standards set by the World Bank and IMF, the implementation of SAPs has had major impacts on both rural and urban households. It has exacerbated environmental degradation and stress in people's everyday lives (Kenyinga and Ibutu, 1994). In particular, the costs of SAPs are disproportionately borne by women, who find themselves facing intense labour burdens and increasingly relying on cash to make ends meet. The need for cash has been heightened because of increased costs for food and consumables; the spiraling costs associated with education and health services; the elimination of subsidies for agricultural inputs; and an erosion of real earnings and real wages.

This thesis centres on an important reality: the complexity of women's lives in Maragoli, Western Kenya, as they struggle to sustain the soils as well as negotiate a plethora of competing demands and constraints to survive in an increasingly precarious economic

environment. Predominantly the farmers and managers of the soil, and increasingly the providers of income for their families, women are not a unified, homogenous and powerless 'third world' category. Rather, they are diverse and dynamic actors with extensive knowledge regarding their environments and the management of their natural resources. Women actively shape the material and symbolic worlds around them, but their power, expertise and knowledge are hidden from view by conventional approaches to soils issues in Africa. These gender-neutral² approaches suspend gender from the analysis, and assume that men are by default the 'farmers' and 'providers' - the universal yardstick of measurement, analysis and research - while women are the 'other', 'the farmers' wife' and 'helper'.

In order to move beyond colonizing assumptions about soil degradation as a simple function of population pressure and local 'ignorance', this study contends that soil management is embedded in complex social relations at the local level and in broader political-economic and historical processes. Focussing on these social relations and the micro-politics of farmers' struggles over productive resources such as land, labour and capital, and "the symbolic contestations that constitute those struggles" (Moore, 1993:381), allows for an understanding of the constraints and incentives encountered by people in their everyday lives in sustaining the soils and in meeting broader livelihood needs. Further, in order to challenge gender-neutral generalizations within conventional soils research, this study argues that specific 'third world' locations are constructed within unequal North-South relations of power; that knowledge is never neutral and factual, but is always 'about somewhere' and 'from somewhere', and that the knowers' location and conceptual framework is central in determining the type of knowledge produced (Gupta and Ferguson,

1997a:35).

Throughout this case study, personal narratives provide a critical medium for exploring people's stories and experiences. Logoli women and men demonstrate that relations of production are central to soil management, and are deeply gendered and continuously being negotiated. Gender not only mediates women and men's differential access and control of important productive resources for sustaining the soils, but also the cultural construction of relations of and in production which are inseparable from those struggles (Moore, 1993, 1996).

Bearing in mind the dangers inherent in ethnographic particularism, I argue that examining the micro-politics of women's and men's struggles over resources elucidates the manner in which broader historical, political-economic and 'development' policies are experienced in the context of everyday life³. Rather than monolithic entities which act down en bloc on people, they are filtered, negotiated, transformed and differentially experienced by women and men.

In an area of intensely farmed small-holdings, the increased dependence on cash for meeting day-to-day household livelihood needs, sustaining agricultural production and managing the soils has intensified already complex struggles over resources within a highly charged context of local gender relations in Maragoli. This, in turn, has led to an escalation of gender-based conflicts at the level of the household centred around the renegotiation of what Whitehead has termed the 'conjugal contract' (1981), the terms by which spouses exchange resources. Gender roles, responsibilities, obligations and access to resources, as well as cultural norms, idioms and taboos, are fiercely contested and struggled over. Men have the upper hand in these struggles because cultural meanings are constituted within

patriarchal ideology and gendered power relations.

Men's roles as farmers have been transformed by high levels of out-migration as a result of the colonial policies. They also face major dislocation in terms of their ability to meet their financial roles and responsibilities in the current economic situation exacerbated by SAPs and high unemployment (Abwunza, 1997). Increasingly, women have taken on roles, responsibilities and labour burdens in farming and soil management that were once the domain of men. How successfully women are able to fulfill their roles as farmers affects the long-term sustainability of the soils. Women's investment in soil management is contingent on their ability to maintain long-term security in land tenure, which in turn is dependent on their positioning in terms of age, life-cycle, class and marital status. Women's differential labour burdens on and off the farm and their ability to control their labour and its products, are also key determining factors in their investment in soils practices.

The competing needs which women must meet, such as school fees, health services and food purchases, increasingly compromise their capacity to be effective farmers and sustainers of the soil (Mackenzie, 1995a). In order to meet these intense pressures, women engage in off-farm income generating activities and multiple coping strategies, often negotiating both socially sanctioned and non-sanctioned social relations to gain access to resources.

Pointing to men's failure to meet their requirements as providers for household income and other livelihood requirements, women argue that they need greater mobility to be providers and control the proceeds of their labour. Faced with a situation where they cannot withdraw their labour into a large estate commercial sector to earn off-farm income such as in other parts of Kenya (Mackenzie, 1993, 1995, for Central Province), or onto

individually acquired land as in other African contexts (Schroeder, 1996; Carney and Watts, 1991, for the Gambia) because of land scarcity, women strategically focus on micro-niches on the farm where they have long-term control and security in tenure, and on farming enterprises such as tea where they are better able to control the proceeds of their labour. While they still continue to farm and implement soil management measures on land they do not own and where their security in tenure may be threatened, and in terms of labour they do not control as a symbolic gesture to convey to their husbands and the community that they continue to be “good” Logoli wives and farmers in order to avoid strong social sanctioning and stigmatization, they do this to a lesser extent than on land and in terms of labour they do control. In addition, women maintain a posture of deference to patriarchy in public which reproduces patriarchal discourse of men as “commanders”, a strategic gesture which is designed to buy freedom of movement and room to manoeuvre.

Whether as farmers or providers, women carry out these roles within inequitable gender relations which are shaped by patriarchal ideology. And in diversifying and expanding their roles into men’s domain, by “walking where men walk”, women have taken on increased labour burdens and responsibilities, in the process, gaining some autonomy and freedom, while not gaining the rights, privilege and status that go along with it.

1.1 Outline of Thesis

By intertwining aspects of culture, political-economy, history and gender in a theoretical framework of analysis, and operationalizing these concepts in an appropriate methodology which allows for these aspects to be brought to the fore, Part II of this thesis argues that it is possible to understand the inter-connectedness of ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ changes over time as they impact farming and soil management, as well as the way they are

grounded in women and men's everyday experiences. This study calls into question the taken-for-granted assumptions about the 'farmer' as an undifferentiated and gender-neutral category in conventional soils approaches. Rather than focus on a binary critique of soils research as either 'bad' or 'good', in Chapter 2, I begin by calling into question some aspects of conventional approaches to soil management in Africa, highlighting the effects of discourse and policies. I argue for a re-conceptualization of conventional theoretical frameworks and for placing the gendered life-worlds of farmers at the centre of analysis through the use of a feminist poststructuralist political ecology perspective. In the third chapter, I outline the methodology that I developed in order to put into practice the conceptual framework. Following this, I review the research as it unfolded in the field before reflecting on the research process and dilemmas encountered in the field.

In Part III, I present the research findings and gender analysis of the case study I undertook in Maragoli, Western Kenya, using women and men's words to explore the key gender relations in and of production, i.e. the control of land and labour, which affect the management of soils and farming. In Chapter 4, I review historical struggles over land in Maragoli from pre-colonial Maragoli to the early post-independence. I demonstrate that land tenure, both inheritance and usufruct rights, are contingent on gender. Women's security in tenure is critical to soil management. When women as farmers have long-term security in tenure, they are more likely to invest in sustaining the soils. However, women's security in tenure is increasingly threatened. Marital status, gender and class place certain women and men in particularly vulnerable positions in defending their rights to land. These struggles take place in a context of legal plurality, where women and men have differential access to legal spheres. Women's ownership of land constitutes a major threat to men's position as

‘heads’ of household and men’s authority in a situation where their roles have become untenable in light of historical and economic circumstances. The control over land as a resource is the basis for a bitter war of words between women and men at the level of the household.

Chapter 5 explores the politics of labour. Women and men’s roles and responsibilities for soil management and in agriculture are continually contested, transformed and negotiated through a heated discursive politics at the level of the household and in response to broader historical and political-economic changes. Patriarchal ideology is pervasive in men’s argumentation. Women often maintain a posture of deference to this ideology in order to create room to manoeuvre. However, women’s ability to cope is dependent on their marital status, class, age and life-cycle positioning. In addition to exploring how women and men’s different life circumstances affect their on-farm labour burdens, I bring this relationship to bear on different farming enterprises, such as planting and cultivating trees and hedges, digging trenches, caring for livestock, clearing land and cultivating crops. I show that men have disengaged from many farming activities, except for a select few which reinforce men’s symbolic and material control over and owners of property, as well as their roles as ‘commanders’.

In order to expand the terrain of conventional approaches to soils issues, Chapter 6 focusses on the multiple and diverse off-farm activities and coping strategies in which women engage, that are critical to understanding the priority given to soil management and farming. Under SAPs, women’s and men’s earning power has generally decreased, while their cost of living has increased. In order to sustain their own livelihoods, women have taken on increased labour burdens, roles and responsibilities, including those that were

‘traditionally’ considered men’s. To do this, women diversify their options by engaging in income generating activities, and revert to old modes of exchange such as barter. They also engage in a multitude of coping strategies, such as socially sanctioned social institutions such as kin based relationships, women’s groups, informal social networks, and non-sanctioned relationships including extra-marital relationships and sex work.

I will conclude in Chapter 7 that local level analysis which focusses on everyday struggles allows for an understanding of how broader ‘development’ processes and policies - which are a result of inequitable North-South relations - are lived and experienced in everyday life. I suggest policy and research recommendations for the future. Women and men’s experiences, stories and accounts can be used as points of departure for other context-specific soil management case studies and ‘development’ initiatives, adding another dimension to our understanding of the types of priorities, constraints and opportunities that women and men face in their everyday lives in the face of ever-changing, yet unequal global power relations as well as local power relations embedded in patriarchal ideology.

PART II : THEORY AND PRACTICE

2.0 In Theory : Conceptualizing ‘Development’, Soils And Gender Issues In Africa

In Zimbabwe, in 1981, I was struck to find local agricultural ‘development’ officials eagerly awaiting the arrival and advice of a highly paid consultant who was to explain how agriculture in Zimbabwe was to be transformed. What, I asked, did this consultant know about Zimbabwe’s agriculture that they, the local agricultural officers, did not ? To my surprise, I was told that the individual in question knew virtually nothing about Zimbabwe, and worked mostly in India. “But,” I was assured, “he knows development” (Ferguson, 1994:258).

If “thinking is as ‘real’ an activity as any other”, then ideas and discourses have important and very real social consequences (Ferguson, 1994:xv). Ideas are connected with and implicated in broader political processes (ibid.). They are constitutive forces that *do something*. Conceptualizations of ‘development’ and soil management construct social reality and shape natural resource management in local environments. They are continually reproduced and contested within hegemonic constructions of Africa which are grounded in discourses of knowledge and power (Mudimbe, 1988; Mackenzie, 1995b). Instead of taking the theoretical realm for granted, it is critical to pry open and scrutinize the epistemological foundations inherent in the construction of the ‘problem’ and ‘solutions’ put forward by hegemonic discourses of ‘development’ and soils issues, as well as critical perspectives which challenge them.

This chapter represents an investigation into the theoretical and political underpinnings of conventional and alternative approaches to soils issues in Sub-Saharan Africa. It problematizes the taken-for-granted assumptions inherent in meta-narratives and discourses of ‘development’, and suggests an alternative analytical framework. The first part of the chapter scrutinizes mainstream approaches to soils issues which are embedded in broader ‘development’ processes and discourses. I argue that in order to comprehend the successes and failures of conventional soils approaches, it is necessary to explore the

discourses of 'development' which construct certain types of social and environmental realities as well as perpetuate inequitable North-South relations. Soils issues are embedded in colonial discourses which construct a 'crisis', and in response, deploy 'solutions' which are often technical in nature, and ultimately miss out on critical factors, especially class and gender, that affect natural resource management. After demonstrating the problems inherent in conventional approaches, I argue in the second part of the chapter that a critical political ecology perspective and a feminist post-structuralist analysis of gender allow for a better understanding of complex and gendered local realities of women and men, while situating them within broader historical and political-economic contexts. Natural resource management, and more specifically soil management, is better conceptualized and better reflects the problems of local 'farmers' when it places the gendered micro-politics of women and men's struggles over material and their symbolic meanings at the centre of analysis (Moore, 1993). Also critical to the analysis are issues of race (whereby Africans are constructed as the 'other' in the face of exogenous and modern 'expertise') and the deeply contested terrain of the household as its members, differentiated by gender, class, age, life-cycle and marital status renegotiate relations of and in production within an ever-changing political economy (Mackenzie, 1995b:100-101).

2.1 Problematizing Conventional Approaches To Soil Management

Conventional approaches to soil management within the African context are constituted and reproduced within broader concepts of 'development'. Therefore, they must foreground 'development', not simply as an unproblematized, static and monolithic force 'out there', but as a valid site for critical enquiry in itself (Ferguson and Gupta, 1997; Gardner and Lewis, 1996). Such an enquiry might begin by recognizing that 'development'

is a firmly entrenched and taken-for-granted organizing concept, as Ferguson points out:

What is 'development' ? It is perhaps worth remembering just how recent a question this is. This question, which today is apt to strike us as so natural, so self-evidently necessary, would have made no sense even a century ago. It is a peculiarity of our historical era that the idea of 'development' is central to so much of our thinking about so much of the world. It seems to us today almost non-sensical to deny that there is such a thing as 'development', or to dismiss it as a meaningless concept, just as it must have been virtually impossible to reject the concept 'civilization' in the nineteenth century, or the concept 'God' in the twelfth. Such central organizing concepts are not readily discarded or rejected, for they form the very framework within which such argumentation takes place. ... Each of these central organizing concepts presupposes a central, unquestioned value, with respect to which different world views can be articulated. 'Development' in our time is such a central value. Wars are fought and coups are launched in its name. Entire systems of government and philosophy are evaluated according to their ability to promote it. Indeed, it seems increasingly difficult to find any way to talk about large parts of the world except in these terms (1994:xiii).

Rather than discussing at length about how 'development' is defined within various theoretical frameworks, the primary focus here is what it "has meant for those spaces and people who it defines as its objects" (Crush, 1995:21). Resisting the basic impulse to fix, define, categorize and bring order to a heterogeneous and constantly multiplying field of meaning (ibid.:2), it is perhaps more useful to view 'development' as Ferguson suggests:

A dominant problematic or interpretive grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us. Within this grid, a host of everyday observations are rendered intelligible and meaningful. Poor countries are by definition 'less developed', and the poverty and powerlessness of the people who live in such countries are only the external signs of this underlying condition. ... Within this problematic, it appears self-evident that debtor Third World nation-states and starving peasants share a common 'problem', that both lack a single 'thing': 'development' (1994:xiii).

The power that the 'development' problematic wields over the social imaginary of 'Third World' countries - the way that social and environmental realities are created and controlled - indicates the dominance of one portrayal of reality over other alternative ways of representing reality (Opp, 1998:13-14). Illustrating how and why this dominance is established and maintained, as well as how it may be critiqued and resisted, requires an examination of the formation of the hegemonic discourse of 'development' (ibid.), and a discussion of how it is embedded in soils issues.

By conceptualizing 'development' as an apparatus that institutes its own language

and *does something* in response to a problem which it has a hand in constructing, it is possible to investigate both the problematic discourse and effects of 'development' in Africa.

In the discussion that follows, I briefly explore the notion of 'development' as discourse from a broad perspective, before bringing it to bear more specifically on soils issues in Africa. I then focus on the striking similarity and connections between contemporary and colonial approaches to soils issues, and then turn attention to the production of hegemonic 'development' discourse pertaining to soil management in Africa perpetuated by major 'development' institutions, demonstrating the way 'doomsday' scenarios are constructed, using World Bank documents to elucidate my argument. Finally, I draw out the problems within 'new' approaches to soils issues, highlighting what 'development' discourse and projects actually do in practice from a critical perspective.

2.1.1 'Development' As Discourse

'Development' produces its own type of language and form of discourse. By investigating the discourse of 'development', it is possible to explore the forms in which it makes its arguments and establishes authority, the manner in which it constructs the world, the ways in which its ideas are translated into real effects and can bring about intended and unintended changes (Ferguson, 1994; Crush, 1995). In this sense, discourse is much more than language. It also embodies social roles, cultural practices and political positions within multiple relations - from the micro-politics of the household to broader North-South politics - which deploy and channel power (Opp, 1997:14). Influenced by the work of Foucault, Parpart and Marchand define discourse as "a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs... the site where meanings are contested and power relations determined" (1995:2-3). Power is inseparable from this

conceptualization, as “the ability to control knowledge and meaning, not only through writing but also through disciplinary and professional institutions, and in social relations, is the key to understanding and exercising power relations in society” (ibid.).

The belief that knowledge is inextricably intertwined with power is reflected in Foucault’s argument that “the criteria of what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded and who is designated as qualified to know involves acts of power” (1971, cited in Scoones and Thompson, 1992:12). Within ‘development’ discourse, the definition of the ‘problem’ which must be tackled, along with the representation of the needs, priorities, constraints, beneficiaries and definition of local people, must all be understood as social constructs which exist within political contexts and inequitable global power relations (Ferguson, 1999; Pottier, 1993). As Gardner and Lewis argue, ‘development’ knowledge and expertise are historically and politically specific constructions of reality, which, “have more to do with the exercise of power within particular historical contexts than presenting ‘objective’ realities” (1996:71). Crush contends that focussing:

...on the vocabularies deployed in ‘development’ texts to construct the world as an unruly terrain requiring management and intervention; on their stylized and repetitive form and content, their spatial imagery and symbolism, their use (and abuse) of history, their modes of establishing expertise and authority and silencing alternative voices; on forms of knowledge that ‘development’ produces and assumes; and on the power relations it underwrites and reproduces (1995:3).

This highlights the political processes inherent in the ways that ‘development’ is written, narrated and spoken - in its discursive elements.

This focus also makes it possible to move beyond a preoccupation with whether ‘development’ is a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ thing, and rather, see ‘development’ as a name for a “complex set of institutions and initiatives encompassing multiple, and often contradictory, interests” (Heyer et al., 1981, cited in Ferguson, 1994:14). The task is to improve the

visibility of 'development' discourse and practice as it operates in various spheres of life, highlighting that planned interventions do something and contribute to some kind of change, most often unintended (Ferguson, 1994; Pottier, 1993):

Whether initiatives introduce new power relations and ideologies or support existing ones, every intervention remains a political statement the significance of which must be grasped (Pottier, 1993:7).

In this vein, the discourse upon which conventional approaches to soils issues in the African context have been justified and deployed must be scrutinized and deconstructed in order to understand their political significance - both in terms of what is articulated and privileged, *as well as what is subjugated and silenced.*

2.1.2 What is New is Old: Soils Issues And the 'Doomsday' Scenario

Soil management has been the focus on intervention efforts from colonial times to present day 'development' policy in Africa (Mackenzie, 1995b, 1998; Scoones, Reij and Toulmin, 1996; Keeley, 1996; Leach and Mearns, 1996). Rather than 'knee-jerk' responses (Stocking, 1996:153), these efforts have been instituted repeatedly over time in a variety of countries and conditions, and have been strikingly similar on many counts. They have been framed and legitimated through colonial discourses, evoking emotive images which construct Africans as 'unscientific exploiters' of the resources base (Mackenzie, 1995b:101), and 'degraders' of the environment in the context of a rapidly growing population. This ethnocentric discourse constructs African environments as degraded, eroded, neglected and unruly, and indigenous practices as backwards, traditional and unscientific. Such constructions are often situated within dualisms such as: 'traditional' versus 'modern'; agrarian and customary versus urban and industrialized; and subsistence versus highly productive economies (Mudimbe, 1988:4). From these constructions, African knowledge

continues to be disqualified as ‘unscientific’ in the face of what Mudimbe has called the ‘epistemological ethnocentrism’ of Western scholarship and privileged claims to know (1988:15; Mackenzie, 1995b:101).

African environments are socially constructed within the discourse of ‘development’ - something entirely different from arguing that ‘there is no real environment out there’ (Mackenzie, 1995b; Escobar, 1996). Africa continues to be constructed as ‘backwards’, ‘traditional’ and ‘less developed’, the vast diversity, differences and complexities of a whole continent reduced to mere generalizations. This same ‘development blue-print’ is applied across diverse regions and nations within Africa (Roe, 1991), including Kenya⁴, ⁵.

The ‘Doomsday’ Scenario

Conventional approaches to soil issues in Africa have repeatedly been legitimated through a particularistic language having a strident, urgent tone, advocating an eminent ‘crisis’ or doomsday scenario which:

...will usually include one or more of the following features: huge, canyon-like gullies, with bare and collapsing sides caused by waves of sediment-choked off runoff; ‘moonscapes’ of stones, or treeless slopes littered with the debris remaining after erosion; or the remains of a once-pristine forest, the blackened stumps still giving wisps of smoke, with the soil baked hard into nodules of brick (Stocking, 1996:141).

Severe soil erosion, soil mining, rapid deforestation, overgrazing, soil fertility decline, massive soil loss, mismanagement of land, food production crisis, famine, rapid and unbridled population growth, disease, and resource scarcity: these words and images are routinely used within conventional ‘development’ discourse focussing on soils issues in Africa. They imply that something is ‘not right’, and therefore, something must be done to improve and reverse the situation to avert the assumed and inevitable ‘crisis’. They are constituted within an environmental and ‘development’ discourse which rests on the ‘self-

evident' and 'common' assumption that soils issues are a major problem and 'development' challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa (Leach and Mearns, 1996; Scoones et al., 1996).

This 'doomsday' scenario is imbued with the rhetoric of a Malthusian apocalypse and based on the supposition of a widespread collapse of the African environment (Keeley, 1996; Scoones et al., 1996:3; Roe, 1995). Accompanying this 'crisis' scenario is an implicit assumption of causation which is construed as endogenous, inferring "tribalism, primitivism and barbarism in older versions; ethnicity, illiteracy and ignorance in modern incarnations" (Crush, 1995:10). The responsibility for instigating the environmental 'crisis' is placed on population growth and rests on what are described as 'generic' yet 'traditional' African cultural practices which place a 'high premium' on fertility and 'loose' reproductive customs such as polygamy, despite studies which have documented that increased population pressure does not necessarily lead to soil degradation - and in fact, has led to increased incentives to conserve the resource base and manage the soils (Tiffen et al., 1994).

This long-standing western obsession with the assumed negative effects of population growth is put forward by the World Bank - one of the largest organizations and 'spin-doctors' of the discourse of 'development' - in its 1989 long-term perspective study entitled *Sub-Saharan Africa : From Crisis to Sustainable Development* :

The link between accelerating population growth and environmental degradation is especially worrying. In several countries overpopulation is putting unsustainable pressure on agricultural land. In many places traditional farming land is already overcultivated, and more fragile land is being exploited to meet the needs of the growing population (1989:41).

The pressure of population is causing desertification to accelerate, because it forces people and their livestock farther into marginal grassland. The productive capacity of land is falling because of shorter rotations, soil erosion, and overgrazing. Growing population also raises the demand for fuelwood and cropland, and the resulting deforestation increases runoff and erosion, lowers groundwater levels, and may further reduce rainfall in arid areas. Pollution is a growing problem. (ibid.:22).

Poor families cut whatever fuelwood they can for essential fuel. The result is ever-widening circles of bare and infertile soil around settlements, ever more time and effort required simply to obtain fuel

and raise enough crops to survive, and less time and energy to improve welfare. Where environmental abuse leads to loss of arable land, wildlife, and water supplies and even to local climate change, the effects are felt in declining incomes and a diminishing quality of life (ibid.:44).

Almost a decade later, in its new document entitled *Toward Environmentally Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: A World Bank Agenda*, the causal links and 'obstacles on the path of sustainable development' remain central to the discourse, with a few 'new' problems such as loss of biodiversity and global climate change added to the mix:

Poverty is exacerbated by a demographic explosion unprecedented in human history... poverty and high population growth often induce land degradation and deforestation, which lead to growing food insecurity and loss of biodiversity (1996b:2).

In this discourse of an uncontrolled 'demographic explosion', Kenya takes a special place as an environmental 'hot spot':

Kenya, an extreme case, has only 0.1 hectare per capita. These small areas, which seem at odds with usual perception of the vast, unlimited African lands, reflect the uneven distribution of population... as well the low levels of technology and the unsuitability of wide areas for farming (1996b:11-12).

[The natural capital of Kenya], which is renowned for its unique scenery and the diversity of its natural parks and reserves...is at risk because of the extreme pressure of population on arable lands. ... Permanent intensive cropping is the current pattern in favourable highlands, but degradation is high under low-input technology and without enough erosion control measures. Forests cover less than 20 percent of the total surface of the subregion. Of those forests, the small remaining pockets of primary mountain rain forests with their unique biodiversity are at risk because of extreme population pressure due to scarcity of land (ibid.:29-31).

The role of history and politics in affecting change are suspended from the analysis. World Bank publications silence history and relegate blame to endogenous 'local factors'. Despite studies which have meticulously documented and mapped out the repeated institution of soil conservation policies and interventions over time (Mackenzie, 1998, 1995a, 1995b; Tiffen et al., 1994; Zimmerer, 1996; Scoones et al., 1996; Rocheleau, 1995), recent World Bank documents argue that African countries should be assisted in implementing actions that would lead to the regeneration of the soil productivity since "*no wide-scale attempt*" has been made in Africa to address these requirements (World Bank, 1996a:iv):

The intensification of agriculture, shortening of the cycle of shifting cultivation, sedentarization of farmers practising shifting cultivation or increasing cropping intensities on permanently cropped land, are all contributing to degradation of the resource base in the more densely populated areas of SSA.

With the population growing at over 3% per annum and increasingly migrating to urban areas, it would be difficult for the agriculturally active population of 155 million of this region to even come close to producing its future food and fibre, unless this soil degradation can be halted and the productivity of the soils and other factors of production improved (ibid.:2).

Again, changes in the environment and modifications of soil practices are assumed to be destructive, and blamed on local African farmers and local governments (Williams, 1995:166), effectively hiding from view the effects of historical, colonial and political processes in producing some of these phenomena. In this manner, 'development' institutions like the World Bank routinely overlook historical processes, including their own involvement in bringing about failures. What is left out is the role of 'old' discourses of 'crisis' in perpetuating some of the phenomena described in 'new' narratives, and of old policies and interventions, as well as specific acts of resistance to these (Rocheleau et al., 1995:1038).

As I demonstrate in later chapters, in Kenya, the colonial conceptualization of African agricultural and social practices as 'backward' and 'inefficient', and western based knowledge as 'modern' and 'efficient', led to interventions and policies of land alienation and soil conservation which have had dramatic effects on the way people carried out farming, where they carried out farming, and the types of livelihood strategies in which they engaged in (Mackenzie, 1998, 1995b).

2.1.3 'New' Plans And Rationales For 'Development' Action And Their Malcontents

Restoring soil fertility, managing soil fertility, combatting desertification, assessing soil degradation, controlling soil erosion, mitigating soil loss, enhancing soil fertility, recapitalizing soil fertility, and rehabilitating degraded lands: these words and images are commonly employed to justify 'new' plans for action and rationales for 'development'

intervention by 'development' institutions. All the words and statements evoke images of almost military-like action to correct a set of conditions gone wrong. Implicitly embedded within them lies the notion of trusteeship - the idea that "those who see themselves as 'developed' believe they should act to determine the process of development for others deemed less-developed" (Cowan and Shenton, 1995:28). 'Betterment' underlies the concept of trusteeship and is produced and reproduced in discourses of 'development'.

'Development' is both a global industry and an apparatus which, as Crush puts it, is about the "spatial reach of power and control and the management of other peoples, territories and environments" (1995:7). While this global industry works in vastly different contexts, its institutions and discourses are strikingly similar. Despite the fact that soil conservation efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa have had a chequered history (Scoones et al., 1996:1) and are marked by a routine and unremitting failure of projects to meet their objectives⁶, old plans are 're-packaged' as new and highlight soil degradation as a major 'development' challenge. Williams argues that 'development' institutions like the World Bank do not ask whether the whole approach of exporting gender neutral technical technologies might be inappropriate. Instead, they "recommend more of the same" (1995:166). Despite the growing number of case studies and evidence that show the importance of taking local, gendered micro-politics into account in order to understand natural resource management issues, both soils and agricultural analysis continue to operate in a gender-neutral mode, assuming that farmers have undifferentiated options, interests and opportunities - a view that is clearly untenable and unrealistic in light of the inherently gendered realities of farmers (Leach, 1991a:18).

Why then, are 'development' institutions incapable of learning from past failures and

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Why then, are 'development' institutions incapable of learning from past failures and

omissions ? Why do they routinely ignore academically grounded empirical research as well as critical theoretical debates and counter-narratives which incorporate gender, history, political-economy and context-specificity ? Ferguson argues that academic discourse is quite different from 'development' discourse in that "what is being done here is not some sort of staggeringly bad scholarship, but something else entirely" (Ferguson, 1994:27).

'Development' discourse does not allow the role of 'development' institutions to be political (ibid.), and in doing so, cannot allow for gender, history, culture and politics. Rather, it depoliticizes poverty and dehistoricizes the past, reducing 'development' to a static technical 'problem' that can only be solved by incorporating 'traditional' societies into the 'modern' world through technical initiatives (Williams, 1995:172; Ferguson, 1994:256; Blaikie, 1989).

History is frozen and the past is obliterated. Poverty and 'combatting the widespread problem' of soil degradation and erosion can only be solved by following a standardized technical package of inputs formulated within the practice of 'development' (Ferguson, 1994) as this passage from a recent World Bank document entitled *Recapitalization of Soil Productivity in Sub-Saharan Africa* illustrates:

... for a special focus on soil productivity in order to devise a strategy to overcome the economic, social, and environmental problems caused by its long neglect. And it proposes a special programme of technical and investment support to assist SSA countries in dealing with these problems. ... The regeneration of soil productivity would, with the appropriate accompanying policy measures and investments, enhance the productivity of farm lands, contribute to the rehabilitation of degraded lands and relieve pressure to open new lands for agriculture (World Bank, 1996a:1).

Without agricultural modernization the result is rapid desertification, deforestation, and loss of vegetation cover. With sound practices and technological innovations Africa might eventually accommodate several times its present population. But this will take time, and, meanwhile, high population growth spells disaster (World Bank, 1989:41).

Similarly the 1996 document argues that measures are needed to repair "the damage caused by years of neglect or to correct a natural deficiency in the system" (1996a:20).

Invoking a language of 'crisis' brought about by endogenous 'neglect' and 'deficiency' paves the way for a 'logical' need for external intervention and management. Inherent in this discourse is an epistemological ethnocentrism which puts forward the idea that "there is nothing to be learned from 'them' unless it is already 'ours' or comes from 'us'" (Mudimbe, 1988:15). In this process, local farmers are constructed as the 'other' in the face of exogenous technical and modern 'expertise' (Mackenzie, 1995b:101).

In Kenya, engineering approaches to soil conservation have been repeatedly put forward since colonial times, instituting standardized and gender-neutral technical 'solutions' without regard to ecological specificity, spatial variability, changes in micro-environments, and to the complexity, diversity and variability in farming and socio-cultural systems (Keeley, 1996; Carter and Murwira, 1995; Mackenzie, 1995b). More often than not, projects are formulated as technical and standardized cookie-cutter packages. As Williams points out, "complexity and variation, the stuff of history, geography, sociology, gender or anthropology, cannot be managed within the practice and discourse of 'development'" (1995:173). Ferguson argues that this is not surprising, as through much of Africa and the 'Third World', there exist closely identical 'development' institutions and a relatively small, interlocked network of experts spinning a common discourse of 'development' (1994:8) and similar gender-neutral ways of defining the 'problem'. This leads to a single and undifferentiated stock of free-floating 'development' expertise which is "untied to any specific context, that is so generalized, and so easily inserted into any given situation" (ibid:258-259). The extent to which 'development' projects the world over are formed by context-independent expertise, Kenya's experience with 'development' is part of this general phenomenon (ibid.).

However, these arguments alone cannot explain why 'development' interventions which have failed in the past are regularly instituted with such conviction. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the way justifications for 'new' interventions are predicated on data and statistics on soil loss, degradation and erosion derived from a variety of sources which are often suspect (Stocking, 1996; Scoones et al., 1996; Ferguson, 1994; Blaikie, 1989, 1985). These figures rarely make explicit how the measurements were derived, what scales were used, and more often than not, figures for soil loss, for example, are extrapolated from a small plot to increasingly wider scales (Scoones et al., 1996; Keeley, 1996). Studies are beginning to show that the 'lost' soils do not match levels of river or dam siltation in the same catchment area and further (Scoones et al., 1996:2). This 'lost' soil must go somewhere, and that somewhere is usually somewhere within the agricultural landscape rather than being lost permanently (Bojo and Cassells in Scoones et al., 1996:2).

Based on these problematic statistics, conclusions are drawn and interventions are justified. Both the 1989 and 1996 World Bank publications put forward the following statements, referring simply to the "UNEP/ISRIC" and "GLASOD" methodologies without further explanation or elaboration:

Sub-Saharan Africa's environment is easily damaged. Eighty percent of the soils are fragile, 47 percent of the land is too dry to support rainfed agriculture, and average rainfall varies from year to year by an enormous 30 to 40 percent (World Bank 1989:44).

...about half a billion hectares are degraded, with one-third of all cropland and permanent pasture moderately to severely degraded (World Bank, 1996b:12). .. Some 5 million ha of land in Africa as a whole are degraded to the point where their original biotic functions have been fully destroyed and rehabilitation would probably be uneconomic. Another 321 million ha have been degraded through deforestation, overgrazing, mismanagement or arable lands and other causes to levels at which their productivity is moderately or severely affected. Another 174 million are regarded by this study as having undergone light degradation. Other methods of estimating soil degradation have resulted in somewhat different assessments of its geographical distribution and areas affected, but all indicate that it is a problem of major proportions which affects the incomes and even survival of farmers in Africa (ibid.:3).

What is deemed as 'technical' and 'scientific' data - no matter how questionable - is used within 'development' discourse in order to justify technical intervention. This means that conventional research methods, which are construed as 'objective' and 'factual', are used as instruments for constructing reality in such a way that only that which is deemed quantifiable qualifies as 'real' (Mies, 1991:67). Thus, the complex reality of variance, diversity and change is hidden by the kind of conventionally, scientifically and technically based arguments which are substantiated by suspect statistics and technical data. Within this discourse, gendered life-worlds, knowledge and experiences are left out, ignoring not only that local realities and gender relations change over time and space, but that they are imbued with conflicts, inconsistencies, ambivalence and contradictions - and subsequently do not fit into simple, linear models of 'development' (Mbilinyi, 1992:36-39).

Often, socio-economic analysis, gender or cultural analysis of local 'conditions' are carried out as 'add-ons' or boxes to be checked off to satisfy donors using rapid and superficial methods to evaluate complex socio-cultural contexts, and are subsequently marginalized in project texts and analysis, and inevitably in practice. Rather than in-depth integrated and multi-disciplinary analysis, technical analysis is privileged. Moreover, socio-cultural and gender analysis within 'development' tends to employ macro-structural frameworks which focus on overly deterministic conceptualizations of social structures, which ultimately produce misleading monolithic representations of 'development' and homogenizing accounts of local actors and experiences (Moore, 1993:381). These frameworks miss critical factors which explain resource management, such as the gendered micro-politics of struggles over access to material resources, and the symbolic contestations that constitute those struggles "among a differentiated peasantry and a state [and

‘development’ industry] made up of multiple actors with sometimes disparate interests” (ibid.:381-382).

So why do local people themselves allow ‘development’ projects, and specifically soil management projects, to be deployed repeatedly? Sikana suggests that local people view ‘development’ as strategically linked to resources, even when they do not agree wholly or even in part to the aims of projects which are formulated without taking their input or interests into account (1995). As I will demonstrate in later chapters, this is evident in the lengths to which local people go in reproducing the ‘development’ discourse of the ‘unknowledgeable and illiterate’ farmer in face of the ‘modern and knowledgeable’ researchers in vying for resources that have long been associated with western intervention. This vying to access resources by strategically reproducing ‘development’ discourse, while, on the other hand, filtering, rejecting and manipulating aspects of ‘development’ intervention they do not agree with (Sikana, 1995), highlights how, contrary to conventional conceptualizations of soils issues, interventions and policies are not simply imposed or transferred wholesale, en bloc, but rather, are negotiated and contested. People actively filter, mediate, manipulate and transform external interventions and policies and accord their own meanings and understandings to them. As Long asserts:

A more dynamic approach to the understanding of social change is therefore needed which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ factors and relationships, and which recognizes the central role played by human action and consciousness” (1992b:20).

Social change does not take place in isolation. Many changes do indeed occur from the impact of external forces, and an understanding of these ‘outside’ forces is vital in understanding of people’s life-worlds; nevertheless, social actors actively define and shape those ‘external’ forces in the context of their own life-worlds. In doing so, they set in motion

a new and unique set of emergent changes, practices and strategies.

These emergent changes always take place in specific contexts and are influenced by social, cultural, economic, political, ecological and historical processes. For instance in Kenya, Carter et al. have demonstrated how 'macro' national policies and interventions have led to different patterns of land use change within Western Province, with very different implications in Kabras in comparison to Maragoli in terms of agriculture, soil management and on and off-farm livelihood strategies (1998:3). These differential patterns call into question the conceptualization of social change as being homogenous, top-down, linear, deterministic and driven from the outside. Rather, they show that environmental change is something that is discursively and historically constructed, and is context-specific.

Long argues that local realities and practices encapsulate 'macro' representations and are only intelligible in situated contexts. "They are grounded in the meanings accorded them through the ongoing life-experiences and dilemmas of men and women" (Long, 1992:7).

Pottier further argues that 'development:

...is marked simultaneously by the recurrence of broad, seemingly universal patterns and by a diversity of local contexts. However, while the broad patterns receive ample attention in the work of economists, statisticians and agronomists, the importance of diversity remains largely under-reported and insufficiently understood. ... [T]here is growing concern about the use of 'hold-all' categories that describe what appear to be universalistic phenomena. ... These broad categories do little to reveal the vast heterogeneity of location-specific conditions, but a lot to generate bland analysis and nonsensical prescription (1993:2).

I argue that using a feminist poststructuralist political ecology conceptual framework is an alternative which addresses problems inherent in conventional approaches of soil issues. It allows research and analysis to focus on the complex lived experiences of women and men, and lead towards a more nuanced understanding of local contexts of soil management.

2.2 A Feminist Poststructural Political Ecology Conceptual Framework

A feminist poststructuralist⁷ political ecology conceptual framework brings together two alternate and critical ways of conceptualizing natural resource management: it fuses a feminist poststructuralist emphasis on gender and household relations as a focal point through which relations of and in production are mediated within natural resource management (Carney, 1996:165), with a political ecology concern over the ways that 'development', the market, the state, 'culture' and multiple regimes of property rights affect land use practice (ibid.). This framework centres on important and inter-related factors which shape conflicts over environmental resources: the micro-politics of women and men's struggles over access to productive resources, the symbolic contestations that constitute those struggles (Moore, 1996:126; 1993:381), and the linkages and between these micro struggles and the macro level, historically, and in terms of the political-economy and social relations (i.e. class, gender, kinship, etc.). Moore explains:

By fusing together an understanding of the mutual constitution of micro-politics, symbolic practices, and structural forces, it may be possible to unravel how competing claims to resources are articulated through cultural idioms in the charged contests of local politics (1996:125).

In this section, I expand upon a feminist poststructuralist conceptualization of gender; explore a feminist poststructuralist political ecology conceptualization of struggles over resources in natural resource management; and argue that the 'household', once problematized, offers an important point of departure for analyzing these struggles, and therefore, soil management.

2.2.1 Foregrounding Gender Within Poststructural Political Ecology

Carney argues that a feminist poststructuralist emphasis on gender offers political ecology a more nuanced conceptualization of the complex and historically changing relations

that shape rural land-use decisions (1996:165). Recognizing multiple voices, identities and experiences brings to the analysis of natural resource management, and soil management in particular, an understanding of diversity and multiplicity; not just among women and men, but among different epistemological perspectives on feminism itself⁸. While there are various ways of 'doing' feminism within 'development' - including Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), Gender and Development (GAD) (Rathgeber, 1995, 1990), and Gender and Environment (GED)⁹ - the central tenets of feminist poststructuralism offer an alternative which more closely reflects people's lived realities pertaining to environmental resources and a deeper understanding of gender relations.

First and foremost is the definition of gender. Within feminist poststructuralism, and for the purposes of this thesis, gender refers to the socio-cultural construction of roles and relationships between men and women, that change over time and are context-specific (Hovorka, 1998:4; Marchand and Parpart, 1995:244). By understanding gender in this manner, the essentialist category based on biological characteristics (male and female) is replaced by an analysis which also takes into account the roles and relationships *among* women and *among* men, differentiated by axes of difference such as class, race, age, life-cycle positioning and marital status (Mackenzie, 1995b:100; Leach, 1991:22). People's identities or positions are not "reducible to origins, skin colour, or material locations", but rather, are the products of struggles over meanings representing an achieved, not an ascribed, trait (Mbilinyi, 1992:35).

This conceptualization stands in stark contrast to conventional approaches to soil management which views the 'Third World' farmer as a homogenous and undifferentiated 'other' (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:79), denying history, individuality and multiple identities¹⁰

(Mbilinyi, 1992:45-46). Conventional 'development' discourse freezes 'Third World' farmers in time and space and produces knowledge which is constructed on and ruled by binaries or dualisms which reinforce existing power relations such as western (read progressive/modern/superior)/non-western (read backward/traditional/inferior) (Mohanty, 1991a:6)¹¹.

Mohanty argues that simply being a 'woman' or 'poor' or 'rural farmer' is not sufficient ground for assuming political self-identify or identity to a common cause or set of interests (1991a:33). Men and women have multiple positionalities which are a result of intersections of the various systematic networks of class, life-cycle positioning, marital status, age, race, sexuality, and nation, that position them and which are experienced differently in different cultural, economic, social and political contexts (ibid.). While all women and men share important experiences as a consequence of their gender, this identity is not necessarily sufficient to override social and political barriers of status, class, age, race and disability (ibid.:13). Power relations vary both by nature and degree, and it is simplistic to assume that all women, or men for that matter, necessarily identify with each other on that basis alone (Cotterill, 1992:595).

What emerges from a feminist political ecology approach, as opposed to perspectives from a 'women and environments' theorization which focusses on the essentialist category 'woman'¹² (Mackenzie, 1995, 100; Leach, 1991a:18-19), is a focus on gender as a powerful conceptual framework for understanding and analyzing local realities and environments. Gender becomes an invaluable entry point for gaining insights on the ways in which environmental change is intimately intertwined with women and men's livelihood concerns and the way in which land and soil management is adapted and refigured to cope with larger

political-economic, demographic and socio-cultural changes (Leach, 1991a:17). A focus on gender relations reveals how local resources are controlled, used and both materially and symbolically struggled over, and therefore, is central for understanding local resource management practices and innovations (ibid.), as well as multiple priorities and constraints.

2.2.2 Struggles Over Resources, Struggles Over Meanings Within Contexts Of Power

Using this perspective, scholars working in Sub-Saharan Africa have demonstrated that struggles over resources are simultaneously struggles over 'cultural' meanings (Moore, 1996, 1993; Carney, 1996; Carney and Watts, 1990; Schroeder, 1996; Berry, 1997, 1989).

Struggles over resources occur through 'cultural' processes:

These processes may, in turn, effect structural change or material [and environmental] transformation. On the one hand, ideology does social work insofar as meanings mobilize action, shape social identities, and condition understandings of collective interests. Cultural meanings are *constitutive* forces in historically specific relations of production and are not simply a reflection of a material base. Productive inequalities become naturalized through cultural understandings of social hierarchy that encourage popular consent. On the other hand, struggles over symbolic processes are themselves conflicts over material relations of production, the distribution of resources in society, and ultimately power. Meanings may sustain prevailing productive inequalities. ... But... dominant meanings are always contested, never totalizing, and always unstable, even when they encourage degrees of subordinate people's 'consent' to particular forms of oppression (Moore, 1993:383).

Rather than conceptualizing 'culture' as the "exotic trappings to the nuts and bolts of 'underlying' structures" (Moore, 1996:126) and something that is fixed and rigid, it is understood as a social and historical construction which is dynamic and fluid. It is continually and actively being created and recreated, interpreted and re-interpreted by women and men (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b:14). Local people actively and strategically construct their own gendered identities within natural resources management. However, they are simultaneously constructed in relation to global processes which are involved in the production of 'local' identities (ibid.) and in 'development' discourse.

'Culture' is a site of common understandings of sharing and commonality *as well as*

a site of difference and contestation (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b). It is open to multiple, subjective and gendered understandings. When viewing 'culture' through a gendered lens, it is possible to ask searching questions about how the societal and gendered 'rules of the game' were made, by whom, and for whom (ibid:4), while recognizing that they are constructed in the midst of inequitable power relations and hierarchies. Power is central to the conceptualization of 'culture', and is inseparable from the dominant construction of gender relations.

Women and men invest differentially and strategically in various 'cultural' meanings as well as in the means of and in production, and "struggles over meaning are as much part of the process of resource allocation, as are struggles over surplus or the labour process" (Berry, 1988:66, cited in Moore, 1993:383), and property relations. Relations *of* production and relations *in* production - the former understood as property relations, and the latter as labour processes (Carney and Watts, 1990:217) - are important in understanding natural resource management issues.

A focus on the gendered division of roles, responsibilities, rights and interests situates resource management changes and what meanings they are given by different people (Leach, 1991a:22). Relations of production, such as land and soil, are critical in resource management, as arrangements for resource tenure and access always implicate gender relations (Leach, 1991a:19). For instance, gender analysis has illustrated that people with secure tenure rights invest in land with a view to the long-term, but their ability to do so can be compromised by lack of access to economic or other resources vital to the maintenance of their livelihoods (Mackenzie, 1995; Leach, 1991a:18). Within relations in production, the gendered availability of labour figures centrally in terms of how tasks are divided, the way

work is sequenced or segregated between women and men's, crops and place, as well as the links between divisions of labour and rights to access which change in value over time.

While decision-making is important and reveals a lot about how gender relations impinge on resource management, Leach argues that it also hides a lot from view, and that in fact, many people are not making decisions at all but dealing with dilemmas and constraints in a context where agro-ecological and socio-political issues are intertwined (Leach, 1991a:23). In this way, coping with changes in the political-economy, the environment and new contexts means coping with new emerging dilemmas and problems (ibid.). These have implications for gender relations - as they are bound up in context-specific notions of what constitutes marriage, or relations between older and younger people, between co-wives, between members of the extended family and kin relations, between neighbours, friends, lovers and patrons - as much as crop yields or conventional soils issues (Leach, 1991a; Berry, 1997, 1989; Crowley, 1994). Gender relations involve ongoing struggles over meaning and control of strategic relationships and resources, and hence, are inseparable from issues of power, agency and knowledge.

The Power-Knowledge-Agency Nexus

Power is conventionally seen as being a fixed and rigid block of control which is possessed or not possessed (Villareal, 1992; Long, 1992b). It is viewed as being vertical in nature - dominating, oppressing and subverting - thereby focussing the analysis to who 'possesses' it and how it is exercised on its 'victims' (ibid.). Feminist poststructuralist political ecology offers an alternate perspective which views power as a fluid and multi-faceted force that fills up spaces, "sometimes for only flickering moments, and takes different forms and consistencies, which make it impossible to measure, but conspicuous

enough to describe” (Villareal, 1992:258). It argues that power is inseparable from knowledge and agency and brings their complex interrelations to bear on the analysis of a multiplicity of gender relations which play out in struggles over symbolic and material resources. It makes it possible to explore how power operates in everyday life, focussing on negotiation and resistance within gender relations.

Power is not a ‘zero-sum’ game in which possessing power means that others are without it (Long and Villareal, 1994; Long, 1992b). In this way, women are not ‘victims’, ‘powerless’ and ‘subjugated’; they are not utterly ‘trapped’ in patterns of domination and powerlessness, but are agents involved in negotiation and acts of resistance (Villareal, 1992:257; Scoones and Thompson, 1993:13). Conversely, the ‘powerful’ are not in complete control of all aspects of social and political life and are influenced, affected and sometimes subverted by the ‘powerless’ (ibid.). Rather than being something that is possessed, power is constituted in interaction (Verschoor, 1992:177). Actors create space and room to manoeuvre in order to meet their own interests and projects, as well as in order to gain an edge or advantage over others in struggles over access to and control over resources:

Society is composed of actors, thinking agents, capable of strategizing and finding space to manoeuvre in the situations they face and manipulating resources and constraints. Economic and political considerations, as well as life experiences and particular everyday circumstances, are relevant to the way actors tie together, act upon, attribute meaning to, and recreate different elements (Villareal, 1992:248).

Farmers strategize and problematize situations. They process knowledge and information and bring together elements necessary to manage their soils and operate their farms (Long and Villareal, 1994:48), as well as maintain livelihoods from their land and environments. They process social experience, and devise coping strategies, even under the most extreme conditions or coercion (Long and Villareal, 1994:48).

Power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined: knowledge is context-specific as well as being socially and historically constructed and is inherently political in that “what is excluded and who is qualified to know involves acts of power” (Foucault, cited in Scoones and Thompson). Peet and Watts argue that each society has regimes of ‘truth’ which control the political and economic apparatuses which diffuse ‘truth’ in the form of discourse (1996:13). In addition to being statements within socially produced discourses, ‘truths’ are simultaneously facts about reality (Moore and Vaughan, 1994). Within this conceptualization, knowledge is considered as both representation (a matter of conversation and of social practice), as well as fact (Moore and Vaughan, 1994). However, there exist multiple interpretations regarding facts (ibid.). There are multiple ‘truths’, many complex networks of knowledge, instead of a unitary ‘truth’ and knowledge system (Long and Villareal, 1994; Flax, 1992). Feminist poststructuralists incorporate a multiplicity of variants and recognize that knowledge processes are embedded in social and ‘cultural’ processes which are imbued with aspects of power, authority and legitimation, often involving social struggle and conflict. They involve a multiplicity of actors and networks through which knowledge is shared and negotiated. Similar to power, knowledge is not simply possessed, accumulated or unproblematically imposed on others, nor is it a commodity that is reducible to single, cohesive structures, stocks and stores which can be precisely measured in terms of quantity or quality (Long and Villareal, 1994; Scoones and Thompson, 1993).

Local knowledge, practices and discourses do not exist in a vacuum (Scoones et al., 1996; Vaughan and Moore, 1994; Ferguson, 1999). They are often influenced by the movement of people, such as migrants living in or passing through; learned during journeys to other places; or adapted selectively from interventions imposed during colonialism,

national action plans or ‘development’ interventions (Scoones et. al, 1996:10). Rather than considering knowledge and experience as being unitary and linear, or frozen in time and stuck in history, the multiplicity, variation, adaptation, improvisation and strategic opportunism which takes place in daily livelihood struggles must be examined (Ferguson, 1999; Scoones et al., 1996). In this way, global forces and interventions are not “characterized by simple, Eurocentric uniformity but by coexisting and complex socio-cultural alternatives” (Appurдай, 1996, cited in Ferguson, 1999:385), based on the dynamic negotiation and mastering of a complex web of variants and range of influences over time (Ferguson, 1999:385; Scoones et al., 1996:10).

When we view aspects of knowledge through the prism of gender and apply them to the issues at hand, some very interesting questions emerge: who can be a ‘knower’? What tests, methods and research approaches must pass in order to be legitimated as agricultural knowledge and knowledge about soils? Do subjective truths count as knowledge?

Feminists argue that traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women could be ‘knowers’ or agents of knowledge. They claim that the voice of science is a masculine one, that history is written from only the point of view of men and... that the subject of a traditional sociological sentence is always assumed to be a man (Harding, cited in Mbilinyi, 1992:32).

From such critiques, experience emerges as a legitimate source of knowledge, as well as a guide to analysis and political action. Hence, the sharing of women’s and men’s experiences becomes a central element of gender analysis (Martin, 1995:84).

However, gender analysis, which focusses on the everyday experiences of local people, must not succumb to the individualistic and trivial. The aim is to address inequities and grasp crucial patterns, relationships and mechanisms that organize and map the social world (Villareal, 1992:248). Rather than suggesting deterministic macrostructural

frameworks of analysis, what is required is to give conceptual order to a complex and 'chaotic' world, recognizing patterns of gendered power relations within them, where 'chaos' is a manifestation of the multiplicity of ways that actors negotiate problems and constraints in their lives (Long, 1989, cited in Villareal, 1992:248). Participants' perceptions and interpretations of personal and collective experiences need to be scrutinized, theorized and deconstructed (Mbilinyi, 1992:52) so that experience as recounted is not taken for granted.

Poststructuralist feminists reject the conventional construction of women as 'passive victims'. They argue that such constructions "miss out, silence and subjugate alternative voices, along with their history of contestation struggle and resistance" (Mbilinyi, 1992:38). Women and men's stories, histories and personal narratives provide crucial accounts of resistance to dominant gender relations (Mbilinyi, 1992:41). They bring to the surface people's active agency and role as social actors. It is not only what Scott has called 'public transcripts' i.e. the rare and open material struggles over access to resources, which are important. But the 'hidden transcripts' and the strategic struggles over meaning that take place in the in-between spaces are also crucial (Villareal, 1992; Scott, 1990). Gender relations may manifest themselves in open struggles, protests, petitions and revolts, but they do not tell the whole story (Scott, 1990). The larger and more complex political terrains which are often beyond direct observation are constituted in "off-stage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm contradict or inflect" the dominant ideologies of gender relations (ibid.). Hence, the ideological, symbolic dissent and discursive politics which continually press against the limits to what is permitted, sanctioned or ordered (Schroeder, 1996; Scott, 1990), is central to the analysis of gender relations.

The everyday issues, through which negotiation, accommodation and resistance play

out, are important in the everyday lives of actors (Villareal, 1992). We need to look at the small attacks, probings and flashes of command which peek out behind the scenes - the 'guerilla tactics' inherent in gender relations (Villareal, 1992; Mbilinyi, 1992; Scott, 1990).

Mohanty sums up:

Resistance clearly accompanies all forms of domination. However, it is not always identifiable through organized movements; resistance inheres in the very gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives. Resistance is encoded in the practices of remembering. ... The very practice of remembering against the grain of 'public' or hegemonic history, of locating the silences and the struggle to assert knowledge which is outside the parameters of the dominant, suggests a rethinking of sociality itself (1991a: 39).

Knowledge, power, negotiation, bargaining, and changing gendered social relations in which decisions about land, labour and surplus play out, are crucial aspects of resource struggles. Gendered access to resources, distribution and control are commonly, although not exclusively, defined and negotiated at the level of the household (Adamo, 1998:2). The household is a site which represents to women and men, one channel of access to productive resources, such as land, labour, income (ibid.) and soil management inputs, as well as being a space where other important social relationships intersect. In order to understand the gendered options and opportunities available to farmers in terms of resource management, it is important to explore the processes by which household members gain access to, and control over, resources which are available to the household as a whole, and the forms of negotiation, bargaining and conflict that occur between household members (Whitehead, 1981; Leach, 1991a).

2.2.3 Beyond The Household As A 'Black Box'

A feminist poststructuralist political ecology perspective links broader concepts of power, knowledge and agency with micro-political-economic issues grounded in the everyday lives of women and men at the household level:

The central insight of poststructuralist research over the past fifteen years is the need to extend the definition of politics from the electoral politics of the state and/or between classes to one that includes the political arenas of the household and workplace. ... This emphasis brings attention to the crucial role of family authority relations and property relations in structuring the gender division of labour and access to rural resources. ... However, as development interventions, environmental transformations, and markets place new labour demands and value on rural resources, these socially constructed relations of the household labour and property rights often explode with gender conflict. Struggles over labour and resources reveal deeper struggles over meanings in the ways that property rights are defined, negotiated, and contested within the political arenas of the household, workplace and state (Carney, 1996:165).

When conventional 'development' and soils or agricultural research and analysis skirtingly turn their attention on the household, it is in unproblematic terms, viewing it as a 'black box' - with its internal 'circuitries', its complexities reduced to aggregations, and its dynamism suspended (Kabeer, 1994; Carney and Watts, 1990; Whitehead, 1981). This view constructs the household through the lens of neo-classical economics: as an 'altruistic', 'democratic' and 'cooperative' decision-making unit, characterized by a joint utility or joint welfare function that pools resources, such as labour, income and goods, into a common 'fund', and which in turn is equally shared and accessible to all household members (Kabeer, 1994; Evans, 1991; Roberts, 1991; Moore, 1988; Whitehead, 1981).

This conception of the household views it as a unified production unit, consisting of harmonious social and gender relations (Mbilinyi, 1992:41). It conflates units of residence, reproduction and production - the 'domestic domain' - as a monolithic, bounded and unchanging space, except in its capacity to change 'personnel' (Pittin, 1987, cited in Kabeer, 1994:113). The 'household' is based on the western model of the nuclear family made up of a male 'head', wife, and children. 'Development' institutions, organizations and researchers still persist in using this model even in situations where there are separate economic activities, separate incomes and expenditures which challenge conventional household analysis (Mbilinyi, 1992:41). Notions of power, negotiation, accommodation and

bargaining are hidden and obscured, and therefore are rendered virtually meaningless.

Poststructuralist feminists argue that, in actuality, the household is complex, variable and does not exist in isolation from other institutions and relations. Evans points out that “households are often shifting, flexible structures in which boundaries are difficult to discern” (1991:54). Indeed, the sheer cross-cultural diversity of household forms, almost defies definition. This diversity extends to various aspects of the household. For instance, family and household composition, and the ways by which social relations are mediated through kinship, marriage and other social institutions, all create a variety of conjugal and residential arrangements (Evans, 1991:54). Heterogeneous household forms can include polygamous households, female-headed households, or clusters of households that are part of a larger compound and/or extended family units. Further, patterns and channels of access to resources cannot always be located or confined to the household.

As an argument for moving beyond ‘the household’ as a unit of analysis, Carney and Watts suggest:

It is the porosity of the household boundaries, the tensions and competing interests among, and between, enterprises and individuals, the fluidity of internal social processes, and the constitutive role of ‘external’ political economy that have become the benchmarks of African household studies (1990:217).

Berry offers a way out of the conundrum of the ‘household’ by arguing it should be treated as a *point of departure* for gender analysis (1984, cited in Carney and Watts, 1990:217). The household, is a socially constructed concept, its activities may not have a single locus, and any one locus may not indicate a single unit of labour or resources (Roberts, 1991:62). Nonetheless, this concept, the household, remains valuable for exploring the ways that different gendered interests, options and social relationships affect resource management.

The conjugal contract, defined as the terms by which spouses exchange goods, incomes, services, including labour, is a useful concept for drawing out these issues and draws our attention to the changing nature of these contracts according to wider changes in the political-economy (Whitehead,1981:88). The conjugal contract varies, depending on such factors such as cultural patterns of inheritance and residence (Evans, 1991:54), and by the extent to which resources are joint or 'pooled', or, are dealt with as separate holdings or 'separate purses'. Because of these types of factors, women's and men's access to resources, labour, income and inputs are determined by relative position within a complex web of responsibilities, obligations and rights within conjugal contracts, kinship groups and the wider social and political-economic environments (ibid.:57).

Recognizing the fluidity of conjugal contracts makes it possible to focus on the complex interplay of power, knowledge, labour and resource relations, and also to incorporate the gendered politics - the strategic and symbolic deference, the marital and non-marital metaphors, the rhetorical struggles, wars of words and negotiation of symbolic representations - which are used to configure and reconfigure gender relations, and shift responsibilities, obligations and rights within a changing political-economy (Schroeder, 1996). Understanding the complex overlapping rights and obligations, and the competing interests, tensions and conflicts, relations of domination, cultural representations that produce and reproduce power relations, is crucial for understanding the politics, and the points of resistance, associated with control of resources (Carney and Watts, 1990).

The household is also a locus for a number of relationships which take place outside conjugal relations, such as social institutions in which women and men invest as diversification strategies in the face of increasingly unstable economic conditions. These are

critical for exploring struggles over resources and the way they are controlled, managed, accessed and made available to different people (Evans, 1991; Whitehead, 1981). Social organizations, such as women's groups and informal networks, are important channels for accessing resources and are one type of social institution. Non-sanctioned social relationships, such as extra-marital relations and, economic strategies such as sex work are important channels for accessing resources for women in difficult circumstances (Jefremovas, 1991a, 1991b). By exploring the diverse, multiple and sometimes 'hidden' social institutions and relationships that women and men invest in as diversification strategies in the face of tenuous circumstances, it is possible to explore how different types of context-specific social and institutions shape struggles over resources. Rather than think of social institutions as monolithic, static and rigidly regimented, Berry suggests that we need to think:

...about institutions as processes begin[ning] with movement and interaction. For example, one might conceptualize social institutions, such as household, family, community, etc., not as clearly bounded, consensual entities, but rather as constellations of social interactions, in which people move, acquire and exchange ideas and resources, and negotiate or contest the terms of production, authority and obligation. People interact, within and across various social boundaries, in multiple ways and relations among them are constituted less through uniform application of written or unwritten rules, as through multiple processes of negotiation and contest which may occur simultaneously, or in close succession, but need not be synchronized or even mutually consistent (1997:1228).

Membership in conjugal relations and a diverse range of social institutions forms a complex web of labour and land rights, claims and obligations. Far from being stable, consistent or guaranteed, they are negotiated processes (Berry, 1997:1229). Rather than view institutions as fixed structures, rigid rules and guaranteed outcomes, it is more appropriate to shift our analytical focus on negotiations, contestations and debates (ibid.).

There are important links between these relationships, institutions and patriarchy, which shape the gender division of labour, property relations (Carney and Watts, 1990:218),

and roles and responsibilities:

Land entitlement may simultaneously carry a right over labour power - land rights designated as 'communal' or 'family' may confer culturally binding expectations regarding labour obligations by affines for example - and it is the this intersection of power, language and property that strikes at the core of domestic social structure. The nexus of social and power relations is typically rooted in traditional practice and customary representations which, while regularly contested and negotiated, retain their status by virtue of being believed in and capable of providing individuals with explanations of a contradictory lived reality. The cultural representations of the domestic order provide an encompassing ideology which naturalizes and sanctions property rights... built upon the bedrock of social structure, specifically patriarchal family relations and the sexual division of labour (ibid.).

However, patriarchy is not a fixed, monolithic, timeless and unchanging. It is rather, both a dominant ideology which underlies 'cultural' norms, idioms and practices, as well as a structure that shapes and permeates gender relations (Abwunza, 1997).

2.3 Conclusion

Being wary of the problems inherent in conventional approaches to soils issues, I have argued that the employment of a feminist poststructuralist political ecology conceptual framework will provide a lens through which it is possible to understand the politics of land, labour and soils. To do so, it is necessary to focus on the diversity of farmers' lived experiences and identities, their agency, power and knowledge in the engagement of the micro-politics of resource struggles, which affect soil management, the role of social institutions, relations and organizations as channels of access, as well as struggles over resources as struggles over cultural meanings. This process is best understood through the everyday lives of women and men. In the next chapter, I will consider how ethnography provides an invaluable avenue for exploring the dynamics of micro-politics, which animates and gives meaning to local soil management practice, and ultimately brings into focus what is normally hidden and silenced in conventional approaches.

3.0 The Research Methodology : Operationalizing Theory into Gender-Sensitive

Practice

Books written by anthropologists, including the present one, are 'always already'... suspicious. And so they should be, necessarily and immediately; for they are not evoking eternal truth, but localized, situated, partial, special, little, ephemeral realities, which would lose their entire content if deprived of the contexts from which they emerge. If, as usually the case, anthropologists 'speak' through ethnography, all too often they mask the conditions of emergence of their text for the sake of a wishful and fallacious coherence (Dumont 1992:2).

Placing the everyday experiences of women and men at the centre of analysis requires reconceptualizing soils issues as gender issues, and recognizing that local actors are not passive, powerless, unknowledgeable and gender-neutral subjects, but are actors who can institute change, create and perpetuate knowledge, and play a hand in shaping and transforming their social and physical worlds, often, not always in the ways 'development' practitioners would like. It also requires an appropriate methodology¹³ which *operationalizes* critical theoretical concepts into gender-sensitive practice by recognizing research as a dynamic and social encounter, complete with dilemmas, subjective interpretations, multiple meanings and human agency. In particular, ethnographic accounts provide a critical medium for exploring the dynamics of soil management, as well as embracing complexity and highlighting the everyday lives of local women and men.

The attitudes, opinions, priorities and knowledge of local actors are central to understanding what 'development' "has meant for those spaces and peoples who it defines as its objects" (Crush, 1995:21). It is through the "elucidation of actors' interpretations and strategies, and how these interlock through processes of negotiation and accommodation" (Long, 1992:5) - along with a conscientious commitment to *listening* to the participants themselves and taking seriously what they have to say (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:36) - that perspectives which emphasize people's realities can be achieved, perspectives which

recognize the multiple realities and shifting identities of various actors, including the researcher herself. This entails viewing research and ‘development’ projects as subjects in themselves - not just as ethnographies *in* ‘development’, but as ethnographies *of* ‘development’ (Ferguson, 1994; Pottier, 1993).

In this chapter, I underscore the impact of critical theoretical conceptualizations on how research is lived and experienced, in order to make the manner in which the data were obtained and interpreted transparent. I begin the chapter by exploring the central themes of cross-cultural gender research, drawing on recent literature within critical feminist, anthropological and participatory approaches to ‘development’. In the second section, I recount the research journey as a series of processes, highlighting the manner and context in which the data were collected. In the final section, I explore methodological insights and issues which emphasize the research as a dynamic political process involving the active collaboration of Logoli women and men.

3.1 Formulating An Appropriate Cross-Cultural Research Methodology

In developing an appropriate methodology for exploring the gendered micro-politics of struggles over resources which affect soil management and livelihood concerns, I shared a concern with critical feminist, anthropological and participatory approaches to ‘development’ for using methods which are sensitive, respectful and accountable within research relationships, and which call for action research with has transformative potential for improving the lives of participants in a positive and locally determined manner (Martin, 1995; Wolf, 1995; Kirkby and McKenna, 1989). These approaches challenge conventional modes of ‘development’ and research which perpetuate ahistorical, apolitical and gender-neutral understanding of local realities. In particular, three methodological issues underlay

the thrust of my approach: a rejection of generalization in soils research; an emphasis on difference and the role of human subjectivity in knowledge creation and lived experience; and a recognition of power imbalances within research relationships and the writing process.

3.1.1 Researching And Writing Against Generalizations

In seeking technical ‘fixes’ and ‘cookie-cutter’ solutions to the ‘technical problem’ of soil degradation, conventional soils research often ignores the social aspects of reality, as these are deemed superfluous and unmanageable. In doing so, they miss the intricacies and deeper sociological, political and gendered realities of local people and spaces. In cases where social aspects are considered, the diversity and complexities of people’s everyday lives are stripped of their rich detail and reduced to mere generalizations and static, interchangeable ‘facts’ (Abu-Lughod, 1993:7-8). What emerges is a professional and authoritative discourse of detachment and objectivity which produces a homogenized, coherent, self-contained and different ‘other’ (ibid.). This produces a language of power in which researchers “seem to stand apart from and outside of what they are describing” (ibid.:8). Generalizations contribute to the creation of timelessness and homogenization which flatten differences among people within and variability across different contexts, smoothing over contradictions, conflicts, changing motivations and historical circumstances (ibid.:9). This lack of internal differentiation perpetuates the notion of groups of people as discrete, fixed and bounded entities and contributes to the creation of a static vision of ‘cultures’ (ibid.).

Recognizing, implementing and incorporating the agency of participants into research design is a way of working against generalizations. It acknowledges the voices of people and recognizes them as differentiated agents who live and experience a host of multiple and

simultaneous issues in their everyday lives. By highlighting:

...the dailiness, by breaking coherence and introducing time, trains our gaze on flux and contradiction; and the particulars suggest that others live as we perceive ourselves living - not as automations programmed according to 'cultural' rules or acting out social rules, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of laughter. It is hard for the language of generalization to convey these sorts of experiences and activities (Abu-Lughod, 1993:27).

Incorporating agency entails recognizing the individual capacity of people to process social experience and to actively devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion (Long, 1992:22). It recognizes that people are social actors who are knowledgeable, capable of solving problems, negotiating and manipulating social relations, monitoring and observing themselves and others, as well as strategizing, resisting, innovating and experimenting. Hence, the dimension of power is inseparable from the notion of agency, and recognizes that individuals can engage in projects on their own terms. Participants can create and re-create structure within research relationships, and in doing so, can influence and interpret its externally determined structure and objectives through the pursuit of their own interests and the assertion of their own agency (Hovorka, 1997:39; Huntington, 1998:104). This recognition allows for context-specificity within soils research:

The recognition of multiple realities and identities of real life means carefully and sensitively collecting qualitative data which seeks to differentiate rather than to homogenize, to focus on diversity rather than universality, on variability rather than averages (Chambers, 1992:14).

Qualitative methods offer an effective avenue for challenging generalizations and understanding gendered realities. They focus on people's lived realities by emphasizing their voices, perceptions and experiences, thereby reducing the risk of arriving at false assumptions about life¹⁴. By embracing complexity, context-specificity, and acknowledging change over time, such methods move away from the realm of constructing inanimate 'facts'.

Qualitative methods allow for gendered accounts of everyday life, and enable the emergence of a range of multiple and simultaneous priorities of concern which affect soil management.

Personal narratives, in particular, are useful in unsettling generalization, subverting the process of othering (Abu Lughod, 1993:13), and asking questions about how people live and experience soils issues when viewed from a gendered lens - and what meaning they give to those experiences. They challenge essentializing views which are often detached from the complex and multiple realities of participants (Mies, 199:63; Kirkby and McKenna, 1989:164). They provide local women and men opportunities and spaces to articulate their own knowledge, views, experiences and perspectives:

In telling their stories the women [and men] reproduce their own images of themselves and their relations with others. This is a type of data often ignored in conventional histories as too individual, too specific and atypical. But it is this very specificity and concreteness which gives it strength as a challenge to long-standing generalizations... [and] the possibility to examine interactions of class and gender in specific historical situations (Ngaiza and Koda, 1991, cited in Mbilinyi, 1992:66).

Women and men's subjective accounts have integrity in their own right because they are located within their real and gendered life-worlds (Mbilinyi, 1992:65). They open windows for exploring realities that have been marginalized in the past and challenge generalizing constructions of realities found in soils literature, thereby working against narrative closure and the silencing of multiple voices (Moore and Vaughan, 1994:xxiv).

3.1.2 Dealing With Subjectivity And The Politics Of Difference

In order to counter the problematic assumption within soils research that the farmer is an undifferentiated and gender-neutral actor, the concept of difference was central to my research question and methodology. Focussing on difference highlights that people are differentiated by gender, age, life-cycle, race/ethnicity, class, marital status and other axes of difference (Parpart, 1995; Mbilinyi, 1992), which are given meaning within various socio-

cultural contexts and play a significant role in people's struggles over and differential access to resources, division of labour and the manner in which they experience constraints and opportunities in their everyday lives. Rather than positionalities being uni-dimensional or fixed, women and men have multiple identities and realities "over time, and at any time, often conflicting with each other" (Mbilinyi, 1992:45), which are experienced differently, and filtered, interpreted and given meaning by subjective realities.

If knowledge is central to understanding local realities, then what is the role of 'outsiders' in theorizing, analyzing and researching issues that they have not themselves experienced and lived ? Haraway suggests:

There is no way to 'be' simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (or subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation and class (1988:586).

This argument reinforces the feminist post-structuralist notion of multiple identities and rejection of any one truth. All observations, perceptions and knowledge vary according to the positionality of the knower and are subjective in that they are shaped by the individual experiences within and across different social and cultural settings, and therefore can only be partial (Mbilinyi, 1992:54, Maguire, 1987:19). Research and knowledge are contested concepts and sites of struggles. Hence, no account is free of bias or distortion and there exists no one authoritative knowledge (Mbilinyi, 1992:54). There exists no unitary speaker about, for and as 'woman', and there exists no true 'insider'; making the notion of like studying like, the possibility of total identification between the researcher and researched, a paradox (Mies, 1991:61). Women, by the virtue of their gender do not necessarily share a common experience - as individual experiences differ considerably in relation to class, age, education, race, sexual orientation, and mobility - a notion that extends to women studying

and researching gender issues in their own societies (Mbilinyi, 1992; Cotterill, 1992; Mohanty, 1991a). Taking this argument a step further, there similarly exists no rigid understanding of an 'outsider', as we assimilate cross-cultural experiences into our own understandings of realities and meanings about the world, and form alliances and political projects as we become closer and familiar to participants over time, and vice versa. Rather than focus on the binary of 'insider'-'outsider', it is more useful to highlight factors such as duration of contact, quality of research relations and multiple subjectivities (Wolf, 1995:17).

To Be Or Not To Be A 'Southerner'? : Shifting Multiple Identities

Mbilinyi argues, "our identities are not given or reducible to our origins, skin colour, or material locations. Identities or positions are the product of struggle and they represent an achieved, not an ascribed trait" (1992:35). Recognizing the constructed nature of the category 'insider'/'outsider', my own multiple and shifting identities highlighted some of the dilemmas discussed above and produced an interesting situation. My identity simultaneously straddled various axes of difference, including gender (woman), age (young), ethnicity ('outsider'/'*mzungu* and 'insider'/'*Asian*'¹⁵), as well as socially and professionally ascribed positions as an engineer- social scientist, researcher-development agent-academic and student-intern. All these differing dimensions of my positionality interacted, opposed and contradicted each other, and shifted and changed over time in differing circumstances. They affected the way I represented myself, my work and the meanings I accorded to them, and also influenced the way people perceived me.

I found myself silencing aspects of my identity in certain interactions and encounters, while emphasizing others as a conscious, and sometimes sub-conscious strategy in the politics of representation. For example, during encounters with Kenyan participants, I

presented myself as Canadian '*mzungu*', and silenced my '*Asian*' identity, and for the most part participants also viewed me as '*mzungu*'. Representing myself in this way helped to counter feelings of vulnerability associated with being an '*Asian*' in a context in which racial tensions were both constructed and exacerbated within national political discourse (especially during the Kenyan national elections which took place halfway through my research). On the other hand, in encounters with '*Asian*' merchants, I found myself silencing my '*mzungu*' identity and emphasizing my '*Asian*' background in order to form ties to these communities and to decrease feelings of vulnerability.

These seemingly contradictory identities as both 'outsider' as well as an 'insider' caused certain conceptual and practical dilemmas. To some extent, I considered myself an 'outsider'. Being educated and socialized in the 'North', placed me in a more powerful position in terms of status as a researcher. On the other hand, as someone who was borne of *Asian* parents and was born, educated and partly socialized in the 'South', I considered myself to some extent as an 'insider'. I also realized, however, that having shared feelings of being from the 'South' was not enough to accord me this status and that various axes of difference, power and positioning in the global system separated my realities from those of the research participants and colleagues.

Critical approaches to research recognize that the topics we study and the methods we employ are inextricably bound up with the politics of practice (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), and informed by our own subjectivities. My professional status as an engineer was moderated by a need to explore and challenge the belief in 'rationality', and linear and static conceptualizations of 'development'. This not only affected the research and objectives, but made the research a political and personal process for change. However, despite being an

intern and student, my affiliations with international institutions put me in a more powerful position than many of the participants (who were years older and wiser than me), and Kenyan colleagues who had similar institutional and funding affiliations¹⁶. In encounters with participants, I found myself emphasizing my academic student status and de-emphasizing my professional and institutional status in order not to influence their reasons for participating, their responses and to avoid raising expectations of access to material and economic resources (which they often anticipated in encounters with ‘development’ agents). On the other hand, in interviewing government officials and soils experts, I found myself emphasizing my institutional affiliations in order to increase my chances of gaining access to information and documents.

Relations of Power in Moving From ‘Field’ to ‘Home’

The meaning and significance of these shifting and multiple identities can be better understood within a critical discussion of ‘the field’ which moves away from notions of ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere’ as mere features of geography, and considers research sites as “sites constructed in fields of unequal power relations” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:35). The conventional idea of going to ‘the field’ is often equated with entering another world with its own discrete and bounded culture, and ‘going home’ is equated to leaving that other world and re-entering to academia (ibid:35), or the centres of research and ‘development’.

Nonetheless, my fieldwork was marked by a profound sense of separation between places. I felt I was moving between chasms of differences and referred to it as ‘planet hopping’. ‘Planet hopping’ also carried over to movement from ‘the field’ (a rural setting) to urban cities (Kisumu, Nairobi) and research stations (Maseno), as well as from the ‘field’ (Mbale) to ‘home’ (Ottawa). These feelings were complicated by my own shifting

positionality and feelings of power, and powerlessness, in relation to place. In this regard, when I was in Nairobi and Maseno, I was considered an expat; when in Mbale, I was a *mzungu*; and when in Kisumu, an *Asian*. In addition, being back 'home' initially exacerbated feelings of distance as I felt far-removed from the every-day lived realities of the farmers. Despite this initial feeling of distance, a reflexive and critical engagement of the research process provided a means of bridging the space between the everyday lived realities of participants and my 'planet-hopping' and of conceptualizing these interfaces as political and social spaces mediated by discourses of knowledge and power.

3.1.3 Highlighting Reflexivity In Research Relationships

While positivist research encourages the researcher to remain outside the world studied so as not to lose 'objectivity' and not 'bias' the findings (Mbilinyi, 1992:53), feminist post-structuralist and critical anthropological approaches emphasize a reflexive approach which highlights that the researcher is integral to the process, and therefore both actor and subject in study and analysis. The goal is not rampant self-reflexivity as an end in itself, which is a form of "self-absorbed navel gazing" (Harding, 1987:9, cited in Lal, 1996:207). Rather, the goal of self-reflexivity is to make the research process transparent and counter the notion of 'neutral' research and knowledge production (Mbilinyi, 1992:59).

Although research is charged with issues of power, it often displays:

...contradictory, difficult, and irreconcilable positions for the researcher. Indeed, the power dimension is threaded throughout the fieldwork and post-fieldwork process and has created a major identity crisis for many feminist researchers (Wolf, 1995:1).

The research encounter is one where actors with varying positionalities interact and create spaces for negotiation, accommodation, exchange and transformation (Long, 1992:6).

Although participants play an active role in the research process, there is a marked power

imbalance centering on the vulnerability and lack of control of participants in the research itself and the production of knowledge that results from it, as it is the researcher “who eventually walks away” (Cotterill, 1992:604). Unless the research is designed to do so, participants have no control over how the research is written, interpreted and represents their realities. It is the researcher who in the end controls the final interpretation of the data no matter what form it takes.

Texts are not written in a vacuum. Writing and recounting is itself an activity which is marked by the positionality and subjective experiences of the researcher (Mohanty, 1991a:33). It is not just a matter of ‘unbiased reporting’ of research findings. The researcher’s conception of the ‘problem’, choice of methodology, epistemologies and interpretation of the data invariably colour the research findings, as well as influence events and the construction of the ethnographic text. To capture this process, I found continual reflection on the research process was facilitated by the use of a personal journal¹⁷.

3.2 The Research Journey

Making the research transparent makes it possible for others to understand how the results were obtained, and makes evident power relations, methodological problems and ethical issues that were encountered. This approach turns a critical eye on conventional conceptualizations of ‘the field’ as a taken-for-granted space “where an ‘other’ culture or society lies waiting to be observed or written” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:2). By writing this section as a *research journey*¹⁸ involving diverse social agents, I move beyond the notion of fieldwork as a top-down and unilateral encounter, and present it as a series of mutual and dialogical encounters (DeVries, 1992), and as continuous negotiation between the researcher and the researched.

Although I describe the research journey below in terms of the methods used, it consisted of a series of inter-related processes and simultaneous methods with multiple linkages from one process to the other, which made the research journey a complex, inter-dependent and an ever-changing experience. By recounting the research journey as a series of dynamic, interlinked and evolving processes, the intention is to highlight the methods used, and also the problems and issues encountered, and therefore reflect on the research findings in an honest, transparent, and in an anti-reductionist and anti-positivistic manner.

3.2.1 The Pre-Fieldwork Planning Process

Pre-fieldwork planning involved formulating the research proposal and institutional links, and was an intense process which began months before the fieldwork and played an integral role in shaping the research and methods used¹⁹.

While the research proposal is rarely included in writings about research processes, it is an integral part of it, setting the parameters of the research, as well as its possibilities. My main concerns centred around establishing institutional affiliation, acquiring funding, ensuring a balance between my own objectives and institutional interests, and anticipating the interest of participants to an external and pre-determined subject of study.

My institutional affiliation with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Programme (TSBF-UNESCO) played a significant role in defining the research agenda, and made a profound difference in reducing the level of anxiety and vulnerability associated with cross-cultural research. My research was incorporated into an IDRC Centre Internship with the People, Land and Water Project Initiative, and the Gender and Sustainable Development Unit. This was based on mutual interests in exploring local perspectives on gender and soil management issues through a case

study drawing out entry points for other context specific research initiatives. I was also seconded to TSBF, given their interest in collaborating in the research and linking it with their own work in Western Province. Both these affiliations provided me with an open and constructive space for exploring gender and soils issues, valuable institutional and logistical support, and intellectual discussions on the program of work and methodology.

3.2.2 Getting Started : Establishing The Research Context

Upon arriving in Kenya, I immediately began the process of site selection, which evolved in successive iterations towards a geographic focus. Western Kenya became an obvious location because of TSBF's sustained and long research presence in the area. TSBF had formed close associations with various communities, farmers, research assistants (RAs), local organizations and the Maseno Research Station operated by ICRAF and KARI (which provided me with additional logistical and administrative support as well as contacts with other researchers).

I became interested in working in Maragoli because it was recognized by a TSBF researcher as a "hot-bed" for gender relations. I chose to live and work in Mbale, the central town of Maragoli, because of the advantages of establishing in-depth research relationships by living in the community (Sollis and Moser, 1991). Mbale was convenient for the RAs who lived nearby, and it decreased the need to commute on local *matatus*²⁰. I chose the villages of Luduguyiu, Chambiti, Luyaduyia, Kegoye and Viyalo as research sites, based on their close proximity to Mbale, and because they coincided with the location of the women's groups participating in the research.

As I was unfamiliar with Maragoli as a language, I not only required an interpreter, but also RAs to independently transcribe and interpret tape-recorded interviews into English.

To this end, TSBF's long-time presence in the area played a key role in selecting the research team. Through them, Wycliffe (Cliff) Ngoda became my principal field assistant and cultural guide, and in turn, assisted me in formulating the rest of the research team. Cliff had extensive research experience and shared invaluable local contacts from his social networks. His extensive knowledge of Maragoli history and culture, coupled with his excellent interpersonal skills, put to rest any misgivings that his gender might adversely affect research with women participants. Through Cliff's assistance, Patricia Lugalia became the primary transcriber-interpreter. Leah Mukaya joined the team as my Kiswahili tutor, but later became involved in transcribing-interpreting, along with Janet Ojango and Nicholas Ndolo²¹.

3.2.3 The Fieldwork Research Process

The fieldwork took place over a six month period beginning in mid-October 1997. It was a dynamic process, and encompassed various qualitative methods which were used simultaneously. Sometimes, the same method was used more than once at different stages, but with a different intent and purpose. Wherever possible, the research findings were 'triangulated' against secondary sources of literature in order either to corroborate or challenge conceptualizations of soils issues. The methods used in the research can be divided into three categories: (i) group methods, (ii) individual methods, and (iii) disseminating and sharing results. Table 3.1 below illustrates these different methods and describes chronologically their use at different phases of the research.

Table 3.1 The Fieldwork Process : Phases And Methods Engaged

	PHASE					
WEEK NUMBER	I 1-2	II 3-8	III 9-15	IV 16-22	V 23-23	VI 25-28
INDIVIDUAL METHODS						
Site Selection	√					
Interviews with Farmers			√	√	√	
Interviews with Officials	√	√	√	√	√	
Participant Observation			√		√	
Personal Narratives				√	√	
Photo Appraisals			√	√		
GROUP METHODS						
Group Selection	√					
Group Interviews		√				
DISSEMINATING & SHARING RESULTS						
Group Feed-Back Sessions						√
Photo Exhibition						√

(i) Methods Engaged in Collaboration With Women's Groups

As membership in women's groups is an important channel for accessing resources and a crucial coping strategy for women, they were important in terms of learning about group dynamics, problems, activities and collective understandings of gender and soils issues. Issues encountered centred around the selection of women's groups and the group interviews.

Nine women's groups, which varied by class, average age, group activities and raison

d'être, collaborated in the research²². I engaged in methods which ranged from random to purposive selection. The selection unfolded in a number of ways. I was introduced to four women's groups through TSBF, but chose to restrict my involvement to one because of logistical and transportation constraints, as well as the cross-cultural complexities associated with working with non-Avalogoli participants. Two of the nine groups were included in the study through Cliff's social networks. As word of my research spread, several groups expressed their desire to be included. However, I selected the first one to approach me in this manner, before realizing that such random selection could escalate into the inclusion of a large number of groups. For the five remaining groups, I carried out purposive sampling involving systematic analysis of records of women's groups kept by the Ministry of Culture and Social Services in Vihiga town. I selected groups based on their proximity to Mbale (clustered around the villages of Chambiti and Viyalo, which also provided opportunities for observing inter-group interaction within the same village-community), and their objectives stated in their registration forms which indicated their involvement in agricultural activities.

One dilemma I faced in selecting the groups was the groups' conviction that the research was a 'development' initiative, complete with monetary and material resources. This idea persisted despite my consistent efforts to dispel this myth, and various women's groups continued to approach the RAs and me to ask to be included throughout the research. In some cases, they accused Cliff of 'manipulating' the selection process, believing that he was somehow 'obstructing' them from benefiting from the resources of 'development' that they believed were sure to follow.

Group interviews were held in churches or a group member's home, and normally began and ended with prayers, music, singing and dancing. After arranging the seating in a

non-hierarchical manner²³, I began the interviews by introducing myself, explaining the objectives, the background, and the role of the women's group in the research. Every group member was encouraged to introduce and say something about herself as well as to share individual details such as year of birth, marital status, types of crops grown, etc. This information was useful for individual participant selection. The remainder of the interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding group activities, reasons for forming, as well as constraints and opportunities facing them. While I encouraged participation from all members of the group, hierarchies within the groups manifested themselves through the domination of members who tended to be 'leaders', elders or outspoken individuals.

(ii) Methods Engaged In Collaboration With Individuals

The bulk of the methods utilized centred on individuals, since the aim of the study was to understand what soils issues meant for women and men in their everyday lives.

Individual Participant Selection

A dilemma arose in the selection of individual participants: while I recognized that exerting control over the sampling process would ensure a fuller and more diverse range of views and a more heterogeneous 'sample' (Mbilinyi, 1992:61), I also recognized that this was non-participatory. I resolved the tension by recognizing that giving control over participant selection to the women's groups would most likely entail the control of the selection process by more powerful and vocal members of the groups. By focussing on women whom I thought were most 'vulnerable', I engaged in purposive and stratified sampling using individual information gained from the group interviews. However, rather than taking for granted and lumping all Logoli farmers as 'marginalized', I placed the concept under the critical lens (Gupta and Ferguson:1997a:36), by including a wide range

of participants with varied and multiple positionalities, reflecting different axes of difference²⁴. While most participants were selected through the group interview process (making group membership an axis of difference), 7 participants were selected through more ‘random’ means, and tended to be spouses of participants, individuals introduced to me or encountered in the field, or life historians²⁵.

Survey Data Collection

Collection of survey data allowed me to establish a personal profile of participants. I asked questions in the initial stages of the interviews pertaining to personal information such as year of birth, occupation, year of marriage, education, marital status, number and sex of children, income, religion, clan and sub-clan membership, place of birth, income generating activities, types of crops grown and livestock owned. While it could not capture in detail the subjective realities of participants, survey data were useful as an entry point for interviews and in bringing to surface discrepancies requiring further investigation, which sometimes arose when I compared information collected from other methods. For example, a common discrepancy was household income and wealth. In many cases, participants indicated their discomfort by laughing at this question, demonstrating ambivalence, avoiding a disclosure of a numerical value or providing a value which did not coincide with information obtained from other methods.

Photo Appraisals

Photo appraisals were used to capture visually, through farmers’ eyes, their perceptions on soils and gender issues. For the most part, the method was successful in capturing their insights as well as bringing to the surface additional insights and issues²⁶. Twenty cameras were shared between 43 individuals. Each camera contained 27 exposures²⁷.

and participants were encouraged to take a set number of photographs which reflected their realities - both good and bad - pertaining to soil management, agricultural, land and gender issues. Each participant was allocated 3 photographs for personal use, and 3 to illustrate issues relating to the women's group. Each received personal copies of all photographs.

Despite the fact that most farmers were unfamiliar with this technology, the majority of photographs turned out well²⁸. The use of disposable cameras required creative and accessible methods of explaining the technical aspects of photography as well as the purpose and description of the method to participants who were unfamiliar with it. I prepared colour diagrams and went through a tutorial for participants in pairs and in groups, demonstrating how the camera worked, an introduction to film and shot composition.

Once they were developed, I asked the participants to explain the content of the photographs and the meaning they held for them in terms of soils, gender or other livelihood issues. The photo appraisals were an iterative process²⁹ which I eventually refined by enmeshing questions pertaining to individual photographs with in-depth interviews, at times using the photographs as an entry point for drawing out discussion on various issues. Carrying out the photo appraisals in conjunction with interviews was important in taking into account people's interpretations on their own photography. Rather than making assumptions on behalf of participants about objects and subjects of their photography, I focussed on women and men's own words and perceptions.

Participant Observation

I carried out participant observation with 11 individuals, often combining it with individual interviews. It involved engaging and *participating* in everyday farming and household activities in order to understand the amount of energy, labour and constraints

involved. It also proved useful in contextualizing soils issues in people's broader realities and cross-checking findings from the in-depth individual methods. Participant observation included assisting farmers in activities such as picking tea and vegetables, bringing tea to the collection centre, weeding, tilling, collecting water, cutting napier grass and wood, feeding livestock, planting, watching children, tending their market stalls and stores, visiting relatives for school fees and a local district hospital for malaria treatment.

Carrying out participant observation at various different times during the fieldwork was insightful. As seasons and time of the year changed, so did issues being faced, activities carried out and degrees of vulnerability. For example, the time of year influenced women's decisions to withdraw from farming in order to focus on the payment of school fees, on health issues and the intensification of income generating activities. Although I recognize that I was only able to glimpse momentarily the amount of energy, stamina, knowledge, expertise and dedication that was required in carrying out activities that often looked deceptively simple, I cannot claim to have *lived* first hand the participants' realities. I can however, say that it enabled me to better understand the difficulties, complexities and constraints encountered in women's and men's every-day lives, than if I had simply observed from the 'sidelines'.

Open-Ended and Semi-Structured Individual Interviews With Farmers

Open-ended and semi-structured individual interviews provided rich ethnographic accounts. No two interviews were the same and the thrust of interviews depended on the participants themselves. They ranged from encounters where participants were open, leading to a more fluid approach such as a personal narrative, to interviews where participants were more closed and guarded, leading to more spasmodic question-and-answer sessions complete

with gaps and silences. Most interviews took place under the shade of a tree or inside a participant's house and drew lots of attention from children, family members and neighbours.

I undertook multiple interviews in order to explore issues in depth, keeping in mind that a shift sometimes occurs from public to private accounts when levels of trust, confidence and familiarity in the research relationship are established over time (Cotterill, 1992:596), as well as to follow up on issues, discrepancies and clarifications required from previous interviews (Mbilinyi, 1992:61). I carried out two interviews with almost every individual and in some cases, three to four. The first round of interviews provided an opportunity to gain an initial understanding of the participant's positionality and the types of issues, problems and constraints they faced, in addition to being an opportunity to introduce the cameras and to ensure informed consent of participants³⁰. I started most interviews by asking the participant to talk about themselves as this gave an indication of their willingness to be open. At first, I used an interview guide which outlined the main questions, topics and issues for discussion. Later, I learned to trust my instincts and allowed participants' accounts to lead the focus.

The second round of individual interviews allowed for additional space for the photo appraisals and more in-depth narratives, and were sometimes combined with participant observation. The third and fourth round of interviews were intended to elicit deeper understandings of issues and topics from previous interviews, and tended to be more narrative in nature, especially in cases where participants took the initiative.

A level of continued commitment was maintained towards participants throughout the study, based on the view that it is problematic to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' participants and to withdraw from the 'bad' ones (Cotterill:1992:602), especially since

participants' expectations are inadvertently raised in carrying out research, and negative feelings are bound to be generated if involvement is withdrawn. Most interviews were interpreted in the field by Cliff and later independently interpreted and transcribed onto paper by Patricia, Leah, Janet and Nicholas, a method which also provided an avenue for checking for discrepancies in field interpretations. In the end, 60 ninety-minute tapes were recorded and hundreds of pages were transcribed.

Personal Narratives

Twelve participants, mostly older women and men in their 80's and 90's who had clear memories of events in their lifetime and could provide first-hand and personalized accounts of change over time in Maragoli, participated in providing personal narratives. These varied in length and level of detail. This method provided rich and personalized accounts and individual perceptions of Maragoli history.

Interviews with Officials and Scientists

I undertook 17 semi-structured and open-ended interviews with extension workers, soil scientists, 'development' agents and government officials. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of gender and soil issues from an 'official' and 'technical' point of view. I carried out these interviews in offices and in the field, taking notes rather than recording discussions as most individuals spoke English, and because farmers' words were more central to the research.

(iii) Methods For Disseminating and Sharing Research Findings During Fieldwork

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I engaged in group feed-back sessions and a photo exhibition, as a way of disseminating and sharing the research findings with participants.

Group Feed-Back Sessions

The group feed-back sessions were the last venue in which information was exchanged between myself and the participants. The sessions were formulated on the concept of intersubjectivity which calls for the research to reflect the realities, constraints and priorities of the participants, and is meant to be a dialectical relationship which allows the researcher to share and compare her work and experiences with her subjects, who then add their own opinions and perceptions (Klein, 1983, cited in Wolf, 1996:5). The main purpose of these interactive sessions was to elicit feed-back, input and insights from the participants on the research findings, methods used, and suggestions for improving future initiatives.

I met with most groups individually. The sessions were well-attended, and began in a similar manner to the group interviews. I proceeded by explaining the purpose of the exercise and encouraged participants to participate by sharing their perceptions and feelings towards the research. The dynamics of the sessions, and the level of sincerity, openness, quantity and quality of the feed-back varied from group to group. During some sessions, participants were open and provided valuable and constructive criticism, while during others, participants exhibited reluctance to share critiques of the research. Nonetheless, the sessions were invaluable in learning about what was often hidden from view about group dynamics, as well as the effects and feelings about the methods, the research, and the research findings.

The Photo Exhibition

I considered various mechanisms and forums for addressing the power imbalance within the research encounter, which would give ownership of the research findings to the participants. A photo exhibition gave individuals and groups the opportunity to display their work to the public, the community and to other women's groups. After putting the idea

forward to the women's groups, it was received positively and participants were interested in making contacts with 'development' agents whom they hoped might visit the exhibition. The women's groups took charge of making their own displays with materials I provided³¹.

The photo exhibition took place on April, 6, 1998 at a rented Salvation Army church hall. Each women's group was given a section of the hall which included a table, benches and a back wall to display their posters and photographs. Participants showed a great deal of creativity and brought farm produce and livestock (including pigs, chickens, vegetables, seeds, fruits and other crops), as well as samples of non-farm related products, which were offered for sale. Some groups set up ad hoc food stalls, selling bottled sodas, local sweets and food dishes. The atmosphere was lively. Some groups had active choirs and gave demonstrations of their singing and dancing abilities. Researchers, officials such as those from the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, extension workers and other members of the community visited the exhibition. While attendance and participation from group members was excellent, participation from 'development' officials was low, and I felt I had let the women's group down. I sensed that they were disappointed as they were hoping to get exposure and an opportunity to access potential resources that outsiders often brought.

3.2.4 The Post-Fieldwork Process

Post-fieldwork processes included the analysis and synthesis, as well as the writing and dissemination of the research findings.

Analysis and Synthesis : Distilling the Research Findings

The analysis and synthesis of the research findings were carried out in light of key literature and was a time-consuming activity, given the amount of data collected (recorded tapes, transcripts, photographs, field notes and journal entries). I reviewed and kept track of

ethnographic data by taking notes along thematic lines and by formulating extensive spreadsheets as tools to keep track of the topics that were discussed in each interview.

‘Producing Deliverables’ : Writing and Disseminating the Research Findings

Sharing a textual account of the research provides academics, researchers, government officials, ‘development’ agents and women’s groups an opportunity to access current research on gender and soils issues pertaining to people’s lives. This thesis, which represents the first written body of work to emerge from the research, will be made available at the NPSIA resource centre, the Carleton University library, the IDRC resource centre, the IDRC and TSBF office in Nairobi, in addition to being shared with the research team.

Secondly, the findings will be shared with the women’s groups in an abbreviated and accessible newsletter and summary report to be translated and made available in Kiswahili and Maragoli. Summary reports will be disseminated to government offices and Ministries in Kenya, NGOs, international organizations and other interested organizations working in Kenya. Third, the thesis will be adapted as an IDRC Focus Series Book, which will be disseminated to various organizations working in Kenya and East Africa.

Oral and visual methods of disseminating the research findings have included a seminar presentation given to PLAW team members for their feed-back and review, which will also be presented more broadly to the IDRC. In Kenya, the findings will be presented to TSBF and ICRAF, and will be shared in person with the women’s groups in Maragoli through additional feed-back sessions, giving me a rare opportunity to share the findings after extensive analysis and synthesis, and illustrating a commitment to local participants³².

3.3 Reflections On Research As A Dynamic Political Process

Although I anticipated numerous methodological dilemmas in carrying out research

in an honest, sensitive and ethical manner, I recognized that the lived research experience could potentially confound, challenge and 'scramble' my neat and pre-conceptualized categories. As Cotterill suggests, some events, experiences and feelings are unpredictable at the research planning stage and only emerge as the field work progresses, and is lived and experienced (1992:602). Reflecting critically on the research has allowed to me to view it as an inherently political process - an encounter of active enrolment and collaboration, a dialogical rather than a unilateral process (de Vries, 1992) - in which various actors act and live out their agency in a host of strategic ways in addressing their interests, agendas and articulating their knowledge. Understood this way, researchers are not authoritative, neutral agents who stand detached from what they are describing; participants are not passive 'Third World' objects waiting to be 'discovered'; and RAs are not invisible actors who carry out work unnoticed 'behind the scenes'. All actors are part and parcel of engaging in the research, within which relationships of power and agendas for change play out.

3.3.1 Acknowledging The Unintended Effects And Dilemmas Of Research Encounters

As Ferguson has shown, despite the best meanings and intentions, 'development' projects often have unintended effects (Ferguson, 1994), as I would argue, do research interventions. Acknowledging the unintended effects of research entails looking critically and reflexively at our own assumptions, knowledge and identities in relation to, and in light of, participants' own understandings, representations and interests. The unintended effects and unexpected dilemmas which arose within this research revolved around issues of language, the introduction of technology, and other aspects of the research.

Bridging the Cross-Cultural Divide of Language

The language divide and barrier caused by my being an 'outsider' without knowledge

of Maragoli gave rise to unintended effects which were most pronounced during the interviews. These encounters highlighted cross-cultural differences and individual interpretations pertaining of language, including English itself. For example, participants referred to certain women as “roaming”, which had a meaning other than in the literal sense; it referred to women who they considered engaged in extra-marital affairs. Similarly, when they mentioned gaining access to “sugar”, “tea”, “soap”, “clothes” and “soda”, they were actually referring to getting access to money or resources. The cultural and local understanding of linguistic subtleties were crucial in avoiding mis-interpretations, and often came to light either during the field and in analyzing discrepancies in interviews.

The majority of interviews were carried out in Maragoli and interpreted in the field by Cliff and, sometimes, Patricia. Interpreted interviews prolonged the duration of the process, but were nonetheless crucial in enabling a meaningful discussion in which follow-up and pertinent questions could be formulated on-the-spot. I supplemented interview transcripts with my own field notes especially when the tape recorder was switched off, and kept a daily journal.

The Dilemmas Around The Introduction Of Technology In Research

Purposive participant selection and the introduction of a prized technology, the disposable cameras, brought about unintended effects which were initially hidden from view. They poignantly came to surface during group feed-back sessions where it became apparent that purposive selection of group members had caused much discussion and debate among and within groups, both creating and exacerbating pre-existing tensions, alliances and factions within the group’s political structures and hierarchies. Giving space to actively and conscientiously acknowledge these unintended effects enabled participants to share useful

critiques and ideas for future participant selection, such as sharing selection criteria with women's groups in advance, which may reduce group politics and friction when a limited, yet coveted technology is introduced. Addressing the unintended effects enabled us to agree to a mechanism which redressed these tensions: the distribution of group photographs to every group member who did not participate in the photo appraisals.

Other unexpected dilemmas from the introduction of cameras included an initial feeling of mistrust and uncertainty about using an instrument that resembled a 'toy' (these feelings were often transformed to self-congratulation and pride when the photographs were developed); the appropriation of cameras by non-participant men (husbands, brother-in-laws, grandsons and sons), as well as women (daughter-in-laws and neighbours)³³, an issue that became evident when participants seemed at a loss in explaining photographs; and the result of a wide range of quality of photographs as it became apparent that issues such as poor eyesight affected some participants' ability to compose photographs³⁴.

Participants also took personal photographs of things unrelated to soil management. When explaining these photographs, participants claimed they were 'testing' the cameras, or they were taking photographs for future posterity, or to show people in Canada how they lived. Participants added that they took them in order to see for themselves how they, or certain things, looked. I believe participants wanted simply to reinforce through photography what they owned and to reinforce their work contributions to the household and *shamba*. Participants also took numerous photographs of neighbours, relatives, group members and friends, indicating an importance of social and kinship ties, as well as the social obligation to share resources. Participants were highly creative in combining both personal photographs with those allocated to soils issues, which increased the number of personal photographs

agreed upon. For instance, photographs illustrated friends or relatives holding up a certain kind of weeds or crops, or of neighbours and friends carrying out farm activities.

Photographs illustrating issues other than soil management were nonetheless highly significant, in that they indicated the extent to which issues, such as access to water, health issues, school fees, and social relationships, were important to participants. They further demonstrated that the conventional definition of the 'problem' of soil management needs expanding and that farmers deal with a multitude of other issues which often take precedence in terms of prioritization, but which nonetheless are inter-related and affect soil management.

Other Reflections On The Research

Throughout the research process, I often felt guilty about the time the research methods were taking from the precious days of the farmers - time that they could have been carrying out household, farming or off-farm income generating activities. Added to this was the dilemma which was raised when farmers insisted on giving me small token gifts such as eggs, bananas or other farm produce. At first, I did not accept these gifts but later realized that I was offending participants and compensated for this by showing up to interviews with small gifts of salt, tea, sugar, soap or maize.

I brought to the field predetermined notions of what constituted a 'good' fieldworker, where my primary goal was to establish in-depth research relationships with participants (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:26-27). Although I interviewed other field-workers, researchers, 'development' practitioners and government officials, I remained steadfast to my goals of focussing the field work on local farmers. A more flexible and collaborative approach may have led to more constructive and creative ways to bridge the gap between what I envisioned as the 'correct' way of carrying out fieldwork and what other research organizations working

on the issues of soil management were practising (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:26-27). This would have led to a more grounded and in-depth understanding of the rationales employed and used to justify those practices.

3.3.2 Identity And The Politics Of Representation

By distinguishing research as a political process, it is possible to recognize power, knowledge and identity as *negotiated* processes in the politics of representation. Conceptualized this way, research is an encounter of knowledges and identities, located within relations of power which are constructed and set into place by discourses of 'development' (Vander Zaag, 1998:12). These have profound meanings and effects on the various actors involved and the manner in which encounters play out. Hence, agency, power, the construction and articulation of knowledge and subjective realities manifest themselves in different ways for the researcher, RAs and participants. Highlighting agency in the production and reproduction of identities suggests that actors strategize and perpetuate their own representation. Acknowledging the vulnerability of the researcher adds one more dimension of experience which has been overlooked in highlighting the subjective (Cotterill, 1992:605), as well as countering prevailing notions of verticality of power.

Vulnerability : Acknowledging Subjectivity, Countering Notions of Power Verticality

Research is a fluid encounter where power balances shift throughout (Cotterill, 1992:593). Power is not simply concentrated in either the researcher or the 'researched', or in a straightforward vertical interaction, but rather it is a dynamic, multi-faceted and moving force which is exercised in all directions (Martin, 1995:89). Although it is influenced by structural factors and wider discourses of knowledge, it is also a negotiated process which interacts with personalities and ideologies, thereby creating spaces for domination and

resistance (ibid:91). Although researchers are in a more powerful position in terms of their positionality, there are times when the researcher is also vulnerable. This highlights the way that individuals such as the researcher can experience domination in one situation while dominating in others (ibid.).

As a researcher, I experienced vulnerability and feelings of powerlessness during interview situations where participants withheld information and refused to answer questions during interviews and photo appraisals (Cotterill, 1992:599). Feelings of powerlessness also arose from constant interruptions during interviews which involved flying chickens, sudden movements from cows, the boisterous noise of children, visiting friends, neighbours and relatives and, sometimes, the meandering through of drunken men. Some interview situations were bleak because the economic situations of participant meant they were short of money, food and medicines for themselves and their families, which made them anxious, depressed and unwell. For instance, when carrying out interviews in the presence of children suffering from malaria, I experienced feelings of helplessness and questioned the *raison d'être* of the research in light of these more immediate and pressing needs. Although I empathized with participants, I recognized that establishing friendships within research which are based on inequitable relations and power imbalances highlights an inherent dilemma in obtaining ethnographic accounts because “close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say and then disappear” (Cotterill, 1992:599). Nor did I consider it my role to be a counsellor because of ethical issues inherent in setting up interviews which may encourage painful disclosures (ibid.:598), although this issue was heightened during one interview where a participant was visibly upset in recounting her difficult personal circumstances. While some feminists argue

that the researcher can only be a sympathetic listener (Cotterill, 1992), I would argue that by listening, empathizing and writing the experiences of women and men as lived, by placing the participants' voices and experience at the centre of research, it is possible to make visible what was invisible before, as a political process for change.

Other feelings of vulnerability arose from participants' understanding and construction of 'development' identities which viewed me as a 'development agent' outside the norms of the community, despite my best efforts to the contrary. In dealing with feelings of alienation caused by this construction, I found myself falling back on the 'comfort' of doing work which gave me back some sense of control. Moreover, being perceived as a 'development agent' meant that the expectations of participants were raised. While I continuously emphasized my role as a student with little access to resources, I was nonetheless continuously asked for resources, advice and money, as participants tended to regard me as being a 'wealthy and knowledgeable expert'.

The Power of Interpretation : Making Research Assistants Visible

One area of the research process which is mostly left invisible is the involvement of the RAs in the production of knowledge and in influencing the research findings vis à vis their own perceptions, experiences and views. Although the RAs were key in setting the parameters of what was possible within the research, they also influenced the research in other ways. Their interpretations and their representations of identities in the fieldwork reflected their gender, age, class, experience, status, and education³⁵. For example, the RAs represented themselves to participants as being attached a 'development' project, and participants ascribed meaning to this. In reviewing transcripts, it became apparent that on several occasions participants felt 'stuck' in answering a question. They looked towards the

RA to assist them in answering 'correctly', thereby indicating not only the importance placed on getting the answer 'right', but also the degree of status accorded to the RAs.

RAs' opinions, views, perceptions and biases also affected their interpretations of participants' responses. These varied from leaving information out, to asking leading questions and inserting personal views³⁶. Both Cliff and Patricia drew on their kinship ties and social networks in order to place their relationships with participants in the context of common acquaintanceship, which increased the potential for a familiar atmosphere within which participants felt more at ease.

My relationship with RAs influenced the research in terms of different cross-cultural understandings of what constituted work and work relations, where my own rigid sense of punctuality often conflicted with a more relaxed sense of Maragoli time. In retrospect, I believe the ambitious research schedule adversely affected the quality of interpretations when RAs became tired and influenced participants to curtail their responses.

My methodological training had not prepared me to deal with issues related to managing a team of RAs in a cross-cultural context, both in terms of the issues mentioned above, and other issues such as the amount of time and energy required to train RAs in qualitative methods. However, working with RAs highlighted the need to be sensitive to the cross-cultural implications of work and accord RAs the same degree of sensitivity and ethical considerations as was given to the participants themselves.

Participants And The Construction and Interpretation of 'Development' Identities

One of the most profound and unexpected dilemmas I encountered throughout the research process was the difference between the way in which *I perceived* 'development' knowledge and identities and expected participants would perceive them, and the often

contradictory and changing ways participants *actually* perceived them. Vander Zaag's articulate account of this dilemma during his research in Haiti is pertinent here:

Local identities and knowledges were certainly not how I identified myself and understood my research intervention. I viewed my identity, particularly when I had my field notebook in my hands, as largely that of a researcher, an identity undoubtedly largely constructed within discourses of academia, the university and post-developmentalism. Yet this identity had little hold in rural Haitian's imagination, and local people largely interpreted or constructed my identity within the discourse of development. ... [L]ocal people certainly couldn't really understand my presence as not related to some potential development project. Thus the research process was largely interpreted and conducted within the dynamics of power relations established by the discourses of development. People's responses to me was so strongly conditioned by these discourses that the research could not escape these relations (1998:10).

The powerful discourse which pervades 'development' knowledge and identities in Haiti also holds in the imaginations of Avalogoli women and men in Western Kenya. Throughout the research, no matter how I presented and represented myself, it became evident that local people regarded all 'development' agents as conduits through which much needed resources emanating from the outside were channelled, and therefore learned to become agents within it, manoeuvring, representing and positioning themselves as best they could (ibid.:9; Sikana, 1995:3). Based on a long history of externally driven intervention in Kenya, women and men have learned to develop a pragmatic and strategic knowledge concerning 'development' and research projects, learning to exploit, divert, and comply with research project intentions according to their own short term and long term interests (Vander Zaag, 1998:9). This made the primary concern of participants *how to access resources* rather than *how to be involved* in the execution of research projects (Sikana, 1995:3).

On two occasions during the fieldwork I arrived at interviews in a TSBF vehicle with bright red UN license plates. Despite my consistent efforts to define myself as a student-intern-researcher with limited access and power in mobilizing resources, arriving in this manner seemed to confirm to the participants what they had suspected all along: no matter

how researchers or ‘development’ agents represent themselves, their identity is bound to be linked to much needed material and monetary resources. The UN symbolized resources associated with ‘development’ and further ‘verified’ assumptions about my position as a wealthy, educated and well-connected ‘development’ agent. This affected the manner in which participants in this study area perceived and acted towards me thereafter.

Participants also illustrated their desire to be ‘good’ by engaging in strategic representations which attempted to obscure and hide from view aspects of their lives that might be viewed as ‘bad’. This representation came to light during a set of group feed-back sessions where participants adhered to a collective strategy of refraining from giving critical feed-back as a conscious strategy to avoid displaying conflict, ‘contradicting’ me and airing ‘dirty laundry’ pertaining to the internal dynamics and politics of the group, as well as any criticisms of the research methods and findings. In effect, constructive criticisms were silenced and the sessions proceeded with a great deal of acquiescence and nodding heads. Although frustrating and disappointing, it indicated the extent to which it was important for participants to show that they were ‘good’ groups and hide from view the politics and conflicts inherent in the group, thereby ‘worthy’ of any resources in the future. It was a strategy of self-representation which was tied to the powerful discourse of ‘development’ and its relation to access to resources.

The politics of representation were diverse and varied according to individual positionalities and subjectivities. For example, while symbolic representations such as attire tended to vary by class³⁷, one middle-income farmer consistently wore ripped clothing to interviews. Despite the fact that she was envied by economically poorer neighbours, she strategically engaged in a politics of representation which put forward the idea that she was

economically poor and disadvantaged, and in need of ‘development’.

The politics of representation went beyond symbolic representations and manifested itself more outwardly in the verbal and discursive realm through the type of language employed by participants for strategic purposes. Participants often represented themselves in changing, contradictory, inconsistent and seemingly incongruent ways. In many instances, participants described themselves as being ‘poor’, ‘powerless’, ‘suffering’, ‘persevering’, ‘unknowledgeable’ and ‘illiterate’. Often this was followed by outright petitions and appeals for money or material benefits. In other cases, they spoke of themselves as knowledgeable, empowered, resourceful, clever and capable. The discourse of being ‘powerless’ and ‘backwards’ resonated with hegemonic discourses of ‘development’ which constructs the ‘Third World’ and Africa as ‘less developed’ (Ferguson, 1994; Mudimbe, 1991).

Given the myriad of multiple, dynamic and contradictory representations of various actors, a central dilemma in the research became disentangling the complex and coexistent web of interpretations. Rather than search for the ‘correct’ or ‘truthful’ interpretation, I was aware of the necessity to be suspicious of all claims about ‘truth’ and the capacity of representations to mirror an absolute reality, as all ethnographic texts are partial truths:

A story is always situated, it has both a teller and an audience. Representation itself is a strategic project and must be placed under a critical lens. Its perspective is partial ...and its telling is motivated (Abu Lughod, 1993:15).

In analyzing the representations and practices of various actors, I considered that accounts were both factual and simultaneously constructed (Moore and Vaughan, 1994:xxiii), and that multiple strategic projects co-existed simultaneously.

3.3.3 Research As Political Action

Producing and accumulating “knowledge for knowledge sake or some indefinite

future application is an exploitative, unaffordable luxury” (Maguire, 1987:100). In order to question the purpose of research beyond its role as purely ‘academic’, and into the realm of political, the vibrancy and dynamism must be recognized within research which resonates with the agency of actors. Research is a site for strategic intervention - a political process which is not just for sharing knowledge, but for forging links between *different* knowledges based on different positionalities and subjectivities, as well as tracing lines of possible alliances and common purposes between them (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:39). Sylvester suggests that difference is not an ascribed trait, but a politics, and argues for methods “of speaking in, through and across differences”:

...methods by which different identity feminisms and geospatial locations within them become mobile in ways that juggle and cross borderlands without leaving us with baseball caps affixed with tourist decals... (1995:945).

In this sense, research is less a ‘field’ site for the collection of data, but more a site for strategic intervention and positive transformation (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:39).

The creation of knowledge through research can be strategic and political if it is based on the active acknowledgement and incorporation of personal and political contexts which underlie investigation, the accountability for the process of that investigation, as well as acting with the knowledge created (Kirkby and McKenna, 1989:167). Qualitative methods and personal narratives emphasize the process of remembering, recounting and writing, and therefore have the potential for conscientization (Mohanty, 1991a:34). However, structures do not change simply because conscientization takes place (Mies, 1991:68), but if conscientization does not take place, its potential to create alternative institutions and centres of opposition from conscientization raising processes and research will be lost, leading to a continuation of old power structures (ibid.). We can move beyond this impasse by

recognizing the relationship between power and knowledge; the ability of discourse to structure relationships of dominance as well as the potential of counter-narratives to subvert and resist hegemonic constructions. Research can transform 'information' about the lived experiences of local women and men, into action. One of the most significant purposes of carrying out research is to highlight new information as a corrective to the gaps and erasures of hegemonic conceptualizations of 'development' - to make visible those people who have been kept invisible, to debunk the myths and dissolve the misconceptions about people's lives as lived (Mohanty, 1991:34; Kirkby and McKenna, 1989:164).

However, in transforming 'information' into action, it is necessary to recognize that it is not appropriate to advocate change to local structures or call for alternative institutions or organizations from the 'outside', as these must be locally determined, approved and sanctioned by the participants themselves. To this end, it is the responsibility of the researcher to engage in research as mutual collaboration. Such a project must focus on placing the voices and experiences of participants at the centre of the analysis, writing and processes for change. The onus is also on the researcher to seek and incorporate feed-back from participants themselves in order to ensure that the findings and textual accounts reflect their realities, as well as their needs, constraints and problems.

This potential can also be wasted if no conscientious effort is made to "get the information out there" to those who can benefit most from the research and those who can effect change. In this way, sharing and disseminating is of utmost importance and should not only be aimed at local participants at the grass-roots in an accessible manner, but also to those researchers, scholars and 'development' practitioners who are willing to work towards similar change and greater awareness of local realities, as this is often the aim of the

participant themselves. Research must have practical applications and should benefit those who have given up so much of their time in participating (Kirkby and McKenna, 1989; Mies, 1991), as well as sharing their experiences, words and lives.

3.4 Conclusion

Research becomes political when it recognizes the 'gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives', when it actively engages in the process of remembering and writing against the grain of hegemony by bringing to surface the minute, day-to-day practices and struggles of local people (Mohanty, 1991:39). The pages that follow are written and grounded in this commitment to writing against generalizations, or working against narrative closure and the silencing of multiple voices, and seeks to channel intellectual and scholarly energies towards social and political transformation (Lughod, 1993; Moore and Vaughan: 1994; Ferguson, 1994), in a way that is consistent to the contextualized experiences of Maragoli women and men, as lived.

PART III : THE GENDERED TERRAIN OF THE FARM

The view of a complex society, or of any society, leads one to a paradox. Formal reglementation can control certain behaviour, but not the aggregate of behaviour in a society. The more 'rational' a society seems in its parts, and its rules, and its rules about rules, the thicker the layer of formalism and ideological self-representation to be penetrated to find out what is really going on. ... But over time, reglementary control can only be temporary, incomplete, and its consequences not fully predictable. The study of reglementation is therefore the study of the way partial orders and partial controls operate in social contexts (Moore, S.F., 1978:30).

4.0 “Without Land You Are Nobody” : Gender And The Politics Of Land

Property, it has long been observed, is not a relation between people and things. It is a relation between people, concerning things. And if property is always a social relation, one can state as a corollary that property is always structured - always, everywhere, property is structured (Ferguson, 1994:142).

Land, as both an important material and symbolic resource, is a critical factor in understanding the dynamics of gender relations and soil management in Maragoli. In discussing this complex and dynamic relationship in terms of people's everyday lives and experiences, it is necessary to avoid perpetuating the problems inherent in simplistic neo-Malthusian explanations of soil degradation and conflicts over land as 'natural' mechanisms of population pressure (Williams, 1995; Tiffen et al., 1994; Moore, 1993). Instead it is necessary to locate local farmers' struggles over land as a productive resource within broader social, political-economic and historical processes, and what these mean to women and men in their everyday lives (Moore, 1993: 383).

At the heart of gendered property relations is the issue of security in tenure. Struggles over land are experienced differently by women and men depending on the complex interactions of gender, class, age, marital status and life-cycle positioning. People negotiate, contest, access and maintain control over land as a productive and material resource differently within relations of power.

Land is also an important symbolic resource, and a focus on women and men's

struggles over land must also consider the symbolic and discursive contestations that constitute those struggles (Moore, 1993; Schroeder, 1996):

Attention to the complexities of resource politics in particular localities... requires close examination of the myriad struggles over the cultural categories through which access to critical environmental resources are contested. An analysis of peasant politics needs to take peasant culture seriously, not simply as a quaint epiphenomenon of structural features of society, but as integral to resource conflicts themselves (Moore, 1993:382).

As a symbolic resource, land holds important meanings within Avalogoli cultural discourse which 'order' gender relations and women's and men's rights to access and use land, and which are closely bound to issues of identity and place. These multiple meanings are constantly being contested and transformed within a situation of legal plurality, and they highlight the diverse ways in which women and men struggle over long-term security of land, because rights to land are gendered.

This chapter begins by situating contemporary struggles over land within historical processes, and briefly reviews the politics of land struggles from the pre-colonial to the early post-independence period in Maragoli. Drawing on participants' narratives, it then explores contemporary relationships between cultural idioms, norms and meanings regarding land and the way these are negotiated and contested at the household level through discursive politics and legal processes within a situation of legal plurality by examining the gendered aspects of land inheritance and usufruct rights to land. Two situations where women and men's security in tenure is threatened are explored. Further, the situation of women's ownership of land, where they inherit land as unmarried daughters, and where women attempt to purchase and own title deed to land, is examined.

I argue that struggles over land highlight the importance of women's ability, as farmers, to secure long-term rights and control of the land, which, in addition to insufficient

land and other competing priorities, determines the extent to which women farmers are willing to invest in labour-intensive strategies to sustain the soils. The co-existence of customary and statutory laws provide political spaces for women and men to manoeuvre and contest rights to land, but within real limits set by patriarchal ideology and norms. Given the existence of legal plurality, land tenure is a complex issue which is influenced by circumstances of individual farmers including their positioning, identity, and reputation. While many patriarchal norms and idioms have undergone transformation, the ones that remain affect control over property and land, and therefore power.

4.1 Historical Struggles Over Land

Land tenure in Maragoli is an evolving and dynamic process, which has been affected and transformed by broader changes over time, as well as mediated by ever-evolving cultural norms. An analysis of historical and political-economic struggles over land reveals changes in social relations of production and fundamental transformations in women's and men's relationships to their environment (Moore, 1993:383).

4.1.1 Pre-Colonial Maragoli

Before the imposition of British colonial rule, both communal and individual lands in Maragoli were an integral part of the landscape in both the spatial and social sense. Communal lands consisted of forests, grazing land, salt-licks, watering places, pathways and reserves for building materials. Collective rights to these lands were important in Avalogoli livelihoods as they held a diversity of resources that were critical in people's lives (Crowley and Carter, 1996:4). Communal lands were used for grazing livestock and were important sites for cultural ceremonies and rites of passage, such as male circumcision. Natural resources emanating from these lands were mediated by customary law and controlled by

clan elders who allocated land, adjudicated conflicts and regulated use (Carter et al.1998:7).

Individual land was passed trans-generationally through patrilineal segmentary lineages of descent, succession and inheritance in the late nineteenth century (Crowley and Carter, 1996:38). As one Logoli farmer in her 70's explains:

No one owned their own plot. Land was free for everyone. Land allocation started recently. ... Most of it used to lie fallow. Wherever you marked your land was enough for you. (L041)³⁸

Land scarcity did not exist in the pre-colonial period and land allocation and local disputes were overseen by clan elders. Marriage was the main channel by which men and women gained access to individual land for farming and residence. However, access was differentiated by gender, as men were allocated land by their fathers, which corresponded to the section of the *shamba* their mothers worked (which affects allocation decisions given the existence of multiple wives), whereas women gained access to use rights to their husband's family land upon marriage and upon bearing a number of children. Women did not 'inherit' land outright, except in exceptional circumstances where, at the discretion of her father, a daughter was either unable to marry or was divorced.

4.1.2 The Colonial Period

British colonial rule in Kenya brought about drastic changes in land tenure, through a series of Acts, Policies and Plans from 1894 onwards for the purposes of political and economic control of land. These led to the formation of Native Reserves and the alienation and privatization of land which threatened security of tenure for Kenyan farmers³⁹. In Western Kenya, this meant the establishment of the North Kavirondo Native Reserve which restricted the population, and altered historical, political and social patterns of migration (Carter and Crowley, 1997:7).

Fundamental changes to communal lands, the customary laws that regulated them and to the role that clan elders played in administering them took place during this time. After 1926, the political and social functions of the clans as the primary administrative, political and judicial authority were superseded by the establishment of headman and Native Tribunals, and thereafter, gradually abolished (Wagner, 1970:74, cited in Carter et al, 1998:9). This not only led to the decline of the clan's sole authority in socio-economic and agricultural activities but also their custodianship of the land (ibid:9). Restrictions on Kenyan settlement imposed by the colonial administration in combination with continual division of the land through inheritance created new land constraints in Maragoli. This contributed to the encroachment on, and eventual disappearance of, communal lands, which in the past had acted as a reserve of undistributed lands set aside for the needs of future generations. These changes diminished collective rights and entrenched individual rights.

The Hut (1901) and Poll (1910) taxes created the need for income generation, forced male out-migration in search of wage labour, and played a role in exacerbating a process of socio-economic differentiation in Maragoli⁴⁰ (Carter et al., 1998:8; Crowley and Carter, 1996:9). Male access to education and cash supplanted seniority within the lineage as the basis for accumulating property, status, prestige and power (Carter et al., 1998:9). Increased social differentiation became rooted in individual success in the market economy through the accumulation of monetary wealth and land, and ability to hire labour (ibid.). As in the case of Central Province described by Mackenzie, a class of wealthier peasants emerged, consisting of chiefs, sub-chiefs, members of the Local Native Council, those with close ties with the colonial state, and those with substantial off-farm income (1995:18).

The Swynnerton Plan (1954) had far-reaching effects on land tenure, by advocating

for the abandonment of traditional land practices as defined by customary laws and encouraging Kenyan farmers to consolidate holdings under individual title deed (Okoth-Ogendo, 1991:69-74; Davison, 1988:164). Based on 'trickle-down' policy, it argued that "energetic or rich Africans will be able to acquire more land and bad or poor farmers less, creating a landed and a landless class" (Swynnerton, 1954:10, cited in Wangari et al., 1996:133). In Maragoli, the Plan caused a large number of households to resettle onto small holdings in areas such as Kabras (Carter et al., 1998:15; Crowley and Carter, 1996). The drive towards private ownership prompted the consolidation of fragmented parcels into single holdings (Carter and Crowley, 1998:15), entrenched land tenure policies which legitimized differential access to land and exacerbated social differentiation by class and gender (Abwunza, 1997; Wangari et al., 1996; Davison, 1988).

While customary laws were based on a complex set of overlapping, reciprocal and elastic rights to land, in which position in kinship relations, gender, age and life-cycle were defining principles, colonial land policies were formulated on a Eurocentric ideology of outright or allodial male ownership, privatization and exclusive rights (Abwunza, 1997:30; Wangari et al., 1996:130-131; Davison, 1988:163). The new form of land tenure recognized the 'head' of the household as male and therefore, as the sole owner and bearer of the title deed and the means of production (Abwunza, 1997:30). This bias failed to recognize the complex, gendered and reciprocal rights to land, responsibilities and obligations under customary law, thereby exaggerating male authority and power, as well as privileging allocative rights over use rights. Women's rights to land became invisible within this Western-based legal order. Customary land tenure was transformed, entrenching of power within conjugal relations.

4.1.3 The Early Post-Independence Period

Since Kenyan independence in 1963, land tenure policies have continued to exacerbate social differentiation and reinforce patriarchal ideology. Economically wealthier farmers were able to expand their land-holdings by purchasing land from those people partaking in government resettlement schemes in the former White Highlands (Carter and Crowley, 1997:11). Gender bias continued in the practice of land tenure policies such as the Registered Land Act of Kenya enacted in 1977, and the Law of Succession Act, Chapter 160, enacted in 1972 and operationalized in 1981. While in principle both gave widows and their daughters equal footing with male relatives in property succession at the policy level (Otieno, 1998:161; Abwunza, 1997:95), in practice, they followed the precedence set for the individualization of land through free-hold title allocated to the male 'head' of the household by colonial statutory laws (Wangari et al., 1996:131; Davison, 1988:165). Wangari et al. argue that while the new legal order did not exclude women from land ownership, it continued to issue title deeds to male 'heads of households', a reality reflected in the fact that only 5 per cent of Kenyan women were landowners in 1995 (1996:131). However, a simple correlation between number of women with title deeds and male bias inherent in the practice of statutory laws cannot be assumed as this ignores the complex situation of legal plurality inherent in the post-independence period. Mackenzie shows for Central Province, a situation of legal plurality similar to Maragoli, that the new system of freehold tenure did not, and has not, pre-empted other rights to land. Rather a complex and highly fluid legal plurality emerged. Women were not excluded from either legal order but had different access to *both* statutory and customary law vis-a-vis men. A difference which was further affected by class (Mackenzie, 1995a:17-18), age, life-cycle positioning and marital status.

4.2 The Contemporary Terrain : Struggles Over Meanings, Struggles Over Land

Today, Maragoli is predominantly made up of small-holdings varying between 'a point' (less than one acre) and 3 acres⁴¹. Increasing land pressure - caused by land alienation, social differentiation, continual subdivision of the land base through patrilineal descent and, to some extent, population growth in the context of politics of land division at the national level - has meant that in some extreme cases, *shambas* are reduced to a small garden plot.

This situation is best described by a 66 year old Logoli farmer who recently divided his less than 2 acre *shamba* among 7 sons:

It is bad... because of the congestion. I mean the cow is here with me. I can't take it anywhere else because the space does not allow me to move it anywhere else... because of the small sizes of the plots. For example, I am here alone and I've given birth to seven boys, meaning seven houses are to be constructed on the same plot. ...the plot has been subdivided into small pieces and the owners want to till them. So grass can't be grown in the home and this is how scarcity comes by. (L019)

This account illustrates that when small land holdings are subdivided for the purposes of passing land trans-generationally, there is little space for farming or extensive soil management. Past practices such as fallowing, growing thatch grass and grazing cows are no longer an option. Despite diminished plot sizes, however, and the fact that few *shambas* produce enough food or income for sustaining livelihoods, land continues to be of central importance in people's lives, and is often the crux of legal struggles and heated gender politics. Before turning attention to these struggles, it is useful to understand the significance of land and all its multiple meanings which deepen understanding of the intensity inherent in contemporary struggles over land.

4.2.1 "The Avalogoli Way" : Multiple Meanings Of Land

Land has multiple meanings that go beyond understandings of it as a material

resource which sustains farming and soil management. Land has social and cultural significances which are bound up in patriarchal ideology. These meanings are socially constructed and manifest themselves as cultural norms, idioms and stigmas which perpetuate 'Avalogoli identity', status and gender relations. These cultural meanings are constitutive forces which have real influences in 'ordering' and structuring life, as well as producing and reproducing gendered property relations.

First and foremost, land is understood as 'home'. As one male farmer explains, "land is for habitation... for a house and to keep some cows" (L042). Not only does land meet day-to-day needs such as shelter, keeping livestock and agriculture, but as Abwunza explains,

Avalogoli are... known for their attachment to 'home', where birth gives them membership in a social group and their resting place in death (Abwunza, 1997:14).

Hence, not only does land have significance in life, but it also holds strong meaning in death, which explains certain dynamics around struggles over land. A 76 year old Logoli farmer and retired electrician explains:

Without land you are nobody. And if you die, you need some piece of land to be buried on your own plot. (L042)

According to farmers' accounts, Logoli women and men are buried in front of their houses. While married men are buried on their ancestral *shambas*, married women are buried on their husband's *shambas*. Unmarried women are an 'exception' or an 'anomaly' within patriarchal norms, and in the words of a Logoli farmer, "traditionally you will always be referred to as a girl till you get married". An unmarried woman is buried as a "girl" and certain ceremonies that normally would have been performed had she been married are not performed at her funeral. The same applies to unmarried men, although social stigmas in life and death are not as fierce.

Having a 'proper' funeral figures centrally in people's lives, and has both immediate and long-term implications for soil management and agriculture. A funeral is a burial and commemoration ceremony which takes place some time after death when enough money is raised. Without a 'proper' funeral, it is thought the deceased do not rest peacefully and create difficulties for the living (Abwunza, 1997:115). Funerals are normally attended by everyone in the extended family and the village, which in the immediate term means all agricultural and soil management work must be halted. Farmers believe that if they continue to "dig⁴²", it will result in a curse on the living and the land that was worked on will not produce (ibid.:53). Indeed, during the course of the research, agricultural and soil management work, as well as research activities, were frequently halted for these reasons. In the long-term, commemoration ceremonies are significant because it is here that a person's life history is told. How one is remembered in death is important in people's lives. Women spoke about how they anticipate being remembered. Most women who "persevered" through the hardships of life can look forward to being remembered as "good" Logoli women, as examples for others. While those that have "deviated" from the norm of marriage will be remembered as "girls" in death.

The Avalogoli "attachment to home" (Abwunza, 1997) is also reflected in the fact that despite high levels of out-migration, especially among men, Logoli women and men continue to retain strong links to 'home'. An economically wealthy widow aged 52 explains:

As I can see, I am staying here. I have a banana [plot] here, am planting vegetables, am getting some little maize, I have cow and get some milk. ... I don't pay rent. ... [People who out-migrate] they know one day they'll retire. After retiring from their jobs they will go back to their *shamba*. That is why in Kenya, we have houses and homes. You know in Nairobi you have a house, and in Maragoli you have home. (L001)

There is a distinction between what is considered as “home” and “house”. Although men may spend decades away from Maragoli, their claims to land remain intact as long as they do not establish a permanent “home” in the place they are employed, even if it serves as their “house”. They continue to remain Avalogoli and bound to social and cultural obligations such as funerals, weddings and kin relationships and duties, as well as “providing” for their family’s education, housing, farming and bridewealth needs in their rural homes (Crowley and Carter, 1996:9). They always return to their homes when they retire and are buried on their *shambas* (ibid.).

While ‘home’ has different meanings when seen through the lens of gender, it is based on the belief that long-term security of tenure is derived from owning or having access to land as a resource. As different political and economic policies have come and gone, one thing that has always remained steadfast in Maragoli is the knowledge that one can turn to the land as ‘home’, as long as one remains within the constructs and norms of changing, yet pervasive patriarchal ideology. Deviating from the norm entails strong social stigmas. A farmer, a 48 year old woman, explains the importance of gaining access to a “home”:

Each and every person needs a place to take care of herself... to belong somewhere. And if you don’t get, you usually feel lonely and you will ask yourself what happened and won’t stay happy in your life. (L026)

Land is also a patriarchal social construction. Land, along with women, children and livestock, is considered “property” in Maragoli. One married Logoli woman explains, “we [women and children] are his property. That’s what they say, men’s property” (L014). This patriarchal ideology is sustained and perpetuated through the language of custom based on men’s roles as “commanders” (Abwunza, 1997), and the adoption of western concepts of men as ‘owners’ (Kitching, 1980:285). While the “Avalogoli way” is discursively upheld

by both women and men, men have the upper hand in the re-creation and perpetuation of elements of custom as they are able to invoke cultural norms and western legal concepts which perpetuate gender relations and power in their favour (Mackenzie, 1990:635). Although these inequities are recognized by women, many believe it is “a matter of persevering”. Women often posture a deference to patriarchal ideology, making room to manoeuvre through “back-door” decisions (Abwunza, 1997), as well as covert acts of resistance, rather than outright contestation⁴³. Nonetheless, the fact that most “property” is owned by men significantly affects the way struggles over resources play out, and the types of constraints and opportunities that are available to women, especially in situations where they are vulnerable to threats to security of tenure.

The types of priorities, constraints and motivations that farmers experience in terms to soil management are tied to the long-term security of land which in turn, play out as struggles over land in a situation where landholdings are both intensively farmed and often insufficient for livelihood requirements. Also, the amount of energy, time and labour that people are willing to invest in soil management is dependent on their ability to maintain long-term security of tenure, which in turn is shaped by ongoing struggles over land within the limits constructed and perpetuated by the patriarchal ideology.

4.2.2 Land Tenure In The 1990s

With the intensification of land holdings in Maragoli over time, there has been an intensification of struggles over land tenure, with a correlating escalation of gender politics. As in the case described by Moore, these struggles are often symbolic, constituted within the realm of cultural idioms, norms and meanings embedded in ideas about morality and patriarchy, which in turn shape material resource struggles over land (1993:383).

These struggles play out within and across two multiple and overlapping legal spheres. Statutory laws have not pre-empted, replaced or overridden customary laws, instead there is a certain degree of fluidity in the use of land rights mediated by the two legal spheres.

As Mackenzie notes for Central Province, Kenya:

Customary law and statutory law are not two isolated and essential legal orders. Rather, they provide spaces within which people, differentiated... by class and gender contest rights to land (1995a:18).

Both the practice of customary and statutory laws cannot be separated from patriarchal norms, nor from ideological and symbolic processes associated with them, which consolidate control over material property in the favour of men. Women negotiate control over land by both navigating between, and within, the two legal spheres. In some cases, women draw upon custom as a strategy to retain control when, paradoxically, their rights are threatened by men's manipulation of custom. In other cases, they invoke statutory laws when they are able to access the judicial system to defend their rights and when this same system is not used against them by men.

Each legal sphere has different mechanisms for dispute resolution, sets of 'rules', decision-making bodies, hierarchical structures and degrees of accessibility. People use one or the other to both access and retain control over rights to land, depending on the costs and benefits associated with either system in order.

Land Inheritance

Customary law, although modified, continues to take precedence in Maragoli in terms of land inheritance. While marriage remains the central conduit by which the rights of individual ownership, as well as use and access to land are distributed, these rights are mediated by gender, and further differentiated between rights to ownership and rights to use

and access. Men gain rights to land inheritance through trans-generational patrilineal segmentary lineages of succession. Men are allocated land by their fathers upon marriage, whereupon the construction of a permanent dwelling and banana plot signify the establishment of residence⁴⁴. However, as land-holdings become increasingly smaller, scarcer, and unaffordable (the current price being 50,000 Shillings for half an acre), land allocation does not always occur according to the 'proper' "Avalogoli way". Logoli fathers do not always immediately allocate all portions of the *shamba* to their sons and daughter-in-laws upon their marriage, and in a situation of high male out-migration, widowhood and charged gender politics, sometimes the decision to allocate land is ultimately made by women, as I illustrate later.

Struggles over land have become intense, especially among economically poorer households. These struggles occur in a context where there is a great deal of spatial variability within land-holdings in terms of crops grown and soil fertility. For instance, in certain parts of the *shamba*, soil fertility may be better, or planted with more economically valuable crops such as tea or French beans. Hence, the formal allocation of these lucrative parts of the *shamba* becomes a strategic decision, with farmers opting to hold off allocating these sections as long as they can in order to continue generating income. This decision varies among farmers and is dependent on plot size, cash crops grown, number of sons, number of migrant sons, and the intensity of struggles over land among sons for these sections of the *shamba*. Although farmers may not immediately allocate all land to their sons upon marriage, many nonetheless do so while they are still alive to avoid conflicts after their death. A widow aged 80 explains:

My son and the village elder of the village [divided the land]... I just decided it as

early as this when I'm still alive to avoid attacking each other. ... There are many quarrels. And people would say it is their parents mistakes "why didn't they divide the land when he was still alive?" Because usually [when] the land is already divided and boundary markers are in place, nobody will ever think to going beyond the boundaries. (L001)

Another woman in her 70's explains:

If you have children, it is a must you divide the piece of land and give one portion to one and another portion to the other. ... Traditional life was good because people had no land conflicts. When they saw that you have land that is not belonging to you, they just solved it in a more soft way. So they didn't have a lot of noise and that way was better. ... Nowadays, it is the children who bring all about this noise. He says I want to dig here, and he says I want to dig here, this is how the noise is coming along. Then the difference comes. And long ago there wasn't difference. ... Children never refused. Those ones used to understand their father. ... (L039)

Because of the increased possibility of 'attacks' over land among sons and daughters-in-law after their death, farmers prefer to ensure that land is allocated while they are alive; all the while holding off allocation of the most lucrative parts as long as they possibly can.

Farmers' accounts illustrate a trend towards the intensification of struggles over land.

However, these struggles must be placed within historical, political-economic and environmental contexts, rather than assuming a simplistic causal link between population growth and land pressure. In Maragoli, state policies over time have meant a drive towards a cash-based economy, which in turn has exacerbated struggles over the most economically valuable sections of the *shamba*. What size and which section of the *shamba* people inherit has implications for income generation, and plays a role in determining the intensity of struggles over land in terms of inheritance, as well as access and use rights.

Usufruct Rights To Land

While individual land is allocated from father to son, access to land is contingent upon marriage. Women play a critical role allowing land inheritance through the patrilineal

line to take place. Women are normally allocated land for use by their fathers-in-law upon or soon after marriage, although in certain cases, male elders may be called to do so by mothers-in-law who are heads of household. Women's rights to land through marriage are further solidified through the birth of children. A Logoli woman in her 80's explains:

When you first move to a new home, when you become a wife, you first stay until you give birth to three or sometimes even four children. Then they realize you need a place to till your own food for your own children. If your father in-law is there, he will allocate the plot. If he is dead, then your mother-in-law gets some men to allocate for you. If the mother-in-law cannot allocate the land, you have to go and get a brother [cousin] to your husband. That is how it is done in Maragoli. (L041)

Without the birth of children, including at least one son, these rights can be contested and the women may be "chased" away, no matter who in the marriage may be responsible in cases of infertility. The case of Rachel in chapter 6 illustrates such a situation.

In the case of polygamous marriages, where each wife must be allocated her own house and *shamba*, the arrangement is slightly altered, as the following account of a 44 year old woman whose husband married a second co-wife after four years of marriage illustrates:

When I came here we used to work hand in hand with my mother-in-law. ... I started working on my plot when my mother-in-law said she was growing weak and she didn't have the strength to work on the *shamba* anymore. So she asked us to work on. ... Then the day came when my co-wife was to join the family, and because both of us could not share everything with our mother-in-law when we belong to one man, our husband decided to buy another plot down here [pointing in a certain direction]. So I was supposed to start cooking in my house and the same [applies] to my co-wife. So she cooks her own meals and farms. And she's been shown where to farm. ... I am the one who has remained on this plot and I till on this one. This is my home and my co-wife is the one who is supposed to move where she tills. (L027)

As the above account demonstrates, a husband must provide both wives with separate plots and houses. When a husband does not have enough land to do so, the onus is on him to acquire another plot, usually through purchase, to ensure that both wives are allocated their own plots to farm, and in order that their respective sons inherit the land they farmed⁴⁵.

While fathers-in-law and male elders are in 'charge' of allocating land, mothers-in-law may also play a role in the allocation of land insofar as they are able to negotiate the timing and control of productive land which generates income. Elizabeth, for example, awaits being allocated the most lucrative sections of the land to farm by her mother-in-law.

Elizabeth⁴⁶

Elizabeth is a 24 year old newly-wed woman who has been living in her marital home for 2 years. Her father-in-law is deceased and her husband is the only son in the family. He is living and working in Nairobi and she sees him rarely. He has not been allocated a plot to build a house, and Elizabeth lives in the back room of the kitchen with her two children. While her mother-in-law continues to control and farm the family tea plot, Elizabeth has been given use rights to a very small plot on which she grows cabbages, sugar cane and bananas. The ultimate decision to allocate land to build a house and to control the tea plot lies in the hands of her mother-in-law, who finds the revenue from the tea plantation too lucrative to give up. (L006)

In an increasingly tenuous economic environment, mothers-in-law find ways to hold off the transfer of land to their daughters-in-law, often drawing on elements of custom which call for the birth of three to four children, or call upon the patriarchal ideology itself to dictate that a daughter-in-law prove herself as a "good" Logoli wife through the provision of household and farm labour, a subject I will develop in Chapter 5 as I elaborate Elizabeth's narrative further. Older women draw on elements of custom to maintain control and power over a daughter-in-law's access and rights to use land in the short-term, a situation which emphasizes struggles over resources which take place *between women* in different positions of power, authority and life-cycle positioning. In the long-term, older women and men's ability to negotiate access to resources from their sons, daughter-in-laws and grandchildren depends on the types of relationships they have maintained with them. A focus on inter-generational relationships highlights the importance of age and changing life-cycle circumstances, and hence power relations within the household, in terms of land tenure.

These relationship are especially pertinent in land tenure pertaining to banana plots.

Gender, Age And The Micro-Politics Of Banana

Despite the eventual distribution and allocation of family land to sons and daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law continue to have long-term, access, control and use of land upon which their houses are constructed, as well as the banana and home garden plot located behind it. These plots in particular, constitute an interesting micro-niche on the *shamba* in terms of cultural significances, land tenure and soil management which warrants special consideration and analysis.

Banana plots are both a physical and symbolic representation of the establishment of a new household on the family compound. They also carry other multiple meanings and significance, as they provide food, storage areas for cattle fodder, a place for fermenting sorghum, secluded sites for child bearing, love trysts, ritual cleansing and oath taking ceremonies (Crowley and Carter, 1996:5-6).

It has been argued that the banana plot constitutes a special micro-niche which by virtue of its proximity to the household and location in the lowest lying section of the land, receives more nutrients from household and on-farm refuse, as well as inputs such as chicken droppings, livestock manure from nearby livestock enclosures, waste and rain-water from the house, and therefore is higher in soil fertility and organic matter than any other part of the *shamba* (Carter et al., 1998:26; Crowley and Carter, 1996:26). However, I would argue that this special attention to the banana plot is not because of its close proximity to the household as a “convenient place to dump refuse” (ibid.). It is part of a long-term strategy which has to do with women’s security of tenure. Older women continue to work on and control banana plantations even in situations where the rest of the *shamba* has been allocated

and divided among their sons and daughters-in-law. Therefore, the fact that this micro-niche receives special attention in terms of soil fertility is not only a function of geography, but is also a conscious and strategic decision which is a function of the relationship between land tenure, gender, age and life-cycle. Given women's long-term security of tenure and control of products such as bananas, inter-cropped vegetables and green manure, banana plots constitutes a micro-niche of high soil fertility because *it is in their livelihood interests* to ensure that it receives ample amounts of organic matter and nutrients in order to maintain its long-term sustainability and productivity. The importance given to banana plots also has implications in terms of labour inputs and priorities, an issue I will expand in chapter 6.

These strategic decisions illustrate that a woman's long term security to land is central to their livelihoods and to the types of strategic decisions she makes allocating her time and energies. Security of tenure also ensures that land is inherited by sons, reflects a woman's reputation and efforts as a "good" Logoli woman, and is central in determining the extent to which soil management practices are undertaken. Given this importance, women will engage in fierce material and symbolic struggles in order to defend their land rights when they are threatened, using both customary or statutory law as strategic 'weapons' in differing circumstances.

4.2.3 Threats To Security Of Tenure In A Context Of Legal Plurality

While women and men gain rights to access and use of land through customary law, in practice, these rights can be contested. This is illustrated in the following two situations where symbolic and material struggles over land have become particularly acute. The first pertains to three widows whose rights to tenure are threatened by their husbands' families. The second pertains to a son who is "outgrown" (or born out-of-wedlock) and whose rights

to land inheritance are made vulnerable or denied by his father and step-mother. These two situations emphasize that access to resources is a negotiated process, even within legal codes.

The Many Meanings of Widow-Inheritance

In the past, through the custom of widow-inheritance, a brother-in-law inherited all the “property” of his deceased brother, including the widow herself, her children, land and any livestock present or owed through bridewealth payments. This not only ensured that land, wealth and “property” were kept within the family and the sub-clan’s control, but also secured the widow’s long-term security in tenure, her status within the clan, as well as her sons’ eventual inheritance of the *shamba* she farmed. For example, a widow aged 80, who was inherited by her brother-in-law after her husband’s death, explains both the custom of widow inheritance and her own experiences:

It was a good thing. ... It depended on how you agreed with someone. ... During then, when someone inherited you, you respected him as your husband. ... [But] it was difficult because of the sorrow, the head of the household had left me young. My brother-in-law inherited me and we stayed together nicely. He never mistreated me. ... I continued to grow crops there. Then when my elder son grew up, he went to construct his house there. (L003)

This account illustrates how widow inheritance was a potentially beneficial experience depending upon a woman’s personal relationship with her brother-in-law. It provided women an avenue to maintain land until it was allocated to sons.

Widow-inheritance today has taken on a different form and meaning. In a highly changed environment - where land is a scarce resource, costs of bringing up children are high (involving the provision of land to ‘inherited’ sons, as well as numerous costs in terms of school fees, uniforms, etc.), and AIDS is a very real health threat (especially where the cause of a husband’s death is “unknown”) - men invoke selective aspects of the custom of ‘widow

inheritance' which involve inheriting land, while silencing other aspects which involve 'inheriting' the widow and her children, as these entail taking on additional financial resource burdens and obligations. When invoked in this manner, 'widow inheritance' involves "chasing" their deceased brother's widow from her *shamba*, a situation which may be facilitated if her reputation as a "bad" Logoli wife can be demonstrated. Widows who are new in their marital circumstances or who have young children are particularly vulnerable to being "chased", whereas those with adult sons are in a more powerful position to defend their rights to land.

The reinterpretation of the custom of 'widow inheritance' by men has become a very real threat to women's long-term rights to land. Women have responded to this threat by invoking statutory law in some cases, while invoking customary law and cultural norms in others, depending on their individual situations and circumstances. Understanding the dynamics of, and the circumstances under which, women's rights to land are threatened, and the resources necessary to defend these rights, is critical for soil management. This is especially pertinent because long term security of tenure is a major motivating factor for sustaining the soils and maintaining continuity of extensive agricultural knowledge is critical in a context where there is a high degree of spatial variability. In this light, the following three vignettes describe the varied, yet creative ways women engage in intense and involved struggles over land in response to the threat of 'widow inheritance'.

Desi⁴⁷

Desi is a widow in her mid-fifties. After her husband passed away in 1969, her brother-in-law attempted to "chase" her from her *shamba*:

My brother-in-law and I, both of us scrambled for the land. Him, he wanted to chase me away so he could occupy my soil. Then I went to the local elders because the

shamba had already been subdivided and everybody had his own piece. ... He wanted to grab mine. So I reported to the sub-chief and they summoned him and asked why he is disturbing [me]. They asked him, "This woman, did you try to inherit her and she refused?" He said, "No, I just want her to go. Mother is there, she will take care of the children". Then they asked him, "How long will your mother be alive to take care of the children? And do you give this woman the food she cooks for her children which you will take to your mother to cook for them? And expense matters in helping the children?" Then he was defeated. ... It hurts a lot when your husband dies, leaves you a plot for you and someone else tries to claim it. He had no right, he was just a nuisance. He was just out to disturb me.

Desi explains that she engaged in customary law to adjudicate the dispute as a first line of defence because "you just know that home affairs have to go through elders first, if they are defeated, then you can proceed to court". Desi defended her rights to her land by invoking a particular element of 'widow inheritance' that her brother-in-law attempted to ignore, namely all the responsibilities for "providing" resources. Knowing that her brother-in-law was not prepared to 'inherit' her, customary law became the best avenue in which to defend her rights. Of course, all of this depended on her reputation as a "good" Logoli woman at the time of her widowhood, indicating the importance of reputation as a critical aspect of land tenure. Desi's situation changed after she defended her rights to land and had four children out-of-wedlock with a man outside her sub-clan:

He was just a friend. And I had my home. I couldn't move from here, the reason being that my son wouldn't have got his share of land. My brother [in-law] wanted me to go. So I had to stick here and wait for my share. ... When there is a case like that they [the clan], have to complain, "where does this man come from? Messing our homesteads." Women are never interested in such things. The clansmen are the ones who get involved. But women and children, no. They know someone can have a friend.

Desi did not marry this "friend" because it would have entailed losing her status as a first wife, as well as foregoing all claims to her *shamba* for a smaller piece of land while making her sons' rights to inherit insecure. While women in her sub-clan were more understanding and supportive to her circumstances, she was harassed by clansmen who were concerned about her defending clan land from the claim of outsiders, and also controlling her behaviour within the norms of the Avalogoli patriarchy:

Widows face very unsettled lives. ... You find that people fear interfering with your home affairs when a husband is around. If not, they keep on disturbing you. There is gossip and trespasses on my *shamba*. ... You may have neighbours, can you see this is the boundary fence, you have to keep disagreeing, like maybe "your cow has eaten my maize, or my beans". The owner may make a lot of noise or even report you to the elders. "Your child cut a maize from my *shamba*" and it becomes a case that has to be settled. Or you quarrel between yourselves. So like her there must be some lack of respect because that's a compound headed by one person. ... Because

they know you are a woman and being alone there is nothing you can do... (L024)

Desi's account illustrates three important points. First, customary law can be used by women in order to retain control of land when their rights are threatened⁴⁸. Economically poorer widows are more likely to go to elders first to resolve disputes using 'widow-inheritance' itself as a weapon of defence, because the cultural norms which require that brothers-in-law who 'inherit' wives must "provide" for those wives and their children, have become difficult to fulfil in today's economic environment.

Desi's case also illustrates that clan and sub-clan solidarity, kin ideology and territoriality are strong forces in the manipulation of custom in order to control women's behaviour, and therefore maintain power relations. Customs regarding marriage and inheritance are invoked by clansmen to keep widows from remarrying for fear of losing clan land to "outsiders". As Jefremovas has argued for Rwanda, acting as a 'virtuous' widow is powerfully sanctioned by the clan (1991:229b), in order to control women's behaviour. As such, women with reputations as 'virtuous' widows face less harassment and are less likely to be "chased", whereas those who act 'bold' are more likely to have their rights threatened and are socially penalized through harassment. Moreover, a focus on these dynamics highlights that everyday conflicts involving boundaries and "trespasses" are not simply caused by land pressure. Rather, they are culturally specific and are related to a person's identity and reputation.

While the Law of Succession Act, Chapter 160 (operationalized in 1981), did not apply in 1969 when Desi defended her rights to land, the Act continues to be difficult to invoke, as the following narratives illustrate. Not only are there monetary costs associated with engaging and accessing statutory law, it cannot be separated from wider practices of

patriarchal ideology.

Rebeka

Rebeka, aged 52, is an economically elite woman whose husband died 8 years ago, leaving her three separate plots of land. Despite the fact that she changed all title deeds to her name, her brother-in-law “grabbed” and sold one of her plots without her consent or knowledge:

My husband had three brothers... we used to stay well with them. But after his death, the brother whom my husband follows started saying that there was a plot that he bought with my late husband. But me I denied. I asked him to bring what shows they bought together [the title deed]. But he didn't produce anything. ... I had changed the title deeds in my name. I thought they [in-laws] might steal or do something on them. He had started [to try] but when I told him “me, I didn't see you buying this plot”, he just kept quiet and that is when he went and sold that one in Kitale. ... And me without knowing ... he had gone and started selling. I just heard [from] someone telling me. From there is when I really knew the plot had already been sold.

Rebeka believed that statutory law would defend her rights to land. However, her brother-in-law was able to subvert statutory law in his favour by gaining access to information regarding her title deed, thereby gaining control of her plot. She explains the situation:

Nowadays, people are funny. Someone can know your title deed. Maybe he has gone to land office at Kakamega, asking “just let me know someone's title deed number, or the number of this plot”. And they cannot hide [from] him, [the title deed information] to see, and from there someone can do something without you knowing.

Subsequently, there was another attempt at “grabbing” her land which she managed to avert by engaging in drastic measures:

The original home of my husband, so he had put up a house there before we came here. And that house used to just stay there. But it was one day I heard a son of my sister-in-law [nephew]... saying he wants to go and stay in that house. So that made me destroy the house. ... Such a house you can't destroy by yourself, but my [other] brother-in-law with other men destroyed it. ... I am just digging the land. It's where I plant maize and beans. (L001)

The destruction of a house on one of her plots acted as a strong physical deterrent for her nephew to take up residence on the *shamba*. It was not only a powerful symbolic gesture which halted her nephew from taking up residence and laying claims to land, but was also an overt act of resistance which spoke volumes about her determination to retain her rights.

Rebeka's narrative illustrates how women may engage in material as well as symbolic struggles in order to protect their land rights, drawing on both statutory law and custom. However, women's ability to engage in these choices require access to resources and are influenced by their class, as gaining title deeds requires money and influence. Further, an act such as destroying a house can only be carried out if a woman has an alternative residence, options that are not available to economically poor women. It also illustrates women's disadvantaged political position in the practice of statutory law, as men's claims as 'heads' of household take precedence in the operationalization of legal structures which regulate land tenure.

Jane

Jane is a 44 year old middle income woman whose husband passed away 11 years ago. After her husband's death, she got wind of her parents-in-law's plans to appropriate part of her *shamba*. She "sued and took them to court":

Now this plot, my parents in-law wanted to give it to their eldest grandson. They wanted to divide my plot. They had given each son his own share. Then my father-in-law asked my mother-in-law "can't you give a piece to your grandchild? He must get a share". That was after the burial of my husband. When I heard this I went to Kakamega to collect forms. I came and told my nephew to help me fill them. He refused. His father told him not to help me. I went back with the forms to Kakamega. Fortunately, I met the late chief. He is the one who told me how to go about it and he told me to take them to Vihiga. At Vihiga, they told me to be accompanied by my father-in-law. They gave me the date for the land board meeting. When I told my father in-law, he refused. Instead he send his eldest son to represent him but the board turned him away. When I went home, I tricked the old man. This was a lie actually, [I told him] that the board members said if you fail to turn up in the second meeting then you should pay 5000 Shilling as a fine. That is when he attended it. They told him "we've found this woman a job and when she goes you remain with the rest of her family". That is when he said "No, I will give her a *shamba*". But they had refused completely. It was very difficult, I had to bribe the board [laughs] don't joke, it wasn't easy.

After attending the district land board meetings, Jane had to attend court hearings at the land registration office in Kakamega, the provincial capital.

We continued like that till we went to court. The old man never stopped at Kakamega when we went. I asked someone to represent him [as a proxy] and the person said he was the brother to my late husband, and “father is so sick he can’t make it to court. But we’ve agreed with the Vihiga board to allocate her a plot”. That is when they gave it to me. They wrote his identity card details and he swore that he was saying the truth, otherwise they had refused.

Through creative ‘back door’ manoeuvring, she discreetly initiated a process towards protecting her land rights:

I didn’t tell anyone. ... I would leave early in the morning till evening. No one would know. This went on till I was finished. Till I succeeded. No one helped me. ... Was I to tell anyone ? When you are looking for something, you are not supposed to tell anyone. ... some people will mock you, others will talk ill of you till you even can’t succeed.

Jane was able to use the judicial system within statutory law because her economic status allowed her to afford the associated costs of ‘influencing’ officials, acquiring title deeds, and transportation costs to travel to Kakamega in order to protect her land rights. However, she did this on her own, without telling anyone of her plans, fearing that doing so might alert her in-laws and jeopardize the outcome. By keeping her plans as ‘back-door’ decisions, she was able to manipulate the system and ‘spring’ her defence on her in-laws without their knowledge. Jane’s account demonstrates that widows may invoke statutory law in order to defend their rights to land when they are threatened. Drawing on statutory law is not always straight-forward, as it requires access to its machinery and processes. Accessing it requires a great deal of creativity, as well as energy, time, money and tenacity. In order to make it work in the favour of women, it involves manipulation, using “tricks” and bribes to influence officials. As Jane’s account illustrates, it can also be manipulated by men to control land even if they do not have title deed. A situation that would not exist unless land officials themselves sided with patriarchal norms to begin with, and in a situation where bribery is accepted. A Logoli woman puts the situation into perspective:

Nowadays you have to bribe, they will keep telling you go and come back tomorrow yet you travelled all the way from up country and you are putting up in a relative's house so you become a burden. ... You go to court and you are told your file is missing so you have to bribe in order for it to be traced... (L044)

In contemporary Maragoli, being “chased” from one's land upon a husband's death is common. Married women who have economically productive *shambas* anticipate this threat in advance. The preceding three narratives illustrate the great lengths to which women go in defending their long-term security in tenure against the threat of ‘widow inheritance’. Being “chased” has grave implications for their livelihoods. These accounts illustrate that women react to being “chased” in different ways, sometimes drawing on statutory law, and sometimes drawing on customary law and cultural norms in order to legitimate rights to land. As such, customary and statutory law are not two isolated legal orders but provide women space (Mackenzie, 1995:18) within which to defend rights to land in the face of threats to their long-term security of tenure. The ability of women to access either of these orders depends on their economic status, positioning and reputation as defined by patriarchal ideology.

The selective re-interpretation and invoking of ‘widow inheritance’ by men has long-term consequences for sustainable soil management. Given that there is a great deal of spatial variability in terms of environment, land, soil fertility and crops grown, women as farmers accumulate a great deal of valuable knowledge and expertise over time regarding the context-specific conditions and micro-environments of their *shambas*. Hence, when a widow is “chased” from her *shamba*, her accumulated knowledge and expertise are lost. Where the sustainability of the land base is dependent on whether women successfully pass along valuable agricultural and soils knowledge of particular micro-niches to each other, a break

in this chain has serious implications for sustaining the soils. The incentives and constraints that women face in defending their rights to land is therefore an area where 'development' organizations should focus attention in the future in order to ensure security of tenure to enable long-term farming and soil management.

The Case Of "Out-Grown" Sons

Men's rights to inheritance through customary law can be rendered vulnerable, and denied, in circumstances where men are born out-of-wedlock (or "out-grown"), and where their fathers' refuse to formally recognize them as sons. The role of women in this situation is central, as the recognition of biological linkage to fathers rests upon paternal grandmothers, who performs certain rituals which confirm their membership to the family, and is dependent on step-mothers, who influence the way step-sons are treated within the family, and the extent to which their rights to land are denied or recognized.

Benjamin

Benjamin is 32 year old. He was born out-of-wedlock, and his mother married "elsewhere". He was brought up in his grandfather's home, and later, his father's home, where he suffered mistreatment from his step-mother and siblings:

Now, my childhood was like this, when I was born, both my parents were alive, my mother was alive and my father was alive, but I grew up like someone who had no parents... like an orphan. The reason was that I was an out-of-wedlock child... I grew up in problems, I started hiring [out my] labour when I was still a very little boy. At an age you wouldn't believe. ... My father refused to educate me. I was an out-of-wedlock child, this made him not like me. ... I stayed with my step-mom in problems. ... And what made it worse was that I wondered if I was a son to my father why should they discriminate [against] me, can't they treat me like the rest ?

Despite the fact that Benjamin was recognized as a member of his father's family, his status as "out-grown" placed him in a vulnerable position in terms of inheriting land:

The [family] plot is small and what makes me think I won't get a share is that my step-mother hates me, so even when you asked me about marriage, it's because up to now I haven't constructed a house. This is one of the reasons I haven't married

because if I did, where would I stay with my wife ? I feel like I am homeless. If I make some money I will go to my home and ask for a place to put up my own house. ... Though the problem [is], it's my step-mother who is against it. Because like now why I say I want to get money and ask for a place to construct a house alone is because you see, the elders of the family are getting finished. This month we buried our last born uncle.

Benjamin's account demonstrates several points that are important in understanding the dynamics of gender relations and the sustainability of the soils. First, it illustrates that men can also be vulnerable in terms of land tenure. However, their insecurity in tenure is rendered vulnerable via à vis their relationship with their mothers and step-mothers. The dislocation of sons' rights is a major factor in explaining why so much emphasis is placed by women on marriage, which acts as a conduit for women to access land, and ensures that sons inherit land, which in turn effectively ensures women's own security and livelihoods in old age. Maintaining inter-generational rights to land is a key factor in explaining why women continue to "persevere" in the harshest circumstances, rather than withdraw labour from their husband's *shambas* even when there are no immediate, short-term returns, a point I will expand in the next chapter. As Benjamin's narrative illustrates, sons often face difficult livelihood circumstances when such withdrawal takes place.

Step-mothers, on the other hand, wield a great deal of power as they influence the equitable distribution of land among sons and step-sons. In Benjamin's case, his step-mother regards her husband's children differentially, and fiercely defends her own sons rights over further division of the small parcel of land. The extent to which his mother-in-law was able to hold off the formal allocation of land to Benjamin's while his father was alive, has further rendered his security in tenure vulnerable, making his chances of inheriting a plot, and therefore of marrying, difficult.

The normal recourse, when the father is deceased, is to turn to the paternal uncles to ensure inheritance according to customary law. Since all of Benjamin's uncles have passed away, there is only one option left open to him, calling upon the elders in the sub-clan to adjudicate his land claims. However, initiating the formal and ceremonial processes involves monetary costs, an unaffordable option in the short-term. Although men are in a more powerful position in terms of customary law, this is dependent on their ability to incur the monetary costs associated with negotiating claims under customary law.

Without land, Benjamin is unable to marry and establish a home, and he will not be recognized as an adult, and therefore cannot be buried as one. What this account demonstrates is that although women's role in land inheritance is not overt, it is nonetheless central. Women's roles as mothers, step-mothers and grandmothers are important in influencing how land is allocated among sons and step-sons.

4.2.4 Women's Ownership Of Land : Deeply Contested Terrain

Of the forty women in this study, none held title deeds in their name; a situation which is similarly reflected in Abwunza's (1997) study in Maragoli from 1987-1988 where only 2 out of 410 women she interviewed had title deeds. Women's ownership of land is deeply contested and is viewed as an overt and explicit threat to existing power relations within the household, and more broadly, within the patriarchal "order". There are two situations where both material and symbolic struggles for land become a fierce battle ground for gender politics: when unmarried daughters remain in their parents' home or inherit land, and when a married woman attempts to own land through title deed.

The Case Of Unmarried Daughters

According to customary law, daughters are not entitled to inherit family land. A

young woman aged 22 explains:

Your share is not there. ... In Maragoli, girls are not supposed to get land, and even if they give you, you won't feel okay. ... People in the society won't respect you. ... Because even if you stay at your home it won't be good because many people will start laughing at you. Because mostly people in Maragoli prefer girls to move from home and join their husbands, and if you stay at home without getting married, they bury you badly when you die. (L005)

Women are expected to marry and move to their husband's homes, gaining usufruct rights to land in this manner. However, there are exceptions. A father may decide to allocate land to his daughter in cases when she is unable to marry, or if her marriage fails and it is proved that she was not at 'fault'. Mackenzie has argued for Murang'a District, Central Province that the allocation of land to a daughter depends on the size of the *shamba* to be divided and is further contingent on her brothers' willingness to accept allocation of land to an unmarried sister, as well as their ideological stance against women's ownership of land (1990:635). While the latter two points can be negotiated and are variable, the majority of land holdings in Maragoli are small, leaving little possibility of brothers' or their wives' willingness to share already small *shambas*. However, a woman's ownership of family land is not contested on the basis of land availability, but rather, involves the harnessing and rigid interpretation of cultural idioms regarding unmarried women, in tandem with invoking social stigmas and taboos in order to legitimate men's control over family land. As the following three vignettes demonstrate, regardless of their situation, women who remain in the parents' home are in an extremely vulnerable position in terms of their status and reputation in society, and in terms of land tenure in a situation where land is increasingly scarce.

Melissa

Melissa is a 30 year old unmarried woman who lives in her widowed mother's home, along with her sister-in-law and nephews. She describes a situation where the social pressure for

her to leave, as well as the social stigmas associated with her remaining, have intensified:

When I was young, life was good because my mother helped me...clothing me, feeding me... paying my school fees, and so on. But now life is difficult... because now I am fully grown up and should depend on myself for my needs. ... That's why I dig and pick tea in order to get money. ... I want to get someone to marry. If I leave this year, it will be good, but if I stay in the coming years, it will be difficult. ... This side, it is a problem because it is a burden being fed by your parents and other members of the family don't like it... even my brother tells me to leave before I start cursing his children.

Melissa finds it difficult to negotiate the returns from her labour inputs, and frequently has to hire out her own labour on other people's *shambas*. However, despite all these personal problems, Melissa believes that it is best for a girl to leave her parents' home and find her own home and *shamba* to farm:

Girls should leave because it's Maragoli culture. It's good for a girl to take a *shamba* if there are no boys, but if there are, then it can't happen. ... Girls stay at their homes, but with difficulties. Like their brothers don't want them. If they have children, for them to grow is difficult. If she gets children outside of marriage and she passes away and the husband doesn't bury her, she's buried in her father's home. ... You can never be constructed a house. If you have children it is very difficult to feed them and you cannot get a share of the plot. (L009)

The possibility of her gaining rights to land are bleak. She recognizes this as the "Avalogoli way". However, life has become increasingly difficult as she grows older and is expected to find her own home and *shamba*. If she does not leave in the near future, the social stigmas will become increasingly fierce to the point where it will be unbearable for her to remain.

Her only hope of gaining access to land is through marriage. If she is unable to marry, she will have few livelihood options open to her, and she will be forced to find alternative means for survival.

As Melissa suggests, and Beatrice account demonstrates below, this situation is made worse for unmarried daughters with children out-of-wedlock.

Beatrice

Beatrice is a 39 year old single mother who lives with her widowed mother and sister. When she was young, she became pregnant, and as she puts it, the biological father of her children "turned against me and said he cannot marry me". She later had several "friendships" with men and had two more children out-of-wedlock. Since her brothers are deceased, there are no sons to inherit the three acre family farm, which is controlled by her mother. She describes her situation and explains that having four children out-of-wedlock makes issues of gaining income to meet the monetary needs particularly difficult:

My problem is how to bring up the children yet I don't have a husband. ... it's hard to feed the children, hard to cloth them and take them to school. And that preoccupies my mind so much. That's what gets me down.

The situation is made worse by the strong cultural taboos and stigmas that exist around single daughters with children out-of-wedlock, who continue to remain in their parents home:

When you give birth in your home it is difficult. Your dignity is lowered, they mock you, they don't respect you at all. You also lose respect for yourself. ... Here in Maragoli, there is a lot of taunting. ... Most of the words come from women, men just understand and knows it's actually a problem. ... Neighbours sometimes look down upon me. They tell me that I have refused to get married, that I have stuck in my home, that I should have tasted marriage. ... The thought of marriage has faded away because whenever you find one and tell him about marriage they don't accept...

While Beatrice never brought the subject up in interviews, members of her group confirmed my surmise that she engages in sex work to make economic ends meet. This may go a long way in explaining the particularly fierce social stigmas that she faces in her everyday life, especially from women. Similar to Melissa, Beatrice feels that "girls" should leave their parents' home. Given that her brothers are deceased, she feels no particular advantage in the knowledge that she may inherit a piece of the family's *shamba*:

When you stay in your home you are referred to as a girl since you are not married. ... You are supposed to leave and make your own life. ... You can stay, but it really is a big problem. ... The *shamba* is there alright, but if you have no help for using the *shamba*, what use does it have for you ?

Beatrice strongly believes that married women have better lives:

You cannot compare the life of a woman who is at her [parent's] home and that one who is married. The married woman has her own house, her own home. Even that married one doesn't have a lot of problems... The one who is in her home can discuss issues with her children and husband. ... So the women who lives in her home is really a burden. It is difficult... there are no advantages, you just persevere. (L018)

Despite the fact that married women often have no material advantage in residing with husbands who do not provide labour, income and other important resources, according to

Beatrice, they are in a far better situation than those who are unmarried and live at home. This contradiction may be addressed by turning attention to the extremely strong social stigmas and cultural norms which perpetuate men's ownership of land over those of women, and the status of having one's own "home" through marriage, all of which cause women such as Beatrice a great deal of anxiety and despair.

Despite the fact that they may inherit *shambas* in the future, daughters who continue to remain on their family's land face strong social stigmas, especially if they have children out-of-wedlock and/or turn to sex work for economic survival. While they have an obligation to contribute labour on the *shamba*, they do not necessarily control the returns from that labour, thereby being forced to engage in alternative means of economic generation. Most single women attempt to find an alternative means for survival, normally through marriage as second wives, through employment in towns as "housegirls", or by taking on lovers or engaging in sex work in order to generate an income. While they may have secure rights to land in the future, they themselves do not view this as an advantage as social stigmas constructed within patriarchy weigh heavily in their lives.

Rina

Rina is a 50 year old widow whose husband died 8 years ago. She was "chased" from her first marriage because she was unable to bear children and re-married as a second wife. Rina has only one daughter. She would like to leave her land to her, but has reservations based on her own experiences. She explains:

It is said that a girl cannot stay in her home. Staying there usually means conflicts so it is better to find a place for yourself... [Then], you become happy because now you are in your house, with your own husband. It's known that you are in your home.

Rina has considered obtaining the title deed for her land in order to leave it for her daughter, but is also considering leaving her land to one of her step-sons, despite the fact that she has had a hostile relationship with her co-wife. She explains:

I am supposed to do that [obtain a title deed], but I don't have enough money for the whole process... [My land] it is usually supposed to be inherited by one of my step-sons, the one that I feel is good to me. ... If he takes good care of me he will get, but if he doesn't, he won't get. ... [But], if my daughter feels that the shamba should belong to her, then I will give to her. (L028)

Faced with an economically uncertain future herself, Rina would rather arrange to have her land inherited by her step-son, thereby using land as an important resource and lever to negotiate her future care in old age. Rina's account illustrates two points. First, decisions for land allocation are not always made by men and can also be made by women in certain situations such as widowhood. Second, despite the fact that customary law allows for daughters to inherit land in the case where there are no sons, in economically difficult circumstances, this does not guarantee the land will be inherited by daughter(s), even if the decision is made by women.

The cultural significance given to women's ownership of land vis à vis norms and fierce social stigmas make it extremely difficult for unmarried daughters to remain and inherit family land. As such, these social stigmas are not just "quaint" cultural ideology but are constitutive forces with real effects and far-reaching implications which weigh heavily in women's lives. Stigmas often manifest themselves as forms of harassment from families and community. Given these factors, it is not surprising that daughters in Maragoli rarely inherit land. Indeed, none of the women interviewed had inherited land from their fathers.

When Women Purchase Land

Land in Maragoli is in short supply and very expensive, making the option of purchasing land unviable for most economically poor farmers. However, when it is available, it can be purchased from those who migrate to less densely populated areas outside Maragoli, such as Kitale and Nandi, and where land is less expensive. Given an average cost

of 50,000 Shillings for half an acre, only economically wealthy farmers are able to purchase and increase their land-holdings within and outside of Maragoli⁴⁹. Women rarely purchase land, not only because of the high monetary costs involved, but because when they do attempt such a purchase, these transactions are bitterly disputed within the household and by clansmen in the community. The following two accounts of Jedda, a wealthy woman who purchased land on her own, and her husband, Lucas, demonstrate this situation.

Jedda

Jedda is 56 years old. She is the chairperson of her women's group and is actively involved in community affairs. She explains on a broad level, the types of constraints that women face with regards to their husbands in attempting to acquire title deeds in their names:

It is just lack of money, but if you had your own plot, it could help you get a loan in the bank because you cannot manage to get a loan without security [collateral]. ...

A lot of property is owned by men and when you tell him to give you a plot as security, he refuses. Yet if you bought he rushes to get the title deed in his name. Is that very fair, surely? It's so unfair. ... Men cannot give you a title deed, unless you talk to him so nicely, so that he can give you a letter with the title deed. So that he can introduce [you] to the manager of the bank to get a loan. Otherwise, if you don't talk nicely you won't be given a title deed. They're very difficult. Men are always difficult.

Jedda bought a plot with her own money and had the title deed registered in her name, only to find out that her husband had gone to the land registration office without her knowledge and had it transferred to his name. She then proceeded to "talk to him so nicely" in order to convince him that both their names should appear on the deed. This could also allow her to process an application for a loan at the local bank. After her own personal experiences, she reflects on why men feel the need to control title deeds:

Men are afraid of putting the title deeds in our names because they are afraid we will run away. Women will say "I can go and do something else, I can do without you".

So, I think that men are afraid of this. That once they have given women something, that they will talk among themselves and exchange ideas with other women. ...

Women will boast. But the man will feel very bad, because this will go to other men, and they will start talking about you. Bad things about you. They'll feel that you are spoiling it for other men. Because this title deed was given to that woman and now she is talking like that, "I can't give it to my wife". (L014)

Jedda recognizes that men's control over title deed - both a material and symbolic

manifestation of land ownership - is a way of maintaining control over women. She feels that if women are “permitted” to own title deeds, men fear that this idea will gain momentum as the “word spreads”, and soon they will lose all authority over women. Therefore, men need to maintain control over this process within conjugal relations as well as within patriarchal discourse in order to restrict women’s actions and ownership of land.

Lucas

Lucas, Jedda’s 58 year old husband, explains why only men can, and should own land:

...Not the wife, it is always the husband [who owns land]. ... The reason is that you may have economic difficulties, and a wife is the weaker sex in being tempted to make the wrong decision, “that after all, I can also find another man outside here”. But a man would always want to keep the family [the clan]. But the woman can take the harsh decisions, maybe moving with the man next door. (L013)

Men claim that women are incapable of owning land because of their “incapacity” as the “weaker sex”, their propensity to make the “wrong” decisions in terms of maintaining clan solidarity. Within this discourse, women need to be “protected” against their “incapacities” and their tendency to “roam” with men outside their clan. Their justification to maintain control over land and the means of production uses the ‘imported’ concept of ‘ownership’ ideologically in a struggle for resources within the household (Kitching, 1980:143), while at the same time drawing on elements of custom which emphasize clan solidarity.

Women’s ownership and control over land is viewed as a threat to the patriarchal ‘order’ and therefore, the balance of power within conjugal and kin relationships. As Jedda’s account illustrates, outright purchase of land by a woman is considered an act of subversion to the ‘order’ of things. In this case, men engage in both statutory law and customary idioms in order to ‘restore’ the balance. The case of Helen, Jedda and Lucas illustrates how men can gain access to land to which women own title deed by manipulating the system of statutory

law. As statutory law does not exist in a vacuum, its manipulation to suit the interests of men is most likely carried out by invoking patriarchal custom to land officials - who themselves might be sympathetic to men - in combination with bribery. However, this type of struggle is limited to economically elite women and men, as there are monetary costs involved in both registering title deed and 'bribing' officials.

Women may also be able to purchase, rent and control land through the collective idiom of gender based work groups. While none of the women's groups interviewed owned land collectively, one group had intentions of renting church land to cultivate income generating cash crops. Purchasing land is only an option open to economically wealthy women's groups, given the high cost of land.

4.3 Conclusion

As material and symbolic struggles over resources intensify in an environment of insufficient land-holdings, women's rights to land become increasingly insecure. Seen as both soil and semiotics, the Maragoli landscape is the site for not only social and cultural production and reproduction, but also, as in the case illustrated by Moore, for symbolic struggles (1993:396) which are played out within the context of inequitable power relations enforced and reinforced by patriarchal ideology. In this light, land tenure systems constitutes an arena of struggle where women wage fierce, yet creative battles to defend their long-term security and rights to land, using a plethora of strategies including the manipulation of customary and statutory law, "back-door" decisions, "tricks" and as Mbilinyi suggests, guerilla tactics (Mbilinyi, 1989). Men engage in this struggle as well, fiercely defending their privileged positions as "commanders" and owners of "property" in an era where there have been major dislocations and transformations in their roles and fracturing of their

functions. Men turn to patriarchal ideology to re-establish authority in spheres concerning ownership and control over property. But what is at stake is beyond property: it is the balance of power within gender relations. Men draw on idioms, norms and stigmas within patriarchal ideology, as they have the upper hand in recreating and perpetuating selective elements of customary law to their advantage.

Norms, idioms and taboos within customary law are continuously evolving. They constitute a set of shifting symbols, which not only define society but also create strategies that serve economic and political interests (Glazier, 1985, cited in Mackenzie, 1990:613). As such, faced with social disruption and a major dislocation of their power and position within society, customary law is used selectively as an instrument by men in order to control resources and behaviour within conjugal relations, including the restriction of marriage, institution of widow inheritance, bridewealth, divorce and the stigmatization of “roaming”.

Given these realities, women’s position in securing rights to land is far from being equitable and their ability to negotiate, contest and manoeuvre their rights to land is mediated by class, age, marital status, life-cycle positioning and reputation. As such, who the farmer is has implications in terms of the types of struggles which take place and their ability to engage in different legal spheres and customs. Women have differential access to both legal spheres. Economically poor women, as well as those who are new in their marital life-circumstances and those who ‘deviate’ from norms, may be the most vulnerable of all, with very few options open to them. The accounts in this chapter are based on experiences of women who were able to succeed in maintaining rights to land. Other stories which are often hidden reveal what happens to women, their land and their extensive agricultural knowledge when they are not able to defend her rights - a circumstance I will discuss in Chapter 6.

How successfully women manage to secure rights to land is critical in understanding soil management. Struggles over the rights and control of land highlight the importance of a woman's ability to secure long-term rights and control of land as both a material and symbolic resource, as well as the basis for soil management. As the micro-niche and micro-politics of banana plantations illustrate, when women have secure rights to land, they are more willing to invest in long-term strategies to sustain the soil, as well as agriculture. This, in addition to insufficient land and other competing priorities, determines the extent to which women, as the principal farmers and managers of the soil, are willing to invest in, or withdraw from strategies to sustain the soil and farming, within real limits set by the patriarchal "order". While certain norms and idioms have been transformed in the face of historical and political-economic change - which have to do with labour, thereby intensifying women's labour in all aspects of life - the ones that remain entrenched and are fiercely resisted by men are those roles and responsibilities that pertain to the control over property and land, and therefore, power.

5.0 Between Toil And Soil : Gender And The Politics of Labour⁵⁰

Attention to the complexities of resource politics in particular localities... requires close examination of the myriad struggles over the cultural categories through which access to critical environmental resources are contested. An analysis of peasant politics needs to take peasant culture seriously, not simply as a quaint epiphenomenon of structural features of society, but as integral to resource conflicts themselves (Moore, 1993:382).

Farmers' ability to control and gain access to labour as a key productive resource for farming and soil management is affected by their diverse and multiple experiences as wives, co-wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, daughters-in-law, widows, and as women and men. Just as their experiences vary by gender, class, age, marital status and household headship, their priorities, constraints and the meanings they attach to different soil management and farming practices also vary according to different labour enterprises, which themselves are gendered, dynamic and constitute an arena of struggle.

Using the household as a point of departure, the everyday micro-politics of women's and men's struggles over relations in production, *as well as* the symbolic and discursive contestations that constitute those struggles (Moore, 1993; Schroeder, 1996), will be discussed in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics of labour and gender relations, and how these affect soil management. Such a focus challenges overly simplistic conceptualizations of social realities and demonstrates the ways in which competing claims to and control of labour are articulated through cultural norms, idioms and taboos in the charged contexts of local gendered politics (Moore, 1993:381). Similar to property relations, cultural aspects of life are constitutive forces which affect relations in production:

Culture... does not stand apart from the socially organized forms of inequality, domination, exploitation, and power that exist in society but is implicated in and inscribed in these practices, which are maintained and contested symbolically as well as instrumentally, discursively and forcefully (Coombe, 1991, cited in Moore, 1993:382).

Struggles over symbolic processes are important because they are conflicts over material

relations in production, the distribution of resources in society, and ultimately power (ibid.), and consequently are the basis for heated gender politics.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the politics of labour from two different perspectives: by focussing on the diversity of farmers' experiences and the diversity in different on-farm labour enterprises. I begin by situating the discussion on the gender division of labour as it is articulated publically by men and women through cultural norms, idioms and taboos - the way the way gender roles and responsibilities are "ordered" by Avalogoli cultural discourse and patriarchal ideology. Following this, I focus on the manner in which cultural idioms, norms and taboos are invoked and negotiated in everyday practice.

The category of 'farmer' will be scrutinized, demonstrating that the gender division of on-farm labour is contingent on gender as well as women and men's position in terms of marital status, household headship, class, age and stage in life-cycle. Their diverse and varied experiences and labour practices are vital to understanding soil management, as are situations where people lack access to and control of labour, sometimes their own, because of inequitable power relations both within and outside of conjugal relations. Finally, I bring these relations to bear on five on-farm labour enterprises including trees and hedges, livestock, clearing land crops and digging trenches, highlighting that women are predominantly the farmers in Maragoli and that they carry out these roles and responsibilities in increasingly precarious circumstances. Their labour burdens have intensified and they do not always control the proceeds of that labour.

5.1 The Avalogoli Way :“Ordering” Gender Roles And Responsibilities

Cultural meanings figure centrally in gendered relations in production and have an important bearing on soil management in Maragoli. Articulated through cultural idioms,

norms and taboos, they are harnessed by both women and men either to perpetuate gender roles, responsibilities and sustain power relations, or to challenge and contest them. In the former case, they lay out a cultural and social map of 'traditional' gender roles and responsibilities as they *should* pertain to all aspects of life, including the way farming and soil management is meant to be 'traditionally' structured, produced and reproduced in practice. The gender division of labour is 'naturalized' through cultural understandings which encourages public consent and deference to patriarchal ideology (Moore, 1993:383).

In the latter case, despite struggles to establish hierarchy, cultural norms are continually contested by women and men in ways which illustrate that the politics of labour are interpretive struggles over gender responsibilities and labour obligations, especially in light of changing historical and political-economic circumstances which have contributed to the transformation of boundaries of who does what:

Socially dominant representations pertaining to gender, cultural order of the household and property rights are in conflict with the new experiences of material rights. ... [S]uch contradictions are rarely contained through coercion but rather through bargaining and negotiation. ... [They are] struggles over meaning. Such negotiation is rarely an interpretive contest between equals because these struggles must confront the hegemonic cultural representations which precisely attempt to contain contradictions and conflicts and so to contain the vagaries of lived reality (Carney and Watts, 1990:211).

The following accounts of a married Logoli couple highlight a number of important points regarding gendered conflicts over relations in production, and how these are mediated by cultural representations, which are themselves imbedded in patriarchal ideology.

George and Miriam

George, a 58 year old economically wealthy elder, describes how gender roles and responsibilities are defined by 'tradition':

The husband is the provider, ploughing and providing in the *shamba*, but still the wife will have a responsibility to ensure that plants are properly planted and so on. Harvesting is the same, it is the wife who knows where those things will be harvested and stored in the house. The husband provides the means and [the] wife

is to ensure that things are done to the family. The husband provides the means, that means provides the money, labour force and supervision.

Before Christianity came, it was a known factor that a woman would be your helper. And you would marry a woman to come and help you with domestic duties in the house, like sweeping. And when you marry her to come and do those duties, she helps you lead a better life. In marrying, one would look for a good girl with good character. Not a girl who is a prostitute; [one] who does not roam here and there and then gets married to so and so; [but one] to maintain the home and also the family and the clan. Because in the old days, if a woman is married to a community, that woman would be an asset to the community. They will value her because it is the teachings. The family or community comes from the home, and the person who does that is the woman, and so they have a lot of respect for her, because she is the initiator of bringing up children, and the home, and community as well. In the old days, if a woman is married to a certain somebody, like here, then she is also married to my clan, the clan looks at her as a wife of the clan. They'll expect her to do the things that a woman is expected to do. People will be monitoring if she misbehaves a bit. The clan can tell you to chase her [away], "this is not the best wife".

All cases where you've seen a woman and man marrying and swearing that "I'll take care of you whether there are difficulties or not". And since old age [arrives], those things are forgotten and lead to the early deaths of husbands. ... Tradition should not be overlooked in order to maintain a family. Tradition should be upheld. A wife should remain responsible to the husband. All the domestic duties that a woman is supposed to do, a man must not be tempted to do, because some of those duties like making fire [collecting or supplying firewood, and lighting the stove], cleaning the house, and those [other] ones traditionally, they are the responsibilities of a woman. Not the husband... even if she has to delegate [them] to somebody or employ somebody to the duties.

He goes on to explain what would happen if a wife asks her husband to carry out duties that considered to be her responsibilities:

There will be differences between them. You know, if the wife tells the husband to go and sweep the house, it becomes very abnormal. There will be resistance. And when the resistance begins to be noticed, they [the wife and husband] will tend to keep away from one another.

In cases where a man agrees to carry out duties that are 'traditionally' considered those his wives, this would have certain implications within the community, and would lead people to conclude the following:

Either the wife is dead...or conclude that something is wrong in the home. There is no order. She's unsuitable to [carry out] the duties of the wife. The community will resist. It is unusual and abnormal. Even if the husband reacts [in a way that is

supportive of this behaviour], the community will come and say no, “you don’t stay in this house” (L013)

Men’s interpretation and reconstruction of norms substantiate women’s responsibilities in a way that establishes men’s control over women’s labour within the norms of the patriarchal “order”. However, women engage in struggles over interpretation as well.

Mariam, George’s wife, explains that taboos play an important role in women’s lives, as they are used as a powerful argument for men’s labour and participation on the farm:

Taboos are good because they make men help us. The only advantage is the taboos give equal responsibilities to both men and women, otherwise, if the taboos were not there, then men would never touch anything. (L014)

George’s account demonstrates that the language of “tradition”, in conjunction with clan sanctioning, are invoked by men as powerful tools in the reconstruction of gender-based duties and obligations. This discourse not only *restricts* what women can do, but also articulates what they *should* do to be considered “good” wives. Farmers’ accounts illustrate that within this “ordering”, women should not plant trees, bananas, or hedges, clear the land, dig trenches or terraces, and construct or repair houses (in particular, lay foundations or frames). Women as “helpers” are responsible for the family and home, and therefore should “dig”, plant seeds, weed, harvest, store farm produce, carry out kitchen work (prepare meals, clean utensils, etc.), and housework (cleaning, laundry, sweep rubbish from the house and compound), collect animal fodder, manure and water, collect and split firewood, and take care of children and their parents-in-law.

Clearly, this gendered “order” places the responsibility of much of the day-to-day household, family and on-farm labour on the shoulders of women, but also constructs these labour inputs and duties within the realm of what is considered ‘normal’, and ‘valued’ by

'tradition'. As such, a "good" wife not only fulfils the every-day survival needs of her family, but also holds a prominent role as a farmer. Women have always been the farmers, and their "goodness" continues to be defined by their farming abilities, by how hard they work and by how productive the *shamba* is. An older Logoli woman explains:

Girls were mostly on the farms and in the kitchen. ... Girls knew there place was on the farm. ... The criteria for selecting a good woman included how well she prepared the land. People wanted many wives who were hard workers on the land. ... (L032)

Norms have different implications for men, and dictate that they should not weed the *shamba*, carry out housework, carry water and baskets (used for collecting farm produce), or smear floors of houses. They also construct men's work and obligations, such as providing the *shamba*, clearing land, "digging" and tilling, digging trenches, constructing and repairing houses, and grazing cattle. The norm of being a "good" husband is used by women to argue for men's provision of labour input, of a *shamba* and a house, and of income to meet the monetary needs of the family.

Children and unmarried adult daughters and sons who live on the compound also figure into the 'traditional' division of labour, which is also differentiated by gender. Young women are 'traditionally' charged with taking care of small children, "digging", planting seeds, harvesting, as well as assisting in household duties, such as fetching water, laundry and cleaning. Young men's duties include grazing livestock, clearing land, and sometimes, fetching water and splitting wood.

The construction of these gender roles give rise to strong normative and interpretive currents. What is 'normal' and 'traditional' is established through discursive practice (Carney and Watts, 1990:230). A "good" Logoli wife does not "roam", perseveres in the face of hardships and maintains a posture of deference to male authority (Abwunza, 1997).

A “good” husband does not revert to violence, alcoholism or neglect his role and responsibilities as a provider for his family. Deviating from and contesting ‘traditional’ norms have very different repercussions for women and men. Sanctions are deeply gendered, as men are in powerful positions in terms of invoking, remembering and reconstructing elements of “tradition” within their capacities as elders. Abwunza has demonstrated that “tradition” is based on the cultural norm that men have the right to rule over women and children as “commanders” and this rule extends over the ownership of production and decision-making (1997:21-22). However, this ‘rule’ does not extend monolithically and unquestionably, but is contested.

Nonetheless, cultural discourse and its affects on gender relations cannot be separated from patriarchal ideology. The patriarchal “order” in Maragoli is not all mere ideology, but is observable and operative in action, in ideas and within discursive politics within conjugal relations (Schroeder, 1996; Moore, 1978). It not only has very real effects on social behaviour and gender relations, it also places very real limits on what is negotiable and what is not. Women are expected to maintain a deference to patriarchal authority or suffer the consequences, namely ‘punishment’ through violence (Abwunza, 1997:22), and the weighty sanctioning of being labelled a “bad” Logoli woman.

Within this “order”, Logoli women reproduce patriarchal discourse around labour, seemingly reinforcing existing power relations. But as Moore has suggested, the more entrenched, pervasive and ‘rational’ organizing cultural concepts appear, the more incongruities - as manifested in negotiation and resistance - there are bound to be behind everything “that seems apparent, and what in turn is hidden behind that” (1978:38). Indeed, in Maragoli, within seemingly rigid rules of conducts, there exists room to manoeuvre, and

space for interpretation and transformation.

Women strike a posture of deference to patriarchy in public, upholding men's roles as "commanders." Such a tactic creates room to manoeuvre so women can pursue their own interests, and push boundaries. The difference between what Scott calls public transcripts and hidden transcripts (1990) is useful in understanding the gender division of labour. It offers a way of exploring the spaces and gaps between norms and practice; as something that involves the continuous struggles over meanings between the patriarchal "order" manifested in norms regarding gender relations, as well as the counter-narratives, incongruities and negotiations. A focus on the complexities that thrive in politically charged contexts of the household "scramble" ideas about a monolithic patriarchal cultural "order", as well as romanticized ideas about overt resistance without considering its very real consequences.

5.2 The Diversity Of Farmers' Experiences

Despite seemingly rigid Avalogoli cultural idioms and norms that are meant to "order" gender roles and responsibilities, and thereby maintain power relations, farmers' stories illustrate there is a great deal of diversity and variability in the way people live out gender roles and responsibilities in practice. This diversity reveals much about the lack of congruence between conscious, articulated and culturally understood models of society and the way life is actually lived (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Moore, 1978). Focussing on this diversity brings into perspective that relations in production are distinctly social relations by virtue of the dominance of kinship and gender in shaping them, and therefore are inseparable from multiple positions affected by axes of differences such as gender, marital status, class, life-cycle and age (Carney and Watts, 1990:217). Farmers' positions impinges upon the types of resources they are able to access, the types of farming activities they engage in, as

well as the different amounts of energy, time and labour they are able to invest in order to sustain the soils.

In this section, I discuss farmers' positionality and specific labour enterprises separately. This separation is for analytical purposes and does not correspond to the realities of farmers who have multiple and varied positions and who simultaneously engage in multiple farming enterprises⁵¹.

5.2.1 The 'Farmer' : A Diverse, Dynamic And Gendered Actor

As much of soil management and agriculture in Maragoli depends on household labour, it is important to understand the multiple constraints and opportunities that women and men face in their personal circumstances and within power hierarchies at the household level. Carney and Watts explain:

A focus on local power structures within the household... in particular domestic power, and the dominant male order which sustains it is central to the process of vesting rights of access and control over people and resources within household social structures. Understanding the complex overlapping rights and obligations, and competing interests between household members - that is to say, the relations of domination within the household and the cultural representations that produce and reproduce these power relations - is a critical starting point in understanding the politics, and the points of resistance, associated with new forms of labour control and social integration. ... (1990:217).

The Avalogoli household is a useful point of departure from which to begin a gendered analysis which focuses on the diverse and dynamic nature of people's everyday experiences and struggles over access to and control of labour, as they are mediated by marital status, class, and age and life-cycle circumstances.

Marital Status

Marriage is an important channel by which both women and men gain access to and control of resources central to farming and soil management. It is also a central organizing cultural concept through which identity, codes of conduct and behaviour pertaining to on-

farm labour are defined. However, farmers' accounts illustrate that there is a great deal of diversity in the way women and men live and experience marriage, which calls into question the western concept of a nuclear household unit which is characterized by the pooling and sharing of labour and income (Moore, 1988:55), and operating on the basis of monogamy. Further, the dynamics and variability within conjugal relations in Maragoli challenge Western models of the male household 'head,' highlighting the need to explore issues of household headship, and in particular, women headed households.

Changing Conjugal Relations, Changing Roles And Responsibilities

The 'conjugal contract' is crucial for understanding Avalogoli norms and idioms as well as the actual practices upon which gendered responsibilities for soil management are negotiated and divided. The conjugal contract is not a fixed 'given' but has been transformed and reworked over time in response to historical and political-economic changes. These changes have brought about an escalation of gender micro-politics, a charged social terrain where renegotiation of the conjugal contract, and struggles over symbolic and material struggles, are played out, as the following cases will show:

Rhoda

Rhoda is 70 years old and has been married for 55 years. She recounts how the 'traditional' gender division of labour and separate spheres of roles and responsibilities between women and men were divided when she was young:

During the days we grew up, we never bothered with being dependent fully to a man. Before, women arranged for food on their own with less of men's input. You could plant your own cassava or potatoes and keep a share for him. When the problems increased we just took a hoe and went to the farm. Then the food you harvest there, you cooked and shared it with your husband. You would not rely on him. So it didn't matter whether the man walked in with anything or not, because women had their own food already. That's how it was. We fended for ourselves, we never told our husbands to go to town to bring us money.

She explains that there have been drastic changes over time, as *shambas* no longer provide adequate food for many farmers, and women look towards their husbands to assist in the provision of income towards the purchase of food and other livelihood needs. When men are unable to fulfil this role, there is an escalation of hostility within the household:

Unlike now, there are very few homes with cassava and potatoes and such kinds of foods. And all the food, nearly all the food has to be bought from the town, and the husband is always looked upon to come home with food items. So the man who cannot buy food is courting domestic trouble, you know, and that's where the friction begins. People now have problems. Today's women begin cursing, "wherever he went, he doesn't care about his children". They tell their husbands "unless you bring food, you will see me", and they become hostile. They simply refuse [to persevere].

Rhoda reflects having 'persevered' through many hardships in her life while she observed other women ceasing to do so and failing to behave in the 'proper' Avalogoli manner:

When I took the hoe and tilled I thought I was improving things, I [now] wonder, was I improving things or spoiling things? I always think about it myself when it rains on me, it looks like I was asking for trouble. Then I ask myself about these women who roam around. They have everything. Then I brush off the thought. Today's women cannot work on the *shamba* and feed a man who sits at home; they have refused to persevere. They do not conform to the old style of life where a women's position was known. So, if I was a soft person I wouldn't be here. If I was a soft person, I wouldn't have worked on other people's *shambas* to feed my children. I want my name to be good and make history. People can uplift my name and use me as an example, and say that this woman was in problems but persevered till the end. My name will spread among my relatives and children. (L041)

Rhoda's narrative highlights several key points regarding the conjugal contract and the division of labour. It demonstrates the weight of cultural norms in giving meaning to what is normative and valued. When wives "persevere" within marriage, within the "old style of life", they are upheld as examples for others, and are immortalized as such even after their deaths. This is a key factor in understanding the negotiation of labour responsibilities and obligations between women and men, as those women who "persevere" and fulfill their labour obligations are in a better position to argue for men's fulfilment of duties.

Further, Rhoda's description of women's on-farm labour responsibilities corroborates Wagner's (1970) and Kitching's (1980) descriptions of the gender division of labour in

Maragoli in the 1930s and 1940s. While the husband allocated land for his and his wife's use, a woman's plot was not distinguished in any way by the labour process of cultivation or crop mix (Wagner, 1970, cited in Kitching, 1980:83). Rather, it was distinguished in end use, as women controlled produce from their own plots which were meant for family provisioning (ibid.). While women worked on their husbands' plots, they did not control the end-products of that labour, as their husbands retained exclusive rights to them (ibid.).

Rhoda's as well as other farmers' accounts illustrate the distinctiveness of the contemporary Avalogoli gender division of labour. While in many African contexts, the conjugal contract is marked by a gender division of labour based on men's control over cash crops (Schroeder, 1996; Carney and Watts, 1990), in Maragoli, such a clear-cut division does not exist; a finding that is substantiated by Carter et al.'s gender disaggregated survey on crops (1998). Rather, on-farm labour is traditionally divided by gender roles and responsibilities pertaining to specific labour enterprises.

Rhoda's narrative also demonstrates that there have been drastic changes in roles and responsibilities which have led to an escalation of intra-household politics, and which must be contextualized within broader aspects of history, political-economy and the environment. For instance, male out-migration and the subsequent loss of male labour and decision-making in agriculture and soil management arose from colonial policies and drove men to towns and plantations in search for wage labour. While Logoli women were always the farmers, this scarcity of men's labour further entrenched women's agricultural responsibilities. While women's primary role continues to be that of farmers based on the duty of providing labour and food for household needs in exchange for usufruct rights to land, this role can no longer fulfill livelihood requirements because of shrinking plot sizes,

the loss of communal grazing land and increasing trends towards the purchase of food.

Renegotiation Of The Conjugal Contract And Struggles Over Labour

While male out-migration prompted a major dislocation and disengagement of men's responsibilities in agriculture and soil management, a drive to a cash-based economy emphasized monetary remittances from men's employment and reinforced the Avalogoli "tradition" of men as "providers". Although this was made a necessity through the imposition of hut and poll taxes, new burdens from recent measures to 'adjust' the Kenyan economy have intensified demands on men to provide for the income requirements of their families - such as the escalating costs of school fees and health care. The failure of men to meet these needs in an economically precarious environment has been a major factor in the escalation of gender politics centred around the renegotiation of the conjugal contract. Rhoda's narrative described such an escalation of hostility between spouses based on husbands' failure in fulfilling their role as "providers." This concern was non-existent when she was growing up. These political-economic transformations have created significant changes in relations in production and have also prompted struggles over labour and their meaning in a situation where women face increased burdens in agriculture, soil management, and other spheres of life.

Frederika

Frederika is an economically poor married women aged 52, who married young through arranged marriage. She carries out most of the household and on-farm labour:

My duties are to fetch water, sweep the house, prepare food, going to the *posho* mill, come back and prepare a dish for the children and my husband, doing laundry, make sure that children have clothes. Myself, I have a problem getting clothes, and so I have to hire my labour in the neighbourhood for cash, especially during the months of December and January, when there are many things - there is a lot of work on the *shamba*, hunger is so much and there is nothing in the house, and drought - it's really

tough. I do this because I have no one to assist me. None of my children are employed. My husband is an alcoholic. He comes back in the house and demands food from his missions not knowing how it is acquired. He never performs any house duties. Furthermore, my own children while on vacation, have to hire their own labour for cash to purchase books and uniforms.

Frederika's husband helps minimally in carrying out *shamba* work. She carries out most of the *shamba* and soil management work. She explains:

When I've prepared my land, I do plant things like maize, cowpeas, beans, cassava, millet. ... After I've dug, I incorporate maize stalks from the previous harvest underneath the soil. I remove dropped leaves from the trees and put them together with manure. I also dump there manure, that is decomposed leaves, grass and manure from the *nbombe*. On my bananas, I clear the bush, spread some stalks and also add manure, and I've put there trenches [through her husband's labour input].

Her husband used to work as a *shamba*-boy. In order to gain access to his earnings, Frederika devised ways of intercepting his wages:

He used to assist a bit, noting that he was always drunk. I learned to cope right from the beginning and had to work even harder. Even when he was a *shamba*-boy, in order for me to get money from him, I had to go to the pay point. Otherwise, I will get nothing. I used some for paying fees, buying soap and for clothing. Otherwise, he simply disappeared into beer-drinking. Now, my husband helps on the farm in the mornings, clearing the compound and grazing the cows. Then he leaves in the afternoon. His priority seems to be beer and cigarettes. He buys those things before he thinks of anything else. Afterwards, he comes to beat me. It is problems all through. I have just persevered since we women need to bear with such situations. (L040)

Although he no longer works and contributes little to the day-to-day running of the household and *shamba*, but she still lives in the fear of violence and abuse from her husband.

Frederika's situation is not unique and illustrates that, in Maragoli, women carry out the bulk of farming, soil management and household labour even in cases where their husbands reside in the household. When husbands do not provide for the monetary needs of the family or labour inputs, women take on these tasks and responsibilities, adding to their already heavy labour burdens. The situation is most difficult for economically poor women and children, who often hire their labour on other people's *shambas*, sometimes withdrawing

their labour from their own *shambas* at crucial times, such as digging and planting season.

Faced with this situation, women negotiate their husband's labour input into agriculture and soil management with different degrees of success by invoking cultural norms which highlight men's failure to fulfil roles as "providers". In this way, Frederika negotiated her husband's labour input, as well as his wages at pay point, by drawing upon Avalogoli cultural discourse, highlighting his failure as a "provider" and his alcoholism.

Although women may be able to negotiate their husband's labour and income to some extent, men not only retain the upper hand in the creation and recreation of cultural norms and idioms, but also wield power in other real ways. Physical violence is a common occurrence in Maragoli and is a clear manifestation of men's power over women and a means of re-establishing authority. It is used as a weapon to control women's behaviour and therefore maintain patriarchal "order" within conjugal relations. Women have limited options but to "persevere" in the face of violence and inequitable power relations⁵². The following account illustrates the limitations set by this "order".

Jessika

Jessika is 44 year old senior co-wife and resides with her husband while her co-wife has a separate house and plot. Jessika explains the gender division of labour within the household:

In the house what I do in the morning is sweep the house, after that I prepare breakfast and then wash the utensils. Then I search for cow feeds. Later on I go and till the land. By this time he has already left. He does not do much of it. Most of the *shamba* work is done by the woman. This is because our plots are small. ... He can plant the seeds after I have tilled but he cannot frequent the land and till it. ... We don't hire labour for tilling. I do the tilling by myself. ... Our husband when we are tilling, he has to purchase the seeds and fertilizer for planting. He is responsible for that. He provides money for specific purposes. ... Like he says I've left this money for you to buy the food that you will eat. ... What he wants is nappier grass and the maize planted in a proper manner. He supervises the planting but when they are ready for harvesting he doesn't control the usage. We just use. Like vegetables he doesn't decide for me, I just do it myself.

Jessika's husband provides income towards her cash needs, although this is insufficient and irregular because of his work as a carpenter, and because it has to be shared with her co-wife. Jessika carries out most of the work and decision-making pertaining to her *shamba*, while her husband carries out a 'supervisory' role. Although Jessika is held up as an exemplary and 'persevering' co-wife in the community, and she is in a more powerful position as senior co-wife, she does not agree with polygyny, but believes that it is a "man's choice":

...I don't think it is a good thing. The reason why I think it is a bad thing is that when you are two, you can easily develop. You educate your children, eat well and dress well do everything to make your home good. But if you have a co-wife, the income is low. Your children can never get educated. Expenses are not met. Then you start blaming each other, meaning if the income is low you can't distribute it easily because its not enough. ... You can't get along well. So you kind of blame each other.

Having a co-wife means that resources such as land and income have to be shared among wives and children. This leads to an escalation of intra-household politics. However, rather than engage in the bitter war of words that normally ensues when a husband marries a second wife, Jessika chose to ignore the hostility and "keep quiet":

I used to have such feelings when it had just happened. ... Those days I used to feel he had degraded me because I thought if he knew I was his wife why did he marry another one ? I reached a stage where I considered leaving but then I thought my children will remain in problems. ... That is why I'm still here. Now even many people are giving me as an example "go to Jessika so that she can explain to you how people stay", because I am not complicated, they know that. So somebody can say, "you are very stubborn you should be spending some time with Jessika and her co-wife, they will tell you how life is".

It's a matter of perseverance. Even if you experience some difficulties and you are there, what will you do? There is nothing you can change. ... It's hard for a young woman to settle for marriage. In order to settle you need to be patient, whatever the circumstances. This is because, a man's word is final, even if he wants to marry a second wife. ... So life becomes tough and this is when most people give up, because he doesn't provide food and there is no good care. (L027)

Despite Jessika's disagreement, she accepted her husband's decision to marry a second wife because of the consequences that would have ensued had she stopped "persevering" and "walked", a final act of resistance. Ceasing to "persevere", even in the face of violence, abuse or inequitable circumstances, has major implications for women, as it effectively means divorcing their husbands and forfeiting their usufruct rights to land. Further, as

children are the “property” of the husband and his clan, when women “walk”, they either leave their children behind in uncertain environments in the hands of step-mothers, where their inheritance rights may be rendered vulnerable, or leave their children in their parental homes, if this is an option. These consequences are a major factor in keeping Jessika and other women from “walking”.

Jessika’s narrative also highlights dilemmas women face when they “walk” from circumstances that are difficult. As I illustrate in Chapter 6, when women “walk”, they face stark livelihood options. Further, as Rhoda’s account demonstrates, strong cultural stigmas exist against women who “walk” in a context where “persevering” is highly valued. With this context for “persevering”, it is possible to understand why women in Maragoli do not often withdraw their labour from their *shambas*. Nevertheless, women’s public transcript of “persevering” must itself be closely examined, especially in terms of its on-farm labour implications.

While it has been demonstrated that women withdraw their labour from their husband’s *shambas* in other African contexts in situations where they do not control the returns of their own labour (Schroeder, 1996; Mackenzie, 1995a; Carney and Watts, 1990), the same cannot be said for Maragoli. There are some significant reasons why women do not totally withdraw their labour from the *shamba*.

The first is the weight that goes with being a “good” wife. Being seen as a “bad” wife has symbolic and material consequences. When a husband passes away, she will most likely be stigmatized. Her life is open to critical discussion and scrutiny by others. By totally withdrawing her labour from the farm, she is not only viewed as being a “bad” wife and farmer, she is risking her long term claims to the land for herself and children. She must, at

the minimum, invest in farming as a symbolic and strategic gesture towards her commitment as “good” wives, while she invests in other livelihood options that are more lucrative in terms of generating a income and sustaining a livelihood. A minimum commitment of energy, time and labour into the farm has long term implications for soil management, which normally require intensive labour inputs. The possibility of totally withdrawing from labour on the farm and the household, means that she cannot continue to stay on her husband’s and clan’s land, as this is grounds for being “chased away”.

Second, there are restrictions which make the option of withdrawing labour untenable. There is no alternative land available, except in the rare opportunity where a woman can ‘borrow’ or rent. However, this requires capital or ties to people who may be willing to lend land⁵³. The option of buying or renting land, even for group, is not viable because of the high price of land, as well as men’s resistance to this.

The preceding discussion highlights the different ways of living marriage and focuses on the negotiation and struggles that take place within the household, the significance of which is that struggles over meanings and symbols are in themselves struggles over resources (Moore, 1993). Marriage then, is a site for gender politics. It is an arena for material as well as symbolic struggles between women and men where negotiation over roles and responsibilities impinge on access to resources central to sustaining the soils, as well as sustaining a livelihood.

Women-Headed Households And The Issue Of Household Headship

While much of conventional research assumes that the ‘head’ of the household is male, the experiences of farmers in Maragoli calls this into question. Women-headed households are both numerous and varied in Maragoli, and these circumstances have

implications on access, control and rights to resources such as labour, as well as women's status within society. The discussion below explores the different situations of *de facto* and *de jure* women-headed households.

De facto women-headed households are defined as those where husbands have out-migrated, or where husbands and wives reside together but their marriage exists "in name only". In these cases, women are in charge of day-to-day farming, soil management and livelihood responsibilities. The following narrative illustrates a situation where both circumstances have applied over time.

Etta

Etta is 56 year old. Her husband married a co-wife 12 years into their marriage. She explains:

Since I got married, life was good. But somewhere along the way of my married life, my husband began misbehaving. I thought, what has become of my house? Is it because my husband has married a second wife, hence undermining me? He reached a point of ordering me to leave his compound and go. ... His people [his brother] got inspired and investigated the whole conflict and found me innocent. They concluded, "Etta, you have no reason to leave". ... Why was I to leave so abruptly ? So this matter has in the past disturbed my mind. ... So he has to favour the second one [wife] and tends to hate the older one. ... My *shamba* was big enough, but he divided and gave some to my co-wife, and left me with a small piece. ... If you don't get enough strength and courage, it's very difficult. ... Because you have to take care of your children. The children cannot suffer.

When Etta's husband married a second wife, he allocated part of her *shamba* to his co-wife. When he began to neglect his obligations towards her, and ceased to fulfill his role as a "provider", she began to hire out her own labour.

When they were still working is when they were really bad people. ... They didn't send me anything. ... Even those days, school fees were not very high, and these children of mine, [they] made them not go to school by not paying their school fees. I told my children to just persevere because I had nothing else to say. Even when he was still paying fees, I would go there and he used to give me only school fees and nothing else. Then I would come and start afresh digging for other people's farms.

She eventually took a job as a cook in a local school and later became a TBA. She now

supports her family, and sometimes even her husband.

Now that he is out of work [retired], his economic power has gone down. He still gets a pension that he uses. When he's broke you will see him coming. And when he comes, he comes as a good person and very friendly. ... We greet each other, but he rarely comes to my house. ... I prepare a meal and we eat, but he never spends a night in my house, no. (L017)

Etta's marriage exists "in name" only. She has taken over all the roles and responsibilities in terms of farming, soil management and "providing". She makes all the decisions regarding the household and *shamba*. She is a de facto head of household.

Etta's account, along with those of Frederika and Jessika, demonstrate that while women may be married, their husbands provide little farming and soil management labour, or resources such as income for sustaining a livelihood. Nonetheless, women publically cite their husbands as 'heads' of household, although it clear that their husbands' input, both in terms of labour and income, is minimal at best. Similar to Pottier's (1989:465) findings in Rwanda, Logoli women's initial responses, or public transcripts about agricultural and soils practices, do not reflect the extent of their knowledge and decision-making power in these areas. What in-depth accounts reveal is that women are the farmers and sustainers of the soils, making the bulk of decisions based on in-depth knowledge established over the long-term regarding the micro-environments of their *shamba*, even though they do not always publically subscribe to these roles. Hence, agricultural researchers may under-estimate the central role of women through their public transcripts or the superficial conversations that often occur in "rapid" types of methods.

While many soil management 'development' initiatives miss out on this basic reality by focussing on men as 'farmers', Logoli men themselves reinforce this idea by invoking public transcripts which uphold them as "commanders" of the *shamba* and decision-making processes. What is significant is that men engage in this discourse as 'heads' of household,

through whom important ‘development’ resources are normally channelled. This picture of soil management, farming and “providing” for livelihood sustenance also upholds the way ‘traditional’ cultural norms and idioms regarding gender roles and responsibilities are articulated. Women sometimes continue to uphold this discourse of men as ‘heads’ of household even in situations where men have out-migrated for a great number of years, in order to create room to manoeuvre and deflect taboos and stigmas associated with being women heads of household.

Women whose husbands out-migrate constitute a particular group of de facto heads of household. Whether they view themselves as such depends largely on their own subjective understanding and may be affected by life-cycle and household position. For instance, younger newly-wed women are more likely to regard their husbands as ‘heads’ of household. De facto women-headed households differ from de jure women headed households (such as widows) as they do not face the same social stigmas and threats to land security. However, while their marital status allows them to escape the heavy social stigmas regarding being unmarried, they share the same types of labour and monetary constraints as widows. This situation is made especially acute when their husbands do not provide remittances, highlighting that the successful engagement of wage labour does not guarantee income from remittances, as men often take on second wives or lovers in urban settings, effectively diverting these resources. The account of Elizabeth, a young Logoli wife, illustrates such a situation further in this chapter.

De jure women-headed households are defined as those where women are responsible for the livelihood needs of all residing in the household and have the power to make major decisions. They are those where women are widows or are divorced. In this

section, I limit the discussion to widows, as divorced women rarely retain rights to land or continue to engage in farming and soils management, but are more involved in off-farm labour, a subject I discuss in Chapter 6. Widows are common heads of household in Maragoli. There is a great deal of diversity in widow's positionality. For instance, of the 15 widows and 2 widowers interviewed during this research, their ages ranged from 36 to 90, 5 had co-wives and 2 were economically elite. There are noticeably more widows than widowers in Maragoli, because men can remarry without losing access to land and property, while women cannot remarry and continue to remain on their deceased husband's *shamba*⁵⁴.

Widows who continue to "persevere" and remain on their husband's *shambas* after their death, are often concerned with maintaining their sons' rights to land, and their own access to land to maintain their livelihoods.

Queen

Queen is an economically poor widow with 5 children. She explains her circumstances and some of the problems she faces as a widow:

I was born in 1955 and got married in 1972, I got five children then my husband passed away in 1983. Since then I've been living in problems I can't even farm because my arm is almost withered, my children have never gone to school. Feeding is a problem in order for us to get a meal they [the children] have to sell their labour. And this is how we survive. ... I just do normal house chores. One of my children does work as a house servant. ... And one of my sons is in Nairobi roaming about. It's now five years and he's never been seen.

I feel bad when I stay with my children without any one to help me. That's my biggest problem. You know it becomes more difficult when a man dies, everything remains under your responsibility. ... It's been very difficult ever since he passed away. When he was alive he could go for casual jobs and sometimes he used to help and buy us some food. ... But as you know when men live in town, they become unpredictable, he could finish even six months without sending anything.

There is a difference, because as you know when you are alone you handle all the problems and needs alone, but those who are two easily share there needs. And there are certain jobs that can only be done by men. When there is a man in a home he can

plant bananas because I as a woman cannot do it. If the house needs repair then he can do it. ... Like the way my roof leaks. ... Demarcating the plants that mark the boundary. They are planted by men only. Men build houses. Even making trenches. Women can also dig but it's men who do it better, not women. Women cannot manage to use the spade while removing soil. (L030)

Queen describes a situation where, because of her status as head of household and being economically poor, she and her children are forced to hire out their own labour to make ends meet, thereby taking time away from her own *shamba*. This is further compounded by her poor health, which does not allow her to fully allocate her labour on the farm. Queen also sheds light on the gender division of roles and responsibilities in Maragoli which restrict women in carrying out certain one-time labour activities, although they carry out the bulk of the day-to-day on-farm labour.

The presence of husbands generally makes little difference in the amount of labour women carry out. Similar to Queen's narrative, women insisted that life had become harder after their husband's death while at the same time insisting that those same husbands provided inconsistent, unreliable or no monetary remittances and day-to-day labour in the *shamba* and the household when they were alive. While I recognized that a sporadic income is better than no income, I turned to cultural idioms in order to better understand this reconcile this discrepancy in discourse.

A husband's presence, although often "just in name", holds powerful meanings in Maragoli, as marriage is a norm by which all is measured. When women become widows their conduct, behaviour and labour is closely scrutinized by the community and clansmen, as Desi's account showed in Chapter 4. Widows often described that the first few months after their husband's death were the most trying, not only because of the added stress, labour and monetary requirements pertaining to their husband's funeral and attempts at land

appropriation but also because this was a period where they were closely being scrutinized by their husband's families, the community and friends. While widowhood does indeed bring women some degree of personal autonomy and new measures of decision-making power as heads of household, these gains are off-set by strong social scrutiny, stigmas and taboos, and an intensification of labour, especially in situations where husbands had provided labour or income in the past, or when women suffer "bad" reputations.

Class And Social Differentiation

Male out-migration has affected social differentiation in Maragoli over time.

Crowley and Carter explain:

Who migrates and who does not, the differences in benefits from off farm opportunities, and assessments of returns to labour on farm made within this broader context have had a profound impact on agrarian change and its social significance (1996:2).

During colonial rule, changes brought from education of children at missionary schools, as well as the growing importance of cash from out-migration of male labour for wage employment, affected the seniority within the lineage as the basis for accumulating goods, status and political power (Carter et al., 1998:9). Thus, differentiation within Maragoli society has become rooted in the relative success of the individual in the cash-driven market economy through the accumulation of monetary wealth, and a new indicator and potential factor of wealth became the ability to hire other people's labour for agricultural purposes beyond the extended family (ibid.). The accumulation of monetary wealth not only continues to play a key role in the differentiation of society and the formation of class in Maragoli, but also in understandings of culture based on power, class and status. Farmers' accounts illustrate that the degree to which farmers are able to access income, has implications on the extent to which they are able to access other people's labour as a key resource necessary for

farming and sustaining the soils.

In particular, economically poor farmers face acute constraints in terms of labour burdens and accessing labour. The narratives of Queen and Frederika illustrate that they face an intensification of labour burdens, having not only to care for their own *shambas*, but also having to hire out their labour on other people's *shambas* in order to make ends meet. They are not be able to meet other livelihood requirements such as sending their children to school. In this vicious circle, they are unable to devote time, energy and labour they require to engage in farming and soil management activities to the extent they would like. This stark situation is exacerbated by feeling of despair and acute constraints such as lack of food and income to meet health care needs or education, as well as their lowered status within society.

While there has been an increased differentiation of Avalogoli society in recent times, the situation is not simply a picture of 'haves' and 'have nots'. Intricate and complex sets of social ties, relations and obligations detract from such a simplistic picture. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, women and men engage in and invoke a host of social relationships and ties to access resources. Thus, elite relatives, friends and neighbours do not 'enjoy' their wealth in isolation - they are subject to the expectations, rights and obligations of poorer relatives, friends and neighbours; an important channel of access for economically poor farmers in terms of farming and soil management. The following account illustrates the resources and constraints that economically wealthy woman sometimes face despite their privileged status.

Febe

Febe, is an economically elite woman. Her husband resides with her but contributes little input and labour towards the day-to-day running of the *shamba* and household.

My husband doesn't do any work on the *shamba*. I dig, plant, cultivate, weed and even harvest. I do the cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the houses. He only provides the money. The money comes from his pension. And sometimes he helps with planting. (L014)

Similar to other Logoli men, Febe's husband considers himself the 'head' of the household by virtue of the fact that he provides money for both agricultural and household use. However, his contributions end there. He has little knowledge of the day-to-day details regarding farming, livestock and soil management.

Economically wealthy women are advantaged in many ways. While Febe describes carrying out activities such as "digging", weeding, harvesting, etc., in practice, she takes a supervisory and decision-making role in terms of farming, soil management, and household work, rarely engaging in labour-intensive activities herself. Economically wealthy women like Febe are able to hire other people's labour to carry out labour-intensive activities in terms of farming, soil erosion and conservation. They carry out the task of supervising hired labourers, which not only requires monetary payment, usually 40-50 Shillings per day, but also the provision of a meal. Economically elite women sometimes also hire permanent *shamba*-boys and 'house-girls' to carry day-to-day farming, soil management and household work.

Another advantage that economically elite women have is access to inputs for soil management. They often own a great number of livestock which they keep in elaborate cow *bomas*, from which they obtain large quantities of organic manure for maintaining soil fertility. From these *bomas*, they are also able to collect slurry which acts as an effective fertilizer on crops such as napier grass, substantially increasing yields. They also tend to own a larger acreage of land, sometimes spread over more than one *shamba*, on which they diversify and spread risks over a variety of soil types and micro-environments (Crowley and Carter, 1996:18). Many grow enough napier grass on one single plot to feed their livestock,

and sometimes sell the surplus. They may also engage in extensive soil management techniques, making them obvious 'targets' as 'progressive farmers' by agricultural extension workers and 'development' practitioners. One woman explained that she learned from extension workers how to use left-over brewer's waste from the beer brewery in Kisumu to feed her livestock. This technique has increased the quantity and quality of organic manure and urine produced from her cows, which in turn has increased crop yields.

However, being economically elite does not necessarily translate into full control and access to resources such as labour or income. This depends on women's relationship with their husbands and their positioning in the household. For example, an economically elite Logoli woman described a situation where, despite the fact that she had a separate income from teaching, her husband appropriated her salary at pay point throughout their marriage by invoking his status as 'head' of household, leaving her with little income to run the household and *shamba*. While they continue to live on the same compound, they reside in separate houses. Her access to resources, such as transportation and income, which are vital for managing and farming numerous dispersed plots, is limited by her husband. This example challenges the prevailing view of the 'pooling' household, questions gender-neutral assumptions about access to resources as a 'given' for elite farmers, and highlights that elite women can also be vulnerable in their personal circumstances within conjugal relations.

Age And Changing Life-Cycle And Household Circumstances

Depending on their personal circumstances - age, life-cycle positioning and household circumstances - women and men differentially access and control on-farm labour vital for farming and soil management. Starting from one end of the age scale, young children have always been expected to contribute labour to lighter farming and soil

management activities, although formal education and economic demands have drawn away even these contributions from the *shamba*⁵⁵. An older Logoli woman explains:

Adults used to work on the *shamba*. They could till and the children do the weeding. Children never used to till. Children of this age never worked on the *shamba*. Like this ones [girls] would be told to babysit, these ones [boys] would be asked to take care of cows. It is the big children who would till the land. It's the adults who tilled the *shamba*. Today, if there is no education then they are just taken to the *shamba*. But during our days, it was said that if children work on the *shamba*, they will get stunted, they won't grow tall. (L046)

Today, formal schooling and education has continued to make children's labour input into farming and soil management scarce. Despite this loss of labour, women place a great deal of importance on the education and schooling of both daughters and sons.

Education is perceived as a potentially lucrative avenue for gaining employment and providing resources. Nevertheless, both unmarried young women and men are expected to contribute their labour to the compound, household and *shamba*, although the type and amount is differentiated by gender, varies during the annual cycle and is also dependent on class. While school-going children and adults are not expected to contribute to the day-to-day labour requirements during the semester, their labour in the *shamba* and the household is expected and valued compound during periods of school leave, as it lightens the labour loads of the women on the. Economically poor children sometimes hire out their labour on other people's *shamba* to contribute towards school fees and household expenses. However, children do not always cooperate with their parents and complain about economic pressures and social norms which control their behaviour, labour, time and personal freedom.

Young women in the early stages of their marital life face acute problems in terms of the control and allocation of their own labour and its product, especially when they defy the dictates of cultural norms, unleashing strong stigmas and sanctioning in situations such

as having children out-of-wedlock. The following narrative illustrates such a situation.

Elizabeth

When she was 19, Elizabeth had a child out-of-wedlock and married the biological father 3 years later. She describes her circumstances and the reaction from the community:

It is not allowed for young girls to get children before marriage, so when it happens you are abused. You are told that you are a bad girl and you've left school before completion. ... I was told "you are a mother, why can't you go home and take care of your child?". My dignity in the community was lowered. ... My main problem was the child because my parents could not afford feeding and clothing the child. So the little money [I] shared between me and the child. I finished school and decided to practice farming until I got married. My husband agreed. He called me and then he sent some old mamas to come and collect me.

Elizabeth's husband lives in Nairobi, where he works as a casual labourer. He sends little or no remittances.

He is in Nairobi looking for a job. Earlier, he had a casual job and he only contributed 150 Shillings per month. I buy food, clothing but the money is so little, like now my son is sick but I cannot afford to take him to hospital. ... It is difficult being alone, because everything is upon you. Feeding the children and clothing them, educating them, and doing some household work, and even going to the *shamba*. And for instance, my house is not roofed properly so when it leaks I have to get someone to repair. ... I am left without seeing my husband.

Elizabeth's husband is the only son in the family. Her sisters-in-law are not married and live in the household. Her mother-in-law has yet to allocate her land, although she has been given a small section where she grows cabbages, sugar cane and bananas. She carries out the bulk of the *shamba* and household work, and yet, is not recognized or compensated for her efforts. She has frequent quarrels with her sisters-in-law:

All the work is done by me, and the in-laws only do a few duties. Mostly my mother-in-law is picking tea because it is not frequent. I go and fetch water 6 to 8 time a day.

Like it is dry like now, you can go a lot of times. I also cook, clean, graze the cow, do washing, take care of the children and work on the *shamba*. Digging, they [sisters-in-law] help me on the mother-in-law's farm. Also they help me cook and iron, and sometimes washing of the baby. Sometimes when visitors come, most of the time I am the one who does [the cooking]. And when eating time comes, I'm given a very small portion, yet I work more. I feel that is mistreatment. The work is not divided fairly. ... On the side of food it becomes a problem because my husband does casual work. He cannot afford bringing money for food so it becomes a problem because [the sisters-in-law] they quarrel. It is painful. They say you are just eating yet your husband brings nothing. (L006)

In Maragoli, the position of a woman in her husband's compound in terms of her age, and life-cycle has implications on the amount of labour and degree of control she exerts in making decisions and accessing resources which are vital to farming and soil management, including her own labour. Her personal circumstances, when interpreted through cultural categories, affect how she is viewed by her husband, in-laws, the community, and the degree to which she has to prove herself as a "good" wife.

Elizabeth's account illustrates how women who have children out-of-wedlock face strong social stigmas which paint them as "bad" women. When a woman manages to marry the biological father, this stigma does not go away and is manipulated by her husband, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other members of the compound in order to make additional claims on her on-farm labour until she has 'proved' herself a "good" wife. The fact that Elizabeth had a child out-of-wedlock has been used as a lever over her by her unmarried sisters-in-law - who themselves face strong social pressures from their brother and members of the community to leave their home and to marry elsewhere - and who manipulate the cultural stigmas and norms to transfer some of their own labour responsibilities to her. This lever is also used by her mother-in-law, who in the absence of her deceased husband, has not initiated the allocation of the most lucrative part of the *shamba*, the tea plantation, to her son, thereby withholding the rights to access, use and control over its products from her daughter-in-law.

Elizabeth's experiences are not unique. Cultural taboos are often used to exert power over young women during the early stages of marital life to gain access to their labour. This means that they work on *shambas* where they do not always control their own labour, or

benefit from the products of that labour. They often work “like maids” and face heavy work burdens and time constraints, which leave little time to work on their own plots, or to undertake soil management practices or to partake fully in important social institutions⁵⁶.

In addition, they face constraints in terms of accessing resources, such as land, farming and soil management inputs, and food. Nonetheless, over time, they manage to navigate the in-between spaces and hire out their own labour to meet their monetary needs, join women’s groups and forge relationships with others who are sympathetic to their situation.

Despite all the injustices and mistreatment that Elizabeth faces, she has been allocated a small plot, is able to access a small amount of organic and green manure from the compound, and have a trench built, which illustrates her ability to negotiate these processes. By calling upon cultural idioms which emphasise her hard work, her ‘perseverance’ and her ‘rightful’ position, she is able to find room to manoeuvre and to gain access and use of the land over her sisters-in-law, despite power relations which place her in a vulnerable position.

Another important factor which places young women in a vulnerable position, and which circumscribes their capacity to control and allocate their own labour within conjugal and extended family relations, is bridewealth. Referred to by participants as “dowry”, it involves the transfer of wealth (usually large sums of money and cows) from the man’s to the woman’s family. While in the past, marriage and the negotiation of bridewealth was traditionally organized and overseen by parents and elder relatives, today, most women and men elope. Women simply take up residence on a man’s compound, thereby temporarily eschewing bridewealth discussions and formal wedding ceremonies.

In today’s economic circumstances, the escalating costs of bridewealth payments mean that they are rarely paid in full, but rather rest on a system of debts to be paid sometime

in the undefined future (and sometimes never paid)⁵⁷. Bridewealth is important to young women in the early stages of marital life as their reputation as “good” wives is reflected in its payment. One woman explains:

Dowry is to all people who want to get married, going to another family. At least you cannot go there freely. The man must be responsible at least to give the parents something. Some *ngombes* with cash. (L002)

The negotiation and payment of bridewealth is an important symbolic gesture which opens the way for reciprocal relations vital to both women and their family’s welfare (Abwunza, 1997:21), and in turn, is a potential avenue for accessing future material resources. Given this importance, the payment of bridewealth involves struggles over both symbolic and material resources between spouses. Most importantly, the obligation of the husband and his family to pay bridewealth to his wife’s family can be used as a lever to control her labour and rights to access on-farm resources. The degree of autonomy and space a woman can manoeuvre depends on her relationship with her husband and in-laws and the degree to which she is able to negotiate. This, in turn, depends on her reputation. An older woman recalls the heavy work burdens she faced when she first married:

It depends on the family. You can be married in a family whereby you’ll get a mother-in-law who does not like you. She starts creating problems and then makes the marriage to be broken. When the in-laws have interfered with the marriage, there is no peace. You’ll get your mother-in-law who will need you to serve that family for many years. And maybe this lady where she comes from she is not brought up doing work for 8 people. Now she is preparing *ugali* for 10 people, fetching water all day, cooking all the time, looking after the *ngombes*...doing all the work. It becomes too hard for the girl. She’s miserable. She is not given any autonomy. You won’t be so happy being a slave there. ... She’s in that home, doing all the work, and has not been paid dowry. You are labouring without anything to your home. It can take almost 4 to 5 years, it is very cruel. You start growing old. ... These are some of the things that make mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law to collide. (L002)

The payment of bridewealth, which is a powerful symbol of a woman’s status as a

“good” wife, may be manipulated to maintain power relations so that a woman is never totally in control of decisions pertaining to her own labour and the products of that labour. This has some very real repercussions on farming and soil management, as women sometimes resist in subtle ways. They allocate the minimal amount of effort possible to farming and soil management activities from which they do not gain or benefit, while simultaneously engaging in activities where they control the products of their labour: i.e. participation in women’s groups, in income generation and in extra-marital relationships.

The fact that newlywed women move from their family’s to their husband’s homes and *shambas* has important implications for agriculture and soil management labour. Women’s original homes vary in proximity, because for an Avalogoli marriage not to be considered incestuous, the man and women must be unrelated through both the mother’s and father’s side for at least two ascending generations (Abwunza, 1997:16). As marrying a relative results in a curse which afflicts the whole family, men increasingly search for marriageable women from far away and non-Maragoli areas (ibid:59). Given the spatial variability of soils and land, this move means that newly-wed women must learn the intricacies of carrying out farming and soil management in their new micro-environments from their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. This process of acquiring agricultural and soils knowledge about new micro-environments can be used as another lever by mother and sisters-in-law over newly-wed women to make claims on their labour.

Women, however, may learn to assert themselves over time as they gain more confidence and knowledge of their micro-environments and forge their own set of social ties. Moreover, they may also bring new ideas about farming and soil management practices to local environments through this micro-migration, which they can in turn use to negotiate

their own position in the compound.

On the other hand, the extent to which older women and men are able to negotiate access to resources and control the amount of labour which they invest, depends on their class and marital status, as well as the types of relationships they have with other members in the compound. Older women can make claims on the labour of a newly-wed daughter-in-law for *shamba* and household work, often retaining control over harvesting activities, especially over lucrative cash-crops like tea, thereby continuing their decision-making roles over the *shamba*. However, once a daughter-in-law has had 3-4 children and has “perservered”, this role as decision-maker is no longer tenable. A mother-in-law must prepare to have the remaining portions of land allocated to her son, and therefore, her daughter-in-law for her access and use. This may be forced upon her by her husband, whose decision it is ‘traditionally.’ Therefore, her ability to negotiate the timing of this transfer may also be dependent on her relationship with her husband.

As older women and men recognize that they will be ultimately cared for by their children, the types of relationships they have with their own children, step-children, grandchildren and their daughters-in-laws, are significant for the types of resources and care they are likely to receive in later stages of their lives. Consequently, the allocation of resources that remain under their control are also used to negotiate care and resources in the future. For instance, older women continue to control banana plantations and the distribution of the products from it, such as bananas, inter-cropped vegetables, as well as banana leaves and stalks used as green manure. They also control the products from family woodlots and the allocation of livestock for ceremonial purposes which can be used as levers to gain access to food, labour and inputs from grandchildren as well as daughters-in-law. In addition, older

women also continue to draw on resources from reciprocal relationships maintained with their own married daughters. Lastly, as older women often care for grandchildren, they also use this important labour input to negotiate other resources in return.

Men's ability to negotiate their positions on the compound rests upon their ability to provide for the family needs in the household and *shamba* over time. Many Maragoli men retire in their homes, and those who are entitled to pensions from previous wage labour are in better positions to negotiate resources for their care as they are able to continue to fulfill their roles as "providers." These men can take on a 'supervisory' role, albeit in name only, over soil management and farming. For example, one elderly elite man with a pension claimed to be the 'farmer' in control of the *shamba*, but upon further questioning did not know about the types of crops grown or soil management practices undertaken (or even the age of his children). Men who are unable to meet these requirements or failed to meet them in the past, complain bitterly about how children and wives do not listen or comply to the "order" which requires them to provide labour and care towards them in terms of household roles and responsibilities.

5.2.2 "Don't You Know That Agriculture And Soils Are The Same Thing ?" : Diverse On-Farm Labour Enterprises

Just as there is diversity amongst farmers, there is a wide diversity in the types of soil management and agricultural activities in which farmers engage, giving Maragoli its characteristic intensive mixed farming. Despite the fact that women's labour in farming and soil management activities have intensified in light of changes in the conjugal contract, they manage to engage in a multitude of diverse farming, soil conservation and erosion activities. These diverse activities are illustrated in tables 5.1. and 5.2 respectively.

Table 5.1 : The Diverse Variety Of Farmer's Crops And Livestock In Maragoli

Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Root Crops	Other	Cash Crops	Livestock
Maize	<i>Sukumawiki</i> *	Bananas	Onions	Woodlots	Tea	<i>Kukus</i>
Sorghum	<i>Mito</i> *	Guavas	Ground nuts	Flowers	Coffee	Grade Cows
Millet	<i>Mutere</i> *	Paw Paws	Potatoes	Sugarcane	French Beans	Crossbred Cows
Lentils	Cowpeas*	Avocados	Sweet Potatoes	Napier Grass		Indigenous Cows
	Cabbage	Mango	Cassava			Goats
	Beans	Tomatoes	Carrots			Turkeys
	Pumpkins	Berries	Arrow Root			Ducks/Geese
	Squash	Loquats				Cats
	<i>Tsisaga</i> *					Dogs
	<i>Tisuzza</i>					Sheep

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, group interviews and surveys. N= 47 participants.

*Indigenous green collards

Table 5.2 : Diversity In Soil Management Practices In Maragoli

Soil Fertility	Soil Erosion
<u>Organic Fertilizers</u>	<u>Mulching</u>
Cow Manure	Mulching With Couch Grass
Chicken Droppings	Mulching With Maize Stalks/Stover
Other Livestock Manure	Mulching
Cow Urine And Run-Off From Shed	Compost Pits
Improving Quality of Cow Manure Through Feed*	Rubbish collected from the yard
Refuse from the household	Rubbish collected from the household
Refuse from the farm	
Green manure	
<u>Inorganic Fertilizers</u>	
Store-bought Chemical Fertilizers	<u>Use of Crops</u>
Chemical Fertilizers From	Crop Rotation
Placing Top Dressing In Planting Holes	Inter-cropping
<u>Combination</u>	Rotational Bush Fallowing
Combination Organic and Inorganic Fertilizers	

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, group interviews and surveys. N= 47 participants.

*Cows feed consisting of spent barley bought from beer breweries

Farmers' ability to carry out any combination of these activities depends on a number of factors which include personal preferences, motivations and access to information, as well as their ability to negotiate access to resources, such as money, labour and inputs. Another factor, which will be explored in Chapter 6, has to do with the availability and willingness to invest time and energy in these activities in the face of other competing priorities.

By focussing on five key labour enterprises, I highlight what has always been obvious to Logoli farmers: that agriculture and soils issues are inextricably intertwined. I illustrate that there is a relationship between the gender division of labour and soil management. However this gendered relationship is not static. Faced with an ever-changing environmental and political-economic context, the gendered division of labour in Maragoli has been adapted and transformed in practice, sometimes challenging 'traditional' gender roles and male authority, while in other cases reproducing and entrenching patriarchal "order".

While women continue to carry out the bulk of the day-to-day activities in farming and soil management, they have taken on additional roles and responsibilities that were considered male in the past. Although some men still engage in 'traditional' roles and responsibilities, these activities are not consistently or uniformly carried out and men's labour input into the *shamba* has generally been on the decline. In the past, men's roles and responsibilities rested on one-time labour contributions to planting trees and hedges, digging trenches and clearing land, as well as caring for livestock and specific labour inputs into certain types of crops. Today, the activities, that continue be controlled by men and remain taboo for women are those which involve activities which are bound up in the material and symbolic control of land and property and, therefore, power. In the next section, I illustrate changes and continuities associated with planting of trees and hedges, digging trenches,

caring for livestock, clearing land and planting cash crops.

Trees And Hedges: The Reinforcement Of Gendered Boundaries

Trees and hedges have important functions for conserving the soils and have multiple values and meanings in Maragoli. They are an important source of fertilizer, green manure for mulching, composting and a measure against soil erosion - for “holding the soils” especially during the rains. Trees and hedges are useful for providing shade, fodder, and provide a means for tethering cows. They also act as symbolic and material symbols which mark claims to land and demarcate boundaries. Following colonial policies which encouraged forestation in order to improve increase water infiltration and conserve water and soil in the 1930s and 1950s, trees became an important cash crop which provided firewood for sale (Carter and Crowley, 1997:9-10). Today, trees continue to be considered valuable cash crops which provide income through the sale of fruits, firewood and construction materials. Products from trees such as fuelwood and as well as barks, berries and other medicinal products are used in barter and exchange. For instance, a Logoli farmer described how she negotiated the payment of school fees with the local school by providing fuelwood from a large tree on her *shamba*. In addition, the number of hedges used for demarcating physical boundaries in Maragoli has increased over time, because of changes in land tenure and privitization of land under the ownership of the ‘head’ of household⁵⁸.

Given the multiple uses for trees and hedges, it is important to distinguish between the one-time activity of planting from the on-going labour involved in managing and harvesting its products. In marked contrast to other Kenyan contexts (Rocheleau and Edmunds, for Machakos, 1997; Bradley, for Kakamega, 1991), in Maragoli the planting of hedges for the purposes of demarcating boundaries is controlled by men. Planting trees also

remains the exclusive domain of men, and is circumscribed by very strong cultural taboos.

An elder in her 80's describes the taboo that keep women from planting trees (in this case bananas, an important food crop):

Bananas, women never plant. No, no. Potatoes you plant, vegetables you plant. But a banana, that was prohibited. Even these days, women do not plant bananas. Period. In Avalogoli culture... they believe that if a woman planted bananas, she will become barren. (L039)

Where a tree is planted on the *shamba* has always been a point of struggle between husbands and wives, and may partially explain the “exceedingly strong opposition” that was encountered in the 1950s to colonial forestation programs (DCNN, 1955:12). In the contemporary situation, women complain that trees are sometimes planted in locations that do not meet their approval and where they provide unwanted shade or drain water or nutrients away from crops. Although women carry out the day-to-day work and decision making in farming and soil management, the planting of trees is a symbolic gesture of power invoked by men. One Avalogoli woman explains:

You cannot plant trees on the compound and claim “these are my trees” when your husband is alive. You cannot plant ephobia and say “this is the fence on my shamba” when your husband is alive. Those are the two customs...they say that if you do these things when he is alive then you want him to die.

However, this may be negotiated, contested and even sabotaged by women.

The taboos that restrict women from planting trees and hedges continue to hold sway in the absence of husbands. While men's roles and responsibilities have eroded in other labour enterprises, men continue to retain control over the one-time activity of planting trees and hedges in all circumstances. The control over this activity is bound up with power and control of property and it confirms their control over the material and symbolic demarcation of physical space and boundaries. Both the decision-making and the actual labour allocation

in planting trees stresses men's roles as 'heads' of household and is symbolic of their power.

Women who are heads of household cannot simply hire men to plant trees and hedges, but must call upon male relatives or sons to do so. This means that gendered rights and nested obligations around the control of trees and hedges are central when formulating soil erosion policies and research initiatives.

While trees and hedges remains the domain of men, the maintenance and access to the products of trees is more often the responsibility of women. One woman explains:

Once a man has planted bananas, they really don't bother looking after bananas. ... It's the woman who manages the banana plantation and sells and cooks.

This division of labour and roles indicates that the control over and use rights to trees are based on multiple, nested and overlapping rights which are mediated by different gender responsibilities. Bananas, in particular, provide a good example of the multiple use values of trees, as well as their cultural and gender meanings. In the past, both the planting and the use of bananas were a male activity. Today, bananas are planted by almost all households, and while women continue to be restricted in planting, they actively harvest, maintain and control the products from banana trees. The bananas can be used as food, sold or exchanged, and the leaves and stalks act as green manure and livestock fodder. This control of the banana plot continues even after other parts of the *shamba* are allocated to sons and daughters-in-law. The importance of this micro-niche to women's long term security helps to explain why they dedicate a great deal of labour, and energy to this part of the *shamba*, and why this is the most fertile part of the *shamba*.

“Digging Holes”: Trenches

“Digging holes”, or trenches, is part of farmers' strategy to sustain their soils. Not

only do trenches prevent the erosion of soils, and hold water, they are also a way of controlling pests as they create a break in the burrows of moles and inundate these passages with rain-water. While taboos around constructing trenches and terraces dictate that “digging holes” is the role of men, practice suggests that there is some degree of ‘blurring’ in terms of how this practice is actually carried out. This can be made clear by distinguishing the process of decision-making from practice. Women often have trenches built on their *shamba* to prevent soil erosion. They do this by hiring and bartering men’s or drawing on adult sons’ labour. While women do not actually dig trenches themselves because of social stigmas attached, the decision to have them constructed is often made by them.

Unlike trees and hedges, trenches are not symbolic or material demarcations of property ownership, which may explain the ‘blurring’ of this activity. However, it is in women’s interest in keeping this labour-intensive activity in the domain of men. As Queen explained in her narrative, “women cannot manage to use the spade while removing soil”.

Rather than a claim that women are incapable of removing soil, this discourse is used by women as a strategy of assuring that men contribute labour, and that labour, when available, is spread more equitably among spouses. Cultural restrictions on digging trenches have important implications for conservation strategies and policies, as they must recognize that decision-making, control of allocation and labour around this activity are highly gendered.

Livestock

Livestock are an integral part of people’s lives, and are an important resource, as well as means of accumulating wealth in Maragoli. In the past, livestock were the responsibility of men and boys and animals were grazed jointly on communal lands during the day and corralled in their respective homesteads by night (Crowley and Carter, 1996:4). Colonial

land alienation policies led to the disappearance of grazing land and decreased *shamba* sizes, while at the same time, transforming the remaining grazing land for agricultural production (Kitching, 1980:240). Decreased availability of grazing land and men's diminished roles in this capacity were exacerbated by male out-migration, and led to an increase in "zero-grazing" practices. This increased labour for women, because it became their responsibility to find, cut and carry fodder to tethered cows. After independence, exotic dairy cattle were sold in large numbers by European farmers, giving a boost to milk production and sale (Carter et. al, 1998:16). In the 1970s, cross-bred and grade cows were encouraged through government policies⁵⁹ but never supplanted indigenous cows which were valued for bridewealth and as a reserve for wealth in difficult times (Crowley and Carter, 1996:27-29). Cross-bred cows required intense labour inputs such as cut-and-carry fodder management, an activity which fell on the shoulders of women.

Today, livestock continues to be valued for its significance in social, cultural and economic realms of life, and is an important source of organic fertilizer for sustaining the soils. The ownership of livestock is an important indigenous indicator of wealth. It also provides income from the sale of milk, meat, poultry, eggs, offspring and surplus manure. The scale of these enterprises depends on the number of livestock owned, which is in turn is contingent on a farmer's class, and ranges from the 'sale' of milk through bartering of small quantities, to selling in large volume.

Today, most cows are zero-grazed, although some are grazed along roadsides, usually by male children or hired *shamba*-boys. The labour-intensive activity of cultivating, searching cutting, collecting and carrying fodder, as well as collecting cow manure, remains the responsibility of women. While trading livestock is the domain of men, this does not

preclude women from engaging in trading by drawing upon men's assistance, especially in the absence of husbands. Most Avalogoli farmers today opt for grade or cross-bred grade cows, in addition to indigenous cows, if they can afford either or both. Economically poor farmers may enter into an agreement with a willing neighbour, friend or relative with inadequate land, fodder or labour, in order to gain access to livestock, fertilizer and its produce. The practice of keeping and maintaining livestock on their *shamba* for a neighbour, friend or extended family member in exchange for organic manure and a certain number of offspring was brought up by farmers as a strategy to "chase away the striga weed" on their *shambas*. In essence, a cow or goat is 'lent' to them in exchange for organic manure and other resources from livestock.

Livestock, a vital source of organic fertilizer, plays a central role in soil conservation. Cow-dung by itself, or in combination with chemical fertilizers or other types of organic inputs (such as ash or compost material), is used by a majority of farmers in Maragoli. The management and application of organic fertilizer is more labour-intensive than the application of chemical fertilizers. Yet, many farmers opt to use organic fertilizers as they claim that chemical fertilizers "burn" crops and "dry" the soils. They feel that organic fertilizers are best in terms of maintaining the long-term sustainability of the soil, and cite examples of people they know who use organic fertilizers and get good yields. The following farmers' accounts illustrates the range of preferences in fertilizer. One farmer explains:

I prefer cow manure, it is better for fertility. ... There is a mole which is really giving us problems. The things on my garden are not pleasing because the land there is not fertile. I only have one cow and it does not produce enough manure. So I revert to buying chemical fertilizer. Its name I do not know. (L040)

Another farmer describes:

Even though when I have cow dung manure, I mix with three kilos of commercial fertilizer. ... It's just a matter of using both because the plot is not big. There is no otherwise. ... Our soils are funny, if you want them to produce good yields you have to use both. That way you harvest something good. If you use farm manure the crops won't do well. ... The soils are now exhausted. ...

Economically wealthy farmers tend to have more organic manure available because they own large numbers of livestock, and are able to hire full-time labour for livestock rearing and the production of fodder and organic fertilizer. As such, they use labour intensive methods such as the application of slurry from cow *bomas* on crops such as napier grass to increase yields. Napier grass is commonly grown in Maragoli for fodder, erosion control and is an important cash crop. It can be harvested four or more times a year. However, poor households sometimes harvest this crop before it has reached maturity and rarely apply inputs. Farmers also use manure from poultry, especially on non-indigenous vegetables such as onions, cabbages and tomatoes.

An increase in prices for inputs such as chemical fertilizers prompted by SAPs is central to understanding soil fertility practices. Many farmers cite lack of money or high costs as one reason for the use of organic rather than chemical fertilizers. However, the differential access to credit and lack of money explains only partially the limited use of inorganic fertilizer.

Indigenous cows have multiple values, bridewealth being one, which may partially explain farmers' preferences in the use of organic manure for maintaining soil fertility. Livestock are prized property which are indigenous indicators of wealth and status, and are also considered security in the face of hard economic times. Livestock are also slaughtered for food during ceremonial functions such as funerals and weddings, and are important symbolic ceremonial gifts for male circumcision ceremonies and the first visit by a woman

to her daughter's married home upon the birth of her first-born grandchild. Livestock such as *kukus* (chickens) are presented to visitors of status, although this is on the decline among economically poor or middle income farmers, in favour of eggs and vegetables. Further, livestock are important income generators, as milk, eggs, meat and cow-manure can be sold in exchange for money or exchanged and bartered in return for other products and inputs. Given these multiple cultural, monetary and use value of livestock, it is not surprising that many farmers prefer to own livestock such as cows and use organic manure over buying chemical fertilizers, although this is not to discount farmer's genuine preferences towards the use of organic manure for technical reasons.

While there are some trends in the types of fertilizers used by farmers on certain types of farming enterprises such as French beans and tea, the decision to use chemical or organic fertilizer is very much dependent on farmers themselves. As their opinions and experiences with either types of fertilizers vary, it is not possible to draw direct correlations between specific crops and types of fertilizer inputs, it is only possible to highlight trends which vary according to the subjective understanding of farmers. Even though economically wealthy farmers can afford to use chemical fertilizers, they don't always do so, preferring organic inputs for sustaining the soils. On the other hand, some farmers do not engage in the method they prefer because of resource constraints such as labour or money.

“Digging” : Clearing Land

“Digging” refers to the labour intensive work of clearing, breaking the ground, planting and weeding. At the turn of the century, large gender-based rotating work groups provided the bulk of this work in exchange for an evening of beer drinking and festivities and with the expectation that labour would be reciprocated on their own *shambas* in the future

(Crowley and Carter, 1996:4). This work, carried out by the use of a wooden stick, was eventually replaced by the hand held iron hoe, or *jembe*, in the 1920s and 1930s (Carter and Crowley, 1998:10). While the use of mouldboard plough spread in Kenya during this time, Marogoli's steep topography and small plot sizes prevented its widespread adoption (ibid.). Not all land was cleared simultaneously and farmers practised the technique of rotational bush fallow, as an older Logoli woman recalls:

Shambas used to be tilled in turns. ... A plot would be chosen where tilling would be done then the other portion lies fallow and remains to grow many bushes called *amasatsi* [a local bush which is an indigenous indicator for soil fertility] on it and people used it as a toilet. When you move to that one, the other lies fallow. This is how food was plenty. (L041)

As discussed earlier, historical and political changes led to decreased size in individual land-holdings in Maragoli, which prompted a decrease in the availability of fallow land for the practice of rotational bush fallow. Today, only economically wealthy farmers with large non-dispersed plots continue to practice rotational bush fallowing. For most farmers, decreased plot sizes have meant that the same plot is cleared and tilled continuously, leading to a decrease in soil fertility. One farmer remarks:

Actually the farms we stay on have really changed. However big the *shamba* you are working on might be, it can never give you enough harvest because the soils have become exhausted due to continuous cultivation. Long ago we could have [farmed] on this plot this year and interchanged the next year so that when you come back to the first one it has restored its fertility. So today it's hard even if you add fertilizer we cannot get more yields like we used to before. It is because of the subdivisions that we have done on our farms. The sizes have decreased. (L019)

Further, these aspects of land use change have also made allocation decisions pertaining to clearing and fallowing all but defunct.

Women carry out most "digging", with men occasionally involved in the heavy work of breaking the ground. Land is cleared and broken twice a year, and each time, the earth is

broken and overturned two to three times. The first “digging” involves breaking the ground, while subsequent “digging” involves deeper over-turning of the soils and mixing of dried couch grass with the soils. A decrease in the availability of men’s labour and the existence of de facto and de jure women headed households have been central reasons for women’s increased responsibility in “digging”. Furthermore, the diminished aspect of control and power over decision-making in “digging” (the same plot is tilled repeatedly, rendering decision-making all but defunct), has meant that this gendered taboo no longer exists and that women are ‘free’ to clear the land. This has further intensified women’s labour on the *shamba* without increasing their decision-making powers within conjugal relations.

Cash Crops, Subsistence Crops

Farming in Maragoli is rain fed and the annual agricultural cycle is characterized by two rainy seasons, the short (September to November) and long rains (March to June), with a high average rainfall of 1800mm. to 2000 mm. (Carter and Crowley, 1997:8). Crop harvesting is carried out by hand or with the use of machetes. Although regarded as ‘unscientific’ and ‘backwards’ during the colonial period (Odaga, 1991:75), the major cropping pattern is intercropping with indigenous vegetables, cowpeas, beans, maize and bananas. Given women’s intense labour burdens, inter-cropping allows for efficient use of time, labour, energy, as well as efficient use of small plots. It is also yields better harvests, decreases splash from rain, is more reliable and adds different nutrients to the soils.

Another cropping pattern used to sustain the soils is crop rotation which involves the planting crops in sequence to take advantage of varying degrees in soil fertility over time⁶⁰.

An Avalogoli woman aged 78 explains the implications of reduced *shamba* size which have diminished the use of crop rotation, especially those with small land-holdings:

Fertility has reduced in farms. Do you see you always dig at the same place. People had bigger farms. They dug some of it and the other to preserve it for the next season and then they went to the part that they preserved and dug it. ... And in those days, they planted sorghum, maize, millet. ... If you finished maize, they also went on sorghum and millet. So there was not a lot of starvation. Nowadays we are just following maize alone, that's why you see starvation disturbing us very much because we are not planting sorghum, we are not planting millet. Do you see that ? (L039)

Other soil management practices are intertwined with crop choice as farmers carry out different types of soil management practices with respect to specific crops. These practices are further affected by variability in the micro-environment in terms of differing soils types and fertility within *shambas*, and conversely, labour inputs towards maintaining soil fertility is driven by crop type. As discussed earlier, women's willingness to invest in soil management is a function of security in tenure. Banana and vegetable plots strategically receive more inputs, and highlight that variability in soil fertility is not just a characteristic of physical geography, but is actively shaped, literally constructed, by women themselves.

In this manner, women also shape their environments through the types of crops and inter-related soil management practices they undertake. However, these choices are affected by historical changes and broader political-economic processes such as SAPs. In this section, I will focus discussion on major cash crops such as tea and coffee, maize and French beans, as well as several subsistence crops, highlighting the dynamics of gender relations in driving decisions with respect to crop abandonment or uptake. Such an analysis adds another dimension to understandings of crop changes over time, in addition to poor yields, high labour requirements, pests and diseases, land shortages and preference towards other crops (Carter et al., 1998:20-21).

It also brings into question "hard and fast" rules about gender analysis within African

agriculture, such as the gender division of labour resting on the assumption that men are responsible for and control cash crops, and women are responsible for subsistence crops. In sharing this assumption with one Logoli women, she exclaimed: “tell them that this is a lie”.

In fact, women actively engage in both, and are largely responsible for almost all activities pertaining to farming and soil management, although their degree of control of the proceeds of selling subsistence and cash crops is subject to personal relationships, their life-cycle and household positioning, their ability to negotiate control within conjugal relations, as well as the type of crop. The few restrictions which remain within the gender division of labour pertain to planting trees and hedges, which affect the cultivation of crops such as bananas, tea, coffee and fruit crops.

Before engaging in a discussion about the gendered dynamics of crop changes, it is useful to review the major shifts in crops cultivated over time. The most significant of these involve the decline and abandonment of crops such as sesame, groundnuts, bambara nuts, finger millet and sorghum (Carter et al., 1998:20-21). Table 5.3 presents an overview of the extent to which certain types of crops are grown today in Maragoli.

Table 5.3 : Types And Instances Of Crops Grown In Maragoli

Crop	Percentage Of Households Cultivating This Crop	Crop	Percentage Of Households Cultivating This Crop
Cassava	44 %	Maize	63 %
Sweet Potatoes	51 %	Finger Millet	17 %
Common Beans	68 %	Sesame	0 %
Napier Grass	67 %	Bambara Nuts	1 %
Bananas	95 %	Finger Millet	17 %
Tea	17 %	Sorghum	31 %
Coffee	12 %	Groundnuts	11 %
French Beans	30 %		

Source: Reported by Carter et. al through survey data undertaken with 105 households in Maragoli in 1995 (1998).

Tea And Coffee

Tea and coffee are important export crops which were introduced during the colonial period but which Kenyans were prohibited from cultivating until the enactment of the Swynnerton Plan in 1954. Although Logoli men were first forced to plant tea through government schemes, women who engaged in the cultivation of this crop later established a source of monetary income and gained experience in the use of chemical fertilizers, sometimes applying it to other crops such as maize to compensate for declining soil fertility (Carter and Crowely, 1997:11).

Today, the cultivation of both coffee and tea is emphasized by the government as a strategy to address the balance-of-payment problem in conjunction with SAPs (Mackenzie, 1993:80). In Maragoli, tea and coffee are cultivated on individual plots by farmers, but sentiments towards these two crops are very different, with tea being more valued by women. The valuing of tea over coffee centres around issues of monetary returns to labour input, frequency and method of remuneration, gendered control of the products from labour and the importance of income generation from cash crops in today's economic environment.

Logoli farmers prefer tea as it entails less work per kilogram of output than coffee.

Tea is cultivated continuously throughout the year and is brought to tea collection centres in baskets carried by women on pre-allocated days. One male farmer with a large acreage of tea approximating 4 acres, explains the advantages of cultivating tea:

For coffee, you get 9 Shillings per kilo. We are paid 6 Shillings per kilo for tea. But tea is better than coffee because when you compare the time you work and how much they pay, coffee consumes so much and you don't get as many kilos as compared to tea. ... If you take good care of your tea, if you put enough fertilizer, you can pick about four times or three times a week. But for coffee, you spend all that time putting fertilizer, and you will only pick like four times a month. (L007)

While economically wealthy farmers continue to cultivate coffee because of their ability to maintain contacts with free agents from Uganda who buy the crop for a higher price (15 Shilling per kg. as compared to the price of Kenyan Coffee cooperatives which varies between 2 and 6 Shillings per kg.), an advantage of tea over coffee remains its frequency of remuneration. A female farmer explains:

I chose tea because of its income, you are paid on a monthly basis. (L008)

Monthly payments are seen as a big advantage by women in order to meet numerous economic demands in their everyday lives. The cultivation of tea also brings with it a yearly bonus, an added benefit to farmers. Not only is tea viewed as a "good cash earner" by women, but its advantage also lies in the gender control over the products of their labour, a situation that is more tenuous in the cultivation of coffee. The payment for coffee cultivation in Maragoli are made to shareholders of the Kenya Planters Cooperative Union, who as landholders are predominantly men. On the other hand, payments for tea are made to the holder of the tea registration number, who is not necessarily owner of the title deed to land. As it is easier to control the payment of coffee for an absent male, tea is a highly valued crop

by women because they are better able to exert control over the proceeds of their own labour.

The control of monetary payments earned from labour inputs is of utmost importance to women in today's economic environment. A Logoli woman explains:

This year I've been able to send one boy and a girl to Form One because of the tea. So I feel tea is a very good crop because it has helped me to educate my grandchildren. And it will help other grandchildren. That's why I like it. (L008)

Women also exert control over the products of their labour by using the taboos against men carrying baskets, in their favour. Women's control over this end of the tea harvesting process gives them some degree of power, as they become familiar with officials at the collection centres over time and are recognized as the cultivators of tea.

Given that SAPs have shifted the costs of education and health care on to local people and have created an erosion of real earnings, income generation is a high priority for farmers. While women in other parts of Kenya may withdraw their labour from coffee and divert it to other income generating activities such as large tea estates (Mackenzie, 1993), Logoli women do not have such options open to them. Participants in this study, however, spoke of farmers uprooting their coffee bushes in a final act of resistance. This is seen as a powerful symbol of women's withdrawal of labour into activities where they are in more control over the proceeds of their labour. Women opt to withdraw this labour and divert it to other food crops, off-farm income generating activities or towards the cultivation of tea or French beans. They justify these actions by drawing upon men's failure to fulfil responsibilities for "providing". However, in order to engage in the cultivation of tea, women require land, and men's labour for planting bushes, as this activity is part of the taboo against planting trees and hedges. If women are able to negotiate men's labour for the planting of tea bushes, they may cultivate a large portion of available land in tea at the

expense of food crops. Economically poor farmers view tea as a highly valued crop, and aspire to grow it. However, the cultivation of tea is unattainable for many because it involves high start-up costs, requires land availability and access to seedlings as well as the cooperation of husbands or male relatives to plant tea bushes.

French Beans

A relatively new crop in Maragoli, the cultivation of French beans was prompted by the introduction of a new cannery run by a French export firm in the area⁶¹ (Carter et. al, 1998:27). The firm not only provides chemical fertilizer inputs and guaranteed prices, but also controls the production including screening of beans, limits on area of cultivation and rigorous controls on weeding, mounding and use of fertilizers. The cultivation of French beans - as it is “just a vegetable” - remains the domain of women. Because French beans are harvested twice a year, require intensive labour inputs and are limited by area under cultivation, they are normally cultivated by economically poor to middle income women who rely on their own labour (ibid.). For those women who are able to enroll in the scheme, it provides an important avenue for generating income. Similar to tea, this cash crop allows women to exert control over the proceeds of their labour to some extent in order to meet their monetary requirements. However, women also complain bitterly about their husbands’ assuming a “supervisory” role in the cultivation of this crop. It is easier for men to control proceeds from afar, given its infrequent harvesting schedule.

Maize

The cultivation of maize, at the expense of other staple crops, was expanded in Maragoli in order to meet the demands of the colonial hut and poll taxes (Crowley and Carter, 1996:18-19). In response to high war-time prices for maize in the 40’s, farmers

disposed of livestock en masse and transformed former grazing land to agricultural lands for the cultivation of maize (Kitching, 1980:236). Further incentives for cultivating maize included its larger yields per unit of land in flat and relatively fertile areas, and the harvesting of two crops per year (Crowley and Carter, 1996:19). This transformation may have been driven by women, given the high levels of out-migration of men during the war-time effort, leading women to expand agriculture - as farming was a women's domain - and the high monetary returns to labour for maize.

Today, maize is an important food and cash crop in Maragoli. Only wealthy farmers with large acreage of land are able to grow maize as a cash crop, with economically poorer farms barely able to meet their own food requirements from maize and having to supplement their requirements from purchasing. Harvested maize is taken to *posho* (maize meal) mills for grinding and is used to make *ugali*, a common Ayalogoli meal. Both the making of *ugali* and the cultivation of maize are carried out by women. Given that economically poor farmers rarely produce enough maize for home consumption, women often trade in maize, buying it from traders in Kisumu and Mbale and wealthier households, and reselling it in their village markets or in Mbale for a small amount of profit.

Maize is harvested twice a year. However, given the diminished availability of fallow land and the practice of crop rotation, double cropping has had deleterious effects on soil fertility (ibid.). Although maize is commonly inter-cropped with beans, other soil fertility practices include the use of chemical fertilizers, organic manure, top-dressing, stover incorporation, and crop rotation and fallow being used by wealthier farmers.

Other Crops

Many types of indigenous vegetables are grown in Maragoli, including leafy greens

such as *sukumawiki*, *mito* and *mutere*. Exotic vegetables such as cabbage, tomatoes and onions were introduced in the 1920s and constitute both important food and cash crops sold in markets or road-side stands. Vegetable plots are located where residences were once located and constitute another micro-niche high in organic matter which receive a concentration of nutrients, such as household and *shamba* refuse, ash and manure. Vegetable plots provide the sustenance needs of the household. Increasingly, and similar to banana plots, this is a part of the *shamba* that older women continue to control, even after other parts of the *shamba* may be allocated to sons and daughters-in-law. Following the death of parents, this highly fertile part of the *shamba* is consequently used to grow crops.

Root crops such as cassava and sweet potatoes can be grown in marginal conditions where soils may be infertile and which receive minimal inputs. Women increase the cultivation of root crops when their labour is scarce (Carter et. al, 1998; Berry, 1993; Odaga, 1991). Root crops such as cassava can be left in the ground for a couple of years without deteriorating and can be harvested throughout the year, allowing women to allocate their labour on other on-farm and off-farm activities. However, increased instances of theft has made this practice more difficult. Also, as root crops are associated with economic status, they are often cultivated by economically poor households.

5.3 Conclusion

A gendered analysis of farmers' diverse labour enterprises demonstrate that women's on-farm labour burdens far out-weigh those of men in Maragoli. While women have always been the farmers and the sustainers of the soils, this role has been further entrenched over time by historical and political-economic processes which have drawn away men's labour and emphasised men's roles as "providers". The intensification of women's on-farm labour

burdens have serious implications for soil management practices which require labour intensive inputs, and place women in a position where they may have little choice to engage in unsustainable soil management practices. However, women are not a homogenous category, and the tendency towards unsustainable practices is more likely to be undertaken by 'vulnerable' farmers. More specifically, economically poor farmers, women-headed households and young women in early stages of their marital life and household circumstances are vulnerable and face inequitable power relations in accessing and controlling labour. They have difficulty controlling the proceeds of their labour and are overburdened by the exaggerated demands for on-farm and household labour. They lack incentives to engage in labour intensive soil management practices, and are unlikely to have the time and energy to engage in any of these activities with any degree of thoroughness.

In Maragoli, within a patriarchal "order" which determines what constitutes a "good" Logoli wife, in a situation of acute land scarcity in land and no access to large commercial estate farms, women cannot easily choose withdrawing their labour completely from agriculture and soil management. Instead, women engage in a host of multiple livelihood occupations and diversify their on-farm options as a strategy towards risk aversion. Women strategically focus their energies, time and labour on certain micro-niches on the *shamba* where they have long-term security in tenure and status, on labour enterprises which are economically lucrative and in which they control the products of their labour. Women can extend over control of the products of their labour by engaging in a bitter war of words which points to men's failure to uphold their end of the conjugal contract. This discursive politics is especially heated around the issue of provision of food and school fees. By focussing on a monetary requirements of children and grandchildren - the debate often

centres on failure to meet school fees - women point to men's failure in "providing", creating room to manoeuvre and to control the products of their labour. Where men fail to meet either responsibilities, this is used by women as grounds to argue for men's fulfilment of on-farm responsibilities and inputs, or to provide the means to carry out these activities.

When on-farm labour is analyzed from the perspective of different labour enterprises, a similar picture emerges which illustrates that within the gender division of labour, many on-farm roles and responsibilities which were traditionally the domain of men, have been off-loaded onto the shoulders of women. While colonial policies precipitated out migration and land alienation and explain to some extent the erosion of men's roles and responsibilities for clearing land and grazing livestock, they do not explain why men continue to participate in other responsibilities, such as planting trees and hedges. It is these one-time labour inputs which have remained the exclusive domain of men. I contend that these activities have remained taboo for women because they denote control of land, its physical demarcation and boundaries. These demarcations, however, are not just physical; they symbolise land ownership and control. They represent who is the "commander" and 'head' of household. (Abwunza, 1997). Transformations in roles and responsibilities have been limited by the Avalogoli patriarchal "order" which is centred on retaining control over property, ideology, norms and idioms, and maintaining power relations in the favour of men in an environment where these same idioms and norms are increasingly being challenged.

In today's economic environment, a drive towards income generation has had major implications on the withdrawal of women's labour from certain on-farm labour enterprises.

The case of tea and coffee clearly demonstrates a diversion of energy, time and labour to cash crops over which women have better control of the proceeds of their labour. Hence, less

land is available for food crop production on small land-holdings and poor and middle-class farmers must increasingly purchase their subsistence needs from the market. Faced with a simple reproduction squeeze (Bernstein, 1979), women may opt to maximize short-term economic gain at the expense of labour intensive practices such as mulching, green manuring or application of organic fertilizers.

Because women have had to assume male on-farm labour responsibilities, men's traditional roles and authority are increasingly being called into question. This challenge has also been based on men's failure to meet to their roles as "providers", and has escalated gender conflict and heated discursive politics within conjugal relations. Men draw upon "tradition" as a way of re-establishing authority and power relations. In this "order", while some gender roles and responsibilities have been transformed - skewing the gender division of labour to the detriment of women - it has also opened spaces for women to negotiate new spaces. This new freedom of movement has been created by off-farm income generation activities and other off-farm coping strategies. As I show in the next chapter, these new spaces provide the discursive grounds necessary for "walking where men walk". However, this has come at a cost, namely an intensification of labour burdens and responsibilities in sustaining livelihoods.

The extent to which women engage in soil management efforts is not only contingent on their diverse life circumstances and their access and control over resources within different on-farm labour enterprises, but also on the amount of time, energy and labour they invest in other 'off-farm' livelihood strategies and opportunities to make ends meet. This situation is captured by a statement made by an older Logoli women, with which I will close this chapter:

[Even though] we plant two times a year, I don't have food. My plot is small. We now depend on purchased food. ... Those days almost all the food came from the *shambas*. Unlike now when you have to buy almost everything. If you want to eat you have to buy. You even buy vegetables. ... (L017)

PART IV: EXPANDING THE TERRAIN OF SOILS ANALYSIS

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, Department of Economic Affairs, Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries, May 1951, cited in Escobar, 1984-1985).

6.0 “Walking Where Men Walk” : ‘Providing’ And Multiple Off-Farm Coping Strategies

What emerges is a new respect for the whole ‘full house’ of different urban strategies - the copiously-branching ‘bush’ of coexisting variation -- and correspondingly revaluation of forms of life that a more linear, progressive narration might consign to the past. . . . A new way of conceptualizing urban life may be emerging in all of this, one which values multiplicity, variation, improvisation and opportunism, and distrusts fixed, unitary modes of practice and linear sequences of phrases. . . . The realization that global modernity is characterized not by a simple, Eurocentric uniformity, but by coexisting and complex socio-cultural alternatives, and that the successful negotiation of it may hinge less on mastering a unitary set of ‘modern’ social and cultural forms than on managing to negotiate a dense ‘bush’ of contemporary variants in the art and struggle of living (Ferguson, for Zimbabwe, 1999:385).

In the rural Maragoli context, agriculture and soil management are but one set of livelihood strategies, one inter-twined thread of many that run through the complex web of other cross-cutting livelihood strategies in women and men’s lives. This is especially the case for farmers who cannot depend on food and income from farming alone. I have argued in previous chapters that while women continue to farm, they place their energies and efforts strategically into micro-niches where they have long term security in tenure and where they are better able control their on-farm labour and its products. This chapter argues that given the risky business of agriculture, women diversify their options by engaging in multiple off-farm coping strategies to sustain their livelihoods. In addition to being ‘farmers’, women have multiple occupations and engage simultaneously in diverse activities which affect farming and soil management. The drive to a cash-based economy and changes in gender roles and responsibilities, discussed in previous chapters, have recently been exacerbated by

IMF-World Bank mandated ‘austerity’ measures, and intensified women’s labour burdens and responsibilities in all spheres of life. The priority given these activities is important to the amount of labour, time, energy and effort that is allocated to sustaining the soils.

Women allocate their labour and energies in activities which more directly meet the intense income needs of their families, effectively taking on roles as providers in an environment where there are no options to withdraw their labour onto large commercial estate farms or tracts of available empty land as in other parts of Kenya such as Central Province (Mackenzie, 1995a). Given that “providing” is the responsibility of men, women’s increased engagement in this activity has led to the renegotiation of the conjugal contract and constitutes a serious challenge to the material and symbolic bases of men’s power. However, women are able to “walk where men walk” by engaging in a bitter war of words, a heated discursive politics that points to men’s failure in upholding their ‘traditional’ roles as “providers”⁶². Many men fail to fulfil this role in the current political-economic environment of high unemployment, and sometimes because of non-sanctioned obligations outside of conjugal relations, fail to remit cash and resources to their families, even where they have access to wage labour.

In order to cope with these stressful circumstances, women engage in other off-farm strategies including income generating activities, as well as the participation and investment in social institutions, social organizations, and non-sanctioned social relationships. Rather than overt acts of resistance, women engage in a symbolic deference to patriarchy as a strategy designed to make “back-door” decisions (Abwunza, 1997) and, as in the case of Gambia, to secure freedom of movement and interaction (Schroeder, 1996).

Drawing on women’s and men’s narratives, this chapter explores women’s allocation

of labour, energies and efforts in various 'off-farm' activities and coping strategies in light of changing priorities, and the implications of this for soil management. First, it explores the complex demands that have been placed on women to generate incomes in the current environment of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). Then I discuss how social institutions are invoked to access resources within complex and overlapping reciprocal rights and obligations inherent in kin-based and social relationships. Third, I consider an area that is rarely discussed in soil management, namely women's involvement in extra-marital relationships and sex work as 'high risk' survival strategies, drawing on men's patronage as a means to survival and as channels of access to sustain their livelihoods. Finally, the chapter will argue that these multiple coping strategies demonstrate that gender relations are not simply a reproduction of patriarchal privilege and prestige. As in the Gambia, women negotiate spaces and carefully craft autonomy which carries with it both obligations and considerable social freedoms (Schroeder, 1996:84). I will contend that the competing demands on women's labour have led women to place their labour, energies and efforts in activities which they regard as priorities, never completely giving up soil management and farming, except when they decide to stop "persevering" and "walk". At a minimum, they invest in farming in order to fulfill their roles as "good" farmers, while focussing on alternative means to fulfill the pressing need for generating an income.

6.1 "Foolishness Has Got No Medicine" : Changing Priorities In Economically Precarious Times

Blaikie has argued that land use decisions are only one "sub-sector" in a range of other opportunities, constraints and priorities which must be explored in order to understand how land-use decisions are in turn affected by them (1985:83). Applying this line of

argument to the Maragoli context, it is clear that women and men do not live their lives by sectors, and that soil management is only one priority lived and grappled with in everyday life. In today's economic environment, soil management is not a top priority for farmers.

The decision to allocate labour and resources to soil management is a strategic one, based on meeting economic exigency in an era of structural adjustment, as well as availability of labour and resources, and security in tenure. The diverse range of priorities which take precedence in farmers' lives, is presented below in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 : Multiple Priorities Faced By Farmers In Maragoli

Rank*	Priority	Description
1	Education	Lack of money to meet school expenses, including school fees, supplies and uniforms.
2	Hunger and Lack of Food	Increased reliance on purchased food, low yields and lack of agricultural land.
3	Health	Difficulty in meeting costs of medicines, health services, funeral; access to facilities and transportation.
4	Shelter	Inadequate and damaged shelter.
5	Water	Difficulty and labour intensiveness in accessing water due to long distances to piped sources.
6	Land issues	Insufficient land for inheritance, access and use.
7	Soil Management	Lack of resources such as extension services, lack of fertilizer, time and other inputs; increased cost of inputs.
8	Accessing To Waged Employment	Linked to issues of corruption and bribery in gaining access to waged employment.
9	Personal Security	Theft of food crops and livestock; domestic violence.
10	Alcoholism	Increased alcoholism, especially among men.

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, group discussions. N = 47 participants.

*In order to assess how multiple activities were ranked, I formulated a list and organised it to reflect the emphasis the women placed on different activities. I then brought it to the attention of the women's groups during feed-back sessions. Women made modifications and verified the list.

The point of this table is not to 'fix' or pin-point to any degree of accuracy how different issues are ranked with respect to each other, nor is it meant to be a comprehensive or

exhaustive list, rather it is a tool. It demonstrates that soil management is not a top priority under conditions of competing priorities and demands, and illustrates the increasing importance of income generation for making ends meet in the current economic environment driven by SAPs.

6.1.1 SAPs : Exacerbating Income Needs, Intensifying Women's Labour Burdens

The importance of income generation is best captured by a Logoli farmer, who laments: “everything, nowadays, everything has to be purchased” (L015). This often repeated statement by farmers is significant in highlighting the increasing importance of cash for household survival, family welfare, agricultural production and soil management. As cash-based transactions become increasingly significant in the struggle for survival, they play an important role in determining the amount of labour, time and energy people allocate to on-farm labour and soil management. The drive towards income generation has been exacerbated by SAPs, which have affected Kenyan rural life adversely (Kinyinga and Ibutu, 1994; Hegedus, 1994). Cuts in government spending have increased women's responsibilities for meeting livelihood requirements, and intensified their off-farm labour burdens, effectively increasing their roles as providers over time. Three aspects of SAPs are especially significant to agricultural production and soil management: the devaluation of the Kenyan Shilling, the changes in agricultural input and output prices, and the shifting of the costs of social services to local people, as I will illustrate through farmers' accounts.

Erosion Of Earnings And Declining Returns To Labour

The devaluation of the Kenyan currency has drastically lowered the purchasing power of individuals, particularly for imported goods. Money no longer buys the quantity of goods and services it used to in the past (Gitobu and Kamau, 1994). Farmers' accounts confirm

these escalating costs in all spheres of life. Day-to-day requirements such as food must be increasingly purchased and can no longer be provided through farming alone. The following three accounts show this trend in a historical perspective.

A Logoli woman in her early 80's complains about increased prices:

During the colonial days we could purchase beef for 4 Shillings and fish for thirty cents and a half kilogram of sugar at 5 Shillings. ... [Now] life is difficult because we bought the plot I am living on at 100 Shillings, which is not possible these days. Nowadays you cannot buy a plot at 100 Shillings or even 1000 Shillings. And we thought things would remain the same. Our children are now in problems, they have nothing to give to their young ones. (L032)

In a similar vein, another Logoli woman in her late 70's bitterly complains:

The parents were there and they were wealthy on the side of cows and food. And also there was agreement between them. When a person had his brother there was no disagreement like today's life which is different a bit, less cooperation. ... Of old age, we used to buy sugar at three cents and now days you can't buy sugar at three cents. Now days it's fifty Shillings and above. Fifty and above ! And if you go to see, there's a lot of school fees, and you are still giving birth and you are still being given burdens, children need to eat and drink. Food nowadays is scarce, it is not there, there's a lot of famine. ... It's because of self-government. When these people [*mzungus*; pointing at me] were there, it was of help. The white man did not raise things like nowadays. They used to help, they used to help in that goods used to be down [in price]. ... They used to reduce *ugali* and sugar prices. We didn't have a lot of problems that we are in now. You see we want *ugali* to eat and you don't get it. It's a must to buy. (L039)

Another woman in her early 70's remembers the colonial period and laments:

There wasn't much hunger, everything was available. They would ask many people to go and work in tea and sisal plantations and they would in turn support their people. But today, where if it is you are employing, you employ [only] two. ... It's better to pay taxes because prices of commodities were affordable. Taxes were 6 Shillings and then later became 12 Shillings per head of household per year. The situation today just defeats me. When taxes were done away with, prices of commodities were hiked. We used to purchase items at 6 Shillings. Ever since taxes ceased, schools, commodities and everything became unaffordable. The Africans thought that [getting rid of] tax paying was a relief and yet it wasn't. [Today], school fees are so high that to admit a student in a high school is so difficult, full fees are needed. During the colonial days, fees could be paid in installments and a student goes on with studies. It seems with current circumstances, the world is coming to an

end. Were it not for the colonial masters we would not have gone to school. Education and school were a colonial idea. These are the people who enlightened Maragoli people. ... If all those good things went along with taxes, I'd rather have taxes than what is here now. (L041)

The women contend that drastic livelihood changes have occurred over time, making life more tenuous. Women complain about the difficulty of providing adequate land, sufficient food and formal education for their children. Given these changes, it is not surprising that older women remember colonial times as being “better” when compared to current circumstances, to the point that they literally call for a return of the *mzungus* and accompanying colonial taxes. A historical understanding of these current changes and discourses is critical, as Comaroff argues:

A historical perspective reveals changing social relations of production and fundamental transformations in people's relationships to place; it also examines how social memories construct the past in the present. (cited in Moore, 1993:383).

Moore suggests that historical consciousness is remembered, constructed and invoked in the present in light of transformations in social relations in production, state policy and the international political-economy, and influences the cultural understanding of resource politics (1993:382). In remembering the past, Logoli women and men place all the blame for their current difficult circumstances on the post-independence government.

The past is remembered in a way that emphasizes “good things” - when food prices were lower, wage work was “available” and school fees were minimal, despite burdens placed by colonial taxes - an account of history which brings into sharp focus two important points. First, women's emphasis on escalating costs for food and school fees is a real and immediate problem in people's lives, and is also the basis of the for the escalation of gender politics within the household. Second, the reconstruction of the past also demonstrates the

powerful and pervasive nature of 'development' discourse. This discourse obscures connections between people's current day circumstances and the broader international political-economy which has perpetuated and sustained the current economically difficult environment and shifted the costs of SAPs to the unpaid economy through an intensification of women's labour (Mackenzie, 1993:85). By placing the blame for the current economic environment on local governments, Logoli women and men reproduce this discourse, and do not connect the impact of structural adjustment policies to the difficulties they face in their everyday lives⁶³ (Kanyinga and Ibutu, 1994). Their call for a return to colonialism is not surprising given the extent to which stress has increased in their day-to-day lives. This stress is an effect of SAPs which have increased the prices of goods and services while real incomes has been reduced or remained fixed. They are working harder and longer for decreased returns. These increased burdens and decreased returns in labour are parallel to those in other Sub-Saharan African contexts (Mackenzie, 1993; Gladwin, 1991).

Agricultural Input And Output Prices

The architects of SAPs assume that as agriculture becomes profitable for farmers through increased producer prices for export crops, they will be more interested in investing in soil management (Mearns, 1991, cited in Mackenzie, 1993; Gladwin, 1991). However, other policies under SAPs have undermined this through increased costs of and decreasing financial subsidies for agricultural inputs (Ongile, 1994:28; Mackenzie, 1993:77). Furthermore, these policies have been instituted with a bias for large-scale estate farms and against small-holder farms⁶⁴, especially those with insufficient land in a situation of land scarcity (Mackenzie, 1993:77; Ikiara et. al, 1993:88). In Maragoli, most farming households cannot meet livelihood needs entirely through farming and must rely on off-farm income to

purchase food. Even farmers who are able to grow export crops are in a precarious situation as increased prices for export crops are undercut by increased costs of goods such as food and agricultural inputs. Women's roles as farmers have also been ignored in the agricultural components of SAPs. Agricultural incentives have focussed on export crop producers and ignored subsistence and local cash crops, which all women grow to a greater or lesser extent (Ongile, 1994:28). SAP policies call for increased credit to help farmers obtain the inputs for soil management. This excludes the majority of women because they do not own title deeds to land which are a prerequisite for access to credit.

SAPs have removed subsidies for agricultural and soil management inputs. At the same time, increased prices coupled with the devaluation of the Kenyan Shilling, have increased prices for inputs such as chemical fertilizers, seeds and implements. Economically poor women who face increased roles in "providing" for multiple needs, while having differential access to capital and land, find it difficult to purchase the inputs necessary to sustain soils.

Escalating prices and increased financial obligations have increased food scarcity and hunger. This, in turn, has increased instances of crop theft from people's *shambas*. One farmer laments:

We used to plant *sukumawiki*. ... I like planting cabbages, but immediately they get ready, someone cuts all of them. ... Nowadays, even if the bananas are there, there is a lot of theft... they don't even wait for it get ready, it's stolen. (L017)

Theft is not only a serious social problem but it also has impacts on cropping patterns and time of planting, as farmers choose not to plant certain crops that are theft prone or avoid early planting to avoid the theft of early harvests.

Shifting The Costs Of Social Services

The shifting of social service costs through government cutbacks combined with an increase in price of these services, has placed a new pressure on women to meet the costs for health services and education. Formal health costs have increased while farmers' incomes have remained fixed or declined. This situation is especially acute for economically poorer households, and those living on extremely small land-holdings, who cannot meet their food requirements from farming and for whom good nutrition becomes elusive. Women's health is compromised because they cannot meet their nutritional needs through adequate purchase or cultivation of food. This, in turn, makes it hard for them to carry out labour-intensive work required for managing the soils. The following account of a de facto woman head of household illustrates how women are in many cases left with the economic burdens of meeting the health care requirements of her children :

My husband lives in town and he's not bothered with us so I have to take care of myself and my children too. ... I have to struggle on my own. For instance now all my children are unwell and I have no way out of it. ... So my mind gets worked up wherever I think of buying medicines. I feel so sad about it. ... It's because my husband does not send any money, that's why I'm facing all these problems. ... (L015)

Another male farmer, aged 66, explains how his poor eyesight has not only prevented him from carrying out his occupation as an electrician, but also deters him from clearing the land:

It's the eyes that have really given me problems. ... On the shamba I work, but I don't see clearly what I am doing. You know I can dig where I have already dug. Or I can dig thinking I am in line, when I am just so far from the spot I am to be digging. (L019)

These accounts show how SAPs have exacerbated Logoli women's and men's ability to meet their health care needs, which, in turn, adversely affect their ability to engage in farming, soil management and off-farm income generating activities.

The payment of school fees is a major priority for Logoli women, one to which women often allocate the money received from group revolving funds and loans. School fees are a priority because education is seen as a resource, an indicator of status, and a high risk yet potentially lucrative avenue to wealth. It is also a focal point for material and symbolic struggles within gender relations.

In the past, despite inherent male bias, Kenya prided itself as having one of the most successful education systems in Africa and invested heavily in education (Hegedus, 1994; Gitobu and Kamau, 1994; Bigsten and Ndung'u, 1992). However, SAPs defined these education expenditures as 'unsustainable', and instituted cost-sharing measures. This means that while the government continues to pay for teachers' salaries and basic facilities, local women and men now pay for the furniture and buildings as well as uniforms, transportation and supplies (Gitobu and Kamau, 1994; Hegedus, 1994; Bigsten, and Ndung'u, 1992). Combined with people's decreased purchasing power, these increased school expenses have made education unaffordable, especially for economically poor farmers. Nevertheless, women and men continue to place a great deal of importance on formal education. Strong social stigmas exist against unschooled children, which translate into lowered social status for men and women as well as lowered brideprice for women (Abwunza, 1997; Crowley et al, 1996). This is evident in the following account of a woman in her 80's who is able to compare the way attitudes towards education have changed over time and the importance formal education has taken in today's life circumstances:

Mostly it [formal schooling] was focussed on boys. We really under-rated this education. We thought it was for men who will go into town searching for jobs. And so they say "foolishness has got no medicine". And those girls who had interest really managed and [we] see them reading bibles and other books. ... Education is the major thing in society now, girls who are educated get higher [paid] jobs. They

are really respected by everybody.

She further explains that life in Maragoli has changed drastically and has heightened the importance of education as a means of survival in the long-term:

Life was good, we never lacked food. Today we try to make meals that are not sufficient for children. ... So the only thing is for children to work hard at school to omit these things. ... Those who have fees can manage to send their children to school but the weak ones cannot... their children come rushing home for a book or pen and when they can't find any they are forced to stay at home. (L032)

Another farmer who is a 44 old senior co-wife, bitterly complains that her husband's contribution towards school fees has to be divided between the two wives, which does not leave enough money to educate her children fully. She explains the importance that educating children holds in women's lives:

If a man has many wives and his income is very high and he goes on and educates all his children, then the children go ahead and get jobs. We women get settled after our children have gotten jobs. Once they've cleared school and they get employed we women feel really good. But when they let them roam like this, it means if that man [the husband] happens to pass away, then your home is ruined. (L027)

Although a risky long-term strategy, formal education is a high priority for women because it has the potential to transform their social and economic status. This belief continues even though education does not guarantee employment, even for university graduates, in an environment where unemployment has reached massive proportions (Abwunza, 1997; Odaga, 1991).

Education is only the first expense. Access to employment is also an expense because of corruption. A woman in her 80's explains:

During the colonial days we used to view life as difficult. If you had a problem the *mzungu* could help freely. Nowadays you have to bribe. Nowadays if I come looking for a job you tell me to give 1000 Shillings. Where do I get it from? What is happening? Our country has changed so much it should have waited till we have passed away. ... People should change and note that some [people] never have anything to give as a bribe. (L044)

Although investing in education is a risky and expensive gamble, which involves hidden costs such as bribing, women spoke of how it is worth the risk because of the potential remittances that can be gained from successfully employed children, even though this depends on the nature and quality of their relations with their children. In the colonial era, the economic success of the whole family was associated with formal education because of the high level of employment and the subsequent remittances⁶⁵. In the contemporary situation, the high rate of unemployment for the educated means these remittances are not assured and that children are not necessarily viable and dependable channels of accessing monetary remittances in the future.

Although women are aware that the link between education and improved socio-economic status is tenuous, it can bring high returns in another sense. Women draw on the emotive images of uneducated and unfed children to serve an additional purpose. They are powerful symbols of men's failure as "providers". School fees and food have become the crux of the heated discursive politics which centre on men's failure to provide for the economic requirements of their families. Within this discourse, women's charges are imbued with the 'altruistic' language of children's welfare, and justify their engagement in income generating activities and their control over the products of their labour. Wives wield these arguments to renegotiate the conjugal contract and to push the boundaries of men's domain, namely providing income.

6.1.2 "Providing" Through Multiple Income Generating Activities And Occupations

In an era of reduced purchasing power and increased costs where women are unable to depend on farming alone or men's monetary contribution to household expenditure,

women opt to take things into their own hands. They allocate their labour, energies, efforts and time to activities which meet their current needs and priorities. These priorities revolve around “providing”, i.e. income generation, an activity that was traditionally men’s responsibility. While this constitutes a serious challenge to the material and symbolic basis of men’s power, women are able to “walk where men walk” by pointing to men’s failure in upholding the conjugal contract. The result is a highly gendered and bitter ‘war of words’ around money, as one man explains:

Nowadays milk is money, sugar is money, any other food stuff is money. They are not available in the *shambas* so that is why money has brought misunderstandings. ... I don’t know if it’s because money has become something precious that people fight over it. Since the relationship between man and woman is if a man doesn’t have much money - like the other man and he has a wife - the wife demands to be done for the same things like the ones other women are being done for. Yet she doesn’t know how the other man gets money. So money has become the big issue today. That is why there are many cases of divorce because people are comparing their spouses with others therefore “I should be done for what so and so’s husband does”. Then it causes fights that leads to divorce. (L019)

Unable to “provide” for their family’s needs, men are backed into a corner, asserting that women’s claims are unreasonable and are based on “inapplicable and unfounded” comparisons to those who are economically successful. Women counter that they cannot wait for men, they need to provide for their families themselves in order to meet immediate livelihood requirements. Typically, they claim:

Men leave everything to women. And when they do get money, they use it on alcohol, and don’t assist their wives. Neither do they buy food in the house. They depend on their wives to even buy them clothes ! (L005)

Men’s word is only ‘final’ so long as they are “providers”. Men’s failure allows women to legitimate their autonomy and engage in “providing”, however this must be coupled with farming to maintain their status as “good” wives.

As such, women often have more than one occupation - sometimes two or three simultaneous occupations. Far from being an exhaustive list, Table 6.2 illustrates the diverse range of income generating activities women engage in to meet their monetary requirements, and detracts from a simplistic idea of farmers dedicated solely to 'farming'.

Clearly most women are not just "farmers." Most engage in some form of off-farm income generation - from informal petty trading to wage labour. This not only affects how they allocate labour in other spheres of life, including soil management, but also leads to intense struggles over the proceeds of labour and an escalation of gender politics.

Table 6.2 : Women's Multiple Income Generating Activities In Maragoli

Non-Formal Licensed Petty Trading	Informal Petty Trading	Formal Waged And Salaried Labour
Second Hand Clothing	<i>Changaa</i> ⁶⁶	Tailoring
Dried Fish	Vegetables	Domestic Work
Seeds	Fruits	Traditional Birth Attendant
Fruits	Firewood	Community Health Worker
Vegetables	Milk	Community Based Distributor
Maize	Eggs	Nursing
Spices	Livestock	Teaching
Consumable Items ⁶⁷	Napier Grass	Bar maids
Food	Consumables	Housekeeper
Crafts	Sex work	Ministers
Cloth	Land Rental	Farm Labour
Non-Consumable Items ⁶⁸	Crafts	Government Employee
Pottery	Braiding Hair	Other Professions
Tailoring		Formal Enterprises
		<i>Posho Mills</i>
		<i>Dukas</i>
		Beauty Salons
		Tailoring Shops
		Rental housing

Source: Individual interviews, personal narratives, photo appraisals, survey, group interviews. N= 47 participants.

Trading

The daily buzz of activity in both licensed markets and make-shift stands attests to the prevalence and importance of trading in farm and non-farm products in Maragoli. Formal, non-formal and informal sectors exist side-by-side. Licensed trading in both farm and non-formal farm goods is most the desired and valued form of trading, and its popularity is indicated by the many permanent licensed *dukas* (shops) and outdoor market stands in markets, which swell with throngs of sellers and customers, especially during official market days. However, licensed market trading is not viable for most economically poor women because it requires start-up capital, a trading license and allocation of a permanent stand in the market. If women cannot gain access to licensed trading, they revert to 'hawking' or informal petty trading in their villages or along road-sides using make-shift stands or cloth spread on the ground.

Waged Labour

Most women also engage in waged labour, especially those who are economically poor, most commonly as casual farm labour undertaken on other people's *shambas*. Although casual labour earns the rate of 40-50 Shillings per day, women do it because, as one woman explains:

You may want development, but you lack money or the husband objects. So you must hire labour out to someone to be able to help oneself and push ahead. If not, development would be non-existent. (L011)

Although there is lower status associated with casual labour, women opt to engage in it because it earns income which they can control and use toward their immediate needs. However, a woman's ability to withdraw her non-remunerated domestic and farming labour into casual farm labour and other income generating and off-farm activities depends on her

life-cycle positioning. Young wives in the early stages of domestic life are less able to invest their labour in these activities and are vulnerable during their child-bearing years when they encounter critical labour bottle-necks.

There is a gender bias in waged agricultural labour, as permanent farm labour is considered the role of men as *shamba-boys*. Although considered low status, this form of waged farm labour provides regular income whereas casual labour is seasonal and dependent on availability. While women work as hired casual labourers on other people's *shambas*, as well as on a day-to-day basis on their husband's *shambas*, they are not considered 'professional' farmers. The professionalization of wage agricultural labour is based on a Eurocentric model dating back to colonial policies which considered men as farmers. As *shamba-boys*, men receive advice and resources from extension workers, who recognize them as 'professional' farmers. Benjamin, whose account I discussed in Chapter 4, became a *shamba-boy* when he was young and now farms his landlord's *shamba*. He explains:

So it is due to difficulties that I learnt to work because my father had deserted me, he never bought me anything not even clothing. So I was forced to learn how to fend for myself. I know you have to till and plant in order to get food. So I'd rather work instead of walking around on the roads I can sit at home and do my own work which will in turn benefit me. (L020)

Benjamin is seen by extension workers as a "model" farmer who engages in many soil management techniques and practices. Although he does not own the land on which he farms, as a single man, he faces no other competing responsibilities, labour obligations and has few income expenditures. He is able to devote large amounts of time, labour and energy to farming and soil management, in stark contrast to most married women who have heavy burdens in domestic work, as well as on-farm and off-farm labour.

Although women's casual labour is not considered 'professional' farm labour,

depending on their education, qualifications and success in accessing employment, they may work as professionals in other fields (see Table 6.2). These other jobs are considered high status and associated with economic success, seen as economically successful, and are highly regarded because of their regular wages.

Negotiating The Allocation Of The Proceeds From Off-Farm Labour

Once earned, how is income used, distributed, allocated and negotiated, and how does this affect farming and soil management? Some writers argue that remittances from employment are invested in farming (Carter and Crowley, 1997):

There is indeed a link between off-farm income and on-farm productivity. Farmers with greater access to off-farm income obtain larger harvests and receive more income from farm produce sales. ... Off-farm income is a critical means to pay for farm inputs and other farm investments, and its importance to smallholder livelihood is growing (Crowley et al., 1996:viii).

However, this relationship depends on economic class and on gender, on women's ability, as farmers, to control household income and allocate it to farming and soil management. Off-farm income has the *potential* of being used for inputs and investments in the farm, but given other demands on women's budgets, such as purchasing food, paying school fees and health services, this may be a low priority. This is best summed up in this farmer's statement:

The money we could have used to buy manure, we spent it to buy clothes for these children and pay fees and also to buy food for them which they will use. (L005)

Moreover, women's ability to negotiate the control their income, depends on their personal circumstances and their relationships with their spouses. A Logoli woman explains:

We have some [men] who usually give you some [money] or just leave it to you to plan how to spend, but we have some who usually grab all the money and leave you with nothing. (L017)

The right to engage in off-farm activities and to control the proceeds is fiercely defended by women. In some cases, by highlighting men's failure to "provide", in others, by withdrawing

their labour from the farm at critical times and hiring out labour in return for low wages.

Men's response to these charges by women is to harness the traditional discourse of women as "helpers", to demonstrate that women have forgotten their farming and domestic obligations to their husbands. When women are successful in off-farm income enterprises, it is assumed that they should pool their income with their husbands. As Etta describes in Chapter 5, while her husband had never provided any remittances when employed, he now turns to her when he requires money. This situation has led women to hide money and to be extremely evasive about their earnings, often downplaying them. When women succeed in controlling their income, their autonomy comes at a price. Men often re-establish power and authority through physical violence or appropriating income at the pay point when they are in powerful positions in terms of status and class.

In the face of increased responsibilities, women and men increasingly turn to the non-cash-based economy to make ends meet.

6.1.3 "Kutunda" : What Is Old Is New

When women and men are faced with increasingly precarious economic circumstances, they diversify their activities to meet their livelihood needs. Pushing this argument to what is outside the realm of commodification, while Logoli women and men invest much of their energies in generating income, they also revert to barter and exchange, old, long-known modes of exchange to meet their day-to-day needs. This non-cash based economy is thriving, despite government and international efforts to quash it. In effect, what was once old, has become new, and is vital for sustaining livelihoods, as the . The following farmers explains:

Suzanna

Suzanna, in her 80's, describes how in the past, grains such as millet, sorghum, and "even maize if the harvest was good", were a means of exchange used exclusively by men. Women, on the other hand, used beans as a means of exchange:

Some grains after harvest were put separately for the man. And nobody would dare touch it. That grain would be used for his own deals, to loan to someone who had a poor harvest and it will be repaid back during the next season. Then he will use it to purchase other things like land. Those days, land could be purchased with only three chickens. ... He would use it to buy other things like land, goat and sheep. ... Women had beans. ... It's where the cows for dowry were got from. The Avalogolis say *kutunda* [barter and exchange] somebody got cows from *kutunda* for her dowry. ... It is like [now] you can sell this tree and buy a cow. (L032)

Farm produce is again being used by men and women as legal tender. Where produce such as beans and grains were once used to exchange resources, now they are used in more direct modes of exchange. Suzanna's account corroborates the historical evidence that, in Maragoli, control over crops was divided by gender, despite the fact that women carried out the bulk of farming (Kitching 1980, Humphrey 1947). Men controlled the use of crops which could be traded for livestock and land, while women controlled crops used for 'home consumption' and other forms of trading. Today, the exchange of on-farm produce continues, but in a different form, and in parallel to the monetary economy.

An economically poor Logoli man in his mid-60's, explains the need for people today to be "multi-directional":

People nowadays cannot just depend on cash. People nowadays need different sources of deriving a livelihood. Like now, I sell milk from my *ngombe* in exchange for napier grass for my *ngombe* to feed on. Before my *kutus* died of illness, I sold eggs and chickens in exchange for other things. This is barter. There is no exchange of money. We do this with members of the local church-group. They are like extended family. So you see, we don't need cash to get items like flour and bananas. It works well because people don't have definite sources of income. (L019)⁶⁹

The this type of exchange is increasingly being used as a diversification strategy, especially

by economically poor farmers with unsteady or irregular incomes.

This practice also takes other creative forms. For example, in order to meet day-to-day needs, including those for maintaining soil fertility, people are reverting to the old custom of “*kutunda*”. As discussed in Chapter 5, economically poor farmers sometimes agree to keep and maintain livestock on their *shambas* for a neighbour, friend or extended family member in exchange for resources. In addition to gaining access to organic fertilizer for maintaining soil fertility, by agreeing to look after livestock, they keep a certain number of offspring (usually the third off-spring, while the first and second go to the owner) and receive a small cash compensation of about 200 Shillings. Although less common, similar arrangements also exist in terms of ‘loaning’ land in exchange for a portion of the harvest. Much of what is understood as being ‘backward’ and disappearing within ‘development’ discourse, seems better suited to meet contemporary conditions (Ferguson, 1999:382-3). As these and the following cases show, people draw on long-standing ways of coping, often invoking “custom” to manoeuvre in the stifling economic situation created by SAPs.

6.2 Social Institutions : Invoking Elements Of Custom, Creating Space To Manoeuvre

As farmers’ narratives throughout this thesis illustrate, conjugal relations are an important channel for accessing productive resources for farming, soil management and off-farm activities. While women may depend on these relationships to gain access to resources and to mobilize labour, they are not the only types of relationships which provide access to resources. Faced with many competing priorities in increasingly stressful economic circumstances, women and men increasingly diversify and invest their energies in multiple channels for accessing resources (Berry, 1989). They depend on what is known and viable,

although what is long-standing is not static and fixed:

A number of scholars have questioned the paradigm which represents African societies as 'responding' en bloc to 'exogenous' shocks. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, changes in climate, population density, economic conditions or patterns of conquest and domination have often led people to question established practices, experiment with new ideas, and contest or renegotiate rules and boundaries which they find inadequate or unacceptable in new circumstances. In the process, social identities and institutions have multiplied and/or been reshaped so often that they appear to take on permanent qualities of fluidity, ambiguity and creativity (Berry, 1997:1228).

People engage in social institutions as processes because of the opportunities for negotiating resources which are created, not because of guaranteed outcomes or to reproduce stable and consistent social relations (Berry, 1997:1228).

Faced with increasingly precarious economic times and increased stress in all spheres of life, people diversify their assets and sources of income and proliferate their channels of access (Berry, 1989:49). People harness elements of custom, transforming them to meet current needs and to create space to manoeuvre. Social institutions and social networks are part of the coping strategies people engage in to meet their needs.

6.2.1 Kinship Relations : Investing In Reciprocal Rights And Obligations

Since pre-colonial times, Logoli women and men have gained access to land, labour and other productive resources for agriculture and soil management through exchange, as well as membership in various inter-locked and nested social institutions, such as conjugal contracts, farming compounds, clan-based descent groups and communities (Crowley, 1994). Social institutions, including marriage, clientage, clan lineage and descent, continue to be significant channels for accessing productive resource. Marriage and to some extent clan lineage and descent have been discussed in previous chapters. In this section I will focus on people's membership, engagement and negotiation within other kinship relations⁷⁰.

Women and men draw on kinship relations to gain or defend property rights, to

recruit labour at low wages, and increasingly to gain access to farming and soil management inputs, cash remittances, employment opportunities⁷¹, and other livelihood needs. However, kin relations are neither static nor fixed, and cannot always be depended upon. As farmers find themselves “in a tight spot”, they turn to kin in order to access resources, although this does not guarantee a successful outcome, as the following account demonstrates:

My brother came to tell me he had lost his son... he must have thought that he would get me as his brother in a position to help him and even go and carry the body back home for burial. Unfortunately I had nothing, not even food. So what my sister in-law did was to look for the people who wanted to hire my brother's farm and get some money from them as an advance payment. To some people such an incident may happen when they have 2000 or even 5000 Shillings at least. But for me, I had not even 10 Shillings. So that is how life is the less fortunate are so poor that they can't afford anything (L019)

Although kin relationships are based on reciprocal rights and obligations, these are not always stable sources of money. People's personal economic circumstances may make them unable to assist relatives, causing much grief.

Educated children are an important channel for resources through remittances to their parents and families. A Logoli man explains:

I told my sons, “I have educated you and now it's up to you to find jobs. ... When they grow up, they can in turn take care of me” (L019)

There are strong expectations for children to support their parents. Daughters bring wealth in the form of brideprice, but also draw on their parents' assistance after marriage depending on their relations with them. The relationship between co-wives and their step-children is important, as women may negotiate their step-children's labour on their *shambas*, or allocate productive resources such as land to them, as the case of Rina demonstrates in Chapter 4.

Unlike the Western nuclear family, grandchildren are also considered dependants, and siblings have obligations to each other. If grandmothers are economically well-off, they

may provide school fees and other monetary needs for their grandchildren. Grandmothers often take care of small grandchildren, preparing their meals and watching over them as their mothers work on the *shamba*. Siblings can also provide remittances, especially those with a regular wage income. Kin-based relationships play a central role in people's lives but social organizations and networks also play an important role (Crowley, 1994:17).

6.2.2 Social Organizations

In Maragoli, there are many different types of social organizations, including those whose membership is determined along principles of descent (including clans and lineages), of seniority or age (elders), territorial residence (villages), religion (church groups), gender (women's groups), sectoral or market-oriented (marketing cooperatives), or some combination of principals (households, initiation groups, farming compounds and ad hoc labour groups) (Crowley, 1994:17-19). In this section, I focus on women's groups as well as informal networks as they play an increasingly important role in women's lives as means of gaining access to cash and resources for sustaining livelihoods.

Women's Groups

In Kenya, as well as other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the efforts of women to organize themselves into groups must be placed in a context which recognizes the importance placed on these successful and informal organizations internationally, nationally as well as 'traditionally'. A focus on women's group in SSA grew out of WID programs following the 1975 UN declaration of the International Decade of Women (1975-1985) and Kenyatta's ideology of *harambee*. In Kenya, this prompted the establishment of the Women's Bureau located in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services in 1975, as a strategy to improve the situation of economically poor rural women (Abwunza, 1997:157).

In Maragoli, women's groups can be traced back to gender-based labour groups which banded together to carry out reciprocal labour on the *shamba*. The current emphasis placed on women's groups, although different from 'traditional' women's groups, coincides with elements of Avalogoli 'tradition', and allows women to engage in their own projects as well as exert control over their own labour and earnings emanating from these groups.

In 1997, there were 948 women's groups in Vihiga with a membership of 28, 440 registered with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, a number which increased from 732 (with a membership of 21, 960) in 1994 and has undoubtedly increased since (Republic of Kenya, 1997:114). These groups have different purposes, and are as diverse as women themselves, with vast differences in profiles and affiliations based on village, neighbourhood, church, occupation, activity, class and age⁷². This diversity also extends to the vast range of activities undertaken by each group, as illustrated below in Table 6.3. However, as will be discussed below, the stated activities are not always the activities that groups carry out.

Table 6.3 : Women's Group's Activities In Maragoli

Agricultural Activities	Non-Agricultural Activities	
Farming	Crafts	Trading
Soil Management	Embroidery	Small Business
Poultry	Knitting	Village Shop
Horticulture	Basketry	Cooking Stores
Dairy Farming	Pottery Making	Water Spring
Zero-Grazing	Posho Mill	Revolving Funds
Goats	Tailoring	Merry-Go-Rounds
Firewood	Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA)	Revolving Loan
Charcoal	Choir	
Maize	Brick Making	
Beans	Sugar	
Milk	Uniforms	
Napier Grass	Fish	
Bee-Keeping		
Vegetables		

Source: Women's group registry forms, Vihiga and Sabatia Divisions, Ministry of Culture and Social Services, Vihiga; x=319.

Women join women's groups for diverse reasons: access to resources, including cash, credit, labour (through rotating work groups), knowledge, information, contacts, networks, sociability and moral support. They regard groups as "good and helpful" channels of gaining access to much-needed cash. Women's groups are sometimes able to channel much-needed formal government and 'development' monetary assistance. These positive aspects draw many women to joining women's groups, as the following account illustrates:

Fedda

Fedda is 80 years old and is an active member of several women's group. She explains:

Women have new become clever and learnt the importance of joining women's groups in order to benefit from them in terms of generating income. ... I am a member of three groups... because I like development. And when I don't have any money, I can easily borrow from any of the three. ... The main advantage is the financial assistance we get. Especially the business-women, we can improve our stock. Recently we were in Vihiga [town] and we received 24,700 Shillings for each group.

... I purchased more [dried] fish for trading. ... It was a must. (L003).

Through money that the group received from the government, which was divided among group members, Fedda received 1200 Shillings. For Fedda, this source of income was critical to increasing her stock of dried fish, which she trades daily in the Mbale market, and which is an important income generating activity.

The Kenyan government channels cash occasionally to women's groups. However, not all groups receive these lump sums of cash, as the distribution of these sums is politically motivated and tends to take place during politically opportune times to partisan and influential elite groups. For instance, during my fieldwork, which coincided with the national elections, certain women's groups received money or other benefits such as *kangas* (cloth) and headscarves from the government as part of the election campaigns. The distribution of these 'gifts' is often the source of conflict, as they are not always equitably distributed between members.

A second channel of resources is through international donors and NGOs which are encouraged to go through the Women's Bureau in order to identify 'developmentally conscientious' groups for projects. Through this avenue, groups may be selected to take part in on-farm experiments and gain access to seeds, seedlings, fertilizers and other farming inputs. They are also an important channel for money for projects or infrastructure such as water wells in villages. "Model" women's groups, which tend to be the target of these 'development' initiatives, are often made up of elite women who have greater access to resources which make them "progressive" in the first place.

Despite this bias towards "progressive" groups, women regard membership in women's groups as important coping strategies for accessing money through revolving funds or "merry-go-rounds". Each member is expected to contribute an amount ranging from 20-

1000 Shillings per month. This reliable source of income allows women to acquire lump sums of money for start-up capital or to meet payments for other day-to-day needs.

Another variation on this scheme is the revolving loan, in which members contribute money, and from which members in need access draw loans to be repaid with interest. Members at large are paid the interest accrued through lending activities. Although there are often defaulters and conflicts over non-payment, the majority of women in this study felt that these women's groups are important channels of accessing cash, as one women explains:

The good thing about being in a group is that when you are financially hard-up, you can go there and they can help you. ... It creates oneness and togetherness among the members. And you help one another. (L025)

Women's groups are also a way of establishing solidarity, permitting women to gather and provide moral support to one another.

Women invest time and energy in these groups in exchange not only for immediate outcomes or rewards, but in order to strengthen their position within the group, and hence their ability to draw on its support or assistance, especially for cash needs in the future or in difficult circumstances, as in the case discussed by Berry in Ghana (1989:48). These groups are also significant because they provide a focal point for women's exchange of ideas and knowledge, ranging from income generation to soil management. Given the importance of women's groups as a means of accessing resources, however unstable and sporadic, as support groups and as focal point for knowledge, it is not surprising that they have proliferated over time. It is also not surprising that women often engage in multiple groups as a way of diversifying their options.

As in the case of income from other sources, soil management sometimes loses out to other competing monetary demands and priorities. When asked how money from groups

was spent, women listed school fees, food, increasing stock for trading, household repairs, health requirements, funeral expenses and household implements. Soil management was rarely cited.

Women also spoke of the “badness” of women’s groups, which sometimes arises from intra-group conflicts, as one Logoli women describes:

A group is good, the goodness is that you can discuss and come up with a project that will help you. Also you have women’s issues which you help each other with ideas either good or bad. It’s through such discussions that we get to know that when I do this it is wrong, when I do this, it is right. Then when you contribute money one day, it really helps you. That is what I see being good about the group. ... A group is usually good - and if it is bad, then it is the members. Sometimes some contribute what you agree on and others don’t. So when the day for distributing comes those who didn’t contribute start blaming the ones who have gotten their share. That is when the group is messed up. But if you all agree and contribute what is required even if it is five Shillings and everyone gives then you easily get along. ... Also rumours among members, after a group meeting when you get out the members start backbiting the officials that is not the way a group should be. (L027)

These are not apolitical organizations. Their members have competing interests and ideas.

Further, not only is there micro-politics within groups, but also between different groups as well, as discussed in Chapter 3. For instance, economically wealthier women’s groups are often made up women with formal education and some degree of status and power, who can mobilize contacts, networks and ties and access resources collectively as a group. Similar to ‘progressive farmers’, they are often considered ‘model’ women’s groups and tend to be the target of ‘development’ initiatives as well as extension workers.

Further, not all women can afford to join a women’s group. Economically poor women participate to a lesser extent. The Kenyan Ministry of Culture and Social Services requires an initial registration fee of approximately 200 Shillings, and the opening of a bank account, which in turn requires an initial minimum deposit of 3-5000 Shillings. These

expenses are prohibitive for economically poor women. Moreover, economically poor women find it difficult to keep up with the monthly requirements of revolving funds and loans. Sometimes, women with multiple memberships scale down their involvement in the face of growing economic insecurity. Young wives, who face critical time and labour constraints, close monitoring by husbands and mother-in-laws, and a lack of control over income, participate less than older women. Overall, economically poor and younger participate less than older women in formally registered groups because they cannot afford the start-up costs or the monthly contributions to revolving funds. These women may well join unregistered groups.

Unregistered women's groups have certain advantages. They provide a greater amount of freedom. They often do not have the requirements and rules of registered groups which often discourage less privileged women (for example, opening bank accounts, selecting a 'chairlady', secretaries and treasurers, and receiving training in group dynamics and management).

While women's groups, registered or not, are regarded as important channels of resources by women, men's views are mixed, and this sometimes contributes to an escalation of gender conflicts. Some men feel that women's groups help men inadvertently, while others that feel that women are diverted from their day-to-day duties as wives:

We shall benefit by understanding modern way of life and she will buy views from other members that she hasn't got and even if NGOs come in with new ideas then we can borrow for our own benefit. ... I don't feel bad but the problem is we have not been used to this things for so long you know we are grown ups from childhood in this other style of life now when at the age of 55 you start changing it becomes a bit complicated. ... The reason I can get is like now if we had no house help left to cook and we get visitors it would be difficult for me because I would not know where to assemble everything in the kitchen, and also in the rural areas there is no electricity so it would be hard for me to prepare fire to cook and since I'm not used because I've

been staying mostly in urban centres it becomes complicated. ...

Further, this man contends that women's involvement in groups is too focussed on the potential of income generation.

This element of money. ... You know most women think that when you form a group then you've opened a door of getting more money, or more easy money, without knowing that you got to sweat, to work hard in order to improve on your standard of living. ... It has not been good, it has been bad. Because it's a western way of life. It's not African, so it's a Western style. You know people want to get money for a short time and then it disappears. It's not good. The old tradition says that people must live on the land, must be able to plant enough crops, able to feed you. So if you're keeping animals, it's good. But then there are groups who are not doing things relevant to the African traditions by forming these groups. (L013)

Although this account illustrates that men are aware of the potential benefits of women's groups, especially in accessing 'development' assistance, they express concern about women's withdrawal of labour from domestic and on-farm labour. They draw on elements of "tradition" to try and curtail women involvement in women's groups, stating that such income generating activities are not "African".

Women also draw on 'tradition', arguing that women's groups are based on customary practice, and emphasise government and international donor's focus on 'development' to justify their involvement. A Logoli woman who is involved simultaneously in two groups explains:

They [women] realised they could help themselves through the groups especially when there is some aid from the government this is the only way it can get to them. ... The things that make women join these groups is because they are development conscious and they want to develop. Like me, now I am a member of two groups. ... You see how I am in two groups? ... There are no restrictions as to how many groups one should belong to. These groups have also enlightened us because if you just sit at home idle you can't even think. Many women now have a positive attitude towards life because of the groups. Our leaders are also encouraging as to be active and not just sit home. ... You know, nowadays things have changed. Women are in the forefront of everything. It's not like long ago when all they did was sit at home. Women nowadays attend seminars and they are involved in different professions so

there has to be women's groups where the elite teach their fellow women how things are so that they can be enlightened. ... During those days men were so strict they thought that if a women left home then she was out for her own missions. But today [laughs], today's women do what they like. You can't restrict them.

Both by invoking the powerful discourse of 'development' and stressing the government's emphasis on income-generating activities for women's groups, women build autonomy. In this way, the government support for women's income generating activities is strategically harnessed to exert control over labour and earnings from these activities. This is combined with the arguments about 'tradition' allows women to expand their freedom of movement and room to manoeuvre.

Informal Social Networks

Friendships between women are important channels of material resources and maintaining moral support. These relationships are based on reciprocal exchanges of resources such as fodder (banana stems, napier grass, etc.), food, cash, manure, seeds, information, contacts, transportation and labour. Rather than stable or guaranteed channels of access, they are a diversification strategy women draw upon during tough economic times, and these relationships are especially important for economically poor and vulnerable women. For example, because of their position and status within society, older unmarried women living on their parent's *shamba* often lack food, cash and access to land, and therefore depend heavily on relationships with siblings and neighbours to help them to make ends meet.

Informal networks are also an important source of information, regardless of class.

An economically elite woman describes:

[My friend] she came and told me, "you're having problems of napier grass, why can't you try the *mechicha*" [brewer's waste]. So since that time is when I started. ...

I have seen an improvement in the milk of the *ngombes*. And they don't eat as much napier grass. (L003)

Throughout my fieldwork, women described that certain techniques, crops or practices were learned through friends or neighbours. The same applied to learning “tricks” and coping strategies in the face of inequitable power relations. Nevertheless, these networks are not readily available to all women; young women in the early stages of marital life may not benefit because of the degree of monitoring and the amount of labour required of them.

Social networks such as friendships and neighbourhood relations are socially sanctioned. Not all informal relationships fall into this category. Relationships and channels of access which are considered ‘taboo’ can also help women to sustain livelihoods.

6.3 “Roaming” Wives And “Loose” Women

As in the case in Rwanda described by Jefremovas, struggles over access to resources take place within highly charged gender politics where the language of public morality is used as a weapon to maintain the patriarchal order (Jefremovas, 1991a, 1991b). Despite men's attempts to regulate women's behaviour through cultural idioms and taboos which characterize them as being either “good” or “bad”, women themselves use these constructs to interpret and contest control over resources. In previous chapters, I have shown that regardless of class and status, women's livelihood choices and control over resources such as land and labour are limited by the patriarchal “order”, and that men have the upper hand in recreating and perpetuating elements of custom (see also Mackenzie, 1993, 1995a). In this section, I focus on women who deviate from or push the boundaries of norms, when conjugal contracts no longer sustain their day-to-day needs. In these circumstances, women are driven from their land and homes and turn to relationships that are not socially sanctioned and are

highly stigmatized by the patriarchal ideology.

As 'last ditch' efforts to access resources, women may decide to engage in extra-marital relationships or engage in sex work, thereby drawing on men's patronage as a survival strategy. However, these types of relationships fall outside the norms and rules of society, and as such, are unstable and not always dependable. But as Jefremovas argues for Rwanda, women who gain access to resources through these non-sanctioned social relationships with men, are nonetheless on similar ground to women who "persevere":

Both are treacherous routes. Wives can lose their resources to rivals, widows to the husband's lineage, daughters to marriage, and single women to lovers or to their families (1991a:391).

This points to the fluidity and negotiability within different types of gender relations, in which women are insecure no matter what their position because of men's privileged positions within power relations.

Nonetheless, "roaming" wives and "loose" women, face a difficult and complex situation. As they are seen as no longer "persevering" within conjugal relations, they are construed as "bold" women who are breaking "tradition". They are subject to intense scrutiny as well as fierce social stigmatization and harassment in the community, but with different degrees of tolerance by women and men.

"Roaming" Wives And "Husbands In Name But Not In Action"

While the issue of "roaming" wives came up during interviews, understandably, women rarely discussed their extra-marital relationships openly. I discovered that women had lovers when certain types of discrepancies in interviews or participant observation surfaced. For instance, women were extremely reluctant or even nervous in describing household income. Or sources or incomes did not match their expenditures. Or when they

could not explain how they met everyday expenses. But I also recognized that because of social stigmas attached, women were not likely to admit openly that they were getting money or resources from lovers or through sex work. In most cases, I was able to confirm the existence of these relationships from other women in the group, spending time in the community and from simple observation. Over time, I also began to understand that when women spoke of male “friends” during interviews, the meaning was not literal, and that they were in actuality speaking of lovers.

This propensity to take on lovers is particularly likely in a situation of male out-migration, in which a wife might not see her husband for years and not receive monetary remittances for great lengths of time. One woman explains:

There are some whose husbands have disappeared into town and they don't assist them [their wives] at all. They don't have enough money to buy food or fertilizer or seeds or whatever. They may disappear for as long as two years. She stays on the *shamba* tilling and planting maize and selling vegetables for so long without meeting a man. Then she says I got married here as a wife not just to eat food and that's when she decides to go and find other men who she makes friends with while her husband is still gone. ... (L047)

Another woman explains in a similar vein:

This man [the husband] is not there; he's there in name but not in action. So we have no way out. Because you cannot make these women to divorce when she has children there. You just persevere. ... This kind of treatment [when there is no monetary support], has promoted some women to start roaming. There is no way out. How can you maintain a life ? And there is somebody somewhere who wants to help you. So that man somewhere in a corner is interested in you. Automatically, he won't refuse you. Because financially you know he'll sponsor you. He can give you money on a monthly or weekly basis. He does shopping, it becomes so automatic. But now she becomes too loose, roaming with men. ... We have some men this way who monitor homes, watching to see who is miserable. Scavengers they are. So now you have a married woman but has given birth with someone else. It's commonly done here. Frustrations bring such things. Because you have no way out. How will you survive? (L002)

While there are multiple reasons why women engage in extra-marital relationships,

I would like to focus specifically on these relationships as channels of income and resources.

Because men are the owners of the property, women “persevere” even in the most uncertain economic circumstances for fear of forfeiting their and their children’s rights to land should they “walk”. Faced with this stark option, extra-marital relationships constitute a viable and sometimes lucrative means of gaining income, but these also come with fierce social stigma and other problems. While these accounts imply that this practice is common among wives whose husbands have out-migrated and who are not sending cash remittances, some women believe that the practice is on the decline because of increasing cases of STDs, especially AIDS. One woman explains:

Roaming nowadays is not there. Even if you leave here, diseases are there, where will you go? There is no roaming these days. (L015)

Despite this, five women I interviewed were known to have lovers or spoke of having male “friends”. I suspect that there were probably more instances, but the subject either did not come up or I did not pick up on subtle cues. However, some women spoke of how these relationships provided important channels for accessing income as well as inputs for farming such as fodder and even labour. In two cases while I had been carrying out interviews and involved in participant observation with widows, they abruptly indicated that they wanted to stop for the day. Later, I observed one of them collecting fodder with a male “friend”, and upon realizing that they were being observed, they quickly turned the bend in the road, out of sight.

This corroborates the bitter complaints of wives who argue they are unable to access their husband’s remittances that their incomes are ‘diverted’ to other women. A sole focus on conjugal relations reveals only a part of the reality of farmer’s lives. Informal and non-

sanctioned relations provide other channels of accessing income and resources which are important for sustaining the soils and other livelihood concerns.

“Loose” Women: When Women Are “Chased” Or “Walk”

Women, who cannot bear children, who effectively divorce their husbands by being “chased” from their marital homes (and sometimes from their parental homes), and especially those who choose to “walk”, cannot be found on the ‘farm’. They have accumulated extensive farming knowledge over time which is then lost. When women engage in the final act of resistance, when they divorce their husbands by “walking” from their marital homes, they forfeit their rights to land and “property”. These women have few options open to them: they can remarry as second wives, search for scarce jobs, or go to ‘town’ (engage in sex work).

Women who have “persevered” all their lives tend to take on a strong stance against “walking”. This is clearly evident in the account of a widow in her 80’s, who “persevered” through many hardships throughout life, including an alcoholic husband, having 4 co-wives, experiencing domestic violence, receiving no remittances from her husband, facing economic poverty, the death of her husband, and the death of all her sons - the very reason that she “persevered” in the first place. She reflects on her life and exclaims, “if it was now, I would have gone to look for a job in town or married elsewhere”. However, while she insists she would not “persevere” if she had to relive the same circumstances today, she maintains:

Women these days have no respect. Women of those days were very much respectful. Nowadays they don’t know what is good or bad. That’s why they are all defeated in marriages and that’s why there’s a lot of prostitution. ... Nowadays, women don’t have a lot of patience where they are married. They just say, “if a man plays [has affairs] or disturbs with me, I’ll go and work in town”. And they don’t know there’s a lot of diseases. They don’t know that patience pays and builds and impatience destroys. And men, especially the men are very much mobile. ... Not all

women have become bold. There are those that are quite persevering and those ones, their marriages have survived. It's the bold ones who always end up in trouble. (L022)

The argument for “persevering” even in the most difficult circumstances is not supported by all women. The following account of an economically elite woman actively involved in the community and her women’s group, and describes the contemporary gender relations in Maragoli and the considerations that women take into account before deciding to “walk”:

At this time, both a man and the wife are working. It's not like the old days where you can mistreat a wife beyond capacity. This times when things are too much, a woman can leave anytime. People cannot persevere the way they use to persevere long time ago. If you decide to be cruel to a wife, she can decide anytime to go off. Leave the child and go off. ... However, it is not easy for women who have children to leave them behind. That is the thing that has retained women more, and made them suffer on the capacity of the children. If you don't have a child, I don't think you can resist to have a lot of problems at that place. You just decided to go away. But if you have children, you decide the children might be worse off and the woman who comes in might mistreat them. They might not get an education. You think only of the children all of the time. You have no peace. You don't think of the man. You say, let me persevere, and later you are the one to go nowhere.

These accounts demonstrate a central dilemma faced by Logoli women. Faced with economically difficult circumstances, physical violence and inequitable power relations, women have few alternative livelihood options available. If they leave, they lose all claims to land and to children. Women speak of how they fear leaving their children in unknown circumstances. They fear that these children may be mistreated, unfed and unschooled, and in the case of sons, lose their rights to land inheritance (as the Benjamin's account in Chapter 4 demonstrates). They know they will face social stigma and will be blamed for their failure to “persevere” as “good” wives. Even women with no children and who are more ‘free’ to make the decision to “walk”, face uncertain futures and few livelihood options.

Faced with harsh circumstances and choices, women sometimes do leave, in some

cases engaging in sex work to survive. Two Logoli women explain the reasons why women engage in sex work:

There are some who have hot blood... and the other ones ask for something and her family cannot provide money for a dress or soap or oil, then she finds someone who cheats her by providing these things. She follows him. Then slowly she gets used to it. ... Others get problems in the home like being battered by the husband. Lack of food. They can't even get a dress, then she decides I'd rather go wherever other women are. Then she ends in the trade. (L028)

It's problems that makes people do such things. ... Like there are those who can give birth [out-of-wedlock] and are chased from [their parent's] home. ... Others once got married and divorced, or even widows and they decide that instead of being inherited they prefer working at the bar. ... She may get a friend. And they go steady. When she suggests marriage, the men start changing and the relationship ends. ... Then she decides it's better if she moves into the market and get daily affairs then those permanent affairs when you don't get anything out of it. Those men cannot even start for you a business. ... And others, it's just their life-style... because they believe it's a smart place. Others, it's just problems. ... (L047)

One participant in this study was a sex worker. Her personal narrative explains the types of circumstances sex workers face.

Rachel

Rachel turned to sex work after facing difficult circumstances where she was left by her mother and "walked" from two failed marriages. She explains:

My life has been problematic. Mother got mentally sick and left. ... I used to go home and my step-mother would chase me away and abuse me. ... I was still very young, but another woman convinced me to get married. ... I was there for one month but the man was too aged for me. ... so I quit. ... That is when I went to Kakamega and worked as a maid for one year. I really suffered, and the person I worked for as a house-girl never used to pay me. So I was forced to stay with other girls in their houses and they really punished me because I had to sell my body to survive... but then I was still young so I couldn't manage. Then I went to Nairobi with the hopes of getting a better job. ... I remained in problems. ... And then got married to a Luo man. He always quarrelled and beat me because he wanted a baby. ... but I couldn't give birth. ... When he gave me money, I took a quarter of it. ... That is when I decided to leave and use the money for transport. ... I went home. ... and found my father there, and he told me "my daughter, I have no job that can me solve your problems. Go and stay with a relative who sells maize in Mbale." That's when I came to Mbale and started working in bars.

I had many male friends. ... when I got problems like when my father died they helped me, even when my brother-in-law died, they assisted me with money. ... but most of them told me lies, few could tell me the truth. ... Some would even beat me. ... [Now] I have only one friend who works in a *matatu* on this road. He has a wife. ... They are always quarrelling. ... So he feels he'd better stay with another woman somewhere than stay with his wife. He has helped me a lot. He is the one who started for me this second-hand clothes business. This man tells me that we can buy a plot and construct and stay there. And I feel even if he buys the plot and he has a wife and children then it is useless. I'm not willing to follow him. ... I always wish to get married to my own husband. ... If I don't succeed in marriage then I would like to have a small piece of plot and construct and settle in. So long as there is enough for my grave alone.

My [widowed] sister and [her] children have a lot of problems. I am the one who assists all of them, because it's a home full of problems so I feel there is no need of getting married. I'd rather help them with their problems. ... Even my sister wanted to go and work in a bar. ... but I told her, "no, it's problems. I will assist you... It's better I try to and get you food so long as your children eat even if the money is not enough. I won't till for you, you will do it yourself because I don't have enough money". ... I'd rather stay in the market and support them because the problems are many. I am the one who supports all those children. ... (L047)

Rachel's narrative demonstrates that sex work is a source of income for women who have few other options available to them.

Rachel's account illustrates that male "friends" are not only important channels for money to sustain their own livelihoods, but they are also a critical means of gaining start-up capital for income generating activities, such as trading in second-hand clothing⁷³. It also shows that the money that is earned from the multiple occupations of sex work and trading is used to support her "dependants", which include her sister and children. This is critical, because it demonstrates that women support their extended families meeting their day-to-day needs: food, health care, school fees, clothing and inputs to farming and soil management.

6.4 Conclusion : Sustaining The Soils

Given the multiple coping strategies described in this chapter⁷⁴, we can see that soil

degradation and declining soil fertility are not the result of ‘ignorance’, ‘poor practices’, ‘population growth’ and ‘haphazard and uncontrolled’ ecological destruction. Rather, farmers in Maragoli engage in soil management and intensive farming activities and have extensive knowledge in these activities, but they also have multiple occupations and diverse livelihood strategies which are prioritized differently. In an economic environment driven by SAPs in which the cost of goods and services have increased and incomes have decreased, soil management has become less important than income generating activities. For Maragoli women, ensuring the formal education of children figures is a top priority, although it is a high risk strategy, it has potentially lucrative returns in the long-term.

Nevertheless, women make use of many formal and informal institutions and organizations and many different networks and relationships to enhance their capacity to cope. Women’s groups, kinship relations, and friendships provide access to resources and information. Many of these activities compete with soil management, but women also share resources and information which can improve soil management. They use non-market forms of exchange such as barter, and older practices such as “*kutunda*” to gain access to resources which improve soils, such as manure. Women also engage in stigmatized social behaviour such as taking lovers or engaging in sex work to gain access to critical resources such as labour and income. Although these non-sanctioned relationships are not recognised by researchers as important to the farming enterprise, the case studies show that these women contribute in significant ways to the capacity of other farmers, sisters, mothers and children, to improve their lives and invest in their farms.

Faced with a multitude of priorities and concerns and a pressing need for income, women compromise their knowledge as farmers and managers of the soil and the long-term

sustainability of the soils, in order to meet their most immediate and pressing demands.

Women may opt to maximize short-term economic gain through unsustainable agricultural practices (Mackenzie, 1995a:21), and focus their energies on off-farm income generation.

By understanding the constraints under which women work and on their needs, we can begin to formulate policies and future research which better reflects these priorities and realities, and ultimately serve the people that 'development' claims to serve.

7.0 Conclusions : Rethinking The 'Problem' Of Soil Degradation

In my research, I have 'happened' upon... Zimbabwean women who insist on the mobilities of their subjectivities as they negotiate daily existences with more powerful people. In each case, the happenings were not scheduled into my research plan, and I initially refused to travel these 'extraneous' and annoying 'things' the women wanted to 'chat about' in defiance of my reasons for travelling to see them. But the politics of ironic and playful mobility encountered among Zimbabwean working-class women took my research self where it did not expect to go. ... I had to restrain myself from seeking a conclusion to the story, learning to be content merely to point out to farm managers the ironies in their policies and to women the possibilities of identity empathies in the new situation facing them (Sylvester, 1995:962-965).

Women's narratives from Maragoli are powerful. They challenge assumptions in conventional soils approaches of the 'farmer' as an undifferentiated and gender-neutral category, giving voice to what was silenced before. They show that women, as farmers and sustainers of the soil, are diverse, dynamic and knowledgeable actors who have expertise regarding their environments. However, they carry out this role within inequitable power relations and in increasingly precarious economic circumstances exacerbated by IMF and World Bank mandated structural adjustment policies which emphasize export cash crop production, a devaluation of the Kenyan Shilling and cut-backs in government spending. While women are not powerless in the face of these policies and negotiate space to manoeuvre in many creative ways, they disproportionately bear the costs of SAPs which are precipitated by inequitable North-South relations and mediated by local gendered power relations. Women who are economically poor and in the early stages of marital life bear the brunt of the shifting of costs to the unpaid economy because of the intensification of on-farm labour burdens, a heightened need for 'off-farm' income generation and an increased need for multiple channels of resources access. Under these circumstances, women prioritize and channel their time, energies and resources away from labour-intensive soil management practices, especially where they do not have long-term security in land tenure and do not

control the proceeds of their labour.

This case study also challenges conventional assumptions about soil degradation as a simple function of population pressure and lack of local knowledge. Instead, it demonstrates that access to and struggles over productive resources such as land, labour and its product are critical for sustaining the soils. As I have demonstrated throughout this case study, the politics of these struggles are inseparable from symbolic contestations that constitute them. The active negotiation, contestation, transformation, production and reproduction of cultural idioms, norms and taboos around women and men's roles and responsibilities have real effects in constructing people's environments, both materially and symbolically.

Moreover, Soil management is not only embedded in social and gender relations at the local level, but is mediated by broader processes such as SAPs, which themselves are embedded in North-South relations and 'development' discourse. These broader processes have in fact, escalated gender politics and contestation of local gender relations and have intensified women's struggles over access to and control of resources.

As a conclusion to this thesis, I begin by revisiting the micro-politics of gendered struggles over resources such as land, labour and income, as a way of challenging conventional assumptions about soil management, expanding the boundaries of the local to include broader 'development' processes, and identifying areas of consideration and possible avenues for future research. I then highlight challenges and recommendations which focus on research processes and policies with a view to enriching the interfaces between researchers and local farmers in the future.

7.1 Rethinking Soil Management

SAPs have increased stress in the context of everyday life and have intensified struggles over productive resources including land, labour and income, as well as struggles over meaning mediated by cultural norms, taboos and idioms. These struggles take place within the highly charged context of the household, leading to the renegotiation of the conjugal contract. This has not only created freedom of movement and room to manoeuvre for women; it has also increased their responsibilities and obligations, all within real limits established by patriarchal ideology.

Gendered Struggles Over Land In A Context Of Legal Plurality

Women's security in tenure is crucial for the long-term sustainability of the soils. As the cases of bananas and vegetables clearly demonstrate, when women have long-term security in tenure, they are more likely to invest in labour intensive soil management techniques. However, faced with a situation of land scarcity, women's ownership of land - a major threat to men's power - is bitterly contested, and manifests itself in men's outright threat to women's security through the harnessing of elements of customary law. Women have few options open in the face of these threats, because there is little individual land available or large estate commercial farms in Maragoli to which to withdraw their labour or to derive alternative farming livelihoods. Women engage in fierce struggles over land in creative ways, engaging customary and statutory laws in a situation of legal plurality to defend their rights in a domain that privileges men's rights.

As a major motivating factor for women's investments in sustaining the soils, security of tenure is an important consideration for soil management research. Because they involve money, time and energy, statutory and customary law are differentially accessed and

engaged by women. Economically elite women are in a better position to defend threats to security than economically poor women. While customary law is often considered ‘backwards’, ‘traditional’ and an impediment to women’s security in tenure, this case study demonstrates that it is actively engaged by women to defend their rights as a “first line of defence”. Further, while ‘development’ initiatives often focus on statutory law as the avenue of improving equitable rights to land, future research should consider that is not always accessible to women and may entail ‘hidden’ monetary costs that are not always evident (i.e. bribes). The practice of statutory law is also inescapable from patriarchal ideology, and allows men to override and manipulate the system within their privileged positions as ‘heads’ of household.

Land tenure is also an important factor in gaining access to credit. As men predominantly hold title deed to land and accessing and acquiring credit generally requires collateral such as property, women⁷⁵ experience difficulties in gaining access to credit. Women also experience difficulties in opening bank accounts without the support of husbands who own title deed. However, even if they get credit, women tend to use it for other pressing priorities, such as off-farm income generation and cash crop agricultural production using chemical fertilizers.

The Intensification Of Women’s On-Farm Labour Burdens And Responsibilities

Women’s on-farm labour has increased over time and women have taken over roles and responsibilities that were considered the domain of men because of high levels of male out-migration, especially where migrant men do not or cannot remit income, and by the economic environment driven by SAPs. This research has illustrated that younger and economically poor women face especially acute labour burdens. Men continue to engage in

one-time labour inputs which are associated with property ownership and therefore power, and involve a few select types of soil management practices such as building trenches and planting trees (which have implications in terms of agro-forestry and soil erosion initiatives).

As Mackenzie has demonstrated for Central Province, land and labour are exhausted as production costs increase relative to returns to women's labour with the commoditization of production exacerbated by SAPs (Mackenzie, 1995a:21). In order to make ends meet within this context, women may opt to maximize short term gains through unsustainable soil management practices at the expense of more labour-intensive practices (ibid.). Many women also opt to grow cash crops such as tea where they are better able to control the proceeds of their labour. They cultivate cash crops in order meet the demands for cash at the expense of food crops, so more of their subsistence needs must be purchased from the market. In a situation where livelihood requirements are often not met from farming alone, women engage in multiple occupations in order to generate income.

While women face intense labour burdens and increased responsibilities on the farm, men continue to describe themselves as 'farmers' and 'heads' of household, despite their decreased on-farm labour and cash contributions. This contradiction between what is publicly stated and what occurs in practice may be explained by struggle for potentially lucrative 'development' resources that can be channelled to 'farmers', and as a re-assertion of men's authority. Extension workers and 'development' practitioners view economically elite men, and *shamba-boys* (who have fewer labour burdens in terms of household obligations and off-farm responsibilities than women), as "progressive farmers" and channel information and resources through them. It is important to recognize that women carry out most decisions regarding agricultural production and soil management and that agricultural

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income generating activities. However, the danger of this approach is that non-formal and informal income generating activities and micro-enterprises through which many women gain access to cash do not get the attention they deserve. Further research and support for these activities are required in order to support women in their struggles to sustain the soil and livelihoods. Research initiatives must recognize that while employment and income generation is crucial for women in the short term, that SAPs have created a need for these. Broader policy must also focus on the renegotiation of SAPs.

Furthermore, while income generation is important, future research needs to broaden its scope to other 'hidden' and 'less apparent' coping strategies in order to understand the full range of livelihood strategies in which women engage to access resources. These include social institutions, sanctioned and non-sanctioned relationships and networks outside of kinship and marital relations. These provide women with flexible and ever-changing channels of access to different types of resources such as labour, information, and agricultural and soil management inputs. Channels of access which involve non-sanctioned social relationships are especially important livelihood strategies to women who are de facto or de jure heads of household and those who are "chased" or "walk" from their marital homes in a final act of resistance, and withdrawal of labour.

While women engage in multiple social institutions in Maragoli, membership in women's groups is both valued and sought after by many women. It has provided women an opportunity to invoke 'traditional' cultural idioms around gender-based groups through a government sanctioned institution, providing them with freedom of movement and a means of accessing material resources. However, membership and access to these groups involves the contribution of cash towards revolving funds and the opening of a bank account, which

presents a constraint for young and economically poor women, who are less likely to join. NGO's and 'development' agencies which identify women's groups as entry points and/or recipients of resources from projects and research, must recognize that women's groups are not homogenous or apolitical structures. To date, extension workers and 'development' agents have been more likely to point to more "successful" and "progressive" groups, whose membership tends to include economically wealthier women. This leads to a host of unintended effects which will be largely invisible, unless concerted efforts are made to address them. However, despite these challenges, it is worth taking into account that women's groups are highly regarded and valued by women themselves. They provide women an avenue for mobilizing local, state and 'development' resources, creating space to manoeuvre, engaging in social relations, friendships and work groups, and most importantly, legitimating income generating activities and controlling the proceeds from them.

Women's groups are also important channels for creating solidarity and enhancing women's power. Logoli women expressed interest in the creation of a collective women's centre, where they can access information and resources important to their livelihoods. Sikana's (1995) suggestion regarding the provision of a "miscellaneous" fund attached to every 'development' initiative is a potential avenue for ensuring that no matter what the aims or results of a project, local people are left with concrete resources for their own use and allocation.

These, in summary, are women's realities in terms of the politics and interconnectedness of land, labour and soils issues in their everyday lives. But, what, besides being a valuable case study which focusses on the micro-politics of a particular socio-cultural context, do the narratives in this study mean in terms of broader research and policy

pertaining to soil management ? How can these particular findings be effectively operationalized in practical terms without stretching ‘the particulars’ too thin and far?

7.2 Enriching The Interface Between Researchers And Farmers

In this thesis, I have argued that a focus on the local level allows for a deeper understanding of the complex micro-politics of people’s struggles over resources which are critical for sustaining the soils and livelihoods, illustrating that gender relations are increasingly contested in light of broader ‘development’ policies such as SAPs. In effect, such a focus allows for a rethinking of soils analysis, demonstrating that soil management is embedded in social relations at the household level, *as well as* broader processes at the level of North-South relations.

Beyond getting behind simplistic assumptions about the ‘problem’ of soil degradation propagated by ‘development’ institutions like the World Bank, this conceptualization highlights the way ‘development’ policies such as SAPs adversely affect the sustainability of natural resources. This recognition leads to a fundamental conundrum for ‘development’ practitioners, who must grapple with searching questions about the negative affects of ‘development’ policies on local people: given the repeated nature of failures and unintended effects of ‘development’ policies and projects, do they have anything to offer in terms of collaborating with local people and affecting positive and transformative change ? Can ‘development’ provide possibilities for common linkages and alliances between local people, academics and ‘development’ practitioners? In the discussion below, I address these conundrums and challenges, before engaging in specific research and policy recommendations.

Beyond The Conundrum Of 'Development'

Pointing to the failure of 'development' to deliver on its promises of economic growth and modernization (Ferguson, 1999:376), critiques of 'development' put forward questions about the viability and attainability of 'modernization' (involving the whole planet consuming at 'First' World levels) to deliver the 'progress' and prosperity it promises to. They point out that the Eurocentric "colonizing monoculture" of 'development' discourse hides from view and silence complex, dynamic and diverse local modes of life (Ferguson, 1999; Watts, 199), and in its place, privilege western values, ideals, interventions and discourses. These critiques, when combined with evidence from case studies which document its adverse effects, mount a formidable argument for getting rid of 'development' once and for all. Some enthusiastically argue, "the epoch of 'development' is coming to an end, and therefore the time is ripe to write its obituary" (Sachs, 1992:1).

The rolling back of the state through SAPs, the shrinking 'development' budgets and overseas 'development' assistance are making it seem like this may be happening after all:

For Africa, at least, as for some other parts of the world, there is a real break with the certainties and expectations that made a 'development era' possible. The 'rolling back' of the state, the abandonment of the goal of industrialization, the commitment to what are euphemistically called 'market forces' and 'private enterprise', and the shattering of expectations for economic convergence with the West, all come together to create a very real end, at least at the level of perceptions and expectations, of at least the grander versions of the 'development' project in Africa (Ferguson, 1999:378).

As 'development' budgets shrink and strategic interests of the west change over time, what is left behind are failed promises of modernization. Local people increasingly feel that 'development' has left them disconnected and abjected from a place they once occupied in the contemporary global political economy (Ferguson, 1999:371).

Kenya once was the 'model' African country, but as people in Kenya know all too well, "the upending of the project of modernity is not a playful intellectual choice, but a

shattering, compulsory economic event” (ibid.:387). Like colonialism before it, ‘development’ and ‘modernity’ are real forces embedded within larger North-South relations of power which continue to order and re-order women’s and men’s lives in very real and harsh ways.

While development’s critics celebrate its demise, there is reason to be doubtful of sweeping claims about the ‘end of development’, as it is clear that ideas of ‘development’ policies and discourse continue to hold sway in many parts of the world today (ibid.:377; Sikana, 1995; Van der Zaag, 1998). Indeed, participants in this research would be greatly disappointed if I argued for an end to ‘development’, because it represents a shrinking, but potentially lucrative, channel for gaining access to resources. Similar to Ferguson’s study of the Zambian copperbelt, this study has illustrated that for Kenyans, and Maragoli women in particular, the rolling back of the state through SAP policies, has been more of a betrayal rather than a liberation, and has not made the abruptness of its ‘withdrawal’ any easier to take (Ferguson, ibid. 380). The heralding the ‘end of development’ is neither intellectually nor politically adequate (ibid.). Critics of ‘development’ tend to forget:

The post-World War II conceptual apparatus of ‘development’ did not create global inequality at a stroke, but only provided a new means of organizing and legitimating an only too real inequality that was already very well-established. ... ‘Development’ was laid on top of already-existing geopolitical hierarchies; it neither created North-South inequality, nor undid it, but instead provided a set of conceptual and organizational devices for managing it, legitimating it, and sometimes contesting and negotiating its terms. The subordinate position ascribed to ‘the third world’ in ‘development’ discourse was therefore not a figment of the imagination or a mere Eurocentric illusion, but reflected an intractable political-economic reality that could not, and cannot, be wished or re-labelled away. ... Nor is there any reason to link the forecast the ‘end’ of development with any general liberation or new autonomy, as many critics have tended to do. For if development did not inaugurate the inequalities it organized, neither can its demise be expected to make them suddenly disappear (Ferguson, 1999:379-380).

Local people continue to recognize the importance of soil management for sustaining their lives in the long run and they attempt to engage strategically in a multitude of activities to

sustain their soils, but they do so under severe constraints. The real challenge is to refigure North-South relations in such a way as to affect positive and collaborative transformation and to address global inequality “without reintroducing the teleologies and ethnocentrisms of the development metanarratives” (Ferguson, 1999:382).

Focussing On Collaborative Research

Despite ‘development’s’ economic and social failures, ‘development’ organizations and institutions are not homogenous. There are those organizations and spaces where counter-narratives and movements exist within each organization and institution. Within these spaces, there are those who are interested in recovering gendered voices and local perspectives and in working collaboratively with local women and men. The challenge is to recognize and focus on these organizations and these spaces. It is also useful to engage in collaborative research with organizations who have invested over the long-term in local communities, have forged links with cutting edge academic work with ‘practical’ outputs and are driven by women and men at the local level, and have encouraged and supported links between northern and southern researchers, organizations and academics.

A focus on the micro-politics of people’s struggles, of local perspectives, local realities and local experiences through the prism of gender, is a way of addressing inequities and may be the avenue required for constructing new North-South relations. In such an approach, local knowledge can coexist with other forms of knowledge. The political task, then, is not about ‘sharing’ knowledge with those who lack it, as has been posited by ‘development’ discourse in the past, but of forging links between different knowledges and experiences that “are possible from different locations and tracing lines of possible alliance and common purpose between them” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a:39). Central to such a

project is the need for the input of, and continual evaluation by, local people.

In-Depth Social Science Research

Gender and social analysis is critical for understanding local complexities and countering generalizations in soils research. However, gender analysts, anthropologists, geographers and sociologists are often hired as the 'token' social scientists on research projects and initiatives. Their analysis is rarely mainstreamed into 'development' projects or institutional frameworks, and they are often discouraged from critically analyzing the concepts and underlying assumptions of projects or policies (Pottier, 1993b:22). This is a major oversight, as policies and projects may prove to be inappropriate or miss out on important local realities. To counter this, continual and rigorous ethnography is crucial, as:

...social worlds within which development efforts take shape are essentially fluid. Production patterns, access to or control over resources, the make-up of residential units, the allocation of responsibility within units, patterns of social stratification, and so on, are all liable to some form of ongoing change (Pottier, 1993:7).

Long-term, sustained commitment and study of these dynamic and complex realities is important. For donors, this may mean concentrating in certain regions and areas, rather than having broad and far-reaching programs. In order to avoid project failures, in-depth qualitative research may be required before initiating projects in order to understand better local realities in different cultural, political-economic and environmental contexts.

Another challenge facing soils research is interdisciplinary collaboration. This entails finding congruent and meaningful ways to hash out the diametrically opposed ideologies and conceptualizations within different disciplines. Future research needs to find ways of reconciling the tendency of physical sciences to bring 'order' to reality, to reduce and homogenize with the social sciences tendency - and especially feminist poststructuralism's

tendency - to focus on heterogeneity, diversity and variability

Differences Between Gender Awareness And Gender Analysis

While many organizations have begun to pay more attention to 'doing gender', it is not clear that this attention is grounded in in-depth theorization or understanding of what engaging in gender actually means. As I have argued earlier, gender is very different from 'women', as all women cannot be lumped together in the category of being 'vulnerable'. Rather than "add women and stir", what is required is an understanding of *gender relations*. Women do not operate in worlds devoid of men, or more powerful women, in worlds where these women and men do not exert influence, power and control. Those who are powerful must also be included in the constitution of 'the problem', as well as 'the solution', if there is to be any change, and in order to avoid a situation of escalation of gender politics which sometimes manifests itself in very real and violent forms.

I would like to end this thesis on a personal note. Researching and analyzing social sciences aspects gender for the first time as a physical scientist, has been humbling and a radical learning experience. Placing women and men's words, stories, experiences at the centre of analysis is often considered as 'soft' and 'marginal' in the physical sciences. It requires a radical epistemological and cosmological shift, a massive reconceptualization of what we, as physical scientists, understand as the subject of study.

Gender analysis is just as, if not more, complex and involved as the most complicated technical problem. In order to analyse the circumstances of people's everyday lives and what these mean in terms of broader 'macro' policies and research in an in-depth and rigorous manner, requires moving beyond the realm of the linear and a new way of thinking. To use a mathematical metaphor, it requires moving in to the realm of the multi-

dimensional, invoking complex and critical modes of analysis, and incorporating multiple, inter-related and ever-changing variables. It cannot be a mere 'add-on', a 'box' to check off, or a 'rapid' method of coming to understand complex realities. Not if it is to reflect people's gendered realities appropriately. In an era where we demand research results and 'deliverables' in short time spans, in-depth research, whether it is focussed on gender analysis or other types of rigorous social sciences analysis, quite simply requires time in order to appropriately and adequately reflect the complex realities of the subjects it is studying.

We must learn as both physical and social scientists to differentiate it from gender awareness when supporting and carrying out research and projects. *Gender awareness* is critical for political action, for engaging in collaborative initiatives and for subverting dominant discourses and institutions. It is an action which indicates our personal politics for change and helps to focus our energies on the 'most vulnerable' people in a context of unequal global as well as local power relations. Gender awareness is a powerful tool for instituting political action.

However, simply being gender aware is not enough to carry out research or to institute gender policy. This requires an in-depth understanding of conceptual, methodological and political issues. Focussing energy on training and on creating opportunities for people in the 'south' to carry out gender analysis on their own terms is one way of ensuring that bland, nonsensical, superficial and descriptive gender analysis is not instituted. It is a way of ensuring that in-depth and rigorous analysis, which can lead to real change and positive transformation, can be carried out.

End Notes

1. Throughout this thesis, I use both single inverted commas and quotations for certain types of terms and concepts. I use inverted commas in order to problematize or call attention to terms or concepts that are normally taken for granted (i.e. 'development'). I use quotations marks for terms and concepts which were direct quotations from participants themselves (i.e. "providing").
2. The term 'gender neutral' is used within this thesis the same way that Ferguson (1994) refers to the politically neutral discourse of 'development', which suspends politics from even the most politically sensitive operations of instituting 'development' projects and initiatives.
3. While this case study is concerned about the contemporary dynamics of soil management in Maragoli, references are made throughout to historical evidence cited in people's accounts as well as secondary literature.
4. Within the discourse of 'development', African countries are constructed as 'Third World' countries. This elaborate construction has real effects in term of affecting structural change, and in the case of Kenya, is further affected by the 'special' place Kenya holds within western imaginations through romanticized visions articulated by western mainstream culture and as put forward by novels and films such as "Out of Africa" (Dinesen, 1938), and "West With The Night" (Markham, 1942). Indeed, Images of Kenya in western media and 'development' discourse portray it as a choice tourist destination. For instance, the World Bank consistently highlight Kenya's role in tourism in documents and texts (World Bank, 1996a, 1996b, 1989). Further, westerners know little about it other than what they see within, as well as between the bounds of national parks and five-star hotels - taking away snap-shot images of 'poverty' on the one hand, and 'adventure', 'wildlife' and 'safari' on the other. This is not to say that Kenya's status within Africa can be reduced to romantic visions embedded in popular culture and media images, but that these visions have played a very real role in influencing infrastructure 'development' and 'opening it up' as a hub for both travel and 'development'.
5. Kenya's status within Africa came about through historical and political processes brought about by western constructs and intervention. Initially, as headquarters for the Imperial British East Africa Company, Kenya was to become a key colony which acted as a hub for all of its economic and strategic activities. Kenya's importance continued in the post-independence era, as it was considered by western governments and institutions as being 'progressive' and accorded the status most 'successful' 'model' state in Africa. Independence also coincided with the cold-war era, during which Kenya was considered pro-Western and therefore 'strategic' in light of its being surrounded by 'communist' influences and war-torn countries. Kenya, similar to colonial times, remains a focal point for the deployment of Western knowledge and intervention. It is where 'development' institutions, organizations and agencies congregate to institute 'development' to those countries which are 'in need of it'. It is a place where a plethora of international institutions, including a major United Nations complex in Africa have set up 'shop' in order to deploy 'development' assistance and aid through numerous projects and policies. Kenya was, until recently, regarded as a model country open to the ways of 'modernization' and therefore an ideal 'target' for 'development'. However, projects and policies have regularly and consistently failed. This failure has been couched in a discourse of non-compliance and 'reluctance' to embrace IMF supported reforms, and further, its propensity towards 'over-population', 'corruption', 'ethnic rift' and environmental degradation.
6. Given the routine regularity of failed and inappropriate projects, programmes and research, coupled with ethnographic accounts which have highlighted the lack of meaningful and congruent interface between the 'experts' and the 'recipients' of 'development', it is not surprising that there is a growing dissatisfaction of 'development' and the manner in which research is carried out in Kenya as well as other parts of the world. These studies have indicated the problematic manner in which 'development' initiatives have solely focussed on what they deemed as 'hard', 'factual', 'rational', 'neutral', 'objective' and 'quantifiable' aspects of life and that this focussing on 'technical' aspects neglects the political, social, historical, cultural and other context-specific realities.

7. A poststructuralist perspective parallels and is often conflated with a postmodernist perspective (defined below) (Marchand and Parpart, 1995:245). A poststructuralist perspective is a movement within the social sciences and literature (or linguistics) which is critical of the assumptions embedded in Enlightenment thought (ibid.). Poststructuralism rejects a rationalist world view that rests upon dichotomies or dualisms, assumes an objective reality, and sets out to develop a grand theory and metanarratives (ibid.). A postmodern perspective encompasses discourse analysis, genealogy, deconstructinism and textuality (Marchand and Parpart, 1995:245). It rejects modernity in favour of a broader pluri-cultural range of styles, techniques and voices (Gardner and Lewis, 1996 : xv; Marchand and Parpart, 1995:245). It questions Western knowledge systems, the social construction of dominant interpretations, unitary theories of progress and scientific rationality (ibid.). It is concerned with forms of resistance and the silencing of voices (ibid.).

8. Feminist postructuralism argues that just as there is no one way of conceptualizing 'development', there is no one all-encompassing, monolithic feminism, and likewise, no fixed and unitary feminist theory pertaining to 'development'. As such, feminism is fluid, has no fixed definition and is governed by context, positionality and 'identity' of the knower. Nonetheless, it is inherently political in that when women and men become feminists, the crucial thing that occurs is not that they have learned any new 'facts' or 'truths' about the world, but that they have come to view them from a different position, from their own gendered positions as knowing subjects: "...this difference in positional perspective does not necessitate a change in what are taken to be facts, although new facts may come into view from the new position, but it does necessitate a political change in perspective since the point of departure, the point from which all things are measured, has changed" (Alcoff, 1989:324-5, cited in Mbilinyi, 1992:51).

9. For an in-depth and comprehensive discussion on these different perspectives on 'development', see Rathgeber (1995, 1990), Parpart and Marchand (1995) and Sylvester (1995).

10. The notion that there are different axes of difference or multiple positionalities in people's everyday lives with complex permutations which interplay and interact with each other leads to subjective experiences which are different for each experience, especially when subjective experiences of each person are overlayed with these various positionalities. In other words, women are differentiated along multiple and various axes of difference, as well as individual subjectivities and psychologies - they are not a homogenous group. Every woman has multiple identities, which change over time and space, sometimes conflicting with one another.

11. Another crucial dualism is men/women, whereby men are represented as the 'universal', the standard with which to compare and contrast women. Women in this conceptualization become the 'other'. Indeed, within much of conventional approaches, farmers are assumed to be male (the norm) while women are considered as 'female farmers' ('the other') (Mbilinyi, 1992:51).

12. For a further discussion on the differences between a 'women and environment' approach as opposed to a feminist political-ecology approach, see Leach, 1991.

13. According to Mbilinyi, methodology "is a theory and analysis about the kind of methods and general research approach most appropriate for a given body of theory, such as Marxism or critical feminism. Methodological debates may centre around theoretical issues, such as the appropriate concepts to analyze "the state" and the "construction of gender relations", or linking theory with method by challenging the research procedures adopted in empirical investigations" (Mbilinyi, 1992:32).

14. The decision to use qualitative methods not only stemmed from a conviction of their importance but also from a personal exploration which shifted me away from a 'technical' and reductionist understanding of reality (from my experiences as an engineer) to an understanding of the complex nature of reality. They have also engaged me in a personal journey requiring conceptual transformation and processes which have challenged the positivistic basis and sole belief in quantitative data from my engineering training - and in its place has guided me towards the pursuit of more sensitive and holistic ways of carrying out research and envisioning 'development'.

15. In Kenya, being “*Asian*” refers to being Indian (as there are many people living in the country who came from India in order to construct the railway line in East Africa during the colonial period, and settled in Kenya after independence).

16. TSBF student-researcher colleagues working in Western Kenya had a fraction of the resources and power that I had access to, despite similar institutional and funding affiliations with TSBF and IDRC. However, these researchers were accorded ‘development’ agent status by participants because of their education, class and institutional affiliations and linkages.

17. A personal journal is an important tool in terms of reflexive research and writing. It provided a means of reflecting on the fieldwork experiences and processes both as they unfolded as well as in the post-fieldwork stage. In this way, the personal journal provides a means of reflecting upon and reviewing the decision-making processes, dilemmas, perceptions, feelings of vulnerability and reactions to experiences and events that took place in the field. Although I kept a daily journal throughout the fieldwork process, it is for my use only and is not available for reference. By keeping a daily journal throughout the fieldwork process, I was able to establish a space, besides the field notes, in which to articulate my own thoughts and in which to record observations and notes from interviews. I set aside a bit of time every evening to reflect and write about overall perceptions and feelings about the research. In the post-fieldwork stage, when the researcher is again “home” and far from the field “site”, pouring over the journal provides a window to the thought processes which were going on during the fieldwork stage. It provides an avenue in which to reflect on the process of research and the way decisions and choices were made about methods, issues and dilemmas. In this manner, I also recorded feelings of vulnerability when they arose.

18. The term “research journey” is coined and used by deVries in order to explore the research process in reflexive way, paying attention to issues of actors and agency (1992).

19. The research journey began years before the research proposal was conceptualized. It began while I was an engineering student and practitioner, who at the time was grappling with recurring questions about the way engineering “development” projects were conceptualized and carried out. I found myself continually asking : where were the people in all of this ? Where were the women ? At that time, I did not realize that the knowledge produced and reproduced within technical fields was deeply rooted in notions of positivism and reductionism - and that there was an answer to these questions : in the physical sciences, people did not matter and did not count and therefore, were not part of the analysis. In fact, technical knowledge did not take into account varying cultural, political and social contexts. Projects had to be simple and replicable blueprints which could be used from one context to the other with the slightest of alteration. People and contextualized approaches would make the whole analysis and carrying out of technical “development” projects “messy”, complicated and non-operationalizable. It is also no wonder that this thesis attempts to answer those very same questions which are pertinent to soils issues.

20. A *matatu* is a popular, yet precarious, mode of Kenyan public transportation consisting of a mini-van. Many of these vans are rehabilitations of what was once a tourist vehicle used for Safaris in Kenya. I was often told that Kenya had the second largest death rate from road accidents in the world, and after several hair-raising experiences with *matatus*, fully understood what this meant.

21. All RAs were asked to sign contracts and were employed according to TSBF employment standards. They were offered stipends established by TSBF. They were also given a bonus at the end of the research which reflected the quality of their work. In addition, all research assistants were provided with reference letters which reflected their skills, abilities and contributions to the research.

22. Both my restriction in time, and commitment to more in-depth and intensive methods with fewer participants prompted me to limit the number of groups participating in the research.

23. Group members often arranged a ‘head table’ for us because they anticipated we would ‘teach’ them about

soil management, as they had in the past with government officials. In these cases, I explained that I was interested in learning from them rather than 'preaching' to them, and Cliff and I re-arranged the seating in a circle to 'diffuse' the hierarchy.

24. However, selecting individuals on the basis of their positionalities meant that other pertinent factors were missed, such as geographical location within the village. For instance, within one group, I selected 6 individuals, mostly young women as the group had a very young average age, not realizing that all six resided near each other and were neighbours. In fact, I ended up selecting three women in the same household (two sisters and a sister-in-law, married to the brother), and three of the neighbours. All the participants had different last names, and therefore I did not realize their close proximity to each other. As the research unfolded, it became apparent that other members of the group accused the participants of favouritism or perhaps they had made some sort of "deal" with me.

25. The purposive sampling meant that I deliberately selected certain villages and people, in certain cases, selecting individuals who were recognized as being "knowledgeable" in the community through their roles as life historians and who would for example, be especially able to articulate changes in Maragoli over time. Note that knowledge is not the same as education credentials, especially since many older women in Maragoli never attained any formal education.

26. This method also accorded an opportunity to follow-up on discrepancies and ambiguous responses, especially in terms of the types of crops grown, number of livestock kept, plot size, farming practices and other individuals in the extended family or living on the family compound.

27. The twenty cameras allocated for the photo appraisals were shared among 43 participants - 17 cameras were shared by two participants, and 3 cameras were shared by 3 people. Although I had not planned for cameras to be shared by 3 people, during one session, three participants insisted that they be included in the individual interviews and the photo appraisal. One of the persons who insisted on being included was a group official, whom I had met with originally in tracking down her group.

28. Although most photographs turned out well, a few 'blunders' occurred. These included using the camera the wrong way around (resulting in extreme and un-printable close-ups of a participant's face) and photographs of thumbs and fingers, 'cut-off' heads and non-centred compositions.

29. I initially began the second individual interviews with the photo appraisals but soon realized that when the excitement of seeing the photographs was over, participants seemed less interested in carrying out interviews. I then attempted to carry out the interview beforehand but eventually enmeshed the two methods - the photo appraisals with individual interviews - together.

30. As the informed consent forms were translated into both Maragoli, as well as Kiswahili, they were read and explained to all participants involved in the research on the day of the first round of interviews, before any other methods were undertaken. This process was undertaken individually in some cases, and as in groups in others. The informed consent form itself included a description of the research and its objectives, the methods used, the expected duration of the participant's involvement, the manner in which the results would be used, debriefed and disseminated. The forms outlined the informed consent procedure itself and the methods and procedures which would be used to ensure participant's rights pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity. The forms included the address and names of individuals at the IDRC and TSBF for participants to contact in case they felt they wanted to follow up on the research or make a complaint. They also outlined the participant's right to refuse to answer questions and withdraw from the research. Once the participants were satisfied, they were jointly signed by the participants as well as by me. In cases where participants were unable to sign the form, informed consent was obtained orally, as well as through the written signature of a spouse, relative or friend acting on the participant's behalf. A copy was left with the participant in the language of their choice.

31. Participants were concerned about making displays on their own and I explained that display-making

sessions would be organized beforehand. This would give each group a chance to make a display around the photography taken by the members. During these sessions, group members were provided with poster paper, pens, markers, glue and tape to make their own displays with the photographs. Another concern of participants who participated in the photo appraisal was in terms of ownership of the photographs. I suggested that the photographs belonged to the individual participants, but could be used on loan to the group for the displays.

32. Jefremovas found in her study of brick-makers in Rwanda and amongst the Sagada Igorots of the highland Philippines, that participants showed a level of surprise in encountering her again, and in doing so voiced to her their impression on the level of commitment on the part of researchers to follow-up (Jefremovas, in conversation, Aug.20, 1998).

33. Although I was concerned in the pre-field work stage that cameras would be appropriated by spouses and other men in the farming household, as expected, this occurred in a few cases, but it was not as widespread or straight-forward as I had first imagined. In one case, during personal interviews involving the photo appraisals, a participant was very vague and evasive in answering the questions. Her responses indicated that she did not know much about the reasoning around the pictures and sometimes completely drew a blank on an explanation.

After a while, I started to suspect that she did not take the pictures herself and that perhaps her son had appropriated the camera. This theory was clinched in one of the last photographs which clearly showed a man's thumb (one which was evidently not the thumb of the woman, and therefore could not have been hers). In other cases, participants admitted to not taking the pictures themselves. For example, one participant kept postponing the date of camera collection. Only when photographs were developed did I realize that her grandson had appropriated the camera for his own personal use and that she was embarrassed at returning the camera to us.

In another example, a participant's brother-in-law had appropriated the camera and took photographs at her father-in-law's funeral. Other examples included a participant's spouse taking all the photographs of her undertaking farm and household work, as well as another participant whose neighbour convinced her to give him the camera and then proceeded to take 7 consecutive pictures of her in the same pose and same spot. The neighbour was upset at not being included in the research and had decided to waste the participant's pictures through appropriation. In the last case known by me, a participant's daughter-in-law took all the photographs on her behalf, with her in them.

34. A factor which affected the use of photography as a technology was poor eyesight. I believe that many participants did not want to admit to this at the outset, for fear of being passed over for the photo appraisals.

However poor eyesight, it turned out, was not only an important factor for photo appraisals, but it was also an important insight in terms of soil management, as I will discuss in later chapters. In some interview situations, participants needed assistance in determining the contents of the photographs, as they could not see what the picture was illustrating. Despite over-exposure and un-focussed photographs (including cut-off heads, thumbs, fingers and the sky), the majority of photographs turned out well. However, in future research, I would use more diagrams to illustrate the functioning and use of the cameras, composition of photographs (as a few participants mentioned that certain photographs did not capture everything they had intended) and spend more time in explaining the method.

35. Education and experience also played a factor in the research. Cliff's past experience as research assistant on numerous research endeavours clearly made a difference in the level of confidence he portrayed in carrying out the work. Patricia's education in word-processing and her recently acquired B.A. influenced the fact that she personally enjoyed transcribing/interpreting over interpreting in the field. On the other hand, lack of experience and knowledge in certain types of research methods meant that a great deal of time is spent in training, and trial and error.

36. I believe that the positionality of one of my RAs as an Avalogoli man had an impact on the type of meanings he ascribed to the participants' responses or narration. For example, he sometimes toned down or left out responses that showed men in a bad light or were sexist in nature. Further, he sometimes assisted men in answering questions so as to improve the 'intelligence' of the answer by spoon-feeding or 'nudging' responses in a certain direction. His perceptions towards a participant also affected his behaviour towards them. For

example, in speaking to a participant whom we suspected was a sex worker he was less patient than usual. However an Avalogoli, he had an agenda towards ensuring that participants were shown as being in need of 'development' assistance. To this end, he sometimes interjected his views by adding material to responses.

37. Economically wealthy participants wore clothes or group uniforms tailored in 'modern' styles and fabrics, while economically poorer participants wore 'traditional' clothing.

38. This, and other accounts in this thesis are verbatim, unless otherwise specified. The account is represented in the participant's own words, based on their responses to interview questions, discussions around photo appraisals, as well as their more detailed accounts shared through personal narratives with the research assistant as part of this process. The account has been translated word for word from Maragoli into English. The coding "(L001)" is a system of coding that I have used to identify different participants and to ensure their anonymity.

39. More specifically, in 1894, the British Land Acquisition Act allowed for 'empty' land from the coast to the interior to be acquired for the construction of a railway (Davison, 1988:164). In 1897, the Crown Land Acts brought millions of acres of the most arable land under the British Protectorate, and was reinforced a number of times in the twentieth century (ibid.: 164). Those whose land had been acquired were confined to Native Reserves or became labourers on the plantation of foreign settlers. In 1915, the Crown Lands Ordinance, which was subsequently altered and modified over the next 25 years, further formalized the establishment of Native Reserves to suit the needs of European settlers (Okoth Ogendero, 1991).

40. Male out-migration in search for wage labour took place in colonial railway and road works (1896-1913), sisal and tea estates (1920-1930), gold mines and coffee estates (1930s), as well as military employment, construction, domestic, tourist, professional and government work (since the turn of the century), and continued to increase in importance (Crowley and Carter, 1996).

41. This situation is confirmed by Crowley and Carter's survey of 105 households in 1995, indicating that almost half were less than one acre in size and fewer than 10 per cent were larger than 3 acres (Crowley and Carter, 1995:1).

42. "Digging" refers to the labour-intensive work of clearing, breaking the ground, planting and weeding.

43. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, when women engage in overt acts of resistance, they do so knowing that it entails severe consequences in terms of foregoing rights and claims to "property" and status.

44. The man's father designates the area where the house is to be built by placing the four posts of the house (Abwunza, 1997:196). Women are not allowed to build houses. Although they may help out in constructing parts of the dwelling, they are restricted from putting up the main frame, as well as laying the foundation of the home.

45. A hierarchy in the allocation of land to co-wives is followed, as the senior wife normally remains in the ancestral home while the junior wife is allocated a purchased or secondary plot. This seniority is maintained because when a man dies, he must be buried on the senior wife's *shamba*. As one woman explains, "according to Avalogoli tradition... junior co-wives are regarded as daughters of the senior wife" (L032). This cultural norm is invoked by senior wives to defend their use rights to land, especially when faced with threats of land division, which would affect their livelihoods in the immediate term and reduce the amount of land inherited by their sons in the future. Moreover, in the past, when land-holdings were larger, economically wealthy men married multiple wives, as this was an indicator of status and wealth, as well as a means of accessing labour. Today, men sometimes engage in extra-marital affairs or have co-wives in town to whom they divert their resources, and sometimes, allocate land to "out-grown" sons borne from these relationships. In such circumstances, resources such as land become the focus of intra-household conflict among co-wives, husbands and "out-grown" sons. Co-wives living at "home" complain bitterly about husbands who out-migrate and take

other wives, effectively “forgetting” about them. In many instances, they receive no monetary remittances and assistance from their husbands, and are sometimes left caring for “out-grown” children, in addition to their own. Men who cannot provide separate houses and *shambas* for their wives face heavy criticism from their wives, sons and the community.

46. This account of Elizabeth’s experiences as a farmer and young wife is presented here in my own words, based on our interviews. They are in the third person, as they are transcribed from my personal field notes.

47. This narrative consisting of Desi’s experiences as a farmer and co-wife are based on transcriptions based on recordings of her personal narrative. The double-indented, single-spaced passages in this account are direct quotations of Desi’s own words as expressed in this recording and as translated by research assistants from Maragoli. The passage which begins at the far left margin include other details conveyed during recorded interviews and personal narratives, but are best expressed in my words. This format applies to all subsequent narratives, unless otherwise specified.

48. While at the turn of the century, patrilineal elders played a central role in arbitrating land disputes and presiding over land allocation and demarcation, as well as the distribution of uncleared land [ref. Reqd], today, clan elders are sometimes still brought in to mediate household, succession, as well as territorial land disputes pertaining to individual holdings.

49. Economically wealthy farmers normally own more than one plot, which are dispersed geographically and require access to transportation and hired labour in order to farm and maintain. They are often designated for different purposes and crops, although an increase in theft of crops has made it more difficult to manage plots in the current economic climate.

50. The credit for the phrase “Between Toil and Soil” must be given to Crowley and Carter, as it is adapted from their 1996 manuscript.

51. I engage in an analytical separation of farmers’ position from labour enterprises because (i) broader historical, political-economic and cultural phenomenon apply across labour enterprises, and therefore an analysis of positionality shows how these processes affect different actors; and (ii) because soil management practices are crop specific (Crowley and Carter, 1996:30), or associated with a particular labour enterprise, and need to be discussed in turn.

52. Women can do several things in the face of violence or of disputes they feel are ‘unjustified’. They can return to their homes, go to the elders or ‘leave’ the situation. Usually women go home to let things blow over or to demonstrate the value of their labour and input into the day-to-day running of the *shamba*. In some cases, the matter is mediated and thrashed out by family members. If the woman is found to be in the wrong, her parents ask her to return to her husband’s home. If the husband was wrong, he is made to pay a fine.

53. This situation is in stark contrast to other case studies such as Carney and Watts’ (1990) and Schroeder’s study of the Gambia (1996). Maragoli is distinct, as there exists no large-scale estate farm where women can withdraw their labour, as is the case in Mackenzie’s study of Murang’a, Central Province (1995a).

54. When women remarry, they lose claims to their ex-husband’s land and property, and must move to their new husband’s home. They often must leave small children behind or in their parent’s care. These children may subsequently lose all rights to land from their biological fathers. As such, land tenure is a central concern for widows.

55. Schooling during colonialism had a gendered face. Boys were encouraged to attend formal schooling by the colonial government as well as by parents in order to increase chances of wage employment, and hence cash remittances to the household. Even when colonial policies began encouraging girls to attend, it took some time to convince Maragolis to send girls for formal education, because this had major repercussions on the labour

availability on the farm and in the household compound, and because girls who received formal education were stigmatised.

56. During interviews with Elizabeth or when passing by her compound, I often found her alone on the compound. On these occasions she had been left behind to continue working on the *shamba* and household while her in-laws and neighbours were attending community events or participating in funeral ceremonies.

57. Bridewealth payment consists of cash and livestock normally consisting of indigenous cows. In the past, it consisted of livestock, cowry shells (used as a medium of exchange in pre-colonial times) and indigenous hoes. Older participants complained that the cost of 'dowry' has gone up substantially over time, explaining that a dowry that used to cost 2 cows, now costs 10 cows plus a substantial amount of cash (between 10-20,000 Shillings).

58. The increase of planting of hedges for demarcation in Mbale is confirmed by aerial photographs taken between 1963 and 1978 (Carter and Crowley, 1997:11).

59. Government policies to encourage crossbred and grade cows were supported by incentives which offered free artificial insemination programmes, dips and supporting services (Crowley and Carter, 1996:27-28).

60. In the first year, crop rotation involved inter-cropping finger millet and maize during the long rains, followed by pulses such as beans and bambara nuts in the short rains. In the second year, sorghum and maize were inter-cropped, followed by sorghum in the short rains. In the third year, either millet was planted, or soils were allowed to rest, or the land was placed under sweet potatoes, followed by finger millet, before being left as livestock pasture for three to four years (Crowley and Carter, 1996:6-7).

61. According to Carter et. al, 30 % of Maragoli grow French beans in 1995, a figure that had increased by 11 % in 10 years (Carter et. al, 1998:27).

62. Men's role as the providers for the family has also been called into question. 'Providing' took on new meanings in addition to providing land beginning in the colonial period, which centred around income generation to pay colonial poll and hut taxes.

63. Women and men's resounding silence on the issue of SAPs was made clear by the fact that not one participant raised it as an issue of concern. People do not grasp the actual meaning and purposes of SAPs beyond the way it has been 'politicized' as both state and opposition parties "trade accusations at each other, on SAPs effects, while none have endeavoured to educate people on the meanings of SAPs" (Kanyinga and Ibutu, 1994:2).

64. Kenya's dualistic land tenure pattern emerged during the colonial period which gave rise to two distinct forms of property, namely large-scale or estate farms and small-holder farms (Ikiara et al., 1993:88). Today large-scale farms comprise mixed farms, plantations and ranches that were formally owned by Europeans. Although there was a major sub-division and transfer of large-scale farms in the 1960s, these sub-division and resettlement schemes only affected about a quarter of the best land, only 3 per cent of total agricultural land and only 20 per cent of Kenya's total population (ibid.:89). Further, the schemes favoured certain 'ethnic' groups over others. Ownership of the large-scale property was passed onto the elite strata of the population after independence made up of businesspeople, high-ranking politicians and civil servants (ibid.). Currently, large-scale and estate farms in the former White Highlands produce a large proportion of food production for internal markets (ibid.).

65. The powerful symbolic status of education came into place during colonialism when those who were supported by the colonial government in gaining higher education not only went on to be powerful and wealthy, but also became powerful symbols of status and examples for others to aspire to.

66. Home-brewed 'beer' or alcohol.

67. Here I consider consumable items to include sugar, tea, bread, scones and other food-stuffs. It also includes kersone, matches, soap, laundry detergent, etc.

68. Non-consumable items are considered as cooking pots, utensils, plastic tubs, mattresses, farm implements, baskets, etc.

69. Timothy's narrative is reconstructed from my personal field notes.

70. In order to understand these relationships, it is important to know that the nuclear family model does not apply and the extended family plays an important role in life. As such, cousins and brother and sister-in-laws are known as brothers and sisters, and mother-in-laws are known as mothers.

71. People who out-migrate often draw upon kinship relations to access resources for sustaining lives and in terms of finding work, establishing themselves, borrowing money, etc.

72. One criteria used in this research for establishing whether a women's groups was made of economically elite or poor women, was the amount of monthly contributions made towards revolving funds; which was later supplemented by information collected during individual and group interviews.

73. Her discussion of physical abuse shows the risks she also faces.

74. However, Ferguson argues that it is necessary

...not to join in the tendency... of unreservedly celebrating 'coping' abilities of the... poor and the vitality of the so-called informal sector; such a move can too easily end up whitewashing or romanticizing poverty and unemployment. (1999:384).

And remember that:

. . . we [also not] justified in assuming that this often stigmatized group constitutes a failed, marginal class peripheral to the "main line" of a stable working class. For the people in this large and diverse category (who appear to have in common only their dependence upon one or another sort of social and economic improvisation) are not simply failures or victims; if anything, they seem to represent an especially viable and durable ... alternative... (1999:384).

75. For a comprehensive study on the problems inherent in accessing and engaging in micro-credit for women, see Huntington's case study in Tanzania (1998).

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