

**CONSERVATISM AND CHANGE:  
THE REFASHIONING OF GENDER RELATIONS  
FROM 1870 TO 1914  
A CASE STUDY OF EAST LONDON**

THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

This is a case study of East London from 1870 to 1914 with gender as the critical analytical category. The focus is on change in the structure of gender relations, evaluated in terms of the recognition of the rights of women and their status in society and women of all race groups are dealt with. A feature of the source material has been the use made of oral history where interviews were conducted with the descendants of women who lived during the study period.

There were many indirect factors which had a retrogressive influence on progressive change in the rights and position of women. The initial small size of the population and unbalanced gender ratios, the few natural resources, a small and limited port and periodic unpredictable natural disasters gave rise to a 'boom and burst' economy with very little industry. The result was that initially the women were very conservative and unwilling to make social changes. The military occupation and the outbreak of hostilities in the late 1870s affected social and racial attitudes detrimentally.

The entrenched patriarchal system, under which both black and white women lived, and the legal controls, particularly in the marital situation, reinforced the subordination of women, making the system difficult to break. Further conservative forces were at work with the European class system being well entrenched, with most women working for upward mobility, gentrification and respectability. Wealth was critical in determining status and those women from the working class, who

had achieved some degree of wealth and status, were not prepared to challenge the system. Religion was important for nearly all white women and converted black women, but was a retarding influence in the growth of feminist consciousness. Little progress was made in improving the condition of women who transgressed the law, the non-respectable women, and ethnicity made no difference.

Progress was made in gender relations for women in some fields. The reduction in family size and the improvement in health, gave women more time and energy for public affairs. Participation in sport helped women discard the image of being weak and frail and also improved health. Educational opportunities allowed some to get tertiary training and obtain proper qualifications to earn a living for themselves. Xhosa women who came into the town, made a major break with traditional society and many became independent.

The major impetus for change came through women's associations, where women actively worked together and achieved some positive results. Middle class white women could earn an independent living without losing respectability, although it was accepted that women should give up paid employment on marriage. Black women broke traditional ties and many urban women became independent. Conditions for working class and non-respectable women changed very little. A deduction is that many women, both white and black, had sympathy for one another and they created a fund of goodwill on both sides of the colour line.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CA CAPE ARCHIVES

CCP CAPE COLONIAL PUBLICATIONS

DISPATCH This is used for the three different names given to the same Newspaper:

East London Dispatch and Shipping and Mercantile Gazette: 1872-1879

East London Dispatch and Frontier Advertiser: 1879-1899

East London Daily Dispatch: from 1899

EAST LONDON STANDARD This is used for the two different names given to the same newspaper:

Frontier Standard and Border Gazette: 1890-1891

East London Standard and Border Gazette: 1892-1899

CD ACTS Contagious Diseases Acts

IOGT International Order of Good Templars

SANC South African Native Congress

WCTU Women's Christian Temperance Union

WEL Women's Enfranchisement League

YMCA Young Men's Christian Association

YWCA Young Women's Christian Association

**CHAPTER 1****INTRODUCTION**

The object of this dissertation is to examine change in a society, defined temporally and spatially, with the focus on gender as the critical analytical category. In this case the field is a colonial seaport town and its immediate environs, situated on the south-east coast of Africa, near to the eastern frontier, and as such it was an area of intensive social, cultural and racial interaction. East London was founded in 1847 as a supply port for King Williams Town, at that time the headquarters of the military establishment involved with the frontier wars. The period of study is between 1870 and 1914, when East London began developing as a viable commercial centre, to the time when it was proclaimed a city and the First World War broke out. This period is a significant one for the growth of the demands for women's rights and noteworthy for the suffragist movement in Europe and the United States.

The focus of this study is on change in the structure of gender relations during this period. Change in this instance is evaluated in terms of the recognition of the rights of women and their status in society. It is argued that there are a number of processes which have to be considered and important external factors to be taken into account. Population growth and gender ratios, the environmental resource base, and developing from this, the economy, determined the nature and speed of change. Controls exercised by males within the family, the municipality and the law were obstacles which could be challenged.

A goal has been to understand the role which women themselves have played both in resisting change and acting as active agents for change. It is argued that resistance to change among white women was to be found in their search for status and security. In acting as active agents they had to fight legal discrimination and patriarchal controls as well as deeply entrenched social structures. In their search for improved conditions, improvement in educational and work opportunities assisted women being able to attain some degree of financial independence. The growth of women's associations provided stimulating support systems and encouraged women to work actively for an improvement of conditions.

It is recognised that women in any society do not have similar experiences, especially those of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. In spite of these differences, it is argued that it would be contrary to the idea of a gender-based study such as this, to exclude the accounts of black or white women as they both lived in the same town and interacted with one another. They shared the common experiences of living under a patriarchal system of domination, of bearing children and being responsible for the maintenance of the home. In spite of many divisive forces it is argued that there is evidence of change in attitudes with the development of a 'sisterhood' which crossed racial barriers. It is important to note that this did not necessarily mean equality, a concept which was unknown in the class-ridden white society of the time, but involved a sympathy and concern based on common problems. It is also argued that although black and white women lived within strongly patriarchal systems and

did not have access to the same resources as the men, they were not always victims. Xhosa-speaking women in particular, initiated profound changes in traditional social structures.<sup>1</sup>

### **Historiography**

The historiographic background and theoretical framework which inform this dissertation have been drawn from a number of disciplines of which the main one is women's studies. It is usually accepted that this in turn falls within the umbrella of social history. The fact that this is a case study set in an urban environment with a defined temporal and spatial setting means that urban history constructs need to be addressed.

As with urban history, social history was one of the specialisations which developed during the 1960s. It arose out of the idea that 'history from below' was important and encompassed the experiences of ordinary people. Samuel suggests that it is concerned with 'real life' rather than abstractions, and 'evokes the human face of the past'. It was influenced by the French Annales school which incorporates the study of long term events and emphasises the permanent influences of the environment. Methodologically, social history has adopted a multi-disciplinary perspective, incorporating anthropology and sociology. The

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1. The term 'white' is used for women who were described in contemporary records as 'Europeans'. The term 'black' is used for women who were described in contemporary records as 'Non-Europeans', or divided into Asians (Indians and Chinese), 'Hottentots', 'Coloureds' as well as Xhosa-speakers such as Gcaleka, Rharabe, Ndlambe, Mfengu, Pondo, Thembu etc.

effect has been to widen the scope of historical enquiry and include the study of households and kinship, as well as the study of the oppressed. This field has proved to be very compatible with women's history.<sup>2</sup> This approach has been influential in the construction of this thesis with efforts made to evaluate the effect of the environment on the inhabitants, to utilise anthropological and sociological information and to incorporate the experiences of ordinary people.

It is generally agreed that the writing of women's history arose out of the Women's Movement in the United States during the 1960s. Different approaches to the concept of women's history were soon suggested by American historians as the subject began to be recognised. Lerner argued that the history which did exist was narrow, descriptive and without interpretation.<sup>3</sup> As a basis for a conceptual framework, she suggested that status was important in the economic, family and political-legal fields. The record of women's contribution to their roles in the frontier communities and in political issues, such as the women's rights movement should be assessed. The effect of educational deprivation on women and their late entry into cultural institutions and professions were important as was an evaluation of their perceived place and actual status in society.

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2. Samuel, Raphael, "What is Social History?", History Today, Vol.35, March, 1985.
  3. Lerner, Gerda, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History", Journal of Social History, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1969, p.53.

These ideas in different forms have played important parts in the development of women's studies.<sup>4</sup> Later Lerner developed further ideas, arguing that the history of 'notable women' gave little insight to the experience of most women. She thought that the complexity of classes should be taken into account as women of different classes have different histories. Nineteenth century women were indoctrinated into a male-defined value system and the reformers worked at first within that framework, a position adopted by later historians. Lerner further argued that the conceptual models of history which existed had limited use for women's history as they were based on the assumption of the male patriarchal order. She also argued that the marxist framework left out essential class and race factors. Lerner felt that a single framework was not enough and new questions should be asked of universal history, taking gender into account.<sup>5</sup> These ideas were influential in the planning of this thesis.

In a later review article, Norton agreed with Lerner but complained that the new insights, perspectives and knowledge had not been understood or utilised effectively by scholars in other fields of history.<sup>6</sup> A flood of information had been produced during the 1970s pertinent to women on the frontier, middle and working class and in the professions. It was clear that work patterns, age,

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4. Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History", pp. 60-62.
  5. Lerner, G., "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges", Feminist Studies, Vol. 3, Nos 1 & 2, pp. 5, 12 & 13.
  6. Norton, Mary Beth, "Review Essay: American History", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 5, No. 2., 1979, p. 325.

marital status, children, economic class, educational level, ethnic background and employment opportunities were important factors to consider. Studies had also shown that, contrary to popular opinion, colonial women did not enjoy a higher legal or social status and a relative degree of freedom compared with their European counterparts.<sup>7</sup> These factors have been incorporated into this dissertation in order to deal with aspects of women's lives and explain change.

Jaggar and Struhl identified the different frameworks within which women's studies had been pursued and that they were feminist ideologies working towards change, rather than historical goals, which shaped women's studies. These they identified as conservative, liberal, traditional marxist, radical feminism and socialist feminism, all with the underlying idea of understanding and explaining the cause of women's oppression. The conservative approach was one which believed in biological determinism; the liberals felt that psychological differences could be learned and not inherited and that the roots of oppression lay in the lack of educational opportunities and of civil rights; traditional marxists located oppression within a particular system of social organisation with capitalism and imperialism as the cause of inequality; the radical feminists felt that women's oppression should form the conceptual model for women's history and socialist feminism had a basic acceptance of the marxist materialist approach, but that race and class should be added.<sup>8</sup> While none of these

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7. Norton, "Review Essay: American History", pp. 328, 336-337.

8. Jaggar, Alison M., & Struhl, Paula Rothenberg, Feminist Frameworks. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1978), pp. 81-85.

dialectics have informed this thesis, an understanding of the different approaches is important in evaluating the work on women's history.

By 1990, it was suggested that, in spite of the recovery of women's history, there was still a long way to go. Present concerns have raised questions about themes fundamental to universal history, such as the nature of sexual identities in different societies and the relationship between private and public spheres. It was suggested that much more fundamental research is required.<sup>9</sup> In this thesis, the activities of women within the private and public spheres has been addressed and specific data has been utilized.

In South Africa, Olive Schreiner was the first woman to articulate the oppressed position of women and her work became influential in the early twentieth century in the wider world as part of the Women's Movement.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, Bozzoli was one of the first to identify women's studies as being important and to make some suggestions about research possibilities. She commented that the problems of providing a general theory on which to base women's studies was not to write sentimentally or uncritically about resistance, but to consider how gender relationships interact with race and class and how gender functions

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9. Rendall, Jane, "Review Article: Women's History: Beyond the Cage?", Journal of Historical Associations, Vol. 75, No. 243, Feb. 1990, p. 72.
  10. Van der Spuy, A., & A., Eds, Women and Labour by Olive Schreiner, (Johannesburg, Cosmos Publications, Commemorative Edition, 1975, Original 1911).

historically.<sup>11</sup> Following this, the Journal of Southern African Studies devoted a special issue to the topic of women's studies. Gaitskell commented that the early work on women had been done by anthropologists and sociologists, such as Hellman, Wilson (Hunter), and Pollack, had offered no explanations of women's subordination. Political activists and those working for upliftment of women, including articulate black women such as Charlotte Maxeke and Violet Makanya, also generated some information on the position of women in an early period.<sup>12</sup>

In South Africa women's studies involve many different disciplines with many of the leading scholars, such as Bozzoli, Walker and Cock, being sociologists.<sup>13</sup>

In Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945, of the 12 contributors, only four are from departments of history. In a survey of the historiography of women's history in South Africa, published in 1993, Hetherington analyzed the various approaches which have been utilized in this field. She stated that by the late 1970's, a basic difference had appeared between the marxists and the radical feminists as they had different political goals. By the 1980s, historians were writing about African women, often in marxist terms, focusing on class, gender

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11. Bozzoli, Belinda, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 9., No. 2, 1983, pp 170-171.
  12. Gaitskell, Deborah, "Introduction", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1983, pp. 2-7.
  13. Cock, Jacklyn, Maids and Madams, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980).

and modes of production.<sup>14</sup> Feminist historians began writing 'compensatory history' especially focusing on black women to make up for previous neglect. Women's resistance to oppression became a major concern for historians such as Wells, who addressed the struggle of the black women against the pass laws. In her work on the beer-brewing protests in Natal, Bradford argued that feminist consciousness was more important than class as women struggled to retain their own earnings. Cock, a sociologist, dealt with domestic workers and their employers and attempted to explain why black women were such a highly exploited group. Studies by Gaitskell looked at black women making the change from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies, dealing especially with church groups. Berger examined the relationship between household and wage labour and capitalism. Berger and Gaitskell further suggested that the position of women within their families needs explanation as they have taken the full responsibility for their families and so have not been dependent on men.<sup>15</sup>

White women have not received as much attention in South Africa as black women in recent years. Giliomee suggests that

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14. Hetherington, P., "Women in South Africa: The Historiography in English", International Journal of Historical Studies, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1993, pp. 242-245.

15. Hetherington, "Women in South Africa; The Historiography in English", pp. 249-257.

"The way in which the influence of white women on the evolution of South African race relations has been ignored represents one of the greatest flaws of the male-centric South African historiography".<sup>16</sup>

Walker has written on the suffrage issue and Swaisland and Van-Helten and Williams on the emigration of single British women to the Transvaal.<sup>17</sup> Although not mentioned by Hetherington, Bradlow has addressed issues relating to white middle class women such as mid-nineteenth century women at the Cape, education and charitable work.

In a challenging article Bradford pointed to the fact that the marginalisation of gender in the historical record has led to a misinterpretation of events and their causes. She maintains that the vision of the past can be transformed by integrating gender into all aspects of history.<sup>18</sup> In an address given at the Women's History Workshop in Grahamstown, Berger argued that the evaluation of the place of women in society and explanations of the ambiguities of their differently defined positions, is one of the challenges facing modern historians. She suggests that new research on women has opened up new areas of enquiry

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16. Giliomee, Hermann, "Eighteenth Century Cape Society and its Historiography: Culture, Race and Class", Social Dynamics, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1984, p.26.
  17. Hetherington, "Women in South Africa: The Historiography in English", pp.260-262.
  18. Bradford, Helen, "Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c. 1807-1890", The Journal of African History, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1996, p. 352.

with gender becoming as important as race and class as an analytical category.<sup>19</sup> At the same workshop, Wells also suggested that gender should not only be as significant an analytical category as race and class, but also that further studies would in fact, fundamentally transform the way historical records are constructed.<sup>20</sup>

Walker has argued that there is still some way to go with women's history, as gender does not fit the existing theories of race and class. There are issues of sexuality, patriarchal relations within the family and the control of female fertility which need to be addressed. Empirical studies need to be done in order to understand the dynamics of male and female roles in society in order to construct a more sophisticated theory of gender.<sup>21</sup> She states that the domestic rather than the public world is of major importance in defining feminine social awareness and it is in this field that there is the potential for women to develop a common cause across the barriers of race and class. She suggests that women were not always victims of oppressive social codes but could become agents of rebellion and change. There is also evidence that women could be extremely conservative in defence of the status quo, and this needs to

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19. Berger, Iris, "Interpretations of Women and Gender in Southern African Studies", Paper given at the Women's History Workshop, held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, as a part of the South African Historical Society Conference, 6 July 1995.
  20. Wells, Julia, "Putting Gender into South African History", Women's History Workshop, Grahamstown, 6 July 1995.
  21. Walker, Cherryl, Ed., Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), p. 4.

be explained.<sup>22</sup> There are still many gaps in women's studies in South Africa and this dissertation aims at adding to the historical record in this field. The concerns articulated by Walker have been addressed within the framework of conservatism and change.

The locating of the field of study within an urban location means that the theoretical concerns of urban history have to be addressed. As a specialised discipline, urban history was developed in France prior to the United States and Britain. Under the influence of Bloch and Febvre and their holistic approach, the city was seen to play an important role in the development of civilisation.<sup>23</sup> The feature of urban history as developed in the United States was the emphasis on quantification and census analysis and this came under heavy criticism.<sup>24</sup> The growth of urban history in the United Kingdom really began during the 1960s under the leadership of Professor J. Dyos and gained ground rapidly during the 1970s. With the death of Dyos there was a period when the discipline floundered without direction and with doubts expressed on the efficacy of quantitative methods which were employed by American exponents. It revived again in the 1990s and many European scholars used urban studies as

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22. Walker, Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, pp. 28-30.

23. Bedarida, F., "The Growth of Urban History in France: Some Methodological Trends", Dyos, H.J., Ed., The Study of Urban History, (London, Edward Arnold, 1968), pp. 50-59.

24. Cannadine, D., "Urban History in the United Kingdom: the 'Dyos Phenomenon' and after", Cannadine D., & Reeder, D., Exploring the Urban Past, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 203.

a focus for research.<sup>25</sup> Dyos had argued that there was a need to relate the kind of lives which were lived in a town with the total urban fabric, but his approach was often criticised as it was suggested that it lacked theoretical rigour.<sup>26</sup> Briggs was the first British historian to study the city for its own sake, breaking down conventional barriers between economic, political and social history and making a major contribution to the discipline.<sup>27</sup> He pointed out that there are many valid approaches to urban history but he felt it was important to include the social categories as were perceived by the people of the time and to utilise quantitative evidence.<sup>28</sup>

In dealing with Africa, Epstein argued that there were several aspects in the process of urbanisation which need to be considered: demography and the redistribution of populations; participation in social relations; the implication of urban growth when related to social change with towns becoming the new locus. He suggests that African towns do not always reflect the Western model on which they were patterned, but that there were many elements derived from traditional cultures which were maintained. The social structures which develop

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25. Cannadine, D., "The Dyos Phenomenon and After", Cannadine, D., & Reeder, D., Eds, Exploring the Urban Past, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 203 & 220-221.

26. Cannadine, "The Dyos Phenomenon and After", pp. 209-212.

27. Cannadine, "The Dyos Phenomenon and After", p. 215.

28. Briggs, Asa, "Introduction" in Dyos, H.J., Ed., The Study of Urban History, (London, Edward Arnold, 1968), p. ix.

in a town are the result of a complex interplay of a number of factors located both within and without the town.<sup>29</sup>

The process of urbanisation played an important part for black women in East London. There are many definitions of urbanisation, as opposed to the discipline of urban history. Schwartz states that it refers to a social process involving people in social relationships with a new kind of physical environment.<sup>30</sup> Reeder's definition is that it is a process of population concentration that alters the balance between country and town. He adds that the impact of technology must also be taken into account as well as the kind of environment formed in the city and the way the city came to function as a place for living.<sup>31</sup> It is argued that urbanisation for black women in Africa is a social process which goes beyond definition as urban population increases. It has involved the formation of new social relationships, the taking on of new friends and adopting new cultural practices.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Epstein, A.L., "The Changing Role of the City", in Breeze, G., Ed., The City in Newly Developing Countries, (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1969), pp. 259-263 and 279.
  30. Schwartz, W.B., "The Changing Role of the City" in Breeze, G., Ed., The City in Newly Developed Countries, (New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc. 1969), p. 279.
  31. Reeder, D., "Introduction" in Cannadine, D., & Reeder, D., Exploring the Urban Past, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. xii.
  32. Little, Kenneth, African Women in Towns, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 15.

Theoretical models for establishing social structures within an urban environment have also proliferated. In one it is argued that there was the evolution from the pre-industrial city where the elite lived in the centre and the poor on the periphery, to the late nineteenth century industrial city where the rich and poor changed places. Geographers have postulated a Social Area Theory. This recognises three distinct types of residential segregation; by socio-economic status; by family status and by ethnic or migrant status. Here the division of labour generated a status hierarchy whose members expressed their status through their choice of residential areas.<sup>33</sup> This idea has been criticised by social historians as the situation is more complex than suggested. However there has been empirical validation of separate patterns of residence which reflect the socio-economic position of families and the ethnic status of the inhabitants.<sup>34</sup>

This model is pertinent to the East London situation as there were distinct residential areas, except that the ethnic division for black people was imposed by municipal regulation and was not entirely created by socio-economic conditions.

That no clear consistent model, or a pertinent and systematic theoretical framework has yet been developed for African towns is argued by Gutkind and

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33. Dennis, Richard, English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 3-4.

34. Dennis, English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century, pp. 5-7.

Schwartz.<sup>35</sup> Miner quotes Southall and lists the factors which influence urban and social change as being demographic factors, the nature of urban and rural links, the degree of ethnic diversity, the extent of industrialisation, occupational characteristics and housing policy and administration.<sup>36</sup> In dealing with characteristics of a colonial city, King suggests that the unique features were that economic and political power was mainly controlled by the non-indigenous minority who were superior in terms of social organisation and there was a radical cultural and religious difference between the two groups.<sup>37</sup> He suggests that the city needs to be examined in relation to the colonised territory and local conditions such as resources, climate and environment should be considered.<sup>38</sup>

Broeze makes a convincing argument that too many studies of cities which are ports fail to deal convincingly with their unique maritime characteristics. The port is the economic base and therefore should be the central organising principle. The starting point would be that the port creates an urban community which derives its uniqueness from the physical and economic dominance of the port activities and the 'port factor' should be integrated into the urban

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35. Gutkind, P.C.W., and Schwartz, W.B., "The Changing Role of the City", in Breese, The City in Newly-Developing Countries, pp.265 and 274.
  36. Miner, Horace, "the Changing Role of the City" in Breese, The City in Newly-Developing Countries, p. 269-270.
  37. King, Anthony D., Urbanism, Colonialism and the World Economy, (London, Routledge, 1990), pp. 19-20.
  38. King, Urbanism, Colonialism and the World Economy, pp. 23-27.

community.<sup>39</sup> As this is not a study of a town only, but is directed towards gender as located within the social structures of a particular town, not all the theoretical principles are relevant. Those which are thought to elucidate women's history have been selected.

Urban history in South Africa to date has not gathered many followers. Tankard points out that work that has been done follows traditional patterns and only 20 theses published since 1918 would qualify as urban history.<sup>40</sup> Much of the work that has been done recently is in the form of unpublished theses, such as those of Gibbens, Sellick, Southey, Bickford Smith and Tankard.<sup>41</sup> While this dissertation is not primarily concerned with urban history, the effect of urbanization upon black women is particularly significant.

The question of whether the external factor of environmental issues have relevance has been argued by some sociologists and historians in the form of

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39. Broeze, Frank, "Port Cities: The Search for an Identity", Journal of Urban History, Vol. 11, No.2, pp. 210-213.
  40. Tankard, K.P.T., "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control 1873-1914", (PhD Thesis, Rhodes University, 1990), p. 17.
  41. Gibbens, M., "Two Decades in the Life of a City: Grahamstown 1862-1882", (MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1982); Sellick, R., "A Study in Local History: Grahamstown 1883-1904", (MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1983); Southey, N.D., "A Period of Transition: A History of Grahamstown 1902-1918", (MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1985); Bickford Smith, J.V., "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875-1902", (PhD Thesis, Cambridge University, 1988); Tankard, K.P.T., "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control 1873-1914" (PhD Thesis, Rhodes University, 1990).

trying to determine whether environmental conditions or prevailing cultural values are more important in controlling the life within cities.<sup>42</sup> It has been argued that the community structures created in a town are the result of the changing balances between people and the environment and that many historians find this type of 'socio-ecology' in history frightening. It has been pointed out that these issues should be considered because as towns improve their control over the environment, so more concentrated activities take place there and the break with the rural environs becomes more marked.<sup>43</sup> It is a major point in my argument that environmental constraints had an important effect on female attitudes and was a restricting influence on the refashioning of gender relationships.

Historians, as opposed to anthropologists, first began utilising oral history in the 1960s, a methodology initiated by Vansina.<sup>44</sup> It grew out of the concern to record African oral traditions where written records were scarce. The concept was utilised by a group of historians based at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, who were concerned to explore African politics under colonial rule.<sup>45</sup>

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42. Dyos, H.J., "Agenda for Urban History" in H.J. Dyos, Ed., The Study of Urban History, p. 3.
  43. Checkland, S.G., "Towards a Definition of Local History" in H.J. Dyos, Ed., The Study of Urban History, pp. 348-349.
  44. Vansina, Jan, Oral Tradition: A Study of Historical Methodology, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) and Oral Tradition as History, (London, James Currey, 1985).
  45. La Hausse, Paul, "Oral History and South African Historians", Radical History Review, Vol. 46, No. 7, 1990, p.343.

Efforts to record oral testimonies were based on the desire to retrieve the histories of illiterate people and was a part of the wider based impetus towards a new perspective of 'history from below'. During the 1980s, oral history methods were used in conjunction with archival sources and the value soon became apparent. Recent work has often centred on the African migrant experiences and oral testimonies have alerted historians to the subtle nuances of class, ethnicity and gender concerns, deepening understanding of working class life.<sup>46</sup>

Recognition of the value has led to the establishment of regionally based oral history projects led by the African Studies Institute at the University of Witwatersrand in 1979. Projects were then started at the University of Natal (1979-1980), the Institute of Race Relations (1982-1984), the University of Lesotho (1982) and the University of the Western Cape (1985).<sup>47</sup> In 1996 the Eastern Cape Oral Studies Association was launched to alert scholars to the wealth of oral history which needs to be documented in that region.

### **Sources and Methodology**

Oral sources are being increasingly utilised in South Africa. For example in a review essay on women's studies, Walker reviews four published works on women by Gordon, Lawson, Meer and Barrett. They all deal with black women

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46. La Hausse, "Oral History and South African Historians", Radical History Review, pp. 346-347.

47. La Hausse, "Oral History and South African Historians", Radical History Review, pp. 347-349.

and all utilise oral interviews.<sup>48</sup> Bozzoli has studied a group of black women through the medium of oral interviews with a view to examining how gender shaped their experiences.<sup>49</sup> As studies have advanced, so the limitations and problems have been recognised. Hofmeyr complains that in the past, the different disciplines of anthropology, history and literature have been too separate and have crippled studies. She feels that oral story-telling, literacy and historical narrative should be seen in a broad context and that studies must take cognisance of change. Scholars have a tendency to search for facts, ignoring the forms of interpretation and traditions which inform those facts.<sup>50</sup>

The sources for women's history is an acknowledged problem as in a male-controlled society, women featured little in the published records. The absence of written records which document the experiences of women of East London during the period under review proved to be a problem and only four manuscript sources could be traced. All were sketchy, covered short time periods and were relatively limited in conveying attitudes and activities geared to change. The most informative were "The Letters of Cyrill Wyche and his wife", covering the period 1876-1881.<sup>51</sup> Cyrill Wyche came to East London to take charge of the Anglican Church on the West Bank and he and his wife wrote letters to members

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48. Walker, C., "Review Article: Women's Studies on the Move", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 13, No. 3, April 1987.

49. Bozzoli, B., Women of Phokeng, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991).

50. Hofmeyr, Isobel, "We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told", (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), pp. 1-2, and 9.

51. Original manuscript in the Cory Library, Ms 16828.

of their English church congregation describing their life and activities. A young teacher, Caroline Robson, wrote a short journal for the period December 1877 to October 1879 which assisted in articulating her attitude towards events and people of the time. She also kept a list of the books which she read.<sup>52</sup> Annie Jarvis, born in 1862, daughter of the Government Surveyor, A.E. Murray, wrote a diary in the year 1882, but the entries are disappointingly short and uninformative.<sup>53</sup> As an older woman in 1935 and 1937, she did however, write a history of Cambridge and the family business. In the collection of papers which belonged to Sir Charles Crewe, three letters written by Lady Helen Crewe, are extant, but there are many letters written to her which are informative.<sup>54</sup> The privately owned reminiscences of Mrs Clarissa Newman were kindly made available to me by her son.

Other contemporary sources which deal with the East London experience are the Gately Papers which contain letters written by John Gately to his wife in 1879 on his visit to his home country of Ireland.<sup>55</sup> The Memoirs of George Leask of the early days in East London were published in the East London Daily Dispatch in 1914 and contain some relevant material.<sup>56</sup> Several compilations of family histories were made available and provided information on certain topics.

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52. Original in the Central Library, East London.

53. Original in the Central Library, East London.

54. The Crewe Papers are in the East London Museum.

55. The Gately Papers are in the East London Museum.

56. Cuttings from the original newspaper are in the East London Museum.

Articles in The Coelacanth, the Journal of the Border Historical Society, also yielded some relevant material.

Contemporary official sources included directories from 1878, 1879 and 1898/99, as well as the East London and Frontier Redbook, which began publication in 1906, contained information on residents, occupations and societies. The Mayors' Minutes had only a few entries on women, but more detailed records on the Native Locations and Health. There were several local newspapers which had good background information, but little on local women. Contemporary books and journals were also utilised.

In contemporary unofficial sources, the Rule Books of clubs and societies were of particular interest, but most informative were the minutes of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the South African Women's Industrial Union, both housed in the Cape Archives. The Women of South Africa, published in 1913, contained records of 39 women who lived in, or were from, East London. Sources in the Cape Archives provided a wealth of information contained in the Criminal Records, particularly about the underclass, or women who transgressed the legal boundaries set at the time. Other background information from the archives were to be found in the sections on Immigrants, Health, Education, Native Affairs and Census Returns.

Of the Secondary sources, Dr Tankard's theses and articles on East London's history have provided essential background information. John Shingler's book

on The Women of East London contained 14 entries which were relevant. Other studies provided background and theoretical material in which to locate the themes of the thesis. Other than written sources, use has been made of objects of material culture which exist in museums. This is an under utilised resource which has much to offer, particularly in the field of social history. Artifacts which women used and the type of clothing which they wore can give much information on their lives and aspirations.

The paucity of women's records for the period under study made it essential to explore oral sources for information. The use of oral history for the retrieval of both black and white women's history therefore has been most useful. Very little of their lives and attitudes were reflected in the published records and in spite of problems of interpretation, much basic data was obtained. It was discovered that there were many older people whose mother, grandmother or aunt had lived in East London during the study period. The oral interviews conducted for this thesis therefore differed from most of the oral history work being undertaken in South Africa at present, in that most of the information was obtained from descendants of women and did not constitute life histories. A questionnaire was drawn up and adapted over time to cover as many aspects of the women's lives as possible (See Appendix 1). Eleven of the women (nine white and two black) were born before 1910 and so were children during the set period so their own early life experiences were relevant. It was found that the closeness of generations, especially the mother, daughter and granddaughter relationships, have been little appreciated in the field of oral history.

The oral history records form only a part of the history of the women of East London. It is recognised that the comments of most interviewed are filtered through time and the perceptions of a later generation, but as most of the questions needed factual answers, bias did not emerge as important. Much was learnt of their demographic records, their educational level, their church and club membership and their occupations. The oral records proved to shed light on the areas of women's history which is usually missing from the official record. The factual information which descendants can provide adds actual data to the lives of the women of the period and gives insight into individual circumstances. This unique source has assisted in evaluating these women's contribution to the society in which they lived.

The gathering together of data on 'invisible women' has been a challenging task and the incorporation of oral history, which includes memories of antecedents breaks new ground. The historiography of the various disciplines in historical studies, with the emphasis on women's studies, has laid the foundations for the theoretical formulations of this gender-based study. Attention has been paid to gaps in the historical record and it is hoped that this dissertation will add to the sum of women's studies in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING FEMALE ATTITUDES TO CHANGE**

There were external factors in East London society which were beyond the control of women, but which defined the parameters within which they functioned. Essentially these were the size of the population, the gender ratio and the environmental resource base which determined the economic and industrial development of the urban area. I argue that this resource base was a fragile one and the economic development was slow and unreliable giving rise to attitudes which were conservative rather than innovative. While economic growth was difficult, an improvement in the economic conditions did take place. From the 1890s, many families had achieved some degree of stability and a white middle class was formed. In spite of the many negative forces, there was a growth of consciousness of the many unjust laws and social barriers which faced women and those who were involved came from this white middle class. These are the issues addressed in this chapter.

#### **Population Growth and Gender Ratios**

Population growth and the gender ratios were indicators of the potential for change. Only when there were sufficient numbers of women to act in support of one another would there be suitable conditions where they could challenge prevailing norms. East London during the 1870s and 1880s was a small society with few women, and people were struggling for economic survival. This meant that the addressing of female concerns was not a priority.

It is impossible to give accurate and comparable figures for the urban population of East London during the years 1870 to 1911 as the published census figures were for the whole Electoral Division of East London, an area which included country districts. In 1873 there was an influx of single men, both black and white, to work on the harbour and railway works. The Anglian brought 64 immigrants from Europe whose occupations were listed as bricklayers, carpenters, gangers and platelayers, with no mention of wives and children.<sup>1</sup> In the following year RMS Basuto brought a further sixteen immigrants.<sup>2</sup> The population was further enlarged in 1876 by 100 more single men; masons, navvies, quarrymen and carpenters, who had been selected in England by Mr W.H. Fuller, Director of the East London Boating Company at the time, to work in the harbour.<sup>3</sup>

In 1875 the newspaper published figures for the urban area which gave population figures for whites as 808 males and 447 females, a ratio of 55 women to 100 men. This was a very small group with an unbalanced ratio. The black population was even smaller, comprising 751 males and 127 females, with an even more markedly unbalanced ratio of 17 women to 100 men.<sup>4</sup> A count of the residents listed in an 1878 directory gives only 268 whites with ten women heading households.<sup>5</sup> The presence of so many single men employed in the harbour and railway works, military men stationed at Fort Glamorgan as well as visiting sailors,

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1. Dispatch, 4.11.1873.

2. Dispatch, 20.1.1874.

3. Dispatch, 15.2.1876.

4. Dispatch, 6.4.1875.

5. King Williams Town and East London Directory, (King Williams Town, A. J. Fuller, 1878).

meant that there was a ready market for poor women who needed to earn money, and prostitutes made their way into this port town. There were only a few stable settled families in this period and the resultant urban society was a rough one with fights being the order of the day, particularly among the 'blue-jackets and surf-boatmen'.<sup>6</sup> Men, both white and black, and often women, lying drunk in the street were common sights as were street brawls and 'abusive language' being heard in public. In 1876 the newspaper reported that there had been

"a disgraceful street brawl in front of the canteen in Smith Street between a lot of drunken sailors. Obscene language and disgustingly indecent scenes are almost a daily occurrence in front of this canteen which all the prostitutes in town seem almost to make a home of."<sup>7</sup>

East London of the 1870s was then a male dominated society with very few respectable black or white women in the town, and who played little part in public life. There was little impetus for change and innovation.

### **The Economy**

By the 1890s the economy had improved and greater numbers of women had entered the town. The location figures for 1895 show that there were 58 females to 100 males (See Table 1), an indication that black women were beginning to enter the town in greater numbers, but there was still a preponderance of whites. A count of the residents in the 1898 directory showed a marked increase in population as the number rose to 1038. This included 111 women who headed households.<sup>8</sup> The 1904 location figures give similar ratios to 1895 with 54

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6. Dispatch, 3.12.1872

7. Dispatch, 15.2.1876

8. Kellsall's General Directory of East London, (East London, Alfred Webb & Son, 1898 - 1899).

females to 100 males (see Table 1), but there is some question as to the reliability of these figures. The position during this period was one where some groups of white women from the middle class, who had enough knowledge and resources, were able to start challenging accepted norms.

The 1911 census was a more comprehensive one than had been done before and for the first time there was a breakdown of the urban and rural figures. The total urban population showed remarkable growth with a total of 25605, of which 15323 were whites and 10252 were blacks. Of these 7833 were white males and 7520 were white females, a ratio of 96 females to 100 males. The black urban males numbered 5824 and the females 4428, giving a ratio of 76 females to 100 males.<sup>9</sup> What is evident is that the ratio between white men and women was just about even and that black women were entering the town in much larger numbers than previously and were bound to make a considerable impact on their community. With a major growth in numbers and an improvement in the economy, further steps towards addressing women's issues were taken.

### **Environmental Determinants**

In the East London situation some fundamental attitudes and responses of women to their society were determined by the prevailing environmental conditions. The fragile resource base of East London and the immediate hinterland affected the women adversely, particularly in the early years, when there was little economic stability. Without the confidence of a sound resource base, most women would not be prepared to put their livelihood at risk by challenging accepted norms.

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9. CA Official Yearbook of South Africa, 1916

TABLE 1

POPULATION GROWTH AND GENDER RATIOS  
EAST LONDON LOCATION

Year	Males	Females	Females to 1000 Males
1875*	751	127	16
1894	1471	468	31
1895	1413	820	58
1896/97	2450	925	37
1898	3151	1752	55
1899	3586	1860	51
1900	3260	1714	54
1901	4016	2172	54
1902	5029	2991	59
1903	6931	3786	54
1904	7666	4157	54
1905	7837	4274	54
1906	7055	4254	60
1907	5798	3233	55
1908	5598	3123	55
1909	5473	3023	55
1910	5303	2993	56
1911	4853	2943	60
1911*	5552	4155	74
1912	5544	3576	64

References:

- 1875\*      Census Returns March 1875 as reported in the  
Dispatch 6.4.1875
- 1894-1912    Figures quoted by the Location Superintendent in  
the Mayors' Minutes
- 1911\*    CA CCP UG-'11    Census Returns for the Cape Colony  
Statistical Register

East London is situated at the mouth of the Buffalo River on the south-east Cape coast. Economic stability for the women was difficult to attain for a number of reasons. There were few mineral resources which could give rise to permanent centres of industry based on raw materials.<sup>10</sup> Coal at Indwe was of a low grade and could not compete with the higher grades found elsewhere in the country. Barytes was found in small quantities near Fort Grey and has been worked sporadically, but is not of significant economic importance.<sup>11</sup>

Much of the economy of the town was based on agricultural products and many immigrants from Europe came to the area to try to make a living from the land. From an agricultural point of view, the soils of the region were not particularly fertile and, with few exceptions, were not suited to the intensive agriculture which was practised in Europe. Conditions were far more suited to livestock, but even then the pastures were deficient in phosphates.<sup>12</sup>

Although the climatic conditions experienced at East London are mostly temperate and benign, there is a built-in 'Disaster Factor' which profoundly affected the lives of the inhabitants. With most of the population depending on the port function and agriculture for their livelihood, these unpredictable occurrences could severely damage the economic stability of the region and give rise to a conservative approach among those trying to make a living. The annual average rainfall of the

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10. Board, C., The Border Region: Natural Environment and Land Use in the Eastern Cape, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 4.

11. Board, The Border Region, p. 20.

12. Board, The Border Region, p. 160.

region varies between 200 and 500mm but when certain pressure systems exist in relation to one another, floods can occur especially in the coastal areas.<sup>13</sup> The prevailing winds are westerlies, with the south-west winds being the strongest and gales to a force of 125 k.p.h. do occur. The resultant gales and floods had a detrimental effect on the shipping activities of the harbour. During the period under review there were 66 recorded shipwrecks between Hood Point and Gonubie.<sup>14</sup> Prior to 1886, larger ships had to anchor in the open roadstead of the sea as the sandbar at the mouth of the river prevented them from entering the harbour. Some examples were: On 26 May 1872, 8 ships were wrecked during a south-east gale and 8 more came ashore on 5 December 1874 with the onset of a south westerly gale. The newspaper recorded that the sea rose rapidly, the wind blew a hurricane and the Buffalo flooded. All bridges came down and there was a break in postal and telegraph communications. In addition to the lives lost, there were shipping and trade losses in the town, as well as huge stock losses.<sup>15</sup> In 1880 another gale caused the wreckage of 3 barques.<sup>16</sup> In July 1881 a huge storm arose during which 29 people died and 3 vessels were lost<sup>17</sup>(See Figure 1).

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13. Kopke, D., "The Climate of the Eastern Cape", in Bruton and Gess, Towards an Environmental Plan of the Eastern Cape, pp. 44 & 51.
  14. Turner, Malcolm, Shipwrecks and Salvage, (Cape Town, Struik, 1988), pp. 206-212.
  15. Dispatch, 8.12.1874.
  16. Harbour Master's Report, 1880, G33-'81.
  17. Harbour Master's Report for 1881, G54-'82.

Droughts occurred with some frequency and were a great threat to farmers and townspeople alike. In 1878 the local water supply all but dried up.<sup>18</sup> There was another major drought in 1898 which galvanised the Council into action in trying to improve the town's water supply. In 1911 the Council reported yet another drought.<sup>19</sup>

The frequent climatic disruptions had important effects on the process of change in gender relations in East London. These disasters affected the lives of the people as they had too few resources to put themselves at risk by challenging accepted norms. Women found that they could not always rely upon their husbands as providers and often had to try to provide extra income. Their efforts in the home by thrifty management made important contributions to economic survival. Nearly all the oral interviews revealed women who worked hard to make ends meet by taking in boarders, doing their own sewing and making preserves. Information from oral interviews about white women revealed that ten had no servants and six employed the services of a washerwoman only.

The port which grew up around the mouth of the Buffalo River was originally established for military purposes and not because it was a natural harbour situated to serve a productive hinterland. East London got off to a bad start by the confusion of administrations and the stranglehold of the military control.<sup>20</sup> The

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18. Dispatch, 28.1.1878.

19. Mayor's Minute, 1912, p.111.

20. Tankard, K.P.T., "East London; The Creation and Development of a Frontier Community 1835-1873", (MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1985).

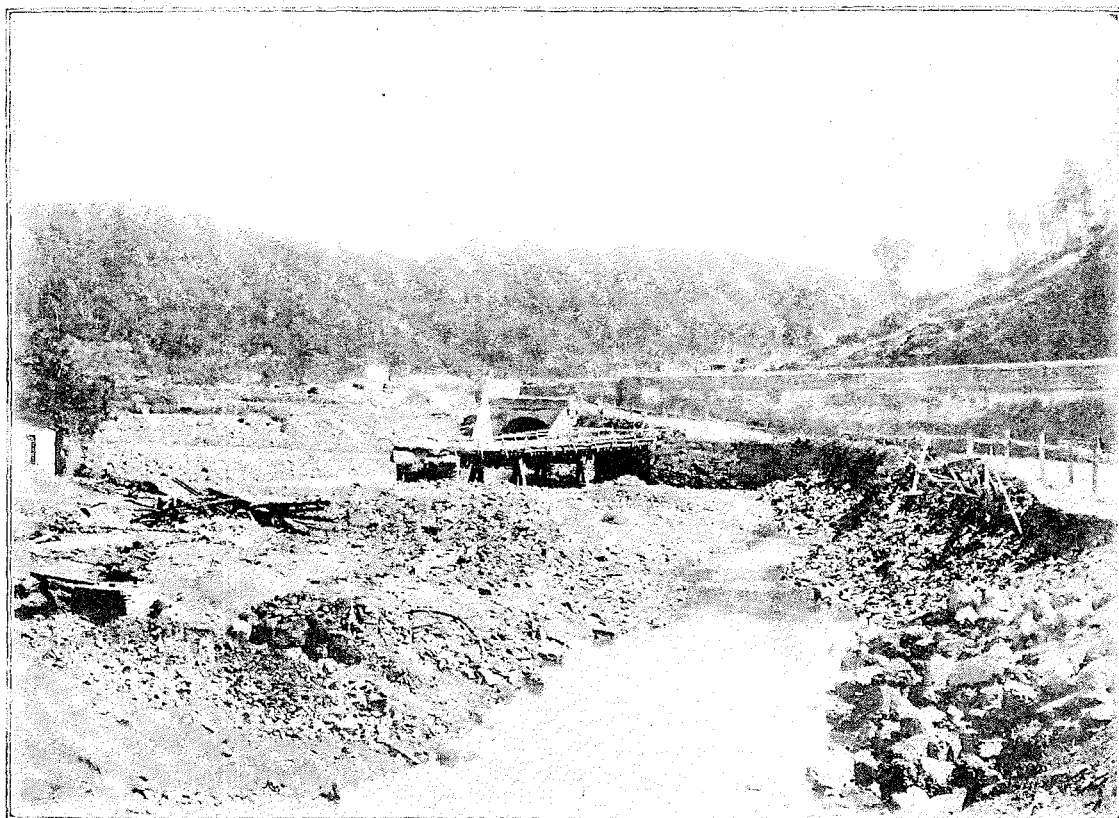


Figure 1  
The flood of 1905 caused extensive damage to shipping and the  
harbour.  
Photograph from "Souvenir of Storm and Freshet, October 10,  
1905", East London Museum collection

development of East London as a river port had many problems. The Buffalo River is a short one, only some 70 kilometres in length, with a relatively low annual flow.

It enters the sea through fairly deep gorges which have created the river depth but this has meant that there has been little flat land at the mouth which could be utilised for industrial development. The effort to maintain and develop the port facilities proved costly and there were limitations because of the narrowness of the river mouth.<sup>21</sup> Until 1886 crossing the bar at the mouth was both hazardous and dangerous (See Figure 2). This gave the port a bad name and meant that those who tried to make a living from the port functions always had to struggle to persuade the authorities that harbour facilities which involved heavy expenditure would lead to long term profits. In 1873 a letter to the Editor of the local newspaper from a ship-owner pointed out:

"this place has got a bad character enough and there is great difficulty in finding vessels to come here at all... the anchorage is foul with anchors ... no effort is made to remove them. Insurance is loaded on these ships"<sup>22</sup>

Improvements in the harbour facilities were made gradually, the most important of which was the introduction of a dredger in 1886. With the clearing of the silt and sand-bar, ships could negotiate the narrow entrance channel and take refuge in the more sheltered waters of the harbour. There was a decided decrease in the number of ships lost, but major storms could still wreak havoc.

In spite of the problems, the port was utilised to develop trade and the construction of the railway to the interior was a major factor in the growth of East London. By

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21. Vernon, G.N., "From Sail to Ro-Ro: the Story of a River Port", The Coelacanth, (Vol.19, No.1, 1981), pp. 5-10.

22. Dispatch, 30.9.1873.



Figure 2

Harbour scene showing the narrow mouth and sand banks in the Buffalo River, 1885. Painting by E H Crouch. Original in the East London Museum

the 1890s trade goods could be moved inland with some facility and many entrepreneurs and later business firms became agents to handle imports and exports. East London was not, however, an industrialised town and, other than in the harbour, there was little work for unskilled labour so the spectre of poverty was ever-present, especially among the black people.

In spite of the lack of natural resources, the economic conditions in the town improved over time and a few industries were established to serve the growing population.<sup>23</sup> A small sweet-manufacturing concern, J. & C. Wilson and Co., was to grow rapidly from a small factory in 1895 with a staff of 5, to a profitable industry employing a largely white female labour force of 20 by 1920.<sup>24</sup>

The most successful businesses were those which catered for the agricultural interests and needs of both black and white farmers in the hinterland. Black farmers kept cattle and sheep and grew millet, maize and pumpkins, success depending on the onset and dependability of the rain during any particular year.<sup>25</sup> All the major firms, such as Peacock Brothers, Dyer and Dyer, Malcomess and Co. and Mosenthals, purchased agricultural products from both white and black farmers.<sup>26</sup> The East London Chamber of Commerce, which was formed in 1877,

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23. Commercial Directory, Redbook, 1913, pp. 338-370

24. Rosenthal, Eric, "Sweet-maker's Story: Rowntree-Wilson of East London", unpublished article in the East London Museum Collection.

25. Board, C., The Border Region, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1962), pp.178-180.

26. Daily Dispatch Christmas Number 1905, pp. 11 & 19.  
The Eastern Districts of the Cape Colony, (Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth Printing & Publishing Co. 1906), pp. 24,25, 28 and 20 respectively.

worked towards getting improved facilities at the harbour and to assist agriculture.<sup>27</sup>

Agriculture proved to be an important part of the East London economy. The first white farming communities of any significance were the German Settlers of 1856 - 1860. They were given only 10 acres on the outskirts of the town and quarter acre lots closer to the urban settlement. They struggled to make the small plots productive, growing mainly vegetables, keeping cattle for milk and butter and chickens for eggs.<sup>28</sup> Much of the work fell to the women as many of the men supplemented income by seeking work in the town. This was extremely hard work and a local resident, reported that in 1872 he recalled seeing the

"German vrouws coming early in the morning from the German village of Panmure with their great loads of vegetables on their backs and with their baskets filled with flowers, eggs or butter."<sup>29</sup>

A Scottish settler group and more German immigrants, who arrived in the 1880s, were also given small allotments on which they had to try and scrape a living, with fruit and vegetables being their main crops. Many found it difficult and some of the men took up alternative employment, leaving the women living alone and having to manage the farming operations. This was born out by information from oral interviews: Franz Faix, who had some land near Gonubie, went transport riding "as many did then";<sup>30</sup> Robert Mackenzie, Clement Green and Josef Pachonick, also from Lilyfontein and Gonubie, undertook building and house painting in and around

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27. "East London Chamber of Commerce Centenary brochure", 1977, p. 6. East London Museum Collection.

28. Schwar, B.E., & Pape, J.F., Germans in Kaffraria, (King William's Town, 1958), p. 45.

29. Leask, G., "East London in 1872", Dispatch, 1.12.1914.

30. Interview with Mrs J Nel about her grandfather, 27.7.1994.

town to supplement their incomes, sometimes living away from home for long periods;<sup>31</sup> John Nowell and Robert Hector had to leave their farms as they could not make them pay.<sup>32</sup> Not all were successful in obtaining work and an underclass of poor whites made an appearance.

Larger farms were granted west of the Buffalo in the Kidds Beach area which specialised in fruit at an early date. On a trip with her husband to Chalumna in 1879, Mary Wyche reported that they were given pineapples, good peaches and the largest apples she had ever seen. Farmers supplied them with oranges, lemons, pomegranates, watermelons, sweetmelons and 'tangerines called narties here'. The vegetables were potatoes, cabbages and pumpkins and there was always milk and butter available.<sup>33</sup> East London was the main market for their produce, so for the town dwellers, fresh fruit and vegetables were easily available and reasonably inexpensive. A healthy diet was therefore within the means of most of the inhabitants of the town.

There was major growth in the production of wool from the 1890s and much of the town's economy became based on this commodity. By 1913 there were 39 firms

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31. Interviews with Mrs C MacLaughlan about her father, Robert Mackenzie, 21.7.1994; Mrs E Hill about her grandfather, Josef Pachonick, 5.8.1994, and father Clement Green. 9.8.1994.
  32. Interviews with Mr J Walker about his grandfather, John Nowell, 27.2.1995, and Mrs M Murray about her father, Robert Hector, 1.8.1994.
  33. Cory Library, The Letters of Cyrill Wyche and his wife, Ms 16828, letter by Mary Wyche dated 5 February 1879.

dealing with aspects of the wool trade.<sup>34</sup> In spite of the increase in wool production, the farming population in the surrounding rural areas did not have an easy time and this reflected on that sector of the town's economy which depended on trade in the rural areas. Disease in livestock was a problem which the farmers had to face. Commissions of Enquiry were appointed in 1877, 1878 and 1883 to investigate the problem of the diseases of sheep and cattle in the Eastern Cape. Reports from the Colonial Veterinary Surgeons in 1890 and 1893 further articulated the problems. In some cases the losses had been ruinous for the farmers.<sup>35</sup> During the 1890s, the locusts made their appearance and caused havoc in the Eastern and Midland Provinces of the Cape.<sup>36</sup>

Scab among sheep and goats also caused enormous losses among farmers with Acts being passed in Parliament to try to control the disease in 1886, 1888, 1889, 1890 and 1894 but with little success as testified by the Scab Disease Commission of 1894.<sup>37</sup> The Chairman of the East London Chamber of Commerce, who had been connected with the wool trade for 16 years, reported that there had been a

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34. The Eastern District of the Cape Colony 1906, pp. 32, 39, 50, 52, 42, and 41 respectively.
35. CA CCP 4/17/2 G85-'83, "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disease among Cattle known as Redwater".  
CA CCP 1/2/1/78 G37-'90, "Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon on the mortality among sheep due to internal parasites, Redwater and Lungsickness".  
CA CCP 1/2/1/83 A18-'93 "Mr Veterinary Surgeon Soga's report on inoculation of cattle for Lungsickness".
36. CA CCP 1/2/1/80 A1-'92, "Report on the Destruction of Locusts by the Agricultural Officer".
37. CA CCP 4/17/3 G-'94, "Report of the Scab Disease Commission of Enquiry 1892-1894".

depreciation in the value of wool in the Colony as against the Australian and South American wools where they had managed to stamp out scab. The wool sales in East London had got a bad name for their quality of wool.<sup>38</sup> In 1898 a Select Committee was appointed to deal with 'Agricultural Distress' in districts which included Queenstown and Stutterheim where farmers had been reduced to a state bordering on destitution.<sup>39</sup>

The effects of the misfortunes of the farming community on the townspeople was profound and were articulated by the editor of the local newspaper in his comment that

"the suffering from the depression in trade was caused solely by circumstances such as rinderpest, drought and locusts which make money tight".<sup>40</sup>

It was during disaster times that rural dwellers, both black and white, made their way into the urban areas.

During the early twentieth century, progress was made with a view to empowering the government to force farmers to dip cattle and sheep and to destroy cattle infected with lungsickness.<sup>41</sup> The Cattle Cleansing Act of 1908 prohibited tick

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38. CA CCP 4/17/3 G1-'94, "Mr Lehmann's evidence to the Scab Disease Commission", pp. 4-5.

39. CA CCP 1/2/2/1/49, "Report of the Select Committee on Agricultural Distress, June 1898".

40. East London Standard, 5.11.1897.

41. CA CCP 1/2/1/141, "Report of the Director of Agriculture".

infested cattle from using public roads and outspans, and was particularly to be observed in the East London and King William's Town districts.<sup>42</sup>

With the limited environmental resource base and the difficulties experienced by the farming community, the economy of East London was one which alternated between progress and recession. In 1894 the newspaper reported that

"the history of East London has been one of alternate boom and burst and that people have never yet had the opportunity of establishing themselves on a permanent basis, as residents of the town"<sup>43</sup>

East London enjoyed a fairly buoyant economy during the 1870s with a minor recession in 1876 and 1877 when the export of wool and diamonds declined. In 1881 the country-wide depression affected East London and a long drought virtually crippled agriculture. A boom was again experienced from 1886 with rapid economic expansion, interrupted by a minor collapse from over-speculation. 1899 saw a lowering of exports and raising of imports with the outbreak of the South African War. The military requirements saw the harbour being fully utilised and the boom extended to 1902. This was however an artificial situation during which there had again been over-speculation and the post-war depression affected the East London economy very badly. After a revival in 1910, there was a crash again with the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>44</sup>

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42. CA CCP 1/2/2/1/148 G31-'09, "Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1909".

43. East London Standard, 19.1.1894.

44. Tankard, "The Development of East London", pp. 37-42.

The many bankruptcies experienced by hopeful East London businessmen also indicate the fragile nature of the economy (See Table 2). John Gately, one of the most successful entrepreneurs of early East London, estimated that he had lost ten thousand pounds in the stock exchange crash which occurred in mid-1889.<sup>45</sup> By carefully husbanding his resources and selling off much of his property, he managed to stave off bankruptcy.<sup>46</sup> W.E. Dickie, a hardware merchant who had a previously successful business, went bankrupt in 1914 and his wife was reduced to taking in paying guests in order to retain their family home.<sup>47</sup> Arthur Savage, a businessman who made a great deal of money during the South African war, overcapitalised on building a magnificent home in an elite suburb in 1905. He went bankrupt and had to sell in 1907.<sup>48</sup> Stickells and Humphries, who owned a business of general dealers as well as a flour mill got into difficulties, and on the death of Mr Stickells in 1882, the firm was declared bankrupt, putting his widow and her children into very difficult economic circumstances.<sup>49</sup> In spite of having a professional training as an accountant, the Watson family lived with uncertainty as the firm Mr Watson worked for initially went bankrupt and the family always felt that the future was uncertain.<sup>50</sup>

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45. Conradie, Barbara, (Archivist, Standard Bank), Letter about John Gately's investments, 22.11.1988, East London Museum Collection.

46. The Gately Papers, Letter from John Gately to his son, Lewis, 4.6.1898, Letterbook pp. 422-423, East London Museum.

47. Oral Interview with his daughter, Sylvia Dickie, 14.6.1994.

48. Watson, Jeremy, The Urban Trail, (East London, Border Institute of Architects, 1889, p. 128.

49. Stickells, L.S., Family Memoirs kindly loaned by Mrs. H.Holder (born Stickells) and Mr B. Stickells.

50. Oral Interview with Mr B. Watson, 15.7.1994.

TABLE 2

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BANKRUPTCY: SEQUESTERED ESTATES AND VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATIONS

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1890	2	1900	12
1891	1	1901	5
1892	1	1902	12
1893	1	1903	6
1894	4	1904	12
1895	1	1905	30
1896	6	1906	28
1897	3	1907	37
1898	7	1908	35
1899	11	1909	19

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Reference:

CA CCP V10/3 Statistical Register, pp. 234-235

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The economic welfare, therefore, was very dependent on a tenuous environmental resource base, a limited harbour function and a 'boom and burst' economy which gave rise to a nervous and conservative population. This feeling of uncertainty and lack of confidence was particularly evident among the women who were responsible for trying to feed and clothe their families. Black women moving to the town found it very difficult to make an adequate living as there were very few work opportunities. Although advances were made, this was essentially a conservative society.

The period under study was however, one of economic growth in East London in spite of the many set-backs (See Figures 3 and 4). In the early days the preponderance of men over women in both black and white communities meant that it was an unstable society with relatively few women, and they were concerned mainly with economic survival. Then from the 1890s, as the gender ratios became more balanced and economic conditions improved, a relatively well-off white middle class was established. The foundation was laid for women to begin to refashion gender relations within their society.

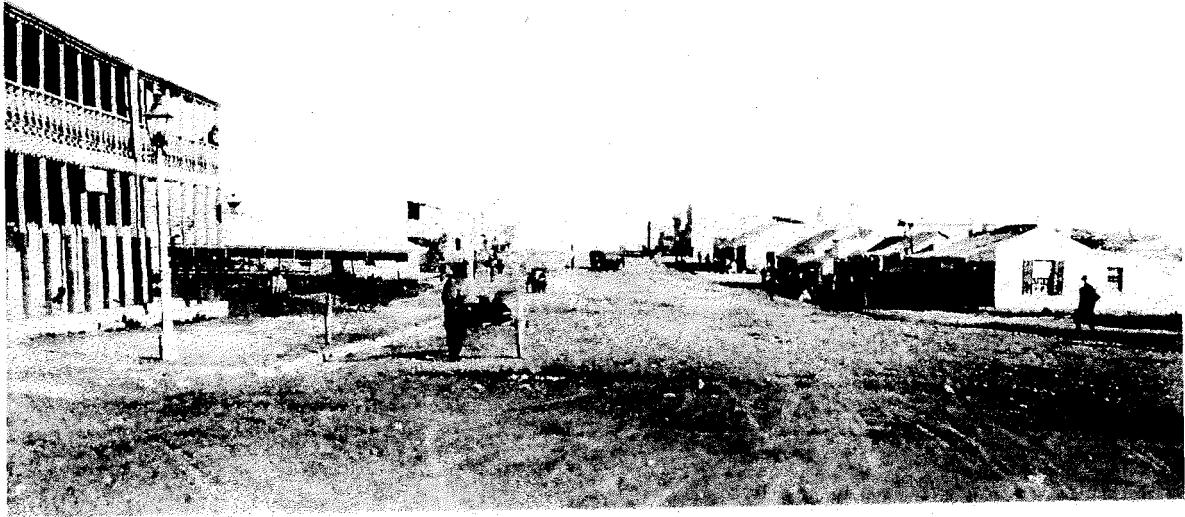


Figure 3  
Oxford Street with few shops and amenities, 1882  
Photograph from the East London Museum collection

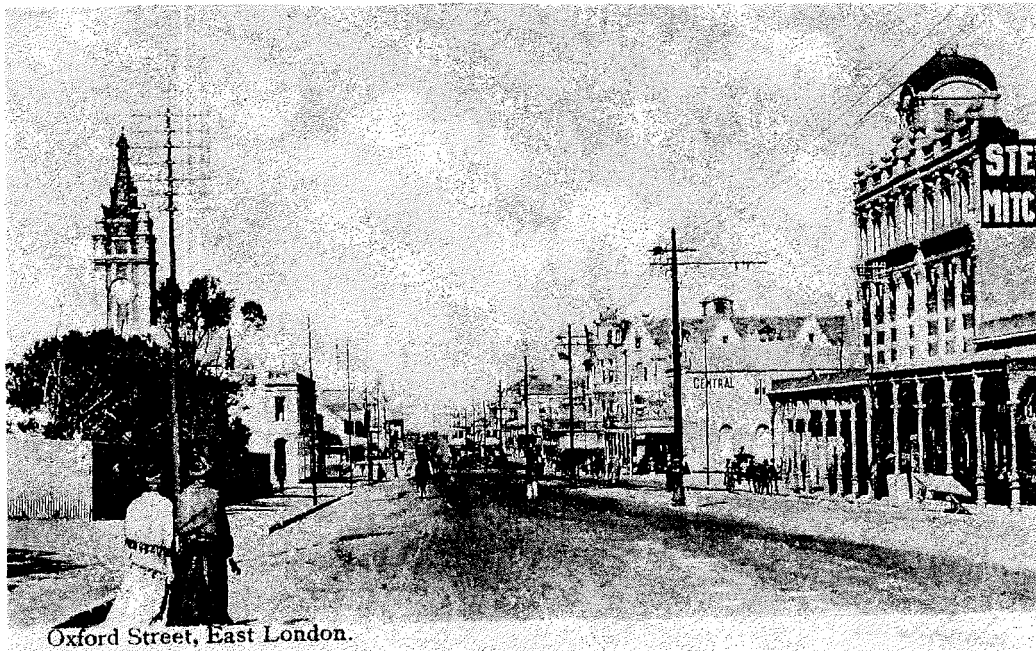


Figure 4  
Oxford Street with the imposing Town Hall tower and large shops. Stevenson and Mitchell on the right was a ladies' outfitter. The two black women are walking in the road as all blacks were forbidden to walk on the pavement, 1910  
Postcard from the East London Museum collection

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **INFLUENCES OBSTRUCTING CHANGE IN GENDER RELATIONS**

The refashioning of gender relations in East London was obstructed by influences which not only entrenched the existing social structures, but also ensured that this was a town divided by ethnicity. The influence of a military regime and the municipal control over settlement patterns affected the ideological attitudes of the women of the town and was retrogressive rather than progressive. While most of the white residents of the town were English speaking, there was a good proportion of German speakers, one of the ethnic divisions which separated women into groups. Among the people who were regarded as 'Non-Europeans', the majority were Xhosa speakers, but there were also Indians, Chinese and Afrikaans speaking 'Hottentots'. Attitudes to race were polarised by an outbreak of violence in 1877. The result was an urban situation of small communities, divided culturally and ideologically, where a sisterhood among women became an almost impossible ideal.

#### **The Military Influence**

The military regime which was responsible for the initial establishment of East London had important implications for women with regard to perceptions of the female role, particularly within the military ethos. The presence of these powerful ideals of class divisions underlined the strength which would be needed if there was to be a break with the iron-clad rules of gender relationships within the class structures of white society.

Tankard has pointed to the fact that the strangle-hold which the military exerted on the development of East London during the first 30 years of its existence was detrimental to its progress and made the establishment of an articulate community very difficult.<sup>1</sup> Even after the mercantile interests became dominant, military attitudes were carried over into civilian life as many soldiers took their discharge and settled in the area. Leading figures in the early growth of the town were ex-military men such as Major Lee, John Gately, John Arnold, Colonel Brabant and Colonel (later Sir) Charles Crewe. Tankard argues convincingly that the reason that Major Lee was elected first Chairman of the Municipal Commissioners instead of John Gately, whose work it had been, was that he was of higher military rank than Gately who had taken his discharge as a mere Lieutenant.<sup>2</sup> In 1873, 48 discharged soldiers received grants of land in the Division of East London, so strengthening the military component.<sup>3</sup>

The British Army had a garrison at Fort Glamorgan until 1880 and their legacy was a society with strong class perceptions. The rigid etiquette of the army was one which profoundly affected attitudes towards change in the status of women adversely:

"To be the wife of an officer in the British Army is to be assured of a sound social position but...the etiquette is rigid - more rigid than in any other division of society. It is as strictly adhered to among the wives as among

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1. Tankard, K.P.T., "The Creation of the East London Municipality; A Portrait in Apathy", The Coelacanth, Vol. 25, No. 2, December 1987, pp. 28-35.
  2. Tankard, "The Creation of the East London Municipality", The Coelacanth, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1987, pp. 32-33.
  3. The East London Dispatch and Shipping and Mercantile Gazette, 28.1.1873.

the officers, and the person who dares to go against it will be made to repent the act....The General and his wife are the leaders of the garrison and local society".<sup>4</sup>

Maria Nolan-Neylan, wife of Colonel John Nolan-Neylan, would only allow her daughters to associate with army officers, never the ordinary soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

### **Municipal Controls and Settlement Patterns**

The settlement patterns which developed were constrained by the geographical features and initially prescribed by the military. The first settlement for the whites was on the West Bank; Fort Glamorgan housed the military, with the harbour workers and few civilians clustered at the mouth of the Buffalo River. Even by the 1870s, the townscape reflected the still transient nature of the settlement at the time as the place was still on trial for economic viability. Few of the white residents had invested much in the way of permanent residences until they were sure that they could make a living. Most domestic houses were small and insubstantial, being constructed of wood and iron, and if trade conditions deteriorated, they could still load their house on the back of a wagon and try for pastures new.<sup>6</sup>

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4. "What it Means to be an Army Officer's Wife", Everywoman's Encyclopedia, (London, 1910), p.210.
  5. Oral Interview with her granddaughter, Patricia Flemmer, 7.3.1995.
  6. Vernon, G.N., "A Study of the Wood and Iron Houses of East London", Annals of the Cape Provincial Museums: Human Sciences, (Vol. 1, No. 4, December, 1984), p. 96.

Descriptions of the town during the 1870s by early travellers described a settlement where there was little evidence of home pride or communal activities.

Helen Prichard, wife of the Roads Engineer of the Transkei, commented in 1876:

"At that time the houses were nearly all of corrugated iron, and looked more like overgrown packing-cases than anything else. I could not trace any line of streets; and though the town did not look very tumble-down, it did decidedly look very tumble-up!".<sup>7</sup>

There was little place for an 'elite' at that time as most white inhabitants were working class with a few aspirant middle class living on the West Bank close to the harbour. There were no women with the resources to even start challenging the status quo.

The separation of white and black was immediately evident as black people were only allowed into the town on condition that they performed manual labour. A separate location for blacks living on the west bank was established in the 1850s and at the outset they were forbidden to enter the white area after sunset. One of the first actions of the newly established Municipality was to create an official location on the east bank in 1874 and a second one created soon after to accommodate the Mfengu separately <sup>8</sup> (See Figures 5 and 6).

By 1878 the District Surgeon reported that the East Bank Location was clean and the men, women and children were well-dressed. Even taking into account the

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7. Prichard, Helen, With Friends and Foes in the Transkei, (London, Samson Low, 1881), p. 21.

8. Tankard, "The Development of East London, 1873-1914", pp. 351, 358 and 361.



Figure 5

The East Bank Location with both round huts and brick buildings and the church in the background, 1900  
Postcard in the East London Museum collection

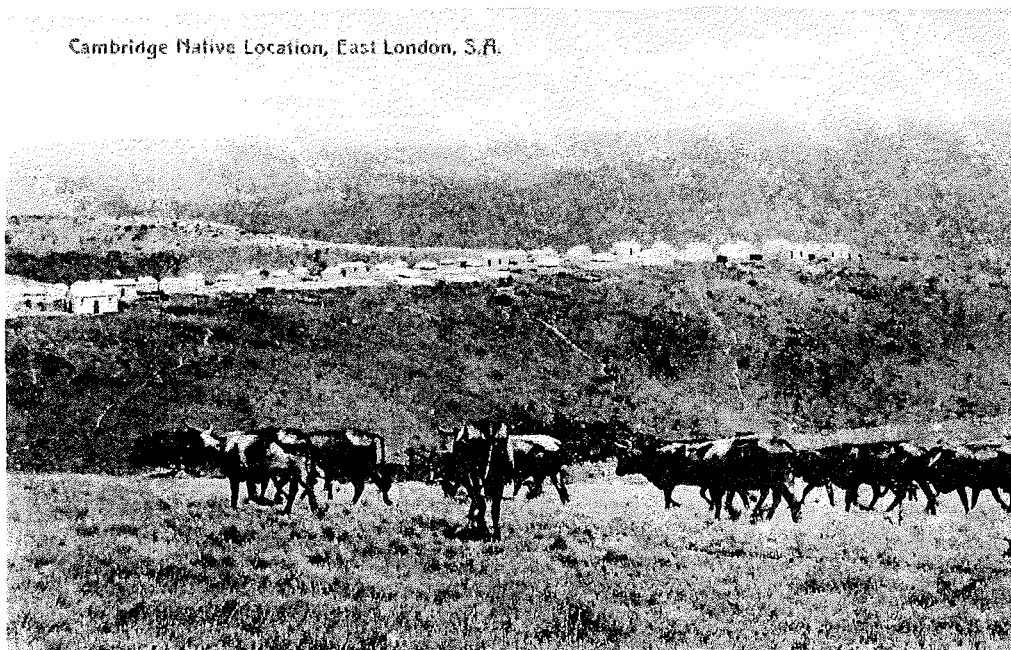


Figure 6

The Cambridge Location pleasantly situated but completely separate from the white area, 1910  
Postcard in the East London Museum collection

vested interests of the white group in controlling the blacks for labour purposes, this description is one which indicates that respectable black women had begun entering the town to live there. Divisions within black society, even at that early period, were apparent as conditions in the West Bank Location were quite different. Drunkenness was prevalent and prostitution was rife with white men living with 'coloured' women.<sup>9</sup> The lack of 'respectable' women seemed to point to a community where there was little self-respect or motivation to work towards stability.

The 1890s and early 1900s entrenched divisions in the society. This was a period when the more successful agents and merchants among the white population managed to establish themselves as a relatively well-off elite group. They built themselves fine houses to the north of the business area in Belgravia and Southernwood and created their social circle there.<sup>10</sup> By 1914 the residential patterns reflected a status hierarchy based on both socio-economic conditions and race. The affluent English and Germans lived in a suburb on the outskirts of the business centre with the poorer whites closer to town and on the West Bank. The black locations were situated on the outskirts of the town at some distance from the white elite area. Racial separation of the races was not, however, complete and the North End in particular, was a place where white, black, Indian and

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9. Tankard, "The Development of East London; 1873-1914", pp. 362 and 363.

10. Watson, Jeremy, The Urban Trail, (East London, Border Institute of Architects, 1989), pp.101-137.

Chinese all lived close together. This was, however, a poor area where women worked towards survival rather than upliftment.

### **Population Diversity**

Between the years 1870 to 1914 different people from different parts of the world, as well as from the country districts, moved into East London and made it their home. They brought many cultural identities where differences of race, class, culture, religion, ideology and economic means made it difficult to weld into a community. Although, unlike other areas of the country, there were very few Dutch (Afrikaans) inhabitants, there was a diversity of language, cultures and religions within both the black and white groups.

Groups of Germans under Sir George Grey's immigration scheme, were settled on the east bank of the Buffalo River, some few kilometres inland. Most formed part of the peri-urban scene as they were farmers on small-holdings but participated in the town life and sold their produce there. Many were unable to make their small farms productive and so got seasonal or permanent work in the town.<sup>11</sup> Shipping agents and traders, who hoped to establish viable businesses with the growth of the port, also arrived in some numbers during the 1870s from Britain and Germany.

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11. Schwar, J.F. and Pape, B.E., Germans in Kaffraria 1858-1958, (King William's Town, 1958), pp. 38-48.

The Townsmen's Roll of 1896 lists a total of 2197 property owners.<sup>12</sup> Dividing them by name origins, there was an overwhelming preponderance of British - 2025, as against 154 German, 8 Scandinavian and only 7 Afrikaans names. Unlike many other areas in South Africa, the influence of the Afrikaans-speaking community was negligible. This is born out in the 73 oral interviews conducted. Of the parents of the subjects, 41 were from the United Kingdom (19 English, 16 Scottish, 6 Irish), 13 were born in South Africa, 14 were German and there was one French and 1 Italian. Of the women subjects themselves, 43 were colonial born (more than half), 33 immigrated directly from Britain, 10 directly from Germany, and one from Italy. There were no Afrikaans women. It is clear that the British element contributed by far the most significant cultural influence, but even within the English speakers, they were divided by class and religion.

The black group incorporated those who were of 'non-European' stock and who were treated separately from and by the whites. Of these people, most were from the neighbouring rural areas, including the Transkei. The largest contingent were Xhosa-speakers and were listed as being from the following groups: 'Pato' [Chief Phato] of the AmaGqunukwebe who lived in the coastal area between the Keiskamma and Chalumna Rivers about 40 kms south west of East London; 'Umhalla' [Chief Mhala], an Ndlambe chief, who lived in the land between Kei Road and East London about 35 kms north east of East London; 'Kreli' [Chief Sarhili], a Gcaleka chief who lived east of the Kei River in the Butterworth district about 70 kms to the north east; and 'Sandilli' [Chief Sandile], the Paramount Ngqika chief

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12. Mayor's Minute 1896.

living south of the Kei River and north of the Kubusi River, some 50 kms north of East London and the 'Fingoes' [Mfengu], who were living north of the Kei River around the Tsomo River about 70 kms from East London.<sup>13</sup>

In the Municipal records the Xhosa speakers were referred to as 'Kafirs', with the exception of the 'Fingoes', who were always listed separately. Also recorded as living in East London were 'Zulus', from Natal and 'Basuto' from Lesotho. The 'Hottentots' were also counted separately from so-called 'Mixed', only in later records being included together. Also found in East London were Mozambicans and American negroes.<sup>14</sup> These were also small disparate groups.

Referred to as 'Asiatics', some Indians and Chinese also made East London their home. In 1903 three were mentioned in the Magistrate's Court Records,<sup>15</sup> and when the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1904, 24 local Chinese residents obtained exemption.<sup>16</sup> A few of their occupations were listed as Laundryman, Shop Assistant, and General Dealer.<sup>17</sup> By 1913 Chinese businessmen owned 13 General Dealers and one Laundry in East London.<sup>18</sup> Some established themselves

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13. Bergh, J.S. & Visagie, J.C., The Eastern Cape Frontier Zone; 1660 - 1980, (Durban, Butterworths, 1985), pp. 55-61.

14. These have been extracted from an examination of the Criminal Records 1883 - 1903 and the Mayor's Minutes from 1892 to 1914.

15. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/29, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, Section 46 23/97, 19.3.1903 and 3.9.1903.

16. CA 1/ELN 14/3/1, Chinese Persons, January 1904 - September 1928.

17. CA 1/ELN 14/3/1, Chinese Persons, January 1904 - September 1928.

18. Redbook, 1913, pp. 350-357.

in the suburbs as small corner shops selling groceries to the local communities and often living near their shops. By and large they ignored efforts to place them in the 'Asiatic Location' and lived in the white communities, mainly on the West Bank, on the Quigney and in the North End, but were socially exclusive.<sup>19</sup>

The Indian population was small and did not mix socially with the other groups. By 1903, some 26 were mentioned in the Magistrate's Records and a further nine in 1913.<sup>20</sup> Some worked in the harbour and some took up hawking fruit and vegetables.<sup>21</sup> In 1913 there was one jeweller, two Indian-owned laundries, eight fruiterers, ten general dealers and four bootmakers.<sup>22</sup> The Municipal authorities tried to take measures to force them to take up residence in the location and by the end of 1904 there were 404. However they discovered loopholes in the regulations and by 1912 most had moved back into the town and only 53 remained.<sup>23</sup>

These diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds soon became apparent in the developing town. The German and British heritages were the most forceful but,

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19. By 1928 the community was large enough to build and open their own school. The school was closed in the early 1970s and the building sold in 1988. Watson, J., The Urban Trail, East London, Border Institute of Architects, 1989), pp. 112-113.

20. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/29 and 1/2/1/42, Magistrate of East London Criminal Record Books.

21. Mayor's Minute, March 1905

22. Redbook, 1913, pp. 342-357.

23. Tankard, "The Development of East London; 1873-1914", p. 427.

prior to the South African War, were not characterised by hostility. Initially the signs of co-operation between German and British were promising. At the opening of the German School, attached to the Lutheran Church in 1875, Pastor Muller, who was very influential in the educational field, stated that while he was considered to be a fanatical German, he hoped that he also worked for the country at large. Gordon Sprigg, in his address, said that they looked towards a 'glorious future' if the Germans and the British joined hands and that this was a special event in the history of Panmure.<sup>24</sup> In the following year the editor of the Dispatch referred to

"our large and industrious German agricultural population".<sup>25</sup>

Members of the British-German Legion celebrated the 25th Anniversary of their arrival in 1882 to general approval.<sup>26</sup> The birthday of the German Emperor was regularly celebrated by the many German businesses flying German flags over their establishments without incident.<sup>27</sup>

The British contingent among the white group was by far the most numerous and they entertained a strong imperialist ideology. During the Jubilee Celebrations of Victoria's reign in 1897, East London was determined to be the 'first and foremost in showing loyalty to the crown' and the town was highly decorated.<sup>28</sup>

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24. Dispatch, 26.1.1875

25. Dispatch, 1.2.1876

26. Dispatch, 8.3.1882.

27. Dispatch, 23.3.1881 and 24.3.1882.

28. Dispatch, 25.6.1897.

From the turn of the century, when conditions were becoming more promising for women to act together for progress, the South African War (1899-1902) broke out and was responsible for engendering an 'otherness' between the English and German women. A controversy erupted when Herman Malcomess, a wealthy and highly respected businessman and German Consul, refused to fly the British flag during the relief of Kimberley in 1900. Anti-German sentiment was created which simmered on until it revived with tensions leading up to the First World War <sup>29</sup> (See Figure 7).

Anti-British feelings among some Germans in the period leading up to the First World War were also to be found. In an incident recounted in an oral interview, the story was told how the local German men met in 'Grandmother's house' in great secrecy at night and with blinds down for 'Grandfather Pachonick' to read the newspaper and discuss political matters with his friends. The women were not party to these meetings although they understood that they were subversive and could get them into trouble with the authorities. The situation affected the daughters in that it was their duty to clean, scrub and polish the parlour on Saturday morning. Following the influx of muddy-booted, pipe-smoking men, the girls had to clean out the room again early on Sunday. Disliking the extra work and not being interested in politics, they decided to put an end to the meetings and one

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29. Tankard, K.P.T., "The Boer War and the Germans at East London", The Coelacanth, (Vol.30, No.1, 1992), pp.10-21.

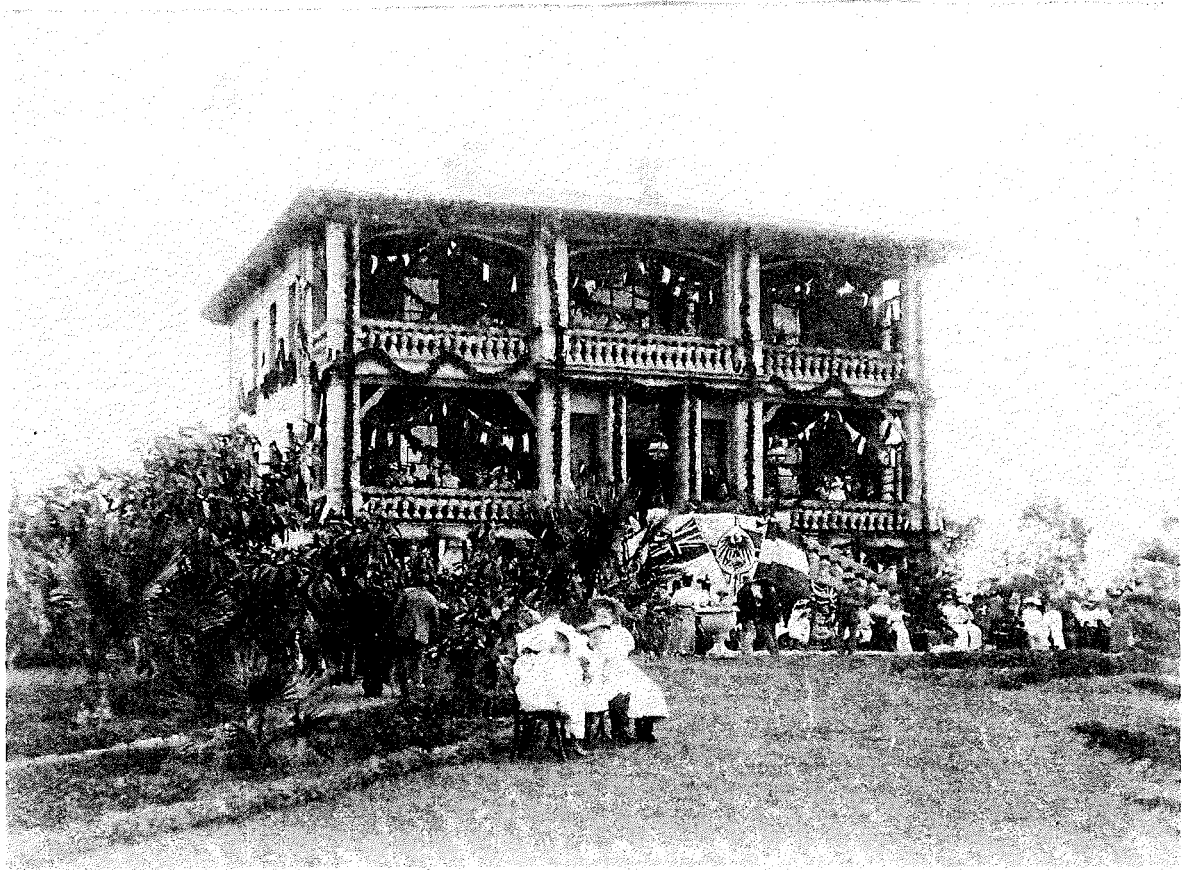


Figure 7

The Southernwood home of wealthy German merchant, Hermann Malcomess, decorated with bunting and the British and German flags to celebrate the coronation of George V. This was probably an effort to re-establish good relations with the English community after the antagonisms of the South African War, 1911

Photograph from the East London Museum collection

night they all shouted that the police were coming. The men all hurried away and the meetings were never resumed.<sup>30</sup>

The effect of strongly nationalistic sentiments was to divide the society into small groups which left little room for broadly based co-operative movements. This impacted upon women as most were coerced or co-operated to function within this social framework and so female associations were formed with difficulty. The German women tended to associate with one another, especially within religious boundaries.

### **Attitudes to Race**

The way white and black women regarded each other in the late nineteenth century was determined by both their programmed expectations of their own culture and the urban residential pattern which separated them. Their experiences of the frontier war of 1877 divided them ideologically and the possibilities of women working together across racial barriers to improve the conditions of women became remote.

The ideology of the white missionaries, with their zeal and sense of righteousness was, in Africa, easily transformed into a sense of racial superiority.<sup>31</sup> By the late nineteenth century, race as a biological concept had become identified with other

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30. Interview with Ellen Hill about her mother, Sophia Green, born Pachonick. 9.8.1994.

31. Bolt, Christine, Victorian Attitudes to Race, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p.111.

cultural qualities, such as religion. Few white Victorians had any understanding of African cultures and assumed that they were inferior, and this linking of race and culture led to the assumption that all African tribes were racially inferior.<sup>32</sup>

Lorimer comments that:

"In a society dedicated to the task of getting on, aware of the minutiae of social distinctions, increasing separation of classes by living areas in the cities, it is not surprising that a new significance was assigned to racial characteristics."<sup>33</sup>

The European influence was such that the question of race was mixed up with the values placed on the hierarchical social order. Equality between black and white had no place where there was no equality in white society.<sup>34</sup> Middle class English white people saw the hierarchy of class as being natural, and viewed race through this perspective, identifying black men with the lower class status as labourers.<sup>35</sup>

The perceptions of white women were informed by such influences. In the oral interviews, one woman said that her stepmother, newly arrived from England, would not have a black servant: "no savages in the house".<sup>36</sup> Miss Shingler, who was secretary at Lovedale for some years and spent much of her life working for racial justice, said that her mother brought all her racial prejudices out with her from England. On one occasion Miss Shingler brought Miss Soga, an educated

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32. Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race, p. 143.

33. Lorimer, Douglas A., Colour, Class and the Victorians, (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1978), p. 112.

34. Lorimer, Colour, Class and the Victorians, p. 15.

35. Lorimer, Colour, Class and the Victorians, p. 100.

36. Oral interview with Mrs J. Stevenson's daughter on 11.4.1995.

black woman, home to tea but her mother decided to stay in the bedroom. However, Miss Shingler said, her mother's curiosity had soon got the better of her and she joined them. At the end of the afternoon she shook Miss Soga warmly by the hand and said she hoped she would come again. Miss Shingler made the point that once personal contact was made, her mother's prejudice was discarded.<sup>37</sup>

The outbreak of violence on the frontier served to intensify racial antagonism within a military framework during the 1870s. White male civilians were encouraged to form volunteer units, the first meeting being held in August 1876.<sup>38</sup> This led to the establishment of the Buffalo Rifle Corps.<sup>39</sup> A proposal to form a further Volunteer Artillery Corps was set up during the following month.<sup>40</sup> Traders were pressurised into supporting these moves and their names were listed approvingly in the newspaper stating that they had agreed to grant their employees the afternoon off every Wednesday to give them the opportunity to join the Volunteer movement described, somewhat hopefully, as "a healthful recreation".<sup>41</sup> A third company was formed on the West Bank in November.<sup>42</sup> With four volunteer companies in East London, there were very few able-bodied men who were not involved in military activities, which meant that the military net was spread

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37. Oral Interview with Miss Shingler, 15.3.1995.

38. Dispatch, 15.8.1876.

39. Dispatch, 22.8.1876 and 26.8.1876.

40. Dispatch, 5.9.1876.

41. Dispatch, 7.11.1876.

42. Dispatch, 20.11.1876.

throughout the white community. References at the time were made to the 'uncivilised hordes' and the 'wave of barbarians'<sup>43</sup> which entrenched and extended stereotypes in which the black people were regarded as enemies.

The white women of the town were affected by the militant sentiments and the involvement of husbands and sons in the fighting. Attitudes hardened among the many who were affected by the loss of lives. Mary Wyche, wife of the Anglican minister, reported that nine East London men had been killed in Basutoland and this had left a profoundly sad impression.<sup>44</sup> In one oral interview, an informant said that her mother had hated 'the natives' as her father had been 'murdered' in the war of 1877.<sup>45</sup> The idea among whites that black people were savage enemies was indicated in the exaggerated stories which circulated. In her journal, Caroline Robson repeated scare and horror stories: Captain Blois had been tortured and killed and his heart cut out and eaten; Captain Cruise's [sic] house had been burnt down; and there was alarm as there had been an "engagement with the Kaffirs at the Kei, about 3 mi[les] from Panmure".<sup>46</sup> In fact the Kei is about 60 kilometres from East London, so this was alarmist talk.

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43. Dispatch, 12.2.1877.

44. CL, Ms 16818, Letters of Cyrill Wyche and his wife, letter by Mary Wyche dated 2.11.1880.

45. Interview with Dr M. Courtenay Latimer, 6.6.1995.

46. Journal of Caroline Robson; December 1877 - October 1879, original in the East London Central Library.

The black urban community also suffered. Tankard points out that in making decisions to implement strict control over the locations, the Gcaleka war was:

"undoubtedly a decisive factor because it caused an already nervous society to become excessively agitated."<sup>47</sup>

In addition, many urban workers had families and homes in the rural areas which had been affected by the war which also led to the impoverishment of the country districts. Cattle were captured, a sale of 20000 head being noted in the newspaper in April and the notice of the distribution of prize money to white soldiers in December.<sup>48</sup> In these circumstances, the black people had little cause to trust or like the whites. These were strong influences at work which placed black and white women in positions of potential enmity.

Women directed their philanthropic efforts towards organising charity concerts to raise funds to care for widows and orphans with the ladies of West Bank organising an entertainment to provide "good cheer" for the men at the front.<sup>49</sup> The black women also provided their men with "good cheer", Caroline Robson reporting that the black women were going out of Panmure taking out large bundles of food for the men who were said to be not far distant.<sup>50</sup>

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47. Tankard, "The Development of East London; 1873-1914", pp. 367 - 368

48. Dispatch, 16.4.1879 and 13.12.1879.

49. Dispatch, 13.11.1880 and 24.11.1880

50. Journal of Caroline Robson, December 1877 - October 1879, Original in the East London Central Library.

In East London the attitudes of women to their own roles and status were influenced by the military component of the society. Perceptions of rigid class distinctions between officers and rank and file permeated the communities, and few women ventured across these lines. Strongly nationalistic sentiments within a diverse population also served to divide people, with the South African War creating British/German antagonism. When economic conditions became more promising for co-operation, these antagonisms separated middle class women. Racial ideology, reinforced by European ideas of class divisions and a sense of superiority, was part of the cultural baggage of the white women and the black people, perceived as inferior were to be tolerated as labourers, but physically separated from the town. Municipal controls of residential areas saw further divisive factors at work. Growing wealth among some sectors of the white community meant a separation of living spaces with the white 'elite' group moving to an exclusive area. White and black women met only through domestic service in a class relationship of middle and working class. The outbreak of the Gcaleka war in 1877 and further hostilities in the early 1880s, meant that the black and white people perceived each other as enemies to be feared. Any crossing of racial boundaries and recognition of a common cause by women would have to be set against these widely held perceptions.

## CHAPTER 4

### **CONSERVATISM IN THE DOMESTIC ROLE OF WOMEN**

The many obstructive influences in women's lives over which they had no control found echoes in the domestic sphere where their conservative attitudes were reinforced. In the legal sphere, marriage bound women into subordinate positions and the patriarchal system was entrenched in both black and white societies. For most women their roles as homemakers and their work in rearing children were priorities in their lives and the full weight of traditional values bore heavily upon them. The white married women of East London, who worked for improvement in the position of women, would have to do so with the approval of their husbands. Other supporters of the women's movement were unmarried and so, as adults, they did not function within a traditional family.

A conservative element during the early period was that the white urban settlement was still relatively new in 1870 and had yet to be consolidated. There was therefore an extra impetus for the white women to establish and maintain the familiar European system which centred on the home and for women not to threaten white society by seeking to make changes, even if they were experiencing personal problems. With great insight, Olive Schreiner wrote

"the women of no race or class will ever rise in revolt or attempt to bring about a revolutionary readjustment of their relation to their society, however intense their suffering and however clear their perception of it, while the welfare and persistence of their society requires their submission."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Adelmarie & Adriaan van der Spuy, Eds, Commemorative Edition, Woman and Labour by Olive Schreiner, (Johannesburg, Cosmos, 1975), p. 2.

### **Patriarchal Controls**

The legal framework which bound the women of East London to a subordinate position was incorporated in the Roman-Dutch law which governed the Cape. Marriage was in community of property by which the wife was reduced to the legal position of a minor and the husband had complete power over their common assets. The father was the sole guardian of the children and could exclude the mother from guardianship in the event of his death. An antenuptial contract could be drawn up to protect a wife's property, but these were seldom utilised.<sup>2</sup>

During Victorian times, the cornerstone of European society was the family and, in terms of the ideal model, the 'perfect lady' of the middle classes was expected to devote herself to her home. Marriage was the goal of every woman, and once married, her home, husband and children constituted the parameters of her life. Although the woman was theoretically in control within the home, in fact the husband and father was the head with economic power firmly vested in his hands.<sup>3</sup> This patriarchal system was well entrenched in East London. As well as his legal rights, the male was also the breadwinner, controlling the finances and leaving the woman with no resources of her own. Should a marriage be unhappy, a wife had no means of escape if the husband did not wish her to leave. This was particularly true of the period prior to 1900 when there were few job opportunities for women.

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2. Potgieter, D.J., Ed., Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa, Vol.11, (Cape Town, Nasou, 1975), p.482.
  3. Vicinus, M. "Introduction", in Vicinus, Martha, Suffer and be Still, Ed., (Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press, 1972), pp.ix-x.

The male-dominated household was the rule throughout the period, although by 1914, cracks were beginning to appear in the previously bland facade. An examination of the available records of married white middle-class women indicates that most considered themselves to be housewives and mothers and did not support the women's movement.

Oral interviews with white women reflected a home-husband centred ethos, especially for the older women. Four actually used the term 'patriarchal' to define the situation at home.<sup>4</sup> Jamesina Barber (born 1870) regarded working for a living as 'infradig' in spite of coming from a working-class background herself.<sup>5</sup> Noreen Friedman (b. 1917) said that she was very strictly brought up and that her father was the authority in the home. Her mother was very retiring, business was never discussed at home and her father thought that a woman should not have to handle money.<sup>6</sup> Sarah Rive (born 1866) had a hard life with her husband as he was a gambler and a drinker and had bad moods. Her granddaughter could not understand that after his death his wife revered his memory.<sup>7</sup> Wilhelmina Ploetz said that women should stay in the home and Augustine Medefindt was described as 'very much a mother and a home-maker'.<sup>8</sup>

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4. Oral interviews on 7.10.1994, 30.3.1995, 22.6.1995 and 1.2.1996
  5. Oral interview with her daughter, 28.7.1994.
  6. Oral interview, 30.3.1995.
  7. Oral interview, 1.3.1950.
  8. Oral interviews; 21.7.1994 and 7.10.1994.

An important factor which made East London white women unwilling to break out of the patriarchal and established mode was the fact that through their marriage, many had become upwardly mobile and enjoyed a higher standard of living than they had before marriage. For example, Frances King (born 1870) was born in Lancashire, the daughter of a mill-worker and was a mill-girl herself in her youth. She came to East London after her marriage in 1902 where her husband was a coach-builder on the railways. Her quality of life and status improved a great deal and she refused to have any contact with 'poor whites'. She never wanted to return to England, even for a holiday.<sup>9</sup> Mary Prior (born 1872) was also born in Scotland of working class people. She told of a very hard early life where there was no work and no money. She also came to East London on her marriage and had a much improved quality of life and higher status, with her husband becoming a Town Councillor.<sup>10</sup>

The patriarchal system at its best offered women care, protection and support, especially during her child-bearing and child-rearing years. When husband and wife worked together to improve their life-styles, there would be little need for the wife to challenge the husband's authority. John and Mary Ann Gately both came from poor working class backgrounds and whose quality of life improved markedly. His love and concern for his wife and family are reflected throughout his correspondence and his wife never challenged his undoubtedly autocratic role which included refusing to allow his daughters to work.<sup>11</sup> His two youngest daughters,

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9. Oral interview with her son, 28.3.1995.

10. Oral interview with her daughter, 22.6.1995.

11. Gately Papers, letter dated 17 July, 1879, East London Museum.

both of whom never married, indicated by contrast, their rejection of his attitude as they took employment after his death and also purchased themselves expensive silver jewellery.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the women interviewed did not know whether or not their mother or grandmother supported the ideals of the women's movement. It is possible that many did not do so publicly for fear of alienating their husbands, should they not support the franchise issue, for example. If a man fulfilled all his obligations in the home, his wife could have been too inhibited to challenge male authority and cause dissension in the home. One such example was Helen Crewe. She was the daughter of Joseph Millerd Orpen, who was the first Parliamentarian to introduce a proposal in the Cape Parliament that women should have the vote.<sup>13</sup> He felt strongly that women were not inferior and these convictions must have had a major influence on his daughter. An examination of the associations which Helen Crewe supported indicate that she had very strong feminist sympathies.<sup>14</sup> Yet, in spite of an admirable record of public service for which she was awarded an OBE, she did not belong to the Women's Enfranchisement League. It seems clear that this was

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12. Gately House Museum, Silver purse and visiting card case dated 1904/5, silver trinket box and visiting card case dated 1905/6, silver-backed mirror dated 1906/7, a silver-backed manicure set and a powder bowl with a silver lid dated 1910/11 and a silver trinket box dated 1911/12. John Gately died in 1902.
  13. Walker, C., "The Women's Suffrage Movement", in Walker, C., Women and Gender In Southern Africa to 1945, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), p.324.
  14. Crewe Papers; Examples of associations connected with women's interests which Helen Crewe supported included: St Monica's Home for Unmarried Mothers; Indo-European Women's Association; Loyal Women's Guild, National Council of Women, Widows and Orphans and House of Bethany. East London Museum.

owing to the fact that her husband was opposed to the movement. Here was a man who was extremely successful in his public life, who was able to provide most competently for his family and was devoted to his wife.<sup>15</sup> In true patriarchal mould, however, it was he who controlled the finances. In the only surviving letter to her husband, Helen Crewe explains her expenditure, trying anxiously to justify it.<sup>16</sup>

The culture and lifestyles of the black and white women who came to live in East London were very different in many ways, but the patriarchal controls were as firmly entrenched in traditional black society as they were in the white social structure. Black women who came into the town from the rural areas around East London brought with them cultural traditions which were based on male power. Controls in Xhosa society at the time were centred around the male chief, with male petty chiefs under him and the father the head of the family unit.<sup>17</sup> Marriage was polygynous and patrilocal and the system of a brideprice (lobolo) was commonly practised. The father arranged the marriage of his daughter in such a way as to ensure her protection and that of her offspring. The prospective husband handed over a number of cattle as a pledge of good faith, the number being agreed by both parties.<sup>18</sup> Soga argues that the custom of lobolo was instituted to secure the

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15. Crewe Papers; a handwritten card from Charles Crewe to his wife, dated on the anniversary of their daughter's death, with a poem and sketch of their daughter's grave, inscribed "To my Darling In loving and sorrowful remembrance of June 23rd", East London Museum.

16. Crewe Papers, CC 37, Letter dated 1909, East London Museum.

17. Molema, S.M., The Bantu Past and Present, Facsimile Reprint, (Cape Town, Struik, 1963, original 1920), p. 113.

18. Soga, John Henderson, The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs, (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1932), p. 265.

married woman's status and to protect her from physical abuse.<sup>19</sup> If a woman was ill-treated by her husband she could return to her parents who could make the man pay for his misconduct.<sup>20</sup>

With the annexation of the Transkeian territories, Roman Dutch law was applied regardless of colour.<sup>21</sup> However, following the Cape Native Laws and Customs Commission of 1880-3, the laws and customs of the people of the Transkei were taken into consideration and Roman-Dutch law was only applied when the people concerned had abandoned tribal customs.<sup>22</sup> This had particular significance in relation to the situation pertaining to marriage for black women. Under tribal custom, women had no rights and could own no property. A clause was introduced which fixed the age of majority at 21, after which she could own property and take responsibility for her own life.<sup>23</sup>

According to Soga, the marriage of black Christians was a hybrid affair in which a Christian church wedding was combined with the custom of the payment of 'lobola'.<sup>24</sup> Even as late as the 1970s, van der Vliet found that many of the

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19. Soga, The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs, p.263.

20. Soga, The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs, p.268.

21. Simons, H.J., African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa, (London, Hirst & Co., 1968), p.28.

22. Simons, African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa, pp. 32-33.

23. Macquarrie, J.W., The Reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford, (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1962), p.99.

24. Soga, The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs, p.281.

couples whom she interviewed in Grahamstown were aware of and influenced by 'traditional Xhosa marriage'.<sup>25</sup>

In the same way as in white societies, when the patriarchal system was functioning well, it offered security for women and their children. In traditional societies there was always a place for every woman and her children. In case of death or desertion, the woman could go back to her parent's home or be taken into the care of her husband's family. Nevertheless the whole social structure entrenched the power of the male in traditional society with women being subordinate. In an interview with 12 elderly women from Gompo, they all agreed that in the old days men ruled everything.<sup>26</sup> The aims of these customs were for the protection of the family unit, control over the woman's fertility and thus her offspring, directed towards protecting the genetic investments of the family. In practice, while the woman may have had security and status within the family group in a ideal situation, she had very little control over her own life. This impacted adversely on women when the situation was less than ideal. The Xhosa women were subject to these intense social pressures to conform and those who broke from these traditions did so with great difficulty.

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25. Van der Vliet, Virginia, "Traditional Husbands and Modern Wives? Constructing Marriages in a South African Township", in Spiegel, A.D., & McAllister, P.A., Eds, Tradition and Transition in Southern Africa, (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1991).

26. Oral Interview with women from Gompo Welfare Society for the Aged, 17.5.1995.

### Family Responsibilities

One of the most important responsibilities that women had was the care of children. In the case of large families, which was usually the case for women born before 1860, their hands were full, leaving little time for concerns outside the home. Caring for sick children was another full-time occupation and this was particularly noticeable before 1900.

While the care of young children within the home was in the hands of the mother but she was not responsible for the urban environment in which she lived. Although no figures are available until 1906, in the early days of the settlement the death rate of children under one year was very high. One example is the headstone of the Coutts family in the West Bank Cemetery which records the death of their first five children who all died very young, between the years 1863 to 1875.<sup>27</sup> Epidemics of childhood diseases did take their toll, such as the two children of Major Elliott who died of scarlet fever.<sup>28</sup>

The worst period of childhood diseases was in 1888 when an epidemic of measles and scarlet fever left 68 dead.<sup>29</sup> An editorial in the newspaper expressed great concern over the infant mortality and suggested neglect by the parents was to blame.<sup>30</sup> This was unlikely to have been the case as Tankard points to the poor

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27. Coutts - John, aged 13 months, 1863; Agnes, aged 21 months, 1867; James, aged 3 years, 1870; Willie, aged 16 months, 1870; and David, aged 5 years, 1875. In the West Bank Cemetery.

28. Dispatch, 23.4.1877.

29. Tankard, "The Development of East London through Four Decades of Municipal Control", p. 509.

30. Dispatch, 4.8.1880.

state of the water supply and appalling sewerage system which affected the health of the population and this was a much more likely cause.<sup>31</sup> In the 1880s there was an improvement in the sanitary conditions as night-soil and rubbish was buried instead of being disposed of on the beaches.<sup>32</sup>

Children's illnesses kept mothers very busy and those with a passing acquaintance with medicine and a few home remedies were kept very busy. Mary Wyche, writing in 1878 said that water was very scarce and all had to be boiled. In spite of that little Alice suffered from an ulcerated mouth and Maurice from dysentery. As with many women, she had a box in which she kept her favourite patent medicines.

"My medicine chest is a great boon and its fame is getting spread. I have physicked several Kafirs now and I find each one I dose brings a brother ere long who is bad somehow".<sup>33</sup>

The newspaper advertisements in the 1870s offered 'Chlorodyne' for the usual complaints of "Dysentery, Fever, Ague, Colera and Colds".<sup>34</sup> Medical care was not particularly efficient even for white children and an alarming story was told by Kathleen Pendrigh, born in 1910. She and her brother had their tonsils taken out on the kitchen table by the local doctor, assisted by her mother and sister. Surprisingly there were no complications and they both survived.<sup>35</sup>

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31. Tankard, "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control", p. 462.

32. Tankard, "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control", p. 537.

33. CL, Ms 16828, The letters of Cyrill Wyche and his wife, letter dated 19.6.1878.

34. Dispatch, 6.6.1876.

35. Oral Interview, 22.6.1995.

In 1907 the death rate of children under 1 year was 125.5 per 1000 for whites and 300 per 1000 for blacks.<sup>36</sup> By comparison, in 1900 the children's death rate in Russia was 252, where it was known to be bad, but in Finland it was 91.<sup>37</sup> The East London rates, particularly for black children were high by comparison and the Medical Officer of Health expressed his concern. He said that 'Gastro-Enteric Catarrh' was responsible for 32% of the deaths of children, it was particularly prevalent among the poorer people where proper food was not available and there was over-crowding.<sup>38</sup> The high death rate among black children was of concern to the Medical Officer but the male Councillors were unmoved. By 1908 nothing had been done about overcrowding, an inadequate water supply and poor sanitation in the locations.<sup>39</sup> Improved sanitation in the white areas did lead to a reduction in the death rates of children under one year for the whites as it dropped to 111.1 per 1000 in 1913. The black rates actually increased that year to 393.1 per 1000.<sup>40</sup>

The high degree of child illnesses, many leading to death, tied mothers to their homes, particularly in the period before 1900. The black women found it difficult to care adequately for their children as many had to go out to work. This was an aspect of women's lives which needs to be considered when evaluating the amount of time which they had to devote themselves to interests outside the home.

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36. Mayor's Minute, 1908.

37. Anderson and Zinsser, A History of Their Own, p.285.

38. Mayor's Minute, 1907/'08, Report of the Medical Officer of Health, p.53.

39. Tankard, "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control", pp. 421-423.

40. Mayor's Minute, 1914, p. 103.

### Housekeeping and Home-makers

The domestic houses which the women occupied were the centres of their world and it was within these structures that they exercised their home-making abilities in the prescribed domestic roles. They provide the physical evidence of how the women lived during the period under study and indicate the extent of change for some women. The difference in the homes which white middle class women occupied in the 1870s and those which were built post 1900, indicate the improvement in their economic positions and their social status.

In the early days very few white women had really comfortable and spacious homes. The first houses consisted mainly of wood and iron and were not really built to last.<sup>41</sup> Brick houses only began to make their appearance in the 1870s. The McKay family home was such a simple brick structure (See Figure 8). In 1878 Mary Wyche described her home, the Manse, as being the best in the town:

"There are two good-sized sitting rooms, good lofty ones, on the left of the house door, being a drawing room and a dining room. On the right hand is my bedroom, also a good room with a hearthstone so I could have a fire in the hearth. At the back is a good room for a nursery and then what will be the boy's room and a smaller one for a servant. We have a good pantry with an inner place which I keep locked for stores. The kitchen is small and has a mud floor and a hearth in which our logs burn".<sup>42</sup>

The provision of a room for a servant indicates that the wife of a minister had high status and an assured income and could afford a servant. This house, which is still

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41. Vernon, G.N., A Study of the Wood and Iron Houses of East London, Annals of the Cape Provincial Museums, Vol. 1, No. 4, December, 1984, p.

42. CL, Ms 16828, The Letters of Cyrill Wyche and his Wife, letter dated 19.6.1878.

extant, is a very simple one and the fact that it was the best in the town at the time is evidence of the much poorer quarters in which the rest of the community lived.

When John Gately's finances improved, the home which he built in 1876 was an unpretentious brick building with only two main bedrooms and two very small ones for his family of 12.<sup>43</sup> By the late 1890s and in the period immediately after the South African War, when finances had improved, many decorative and comfortable homes were built in Belgravia and Southernwood. William Medefindt, who arrived as a penniless German-speaking immigrant in 1877, was able to house his wife and family in a spacious and well-appointed home by 1903 (see Figure 9).

For the white middle class women, many from poor working class backgrounds, these improvements in their home living conditions over a period of time, were very much appreciated. As it was thanks to their husbands' efforts that they owed this upgrading of their homes, it would have been ungrateful for them to demand more rights.

There are no descriptions of the home life of black women during the period under study. The oral records can give only a few answers. Black women had to build their own houses on allocated land in the locations. Hunter's description of town life was researched in the 1930s, and was largely based on the East London experience. In the absence of earlier descriptions, this gives some idea of the conditions experienced by women. The later population was greater, there was

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43. Gately House, built in 1876, is a National Monument and administered as a house museum by the East London Museum.

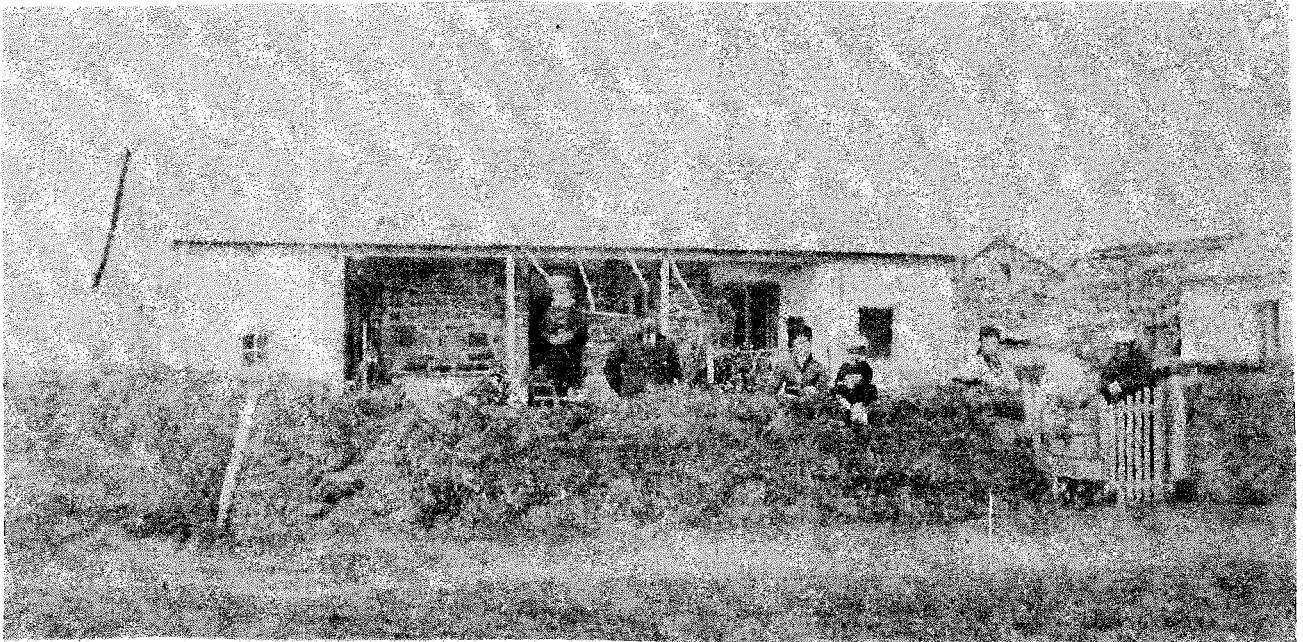


Figure 8

Mr and Mrs George McKay and their family outside their simple stone cottage on the West Bank, about 1890. Their daughter, Ella, was the second woman in the country to obtain a university degree.

Photograph from the East London Museum collection



Figure 9

The splendid Belgravia home of Mr and Mrs Wilhelm Medefindt, about 1910. Medefindt arrived from Germany as a penniless immigrant in 1880

Photograph by courtesy of Mrs Valda Munro

more over-crowding and there were more social associations, but there could have been many women who had been young prior to 1914 who were still alive in the 1930s.

The usual town family consisted of a man, his wife and their minor children and polygyny was rare. The man may have had a mistress (idikazi) who could be temporary. The wife's behaviour in town was much less restricted than in the country as she was not under the control of her mother-in-law and women were less submissive to men. In the town there was access to the Church or to the magistrate in the case of a man assaulting his wife.<sup>44</sup>

The women of the townships were very limited in their choice of homes. At first they had to build their own houses of wattle and daub on rented land. A painting of 1883 shows a scene in the harbour with two black women with babies on their backs collecting wood in order to build their huts (see Figure 10). Later they followed the European example and used wood and iron.<sup>45</sup> According to Hunter, by the 1930s the homes of the better educated and those with good incomes were scrupulously clean and furnished in European Victorian styles. Wallpaper, plush tablecloths and lace curtains were to be found.<sup>46</sup> The taste for these was undoubtedly generated in the period under study, when domestic servants would have had contact with the Victorian homes of the white women. For the elite in the

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44. Hunter, Monica, Reaction to Conquest, (London, Oxford University Press, 1936), pp.459-461.

45. Tankard, "The Development of East London Through Four Decades", pp. 417-418.

46. Hunter, Reaction to Conquest, p. 446.



Figure 10

Black women collecting wood to build their houses.  
At the pontoon - 1883  
Painting by George McKay  
Original in the East London Museum Collection

black community, home conditions did improve, but not to the extent that they were prepared to challenge established Western cultural influences.

In sum, the picture that emerges of women's domestic lives in East London was that they lived under the yoke of a strictly patriarchal system, but for most white women it offered a form of security and an improvement of living standards. By the early 1900s most of the women had comfortable homes to live in and many were fairly well off. White women were involved in establishing a new settlement and this was not a situation which bred revolt. For those who chose to challenge accepted norms, it would be a hard fight. These divisions of roles between the male as breadwinner and the woman as homemaker were to endure into the middle of the twentieth century so were difficult to challenge.<sup>47</sup> In the home women had to care for families which was a major responsibility, especially when illness took its toll. The health of white children did improve with better sanitation over time, but illness and death among black children did not. In moving into an urban situation many of the black women were breaking traditional patriarchal patterns and adopting new roles. Social and economic pressures combined to make their lives difficult and their gains were hard won. It was in the townships that the greatest challenge to the long-established patriarchal system took place.

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47. Gillis, John R., For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 258.

## CHAPTER 5

### **THE SEARCH FOR STATUS AND RESPECTABILITY**

The previous chapter dealt with the conservative attitudes of women in the domestic field. These non-progressive approaches were also to be found in the public sphere. The search for status and respectability during the period of study was an aspect of women's lives which allowed little latitude for innovation and change. Women aspired to improving their class position, in particular advancing from the working to the middle class. The concept of respectability, which involved an irreproachable lifestyle, was embraced by the middle classes, but extended even into the working class. It involved adhering strictly to the rules and conventions of society and no allowances were made for individuality or challenges to the existing social order. Most of the white women of East London were upwardly mobile, and, having come from the working classes, they were particularly interested in maintaining recently achieved class and status differences. As these class attitudes became embedded in society, so it became more difficult for women to break out of conservative moulds. The patriarchal attitudes of the churches which placed women in a subordinate position, also engendered conservative attitudes. With most women being affiliated to one of the churches, this influence was widespread.

## Class

There was a deeply entrenched concept of class consciousness in Europe in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> As most of East London's white women were of British or German extraction, they carried these ideas with them as they created the distinctive society of the town. The term 'class' is one for which a multitude of different meanings have developed. This is not the place to enter into the 'Race-Class' debate as analyzed by Posel, but to appreciate her call to understand the complex interrelationship of economic, religious and ideological forces and not to be limited by the adherence to an 'either race-or class' theory, bearing in mind that race and class structured and reinforced each other.<sup>2</sup>

Many definitions of class have been suggested, some of which have relevance to the East London situation. One theory gives fluidity of movement between the groups as a key factor and postulates a five-class model. This incorporates the upper class of nobles and land-owners; the middle class of industrial and commercial property owners and senior military and professional men; the middling class of aspiring professional men, literates and artisans and the working class which comprises two groups: the industrial workers on a higher level than the lowest group, which consisted of agricultural labourers, low-paid urban workers, domestic servants and working class women.<sup>3</sup> Other theories, which are relevant to the East

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1. Briggs, Asa, "Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics; 1780-1846", Past and Present, Vol. 9, 1956, pp. 67-68.
  2. Posel, Deborah, "Rethinking the Race-Class Debate in South African Historiography", Social Dynamics, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1983, pp. 50-66.
  3. Neale, P.S., Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 19 - 31.

London situation, suggest that the middle classes aspired to the upper class way of life and tried to be 'gentrified'. The middle classes wanted to emulate the elite rather than fight with them. This meant having a good education, acquiring property, furnishing homes in imitation of upper-class houses, wearing the correct clothes and behaving in a socially acceptable manner.<sup>4</sup>

Occupation has been suggested as a basis for analysing social class but there are many different views on the actual classification.<sup>5</sup> This however does not reflect the situation which existed in East London in the late Victorian period as it does not take into account the importance of wealth. Bradlow comes closest to defining the class situation as it existed in East London. She points out that the English-speaking colonials at the Cape prided themselves that their society was more egalitarian than in Britain, although middle class culture, with its hierarchical social structures, was admired and adopted. She identifies five categories in the Cape establishment in the 1850s: military officers; professionals; the civil service bureaucrats; landed gentry and merchants. The crucial colonial status symbol was wealth which determined position and influence. Class distinctions were therefore based primarily on money and status.<sup>6</sup>

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4. Scott, Patricia Elena, "An Approach to the Urban History of Early Victorian Grahamstown 1832-53 with Particular Reference to the Interiors and Material Culture of Domestic Dwellings", (Rhodes University, Grahamstown, MA Thesis, 1987), pp. 47-55.
  5. "Scott, An Approach to the Urban History of Grahamstown", pp. 102 - 106.
  6. Bradlow, Edna, "The Culture of a Colonial Elite: The Cape of Good Hope in the 1850s" in Victorian Studies, Spring, 1986, pp. 388 - 390.

An analysis of the occupations of the white inhabitants of East London in the 1878 Directory gives some idea of the ratio of the classes as defined by occupation at that time. Of 17 entries, nine were upper middle class, 35 were middling class and 73 were working class.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the working class predominated at that time, but the situation was not static. Many of the people listed as working class then, later became leading citizens and grew wealthy. In East London, once a common soldier, a butcher or a transport contractor managed to accumulate wealth, he could and did achieve upward mobility and social status in the white community (See Figures 8 and 9). By 1881, perceptions of class differentiation were apparent as a "Poor Emigrant" complained that "all the schools were filled with the sons and daughters of the gentry of the town".<sup>8</sup>

An analysis of the 73 white women on whom oral history records were done, reveal that only Lady Helen Crewe could be defined as upper class. Of the rest, 18 were middle class, 42 were of the middling class and two were of the working class. Of these informants, 33 came from known poor circumstances or the working class.

Of these, all achieved a better lifestyle with an improvement in economic circumstances being the criterion. In many of the records, the earlier circumstances of the families were not known, but it is clear that most of the white families were upwardly mobile and improved their quality of life when living in East London. It is significant that none of the upwardly mobile 33 women embraced the ideals of the women's movement or belonged to the Women's Enfranchisement League.

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7. Roach, W.M., King William's Town and East London Directory, (King William's Town, A.J. Fuller, 1878).

8. Dispatch, 2.7.1881.

Class consciousness worked against the development of an egalitarian community and led to social divisions between groups and this was a divisive force within this fairly small society. In fact there was no single white community in East London, but one divided, not only by ethnological and cultural differences, but also by wealth and class. Women only visited those whom they considered their social equals and the institution of visiting cards which enabled people to choose their associates was firmly upheld in East London.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the social entertainments reinforced the class structures. Balls were great favourites, usually given by one or other of the clubs. The middle classes managed to exclude those of the lower orders by having subscription balls, by which names could be entered and only the select chosen.<sup>10</sup> It was at these functions that young girls could follow the English tradition and "Come Out". Such an occasion was described by Norah Murray, daughter of the Government Surveyor for East London, A.E. Murray, in 1892:

"It is so funny to be 'grewed up'. I made my grand debut at the Regatta Ball in a white silk train and ruching, to say nothing of a boquet, that almost hid me - & likewise a trembly feeling which fast vanished after the first dance. I enjoyed myself very much went both nights and danced every dance, extra and extra extras until the small hours of the morning"[sic].<sup>11</sup>

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9. The East London Museum has a large collection of both visiting cards and visiting card cases donated by local families.
  10. Dispatch, 7.6.1879, 28.4.1883.
  11. Letter from Norah Murray to her cousin Arthur, dated 1/11/92, address "Kloof Villa". Copy kindly made available by her granddaughter.

Musical evenings, where piano playing and singing by local people were also much favoured as these gave the newly promoted middle class a place to show their accomplishments to society.<sup>12</sup>

John Gately was a typical example of upward mobility and 'gentrification'. He had left Ireland in 1849 during the hard times of the Irish famine and joined the Royal Irish Rifles. He took his discharge in 1856 in British Kaffraria and in 1860 settled in the struggling port of East London in an effort to make a living as a shipping agent. He played a leading role in establishing the municipality and became a prominent and well respected figure in the municipal functions.<sup>13</sup> In 1878 he visited Ireland, to see if he could re-establish contact with his family. He found a cousin, another John Gately, working in a field but he did not introduce himself and did not go further in trying to establish contact with his family as they were "so far apart in the social scale from ourselves".<sup>14</sup> Gately's wife, who had risen in status with her husband, did not espouse any of the women's issues or belong to the Women's Enfranchisement League.<sup>15</sup>

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12. Dispatch, 25.4.1878 - Church Concert, "Miss Tapson and 'Home Sweet Home' with pathos and sweetness but unfortunate nervousness"; 5.6.1878 - Church Funds Concert - Pianoforte duet, Miss Donald and Miss Lucas, Miss Urry sang; 2.6.1880 - Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert "most of the Ladies and Gentlemen of East London will kindly assist";
  13. Vernon, G.N., "'A Very Honourable Record': John Gately of East London", in McCracken, Donal P., The Irish in Southern Africa 1795-1910, Vol.2, (Durban, The Irish in Southern Africa Project, 1992), pp. 236-237.
  14. Vernon, G.N., "A Very Honourable Record; John Gately of East London" in McCracken, Donal, The Irish in Southern Africa, p.238.
  15. A search through the Gately Papers, which include a section devoted to Mrs Gately, revealed no records reflecting any interest.

Mr Will Crosby, the editor of the Dispatch from 1898 to 1912, would have qualified as middle class with aspirations to gentrification. His son wrote:

"My Dad and mother ...; both were involved in the community and social life of the town and both became Presidents or Chairmen of many societies and associations .... On Sunday mornings Dad used to order a landau and with Mother dressed up in her best Sunday clothes and with her parasol up and Dad in his suit and top hat, off they went to drive along the Esplanade which on a Sunday morning was the centre of the social scene."<sup>16</sup> (see Figure 11)

Even a camping trip to the beach, which was a favourite holiday for many families, was often done with an eye to impressing neighbours:

"At Christmas time, my Dad would have two large marquee tents erected at the corner site at the bottom of Moore Street on the Esplanade....Dad did things in style, having a dining room suite and the big double bed installed inside the marquee."<sup>17</sup>

Another example of working class to middle class was David Rees who came to the Cape as an employee of the Cape Government Railways. He began in East London as a cartage contractor to the railways in 1885. He later started his own transport very profitably and was able to afford a grand double storey house in a fashionable part of town and to employ white servants (See Figure 12). He was elected Mayor in 1891 and served for 8 terms. From 1894 to 1903 he owned the Dispatch newspaper and wielded considerable influence. He served as Chairman of the Hospital Board, the Harbour Board and the Agricultural Society and played a leading role in many sporting clubs. He was awarded the C.B.E. for his work during the

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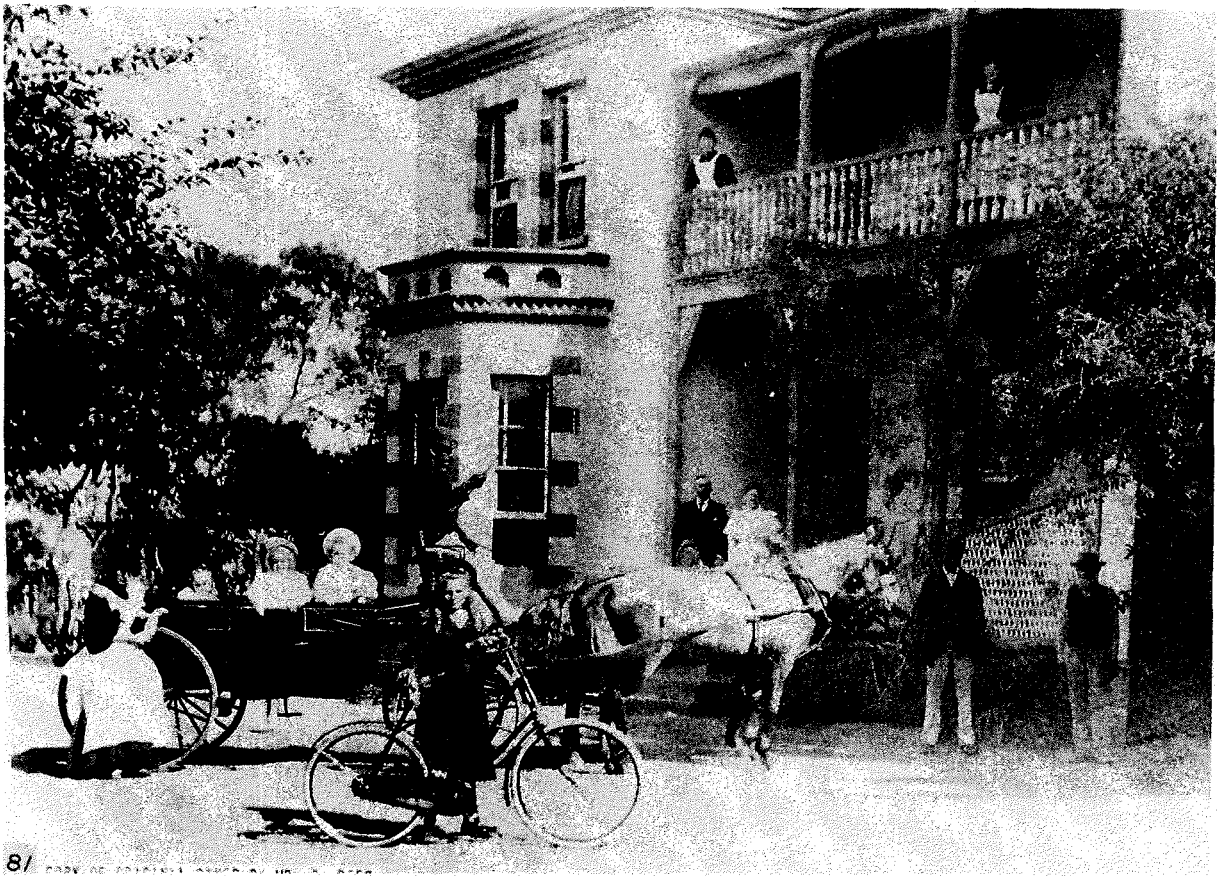
16. Crosby, E.G., "An East London Childhood", The Coelacanth, Vol.24, No.2, December, 1986, pp.16-19.

17. Crosby, E., "An East London Childhood", The Coelacanth, Vol. 24, No. 2, December 1986, p.17.



Figure 11

The fashionable promenade along the Esplanade, 1909  
Postcard in the East London Museum collection



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Figure 12

Mr and Mrs David Rees at their home in Park Avenue with their  
white domestic servants, 1898  
Photograph in the East London Museum

Great War.<sup>18</sup> While Mrs Rees was involved in varying forms of public service, there is no evidence that she supported women's causes.

The ideal of respectability was one which, Lorimer argues, was embraced by all the classes and the cleavage between the respectable and the social outcasts was a deeper division than social class. Respectability had nothing to do with wealth, but those aspiring to it had to have a lifestyle which was above reproach and they should be frugal and industrious. This search for respectability and gentility led to the belief that the inequalities in society could be surmounted by individual effort. Conversely, this ideal of upward social mobility intensified class-consciousness and made people more aware of their social positions.<sup>19</sup>

Aspirations towards respectability and gentility were clearly evident in East London from an early date. When Major Brabant was proposed as a Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1873, he was described as being:

"a gentleman of education, of experience and of position in Society and will therefore command respect".<sup>20</sup>

Mary Wyche (in East London from 1878 to 1882) was imbued with the sense of respectability and was very judgmental, even to rejecting children for the sins of their fathers. En route to East London in 1878, she visited an orphanage in Cape Town where:

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18. Tankard, K.P.T., "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control", (PhD Thesis, Rhodes University, 1990), Vol. 3, p.37.
  19. Lorimer, Douglas, Colour, Class and the Victorians, (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1978), pp. 110-111.
  20. Dispatch, 8.4.1873.

"only the children of respectable persons are admitted, only those whose parents' marriage can be proved so that the children are of a respectable nature usually and capable of being more trained and educated than the wrecklings".<sup>21</sup>

In an advertisement of 1880 for a restaurant, Mr O'Brian assured his customers that he "has well maintained the respectability of his establishment".<sup>22</sup> The local newspaper reported that a 'conversazione' held to raise funds for a church, had "a considerable attendance of the 'elite'".<sup>23</sup> Pianos, cited by Bradlow as the symbol of middle class aspirations,<sup>24</sup> were being advertised as early as 1881<sup>25</sup> (See Figure 13). Daughters of upwardly mobile families, wanting to be trained in the correct social graces, could take up the offer of dancing classes in "Brill's Assembly Rooms".<sup>26</sup> The pretentious title based on an English model referred to a humble stone warehouse on the West Bank and is indicative of aspirations towards gaining social status.

The divisions in white society were also reflected in the black community from the 1890s. In spite of the many difficulties facing them, some Asian people became wealthy. One such example was a Mr Casoojee, who arrived from Natal in the early 1900s, began a business of buying and selling and at his death he was a very

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21. CL, Ms 16828, The Letters of Cyrill Wyche and his wife, letter by Mary Wyche, dated 19.6.1878.

22. Dispatch, 17.3.1880.

23. Dispatch, 17.7.1880.

24. Bradlow, Edna, "Women at the Cape in the Mid-19th Century", South African Historical Journal, Vol. 19, 1987, p. 54.

25. Dispatch, 2 March 1881.

26. Dispatch, 21.9.1881.

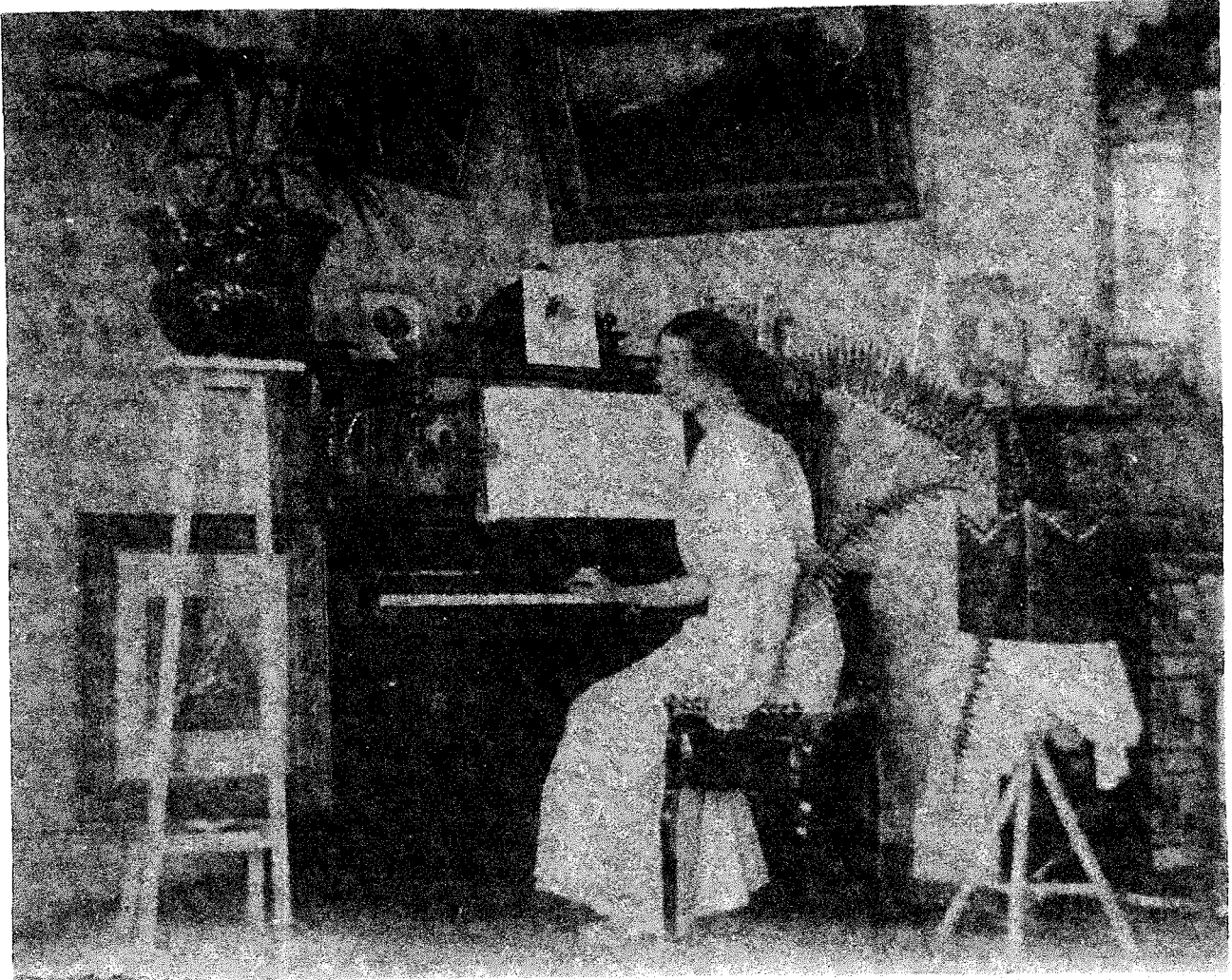


Figure 13

Rita Medefindt at the piano learning the accomplishments of a middle class lady. The picture of her father as Mayor is placed on the left, 1912  
Photograph in the East London Museum collection

wealthy man.<sup>27</sup> Divisions grew up between the those who were economically successful and the poor.

The presence in East London of mission-educated and traditionally-minded people, further divided black society on the lines of education and religion.<sup>28</sup> Mr W.B. Rubusana, a leading figure in the black community was a person who endorsed the idea of respectability within society. Eales argues that the African elite emphasised morality, particularly among women, as the 'upliftment' of the race was linked to the 'level of its womanhood'. They believed that their acceptance by white society depended on getting into line with the prevailing supposed norm.<sup>29</sup> Under the leadership of Rubusana and his wife, Deena, a group of black people who aspired to respectability and equality with the whites, became prominent in black society (See Appendix 5).

As in the white social scene, a cleavage developed between the respectable and non-respectable and between the wealthy and the poor. As early as 1888 these differences were apparent in a report which stated that:

"natives occupying locations may be said to be very well conducted owing in some degree to the presence of an intelligent and educated class belonging to the various religious denominations."<sup>30</sup>

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27. Personal Comment, Mrs Lynn Casoojee.

28. Mayer, P., Townsmen or Tribesmen, 2nd Ed., (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 2.

29. Eales, Kathy, "Patriarchs, Passes and Privilege", in Bonner P., et al, Eds, Holding Their Ground, (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1989), p. 118.

30. Dispatch reporting Municipal affairs, 29.2.1888.

The relationship between the women of the different races was in many ways defined by class. Bradlow argues that there was an assumption of racial superiority by the whites over the black people and that, combined with existing class and social structures, determined black/white relationships.<sup>31</sup> In East London black and white women made contact largely through black women entering domestic service and, as this occupation was accepted as being of the working class, black women became defined as such.

### **Clothing and Fashion**

The outward appearance of people often reflects their status in society and this was particularly true of the Victorians. That this was an upwardly mobile society was shown in the keen interest taken in fashion by East London women and the desire to be socially correct. How a person dressed was very important as it indicated social class, economic wealth and status and this was true for both black and white women. There is evidence that the white women followed overseas fashion very keenly and were anxious to conform. The East London Museum has many fashion journals donated by local families which indicate this. The earliest has some hand coloured fashion plates from a magazine dated 1845. Other illustrated magazines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Museum collection helped to inform colonial women of what to wear and when in order to be socially acceptable.<sup>32</sup> The East London Museum has a collection of many fashionable

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31. Bradlow, "Colonial Elite", p.398.

32. Goubaud, Mme Adolphe, The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, Vol. 11, Nos. 69-79, 1866; Harper's Bazaar, (New York), Vol. XXV111, 1895; The Woman at Home; Annie S. Swan's Magazine, (London, Hodder and Stoughton), July 1900, Our Home, September 1911; The Paris Journal of Fashion, (London), June 1914, May July & October 1915.

garments worn by East London, not least of which is an elaborately ruffled and beaded white satin outfit worn by Mrs Fuller when she was presented at Court in 1897 (see Figure 14).

The only news which the local newspaper editors thought would interest women was fashion and regular features 'For the Ladies' appeared in both the Dispatch and the East London Standard from 1893. A costume designed by Worth, a leading Parisian designer, and worn by visiting actress, Miss Ward, was described in detail.<sup>33</sup> While fashions were important, there were many articles in these magazines which guided the aspirant women of the middling classes on desirable behavioral patterns. Some examples were: "The Well-Bred Girl in Society" and "Costumes for Receptions and Teas"<sup>34</sup>; "Social Observances - Manners in Public" and "How Girls May Cultivate Grace"<sup>35</sup>

The corset, a tightly laced undergarment, was the subject of much controversy as it was suggested that it impeded natural biological functions and was the cause of female ill-health. Writing in 1891, a doctor saw the corset as a cause of consumption:

"with its inflexible stays and hour-glass shape, grasps the expanding lungs in their lower part like an iron vise and prevents their proper filling with air".<sup>36</sup>

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33. East London Standard, 19.7.1892.

34. The Ladies' Home Journal, (Philadelphia), December 1892, pp. 8 & 29.

35. The Delineator, (London, Butterick) September, 1904, pp. 292 & 306.

36. Kellogg, J.H., Ladies' Guide to Health and Disease, (London, Pacific Press, 1891), pp. 244-245.



Figure 14

Elaborate satin dress in the height of contemporary fashion, worn by Mrs W H Fuller, wife of a prominent businessman and Commissioner of the Harbour Board, when she was presented at Court in the late 1890s.  
Dress in the East London Museum collection

It was also a most unsuitable garment to be worn in hot climates. As with most of the immigrant European women, the East London women struggled on in the interests of social conformity. Corsets were regularly advertised from as early as 1874.<sup>37</sup> Photographs of local women show very fashionable costumes worn over tight corsets. In the oral interviews, one of the questions asked was whether the subject wore a corset and it was clear that most did. It would have been more logical and sensible to have adapted dress to the hot Eastern Cape climate and discarded the plethora of undergarments, but this was not to be. Helen Prichard described her experience in King William's Town in 1878 while walking there:

"I ventured to suggest that it was getting rather warm now. 'Warm!' rejoined my husband; 'piping hot, you mean! Can't you take your jacket off?' 'What here in the open street?' I demurred.....Poor old England! people call your climate changeable; what would they say to British Kaffraria! You are a respectable old lady and content to wear a winter or a summer dress for several months in succession; but this Afrikander damsel must don both on the same day, and wish for the other the whole time".<sup>38</sup>

### **Religion and Church Work**

A feature of the town was the importance of the church in the lives of the women and there were very few who did not have active roles within the church. This involvement was yet another very conservative influence on the lives of East London women. The patriarchal nature of the church with males being firmly in control had a restrictive influence on both black and white women. Bedarida points out that

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37. Examples; Dispatch, 5.5.1874, East London Standard, 8.1.1897.

38. Prichard, Helen M., Friends and Foes in the Transkei, (London, Sampson Low, 1880), pp. 49, 60-61.

"the teaching of the Christian Churches acted as a backcloth to the spiritual justification of inequality. Marriage and maternity was the natural destiny of women".<sup>39</sup>

In spite of the fact that more women than men attended church and were more devoted and active in all facets of church work, they were subordinate to and controlled by men and were not allowed to hold any offices.<sup>40</sup>

The first churches to be established in East London were the Wesleyan and the Anglican, closely followed by the Presbyterian. After a faltering start on the West Bank, the Wesleyan congregations built churches on the East Bank, the first of which was opened in 1875.<sup>41</sup> More Wesleyan churches were built in North End, Southernwood, Cambridge and Amalinda, all with active Women's Associations. The Trinity Church with its imposing spire, was erected in 1904 and this congregation also had very busy Ladies' Guild.<sup>42</sup> The Victoria Church in the Quigney was established in 1897, first in a wood and iron building, a proper brick building being erected in the following year. The congregation however, found themselves deeply in debt and in 1906, the (male) secretary was:

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39. Bedarida, Francois, A Social History of England 1851 - 1975, (London, Methven, 1979), p.120.
40. Heeney, Brian, "The Beginnings of Church Feminism: Women and the Councils of the Church of England, 1897-1919", in Malmgreen, G., Ed., Religion in the Lives of English Gentlewomen 1760-1930, (London, Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 260-261.
41. Dispatch, 28.12.1875.
42. "The First Sixty Years; 1904-1964; Trinity Methodist Church", booklet published by the church in 1964.

"requested to communicate with both the Senior Ladies Guild and the Junior Ladies Guild and solicit their practical sympathy towards the reduction of debt."<sup>43</sup>

By 1870 the Anglicans already had a small church on the West Bank and in 1878 the arrival of the new Rector, Cyrill Wyche, and especially his wife, put new impetus into efforts to raise funds and several successful bazaars, run by the women and organised by Mary Wyche, were held.<sup>44</sup> Three further Anglican churches were opened between 1880 and 1887, each with active Women's Associations.<sup>45</sup> Women were always actively involved in Presbyterian Church affairs, such as in the raising of funds and their presence in considerable numbers was noted at the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone for the Presbyterian Church on the West Bank in 1881.<sup>46</sup> The Panmure Church had a thriving Women's Association which assisted in raising funds for the grand building which was completed in 1902.<sup>47</sup>

The other church groups, although smaller than the main ones, also had Women's Associations which were involved in public work, especially the German Lutheran, the German Baptist and the Catholic churches.<sup>48</sup> Marie Bokelmann (born 1859) was one German woman who was devoted to her church's interests. She headed

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43. "Victoria Methodist Church 75th Anniversary: 1898-1973" Booklet published by the Church in 1973, p. 8.

44. Cory Library, The Letters of Cyrill Wyche and his Wife, Ms16828.

45. St Marks: The Witness No. 273, July 1943, p.4.

46. Dispatch, 6.7.1881.

47. St George's Centennial History, p. 11.

48. "Centenary Newsletter: 1864-1964 First Baptist Church", published by the congregation; "Centenary Brochure; 1894-1994 Immaculate Conception Church", published by the congregation.

the Women's Association which was involved in charitable work and went overseas to Germany especially to try to raise money for church building funds.<sup>49</sup>

For the white women, church membership played an extremely important part in their social lives and very few who did not actively participate in church activities could be identified. The subjects of the oral interviews were nearly all known as being firmly committed to a church. These strong church ties were spread throughout the female population and mitigated against women trying to change their traditional roles.

Church influence was strengthened by the involvement of women in church charity work which gave them a sense of purpose outside their homes, a feeling of making a contribution to society and thus a sense of identity with the church. Charity work through the Christian church had a long history of taking women outside the home to visit the poor, the ill and prisoners.<sup>50</sup> The tradition was continued by all the churches in East London. The Ladies Benevolent Society of St Georges Presbyterian Church, not only raised funds for the building of the new church, but also visited the sick in hospital with the Singing and Flower Missions, gave monetary aid to several cases of poverty and medicine to the sick.<sup>51</sup> In 1900 they helped with food and

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49. Oral interview with her granddaughters, 23.11.1994.

50. Perrot, Michelle, "Stepping Out", in Fraise, Genevieve & Perrot, Michelle, Eds, A History of Women in the West, (London, Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 450.

51. Report of the Presbyterian Church, 1893.

clothing for 10 poor families, maintained three children at the orphan home in King William's Town and educated one boy at the public school.<sup>52</sup>

The churches also played a major role in the lives of Christian black women who came to live in the town. Throughout the Eastern Cape, Christian missionaries of all denominations perceived that in order to obtain converts, there had to be a radical break with traditional culture. A mission school for girls, such as that at Peelson, near East London, inculcated 'Western' ideas of dress and behaviour and an individualism which was in direct opposition to the corporate identity of traditional society.<sup>53</sup> The mission schools therefore, became the focus of missionary pressure against certain aspects of traditional culture and social divisions were created between the mission educated and those devoted to their own traditions.<sup>54</sup>

Many of the mission educated women came to live in the town and found themselves at odds with the more traditionally inclined people, as well as those women who had broken social taboos but were not counted as 'school', such as the prostitutes. As early as 1873, it was made known that:

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52. Report of the Presbyterian Church, 1900.

53. Donaldson, Margaret, "The Invisible Factor-19th Century Feminist Evangelical Concern for Human Rights", in Ackerman, Denise, Draper, Jonathan A., & Mashinini, Emma, Eds, Women Hold Up Half the Sky, (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1991), pp. 214 - 215.

54. Ashley, Michael, "African Education and Society in the Nineteenth Century Eastern Cape" in Saunders, C. and Derricourt, R., Beyond the Cape Frontier, (London, Longman, 1974), pp. 201-202.

"respectable natives wanted to construct huts around the teacher's dwelling as strong objection existed among the more respectable people against mixing with the occupants of the present native location."<sup>55</sup>

By 1911 there were 2970 Christian black women as opposed to only 64 non-Christian black women living in East London.<sup>56</sup> While these figures may not be entirely accurate, they do indicate that there were a preponderance of Christian women, presumably with some education, who were living there and who were subject to the patriarchal system of social governance.

The living conditions in the locations were far from satisfactory and the breakdown of traditional values created great stresses among women trying to establish homes in a new and much more isolated way of life. Gaitskell points out that church movements were instrumental in relieving these stresses of social and economic upheaval. The prayer groups which were begun by missionary wives, offered social occasions and women's support groups and helped to compensate for the changes in family life.<sup>57</sup> In 1930, Hunter found that there were many women's associations within the churches which had a strong sense of unity and that the Christians formed a distinct social group.<sup>58</sup> This sense of support and unity offered by the churches was important in assisting women, but the ethos discouraged them from exerting their independence as women.

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55. Dispatch, 12.8.1873.

56. CA CCP 4/11/6, Statistical Blue Books, 1911 Census.

57. Gaitskell, Deborah, "The Bantu People are very Emotional: Comparing Churchwomen's Organisations in Early Twentieth Century South Africa", Paper given at the History Conference of the South African History Association, 1995, pp. 2-3, 5 & 10.

58. Hunter, Monica, Reaction to Conquest, (London, Oxford University Press, 1036), p. 462.

In all these spheres, the women were operating within the socially accepted patterns of feminine activities enjoying social acceptance and a certain (small) amount of public recognition of their achievements. Although the church offered support systems and the means for women to extend their lives the very strict male controls inhibited them from exploring new avenues in life and were strongly conservative.

### **Leisure and Entertainment**

Many leisure pastimes served to reinforce the ties which white women felt with Britain. 'Tableaux Vivant', curiously static productions where participants posed themselves into pictures which usually reflected idealised scenes from European history.<sup>59</sup> By the 1870s professional entertainment companies from overseas began visiting the Eastern Cape. East Londoners were able to enjoy Gilbert and Sullivan's HMS Pinafore as early as 1881 and gave it a rapturous reception. Other entertainments included a magic show with phrenology readings, seances, concerts, circuses, vaudeville and dramatic productions.<sup>60</sup> As most of these shows were produced in England, they served to reinforce ties to the "Home Country" and encouraged women to look backwards rather than forwards. Various celebrations and jubilees were always celebrated in style especially anything to do with British Royalty, which was again an affirmation of overseas ties. The Queen's birthday

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59. Dispatch, "The Tableaux Vivant produced in the Victoria Hall was a credit to local talent", 8.10.1881.

60. Some examples advertised in the Dispatch: 15.6.1875 - Mr Jas. Matthews Magic, Mesmerism, Magical Novelties and an Eminent Professor of Phrenology; 21.3.1876 - Harvey Turner Opera Co. to give a Grand Concert; Gen. Tom Thumb, the Smallest Man in the World will Sing and Dance; 4.2.1880 - Bells' Great Circus; 8.6.1881 - Vesalius & Co. HMS Pinafore; Kellar and Cunard - Seances and Illusionists to the Crowned Heads and Nobility of Europe; 24.9.1881 - The Celebrated Loftus Troupe of Operatic, Vaudeville and Dramatic Artists;

was celebrated every year, usually with a ball, "flags in profusion, artistic designs and the liberal use of evergreens", and where the middle class ladies could show off their "charming costumes".<sup>61</sup> During Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897, not only were there functions and the buildings were hung with bunting, but also the clock tower and the splendid new town hall under construction was to be named for her and the Victoria Old Age Home was planned. Mass demonstrations and bunting also characterised events during the South African War, such as the Relief of the Siege of Mafeking.

Most of the women lived very busy lives with little spare time for themselves. For those who wanted to, reading was an enjoyable pastime and libraries and booksellers offered a variety of reading matter. The nature of the material available is significant in indicating the interests of women and in evaluating outside influences. An examination of books offered for sale in advertisements in the newspaper reveals that few challenging books were on offer. Lance and Goodwin offered a selection of children's books and periodicals such as Sunday at Home, Leisure Hour, Cassell's Household Guide, The Mother's Friend and London Journal in the 1870s and 1880s. The complete works of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Trollope and Tennyson as well as Darwin's work were also available.<sup>62</sup> For the ladies, Hebbe and Co. offered the works of Mrs Henry Wood, Miss Braddon's new novel, Lorna Doone by R.D. Blackmore, Mrs Beeton's Household Management, Ladies' Fancy Needlework, Ward Lock's Home Book and Things a Lady Would Like

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61. Dispatch, 26.5.1880.

62. For example advertisements in the Dispatch in 4.1.1877, 11.12.1878 and 2.2.1881.

to Know.<sup>63</sup> This was very much standard fare with the emphasis on providing information for home-based activities and light reading.

The Settler and the Savage was another book on offer. This was written by R.M. Ballantyne, author of the better known Coral Island, and published in 1877. It was set largely in the Eastern Cape and purported to be a novel about the 1820 settlers. Various racist terminology and attitudes are evident in the book. Bushmen were termed "the lowest of the human race",<sup>64</sup> "The Hottentot race is a very inferior one both mentally and physically"<sup>65</sup> and the Xhosa were referred to as "niggers... Kafirs... savages and savage warriors".<sup>66</sup> This type of writing was one of the influences which allowed stereotypes to develop and which made it harder for those who tried to break racial barriers to achieve anything.

Caroline Robson left a list of the books which she read over a period of eight years. At the time she was a young girl doing her teacher training at the Undenominational Public School in Panmure. As such she was one of the better educated young women of the time. The books which she read indicate a large proportion of light novels with a few which were intellectually challenging. Walter Scott was certainly her favourite author followed by Bulwer Lytton, Charles Dickens and Mrs Henry Wood. Among the non-fiction she read Macaulay's History and Essays, a few

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63. Dispatch, 21.8.1878, 23.6.1883

64. Ballantyne, R.M., The Settler and the Savage, (London, James Nisbet, 1877), p. 3. In the East London Museum Library.

65. Ballantyne, p.65.

66. Ballantyne, pp. 309, 313, 325 & 328

books of historical interest and some poetical works. Colenso's Sermons did feature as one controversial subject. The non-fiction works do indicate that, in keeping with her profession, she would have been much better read than most of her untrained contemporaries. (See Appendix 3)

Oral records revealed that relatively few women enjoyed reading to the extent that their descendants were aware of it. One record was of a woman who had no formal schooling at all but was employed to work as a servant from the age of nine. She learnt to read by sitting in on her employer's children's lessons which were given by a governess. The early deprivation and hard won achievement of learning to read led to her devotion to reading and she was known to let supper burn while she was engrossed in her book.<sup>67</sup>

Middle class women, who could demonstrate that they had some leisure and were able to devote their time to producing decorative rather than functional items for their homes, undertook what was termed 'Fancy Needlework' and lace-making. The large numbers of books on these subjects which have been donated to the East London Museum by local families indicate a considerable interest in fine needlework.<sup>68</sup> The oral records however show that the women who undertook

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67. Oral Interview with the granddaughters of Louisa Green (1853-1935); 5.8.1994.

68. These include; Fancy Needlework Illustrated, (Manchester, Northern School of Art-Needlework), from 1906; Needlecraft Practical Journal, (Manchester School of Embroiderers) from 1913; Needle and Home, (London, Vol.1V, 1915).

this work had some leisure. Mary Ann Venables was an accomplished needlewoman and insisted that her daughters learn the skills:

"Sewing clothes she took in her stride, but she had a rest each day for an hour. Then, tidied and neatly dressed for the afternoon, she was ready to enjoy her beloved fancy work, or pen-painting on velvet or satin for cushions or hangings. A full size tea cloth usually took a year to crochet in the little spare time she had."<sup>69</sup>

Mrs Crosby, wife of the newspaper editor had a hobby with a difference:

"My Mother, among her many activities had the unusual hobby - rearing poultry particularly Leghorn Fowls and Ducks and invariably won top prizes at all the shows".<sup>70</sup>

Most of the white women in East London either came from or had roots in Britain and Germany where the class system was deeply entrenched. Class structure in East London therefore played an important and limiting role for women. As they were mostly from the working or middling classes, upward mobility and 'gentrification' were very important and they were have anxious to maintain their new status and not make any changes. In their pursuit of social status based on a European model, the white women were conservative in the extreme and dressed according to the dictates of European fashion, even when it was totally unsuitable for the climate. Some forms of leisure activities and recreation reenforced European ties, making women look backwards rather than ahead. Religious influences were pervasive in both black and white society and while the associations offered women the opportunity to get together and share problems, the overall structure was a firmly patriarchal one and discouraged women from active rebellion of any kind.

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69. Border, Ursula, "A Kidds Beach Childhood", The Coelacanth, Vol. 32, No. 1, June 1994, p. 18 & 24.

70. Crosby, E.G., "An East London Childhood", The Coelacanth, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 16.

**CHAPTER 6****THE PRISON OF NON-RESPECTABILITY**

There was very little accomplished in the refashioning of gender relations for women who transgressed the law during the period under study. Female criminals were almost all from the working class and they evoked little sympathy from the middle classes and the respectable women of the working class. Ethnicity made no difference as black and white non-respectable women were treated and judged harshly in the courts. The law was administered by males who were not usually concerned with the plight of females, especially those of the lower classes - the non-respectable women. Social disapproval made them outcasts in the community and they often reacted with aggression which further alienated their contemporaries.

In the few examples of criminal activity by women of the middle class, the loss of respectability and the spectre of becoming social outcasts, proved to be major deterrents for their peers who clutched the blanket of respectability around them more tightly than ever. In spite of the fact that conditions for the non-respectable women changed little from 1870 to 1914, there were some women of the middle class who became concerned for their welfare and who laid the foundations for improvements, such as in the care of destitute children.

Information from the criminal records of East London suggest that the root cause of most of the crimes was poverty, where women became locked into a situation where there were few opportunities for them to earn an adequate living by honest

means.<sup>1</sup> Gatrell and Haddon argue that the impact of criminal activity can possibly be linked to social and economic conditions and can reflect the degree of a sense of security or otherwise which people experienced at a time of great urban growth.<sup>2</sup> They suggest that an understanding of the relationship between criminal activity and socio-economic conditions may help to evaluate the extent of social tensions and that certain types of criminal behaviour may be one of the most sensitive indexes to contemporary frustrations than any other source<sup>3</sup> (See Table 3).

Female crime did not constitute a major threat to the social order of East London as the statistics were far lower than those for male crime (See Table 4). There are several possible reasons why there were fewer white than black women prisoners. The indications are that the white underclass was smaller than in black society. There was the possibility that white women could find the money to pay fines more easily than could poor black women. Another reason was that there were fewer laws which applied to white women as they did not have to carry passes, they did not have to run the gauntlet of prohibitive laws collecting wood to make fires and build houses and they were not subject to the taboos on beer-brewing. The relatively high numbers of black women prisoners is also misleading as the numbers

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1. Criminal statistics involving the women of East London were extracted from the records at ten year intervals: 1873, 1883, 1893, 1903 and 1913. (See Table 3)
  2. Gatrell, J.A.C., & Haddon, T.B., "Criminal Statistics and their Interpretation", in Wrigley, E.A. Ed., Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 336-339.
  3. Gatrell & Haddon, "Criminal Statistics and their Interpretation", p. 337.

TABLE 3

PRISONERS IN EAST LONDON 1890 -1906  
(over 18 years)

	WHITE		BLACK	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1890	76	6	298	122
1891	98	5	454	156
1892	184	1	643	147
1893	102	2	784	129
1894	176	4	600	244
1895	180	2	825	394
1896	267	1	765	309
1897	306	0	718	226
1898	368	3	1090	371
1899	744	17	1221	398
1900	1336	22	1222	611
1901	964	18	1128	421
1902	1470	10	1203	355
1903	1122	22	1209	321
1904	761	12	1360	308
1905	474	6	1195	402
1906	318	13	1225	625

Reference:

CA CCP V10/3 Statistical Register

TABLE 4

CRIMINAL CASES HANDLED BY THE MAGISTRATE'S COURT EAST LONDON

	1893	1903	1913
Black	671	1215	1302
White	<u>290</u>	<u>1113</u>	<u>485</u>
Total	961	2328	1787
Female (Black and White)	177	316	386
% of total	18	13	21

References:

CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/18, 1/2/1/28, 1/2/1/42, Magistrate of East London Criminal Record Book

included some women who each had several convictions. In 1893, for example, 15 women each had several convictions. The increase in numbers of white women prisoners between 1899 and 1903, the years of the South African War, corresponds with the increase in the female population with the arrival of thousands of refugees, many of whom were very poor, and this may have led to more criminal behaviour than was usual. It is likely that many prostitutes may have come into the town hoping for an influx of soldier and sailor customers.

### **Anti-Social Activities**

Theft was one of the crimes which defined non-respectable women and where there was little change over time. In both black and white societies the women who stole were mostly poor and illiterate and little was done to alleviate their conditions or appreciate their problems. In 1873 two thefts were recorded, 15 in 1883, 13 in 1893 with two by white women, two in 1903, and 13 in 1913 with four by white women. The statistics indicate that there was a larger group of poor black women than white and that a poor underclass of both black and white women existed in East London throughout the period under study. In sentencing, white women were more favoured than black women only marginally in that they were usually given the option of a fine, whereas black women usually had to do time in gaol.

Food and clothes were the most desirable objects stolen by both black and white women, with jewellery and money also featuring. Food was usually taken from

white employers and indicate the extremes of poverty.<sup>4</sup> Clothing, particularly in the European style, was taken from and by both white and black women.<sup>5</sup> In 1913, of the 13 thefts recorded, four were by white women.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the thefts were committed by women of the poor working class, black or white. The one exception was Fanny Wood, a school teacher of the middle class, who stole jewellery. She was found guilty and was ordered to return the jewellery and pay back money. It was pointed out that she did not come from East London and moved away subsequently.<sup>7</sup> It was accepted that the loss of her 'respectability' was part of her punishment and it was significant that she was not of the town community. In the relatively small middle class of East London, the social controls on suitable behaviour for members acted as deterrents for the in-group. The records show that first offenders were treated more leniently than second or third offenders. The thefts themselves were relatively minor and indicate little more than poverty. There was no significant difference in numbers over the years, in spite of a great increase in the population.

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4. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/4, 1/2/1/8, 1/2/1/17, 1/2/1/42, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book - 9.6.1873; 18.1.1883 & 30.5.1883; 27.1.1893; 27.12.1913, respectively. The items stolen were: a leg of mutton; bread; meal; potatoes and a cabbage.
  5. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/8, 1/2/1/9, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book - 5.1.1883, 15.2.1883, 10.4.1883 and 14.11.1883, 10.11.1883, respectively.
  6. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/41, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 1.1.1913, 21.8.1913.
  7. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/41, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 18.3.1913.

Black women who moved into East London from the rural areas and who broke with family and tradition had a difficult time. For those who were unable to take regular paid employment, uncertainty and tensions were the result.

There were few natural social controls in place among these women and competition for the few resources led to anger which was unchannelled. They had no emotional or economic support base and their lives were characterised by poverty, tension and anxiety.

Assaults by women on women were a product of this environment and those who participated in fights were from the 'underclass' of women who were described as 'prostitutes' or 'washerwomen', and the cause was usually competition for the scarce resources. There was little change over time, in spite of the increase in population. Four cases were recorded in 1873, seven in 1883, four in 1893, one in 1903 and six in 1913. It was usually fighting with fists and teeth, sometimes a knife was drawn, but they were never serious and there were no records of life-endangering incidents.<sup>8</sup>

Women who used 'abusive language' and behaved in a 'riotous manner' in public were instantly perceived as being non-respectable. Here again an unhappy and quarrel-some lower class are revealed. Again there is no regular increase or decrease in the cases between the years 1883 and 1913. In 1883 four women

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8. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/8, 1/2/1/41, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books, 20.2.1883 and 7.1.1913.

were charged with the use of abusive language.<sup>9</sup> In 1893 there were 27 charges of riotous behaviour and six for abusive language. Of these 19 women were listed as prostitutes. In 1903 12 were arrested for riotous behaviour, including two white women, and six were charged with the use of abusive language. The figures were much lower in 1913 when only one woman was charged with being riotous and two for abusive language.<sup>10</sup>

To be found drunk in the street was by far the most common offence among the non-respectable women in East London. The problem of drunkenness was not confined to women but was a social problem in both white and black societies, of major dimensions. The high incidence of drinking among women again points to a tension-ridden underclass with no familial responsibilities or position in society, where the women were insecure and had no self-respect. There were six cases in 1873, 26 in 1883, 81 in 1893 (one a white domestic servant), 23 in 1903 (five whites, one a listed prostitute) and 34 in 1913 (five white women). In 1873 the fine was usually five shillings or three days in gaol, rising to £1 or £2 and around 14 days hard labour in 1913. One white woman, aged 50, was reprimanded and discharged, but the other white women received similar sentences to the black women.<sup>11</sup>

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9. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/8, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 2.1.1883, 18.1.1883, 23.2.1883 and 8.3.1883.
  10. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/8 to 1/2/1/42, Figures extracted from the Criminal Record Books of the East London Magistrates, 1883 - 1913.
  11. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/41, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books: see Christina Leve, 'black domestic servant', fined £2, 14.1.1913 and Marian Rautenbach, 'European Housewife' fined £2; 14.2.1913.

The women who were drunk in the streets were from the lower ranks of both black and white society, many of them known prostitutes. It was often the same women who were found drunk, guilty of assault, riotous behaviour in the streets and abusive language. For example: Bridget Carey, described as a 'European vagrant' had two convictions for drunkenness in 1882;<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth, described as a 'Hottentot prostitute', had 11 convictions for drunkenness, assault, theft and arson from 1882 to 1884;<sup>13</sup> Annie Bibi, described as a 'Kafir prostitute', had 18 convictions for drunkenness, fighting, abusive language and loitering from 1893 to 1903;<sup>14</sup> and Sana Mintor, described as a 'Hottentot prostitute', had eight convictions for drunkenness, assault, riotous behaviour and not having a pass in 1893.<sup>15</sup>

### **Sex-Specific Offenses - Infanticide**

Women who had illegitimate children faced many problems. Social opprobrium was a powerful weapon and the problems of care and expense of unwanted children hit poor women very hard. Infanticide or Concealment of Birth were two sex-specific offenses but they were not common during the period of study. Of those few which

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12. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/8, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 25.7.1882 and 15.8.1882.
  13. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/8 & 1/2/1/9, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books, 16.12.1882 - 9.7.1884.
  14. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/17 - 1/2/1/29, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books, 20.1.1893 - 22.5.1903.
  15. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/17 - 1/2/1/18, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books, 29.4.1893 - 6.12.1893.

were brought to court, there were no indictments. In 1893 Eliza Thomas, described as a "Kafir washerwoman", was charged with concealment of birth but was found 'not guilty'.<sup>16</sup> In the same year Mary Ann Hleka, a prostitute, was charged with infanticide and also found 'not guilty'.<sup>17</sup> In 1913 a European woman, Johanna Fetting, was charged with not registering a still-born child, but she was acquitted.<sup>18</sup> Women in very poor circumstances who found it difficult to support children undoubtedly resorted to desperate measures on occasions. This kind of behaviour was not however condoned, even in the poor (probably prostitute) community. Lydia Janjie was charged by Sarah Ann for abusive language as she had shouted at her "You are a bad woman, you killed your baby", an accusation probably grounded in truth, but the case was dismissed.<sup>19</sup>

This was an area where the difficult conditions were appreciated by women of the middle class and thought was given to the problems which faced unwanted children and unmarried mothers. The Society for the Protection of Child Life (later the Child Welfare Society) began in a small way in 1906.<sup>20</sup> Many middle class women

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16. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/17, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book.

17. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/18, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book.

18. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/42, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 30.12.1913.

19. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/17, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 18.4.1893.

20. Shingler, J., Women of East London, (East London, Private, 1984), p. 106.

became concerned and involved in this project and the official society was launched in 1916.<sup>21</sup>

### **Sex-Specific Offence - Prostitution**

Another sex-specific offence committed by non-respectable women was prostitution. Smart points out that during the Victorian era, the prostitute was thought to have an abnormal sex drive when compared with the supposed asexuality of 'respectable' women and that it was thought that the origins lay in the physiological pathology of certain types of females.<sup>22</sup> She argues that economic necessity has not been given enough credence and it is known that as urbanisation and industrialisation took place in England, women were forced to become prostitutes in order to survive and sometimes even to support their families. This was particularly evident when rural girls came into the towns, broke family ties and found themselves with no other means of support. Even when the need was not survival, there were limited opportunities for women to be able to earn a living wage and be economically independent of men.<sup>23</sup> This was very true for the situation in East London, particularly among the poor black women and it is quite clear that poverty and the lack of alternate means of earning money left prostitution as the only option available to some.

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21. Redbook 1919, p. 202.

22. Smart, Carol, Women, Crime and Criminology, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 80.

23. Smart, Women, Crime and Criminality, p. 87.

While prostitution was a legal offence, the institution was one which males wanted to see retained. It has been suggested that prostitutes actually performed a necessary function, "a necessary evil", in society where men could give rein to their lustful instincts, evincing the double standard of sexuality which existed.<sup>24</sup> There was very little change over time in this field and the prostitutes never felt any benefits from the growth of the women's movement. Double standards existed for men and women in that prostitution or soliciting was regarded as a criminal offence but the clients of prostitutes were not prosecuted.<sup>25</sup>

The double standards which existed in other towns and countries were very evident in East London. Control of women was a powerful motivating factor in constructing the many bye-laws of the town which placed restrictions on female activities. The social controls within the middle classes, where the churches played a strong role in both black and white middle class societies, were enforced by the subtle manner of social approval. It was not so easy in groups where social relationships had broken down and rebellious women transgressed approved models of behaviour with impunity. How to keep them under control, subservient and still be able to service male lusts was a problem.

One of the answers was to construct laws to control the activities of prostitutes in the street, i.e. where they could be seen in public. If men wanted to co-habit with them

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24. Walkowitz, Judith R., "Male Vice and Feminist Virtue: Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain", History Workshop Journal, Issue 13, Spring, 1982, p. 176.

25. Smart, Women, Crime and Criminology, pp. 7, 30, 6 and 77.

illegally behind closed doors, this space should still be available to them. These were: Section 38 of Act 23 of 1880, amended under Section 32 of Ordinance 10 of 1912, which stated that there could be no loitering, begging or solicitation in the streets, to the annoyance of the inhabitants;<sup>26</sup> and Proclamation 17 of 1878 which stated that there was a curfew for the black people who were not allowed to be on the streets of the white areas between 8pm and 5am without a pass.<sup>27</sup> This was to prevent black women soliciting white men.

In 1893 26 women were prosecuted under the No Pass Rule, 15 of whom were listed as prostitutes.<sup>28</sup> In 1900 there were six arrests for no passes.<sup>29</sup> In 1903 there were only two and again only two in 1913.<sup>30</sup> Under the No Vagrancy rule only four, two of whom were white, were charged in 1903. Arresting women for soliciting was

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26. East London Museum Collection, Municipal Regulations: Chapter 1V "Relating to Nuisances in Streets, etc.", p.4.
  27. Tankard, K.P.T., "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control, 1873-1914", (PhD Thesis, Rhodes University, 1990), p. 395.
  28. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/17 - Extracted from Sept. 1892 to June 1893, 1/2/1/18 -June 1893 to March 1894, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books.

seldom done: in 1899 there were two; six in 1900;<sup>31</sup> in 1903 there were seven, four of whom were white; by 1913 there were only four arrests.<sup>32</sup>

Another means of trying to control prostitution but still retain the benefits to men was the passing of the Contagious (Venereal) Diseases Act of 1885. By this Act, any women who was suspected of having a venereal disease had to have her name entered on a register which defined her as a prostitute, be confined in a special Lock Hospital, undergo a gynaecological investigation and be treated there until it was thought it had been cleared.<sup>33</sup> As a port, East London was one of the towns where this Act was applied. Records show that there were 27 in 1897, 24 in 1898 and 1899, 23 in 1900 and 1901, the numbers suddenly jumping to 41 and 43 in 1902 and 1903 respectively,<sup>34</sup> and dropping to 25 in 1904.<sup>35</sup> The discrepancy between the figures for the women charged with soliciting, vagrancy and no passes as against the C.D. Register suggest that the police did not regard prostitution as a serious offence, compared with the possibility of getting a venereal disease (See Table 5).

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31. Mayor's Minute, "Return of Crimes and Offenses in the Magistrate's Court: 1] during the year ending 31st December, 1899", p. 64.  
2] during the year ending 31st December, 1900", p. 65.
32. CA 1/ELN, 1/2/1/29 - Extracted from March - Dec. 1903, 1/2/1/41 - Jan. to Sept. 1913, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books.
33. CA CCP 1/2/1/126, G35-1904, Report of the District Surgeon.
34. CA CCP Report of the District Surgeon, G35-'04 - 1/2/1/126
35. CA CCP 1/2/1/138, G39-'1906, Report of the District Surgeon.

TABLE 5

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NUMBER OF PROSTITUTES EXAMINED BY THE DISTRICT SURGEON  
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS  
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1889	"a very small number"
1897	27
1898	24
1899	24
1900	23
1901	23
1902	41
1903	43
1904	25

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References:

1889 CA CCP 1/2/1/76 G12-'90 Report of the District Surgeon  
1897-1903 CA CCP 1/2/1/126 G35-'1904 Report of the District  
Surgeons  
1904 CA CCP 1/2/1/126 Report of the District Surgeon  
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Between 1890 and 1914 there was a systematic repression of brothels in Great Britain which affected the structure of prostitution, making it much more covert.<sup>36</sup> Eagerly following the British example, the Cape also cracked down with the Betting Houses, Gaming Houses and Brothel Suppression Act No. 36 of 1904.<sup>37</sup> By this Act there were heavy penalties for those keeping brothels, for procuring females for immoral purposes and for males living off the proceeds of prostitutes.<sup>38</sup> This led to existing brothels in East London being targeted and the 'Madams' being prosecuted, but with little enthusiasm. Rosie and Cora Solomon, European women, were charged with keeping a brothel and were fined £50 each or 3 months in gaol.<sup>39</sup> In 1913, Mary Ann Petzer and Mathilda and Jessie Dawson were charged but acquitted.<sup>40</sup> There was some evidence of the existence of brothels, but the acquittals reveal that the magistrate did not wish to have them closed down.

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36. Walkowitz, Judith R., "Male Vice and Feminist Virtue: Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain", in History Workshop Journal, Issue 13, Spring, 1982, p. 85.
  37. CA CCP 1/2/1/124, G35-'04, Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1904.
  38. CA CCP 1/2/2/1/57, A24-1902, Report of the Select Committee on Betting Houses, Gaming Houses and Brothel Suppression Bill. Colonel Brabant, Member of Parliament for East London, served on this Committee.
  39. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/29, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 10.9.1903.
  40. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/41, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Book, 10.4.1913.

Women who were assaulted and/or raped had little chance of justice. Papsi, described as a female general servant, stabbed George Homan with a knife as she said he was making improper advances. In spite of the jury agreeing that he had done so, she was sentenced to six weeks in gaol for assault.<sup>41</sup> There was no recognition of the fact that a woman was weaker than a man and had no means of defending herself without a weapon.

In the past there have been very few studies of rape by criminologists and very little understanding of the reasons why men commit rape, the circumstances why men rape women and how it affects the victim. Accounts which exist focus on the difficulty of applying the laws pertaining to evidence and protecting the accused against a false accusation.<sup>42</sup>

Scully states that historians of colonial life have tended to analyze sexual violence as an indicator of tensions within a society, rather than examining rape as an act of violence specifically against women. Concerns have tended to be concentrated on stories of white women being raped by black men instead of examining the conditions which led to a situation where white men could rape black women with impunity. Scully argues that the different ways in which rape is regarded as an index of social friction should be combined with the issue that rape is an act of

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41. Dispatch, 6.3.1880.

42. Smart, Women, Crime and Criminology, pp. 78-79.

violence by men against women.<sup>43</sup> She suggests that the rape scares that surfaced of black men raping white women, which occurred during times of crisis, have been central to understanding how important sex has been in exposing anxieties and in establishing colonial identities.<sup>44</sup>

In the Cape, under Roman Dutch law, rape was understood to be:

"both the forcible ravishing and forcible carrying off of a woman against her will".<sup>45</sup>

The sentence allowed for the death penalty in cases where the girl was 'unmarriageable', i.e. not yet menstruating, and for the rape of a married woman.

There was no death sentence for unmarried women. The law then protected pre-puberty girls and married women, who were held to be 'respectable', as they were seen to be upholding Christian and moral principles. Status and honour then were critical in determining the sentences for rape. The lack of a death sentence for unmarried women showed that white working class white and black women were regarded and treated differentially from the 'respectable' middle class. Charges were never pursued if a woman was found to have had previous sexual experience.<sup>46</sup>

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43. Scully, Pamela, "Rape, Race and Colonial Culture: The Sexual Politics of Identity in the Nineteenth Century Cape Colony, South Africa", American Historical Review, April 1995, pp. 336-337.

44. Scully, "Rape, Sex and Colonial Culture", p.338.

45. Scully, "Race and Colonial Culture", p. 343.

46. Scully, "Race and Colonial Culture", p. 343.

There were relatively few rape or indecent assault cases in East London over the period of 40 years and none even approached the death penalty even though many involved pre-pubertal girls (See Appendix 4). There were only three cases of black males raping white females and of these, all the females were of the working class and one was a nine year old child. No evidence could be found of a black rape scare as appeared in Natal and which caused a public outcry elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> There were nine cases of black males raping black females, two of whom were 13 and 12 year-old girls. There were six cases of white males assaulting white females, all of whom were young girls aged between nine and 15 years old. Only one white man was charged with raping a black woman and he was acquitted. It is most unlikely that these figures reflect the incidence of rape, particularly of those of white men on black women. The relatively mild sentences, especially when the death sentence was a possibility indicate that males were extremely reluctant to condemn other males for rape and that it was not regarded as a serious problem. Most of the cases were termed 'indecent assault' as if it were rape, it carried a potential death penalty and had to be dealt with by the Supreme Court. Black women had little chance of real justice. In cases where pre-pubertal girls were raped, the law made provision for the death sentence, yet the men received only seven and four years.

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47. See Etherington, Norman, "Natal's Black Rape Scare of the 1870s", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1988, Riekert, Julian, "Race, Sex and the Law in Colonial Natal", Journal of Natal and Zulu History, V1, 1983, and an unsigned article "League for the Protection of Women and Children", in Lewis, T.H. Ed., Women of South Africa, (Cape Town, Le Quesne & Hooton Smith, 1913).

Following several 'rape scares' a Commission was appointed by Parliament in 1913 to enquire into assaults on women. The terms of reference were to enquire into the prevalence of sexual assaults by men of the same race as the woman and by men of different colour to women [read black on white]. There were eight members of the commission and for the first time, women were represented. Colonel E.Y. Brabant, Member of Parliament for East London, served on this Commission. East London was one of the 14 towns visited but only men gave evidence.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of the presence of women on the Commission, there was little sensitivity shown towards the vulnerable position of women, but was instead regarded as an exercise in enforcing racial control:

"Measures must be taken not merely by administrative action but by upholding and uplifting the status and prestige of the white race".<sup>49</sup>

The attitude towards white prostitutes took on a racial flavour as it was argued that they should be discouraged as they:

"made the native lose respect for the white race".<sup>50</sup>

The exercise turned on the idea that the racial separation of locations in urban areas was "highly desirable" and that no white man should be permitted entry into the

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48. SAL UG39-'13, Report of the Commission appointed to Enquire into on Assaults on Women; 1913, p. vi. The East London men were: Dr W. Darley-Hartley; Dr W.B. Rubusana; Dr J.B. Anderson (District Surgeon); R.R.B. Howe (Resident Magistrate); F.L. Robey (Chief Constable); C.A. Lloyd (Superintendent of Locations) and J. A. Goldschmidt (Mayor).

49. Report on Assaults on Women, p. 11.

50. Report on Assaults on Women, p. 21.

black locations.<sup>51</sup> The Commissioners did realise that the numbers of convictions of assaults of white men on black women were probably not accurate as the police were reluctant to arrest white men and evidence was difficult to obtain. They commented that black women were at a great disadvantage as European men were in positions of authority but, rather naively, stated that the law applied to both black and white women so they were equally protected.<sup>52</sup> The title of the Commission might lead to the supposition that this was motivated by some degree of concern about the violence wreaked upon women by men, but this was misleading. The concern was with establishing and maintaining power relations over the black people and entrenching the concept of "superior and inferior races".<sup>53</sup> At the end nothing was done to protect women from male assaults and, in spite of this major commission, women who were raped were as badly off as they had ever been.

### **Murder**

Women were not usually involved in killing people so a murder charge against a young white woman of the lower middle class caused a country-wide sensation. In 1893, Joseph Sage, a hotel-keeper, was found dead with a gunshot wound in his head. After an initial verdict of suicide, his body was exhumed and the stomach contents examined. Strychnine was found and the angle of the bullet entering his head was reassessed. The result was that a murder charge was laid against a man named Job Derosier and Joseph Sage's daughter, Mary. After a trial which attracted

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51. Report on Assaults on Women, pp. 30-31.

52. Report on Assaults on Women, p. 7.

53. Report on Assaults on Women, pp. 40-41,

wide public interest, particularly from women, Job Derosier was found guilty and hanged while Mary Sage was acquitted.<sup>54</sup>

The background to the case involved a father who ruled his family with an iron hand and who used physical violence on his wife and children. In 1893 Mary Sage was 22 years old and had no means of earning her own living. She was not mentioned in her father's will as it was understood that she would get married. With the arrival of Job Derosier, who appeared to be a well-off gentleman, it seemed that she had found a husband. With the sexual inexperience and naivety of young Victorian women, it was to be expected that she had little insight into Derosier's duplicity. She fell in love with him and made the fatal mistake of giving in to his sexual advances and at one stage believed she was pregnant. Her father greeted the news with rage and threatened to throw Mary out of the house. An unmarried girl who had a baby and was not supported by her parents was in dire straits. With her father's rejection, Mary saw her loyalties lying with her lover rather than her father and if she was to get him back, she would have to do as she was told.<sup>55</sup>

Conditioned to obedience to a man, Mary Sage displayed the characteristics of women in such positions as:

"suggestible automata and marionettes in the hands of masterful men who hypnotised them into enacting scenarios of slavish obedience".<sup>56</sup>

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54. Vernon, Gillian, "'A Marionette in the Hands of Masterful Men': The Sage Murder of 1893". *Contree*. No. 38, December, 1995, pp. 1-2 and 4.

55. Vernon, "The Sage Murder". pp. 3 & 5.

56. Quoted by Vernon, "The Sage Murder", p. 5.

The question arises as to why Mary Sage was found 'not guilty' when she admitted to administering poison to her father on Derosier's instructions and was almost certainly party to the final plan to shoot her father.<sup>57</sup>

Her defence advocate played on the idea that she was a defenceless young woman who acted out of love for a worthless man and that she was a helpless victim of male vice. Popular sentiment agreed with the defence argument and applauded at the end.<sup>58</sup> This clemency towards a middle-class woman accused of murder was not confined to East London, but was typical of juries in both England and France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>59</sup>

A feature of the trial was the interest which women took in it and there was evidence that they were sympathetic towards Mary Sage. Hartman argues that women at that time were developing antipathy towards strong patriarchal controls and the double standard and this was the reason that they could sympathise with the plight of murderesses, if not identify with their actions.<sup>60</sup> This suggests that while East London women were very conservative, they were becoming more aware of the disadvantages under which women suffered.

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57. Vernon, "The Sage Murder", p.4.

58. Vernon, "The Sage Murder", p. 7.

59. See Hartman, Mary S., Victorian Murderesses, (London, Robson Books, 1979), p. 1 and Harris, Ruth, "Melodrama, Hysteria and Feminine Crimes of Passion in the 'Fin-de-Siecle'", History Workshop Journal, Vol. 25, Spring, 1988), p. 31.

60. Vernon, "The Sage Murder", p. 6.

What was understood was that a powerful and violent father did little to endear himself to his daughter and that in difficult circumstances, he retained economic and physical control without providing care and support. With rejection on the one hand and with marriage the only alternative option on the other, the fear of losing that option could drive a desperate woman to murder. The women recognised that while Mary Sage's sexual transgression was the result of a promise of marriage, her actions were socially unacceptable and she would be punished and outlawed by society.<sup>61</sup> The notoriety for East London was one which women did not enjoy and which served to make them less than anxious to break the prescribed social codes.

Little was to change for the non-respectable women between 1870 and 1914. Most of the women criminals were from the lowest echelons of both black and white societies, the poor, the illiterate and the unemployed. Anti-social behaviour indicated women living on the margins of society, struggling for survival, had few tools or resources to utilize in order to overcome their problems. Black and white non-respectable women received much the same treatment in the courts and were held in contempt by the rest of 'respectable' society. Assaults on women by women, excessive public drunkenness, riotous and abusive behaviour in the streets, committed by both black and white indicate the existence of a number of women who were locked into the prison of poverty and non-respectability. Women who became prostitutes were too poor and ill educated and too patterned into servitude,

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61. While conducting the oral interviews, it was discovered by chance that one of the interviewees was the granddaughter of Mary Sage's sister. She knew very little of the circumstances, only that there had been a great disgrace which was never referred to and that Mary Sage had left East London. Interview 7.10.1994.

unlike many of their European counterparts, to capitalise and market their sex services efficiently. Control of prostitutes was limited to arresting those soliciting on the streets and through the implementation of the Contagious Diseases Act, but there was no real desire to eradicate prostitution so nothing really changed. Assaults on women, including rape were not treated with much severity and this was particularly at odds with the law which could demand the death sentence. The prevalence of attacks on young girls by both white and black men, the relatively light sentences and the many acquittals reveal an ideology which regarded that men had sexual rights over women. These were areas where gender relations were not changed.

There were very few records of crimes committed by middle class women of any colour. Social controls which worked within the framework of the church and the desire for respectability were very strong. The differential and preferential treatment for white middle class women indicates the power of the concept of respectability within that group and that its loss was deemed a dreadful punishment. The one major crime of murder which involved a middle class woman proved how dangerous it was to flout social codes and reinforced the conservatism within the society. The one area where some change was seen was in the care for unwanted, illegitimate or destitute children. The foundations were laid during this period for the establishment of a Child Life Protection Society by white middle class women, to care for these children.

## CHAPTER 7

### **FOUNDATIONS LAID FOR CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC ROLE OF WOMEN**

The previous chapters have outlined the conservative elements which obstructed change in gender relations. In spite of these, advances were made in improving conditions for women, some of which were not implemented by the direct action of reformers in the town itself, but by a subtle change in value systems stimulated by the women's movement. In 1899 a poem published in the local newspaper, encapsulated the new thinking. While it eulogised the 'ideal woman' who centred her life around her husband and home, the final two verses showed the change in attitudes. There is a claim that she should stand side by side with her husband as she is equal in intelligence, and, should she be unmarried, she should claim equal rights with men (See Appendix 2).

During the late nineteenth century many middle class women from Europe and America began to appreciate that with fewer children their standard of living could improve and they could provide better care for their offspring. With the subsequent drop in family size, women had more leisure, better health and were able to participate in public life. The growing interest in sport among women also improved their health and more sensible dress fashions were adopted. The idea that all women were physically weak and sickly had to be discarded. Improvements in education for women allowed them to compete with men on the same terms and gave them the means to obtain better work opportunities. Black women moving

into the towns made radical changes in their lives and made major challenges to traditional cultural values and beliefs.

### **Family Size and Health Status:**

A very significant change in the lives of women during the period of study was the drop in the birth rate and the lowering of the size of families. Fewer children meant that more resources were available to the family and women were able to improve their quality of life. This meant that should they want to, they could devote some of their time to working for change. An obvious and critical aspect of gender studies is the child-bearing role of women. Up until about the middle of the nineteenth century, European women were expected to have as many children as possible but by the latter part of the century, family limitation had started to be implemented. Banks points out that to try to identify a single causal factor would be inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> Neale argues that in spite of the sexual conventions of the nineteenth century that middle-class women had virtually no sexual desires, there were respectable women who did admit to having a strong sexual impulse at odds with the existing sexual ideology. It was from these women that the movement for contraception would develop. He also pointed to the difference in fertility between women of different social strata who were married as early as 1851 to 1861 which could only be attributed to contraception being practised.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Banks, J.A., Victorian Values: Secularism and the Size of Families, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 6-7.
  2. Neale, P.S., Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 124 - 126.

Evidence from the oral interviews shows that there was a definite reduction in family size over time. White women born before 1860 had an average of 9.9 children out of a sample of 10. Those born after this date had an average of 3.7 children in a sample of 51. If the birth date is raised to 1890, the average drops even further to 2.2 in a sample of 12. By comparison, in Britain in the 1890s, the average size of a professional family was 2.80, with 5.11 for a working class family.<sup>3</sup> Although the oral record figures are relatively small, they do indicate that the East London experience was roughly parallel with the overseas conditions.

Some form of birth control must have been used to limit family size at the time but informants could be of little help owing to the extreme reticence of the Victorians about sexual matters. Any form of talk about female biological functions was an absolutely taboo subject. This extended to an avoidance of any mention of menstruation, virtually none about pregnancy and certainly none at all about sexual matters. Nearly all the informants said that their mothers had told them nothing. When one daughter started menstruation, she thought she was bleeding to death.<sup>4</sup> Another reported that she knew nothing at all about where babies came from, let alone sex, when she got married.<sup>5</sup> One woman complained that her mother had given her a book to read on the subject just before her wedding day.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Anderson, Bonnie S., & Zinsser, Judith P., A History of Their Own, Vol.II, (London, Penguin Books, 1990), p.285.
  4. Oral interview, 28.3.1995.
  5. Oral Interview, 28.7.1994.
  6. Oral Interview, 11.8.1994.

Some facts on how women controlled family size did come to light and indicate the determination of women to limit their families in spite of inadequate knowledge. One woman died of a self-induced abortion.<sup>7</sup> In another case the daughter made the assumption that it was sexual abstinence based on a comment that her father was not allowed into her mother's bedroom.<sup>8</sup> Another comment was that a type of jelly had been used.<sup>9</sup>

Writing in 1920, S.M. Molema reflects a typical male view on the desirability of large families where he chooses to speak for women:

"Bantu women had none of the new-fangled ideas about having only a limited number of children. Each woman bore as many children as she safely could without prejudice to health, and generally, the more children she had, the more she was proud of herself...the average number of children in each family was about nine. Many had more - thirteen to fifteen - and a few as many as twenty".<sup>10</sup>

What he is admitting is that there were 'new-fangled ideas' about limiting family size in circulation. Among the black women of East London, the changing size of families is more difficult to ascertain, but even in such a small sample of 10 urban women, the family size was relatively small at 2.9. In view of the prevailing conception in traditional black society that large families were desirable, urban black women were braving public opinion by limiting their family size. Further evidence

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7. Her daughters said that she had died young and were evasive when asked why. The information came from a granddaughter-in-law. This information was confidential so names and dates are omitted.
  8. Oral Interview, 5.8.1994.
  9. Personal comment, Mrs B.Charlton.
  10. Molema, S.M., The Bantu Past and Present, (Cape Town, Struik, 1963), Facsimile Edition, original dated 1920, pp. 128-129.

is from the birth rates of the town. In 1911 the rate per thousand was 27.3%, which was lower than that of the white rate, which was 30.8% (see Table 6). By comparison the figure for England and Wales was 28.2 in 1901-'05.<sup>11</sup> The similarity of these figures lends credence to the idea that within the urban environment both white and black women were practising some form of birth control to limit family size.

It has been argued that the women who contributed the most in the refashioning of gender relations were those who had a degree of economic stability and a certain amount of leisure. In addition, those who would be able to take an active part in promoting change, should be energetic and enjoy good health. One of the positive environmental factors was that East London had an equable climate and that it was a pleasant place in which to live. In spite of a long period of inadequate health and sanitation facilities and problems with the water supply in the urban situation, East London was a healthy place.<sup>12</sup> The death rate for whites fell from 19.15% in 1900 to 11.3% per 1000 in 1911.<sup>13</sup> The situation was not as good for black people as that varied at a higher rate from 23.3% per 1000 in 1904 to 22.8% in 1911.<sup>14</sup>

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11. Banks, Victorian Values, p.97.

12. Tankard, K.P.T., "The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control", (PhD Thesis, Rhodes University, 1990), p. 514.

13. CA CCP 1/2/1/138, G39-1906, Report of the District Surgeon.

14. Mayors' Minutes, 1905 & 1912, "Report of the Medical Officer of Health".

An examination of the oral history records for white women reveal that out of a sample of 69, the average age at death was 81.1 years, a very high figure. By contrast, in Britain, the average life expectancy for women in 1890 was 44 and in 1910 52.4 years.<sup>15</sup> Even although these figures are for a much larger population, the difference is still marked. During the nineteenth century in Britain, many women were diagnosed as hysterics and there was a high incidence of invalidism. This was attributed to physical and mental distress which arose from the conflict of their role prescriptions and the reality of their lives where they were subject to tightly laced corsets and lacked fresh air and exercise.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, oral testimony revealed that most East London women had healthy energetic lifestyles with plenty of physical activity. Fresh fruit and vegetables were easily and cheaply available so their diet was good. When Ellen Dickie and Mina Hector came to East London, their health was described as 'delicate' or 'frail', but after a while they never looked back.<sup>17</sup>

### **Sport**

It has been argued that little attention has been paid to sport and leisure recreations by feminist and social historians and the part it has played in the refashioning of gender relations. Sport could be viewed as an instrument of control or as a symbol of emancipation but it has generally been agreed that sport has proved to be an

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15. Anderson and Zinsser, A History of Their Own, p.285.

16. Lewis, Jane, Women in England 1870 - 1950, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), p.118.

17. Oral Interviews, 14.6.1994, 11.8.1994.

important means through which gender differences have been defined and reinforced. There is the possibility that sport played a large part in maintaining the patriarchal social order in Western society.<sup>18</sup>

During the nineteenth century there was opposition to women participating in sport as it was said to be injurious to their health. Fundamental to the argument against women participating in strenuous physical activity was the 'energy conservation principle' as described by Atkinson. It was argued that as girls matured sexually, so all their reserves of energy were needed. If these were channelled elsewhere there would be a drain on their reserves which could result in mental and moral degeneration.<sup>19</sup> It was against this background of opposition that physical education was introduced into girls' schools and colleges in Britain and the United States. In order to be socially acceptable, physical education programmes and games were always done under medical supervision and the girls were carefully monitored in a concern for their health.<sup>20</sup> Atkinson argues that, in order to preserve their credibility, female reformers had to work within a very narrow

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18. Mangan, J.A., and Park, Roberta, (Eds), From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialisation of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras, (London, Frank Cass, 1987), pp. 2-4.
  19. Atkinson, Paul, "The Feminist Physique: Education and the Medicalization of Women's Education", in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, p.42.
  20. Atkinson, "The Feminist Physique" in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, p.45.

framework. The strict control over women's bodies did not free them physically as it just generated a new form of social control.<sup>21</sup>

McCrone also makes the point that pre-conceived ideas about the frailty of women's bodies were very powerful factors in determining women's subordinate roles in society and that, in the search for women's liberation, physical barriers were the last to fall. Women entering the sporting field were involved in a degree of physical activity which had not been possible earlier and that exercise offered the opportunity for physical liberation from the crippling effects of the corset and tight cramping clothes.<sup>22</sup> According to McCrone, the physical rebellion which sport represented was part of the process which allowed women to challenge the accepted definitions of their inferiority which had been reinforced by the "tyranny of medical ignorance".<sup>23</sup>

East London white women were not slow to take up the challenge of sport. With the pleasant and healthy climate, there were many opportunities for outdoor activities. As in Australia and New Zealand, there was a degree of freedom for recreation which was not always possible in the colder climates of Europe and

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21. Atkinson, "The Feminist Physique", in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, pp. 54-55.
  22. McCrone, Kathleen E., Play Up! Play Up! And Play the Game! Sport in the late Victorian Girls' Public Schools, in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, p.97.
  23. McCrone, "Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public Schools", in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, p.121.

Britain.<sup>24</sup> In this field the physical and ideological distance from Britain and Europe was a distinct advantage. Colonial medical doctors did not concern themselves with the dangers of physical activity and so the women did not have to fight against adverse opinions in order to play sport. In this way they had greater freedom to enjoy the physical benefits of outdoor activities.

In East London a roller skating rink which was started in 1880 was enjoyed by the ladies who:

"have taken kindly to the sport and cut a fine and graceful appearance".<sup>25</sup>

Athletic sports in which girls participated in the schools were common by the 1890s.<sup>26</sup> The less restrictive conditions of the colonial situation were apparent in that there is no hint that these fell under any medical supervision or that there was any public disapprobation. Ursula Border (born 1904) reported that when she was a little girl she was encouraged to play games and took part in all the school races.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Crawford, Scott A.G.M., "'One's Nerves and Courage are in Very Different Order out in New Zealand': Recreational and Sporting Opportunities for Women in a Remote Colonial Setting", in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, p.174.

25. Dispatch, 16.10.1880 & 27.6.1883.

26. East London Standard, 16.7.1891 and 21.6.1892

27. Border, U., "Reminiscences of a Kidds Beach Childhood", in The Coelacanth, Vol. 32 No. 1, June 1994, p. 19.

The rather gentle game of croquet was a favourite pastime among the older women of middle classes and many aspirant gentry boasted their own croquet courts. Among the oral history records, three women were recorded as playing croquet, two having their own courts. Of these it is significant that they were among the older women, born in 1862, 1866 and 1873.<sup>28</sup> Among the younger generation, 22 were known to have participated energetically in sport with tennis being the most popular. Crawford makes the point that in Australia:

"it was tennis that effectively opened the way for women to enter a much wider sporting world and participate in a physical and social environment where there was less prohibition and inhibition".<sup>29</sup>

A Lawn Tennis Club was established in East London in 1883,<sup>30</sup> and by 1893 "Lawn Tennis Costumes" were being advertised in the newspaper.<sup>31</sup> By 1898 the women had established their own Ladies' Section of the Tennis Club.<sup>32</sup> Many of the wealthier families had their own tennis and/or croquet courts. E. Crosby reported that:

"...Dad's Inverleith Terrace home also possessed a tennis court and our family all became good tennis players".<sup>33</sup>

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28. Ellen Dickie 1862-1937, interview with her daughter, (14.6.1994); Norah Read 1873-1966, interview with her daughter, (25.4.1996) and Helen Elder 1866-1957, interview with her daughter, (12.5.1994).
29. Crawford, Ray, "Girls and Games in the Prestigious Church Secondary Schools of Melbourne: 1901-1914", in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, p.185.
30. Dispatch, 4.1.1883 and 9.6.1883
31. East London Standard, 7.7.1893.
32. East London Directory, 1898-99, p. 112.
33. Crosby, E.G., "An East London Childhood", The Coelacanth, Vol. 24, No. 2, December, 1986, p. 17.

From tennis, the more robust game of hockey was the next to find popularity. It found favour in England in the 1890s and only reached the U.S.A. in 1901.<sup>34</sup> It did not take long to reach East London and by 1906 there was already a separate Women's Hockey Club with competitive games on the programme (See Figure 15). In view of the liberating effect of sport on women, it was not surprising that an exceptionally active and athletic woman, Clarissa Newman, was the first woman to serve on the City Council.

Golf was another sport in which East London women participated from an early date. By 1913 they had their own separate Golf Club and were holding championships.<sup>35</sup> The oral records showed that three women enjoyed swimming, one went bicycling, one played golf with the local champion and three enjoyed an outdoor life, including horse-riding.

Tankard describes the ongoing controversy about the provision of places which were to be set aside for women along the beach front, pointing out that this was of considerable concern to the female population.<sup>36</sup>

There are two points of significance which arise out of the oral records. One is that the women who participated in sport were those of the white middle class who had some degree of leisure. While some informants did not know whether their

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34. Park, Roberta J., "Sport, Gender and Society in a Transatlantic Victorian Perspective", in Mangan and Parks, Sport and the Socialization of Women, p.84.

35. Redbook, 1913, p. 206.

36. Tankard, "The Development of East London", pp. 517-535



Figure 15

Sporting women - the First Hockey Team of the Ladies Hockey Club, 1910  
Photograph from the East London Museum collection

antecedents had participated, there was a definite 'no' for the poorer ones. The other point is that there was a marked change which took place over time in the period of study. Only two women born in the 1860s and two in the 1870s played sport; 10 born in the 1880s and 1890s were interested and of those born after 1900, all nine took an active part in sport. While East London was a conservative place for women, it is clear that, like women elsewhere, they did participate breaking down the barriers which imprisoned women with a sense of physical inferiority.

### **Education**

Education has proved to be one of the critical factors which restricted women as it was a way of entrenching an ideology by determining the belief of children of the psychological subordination of women. The denial of education to women was to deny them access to power.<sup>37</sup> Educational institutions, as well as home teaching, reinforced this pattern where girls were only taught the necessary skills to become wives and mothers.<sup>38</sup> Higher education for women was actively discouraged and even the reform movements in education in the latter half of the nineteenth century were very conservative and never challenged the sexual division of labour.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Dyhouse, Carol, Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 30.

38. Dyhouse, Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, p. 44.

39. Bean, L., and van Heyningen, E., Eds, The Letters of Jane Elizabeth Waterston, (Cape Town, van Riebeeck Society, 1983), p. 58.

Towards the end of the century in America and Europe there was a growing demand for better academic institutions for women which led to the founding of good academic schools and later entrance to universities.<sup>40</sup> In Germany, the homeland of many East London women, the vast majority of the female population was excluded from higher education until the growth of literacy and reading led to intellectual stimulation and socialization towards the end of the century. Higher education with university admission for women was only possible after 1900.<sup>41</sup>

The perception of a 'domestic ideology' around which education was directed, was imported from Europe to the colonies with some adaptations. Mid-century private schools emphasised 'ornamental achievements' with intellectual pursuits being ignored, but towards the end of the century, higher education became a possibility and the earlier superficial curriculum became more broadly based with the 'accomplishments' such as music, singing and drawing, being superseded.<sup>42</sup>

The initial growth of educational facilities for girls in East London was a reflection of developments in England and in the rest of the Cape. The first good educational facility for girls in East London became available only in 1872 when the Lutheran

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40. Marshall, R.K., Virgins and Viragos: A History of Women in Scotland from 1080 to 1980, (London, Collins, 1983) p. 258.

41. Hoocke-Demarle, Marie Claire, "Reading and Writing in Germany", in Fraise, Genevieve, & Perrot, Michelle, Eds., A History of Women in the West, Vol. 1V: Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War, (London, Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 149-157.

42. Bradlow, Edna, "Women and Education in Nineteenth-Century South Africa: The Attitudes and Experiences of Middle-Class English-Speaking Females at the Cape", South African Historical Journal, Vol. 28, 1993, pp. 120-148.

Church in Panmure began a school with Pastor Muller as Principal.<sup>43</sup> Initially boys and girls were taught together and there was no differentiation of syllabus. Under the efficient teaching of Pastor Muller the school advanced rapidly and in 1876 it became a Class 1 with classes reaching the higher standards. At that time there were 88 boys and 50 girls.<sup>44</sup> The relatively small numbers of girls indicate that this type of academic education was still not generally regarded as important for women.

East London girls were fortunate in that a good and undifferentiated standard of education was available to them. In 1878 the school inspector reported that Mr Muller's school was one of the best in the district <sup>45</sup> (See Figure 16). In 1881 girls and boys were separated but the curriculum did not change. Miss E.H. Taylor was appointed Head Lady Teacher. She had a diploma from Oxford so high standards were maintained.<sup>46</sup>

Between 1874 and 1882 nine private schools for girls offered the subjects and crafts which were thought to be suitable for aspirant middle class young ladies and

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43. Tankard, K.P.T., "East London: The Creation and Development of a Frontier Community; 1835 - 1873", (MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1985), pp. 202 - 206.

44. Dispatch, 4.1.1876.

45. Dispatch, 28.12.1878.

46. Dispatch, 29.12.1880.



Figure 16

White girls waiting for the ferry to go to school in Panmure,  
1883  
Painting by George McKay  
Original in the East London Museum

emphasising 'ornamental achievements'.<sup>47</sup> They did not last and the good work of Pastor Muller's School and the establishment of a private well-run Anglican School for girls led to the demise of the small 'Dame Schools' by the end of the century.

There were a few girls in East London who were able to take advantage of the educational opportunities and become economically independent. Two sisters, Alice and Ella McKay, passed their Elementary, Teachers' Elementary and Cape University examinations with Honours.<sup>48</sup> In 1885 Ella McKay was awarded a bursary to study at University, after having passed her Matriculation examination with honours.<sup>49</sup> In 1888 she became the second woman in the country to be awarded a BA degree at the University of the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>50</sup> In line with the general perception of learned women being outside the acceptable place for women, her achievement was never acknowledged or recognised in the local newspaper or appreciated by some family members.<sup>51</sup> Alice McKay obtained the Cape University Certificate and became Principal of the Girls' High School in East London in

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47. Miss Bayly, for example, opened a 'Select Morning School for Young Ladies' where she offered courses in English, French, German, Music and Singing. Dispatch, 26.2.1879.

48. Dispatch, 12.4.1880, 27.10.1880, 11.5.1881 and 2.5.1883.

49. CA CCP 1/2/1/73, G7-'89, Report of the Superintendent General of Education.

50. Cape of Good Hope University Calendar, (Cape Town, J.C. Juta, 1897-'98).

51. Oral interview with her niece, Mrs Erica Wardle, 12.8.1994.

1906.<sup>52</sup> Education at a higher level was not encouraged before the turn of the century. The Gately daughters obtained teaching certificates, but none were allowed to work while their father was alive.<sup>53</sup> After his death, two of his daughters were able to take advantage of their qualifications and pursue careers.

The capability of girls was demonstrated as they featured regularly in the honours; Augusta Muller and Henrietta Rein passed the university examination with honours in 1880, when only 17 passed in the whole colony.<sup>54</sup> Examples of other achievers were; Lilian Mills, (Elementary Examination 1st Class and Teachers' Examination with honours);<sup>55</sup> Mary Janion, 1st Class with honours among 5 boys;<sup>56</sup> Alice Jackson and Mabel Green, Public School Exams with honours;<sup>57</sup> and three girls headed the list of Class 1 Higher examinations in 1897.<sup>58</sup> Gertrude Lloyd and Elfriede Munschied obtained Class 1 matriculation passes, boys only achieving Class

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52. East London and Frontier Redbook, 1906, (East London, Standard Printing Company, 1906), pp. 84 - 85.

53. Gately Papers, East London Museum; Mary Bridget received a Certificate in Elementary Subjects of Instruction on 20.7.1893; Margaret obtained a 3rd Class Teacher's Certificate in 1897 and Norah obtained her First Grade Pupil Teacher's Certificate in 1903.

54. Dispatch, 8.5.1880.

55. Dispatch, 11.5.1881 & 2.11.1881.

56. Dispatch, 25.4.1883.

57. East London Standard, 21.1.1892.

58. East London Standard, 16.7.1897.

11.<sup>59</sup> These results were published in the newspaper so the perception of girls being inferior intellectually was continually discredited.

In spite of the opportunities for education there were many women who were illiterate (See Table 6). The figures are misleading for East London in 1891 and 1904 as they reflect an area of 682 square miles which includes rural districts where illiteracy was higher than in the towns, but they do illustrate the trend towards literacy. The 1911 Census urban figures for East London show a literacy rate of 79% for white women with 20% still illiterate. For the urban black women 34% were literate, the illiteracy rate dropping to 63%.

Information on educational levels for white women from the oral interviews reveal that 23 women had some primary school education, some to Standard Three only. Louisa Green had no formal education and went to work at the age of nine.<sup>60</sup> Mary Prior was taught to read by her mother.<sup>61</sup> 17 of the women reached Standards Six or Eight and 11 held matriculation certificates. Two were educated by governesses and two educated 'privately' overseas. 52 had no tertiary training at all. Two were nurses and five did shorthand-typing or some form of secretarial work. Two went to a finishing school in Germany and nine became teachers, one of whom was a fully trained music teacher. Again there was a change over time

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59. East London Standard, 29.7.1899.

60. Oral interview, 5.8.1994.

61. Oral interview, 22.6.1995.

TABLE 6

FEMALE EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

		1891		1904		1911	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
READ & WRITE	Whites	2042	71	6577	80	5747	79
	Blacks	308	2	1299	10	1417	34
READ ONLY	Whites	132	4	125	2	103	1
	Blacks	80	1	194	2	101	3
ILLITERATE	Whites	852	25	1705	20	1437	20
	Blacks	6669	95	11181	88	2637	63

NOTE: THE figures for 1891 and 1904 are for the East London DISTRICT area of 682 square miles and therefore includes rural areas. THE figures for 1911 are for the East London urban area only.

References:

- 1891 CA CCP 1/2/1/78 G6-'92 Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope
- 1904 CA CCP 1/2/1/127 G19-'05 Census of the Cape Colony
- 1911 CA CCP V10/6 Statistical Register, pp. 300-301

and all the women who were born after 1900 had a high school education, indicating the growth of perceptions of the value of education.

Educational opportunities for black women in East London were very limited. In 1871 the Church of England founded a school for the black community, but it was closed down in 1873 as an inspection revealed that the premises consisted of a hut in poor condition and the level of instruction was poor.<sup>62</sup> At the time of closing there were 31 boys and 25 girls, a higher female gender ratio than at the white schools.<sup>63</sup>

By 1880 the value of obtaining an education was being realised by urban black women. The editor of the Dispatch commented:

"there is a very marked disposition towards education shown of late by local natives. One of the commonest customers in our shop attached to our office is the Kafir - male and female - who comes and asks for the spelling book which is in such universal demand."<sup>64</sup>

By 1913 there were only 6 schools for black pupils, most run as mission schools by the churches. All the schools were B Grade which meant that only an elementary form of education was offered.<sup>65</sup> For black women who wanted any form of higher education, there was none on offer in East London.

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62. Tankard, "East London: The Creation and Development of a Frontier Community", p.210.

63. CA CCP 1/2/1/27, G17-'74, Report of the Superintendent General of Education.

64. Dispatch, 1.5.1880.

65. CA SGE/15/4, Report of the Superintendent General of Education, 4th Quarter, 31 December 1912.

By 1913 educational opportunities had allowed white women to earn an independent living and to be able to seek employment above the level of a servant. Literacy levels had improved for all classes, enabling women to manage their urban environment more effectively. While conditions were far more difficult for black women, some basic education was on offer and for those who wanted to get further education, mission institutions in the surrounding areas did provide further opportunities.

### **The Effect of Urbanization on Xhosa Women**

This section is devoted to an evaluation of the effect of urbanization on Xhosa women in particular. As the term 'black' has been used to include Indian, Chinese and 'Hottentot' women in the preceding chapters, this does not include them. The term here is used to denote Xhosa-speaking people, such as the Xhosa proper (Gcaleka, Rarabe, Ndlambe), Tembu, Mfengu etc. The reference here is to how Xhosa women, who came from the surrounding rural areas, adapted to the town life with western cultural influences, and how they refashioned gender relations in their own society.

It is argued that the status of women in an urban situation is one of the most effective indices of judging social change, especially in how Xhosa women adapted to a 'modern city'. It is in the town that change proceeds fastest and wealth and class supersede traditional culture.<sup>66</sup> Changes in social structures during the

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66. Little, Kenneth, African Women in Towns, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 7 & 12.

nineteenth century in England were as apposite for Eastern Cape black women moving into the towns as it was for their white counterparts:

"A new urban-based way of life was emerging which was to modify the social and religious structures of England and bring into question many traditional values."<sup>67</sup>

As far as Xhosa women were concerned, the urbanisation process involved radical change for them and for traditional Xhosa society. The change in gender relationships affected all sections of the community. The urbanisation process was regarded with mixed feelings by educated Xhosa women. While appreciating the disadvantages which women experienced in traditional culture, Charlotte Maxeke feared the new influences. She said that in traditional life, women were considered to be inferior to men, and were regarded as a valuable assets for personal profit. Writing in the 1920s, Maxeke nevertheless felt that young women in the towns were exposed to 'depraving temptations' which their forebears never had to face.<sup>68</sup> Mrs D.D.T. Jabavu was more sympathetic to the situation of traditional women, stating that women were not mere chattels as they enjoyed a certain measure of independence and were managers of their own households. She was also wary of the effects of the attraction of the towns where women acquired new tastes for foods and clothes. Once there, they were exposed to the evils of drink, children

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67. Shiman, Lilian Lewis, "'Changes are Dangerous': Women and Temperance in Victorian England", in Malmgreen, Gail, Ed., Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930, (London, Croom Helm, 1986), p. 194.

68. Maxeke, Charlotte, "The Progress of Native Womanhood", in Taylor, J. Dexter, Christianity and the Natives of South Africa: A Year-Book of South African Missions, (Alice, General Missionary Conference of South Africa, undated), pp. 177-181. Note; the Conference was held in 1925 and one of the articles is dated to 1927.

were inadequately supervised when women went out to work and there was a degradation of moral life. On a more positive note, she felt that the authority of men was less absolute and the worst forms of superstition could be reduced. Nevertheless, as women left their positions as managers of their homes, they were not afforded the respect which they enjoyed in the traditional homestead, and subsequently developed a sense of inferiority which was aided and abetted by the Europeans.<sup>69</sup>

Studies done in the 1930s and 1950s by anthropologists in East London made particular mention of women. Although these were later than the study period, many of the points raised reflected issues described in oral interviews. The earlier period laid the foundations for later attitudes. By the early 1930s, many of the black urban people had adopted European values, with monetary wealth and education defining status. It was believed that women preferred the town as they had greater freedom and were less submissive to their husbands.<sup>70</sup> In studies done of the urbanisation process among black people in the 1950s it was suggested that the town attracted people who had little to lose in the country, especially women whose disabilities in the rural social system were pervasive and general. All women had to undergo a long period of subjection to men and older women and in the case

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69. Jabavu, Mrs D.D.T., B.A., "Bantu Home Life", in Taylor, J. Dexter, Christianity and the Natives of South Africa, pp. 167-174. Mrs Florence Jabavu was the daughter of Rev. Elijah Makiwane. According to Phyllis Ntantala, her brilliance was far above that of her well-known husband; Ntantala, Phyllis, A Life's Mosaic. (Cape Town, David Philip, 1992).

70. Hunter, Monica, Reaction to Conquest, (London, Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 437 & 461.

of widows and unmarried mothers, they could suffer permanent loss of status. Women agreed that East London was the place where they could be free and independent and that they liked the new environment where their status could depend on their own achievements.<sup>71</sup> The reasons which women gave for coming to town was the desire for freedom and a revolt against the traditional right of the parents to select husbands for them. Many young girls were running towards something they liked, particularly the fact that they could earn and spend their own money.<sup>72</sup> Employment in domestic service fostered new cultural ideas and self-employment in the locations could offer substantial rewards. Some of the mature women preferred the comfort and convenience of town life to the drudgery of the country homestead.<sup>73</sup> Oral interviews supported these later opinions: Lena Ndrana, who was born in about 1898, and Esther Ngova, born in 1902, came to the town as young girls as they wanted to find work to earn their own money.<sup>74</sup> Nowine Nzwanana, born in about 1890 on a farm in Gonubie, went into service as a young girl before her marriage.<sup>75</sup> Mary Kazi, born in about 1887, and Lizzie Bhuku, born in 1908, came to East London before marriage as they wanted money. They both

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71. Mayer, Philip, Townsmen or Tribesmen, 2nd Ed., (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 461.

72. Mayer, Townsmen or Tribesmen, pp. 239-240.

73. Mayer, Townsmen or Tribesmen, pp. 244-249.

74. Oral interviews with their daughters, 22.8.1995 and 7.6.1995.

75. Oral Interview with her son, 2.6.1995.

preferred town life.<sup>76</sup> Noeight Liwane, born in about 1904, came to East London to follow her husband who had obtained work there.<sup>77</sup>

In the 1950s, many young women who came to East London were motivated by economic distress which could be caused by the death of parents or husbands, divorce, desertion, tensions between girls and stepmothers or premarital pregnancy.<sup>78</sup> Oral evidence reflected these issues: Martha Coboti, born in about 1876, favoured the town where she had come as a young girl as she herself 'had no father' and had a difficult time within the community.<sup>79</sup> Welekazi Klaas, born 1893, said that her mother had come to the town as she was deserted by her husband and had to support her six children. Mrs Klaas's mother must have been born in about 1860, the earliest subject among the black women, and she was the only one who said that she preferred the rural lifestyle.<sup>80</sup>

There were other indications that Xhosa urban women were challenging fundamental traditional values with regard to the family. There was a direct rejection of patriarchal controls with women preferring independence to marriage and supporting their own children. By the 1930s there was a high illegitimacy rate

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76. Oral Interviews with their daughters, 17.5.1995 and 21.6.1995.

77. Oral interview with Noeight Liwane, 14.8.1996.

78. Pauw, B. A., The Second Generation, 2nd Ed., (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 16.

79. Oral interview with her daughter, 7.6.1995.

80. Oral interview with Welekazi Klaas, 17.5.1995.

in East London, defining 'illegitimate' as a union where no civil or religious ceremony had taken place and there had been no payment of 'lobolo'.<sup>81</sup> This trend towards a female centred home was begun during the period of study. In an oral interview one black woman stated that her grandmother did not want to marry as she was an 'independent woman' but she wanted children and had two whom she supported herself. Her daughter and granddaughter also refused to marry, but each had a child, again supporting them themselves. The reason given was that they did not want to put themselves under the power of a man.<sup>82</sup>

What emerges from this evidence is that many Xhosa women were very positive in their approach to town life and there was a strong 'pull factor' there. They could escape from patriarchal controls and get a degree of independence which was unheard of in the rural areas. There were certainly many strong 'push factors', such as ill-treatment, desertion and divorce, where the patriarchal support system was not functioning adequately. Minkley argues that the female migrations to the East London gave rise to a distinctive pattern which was different to male migrancy. with women making permanent homes and becoming independent. He cites a young woman who cried:

"East London is ours, with the men in it",

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81. Hunter, Monica, "Results of Culture Contact on the Pondo and Xosa Family", South African Journal of Science, Vol. XXIX, October 1932, p. 685.

82. Oral Interview, 23.5.1994.

arguing the very strong female influences at work there.<sup>83</sup> That women could gain their own economic independence and social status on their own and not in relation to men, was a complete break with the patriarchal situation which prevailed in the country.

It was in these fields that foundations were laid for the refashioning of gender relations. Family sizes in black and white societies were reduced which gave the women more space in their lives and more resources to spare, although working class black women struggled more. With a healthy diet and facilities to enjoy an active lifestyle, white middle class women had more energy to devote to other pursuits, including working for women's causes should they wish to do so. Better standards of education gave all women tools to improve their job opportunities, to become economically independent and to take part in public life, but again it was harder for black women. The process of urbanisation for Xhosa women was a process which radically altered the position of black women who came into the town from the country as they challenged deeply entrenched views of the position of women in traditional society. Many escaped patriarchal control and tried to become economically independent.

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83. Minkley, Gary, "Border Dialogues: Race, Class and Space in the Industrialization of East London", (PhD Thesis, UCT, 1994), pp. 246 and 250.

**CHAPTER 8****GROUP ACTIVITIES CHALLENGE ACCEPTED CODES**

In spite of the many conservative pressures exerted on women, there were some women who challenged accepted norms and who took up the cudgels on behalf of their less fortunate sisters. The women who supported the women's rights movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were overwhelmingly drawn from the middle classes. These were the women who had enough education and understanding to realise the great discrepancies which existed between men's and women's lives. They appreciated the total economic dependence of women on men and realised that women needed a better education and training in order to live above the level of a servant should they have to earn their own living. These were the women who, in getting together in groups, found that they themselves had no independent legal existence and no political power.<sup>1</sup>

Changes in society take time and an appropriate set of social conditions need to be in place before ideological changes can be effected. New perceptions and ideas had to evolve and these were dependent on other influences in the immediate society.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Anderson, Bonnie S., & Zinsser, Judith P., A History of Their Own, Vol. II, (London, Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 356-357.
  2. Chafe, W.H., "Social Change and the American Woman, 1940-1970", in Chafe, William H., and Sitkoff, Harvard, (Eds), A History of Our Time, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 211.

Chafe points out that if changes in behaviour did not succeed in immediately challenging traditional attitudes, a process had been introduced which laid the foundation for such a challenge.<sup>3</sup>

It was through the white women's associations in East London that new causes were espoused and new ideas articulated and put into practice. When the work of the women outside their homes was in accordance with acceptable roles for women, they enjoyed full public support. Problems arose, however, when they stepped outside these boundaries, laid the foundations for new perceptions and ideologies and posed challenges to many basic cultural tenets.

Most of the associations formed in East London were created to serve the interests of men only in the social, sporting and political arenas with male dominance clearly articulated. The object of the formation of the male societies was primarily one of mutual benefit and their loyalties lay within their own groups. Women's societies were fewer in number and all were formed with philanthropic or patriotic objectives or concern for women's issues. From the 1890s women formed separate committees in a few of the originally male societies. While the male dominance in the social sphere could be regarded as counteractive to women's interests, it was the very separateness of these societies which enabled women to progress. They gathered in groups where they could develop their own interests without male interference and control and were able to articulate and share common female problems and interests. The societies formed in East London were, with one

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3. Chafe, "Social Change and the American Woman", p. 213.

exception, all branches of existing national groups. They were not initiators of original ideas, but participated in the national interests.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe, America and the British colonies, the establishment of women's societies which addressed issues which were held to be of importance within the communities, fostered an awareness of problems shared by women. In Europe women's societies flourished sporadically in the first half of the nineteenth century with more sustained efforts being made in the United States from 1837. In the second half of the century, societies proliferated as more and more women became aware of the legal and social disabilities to which their sex was subject.<sup>4</sup>

The various societies addressed a wide variety of issues which often progressed beyond the original, often narrowly defined, goals. Philanthropic and charity work, the temperance movement, church groups as well as nationalist clubs occupied their interest and brought women together. The movement in the United States was a strong one with women combining their societies for the common good. An article published in 1895 showed this where the Second Triennial Session of the National Council of Women was described as being:

"a consensus of the many philanthropic, industrial, patriotic and religious leagues and associations through which the women of the

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4. Kappeli, Anne-Marie, "Feminist Scenes", in Fraisse, G., and Perrot, M., Eds, A History of Women in the West, Vol. 1V: Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War, (London, Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 490-491.

period exerts an influence for good on her town, her State, her country and the world."<sup>5</sup>

Ideally a woman was expected to exert this influence for good in her community and many philanthropic societies were formed. It was while they were undertaking this work that women discovered that they wielded little power without the vote and that there were many other female disadvantages which needed addressing. Women also became aware that groups were more effective than single persons in taking up challenges and a strong support base proved to be an important factor in pressing for unpopular schemes.

In common with the American and British societies, those formed in the Cape were established by women belonging to the white middle class, often single women, who were reasonably affluent. Poor women only had enough energy to try to survive and little time for extra work. The types of societies formed reflected gender-related issues about which women felt strongly enough to get together in order to co-operate.

As in America and other South African towns, the East London women's societies, were concerned with philanthropic work, temperance and patriotic issues, with a suffragist society making its appearance in 1911.

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5. Harper's Bazaar, Vol. XXV111, No. 9, 2 March 1985, New York, p. 168. This is from the East London Museum Collection and was donated by a local family, indicating that this was read in East London at the time.

### Philanthropic Societies

Philanthropic work was the first public work in which women got involved. These experiences altered women's perception of the world, their personal identities and their role in public life.<sup>6</sup> Although this type of work fell well within the acceptable parameters of female activities, it nevertheless provided women with the opportunity to gather together and share ideas and experiences. Their undoubted administrative competence challenged the perceptions of women as intellectually inferior and physically weak.

The Ladies Benevolent Society was started in East London in 1882 and was the first organised women's group. It was probably inspired by Ladies Benevolent Society formed in Cape Town in 1822.<sup>7</sup> Interdenominational in approach, the women directed their attention towards charitable works and addressed the needs of poorer families. The success was dependent on the existence of a number of women who had extra resources, some leisure and a social conscience. In the early 1870s, there were relatively few women in the town and even fewer who had attained middle class status, but by the latter part of the decade many of the men, especially the hard-working agents and traders, were making a comfortable living and so their wives had more leisure and resources than previously. The early 1880s was a time of prosperity in

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6. Perrot, Michelle, "Stepping Out", in Fraise & Perrot, A History of Women in the West, p. 451.

7. Bradlow, E., "'The Oldest Charitable Society in South Africa': One Hundred Years and More of the Ladies Benevolent Society at the Cape of Good Hope", (South African Historical Journal, Vol. 25, 1991), p. 77.

the town when many individuals were making money and there was an unprecedented growth in public works.<sup>8</sup> In March 1882 the local newspaper reported that:

"A number of ladies from the various religious denominations ...met on Monday last for the purposes of establishing an unsectarian and benevolent society".<sup>9</sup>

The recession of the late 1880s took its toll and it was found that there were too few women who were able to run such society effectively and the Ladies Benevolent Society found it hard going. The ensuing depression, which was the worst yet experienced, meant that this Society faded as members of the still fragile middle class struggled for economic survival.<sup>10</sup>

In 1906 the Ladies Benevolent Society was revived as the result of a public meeting.<sup>11</sup> That they worked within the acceptable parameters of social behaviour and that their work was appreciated was clearly demonstrated. The Mayor's Minute reported that the hard times of the 1907 depression had taken their toll, but:

"To the members of the Ladies Benevolent Society is due the greatest credit for their untiring efforts in the amelioration of the distress,... the thanks of not only the poor and needy but the townsmen of East London are due for the untiring exertions in the noble work they have undertaken..."<sup>12</sup>

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8. Tankard, "The Development of East London", p. 161.

9. Dispatch, 8.3.1882.

10. Tankard, "The Development of East London", p. 169.

11. Redbook, 1913, p. 211.

12. Mayor's Minute, 28.2.1908, p.11.

A few weeks before the outbreak of the South African War, refugee women and children left the Transvaal for mainly the coastal towns, East London being one. The huge influx strained the limited resources with the result being overcrowding and poverty, with the majority of the refugees dependent on charity.<sup>13</sup>

Although help was given by the Salvation Army and a Catholic Church group, the numbers soon proved to be too large and it became clear that some sort of official organisation be created and be enabled to handle funds which were available from overseas. Women took the lead and a group held a public meeting, forming the Ladies Relief Committee and electing a committee to handle the work. They took immediate and efficient action, managed to house refugees in tents on the beach front and in the Agricultural Show Ground and undertook the handling of provisions.<sup>14</sup> While working for the women and children, they became very annoyed with the Uitlander men whom they regarded as lazy and living off charity.<sup>15</sup> Tankard argues that these women changed policy at a national level. They managed to convince the Town Committee, in spite of public protest, that funds should not be spent on supporting Uitlander males. The request was carried to the Central Committee in Cape Town and as a result, no able-bodied men in any centre received further funds. The result was a great improvement as more money

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13. Tankard, K., "The Role Played by Women in the Uitlander Refugee Crisis, 1899-1902; A Case-Study of the East London Humanitarian Effort", Contree, No. 36, December 1994, p. 1.

14. Tankard, "The East London Humanitarian Effort", Contree, No. 36, Dec. 1994, p. 2.

15. Tankard, "The East London Humanitarian Effort", Contree, No. 36, Dec 1994, pp. 3-4.

was available for the genuinely needy and many of the Uitlander men roused themselves into productive action.<sup>16</sup>

The women of the Ladies Relief Committee were not only prepared to undertake humanitarian work which involved considerable personal effort, but also were able to influence decision makers at a national level. Their efficiency and achievements did much to refashion perceptions of the limits of women's roles. They proved their competence against the long-held ideas of female inferiority.

Women again proved their competence and value to society outside the home with their work for the Seamen's Institute, founded to entertain and uplift sailors in 1898. By 1906 there was a completely separate Ladies' Committee with their own President. They organised social evenings and concerts, virtually doing all the work, and it was acknowledged that their work was 'invaluable'.<sup>17</sup>

The care of orphaned or destitute children was one of the issues which had been sporadically addressed within many of the philanthropic and church groups. Shingler claims that Mrs Margaret McFarlane first raised the idea of a women's shelter and child's protection society at a Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) meeting in 1906.<sup>18</sup> The Child Life Protection Society was officially

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16. Tankard, "The East London's Humanitarian Effort", Contree, No. 36, Dec., 1994, pp. 4-5.

17. Redbook, 1906, p. 88.

18. Shingler, John Philip, Women of East London; 1900-1979, (East London, private, 1979), p. 106.

established by a number of white middle class women in 1916.<sup>19</sup> According to oral interviews, other women deeply involved were Ellen Dickie (born 1862) and Clarissa Newman (born 1886).<sup>20</sup> The women did not confine their work to white children only.<sup>21</sup> Helen Crewe was instrumental in founding a Mother's Union among poor black women.<sup>22</sup> In this field these women worked for a marginalised sector of the community, the unwanted and destitute children of non-respectable women and succeeded bringing to public notice the problems which faced them.

### **Patriotic Club**

Although founded as a 'Patriotic Society' with the intention of looking after soldiers' graves during the South African War, the Loyal Women's Guild, formed in Cape Town in 1900, soon extended their range of interests.<sup>23</sup> In 1903 a federation of all the groups was formed and together the various Guilds achieved a great deal in a short time. They were instrumental in supporting education, art and music with scholarships and in establishing children's libraries. They also instituted a system of district nursing and founded hospitals and care homes for women in need.<sup>24</sup>

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19. Shingler, The Women of East London, lists: Winnifred Ogilvy p. 129, Catherine Rees p. 143 and Mercy Wilson p. 192.

20. Interviews conducted on 14.6.1994 and 15.6.1994.

21. In the 1920s the Child Life Protection Society opened a baby clinic in Duncan Village and founded the Gompo Institute as a place of safety for African children.

Shingler, Women of East London, p. 122.

22. Dispatch, Obituary for Lady Helen Crewe, 2.5.1938.

23. Lewis, T.H., Ed., Women of South Africa, (Cape Town, Le Quesne, 1913), p. 302.

24. Lewis, Women of South Africa, p. 302.

The East London women formed their own Loyal Women's Guild following Cape Town's lead and joined the Federation. Enjoying considerable public support, they also extended their field of activities. By 1906 the management of the Victoria (Old Age) Home had been placed in their hands.<sup>25</sup> They also wielded considerable political power. Writing to Lady Helen Crewe in 1923 in order to try to gather support for the controversial Flag Bill of the Pact Government, Christine Melser commented:

"We during the early days of the Boer War wielded a great power as the GLW and I believe that if we got together we could wield that power again".<sup>26</sup>

The original aims of the society were so narrowly defined, that following the Act of Union in 1910, it was thought that there was no further need for their services and the Guild was disbanded in 1912. As with the other societies, the members of this Guild proved their competence and had become very influential. They refashioned ideas about the role and ability of women in public life.

### **Women's Issues**

The growing awareness of the importance of addressing the disadvantages which women experienced led to some practical help being given where necessary. The need for some kind of financial benefits was addressed where women could find a market place to sell some of their products. Mrs (later Lady) Helen Crewe, a tireless worker for philanthropic causes, was responsible for starting a branch of the South

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25. Mayor's Minute, 1906, p. 21.

26. The Crewe Papers; Letter to Lady Crewe dated 19 May 1823. In the East London Museum Collection.

African National Women's Industrial Union in East London in 1907 (See Figure 17). She had been President of the Society when it started in Cape Town 1906. The object was to encourage women's home industry by assisting with the sale of their preserves, art and handicrafts.<sup>27</sup> This not only encouraged women to be producers in their own right, but also allowed them to earn money and achieve a sense of economic viability.

The care for the welfare of young respectable white women entering the town and the success of the YMCA, led to the formation of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in East London in 1913. The women of the town carried the burden of raising funds and administering the project and were successful in raising sufficient funds to build hostels to house these girls in socially acceptable surroundings.<sup>28</sup> Important here was the acknowledgement that young unmarried white girls could enter the town unaccompanied by a chaperon and earn a living

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27. CA ACC 1/1/3, A1535, Minutes of the South African Women's Industrial Union.

28. Brochure appealing for funds to build a new hostel for the Young Women's Christian Association, 1929. In the collection of the East London Museum.

In 1917 a hostel had been purchased in Inverleith Terrace but closed down in 1927 as the building had deteriorated badly. The appeal was successful and the hostel built.



Figure 17

Lady Helen Crewe, OBE, a tireless worker for many charitable causes  
Painting by Maurice Greifenhagen, RA.  
Original in the East London Museum

without losing their respectability, a remarkable change in the perception of female roles from 1870.

As East London women grew to be confident of their own intellectual capabilities, they started a society to stimulate their minds. The National Home Reading Union was begun in 1906 and continued until 1984. Meetings were held monthly in private homes and papers were prepared by members to stimulate further reading.<sup>29</sup>

The fight for votes for women was one which engendered strong opposition as well as support in the Western world. It grew in response to important changes in the traditional role of women in society and was linked with the many reformist movements of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> The Women's Enfranchisement League (WEL) was first started in South Africa in Durban in 1902. A branch was started in East London in 1911 and in that year a broad federation of all the societies in the country amalgamated to form the Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU).<sup>31</sup>

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29. Dickie, S.H., "A History of the National Home Reading Union", in The Coelacanth, Vol.23, No.2, December 1985.

By the 1920s there were 20 members who attended regularly. the greatest membership was in 1963 when they had 102. The Union closed in 1984.

30. Walker, Cheryl, The Women's Suffrage Movement in South Africa, (Cape Town, University of Cape Town, 1979), pp. 2 & 5.

31. Walker, C., Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), p. 325.

The suffragist cause was one which came to be identified almost exclusively with the women's movement and one which aroused heated debate. Feelings ran so high that a Women's Anti-Suffrage League was formed in England in 1908.<sup>32</sup> The central argument was that men and women occupied separate spheres in society based on the differences in male and female temperaments, physiques and intellect. They should not be serving inappropriate social functions, but stay at home caring for the family.<sup>33</sup> There were many in the essentially conservative East London who shared that point of view. Many saw the suffragist issue in purely political terms, with four comments being that they were not interested in the women's movement as they were 'not political'.

The oral interviews pointed to relatively few women (eight) actively supporting the suffragist cause.<sup>34</sup> Single women also took the cause to heart as could be expected, including Alice McKay (1863-1935), one of the first well-educated women of East London and sometime principal of the Girls' High School.<sup>35</sup> These women and those in other records (nine) were all of the white middle class and

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32. Harrison, Brian, Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain, (New York, Holmes and Meier, 1978) p. 23.

33. Harrison, Separate Spheres, pp. 56 & 72.

34. Caroline Nowell's mother was a Pankhurst - 27.2.1995,  
Ellen Dickie's daughters named after Mrs Pankhurst's daughters - 14.6.1994,  
Norah Read and Dorothy Stewart - 25.4.1996 and Clara Shingler -  
15.3.1995.

35. Oral interview with her niece, 12.8.1994.

among the better educated.<sup>36</sup> In spite of both opposition and indifference to the suffrage cause, those who adhered to the ideals raised public awareness and a new vision of society was created.

### **The Expansion of Temperance Work**

Many women faced the problem of the breadwinner in the family getting drunk regularly and not being able to support the family properly. The International Order of Good Templars established branches in East London from 1879 in attempts to fight this problem (See Figure 18). In spite of the fact that women were accepted as administrators in this organisation, they preferred to start their own group. This was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which in addition to their temperance work, did a great deal to fight for women's rights and to raise the level of public consciousness of discrimination against women. The WCTU was founded in the United States in 1874 and the members soon extended their responsibilities beyond temperance and became a major force for the change in gender relations.<sup>37</sup>

These were extremely well-organised societies basing themselves on the American system of Departments and sub-groups, each with a Superintendent.<sup>38</sup> Everyone was required to take the vow:

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36. Women of South Africa, published in 1913, record 7 members of the Women's Enfranchisement League of the 33 entries for East London women and Shingler, Women of East London records one out of the 13 entries relevant to the study period.
37. Shiman, "Changes are Dangerous" in Malmgreen, Religion in the Lives of English Women, p. 203.
38. CA ACC 16096 2/4, Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, (Cape Town, Townshend, Taylor and Snashall, 1905), p.4.



Figure 18

Members of the International Order of Good Templars, St  
George's Lodge, 1927  
Photograph in the East London Museum collection

"I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain from all Alcoholic Liquors as a beverage whether distilled, fermented, or malted: from opium in all its forms: and to employ all proper means to discourage the use and traffic in the same."<sup>39</sup>

The WCTU, started in the Cape in 1889, was the first organisation in South Africa which formally introduced women's suffrage. They set up the Franchise Department in 1895 as they realised how powerless women were without the vote.<sup>40</sup> With their watchwords of 'Organise, Educate and Agitate' the WCTU proved to be a formidable force in society.<sup>41</sup> Van Heyningen points out that temperance workers, especially with their emphasis on social purity, were among the most active of the social reformers and their work one of the most neglected aspects of the country's social history.<sup>42</sup>

This was an institution which became a major moving force in claiming justice and humanity for women in East London. A branch opened in 1892 with 28 members and by 1897 the numbers had grown to 47 and three 'Y-Unions' for younger

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39. CA ACC A1696 5/4/3, Minutes of the 14th Annual Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of the Cape Colony, (Cape Town, Townsend, Taylor and Snashall, 1905), p. 3.
40. Walker, Cheryl, Ed., Women and Gender in South Africa until 1945, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), p. 324.
41. CA ACC A1696 1/2, Report of the Annual Convention of the Cape WCTU in 1910.
42. Van Heyningen, Elizabeth B., "The Social Evil in the Cape Colony 1868-1902: Prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.10, No.2, April 1984, p. 187.

women had been formed. In 1904 branches were formed at Cambridge and East London West with a small one at Cove Rock in 1907. The members, as well as the East London public, were inspired by a visit by Miss Alice Palmer, an American WCTU missionary, and given the first experience in East London of a polished woman public speaker. The newspaper reported that Miss Palmer:

"...has a taking and telling delivery and dry humour...make her an entertaining speaker on a subject even of less absorbing interest than the temperance cause...the fair lecturer never lost her grip of the audience".<sup>43</sup>

There were eight oral records where women were known to be involved in the WCTU as they had fathers who had ruined the families' lives by drinking.<sup>44</sup>

The cause of temperance which the WCTU women embraced enthusiastically was one for which they had to work hard. By the mid-1890s they were making their presence felt. They presented many petitions to the Liquor Board to close the canteens on Saturday afternoons.<sup>45</sup> They must have been a formidable contingent when they frequently attended the Liquor Licensing Board sittings to protest against granting licences. In 1897 it was reported that:

"...two liquor licences were prevented by the plucky action of some ladies sitting beside the clergy to protest in the licensing court".<sup>46</sup>

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43. East London Standard, 8.9.1893.

44. Interviews: 4.6.1994, 15.3.1995, 28.3.1995, 1.8.1994, 19.7.1996, 18.7.1996, 22.6.1995.

45. East London Standard, 5.10.1894.

46. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Report of the Annual Convention of the WCTU Cape in 1897.

Through the WCTU, there were now a few women were prepared to undertake a public protest, more radical than a press report and in unfavourable conditions. This is indicated in that they were described as 'plucky' and it implies that there was strong public disapproval of their actions. Here was progress being made as women attempted to challenge male authority. By 1898 they were lobbying in the Municipal elections if without much success, but nevertheless breaking new ground.<sup>47</sup> They also organised the erection of buildings from which they could serve tea and refreshments.<sup>48</sup>

The abuse of alcohol by a husband or father and its deleterious effect on family life and finances was feared by black as well as white women.<sup>49</sup> One of the first social barriers which the women of the WCTU in East London crossed was a racial one and there is evidence that white and black women realised a common 'sisterhood'. The white members first met with black women in the East Bank location in 1894 where they met with an enthusiastic response. They reported that many had signed the pledge and 'at the express wish of the native women and with

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47. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Report of the Annual Convention of the WCTU Cape in 1898.

48. East London Standard, 14.2.1896 and 26.2.1897.

49. The work of Katie Makanya in this respect is documented in McCord, Margaret, The Calling of Katie Makanya, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995), pp. 124-125.

their aid', they successfully petitioned against a licence being granted for a canteen near the location.<sup>50</sup>

This co-operation between black and white women is significant and was unusual. It indicates a feeling of identification of women's common problems in a society where inter-racial contact was not the norm. The mistress/maid relationship was not well established in the 1890s as the wealthier white women still employed white servants and black domestic servants were few. Here they were challenging public perceptions of race differences as well as the shy, retiring image of women.

In the years following the East London branches continued to work with the black women with great success and by 1899 the black women had their own well-organised body.<sup>51</sup> Fortnightly well-attended meetings were held and with the support of the white women, the black women wanted to become fully-fledged members of the WCTU and wear the white ribbon.<sup>52</sup> They carried the request to the Annual Meeting of the Cape body which was refused. By 1908 the East London

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50. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Report of the Annual Convention of the Cape WCTU in 1894.

51. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Reports of the Annual Conventions of the Cape WCTU in 1897, 1898 and 1899.

52. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Report of the Annual Convention of the Cape WCTU in 1906.

and King William's Town branches were the only societies in the Cape which did sustained and successful work among black women.<sup>53</sup>

The other major cause which the WCTU undertook was to take up the cause of women and children. In some cases it was to help families in distress or an orphan in a home.<sup>54</sup> The Cape WCTU began investigating the legal rights of women in 1893 and adopted the franchise issue in 1895.<sup>55</sup> The East London women followed suit in 1903.

It was however, in their active involvement in taking up cudgels against the Contagious Diseases (CD) Acts that respectable middle class women ventured into new territory. The campaign against these Acts in England was led by Josephine Butler. She saw prostitution as a moral evil, but by these Acts, the state was acknowledging and perpetuating it.<sup>56</sup> The examination which the women had to undergo was described as "shameful and brutal".<sup>57</sup> Prostitutes were viewed as victims who could be rehabilitated.<sup>58</sup> The Acts were finally repealed in 1886.<sup>59</sup>

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53. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Report of the Annual Convention of the Cape WCTU in 1909.

54. CA ACC A1696 2/4, Reports of Annual Conventions of the WCTU Cape, 1902, 1908 and 1910.

55. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Reports of the Annual Convention of the WCTU Cape in 1893 and 1895.

56. Forster, Margaret, Significant Sisters; The Grassroots of Active Feminism 1839 - 1939, (London, Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 169-170.

57. Forster, Significant Sisters, p. 171.

58. Forster, Significant Sisters, p. 175.

In the Cape, the first Contagious Diseases Act was passed in 1868 and by 1893 they were in force only in seaports and garrison towns, of which East London was one.<sup>60</sup> The Cape WCTU immediately stated its opposition to these Acts as they claimed that:

"the Acts recognise the necessity for vice by endeavouring to protect vicious men from the consequences of their own acts by subjecting women (often victims rather than evil in themselves) to shameless indignities on their behalf, while preventing their leaving the ranks of the fallen and return to a life of virtuousness".<sup>61</sup>

As early as 1891, they began sending protests to Parliament.<sup>62</sup> The East London women took up the challenge and each year sent numerous petitions to Parliament against the CD Acts.<sup>63</sup> Although the WCTU did have considerable support in the community, this active and admirable organisation received very little recognition of their work in their home town. Marjorie Shingler said that they were regarded as "interfering fuddy-duddies".<sup>64</sup>

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59. Forster, Significant Sisters, p. 195.

60. CA CCP 1/2/1/84, G14-'93, Report of the Medical Officer of Health.

61. CA ACC A1696 2/3, Mrs M. Muter of Wynberg, Report of the Annual Convention of the WCTU Cape, 1902.

62. CA ACC A1696 2/2, Report of the Annual Convention of the WCTU Cape, 1891.

63. Where actual numbers were listed; in 1898 and 1899 7 petitions were sent each year; 8 in 1903 and 5 in 1904.

64. Oral Interview with Miss Shingler, 15.3.1995

### **Societies for Black Women**

Apart from the temperance group formed in response to the work of the WCTU which ran their own affairs, there is little evidence of any other societies for black women in the period under study. There were relatively few educated and relatively well-off black women in the location at the time who would have had the resources to devote to matters beyond home and work. An informant did report the existence of an association of women concerned with beer-brewing who protected each other's interests.<sup>65</sup> Other interest groups did develop, but at a later period. An important black women's group did, however, come into existence in the Eastern Cape on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897, and it is very likely that some East London women were involved. The original society was a black men-only Queen Victoria Memorial League which was formed to raise funds to build a memorial to Queen Victoria. The women, however, soon proved their efficiency and in 1906 it was proposed that they be admitted to membership as they had been the earliest subscribers, they had helped in a variety of ways and their kindness and attention to delegates at meetings was most praiseworthy. This was refused and it was decided to form a women-only society the Native Women's Victoria League. The Editor of Izwi Labantu, an East London newspaper, was clearly appreciative of women's work as he commented that "without the aid of women, all efforts at national upliftment would fail". He perceived that this women's organisation could go further than the immediate fund-raising plan and saw the opportunity which existed for bringing women together for mutual encouragement and support. He however, still saw women in their traditional roles as mothers and homemakers:

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65. Oral interview on 23.5.1994.

"the management of children, the home and family be within their sphere".<sup>66</sup>

The Treasurer was Mrs Katie Soga, wife of A.K. Soga, Editor of Izwi Labantu, who lived in East London.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately with the closing of this newspaper, there are no further reports on the work of this society.

Working within their assigned philanthropic roles white middle-class women of East London first formed a society to undertake this work. Once groups had been formed within which women could function effectively, they turned their attention to concerns which went beyond the original reasons for the formation of each particular society and worked for furthering the interests of disadvantaged women. Against a background of women being regarded as inferior intellectually and as second class citizens, they developed an awareness of their own worth and confidence in their own abilities and this did much to refashion perceptions of gender relations.

While none of the organisations had their origins in East London, they became part of the more widely based women's movement. It was through association with other women and the stimulation of ideas brought from overseas and national parent associations that they were able to understand and work for an improvement of conditions for women. They had the confidence and conviction to challenge

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66. Izwi Labantu, Editorial entitled "Women and the Victoria Memorial", 24.7.1906.

67. Izwi Labantu, 9.1.1907.

accepted norms in society, including racial separateness. Through the WCTU white and black women came into contact with one another and worked together for a common cause with white women going into the black locations at a time when separateness was being promoted by those in power. Through their work in fighting the Contagious Diseases Act, they established common cause with women, whatever their colour, class or respectability. This group of women challenged public perceptions of black people as enemies and they developed an idea of sisterhood.

The societies functioned at three levels. On the one hand social conditions within the community were improved, particularly for women. The women themselves gained confidence in themselves and broke away from perceptions of women as the intellectually and physically weaker sex. But more importantly, they changed the public perception of the role of women. By stepping outside the parameters of what women ought to do and what they actually did do and by challenging male authority, they laid the foundations for change on gender issues. In fact women's associations played a major role in inaugurating change in society.

**CHAPTER 9****MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN ENTER FORMAL EMPLOYMENT**

Women earning money was an important factor in social change. Money is power and with the ability to attain economic independence, women no longer needed to be totally dependent on men. The increasing employment of middle-class Victorian women was the major social phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> This was a part of women's search for a better education, economic independence and a personal identity. It was particularly relevant for the middle-class single women who could, if they chose, become independent wage earners with a life of their own. The changes were made with difficulty as there was plenty of male opposition.

The types of jobs which were open to women generally were limited, underpaid and often had poor working conditions. A review published as late as 1989 stated that more than half of economically active women in South Africa were employed in occupations which were extensions of the traditional female roles of nursing, teaching, clerical work and sales and that the work was generally supportive of men.<sup>2</sup> The considerable change of attitude towards working women which had developed during the decades prior to the first World War were reflected in a publication, Every Woman's Encyclopedia of 1913. This aimed its readership at literate middle class women and accepted that work was a subject in which women

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1. Holcombe, Lee, Victorian Ladies at Work, (Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 1972), p. 18.
  2. Lemmer, Eleanor M., "Invisible Barriers: Attitudes Towards Women in South Africa", South African Journal of Sociology, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1989, p. 30.

were interested, with detailed articles on the different types of occupations available to respectable women.<sup>3</sup>

The changing pattern of middle-class women working for money was well demonstrated in East London during this period and their experiences set them firmly in place as part of the wider trend. During the 1870s most of the women working for money were from the working class, but in the decades following, the situation changed radically. There were few opportunities for women to do the industrial work as there were so few industries in the town, but other fields such as shop work, office work, teaching, and nursing held many attractions. As department stores and offices began opening, and with the expansion of the Civil Service in the Cape, job opportunities became available for white women for which they only needed a modicum of education and which were deemed to be suitable occupations for respectable white girls. It was accepted, however, that most middle class women should give up working on marriage.

The period was also marked by the entry of black women into the urban-based economy, but largely at the working-class level. Most of the black women who entered the town, particularly in the early period, were not only unskilled, but also barred from work where they could earn higher wage. Later trained black women teachers and nurses took their place in society.

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3. Every Woman's Encyclopedia, London, 1913, p. 5435.

### The Position of Single Women

The situation of white single women in the nineteenth century was one of great difficulty where they were condemned to marginal positions at home and in society. If a woman came from a wealthy family, she had little to do other than welfare work or assist other members of her family. In a situation where a middle class woman became economically destitute, she had a choice of three underpaid occupations, governess, companion or seamstress, all of which relegated her to a lower status in society.<sup>4</sup> The spinster became a figure of fun in popular humour, to be mocked and parodied. Social and economic pressures could leave her poverty stricken and unhappy.<sup>5</sup>

The single women of East London born prior to 1900, did not escape the social and economic pressures. A local newspaper assisted in the mockery of unmarried women in an article entitled "A Gushing Woman", published in 1891 and ostensibly written by "A Despairing Spinster". The image of physically plain women "elbowing their way to sturdy independence", trying hard for acceptance in society and being labelled "gushing" is held up for public ridicule.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of these kinds of problems, it was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that, for the first time, middle class single women were able to

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4. Vicinus, Martha, Independent Women; 1850-1920, (London, Virago, 1985), p. 3.
  5. Vicinus, Martha, Ed., A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women, (London, Methuen & Co., 1977), p. xii.
  6. Frontier Standard, 3.12.1891.

take advantage of educational and economic opportunities and live independent and respected lives on their own earnings.<sup>7</sup> They developed personal confidence and took the leadership role in many organisations in an effort to redefine women's roles in society.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Civil Service**

The civil service reflected the microcosm of the employment of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England.<sup>9</sup> The situation was similar, if on a smaller scale, in the Cape in the same period. The difficulties which middle class respectable women faced on entering formal employment were to be found in the adverse conditions which they encountered in the Civil Service. The opposition of men towards women entering formal employment was well articulated in the report of the Select Committee appointed by the Cape Parliament on the "question of the desirability or otherwise of admitting women into the Civil Service" in 1899.<sup>10</sup> At that time women working for the Civil Service were on a temporary basis only, which meant that they did not receive pensions, with the exceptions of teachers and Post Office employees. They were not allowed public status and could not aspire to any of the higher offices. As they were paid so much less than men,

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7. Vicinus, Independent Women, p. 6.

8. Vicinus, Independent Women, p.12.

9. Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work, p. 163

10. CA CCP 1/2/2/1/52, A29-'99, Select Committee Report on Admitting Women into the Civil Service, 8.8.1899.

it was claimed that they constituted a saving of public money.<sup>11</sup>

The eight all-male members of the committee, which included Captain Edward Yewd Brabant, Member of Parliament for East London, interviewed eight males who occupied leading positions in the Civil Service. The ability of women was never in question. They were said to be very hard workers, more conscientious than men, methodical, neat and punctual. They worked much better than male clerks and one woman could do the work of two men. They were accurate, attentive and painstaking.<sup>12</sup> Against this, the conditions under which they worked were spelled out. They were paid much less than the men, about half of a man's wage, and usually received the minimum on the scale.<sup>13</sup> Brabant argued that this was unfair as there were large numbers of respectable women who were compelled:

"to go into the world and take their chances of obtaining employment in the best way that they can"<sup>14</sup>

The others disagreed as they said that as women lived at home, they therefore did not need as much as men and that women accepted the situation.<sup>15</sup> This was a patent rationalisation as it was well established that there were "immense numbers" of applications for every vacancy,<sup>16</sup> which argues that there was a real financial need. The real fears of the males were clearly articulated. If women were allowed

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11. Select Committee Report, pp. iii-v & 19.

12. Select Committee Report, pp. 3-4, 21, 9, 25, 52 and 50 respectively.

13. Select Committee Report, p. 37.

14. Select Committee Report, pp. 45-46.

15. Select Committee Report, p. 28, 45-46.

16. Select Committee Report, p.46.

to enter the Civil Service too many would flood in and there would be too much competition for the men.<sup>17</sup> The spectre of women being put in authority over men was raised and there was even a danger that they might become magistrates.<sup>18</sup>

The men also raised the question of class status, where they perceived paid work as being degrading for middle class respectable women and that their chances of marrying might be lowered. Another felt that working in the public market place might make them become unfitted for domestic work but this was refuted by the Superintendent for Education, Dr Thomas Muir, who said that overseas graduates from Newnham and Girton had conducted exemplary marriages.<sup>19</sup> One member thought that having to mix with men might put temptation in the way of respectable ladies and lead to their downfall.<sup>20</sup> One even said that he knew of a situation where a young girl had moved away from home and entered the office of a private firm and "very narrowly escaped ruin."<sup>21</sup>

Members of the Commission were aware of the "new woman movement", which was said to be "comparatively modern and recent here", but they regarded it as an experiment.<sup>22</sup> They thought that the movement had been responsible for women

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17. Select Committee Report, pp. 10 & 19

18. Select Committee Report, p. 55.

19. Select Committee Report, p. 10 - 11 and 24.

20. Select Committee Report, p. 20.

21. Select Committee Report, p. 45.

22. Select Committee Report, p. 43.

entering the job market (in competition with men) since 1891 and that the numbers had increased greatly. The comments were that, while they a great sympathy with the movement, most still did not believe that women should work with men and have any form of equality.<sup>23</sup>

The final proposals which the Select Committee made were very limited and indicated the fears which they entertained of women competing (successfully) with men. They granted women the right to get a Schedule A (i.e. permanent with pension) appointment, although promotion was limited to that of a second-class clerk. Women could also only be appointed where there was suitable and separate accommodation and there was no mention of improving the very low salary scales for women as these were regarded as savings for the state.<sup>24</sup>

Some East London women were affected. Mrs Maria Elizabeth Browning, Postmistress and telegraphist from 1877, was one of the few women in the Civil Service who would have been eligible for a pension.<sup>25</sup> Jane Bertill (born 1894), a respectable middle class woman, became a Lady Tracer on the Railways before her marriage.<sup>26</sup> Respectable Ellen Dickie was also forced to support herself at a young age when she worked in the Post Office in England.<sup>27</sup>

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23. Select Committee Report, pp. 43 & 45.

24. Select Committee Report, pp. iv-v.

25. The King William's Town and East London Directory, 1878, p. 14.

26. Oral Interview with her son, 12.7.1995.

27. Oral Interview 14.6.1994.

## Teaching

The teaching profession also offered women employment opportunities in the civil service, although conditions were slightly different. This was an area of work which middle class women undertook at an early date. The proliferation of schools in East London gave the opportunity for girls with some form of higher education to train as teachers and still retain respectability. Miss Caroline Robson and Miss Alice Cross were among the first to do so in East London and became assistants at the Panmure First Class Public school in 1876.<sup>28</sup> Among the oral interviews, it was noted that women began training as teachers from the 1880s. Important issues which emerged concerned single women who were young adults in the 1890s. They were able to undertake a training and then follow careers which allowed them financial independence and a respected place in society. Margaret Gately (born 1865) obtained her 3rd Class Teacher's Certificate of 1st Grade in 1897.<sup>29</sup> Alice (born 1863) and Ella McKay (born 1867) obtained high teaching qualifications and became heads of important girls' educational institutions. Their unmarried sister, Christina (born 1859), was detailed to care for her parents in their old age, as was often the case in large families. An intelligent woman with some teacher training, she held classes for the local Chinese children in her home.<sup>30</sup>

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28. Dispatch, 11.7.1876.

29. Gately Papers, Documents, Education Certificates, 16, 16.4.1897, East London Museum.

30. Oral Interview with her niece, 12.8.1994.

In spite of there being opportunities for further education and training, the perception still existed by 1914 that all waged work ceased upon marriage, which was regarded as women's true vocation. Erica Hart (born 1869) had a training and was a teacher until her marriage.<sup>31</sup> Margaret Clark (born 1880) was also a pupil teacher before her marriage,<sup>32</sup> as was Violet Knobel (born 1890).<sup>33</sup> Two notable women teachers were Alice Thompson and Clarissa Newman. Alice Thompson (born 1886) started a country school on the family farm at 'Umdanzane' for local children.<sup>34</sup> Clarissa Newman (born 1886) was the first woman to serve on the School Board and to hold public office. She was a women of great ability who gave up her teaching career on marriage and devoted her energies to a life of public service.<sup>35</sup>

Although there were no institutions in East London, there were many teacher training opportunities for black women offered by the missionary institutions in the Eastern Cape from the late nineteenth century: Lovedale in Alice started a Girls' Institution in 1868; Emgwali Training School for Girls, near Stutterheim founded in 1861 by the Scottish Ladies' Kaffrarian Society; the Lamplough Institution for Girls at Butterworth, started in 1887, had a first year Pupil Teacher's Course; St Matthews Teacher Training School at Keiskammahoek developed from 1904, offered

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31. Oral Interview with her granddaughter, 12.8.1994

32. Oral Interview with her daughter, 11.8.1994.

33. Oral Interview with her son and daughter, 5.6.1994

34. Oral Interview with her daughter, 20.3.1995.

35. Oral Interview with her son, 15.6.1994.

full teaching certificates to women; in 1882, the Augusta Memorial School for girls opened but was transferred to All Saints in Umtata in 1896, where the preparation of teachers was undertaken; the Healdtown Institution developed a Normal training college for teachers in 1892, which included women.<sup>36</sup> (See Figure 19).

The oral interviews revealed that black women also trained as teachers and pursued this most respectable career. Losi Simons (born 1886), who lived in the East Bank Location for most of her life, trained as a teacher at Emgwali. She taught for a short while in King William's Town and then East London. According to her daughter, she was an educated Christian woman and was not interested in rural ties.<sup>37</sup> Deena Rubusana, wife of the noted W.B. Rubusana, was a trained teacher who had done extra study in Scotland. She also worked in the black schools of East London.<sup>38</sup> (See Figure 20 and Appendix 5).

The initial lack of schools in the eastern Cape led to there being a need for parents to obtain the services of governesses to give their children at least a modicum of education. This field therefore offered job opportunities for middle class women who had some smattering of education themselves, and whose families were experiencing financial difficulties, or who were single and had to support themselves. For example, Miss Bayly wanted an engagement where the salary was

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36. Taylor, Revd J. Dexter, Christianity and the Natives of South Africa, (Alice, Proceedings of the General Missionaries Conference, 1928), p. 415.

37. Oral Interview 14.8.1996.

38. Address delivered to the Border Historical Society on W.B. Rubusana by Mr S.J. Ngqongqo on 21.10.1997.



Figure 19

Sylvia Dickie with students at Blytheswood Training College  
when she taught there in 1920  
Photograph by courtesy of Miss Sylvia Dickie

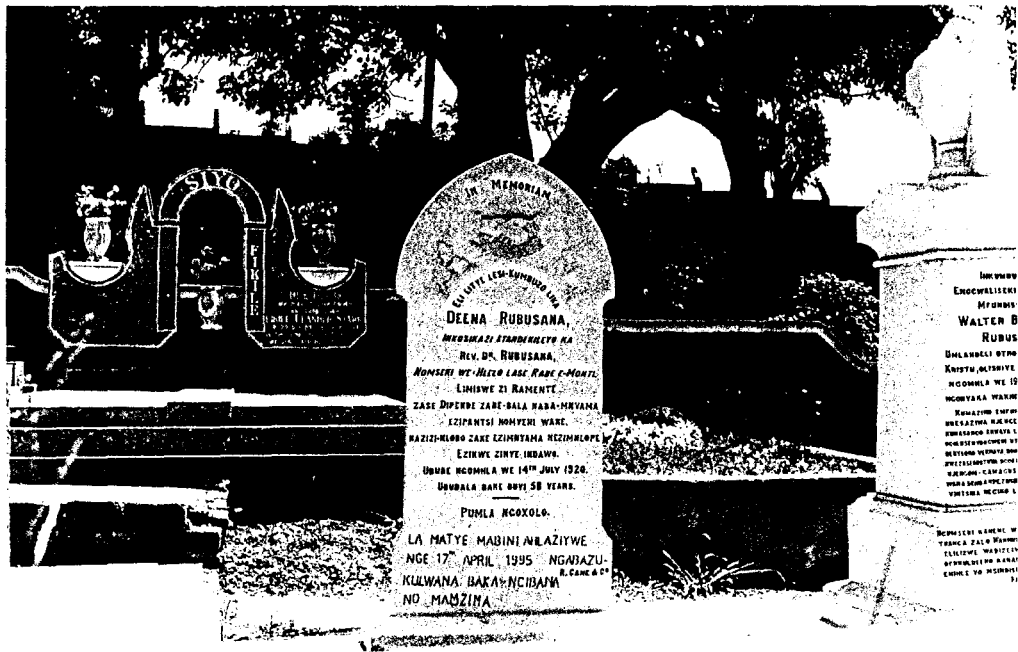


Figure 20

Headstone of the grave of Deena Rubusana, wife of W.B. Rubusana, both leading figures in the black community. (See Appendix 5)  
 Photograph in the East London Museum collection

not as important as "a comfortable home", implying that her home circumstances were very stressed.<sup>39</sup> Another offered the limited subjects of "Music, English and Drawing",<sup>40</sup> suitable for upwardly mobile aspirants, but little else. Prior to 1900 advertisements of women wanting governess appointments appeared, such as "an English Lady, offering Music, French, Drawing".<sup>41</sup> Several of the women interviewed either had a governess or had friends who did.<sup>42</sup> Susanna Arnold (born 1827) was a governess en route to India, when she met and married a soldier at the Cape.<sup>43</sup> After 1900 these types of posts were not readily available as most girls attended schools.<sup>44</sup>

Music teaching was much in demand, even beyond 1900, as accomplishments for aspirant middle class young girls in an upwardly mobile society, and so provided more work opportunities for middle class women who needed money. An overseas training was much vaunted such as "A lady has studied among eminent Professors in England at the RAM [Royal Academy of Music]".<sup>45</sup> A more modest offering read

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39. Dispatch, 7.9.1878.

40. Dispatch, 11.1.1879

41. Dispatch, 4.2.1880, 2.12.1881, 7.1.1882 and Frontier Standard, 8.11.1895 and 3.1.1896,

42. Oral Interview with Sylvia Dickie, 20.3.1995.

43. Oral Interview with her granddaughter, 13.9.1994.

44. A survey of newspapers from 1900 to 1910 revealed no advertisements for these types of posts.

45. Dispatch, 29.3.1877.

"A young lady some experience of teaching music would be glad of a few pupils".<sup>46</sup> Ursula Border (born 1904) became a fully trained music teacher as her mother was determined that her daughters should be able to earn their own living and not suffer as she had done in an unhappy marriage.<sup>47</sup>

### **Shop Assistants**

By 1914 shop assistants formed the largest group of middle-class women earning money in England. An elementary education was all that was needed and with the growth of the big department stores, jobs became available for respectable women. As was true for the other female occupations, the women had low salaries and long hours of work standing for most of the day.<sup>48</sup> In East London this type of work was only on offer to white girls so black women were unable to take advantage of this method of improving their financial positions.

Economic stress was the most likely reason for young women seeking these kinds of positions in East London as early as the 1880s.<sup>49</sup> With the growth of population and development of commerce, department stores began making their appearance in the 1890s, bringing more opportunities for respectable young girls to earn some money (See Figure 21). H. Fletcher and Co. advertised for "young ladies

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46. Dispatch, 24.1.1878

47. Oral interview with Ursula Border, 30.5.1994.

48. Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work, pp. 103-106

49. Dispatch, "wanted a situation in a drapery or fancy shop", 4.5.1881 and "to serve in a retail store or any other light employment", 25.6.1881.



Figure 21  
Women shop assistants on the staff of Whitaker, Paterson &  
Brookes, General Drapers, Milliners, Dressmakers and Home  
Furnishers, 1904  
Photograph in the East London Museum collection

to serve at the Fancy and Confectionery counters".<sup>50</sup> Alice Chambers (born 1880) worked at Gibbert and Bryant before her marriage as her family was respectable but not well-off.<sup>51</sup> Clara Shingler (born 1865) became a salesgirl at the age of 12, as it was a necessity for her to earn her own living.<sup>52</sup> Some enterprising women ran their own small shops and were fairly successful.<sup>53</sup>

### **Clerical Occupations**

By 1914 female clerks were ranked the third, after shop assistants and teachers, in the numbers of middle class women in employment in England. The introduction of shorthand and typewriting were major innovations which brought women into office work. In the years 1861 and 1911 the number of women clerks in England increased 400 times as educated respectable middle class women replaced working class men, doing the work in half the time.<sup>54</sup> There are numerous records of East London women who had a training in shorthand-typing or book-keeping and who went to work before marriage, or continued to support themselves if single. This work was all done by middle class women who were born post 1887, which means that they were only undertaking paid work after 1900. In 1898, two Shorthand and Typing Courses were offered.<sup>55</sup> Margaret McFarlane (born 1887) had an

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50. Frontier Standard, 16.3.1894.

51. Oral Interview with her granddaughter, 1.2.1996.

52. Oral Interview with her daughter, 15.3.1995.

53. 1878 Directory,

54. Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work, pp. 141 - 148.

55. Kelsall's Directory, 1898, p. 31.

education but little training other than in unpaid welfare work, but in 1919 became a Welfare Officer overseeing female employees at Wilson's Sweet Factory.<sup>56</sup> Norah Gately (born 1886) became a clerk at the Municipality, but only after her father's death in 1902 and against the wishes of her mother. Karla Medefindt (born 1894) trained as a bookkeeper and later ran her own business, a dress shop, after the death of her husband.<sup>57</sup> Mary Forbes (born 1890) and Helen Cotterell (born 1906) were employees in the clerical field in Wilson's Sweet Factory, but both only worked before marriage.<sup>58</sup> Helena Batten (born 1899) was a bookkeeper and Amelia Crabbe (born 1900) worked as a clerk for a Shipping Line, both again before their marriages.<sup>59</sup> Blanche Wild (born in 1907 and still alive) trained as a shorthand typist and later taught these subjects in schools.<sup>60</sup> Marjorie Shingler (born in 1906 and still alive), daughter of an accountant, trained as a shorthand typist, worked for Michauds, an East London jeweller, and then became principal secretary at Lovedale for many years.<sup>61</sup> All of these women went into employment, not only through economic necessity, although that was an important consideration, but also as part of a growing awareness among women who were young in the early twentieth century that they were capable of earning money in their own right and wished to do so. Two were single women who were able to

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56. Shingler, The Women of East London, p. 107.

57. Oral Interview with her daughter, 7.10.1994.

58. Oral Interviews, 20.6.1995 and 12.5.1995.

59. Oral Interviews with their daughters, 23.11.1994 and 23.3.1995.

60. Oral Interview with Miss Wild, 22.6.1995,

61. Oral Interview with Miss Shingler, 15.3.1995.

support themselves very adequately and were (are) highly respected members of the community (See Figure 22).

### **Midwifery and Nursing**

By the late nineteenth century nursing had become a respectable and skilled profession which middle-class women could enter. Although the ranks of nurses represented a cross-section of society, women of good background and education were being recruited as hospital matrons and sisters.<sup>62</sup> It was still, however, essentially an occupation which was an extension of the idealised concept of a woman's nurturing role. This comment in a girl's annual of 1906 shows how women were expected to conform to the ideal of service and sacrifice into which women were programmed:

"It is not an easy life but one in which personal sacrifice is involved ... gives opportunities of service to the world and opens fields of usefulness".<sup>63</sup>

In the years before 1900 most East London women gave birth to their babies at home with the assistance of a midwife. There were several women who undertook deliveries, many of whom were quite untrained. An exception was a Mrs Harrington, who advertised herself as a "Ladies' Certified Accoucheuse" with a training at the London Lying-in Hospital.<sup>64</sup> Caroline Nowell (born 1862) had nursing training and

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62. Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work, pp. 77 - 78.

63. Somerset, Lady Henry, "Nursing as a Profession for Girls", Girls' Own Annual, October 1906, Vol. XXVIII, p. 1397

64. Dispatch, 6.9.1877.



Third Class or Elementary Certificate.

This is to Certify that

*Ina Palmer*

has satisfactorily passed an Elementary Examination in Pitman's Shorthand, and that her success has been registered towards the completion of a Full Certificate.

Phonetic Institute, Bath,

*July 13<sup>th</sup> 1904*

*Alfred Pitman*

*Ernest Pitman*

*A Full Certificate for Theoretical and Practical knowledge of Pitman's Shorthand is granted when First and Second Class Certificates have been obtained.*

Taught by

*Teacher of Pitman's Shorthand.*

Figure 22

Certificate dated 1904 for a shorthand qualification, earned by Ina Palmer  
Original in the East London Museum

did some midwifery to help with finances.<sup>65</sup>

With the opening of the Frere Hospital in 1882 an opportunity was created for women to enter this respectable, if difficult, profession.<sup>66</sup> (See Figure 23). Male jealousy, where trained women wielded considerable authority, soon made this occupation a hazardous one for women to negotiate. In 1883 the arrival of a Miss Ferrier, "a lady of superior training" as Lady Superintendent, as well as two trained nurses seemed to augur well for the health of the town as well as providing prospects for female employment.<sup>67</sup> In the following year, however, the Board of Management reported that the system had proved unworkable and had resulted in the resignation of the Lady Superintendent and the dismissal of one nurse. The post was downgraded and the hospital was put under the charge of a married couple, the male serving as Steward and the wife as Matron. In an attempt at justification, the report also commented that this resulted in the saving of one hundred pounds a year.<sup>68</sup>

The problems which women experienced when working in competition with men are indicated by this incident. If it was a problem of incompetence, the post would not have been downgraded with a Lady Superintendent losing control of the hospital,

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65. Oral Interview with her grandson, 27.1.1995.

66. Dispatch, 12.4.1882.

67. Dispatch, 4.7.1883.

68. CA CCP 1/2/1/63, G69-'84, Frere Hospital Board of Management Report, 30 November 1883.



Figure 23

Nursing staff of the Frere Hospital, 1901  
Photograph from the East London Museum collection

the post would simply have been re-advertised. It seems more likely that this was a clash where male doctors were not prepared to work under the authority of a female. Vicinus argues that this was a common problem in hospitals in England where doctors were busy consolidating their recent gains in social status and:

"did not welcome the invasion of self-important ladies from a higher social class".<sup>69</sup>

A very similar situation happened in the early 1900s which supports the contention that there was friction between male and female authority. The position of Lady Superintendent had been re-established and Miss A.G. McKay appointed. The Board reported that:

"it was impossible to over-estimate the value of so highly trained a lady".<sup>70</sup>

After four years of service, complaints were brought against her but, as one of the Board members pointed out, she had not had a chance of defending herself and had denied the charges levelled at her by Dr Mitchell.<sup>71</sup> In the following week the Lady Superintendent resigned, followed by the housekeeper and four staff nurses, indicating their support for Miss McKay.<sup>72</sup> Their subsequent request for compensation for their annual leave which they had not taken was refused.<sup>73</sup>

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69. Vicinus, Martha, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women: 1850 - 1920, (London, Virago, 1985), p. 87.

70. CA CCP 1/2/1/115, G41-1901, Frere Hospital Board Report, 1900.

71. CA HFE 1/1/1, Report of the Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Frere Hospital, 22 August, 1902.

72. CA HFE 1/1/1, Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Frere Hospital, 29 August 1902.

73. CA HFE 1/1/1, Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Frere Hospital, 17 October 1902.

The post was again downgraded and a matron appointed.<sup>74</sup> A wrangle followed about leave pay which must have left a bitter taste. The House Committee recommended that Miss McKay be fully compensated as her devotion to duty could hardly be doubted as during her four years service, she had only taken six weeks leave instead of her allowance of the full three months.<sup>75</sup> In spite of this, some Board members argued that she was not entitled to any as she had resigned. It was finally agreed to pay her the due but the lower ranking nurses were to receive nothing.<sup>76</sup>

Problems did not cease and in the following year a nurse was suspended and she brought charges against the administration.<sup>77</sup> In 1906 complaints were made to government regarding the internal administration in the hospital. In particular the accommodation for female patients was unsatisfactory and an enquiry was held.<sup>78</sup> The implications of these episodes illustrate the unwillingness of the male hierarchy to work under a woman and the difficulties under which a woman, who held a

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74. CA HFE 1/1/1, Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Frere Hospital, 17 October 1902.  
Emily Jane Short (1866-1905) died of the plague. Her headstone in the West Bank Cemetery reads "contracted in the fearless and faithful discharge of her duty ... This tablet erected by a few of her patients, co-workers and friends".
75. CA HFE 1/2/2, Minutes of the House Committee of the Frere Hospital, 22 October 1902.
76. CA HFE 1/1/1, Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Frere Hospital, 7 November 1902.
77. CA HFE 1/1/1, Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Frere Hospital, 5 June 1903.
78. CA CCP 1/2/1/138, G39-1906, Report of the District Surgeon.

responsible position, worked. There is evidence of the solidarity of women standing together even at the expense of losing their jobs. What also was shown in these reports was that there were many women who wanted or needed to work, with 12 applicants for the matron's and 18 for the staff nurses' posts.<sup>79</sup> Oral records showed that on the death of her husband, Charlotte Gately (born 1884), who had been trained in England, had to go back to nursing full-time in order to support herself and her two daughters.<sup>80</sup>

The opportunity for black women to enter the nursing profession became available in the early 1900s. Izwi Labantu reported that the Victoria Hospital at Lovedale had opened for the training of black women on the same lines as in leading Scottish and London hospitals. Miss Cecilia Makiwane had already completed her training and other women had started.<sup>81</sup>

The refashioning of gender relations was most marked in the field where middle class women could undertake paid work without losing their respectability. In 1870 very few middle class women earned money in formal employment, but by 1914, it was perfectly acceptable. As opportunities opened, so more women began seeking work in greater numbers than before. Some form of control of money gave women a leverage in society and this was the beginning of a major social change

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79. CA HFE 1/1/1, Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Frere Hospital, 17 October 1902.

80. Oral Interview with her daughter, 20.3.1995.

81. Izwi Labantu, 3 July 1906.

as women began redefining their social roles. It was not, however, a complete revolution as it was still taken for granted that white middle-class women should give up work on marriage. Conditions were certainly not ideal as most entered the job market of whatever kind under some degree of difficulty, usually poor pay and hard working conditions. The males were usually firmly in control and any challenge to male authority was severely dealt with. The civil service only half opened its doors to middle class white women, with teaching being the major occupation. As department stores became fashionable, so white women could become shop assistants. The clerical occupations, usually with a training needed of shorthand and typing became one of the main arenas where women could work effectively. The nursing profession was one which required intensive training under difficult conditions but nevertheless attracted many women who had been conditioned to service. The only two avenues of work for educated black women were teaching and nursing. In spite of the many problems, by 1914 men and women accepted the fact that women could undertake paid employment without loss of respectability. Single women especially benefitted from the change in attitudes as they were able to play a meaningful and independent role in society.

## CHAPTER 10

### **WORKING CLASS WOMEN TRYING TO KEEP BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER**

The refashioning of gender relations for working class women needing to earn money was, as in the other spheres, a much slower process than for middle class women in the formal sector of employment. For working class black and white women, where waged work was not available or was unsuitable, many therefore tried to earn money for themselves in a variety of ways. Lewis notes that while many women retained their primary responsibility towards their homes, they also often undertook casual work, either for an employer or to their own account, and which was little recorded and recognised.<sup>1</sup> This was often done when the need to supplement income arose, especially when a husband's or father's income was inadequate, or when they had no other means on their own account. They earned money by selling their skills, working from their homes, by making products in their homes, by making use of their homes to rent out accommodation, by selling their labour or by selling their sexual favours.

The major change which did take place, was in the position of black women many of whom were able to manipulate their circumstances and carve out respected places in their communities. Black women coming to East London who did not wish to enter domestic service found other means to earn money. Minkley argues that

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1. Lewis, Jane, "Sexual Divisions: Women's Work in Late Nineteenth Century England", in Kleinberg, S.Jay, Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in English Society, (Oxford, Berg/UNESCO, 1988), p.151.

by the 1920s, it was from beer-brewing and renting that the women in the East London locations established themselves as independent persons earning their own money and it was this 'women's business' which was central to the shaping of society within the locations.<sup>2</sup>

### **Domestic Work**

Domestic service was an avenue for unskilled but respectable working class women to earn money. The change over time in East London was that initially white women filled most of domestic worker posts which were offered by middle class families, but from about the 1890s, black women undertook this work. White maids were in demand in East London from the 1870s. For example Mrs Ogilvie advertised for a German or English servant to assist in her boarding house.<sup>3</sup> The Brabant family arrived from England with a white maid-servant.<sup>4</sup> A 17-year old white girl wanted a situation as a nurse or general servant.<sup>5</sup> The newspaper ran two advertisements in the same issue, one for a young person who "wanted a situation in a family, is domesticated and good with a needle" and a "respectable girl" was wanted at once as a General Servant.<sup>6</sup> In 1876 the newspaper stated that any [white] girls "of sufficient age" could easily obtain employment in town and

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2. Minkley, Gary, "Border Dialogues: Race, Class and Space in the Industrialization of East London", (PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1994), p. 249.
  3. Dispatch, 15 June 1875.
  4. Dispatch, 25.10.1875.
  5. Dispatch, 5.3.1879.
  6. Dispatch, 2.6.1883.

country households.<sup>7</sup> When Mary Wyche arrived in East London in 1878, she brought two white servants and a governess.<sup>8</sup> In the oral interviews, many reported that they knew of families who had white maids.<sup>9</sup> Louisa Green (born 1853) began working as a domestic servant at the age of nine.<sup>10</sup> Work as barmaids and hotel servants was also undertaken by white working-class women in East London at the time. Advertisements appeared such as "a middle-aged woman wants a position as a chamber maid" and "a good barmaid wanted."<sup>11</sup>

By the 1880s the position was beginning to change and the newspaper now reported that "advertisements for European maidservants mostly fail to obtain responses".<sup>12</sup> With an improvement in the economic position of many of the white families in the 1890s, the cry for white domestic workers or nursemaids increased markedly as continual advertisements demonstrated, many repeated.<sup>13</sup> A few appeared which offered more unsatisfactory services, such as a "widow lady, no longer young, wished to act as housekeeper or companion".<sup>14</sup>

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7. Dispatch, 20.11.1876.

8. CL Ms 16828, The Letters of Cyril Wyche and his Wife, letter by Mary Wyche dated 22 May 1878.

9. Oral Interview with her 14.6.1994.

10. Oral Interview with her granddaughter, 5.8.1994.

11. Dispatch, 13.4.1881 and 9.1.1883.

12. Dispatch, 15.7.1882

13. For example, advertisements in the Frontier Standard: 10.12.1891, 25.1.1892, 21.6.1892, 29.5.1894, 7.12.1894, 3.1.1896, 12.2.1897, 3.4.1897, 28.5.1897, 8.9.1897, 24.12.1897.

14. Frontier Standard, 11.4.1895.

As with many avenues of employment for women, domestic service was not easy as wages were low and hours were long. The Masters and Servants Act which governed employer/employee relationships weighed heavily on employees. Simons argues that it was a sharp instrument of racial discrimination.<sup>15</sup> The penalties, however, could and did affect white domestic workers as much as black women. Sarah Mitchell was one such unfortunate example of a white domestic worker who fell foul of her employer. She came to East London in 1876 on a six-month contract, through the agency of an Emigration Society, into the service of Gustav Wetzlar, a prominent East London citizen.<sup>16</sup> The conditions of the contract were that if she wished to leave before the end of six months, she would have to refund her passage money. Her situation must have been untenable as she resolutely refused to work for him even for as short a time as six months and was brought to court on three occasions. She offered to refund the passage money but the offer was refused and she was ordered to return to work.<sup>17</sup> She refused and the following week saw her in court again where she was reprimanded and discharged.<sup>18</sup> After her persistent refusal to work, Wetzlar obtained the services of an attorney and this time she was found guilty and imprisoned for one month.<sup>19</sup> Her unpleasant experience is indicative of the strongly male-dominated society

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15. Simons, Jack and Ray, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950, (International Defence Aid Fund, 1983), pp. 23-24.

16. Tankard, The Development of East London, "Appendices: East London Councillors", p. 45.

17. Dispatch, 15.1.1877.

18. Dispatch, 22.1.1877.

19. Dispatch, 29.1.1877.

where a female servant was dealt with very harshly and denied her contractual right to leave employment if she refunded the money. The circumstances must have been extremely trying as her obdurate refusal to return to work would indicate and it can be inferred that sexual molestation was perhaps taking place. The great lengths which Wetzlar was prepared to go, such as bringing her to court three times and even hiring an attorney, indicate that he was determined to punish her for refusing to co-operate with him. The case also illustrates the powerlessness of an illiterate working-class girl against male control. Conditions for some of the white girls in domestic service could not have been pleasant as advertisements appeared for young girls wanting to return to England and offering their services to travellers in return for a free passage.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike other areas of the country where black males entered domestic service, it was the black women in East London who did so from at least the 1890s. It is not difficult to understand the reasons as this was an urban area with access to the surrounding rural areas and women who wished to go to the town could get there relatively easily. Black women entering domestic service did so, as could be expected, under nineteenth century European conditions. This comment was written describing English conditions but could equally be applied to black female servants:

"Domestic service was characterised by low status, low wages and long drawn out repetitive work....service required of these women demanded an

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20. Dispatch: "Wanted as assistant or nurse to any lady proceeding to England" - 4.10.1877; "Wanted, nurse or attendant to lady on board ship, services in return for passage" - 18.2.1878; "A young person wishing to go back to England would take charge of children for her passage" - 30.8.1879; "Wanted by a Young Woman, a passage to England in exchange for services as a maidservant or nurse" - 7.6.1882.

attitude of deference, an acceptance of a fixed and lowly place in the social order - externalized by a servant's uniform and by the practice of disregarding the servant's first name and bestowing a more suitable one on them".<sup>21</sup>

Women in domestic service were not always victims as has sometimes been depicted. Unskilled women were able to earn their own money and many received free accommodation and food. East London domestic workers also made a public statement of solidarity when they threatened to strike during the small-pox scare:

"Coloured maid-servants have been holding open-air meetings at the back of their employers' premises to consider the question of a simultaneous exodus as soon as small-pox is declared to exist."<sup>22</sup>

The Masters and Servants Act also affected black domestic workers. Being absent without leave was the main complaint and there was usually a fine or 14 days in gaol. Mrs Carroll's servant and Martha, in the employ of Mrs Callaghan, were two such examples.<sup>23</sup>

It was in the domestic field that the most interaction between black and white women took place and that on a very personal level. The implications are wider than just the refashioning of gender relations in the field of paid employment as this was an area where elements of trust and co-operation between black and white women were introduced. By 1906 it was reported that there were 3233 females in the locations, chiefly employed in domestic service.<sup>24</sup> Although there is some

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21. Beddoe, Deirdre, Discovering Women's History, (London, Pandora Press, 1983), p.112.

22. Dispatch, 6.9.1882.

23. Frontier Standard, 7.1.1892 & 8.4.1897.

24. Mayor's Minute, Location Superintendent's Report, p. 79.

doubt as to the accuracy of these statistics, it does indicate that this was the most common avenue for black women entering waged work. Strobel argues that in South Africa it was in domestic service that there was an intersection of gender, race and class divisions. This relationship, often the only significant contact between the races, reinforced the ideology of racial superiority of the whites over the indigenous people.<sup>25</sup> In the East London situation, as black women replaced white servants in middle-class families, race and class certainly intersected, but the idea of racial superiority was one which was brought from Europe and did not need domestic service to introduce it. The important point was that it was through the personal contact between women in the home that an understanding of common female needs were based and it was through this kind of contact that the image of the black people as enemies was broken.

Interdependence and affection grew up between mistress and maid and is well illustrated in a letter written by a maid, Gertie, to her mistress, Lady Helen Crewe.

It begins "Dear Her Ladyship" and is informative about the home situation. A visit from 'old Annie', who came for food and a present, is described. She concluded:

"May I say Her Ladyship we all pass our hearty love to you, Master and Miss. I am your servant Gertie".<sup>26</sup>

While it is clear that there was a social distance between white women and their black female servants as there was in the European class society, many records portray good and sympathetic relationships between mistress and maid. Ellen Dell

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25. Strobel, Margaret, European Women and the Second British Empire, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, undated), p. 27.

26. East London Museum, The Crewe Papers, Letter dated 15.8.1934, 009.

(born 1848) had very happy relationships with her staff, never locked a door and was consulted about any personal problems experienced by her servants.<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Flemmer (born 1884), who did her own cooking, had a warm affectionate relationship with her maids and kept them for a very long time.<sup>28</sup> Augustine Medefindt (born 1869) was fluent in Xhosa and kept her maid, Mina, until her retirement and then continued corresponding with her and even her daughter after Mina's death.<sup>29</sup> Eva Peacock (born 1882), daughter of James Stewart of Lovedale, had Lovedale trained servants, Mary and Kate, who stayed with her for about 25 years.<sup>30</sup> Mabel D'Alessio (born 1874) taught her children to be polite and respectful towards their servants.<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Read (born 1904), who had Mary for 17 years, devoted her life to the welfare of black communities.<sup>32</sup>

The black women who were domestic workers also indicated that there were good relationships with their mistresses. Lizzie Bhuka (born 1908) told her daughter that her mistress was very kind.<sup>33</sup> Martha Coboti (born 1876) worked for only one family and "they were nice".<sup>34</sup> Mary Kazi (born 1887) thought her mistress "kind

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27. Oral interview with her granddaughter, 13.9.1994

28. Oral interview with her daughter, 7.3.1995

29. Oral Interview with her granddaughter, 7.10.1994

30. Oral Interview with her daughter, 9.6.1994.

31. Oral Interview with her daughter, 11.4.1995.

32. Oral Interview with her daughter, 25.4.1996.

33. Oral Interview with her daughter, 17.5.1995.

34. Oral Interview with her daughter 9.6.1995.

and fair"<sup>35</sup> and Esther Ngora (born 1902) enjoyed working.<sup>36</sup> Noeight Liwane (born in 1904 and still alive) said that her mistress was always very kind, but then she always did as she was told.<sup>37</sup> Welekazi Klaas and her mother worked as domestic servants and they had no complaints<sup>38</sup> (See Figure 24).

### **Dress-making**

The knowledge of sewing skills was a valuable asset for working class women who were trying to generate income. With the arrival of white women in East London, there was an immediate demand for dress-makers and milliners to create the fashionable wear of the time. From 1877 there were numerous advertisements by both married and unmarried women: Mrs Kearney offered to make dresses and mantles;<sup>39</sup> Miss Zeidler, hoping to assist her father's failing photographic studio, offered to make dresses as well as making braids of hair into chains and bracelets<sup>40</sup> and Mrs Thompson said that she could "execute fashionable styles at shortest notice".<sup>41</sup> The opening of the big department stores which sold ready-made clothing and employed their own seamstresses made life harder for the self-employed women working at home. One woman who managed to make the change

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35. Oral Interview with her granddaughter, 21.6.1995.

36. Oral Interview with her daughter, 7.6.1995.

37. Oral Interview with her, 14.8.1996.

38. Oral interview, 17.5.1995.

39. Dispatch, 29 11.1877.

40. Dispatch, 11.1.1879 and 6.9.1879.

41. Dispatch, 7.9.1881.



Figure 24

Welekazi Klaas at her 102nd birthday party given for her by  
the church in 1995  
Photograph in the East London Museum collection

successfully and advance to the middle class, was 'Madame Paviour, Costumier', who not only became the head dress-maker at Gibbert and Bryant, but also continued to work for her own account.<sup>42</sup> She was also financially astute as she managed to purchase valuable jewellery.<sup>43</sup>

The life of a dress-maker was not an easy one with long hours and poor pay, but for those who worked hard there were compensations. A Mrs Keen lived on the Quigney and walked every day to her Gately Street premises where she did her sewing, a distance of several kilometres. She was a widow who had to support her three daughters. Through her hard work she assisted her daughters to get a further training and so better themselves. Two became teachers and the other did a shorthand typing course and became a clerk at Dreyfus and Company. This is a good example of the changing attitudes towards working women and the opportunities for upward mobility of people in a colonial town. While Mrs Sargeant, wife of a wealthy merchant, did not regard her dress-maker as her social equal, her daughter was a good friend of one of Mrs Keen's daughters.<sup>44</sup>

### **Renting Accommodation**

This was an avenue for income for both black and white women who had access to premises and who needed extra income. White widows often chose to stay in

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42. East London Standard, 31.5.1899.

43. East London Museum History Collection; Silver bracelet, Gold brooch from Queen Victoria's Jubilee, gold-mounted cameo, gold hair ring and a silver crucifix.

44. Oral Interview with Noreen Friedman, born Sargeant, 30.3.1995.

their homes after the death of a husband and rented accommodation to support themselves. Many women ran boarding houses which were much in demand for single men and often young married white couples, before they could afford to rent or buy a house. The seaside situation also brought holiday-makers to East London who needed accommodation. From 1875 advertisements appeared continually in the newspaper for women running boarding houses.<sup>45</sup> By 1898 there were 27 offering accommodation.<sup>46</sup> Oral interviews uncovered many middle-class women who had economic problems and used their homes to raise money, but did it very quietly so as not to endanger their respectability. After her husband's business had gone bankrupt, Ellen Dickie (born 1862) took in what were termed "paying guests"<sup>47</sup> (See Figure 25). A young couple applied to stay there but, anxious to maintain her middle class status, she refused them as the husband's occupation was a fireman, saying that he would have dirty nails.<sup>48</sup> Margaret and Norah Gately also took in paying guests but never wanted it made public.<sup>49</sup> Other women were Elizabeth Horn (born 1853), Sarah Rive (born 1866) and Kathleen Walker (born 1898).<sup>50</sup>

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45. Dispatch: Mrs Ogilvie - 8.6.1875, Mrs Welsford - 11.12.1876, Mrs Broedelet - 3.4.1877, Mrs Wilson - 20.7.1878.

46. Kelsall's Directory, p. 53.

47. Oral Interview with her daughter, 14.6.1994

48. Personal comment, Mrs B. Charlton, daughter of the couple.

49. Oral Interview with niece and friend, 20.3.1995.

50. Oral interviews with their descendants; 28.3.1995, 1.3.1995 and 27.2.1995.



Figure 25

Ellen Dickie's large home in Southernwood which she turned into a guest house after the failure of her husband's business. This photograph taken in about 1912  
Photograph by courtesy Miss Sylvia Dickie

Black women in the locations who had access to premises also hired rooms out and found this a welcome source of income. This was a service to the community when many single men came into the town on a temporary basis to look for work. From 1893, a Domicile Tax counting extra boarders in each home, was levied in the locations for the Council to capitalise on this source of income, a measure which was not applied to white women.<sup>51</sup>

### **Washerwomen**

Laundry work was one of the less respectable occupations where women who were desperate could always earn money, especially where there was a preponderance of men over women, many of whom were unmarried. This was the situation at East London in the early days and many black women stepped in to take advantage of the situation. They faced competition, however, from white working class women who also found themselves needing money and who had the advantage of being able to advertise their services. One such was Mrs H. Smith who was prepared to take in laundry with the assistance of her "new mangle".<sup>52</sup> One story was told of Dorothy Stickells (born 1860), who was left a widow with four small children in 1895. She tried running a boarding house, doing dressmaking and selling haberdashery, but none were very successful. On a visit to the Rand she remarried

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51. Mayor's Minute, 1894, p.5.

52. Dispatch, 18.1.1876.

but the man turned out to be a scoundrel and "made off with her horse and capital" and she was reduced to taking in washing to make ends meet.<sup>53</sup>

By 1898 there were five laundries listed in the commercial directory, four run by women.<sup>54</sup> Competition led to difficulties for women to continue as by 1913 there were 13 laundries advertised with only one run by a woman. Three of these were owned by Indians and one by a Chinese.<sup>55</sup> This competition caused a protest movement among the black washerwomen and a deputation of several hundred met the Mayor. They pointed out that:

"there was great distress amongst the native and coloured women in the Locations caused by the fact that the natives had no wash houses in the Native Location to enable them to compete satisfactorily with Asiatics".<sup>56</sup>

This points to the image of the black women as always being victims as a false one. When roused enough they were able to take action and in this case they won their point and wash houses were erected. They still found it difficult to compete with the large commercial undertakings. For example the Buffalo Steam Laundry Ltd advertised an:

"up-to-date plant...all classes of material, cotton, wool, linen and silk washed and cleaned...lace goods carefully treated".<sup>57</sup>

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53. Notes on family history compiled by Mr Stickells and kindly made available to me.

54. Kelsall's General Directory, p. 56.

55. Redbook, 1913, p. 357.

56. Mayor's Minute, February, 1909, pp. 27-28.

57. Daily Dispatch Christmas Number, 1903, unpaginated.

Some white women, who were not well off enough to employ full-time servants, still employed washerwomen to do their laundry at home. In general the pay was poor and the work hard.

### **Beer Brewing**

It has been argued that beer-brewing was a visible symbol of the struggle of the white ruling class to establish control over the blacks and was a metaphor for the struggle of the black working class to have some economic independence.<sup>58</sup> This was particularly true for the black women as they were the beer-brewers. In a survey of beer-brewing in a black Johannesburg urban yard, Hellman found that beer-brewing played both a social and nutritious role in the life of the residents. Beer provided both refreshment and recreation and was an integral part of the community.<sup>59</sup> Anthropologists have recorded the great significance which beer-brewing and drinking played in African societies. It was not only an important foodstuff containing B vitamins, but also had ritual and religious importance. The beer drink was associated with sociability and communal harmony and there was a social obligation to brew and provide beer for one's neighbours. In its purer form had a low percentage of alcohol, but when mixed with brandy, it was more intoxicating.<sup>60</sup>

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58. Friedman, Michelle, "'Looking for green pastures': the urbanisation of African women in Pretoria in the early twentieth century", Paper presented at the Women's History Workshop, held in Grahamstown 6 July 1995.
59. Hellmann, Ellen, "The Importance of Beer-brewing in an Urban Native Yard", in Bantu Studies, Vol. VIII, No. 1, March 1934, p. 39.
60. McAllister, P.A., "Indigenous Beer in Southern Africa Functions and Fluctuations", African Studies, Vol 52,, No. 1, 1993, pp. 72-79.

The black urban community in East London introduced beer-brewing in the locations at an early date. In spite of protests from a white resident in East London, who seemed to equate drinking beer with places where "wickedness runs riot and filth abounds" and who somewhat exaggeratedly claimed that one woman had conveyed 60 bottles of beer to the location,<sup>61</sup> beer-brewing was not a major social problem. In each of the years 1893 and 1897 there were only four convictions.<sup>62</sup> The actions taken against beer-brewing only really gathered momentum in the twentieth century as the white councillors sought to extend their controls. The cases dealt with indicate how important beer-brewing had become in social life. In 1899 and 1900 there were 50 and 107 cases handled.<sup>63</sup> In 1903 there were 35 convictions, and in 1904, 110 were dealt with.<sup>64</sup> The numbers then climbed rapidly. In 1906 there were 161 and then varying between 262 and 269 until 1910, dropping again to 140 in 1911.<sup>65</sup> The records for 1913 show that of the 29 reported, most of the arrests were on made on one day at a time, suggesting sporadic police raids.<sup>66</sup>

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61. Dispatch, 11.2.1882.

62. Mayor's Minute, "East London Municipal Native Locations; Return of contravention and convictions for the twelve months ending February 29, 1896", p. 40.

63. Mayors' Minutes, "Return of Crimes and Offenses in the Resident Magistrate's Court:

1] during the year ending 31st December, 1899", p. 64.

2] during the year ending 31st December, 1900". p. 67.

64. CA CCP 1/2/1/130, A10-'05, Native Affairs Report.

65. Mayors' Minutes, 1906 to 1911, pp. 76, 76, 77, 111, 102, 140 respectively.

66. CA 1/ELN 1//2/1/41 and 1/2/1/42, Magistrate of East London, Criminal Record Books, eight on 7.1.1913; three on 9.5.1913 and two on 17.12.1913.

Beer-brewing undoubtedly was much more common in the black community than the criminal records show. Sporadic raids indicate pressure being brought to bear on the police every so often. The relatively light sentences imposed also indicate that the law enforcers, as opposed to the law-makers, were not convinced that this was an area of crime which was a threat to society. The situation was comparable to Bloemfontein as there were also relatively few male migrant workers compared to the Rand. There beer-brewing was not regarded as a major problem and there was a limited amount of home brewing allowed.<sup>67</sup> The hidden agendas were to exercise control over the lives of black people and to discourage women from becoming independent.

Women continued to make beer in spite of the many problems which they faced, the cases indicating large numbers. In the oral records, two women were involved with beer-making. Gertie Qugwala (born 1889) not only brewed beer, but also belonged to an association of women who did so.<sup>68</sup> Noeight Liwane (born 1904) made beer for extra money.<sup>69</sup> Women who brewed beer were respectable women and were not of the class who were found drunk in the streets.<sup>70</sup>

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67. Wells, Julia, We Have Done With Pleading, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991), p. 13.

68. Oral Interviews with her granddaughter, 14.3.1990 and 23.5.1994

69. Oral interview with Mrs Liwane, 14.8.1996.

70. An examination of the criminal records was made and there were no records found of the women who had beer-brewing offences being arrested for drunkenness.

White women were not involved in beer-brewing but were certainly involved in selling liquor, not always legally. Women who ran hotels were granted licences to sell liquor, such as Mary Ann Ries of the Masonic Hotel, Sarah Adkins of the Fort Jackson Hotel and Eliza Brill of the Orange Grove Hotel.<sup>71</sup> Edith Barichievy of the Royal Hotel was fined for selling unlicensed liquor in 1893.<sup>72</sup>

### **Prostitution**

As has been pointed out in the chapter on criminal behaviour, the fact that many women earned money by prostitution has generated much opprobrium and is often ignored when women's occupations come into question. A woman who went into prostitution was essentially a rebel, but she generated so much attention and so much repression because she defied social norms. The disease which she was said to carry was a metaphor for the real danger which she posed as a threat to the patriarchal and established order and therefore she had to be watched and controlled.<sup>73</sup>

Smart points out that in industrialised societies women were often forced to become prostitutes in order to survive. This was especially true when during the process of urbanisation, family ties were broken and many girls from rural backgrounds found themselves destitute in the towns. In addition there were very few opportunities for

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71. East London Standard, 9 March 1894.

72. CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/18, Criminal Record Book, 1.8.1893.

73. Norberg, Kathryn, "Prostitutes", in Davis, Natalie Zemon, & Farge, Arlette, Eds, A History of Women in the West, (London, Harvard University Press < 1993), p. 474.

women to find a job where they could earn a living wage and be economically independent of men.<sup>74</sup> A social analysis of prostitutes in Europe identified them as being from the working class who were often migrants from the local countryside and who had become separated from their families. Many working women were able to supplement their often insufficient wages with money earned from trading their sexual favours. Women in bordellos often found that they had a better quality of life and earned far more than in the alternative occupations of domestic service or sewing.<sup>75</sup>

The situation of the East London prostitutes was similar to the above description. They were from all racial groups and were found in some numbers. As studies from elsewhere suggest, the black Xhosa-speakers were undoubtedly women who had come to the town from the rural districts, who had broken from their families for some reason, and who had to find some means to support themselves. The women defined as 'Hottentot' were probably of mixed descent and are likely to have been without a fixed place in traditional or urban society and who did not have a family support system from which to function. The white women could either have been

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74. Smart, Carol, Women, Crime and Criminology, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p.87.

75. Walkowitz, Judith R., "Dangerous Sexualities", in Fraise, Genevieve, and Perrot, Michelle, A History of Women in the West, Vol.IV: Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War, (London, Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 372 - 373.

women who set themselves up at seaports as has been suggested happened in Cape Town, or who had no means of support in the town.<sup>76</sup>

While the earnings may have been better than those of dress-makers or washerwomen (sometimes additional to), it was a hard life for these women who had lost their place in the social structure and, as theirs was declared to be a criminal activity, they had no support from the law enforcement officers. As Walkowitz points out, physical violence was a common feature of sexual relationships among the working class and these women were subject to this.<sup>77</sup> It was true for both black and white women and was well demonstrated in two cases. A European woman, Johanna Stolze, sometimes known as Mrs Walters, was found dead in her cottage at Panmure. The constable said that he had often seen "strangers (soldiers and sailors) at her house". She had called him on the night she had been murdered as she said she had seen a man on her bed. He noticed that:

"the bridge of her nose had a little abrasure from which blood appeared to be flowing ... I searched but found nothing ... I told Mrs Stolze that she had so often called me when there was no necessity and if she did so again I would apprehend her ... I know myself that the woman was of intemperate habits and I was not surprised to hear of her death."<sup>78</sup>

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76. Hallet, R., "Policemen, Pimps and Prostitutes - Public Morality and Police Corruption in Cape Town: 1902-1904", in Saunders, C., (Ed.), Studies in the History of Cape Town, Vol.11, 1980, p.7.
77. Walkowitz, J., "Dangerous Sexualities" in Fraise and Perrot, A History of Women in the West, p. 374.
78. Dispatch, 11.2.1873.

It was supposed that she had died from drink, but later it was found that she had been strangled.<sup>79</sup> A recently released convict, known as Jantje, was arrested, found guilty on good circumstantial evidence and condemned to death.<sup>80</sup> The constable's uncaring serve-her-right attitude was undoubtedly a common perception, but the fact that a black man had murdered a white woman gave the case some prominence. In the other case:

" a black woman of easy virtue found dead in her bed at Panmure. The deceased and several navvies slept in her room when death occurred. Enquiry found that there was no evidence that the unfortunate creature had died from other than natural causes".<sup>81</sup>

The obviously biased nature of the enquiry and callous tone of the report indicate the total lack of concern for the welfare of women once they had crossed the social boundaries of 'acceptable behaviour'. In spite of the difficulties and threats which faced prostitutes, this was a means of attaining some form of economic survival.

### **Subsistence on the Land**

There were some women who lived in the peri-urban area who tried to make a living from their small-holdings. The life and circumstances of one woman, Edith Pearce (born 1870), illustrate the very real problems which faced women struggling to make a living outside the rewards of waged work. She had an education to standard six and was the only unmarried daughter of Eli and Eliese Pearce, in a family of ten. Eli Pearce was a typical example of a poor working class man who managed to

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79. Dispatch, 11.2.1873.

80. Dispatch, 11.3.1873.

81. Dispatch, 27.7.1875,

make a better life for himself in East London where he purchased some property which lay within the Cambridge Municipality. He turned the small-holding into a productive market garden and opened a trading store to deal with the passing traffic. When he died in 1915 he had amassed a comfortable living and was able to leave each of his sons a considerable amount of money, but left the property to his daughters. As Edith was the only unmarried one, the house became her property. The accepted rules of inheritance at the time favoured the eldest son inheriting property and the responsibility for supporting any unmarried sisters.<sup>82</sup> Pearce's bequest to his daughter was therefore contrary to the accepted norm and caused great resentment among the men in the family. Edith Pearce was attacked throughout her life by her brothers on this issue. The shop was closed after her father's death and she had to make a living off the property. She had no house servant and only one black man (who lived on the property with his wife) to assist in the garden. By the 1920s her main income was selling cut flowers on the market. She was skilled in making wedding bouquets and funeral wreaths which brought in a small income, but her standard of living declined (See Figure 26). According to her nephew, the family all "looked down on her but still took advantage of her". They took it for granted that they and their families could stay at her cottage whenever they wanted to, but made no contribution to their expenses. He said that they mocked her food, but in retrospect, he realises that she was trying to eke out her meagre resources.<sup>83</sup> She was not without spirit and

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82. Oral Interview with Colleen Arnold whose two unmarried aunts had to be supported by her father, the eldest son, 13.9.1994

83. Oral Interview with Edith Pearce's nephew, 24.2.1995.



Figure 26

Plain plaid dress, much mended and altered. Worn by Edith Pearce probably in the 1890s.  
Dress in the East London Museum collection

became notorious for her fights with the Cambridge Town Council. Using a knobkerrie for a walking stick, she would walk alone to Council meetings, a distance of some three kilometres, and which were held in the evenings, to stand up for her rights as a property owner.<sup>84</sup>

Another woman, Johanna Malone (born 1875), worked as a mattress-maker in East London until her marriage. Unfortunately her husband drank and she farmed their small-holding virtually alone, selling her products on the East London market. Apart from fruit, vegetables, poultry and milk, she also sold oysters and prawns which she collected herself. She was said to be a real character, as strong as a man with a booming voice and always dressed very garishly.<sup>85</sup> She may have been working class and not exactly respectable, but by her hard work she was certainly respected.

The problems and means of making money in the informal sector by working class women was shared by black and white women who had no opportunities for getting any education. Home skills, such as domestic work, sewing and washing, could be undertaken to earn money. Renting out accommodation was a means of utilizing resources to make money and was the means that some white middle class women could stave off penury, while retaining respectability. Urban townships were the centres where economic opportunities for independence for black women could be

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84. Shingler, Women of East London, pp. 133-134.

85. Shingler, pp. 102.

found. There little control could be exercised by traditional male figures of authority and the situation was fundamental to the creation of a society where black women broke the ties of tradition. They refashioned gender relations to suit themselves within a limited framework.

**CHAPTER 11****CONCLUSION**

In this gender-based study the concept of change over time has been the focus, with particular reference to the forces which resist change and those which promote it. Change in the structure of gender relations has been in terms of understanding the processes by which there was an improvement in the recognition of the rights of women and their role in society. In the town of East London there were many changes which took place between the years 1870 and 1914, some impelled by external and impersonal forces and others by activists. During this period there was economic and the concurrent population growth, there were changes in the gender ratio and changes in ideological attitudes. The study is set in a period when women in America, Britain, Europe, Australia and New Zealand were getting actively involved in issues to improve the situation for women and the growth of this movement in East London is of significance. An important feature of this thesis, possibly the first of its kind, has not been just the use of oral records, but of some which go back three generations. In a field which is noted for its lack of written records, this has been a very useful source of information and given insight into the lives of individuals.

This was essentially a very conservative society with the forces which resisted change being many and powerful, affecting both black and white women. A pattern of discrimination was so deeply ingrained that many did not even question it. There were many external factors which were beyond the control of the women themselves but which were ranged against challenges to prevailing attitudes on sex

roles. In spite of these, change did take place in the society, both in relation to gender issues as well as ideological perceptions in the wider social context. There were some changes which were external and impersonal and there were those which were deliberately initiated and fought for, usually by a small group of women.

In 1870 East London was inhabited by a relatively small group of mostly working class whites who were trying to make a living. An even smaller group of black people had entered the town from the neighbouring rural areas in search of paid employment. None of the few women in black or white societies were concerned with women's issues as they struggled for economic survival. The unbalanced gender-ratio in which males were predominant meant that there were few social controls. It was a rough society with virtually no community action. Public drunkenness and physical violence in the street, involving blacks and whites, were common sights. By 1914, when the gender-ratio was nearly balanced, the society was based on settled hard-working families with vested interests in preserving social order. A relatively small well-off middle class had been established in the white group and it was from this group that women who worked for change was drawn.

The underlying forces which were resistant to change in the status of women were to be found in the uncertain economic factors, the many divisive influences and the ingrained social and legal structures in the society. Environmental factors played an important part in setting the narrow parameters within which people could function. The hinterland was not a rich one, with few natural resources and farming was a difficult and uncertain occupation. The port had been established for military

purposes and the military control inhibited growth for many years. It was situated far from the main administrative centre of Cape Town and funds for the development of the port were never freely available. There was no easy living to be made in what was described as a 'boom and burst economy', and, while some merchants were successful, there were many who were not. In addition, there was the threat of disasters, such as floods, winds and droughts, which affected the livelihood of the inhabitants. The overall effect was one which did not breed confidence and it engendered a very conservative approach among women in their struggle for economic stability and status.

There were many divisive conditions in the town which meant that co-operation between women was often difficult. The social structures were influenced by the ex-military men who made East London their home, and perpetuated both class and race divisions. This was an ethnically and culturally divided society with municipal controls separating black and white into separate residential areas. Cultural and racial differences were entrenched by the physical separation of living spaces and this added to the deep cleavage between black and white. As East London was situated near to the scene of the frontier wars, with inhabitants participating in black/white hostilities, in the early years each group perceived that the 'other' was an enemy, to be feared and kept apart. Divisions in white society were exacerbated by the effect of the South African War at the turn of the century which engendered antagonism between the British and German inhabitants of the town and the white women lived in very separate communities.

The patriarchal system was another important inhibitor of change. Male control was experienced by both black and white women in the legal field as well as in society. There was little need for women to press for change as long as the patriarch performed his function of being a good provider and a caring supporter of the family. Women did not need or want to challenge their husbands' authority when he was doing his best for them. Problems arose when this situation did not function well. The economic resources were in the hands of the males which placed women in a very vulnerable position. In difficult home circumstances, without any financial means and particularly if there were children involved, independence was a near impossibility. Patriarchal controls were reinforced by education during the nineteenth century and in general, higher education was not thought necessary for women.

In traditional black society, there were also very powerful patriarchal controls in the rural areas and in the towns. There were many women who came to join their husbands and who worked for their economic survival within the familiar framework. Those women who had to, or chose to, go it alone faced social rejection and criticism if they did not conform with the prevailing ideology.

The search for status allowed little latitude for innovation as upwardly mobile white women clung onto the established values. The concept of class was deeply entrenched in white society with wealth determining position and influence. East London was a relatively new urban area where entrepreneurs were striving to establish themselves economically and, once they had attained a degree of

prosperity, they worked to gain social status. Women who participated in this process shared the desire for improved financial and social circumstances. Of those women who had achieved some wealth and status, upward mobility became very important as they drew away from the poorer working classes. The fact that many women had come from the poorer classes themselves, made them all the more anxious to preserve this distance and attain status and gentility.

This divisive factor of class and wealth affected both black and white societies. In the black community, 'School' people who had educational opportunities and who were prepared to adapt to European ideas and lifestyles, were also divided socially from those who adhered to traditions and had no education. These divisions adversely affected progressive movements towards change in the role of women on a co-operative basis.

A strong religious influence was pervasive in the lives of white women and the converted black women, with church teachings reinforcing patriarchal controls. Women were not allowed to hold positions of authority in the church and all were subject to the authority of the minister. The teachings were heavily directed towards keeping women in their accepted place in the home, rearing children and being subordinate to men, concepts which did not encourage women to challenge accepted standards.

Women of all races in the lower echelons of society, the non-respectable women, had a hard life and conditions changed little for them over the period. Where there

was the lack of family support structures and extreme poverty, women had little self respect and public violence and drunkenness remained problems. Anti-social activities, such as theft, were mostly born of poverty. Prostitution was an institution which was seen to be a 'necessary evil' and little was done to abolish it or change the conditions where unskilled women could earn a living in another way. Efforts were made to control prostitution, yet make it available for males should they want it. The Contagious Diseases Acts were not enacted to outlaw prostitution but to regulate it. It was an attempt to clear the women of venereal disease so that men need not be infected. By 1914, little had changed. Rigid social controls among the middle class kept crime to the minimum. A murder case which involved a white middle class woman demonstrated clearly the dangers of transgressing social standards. There was one area where some change was inaugurated and that was in the care of unwanted or orphaned children. It was appreciated that there were many such children and middle class women began a Child Life Protection Society to care for them.

In spite of the many obstacles, foundations for change in society with an improvement in women's economic and social status were laid during this period. The sizes of families were reduced, enabling women to have more leisure and resources for themselves. One of the sources of change in women's lives, although never undertaken as a protest movement, was women's participation in sport. The pleasant climate was conducive to outdoor activities and East London women became active in sport, mainly swimming, tennis and hockey, at an early date. This formed part of the process of change as the stereotypes of women as physically

weak and unhealthy was palpably demonstrated to be false. The educational system on offer for white girls in East London was a good one and by 1914 most girls reached a high school level. Some took advantage of the educational opportunities and were able to create an independent and respectable careers, which was of particular advantage for single women. There is evidence that black women did regard education as important but high schools were not available in East London. Overall, educational standards improved over the years and it is clear that the women who were involved in working for change in East London, were all well educated.

An important causal factor for change can be found when women become dissatisfied with the situation in which they found themselves and took active steps to change their lifestyles. These were not done as 'protest movements' but the result was a catalyst for ideological change. The move to the town by black women was just such a step. The overriding motivation was the need or desire to earn money for themselves and in doing so they made radical changes in the traditionally organised societies. There seems little doubt that, while there were many factors involved, the evidence points to black women coming to the town as a deliberate step, endeavouring to escape the rigid controls of their men and trying to become economically independent. They took responsibility for their own lives in ways which were impossible in traditional rural society. As most were unskilled they had to utilise the few means at their disposal, such as domestic work, renting accommodation and beer-brewing as well as prostitution. Their lives were hard and the rewards were not high, but it was a choice which they made and there were

few voices which said that they would prefer to return to the old ways.

The dynamic impetus for change came through groups of women who actively worked to improve the condition of women. It was through the forming of associations where women began meeting together supporting a variety of causes, that change began to be initiated. East London boasted no bright stars or publicly acknowledged leaders to blaze a new trail and the associations were all branches of national organisations, but the East London women formed the ground-swell of support, without which no movement can succeed. As educated middle class white women gathered together, they became aware of the many disadvantages under which women functioned. In forming their own associations, separate from men, women were able to set their own programmes and standards and, in doing so, they gained confidence in themselves and respect in society. The Ladies Benevolent Society proved their competence against long-held ideas of female inferiority. The Seaman's Institute had a completely separate Ladies Committee who undertook all the work most efficiently. The Loyal Women's Guild expanded their work from only caring for soldiers' graves to running an old age home and gained considerable political influence. The East London branch of the Women's Industrial Union worked to establish a market place for home products to enable women to earn their own money. The Young Women's Christian Association raised funds and made accommodation available for young respectable women coming into the town. The National Home Reading Union encouraged women to expand their minds and break the image of intellectual inferiority. The Women's Enfranchisement League worked for the suffragist cause, affirming that women should have the same political rights

as men.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was a major force for change in East London. In taking up the cause of temperance, white women members found common cause with black women and they crossed racial barriers to try to work together against a common problem. Black and white women then met each other as individuals and this contact was important in creating a reservoir of goodwill between women. The white women of the WCTU went further and took up the cudgels on behalf of black prostitutes in their opposition to the Contagious Diseases Act. These were actions of real 'sisterhood', where they could identify with the problems of women not of their own race and class, against the double standard of the male controllers. The women of the WCTU were among the earliest to realise that women needed to vote and to take up the franchise issue.

Other philanthropic work which crossed racial barriers and initiated change in racial perceptions was also undertaken over particularly female concerns. The Child Life Protection Society concerned themselves with the welfare of both black and white children and the African Mothers' Group endeavoured to assist black mothers with their family problems. A cross-racial women's group was also formed with the Indian women in the 1920s, which is outside the period of study, but the ideology which informed it was developed at an earlier date. The societies run by women not only worked to improve social conditions and crossed racial barriers, but also, more subtly, changed the public perception of the abilities and role of women. They proved their capabilities and gained in confidence in themselves.

The work situation was another avenue for change and here there was an important shift in attitudes from 1870 to 1914. It became appreciated that women could not only earn money, but also control it and take responsibility for their own lives. Control of money gave women leverage in society and this was the start of the redefinition of their social roles. In the earlier period, working women were usually of the working class, with only a few receiving a training as teachers. In the later period, however, of the white middle class women born after 1900, only a very few did not receive any post school training and it became perfectly respectable for middle class women to work and earn money. They entered the Civil Service, albeit at a low level, they went into the teaching and nursing professions in some numbers, they worked as shop assistants and undertook clerical work, all without loss to their middle class respectability. This was a very marked change in attitude, although a woman was still expected to, and did, give up work on marriage. What is significant here is that the changes in the work patterns paved the way for subsequent changes in attitudes.

Single women were among those who early appreciated how male controls worked against them if they did not enter the marriage stakes. Particularly in the early period, they found themselves marginalised in society and penalised in the workplace, and in the East London situation, they were among the most outspoken protagonists of the women's movement. By 1914, however, single middle class women received a tertiary training and conducted careers independent of men and with the respect of their contemporaries.

Conditions changed little for working class women of all races, with low pay and long working hours. White and black women entered domestic service in East London under the same conditions with the same lack of protection through the law. By the turn of the century, there were fewer white servants, with more black women entering domestic service. Poor women struggled to make a living by dress-making, taking in washing, brewing beer and prostitution. Where residential space was available, they rented accommodation. In the peri-urban situation, women sold the produce of their land on the East London market. It was a hard life but one where many women took the responsibility for their own lives and worked independently of men.

Gender has been one of the foundations on which social identity has been constructed and the delineation of the masculine role as the breadwinner and the female role as the homemaker have produced powerful and enduring cultural stereotypes. Changes in these roles affect many aspects of social history such as the home, education and as well as the economy. In the East London situation women were important in changing social structures, in influencing attitudes to the economic productivity of women, and thus the economy, and in breaking down many forms of male domination. In their inter-racial activities and work for the common causes which affect women, they built up an underlying reservoir of goodwill. This study adds to the sum of knowledge of the role which women have played in society and how gender relations changed over time.

In dealing with eighteenth century Cape society, Professor Giliomee states that the

neglect of the influence of women in shaping racial attitudes is a major omission in South African historiography. He suggests that women exerted their influence to prevent inter-racial marriage and so contributed to the rigid racial divisions which developed in South African society.<sup>1</sup> The conclusions which I draw from this study are that the subject is a very complex one. The middle class white women were very concerned with their social status within the class structures and their children were discouraged from marrying 'beneath' them. The relatively large number of single women interviewed indicated that parents had been very strict about who were potential marriage partners. The fact that the black people usually entered the urban society at the working class level, meant that they would be considered in those terms. In addition the physical separation of the races within the urban environment and the differences of language and culture, made inter-marriage highly unlikely. Several informants insisted that their predecessors had brought their racial prejudices with them from overseas and it was contact with black women which changed their attitudes.

In a recent article, Professor Webb poses the question of what has allowed this country to survive in recent years without racial conflict. He suggests that it must lie in the past where there was co-operation and exchange of ideas, culture across the colour-line where goodwill was created.<sup>2</sup> Based on the results of this study, I suggest that women have played a major role in developing areas of common

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1. Giliomee, H., "Eighteenth Century Cape Society and its Historiography: Culture, Race, and Class", *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1984.
  2. Webb, Arthur, "The 1820 Settlers and the Land: Their Farming Contribution", *Toposcope*, Vol. XXVIII, 1997, p.7.

concern between women of different races, in making contact with black women as individuals and in creating a fund of goodwill on both sides of the colour line.

**SOURCES****I MANUSCRIPT SOURCES;****A OFFICIAL RECORDS****i) CAPE ARCHIVES, CAPE TOWN - CA**

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A1/1/1 to A2/2/1 July 1880 to August 1883

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1/1/1/1 to 1/1/1/116 1872 to 1912

Circuit Court Cases:

1/1/2/2/1 1878 - 1880

1/1/2/2/2 1881

1/1/2/2/3 1882

1/1/2/2/4 1883

1/1/2/2/5 1884

1/1/2/2/7 1885

1/1/2/2/8 1886 - 1888

1/1/2/2/9 1889 - 1891

1/1/2/2/10 1892

1/1/2/2/22 1900

1/1/2/2/23 1901 - 1902

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2/2/27 to 1916:

Criminal Record Books:

1/2/1/4 December 1872 - December 1874

1/2/1/8 April 1882 - Sept. 1883

1/2/1/9 September 1883 - September 1884

1/2/1/10 September 1892 - June 1893

1/2/1/18 June 1893 - March 1894

1/2/1/28 July 1902 - March 1903

1/2/1/29 March - December 1903

1/2/1/41 January 1913 - September 1913

1/2/1/42 September 1913 - March 1914

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1/40

## CA 3/ELN - RECORDS OF THE EAST LONDON MUNICIPALITY

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- E1/1 Minutes, Local Immigration Board: March 1877 - September 1879
- E5/2 Nominal List of Immigrants, 1877
- 14/3/1 Chinese Persons: January 1904 - September 1928
- 11/1/1 Protection for Children: January 1909 - January 1923

## CA IEL - ARCHIVES OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF IMMIGRATION

- 1/1 East London; 1879-1884
- 1/1 Letters Received: Oct. 1879 - Dec. 1881
- 1/2 January 1882 - November 1884
- 2/1 Letters Dispatched: October 1879 - June 1883

## CA ACC - ACCESSIONS

- A1535 South African Women's Industrial Union
- A1696 Women's Christian Temperance Union
- 2/1 1891 - July 1906
- 2/2 November 1911 - September 1915
- 2/3 December 1915 - September 1918

## CA HFE - PARLIAMENT COMMITTEES, HOSPITALS, SCHOOL BOARDS

## East London Hospital Board:

- 1/1/1 Board Minutes: 1902-1913
- 1/2/1 House Committee Minutes: 1895-1901
- 1/2/2 House Committee Minutes: 1901-1904
- 1/2/3 House Committee Minutes: 1905-1913

## CA CCP - CAPE COLONIAL PUBLICATIONS

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- 4/17/3 G1-'94 Report on the Scab Disease: 1892-1894

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- 1/2/1/63 G69-'84 Second Report of the Frere Hospital: 1883
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- 1/2/1/79 G49-'91 Report of the District Surgeon
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- 1/2/1/115 G41-1901 Report on Hospitals and Asylums
- 1/2/1/126 G35-1904 and G32-1906 Reports of the District Surgeons
- 1/2/1/138 G39-1906 Report of the District Surgeon

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- 1/2/1/55 G12-'83 Preliminary Report on the state of Education in the Cape Colony by Donald Ross, Inspector-General of Schools and Colleges
- 1/2/1/130 G97-'04 Education Act No.13 of 1865 and Schools registered thereunder and annexures for 1905
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1/2/1/15	1865 A3 Census Population, Partial Return A46 Census Population, 2nd Return A68 Census Population, Final Return
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UG32-'11	Census of the Cape Colony: 1911
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**iii) CORY LIBRARY - CL**

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W F Lance & Co., Prop. from Jan 1879 to Dec 1879

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## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

### WHITE WOMEN

Born pre 1910 in respect of **themselves**:

- 1 COLLEEN ARNOLD 1907 -  
Lived in East London all her life. [13.9.1994]
- 2 URSULA BORDER (b VENABLES) 1904 -  
Born in East London. Lived near until 1918. [30.5.1994]
- 3 HELEN COTTERRELL (b ELDER) 1906 -  
Lived in East London until 1930. [12.5.1994]
- 4 MARJORIE COURTENAY LATIMER 1907 -  
Birth and early childhood in East London. [6.6.1995]
- 5 SYLVIA DICKIE 1904 -  
Lived in East London all her life. [28.2.1997]
- 6 DOROTHY PEACOCK 1908 -  
Lived in East London all her life. [9.6.1994]
- 7 KATHLEEN PENDRIGH (b PRIOR) 1911 -  
Lived in East London all her life. [22.6.1995]
- 8 MARJORIE SHINGLER 1906 -  
Birth and childhood in East London until 1932. [15.3.1995]
- 9 BLANCHE LILIAS WILD 1907 -  
Lived in East London all her life. [22.6.1995]

In respect of **mothers**:

- 1 Colleen Arnold  
MIGNONETTE SYLVIA ARNOLD (b DELL) 1883-1969  
Lived in East London from 1903 until her death. [13.9.1994]
- 2 Rene Barber (her mother-in law)  
JAMESINA (JIM) BARBER (b HECTOR) 1870-1962  
Came to East London aged 7 with the Scottish Settlers in 1877 and lived near Cintsa until the late 1880's.  
Lived in Cambridge from about 1897. [28.7.1994]
- 3 Laura Young & Dora Smith (both b. Batten)

HELENA HENRIETTA BATTEN (b BOKELMANN) c1887-1921  
Lived in East London all her life. [23.11.1994]

4 Douglas Bertill  
JANE CHRISTINA ROSS BERTILL (b KINDNESS) 1894-1969  
Lived in East London all her life. [12.7.1995]

5 Hugh Clark  
MARGARET CLARK (b HECTOR) 1880-1973  
Lived in East London from c. 1900. [11.8.1994]

6 Marjorie Courtenay Latimer  
WILLIE COURTENAY LATIMER (b RAITT) 1879-1957  
Lived in East London 1905-1907, 1930 until death. [6.6.1995]

7 Sheila Bendall (b. Crabb)  
AMELIA CRABB (b. KING) 1900-1982  
Lived in East London from 1905-1923. Returned 1928. [28.3.1995]

8 Sylvia Dickie  
ELLEN JANE (NELLIE) DICKIE (b BRADLEY) 1862-1937  
Came to East London after her marriage in 1894  
and remained all her life. [14.6.1994]

9 Helen Cotterrell (b Elder)  
HELEN HUME ELDER (b CHAMBERS) 1866-1957  
Came to East London after her marriage in 1898. [12.5.1994]

10 Juneta Nel (b Faix)  
MATILDA FAIX (b PIEL) 1890-1962  
Lived in Brakfontein, near East London, all her life. [27.7.1994]

11 Patricia Flemmer  
KATHLEEN FLEMMER (b NOLAN-NEYLAN) 1884-1948  
Lived in East London from 1903 until her death. [7.3.1995]

12 John Forbes  
MARY KERR FORBES (b. GEDDIE) 1890-1970  
Lived in East London all her life. [20.6.1995]

13 Olive Sparg (b Green)  
EDITH GREEN (b KIRCHOFF) 1880-1949  
Lived at Lilyfontein, near East London, all her life. [28.7.1994]

14 Ellen Hill (b Green)  
SOPHIA CHRISTINA GREEN (b PACHONIK) 1901-1982  
Lived at Lilyfontein, Gonubie and Bulugha,  
all near East London, all her life. [9.8.1994]

- 15 Joan Dreyer (b. Gately)  
 CHARLOTTE HILDERGARDE 'DOON' GATELY (b. VON ROSEN)  
 1884-1948  
 Lived in East London for short periods from 1914. [20.3.1995]
- 16 Erica Wardle (b Hart)  
 ERICA MARY HART (b MCKAY) 1869-1956  
 Lived in East London until her marriage in 1895. [12.8.1994]
- 17 Margaret Murray (b Hector)  
 MINA AGNES HECTOR (b BROWN) 1883-1974  
 Lived in East London from 1902 until her death. [11.8.1994]
- 18 Christina Maclauglan (b Mackenzie)  
 WILHELMINA MACKENZIE (b PLOETZ) 1872-1962  
 Came to Gonubie, near East London, in 1895  
 on her marriage and lived there all her life. [21.7.1994]
- 19 Valda Munro (b Medefindt)  
 KARLA HERTHA MEDEFINDT (b HANSEN) 1894-1970  
 Lived in East London intermittently,  
 then from 1920 until her death. [7.10.1994]
- 20 Neville 'Noggs' Newman  
 CLARISSA NEWMAN (b TUCKER) 1886-1977  
 Lived intermittently and spending holidays in East  
 London and living there 1899-1901, during the South  
 African War. Married in East London in 1911,  
 then moved there permanently in 1913. [15.6.1994]
- 21 Dorothy Peacock  
 EVANGELINE MALAN PEACOCK (b STEWART) 1882-1950  
 Came to East London in 1906 and remained all her life. [9.6.1994]
- 22 Frank Pearce  
 HELENE FRIEDERICKE PEARCE (b GOTZE) 1888-1948  
 Lived at Nahoon as a child (1888-1912), then in the  
 Transkei and in East London 1923-1927. [24.2.1995]
- 23 Kathleen Pendrigh (b Prior)  
 MARY PRIOR (b McBEATH) 1872-1954  
 Lived in East London from 1877, came with  
 the Scottish Settlers. [22.6.1995]
- 24 Dorothea Vaughan (b Rowley)  
 MABEL DOROTHEA ROWLEY (b D"ALESSIO) 1874-1935  
 Lived in East London from 1914 to her death. [11.4.1995]

- 26 Noreen Friedman (b Sargent)  
JESSIE MABEL SARGENT (b RIVE) 1886-1933  
Lived in East London from 1903 until her death. [30.3.1995]
- 27 Marjorie Shingler  
CLARA SHINGLER (b CUMBERLAND) 1865-1952  
Lived in East London from 1900 until her death. [13.3.1995]
- 28 Winifred Vaughan (b Smith)  
JANE "JEAN" SMITH (b STEVENSON) 1885-1976  
Lived in East London from 1903. [11.4.1995]
- 29 Olive Sparg (mother-in-law)  
WILHELMINA SPARG (b SCHULTZ) 1869-1903  
Lived at Brakfontein and Mooiplaats, near East London,  
all her life. [28.7.1994]
- 30 Kathleen Broli (b Stewart)  
HELENA JANE STEWART (b TONKIN) 1881-1966  
Came to East London briefly in 1906, to live in 1914. [2.6.1995]
- 31 Gillian Mason (b. Stewart)  
DOROTHY AVORY STEWART (b. READ) 1904-1978  
Born in East London and lived there until about 1912. [25.4.1996]
- 32 Lesley Stickells, Esme Stickells  
and Hilary Holder (b. Stickells)  
VIOLET STICKELLS (b. KNOBEL) 1890-1973  
Lived in East London all her life. [5.6.1994]
- 33 Mary Bassett (b Thompson)  
AGNES ALICE THOMPSON (b MCGRATH) 1886-1942  
Lived in East London from birth until marriage 1914. [20.3.1995]
- 34 Keith Vaughan  
MARY LAURA VAUGHAN (b ATTREE) 1880-1960  
Lived in East London from about 1903. [11.4.1995]
- 35 Ursula Border (b Venables)  
MARY ANN SHONE/VENABLES (b KUHL) c1880-c1940  
Lived near East London from about 1900-1918. [30.5.1994]
- 36 John Walker  
KATHLEEN GRACE WALKER (b NOWELL) 1898-1968  
Lived in East London all her life. [27.2.1995]

37 Brian W Watson  
 ELLA MAUD WATSON (b NEWMAN) 1886-1965  
 Lived in East London all her life. [15.7.1994]

38 Liliias Wild  
 LUCY MATILDA WILD (b. HARDING) 1875-1966  
 Lived in East London all her life. [22.6.1995]

In respect of **grandmothers**:

1 Colleen Arnold  
 SUSANNA ELIZABETH ARNOLD (b FISHER) 1827-1901  
 Lived in East London from 1853 until her death. [13.9.1994]

2 Ronald Bendall  
 ELIZABETH HARRISON BENDALL (b HORN) 1853-?  
 Lived in East London from c. 1900. [28.3.1994]

3 Laura Young & Dora Smith (b Batten)  
 MARIE FRIEDERICKE BOKELMANN (b SCHLAPHOF) 1859-1929  
 Lived in East London from 1877-1928. [23.11.1994]

4 Colleen Arnold  
 ELLEN DELL (b MILES) 1848-1941  
 Lived in Cathcart but paid frequent  
 visits to family in East London. [13.9.1994]

5 Joan Jackson Moss (b Sykes)  
 ALICE MAUD CHAMBERS (b MARLINGHAUS) 1880-1960  
 Lived in East London from 1905 until her death. [1.2.1996]

6 Olive Sparg and Ellen Hill (both b. Green)  
 LOUISA JANE GREEN (b NASH) 1853-1935  
 Lived near East London from her marriage in 1870. [5.8.1994]

7 Margaret Murray (b Hector) and Hugh Clark  
 CHRISTINA HECTOR (b ROY) 1840-1934  
 Lived in East London from 1885. [11.8.1994]

8 Douglas Bertill  
 MARGARET ISABELLA KINDNESS (b ROSS) 1862-1950  
 Lived in East London from about 1890. [12.7.1995]

9 Sheila Bendall (b Crabb)  
 FRANCES KING (b WILSON) 1870-1954  
 Lived in East London from 1902. [28.3.1995]

- 10 Valda Munro (b Medefindt)  
AUGUSTINE MEDEFINDT (b SAGE) 1869-1941  
Lived in East London from 1880. [7.10.1994]
- 11 John Walker  
CAROLINE LOUISA NOWELL (b CHRISTIE) 1862-1933  
Lived in East London from about 1890. [27.2.1995]
- 12 Patricia Flemmer  
MARIA NOLAN-NEYLAN (b IMPEY) 1858-1947  
Lived in East London and King William's Town. [7.3.1995]
- 13 Ellen Hill (b Green)  
MARIA DOROTHY PACHONIK (b MARAIS) 1881-1953  
Lived near East London after her marriage in 1898. [5.8.1994]
- 14 Marion Banister (b Teepe)  
CHRISTINA ELIZABETH 'GRACE' PLYMEN (b PUTZ) 1883-1965  
Lived in East London from 1903. [28.1.1997]
- 15 Gillain Mason (b. Stewart)  
NORAH MAY READ (b. MURRAY) 1873-1966  
Born in East London and lived there until 1912. [25.4.1996]
- 16 Helen Bosworth Smith (b Stidworthy)  
SARAH JANE RIVE (b ROBINSON) 1882-1952  
Lived in East London from 1904. [1.3.1995]
- 17 Ronald Bendall  
MARY MARGARET 'ANNIE' ROLFE-CARTER (b BRYAN) 1852-1930  
Lived in East London from early 1900s. 28.3.1995]

In respect of a **great grandmother**;

- 1 Ellen Hill (b Green)  
SARAH ANN MARAIS (b McCABE) 1845-1944  
Born in Ireland. Came to East London in 1857.  
After her marriage, lived in the Komga area. [5.8.1994]

In respect of **aunts/great aunts**:

- 1 Alison van Zyl (b Pringle)  
MARGARET BROWN (b. McFARLANE) 1887-?  
Lived in East London all her life. [15.7.1996]

- 1 John Orpen, Keith & Dorothea Vaughan  
HELEN AGNES JOSEPHINE CREWE (b. ORPEN) 1864-1937  
Lived in East London from 1896. [11.4.1995]
- 2 Joan Dreyer (b Gately)  
MARGARET GATELY 1879-1966  
Lived in East London all her life. [20.3.1995]
- 3 Joan Dreyer (b Gately)  
NORAH KATHLEEN GATELY 1886-1955  
Lived in East London all her life. [20.3.1995]
- 4 Nellie Wardle (b Hart)  
ANN SUTHERLAND KNOBEL (b McKAY) 1849-1923  
Lived in East London all her life. [12.8.1994]
- 5 Nellie Wardle (b Hart)  
ELLA YOUNG McKAY BA 1867-1945  
Born and lived in East London in youth and old age. [12.8.1994]
- 6 Nellie Wardle (b Hart)  
ALICE McKAY 1863-1935  
Born and lived in East London in youth; from 1930s. [12.8.1994]
- 7 Frank Pearce  
EDITH ANNIE PEARCE 1870 - 1955  
Lived in East London all her life. [24.2.1995]

**BLACK WOMEN**

Born pre 1910 in respect of **themselves**:

1 WELEKAZI KLAAS/DAZANA (b. MDAYI) 1893 -  
Came to East London in about 1894. [17.5.1995]

2 NOEIGHT LIWANE (b. VULA) c.1904 -  
Came to East London in about 1914. [14.8.1996]

In respect of **mothers**;

3 Lily Tyanti (b. Bhuku)  
LIZZIE BHUKU (b. NOSEVEN) 1908-1941  
To East London c. 1913. Returned c. 1928. [17.5.1995]

4 Muriel Nama (b. Bija)  
ELEANOR BIJA (b. KATANAGANA) 1891-1968  
Lived in the town intermittently. [17.5.1995]

5 Vesta Sipalo (b. Coboti)  
MARTHA COBOTI (b. VESTA) 1876-1940  
Came to East London c. 1890. [7.6.1995]

6 Margaret Tonga (b. Kazi)  
MARY KAZI (b. MANGALA) 1887-1959  
Came to East London in c. 1907. [21.6.1995]

7 Welekazi Klaas (b.Mdayi)  
Mrs MDAYI c.1860-c.1930  
Came to the East Bank Location in about 1890. [17.5.1995]

8 Eunice Smith (b Ndrana)  
LENA NDRANA (1878-1963)  
Lived in East London from c. 1910 to c. 1920. [22.8.1995]

9 Dorothy Lusizi (b. Ngova)  
ESTHER NGOVA (b. GAULA) 1902-1963  
Came to East London in c. 1914. [7.6.1995]

10 John Nzwanana  
NOWINE NZWANANA (b. NDYOZA) c. 1880-1950  
Came to East London in c. 1900. [14.8.1996]

11 Winifred Gennetta (b. Simons)

LOSI SIMONS (b. MKUTUKE) 1886-1968

Born in East London and lived most of her life there. [14.8.1996]

In respect of her **grandmother**;

1 Eunice Nosipho Zici

GERTRUDE QUGWALA 1889-1982

Came to East London in c. 1900. [14.3.1990 & 23.5.1994]

## APPENDIX 1

**ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Interview Format for White Women;

INTERVIEWER.....

Date of Interview...../...../199

INTERVIEWEE;

Given names;.....

Maiden name.....

Married name/s.....

Place of birth..... Date of birth.....

Relation to subject.....

Address &amp; Telephone.....

SUBJECT;

Given names;.....

Maiden name.....

Husbands name/s.....

Date of:- birth.....marriage.....death.....

Place of:- birth.....marriage.....death.....

Addresses in East London.....

Dates resident in East London.....

## 1 HEALTH/ FAMILY SIZE/CHILD BEARING

Number of siblings subject's own family.....

Children's names and birth dates.....

Delivery of Children:- Hospital/Home In attendance: Dr/Midwife/Friend

Health..... Did she wear a corset?.....

2 DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

Class position:

Father's name and Occupation.....

Husband's Occupation.....

Subject's Occupation (if any).....

Education: To Std..... School..... Place.....

Further training.....

Accomplishments.....

Church Membership.....

Club Membership.....

3 CLASS RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES:

Were any people regarded as unsuitable as friends or boyfriends?.....

Who were they and why?.....

Were sex/prostitutes/procreation ever discussed?.....

4 RACE RELATIONS:

Servants: Nurse, b/w, name.....length of service.....

Cook, b/w, " ..... " " " .....

Maid, b/w " ..... " " " .....

Gardener b/w " ..... " " " .....

How would you describe subject's relationship with black people.....

5 GENDER ATTITUDES

Was the Women's Movement or Votes for Women ever discussed?.....

Was she in favour?.....

What was her attitude to her daughters' education/higher training?.....

Was subject a happy woman?.....

6 LIVING CONDITIONS

Leisure activities; Her own.....

With family.....

Cultural interests.....

Sport.....

Did she ever express a desire to return 'Home'?.....

Interview Format for Black Women:

INTERVIEWER..... ASSISTANT.....

Date of Interview...../...../199

INTERVIEWEE

Given Names.....

Maiden Name.....

Married Name/s.....

Place of Birth.....Date.....

Interviewee's relationship with subject.....

Address and telephone .....

SUBJECT;

Given Names.....

Maiden Name.....

Married Name.....

Husband's Name..... One wife only?.....

Date of Birth.....Marriage.....Death.....

Place of Birth.....Marriage.....Death.....

Residence in East London:

Where.....

When.....

Reasons for coming to East London.....

.....

Any comments about town vs rural life.....

.....

1 Health/Family Size/Child bearing

Number of siblings in subject's own family.....

Number of Children Boys.....Girls.....

Delivery of children.....

Health.....

Education .....

Occupation.....

Attitude towards working for a living.....

Church Membership.....

Club Membership.....

3 Relationships

Was there a strong supportive group or was she lonely?.....

If a domestic worker, how did she regard her employer.....

4 Gender Attitudes

What was her attitude to the rural/traditional homestead.....

Polygamous marriages.....

Illegitimacy.....

Did she have any aspirations for her daughters/granddaughters?...

.....

5 Living Conditions;

What were they like?.....

Problems.....

Economic conditions.....

Did she ever participate in any resistance movements?.....

**APPENDIX 2**

## THE IDEAL WOMAN

She should be fair, if not in face  
Why then in culture, thought and grace  
Ruling in peaceful strength the place  
That she calls home.

She should be brave as soldiers are  
To meet the infinitesimals that are  
The sum of woman's lot.

She should be true as tempered steel  
Casting a radiance all can feel  
Of that great love that's made to heal  
Our human woes.

She should be tender and sincere  
Casting a halo round her sphere  
Where the true woman grows most dear  
Her home.

But I maintain that side by side  
Should stand the bridegroom and the bride  
Equal in all, and brains beside, into eternity.

But if into the world alone  
It be her doom to have to roam  
She should insist on equal rights with men

F.A.S.

[Published in the East London Standard, on 2.8.1899]

## APPENDIX 3

## BOOKS READ BY CAROLINE ROBSON JANUARY 1877 TO JANUARY 1884

The original order was chronological. The books have been arranged by author and subject. The squared brackets indicate the publication date

Fiction:

- Alcott, Louisa M.: *Little Women; Good Wives*  
 Aldrich, J B: *The Story of a Bad Boy*  
 Alexandra, Mrs: *Which Shall it Be?*  
 Anther, S.: *Anna Lee*  
 Arnold, Thomas: *Tom Brown at Oxford*  
 Black, W.: *The Princess of Thule; Sunrise*  
 Braddon, E: *Henry Dunbar*  
 Bronte, C.: *Villette* [pub.1853]  
 Broughton, Rhoda: *Second Thoughts*  
 Carry, Alice: *Clovernook*  
 Coolidge, Susan: *What Katy Did; What Katy did at School*  
 Del la Motte, Fougue: *Undine and Other Tales*  
 Dickens, Charles: *Pickwick Papers* [1836/37]; *The Christmas Story* [1843]; *Little Dorrit*; [1855/57]; *Martin Chuzzlewit*; [1843/44]  
 Edwards, A.: *Low Brackenbury*  
 Edwardes, Mrs: *Ought We to Visit Her?*  
 Elliott, George: *Scenes of Clerical Life* [1857]; *Daniel Deronda* [1876];  
 Fothergill, J: *The First Violin*  
 Harland, Marion: *Alone*  
 Harrison: *St Pauls or the Plague*  
 Heyser, Paul: *Larrabiata*  
 Kingsley, Charles: *Two Years Ago*  
 Lytton, Bulwer: *What will he do with it; My Novel; Through a Needle's Eye: The Caxtons* [1848]; *The Last of the Barons; The Vicar's Governess*  
 Marlith, E.: *Gold Elsie*  
 Marryat, Florence: *No Intuitions*  
 McIntosh, M.l.: *Violet*  
 Payner, James; *The Canon's Ward*  
 Piggot, Miss: *Fair Passions*  
 Pollard, M.: *An Earl's Daughter*  
 Roe, S.: *Faith Gartney*  
 San Juan: *Uncle Silas*  
 Scott, Walter: *Anne of Geierstein; A Legend of Montrose; Bride of Lammermoor; Castle Dangerous; Guy Mannering; Ivanhoe; Kenilworth; Old Mortality; Peveril of the Peak; Quentin Durward; Redgauntlet; The Abbot; The Antiquary; The Black Dwarf; The Fortunes of Nigel; The Heart of Mid-Lothian; The Monastery; The Pirate; The Surgeon's Daughter; Waverley*  
 Trafton, Miss A.: *Katherine Earle*

Trollope, Anthony: *Doctor Thorne; The Bertrams; Valentine; The Pirate City*  
 Wetherall, Miss: *Wych Hazels; The Gold of Chickaree*  
 Whyte, Melville: *Black but Comely*  
 Worboise, Emma J.: *Father Fabian*  
 Young, C.: *Love and Life; The Dove in the Eagle's Nest*  
 Young, B.C.: *The Heir of Redclyfe*  
 Wood, Mrs: *The Channings; Parkwater; Dean Holland; Anne Hereford*

Non-Fiction:

Besant and Rice: *With Harp and Crown; The Chaplain of the Fleet*  
 Colenso's Sermons  
 Macaulay: *Essays* [1843] and *History* [1848-1855]  
*Great Events of History*  
*Great Invasion or After Leipzig*  
*Life of Bonaparte*

Literature and Poetry:

Goldsmith, Oliver: *Works of*  
 Cambles Poems (?Campbell)  
 Humorous Poetry by different authors  
*Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare*  
 Shakespeare: Selection, and his life  
 Tennyson: *Harold; Queen Mary; The Holy Grail; Gareth and Lynette*

German:

*Maria and Elizabeth*  
*Rogata*  
 Hauff: *Vor Merum im Mond*  
 [Two others illegible]

Periodicals:

*Boy's Herald*  
*Golden Hours*  
*Illustrated London News*  
*Sunday at Home*  
*The Leisure Hour*

Lily Series:

*Gypsy's Sowing and Reaping*  
*Quichy* by A.S. Roe  
*Aunt Jane's Hero*  
*I've Been Thinking*

No authors recorded:

*Almost Lost*  
*Arthur Sutherland's Two Journeys*  
*Baron's Daughter, The*  
*Conscript, The*

**Berna Boyles**  
**Constance and Nellie**  
**Countess Kate**  
**Country in Danger, The**  
**Daughter of Hetla, A**  
**Dead Secret, The**  
**Gaberille Vaughan's Probation**  
**Gertrude's Trial**  
**Grafton Family, The**  
**Helen's Babies**  
**Hidden Pathway, The**  
**Inconstant, The**  
**Isabel's Secrets**  
**Ivyland's Invasion**  
**Janet's Love and Service**  
**John Halifax, Gentleman**  
**Katherine Earle**  
**Louis Atterbury**  
**London Society**  
**Looking Glass, The**  
**Minister's Warning, The**  
**Myra Sherwood's Cross**  
**Once a Year**  
**Old Organ Grinder, The**  
**Pilgrim Street**  
**Rose Bryant**  
**Sceptres and Crowns**  
**Shady Side or a Country Parson's Life, The**  
**Story book for Boys and Girls**  
**Sturdy Jack**  
**Thousand and One Guns**  
**Two Spanish Brothers**  
**Young Yachtsman, The**  
**Valentine and his Brother**  
**Vicar's Governess, The**  
**Working to Win**

**APPENDIX 4****ASSAULTS ON WOMEN**

Note that there was provision for the death penalty for the rape of a pre-pubertal child and an unmarried woman.

**BLACK MALES ATTACKING WHITE FEMALES - FIVE CASES** (One child)

1876 - Zitisi; attempted rape of Louisa Nass. No sentence published.  
[Dispatch, 3.4.1876]

1893 - Delihlaza found guilty of assault on Hannah Lang. Sentenced to seven years hard labour and 36 lashes.  
[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/10]

1894 - Fred Madatt (a Cape boy); guilty of indecent assault on a nine year old white child, Agnes Bekker. Sentenced to seven years imprisonment and 25 lashes.  
[East London Standard, 5.9.1894 and CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/14]

1896 - Mace; guilty of attempted rape of Adelaide Matzke. Sentenced to five years imprisonment and 36 lashes.  
[East London Standard, 2.4.1896 and CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/17]

1900 - Jan Qualani; guilty of assault with intent to commit rape on Mary Frances Roome. Sentenced to seven years imprisonment and five lashes.  
[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/24]

**BLACK MALES ATTACKING BLACK FEMALES - NINETEEN CASES**  
(Eight children)

1876 - Njoda charged with raping a 13 year old black girl. No sentence published.  
[Dispatch, 16.5.1876].

1879 - Ndzeleni charged with raping Tigiwe, a 12 year old girl. No sentence recorded.  
[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/1]

1880 - Nxekana; guilty of attempted rape. Sentenced to three years imprisonment.  
[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/1]

1880 - Solani raped Mohlabate. He broke into her hut where two other men were sleeping. Found not guilty and acquitted.  
[Dispatch, 6.3.1880].

1880 - Nxekana convicted of rape of Mary. Found guilty and sentenced to six months and 25 lashes.

[Dispatch, 6.3.1880 and CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/1].

1881 - Ginyigazi charged by Noyanti with rape. Found guilty of assault.

[Dispatch, 24.9.1881].

1884 - Jacob found guilty of the rape of Noyenti.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/5].

1891 - William Umvalo was charged with rape but acquitted.

[East London Standard, 24.9.1891].

1892 - Joseph Bodlani charged with assault with intent to rape Mayasi. Sentenced to four years imprisonment with hard labour and 2 lashes.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/10]

1893 - Jim Gabo found guilty of assault with intent to commit rape on Mayan Narwai. Sentenced to one year imprisonment with hard labour.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/11]

1894 - Kufa and Mafilea charged with the abduction and rape of Deliwe, an unmarried girl of 20. Found guilty of abduction. Sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/16]

1894 - Ntsilati accused of raping Nanci, a child of 11 years. Found not guilty.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/13]

1897 - Ngolata Lasca accused of rape by Nokapa Delanto. Found guilty of attempted rape and sentenced to six months and 25 lashes.

[East London Standard, 10.10.1897 and CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/18].

1897 - Ebenezer Majiza, a headman and special constable, was charged with raping a girl under 12 years old, Novelapi Booy. Found not guilty and discharged.

[East London Standard, 10.10.1897 and 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/18].

1898 - Peter Masuti charged with raping a child under 12, Rili Bulu. No sentence recorded.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/19]

1899 - Willie Zandayibo found guilty of the crime of assault with intent to commit rape of Dora Martin aged 13 years. Sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour and 25 lashes.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/20]

1900 - Bloom Nlandini: assault with intent to commit rape on Nomakayalude, aged 3 years. Sentenced to three years imprisonment with hard labour and 36 lashes.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/24]

1900 - Kilani; assault with intent to commit rape on Yosi, aged 6 years. Sentenced to two years imprisonment and 36 lashes.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/24]

1903 - Philip charged with attempted rape. Found guilty and sentenced to six months in gaol.

[CA 1/ELN 1/2/1/28 - 1/2/1/29].

#### WHITE MALES ATTACKING BLACK FEMALES - ONE CASE:

Lizzie, a prisoner, charged the gaoler with rape. Found not guilty.

#### WHITE MALES ATTACKING WHITE FEMALES - EIGHT CASES (Seven children)

1876 - 'a white man' "violated in the most atrocious and brutal manner", a ten year old white girl. Two men arrested, both released.

[Dispatch, 30.5.1876]

1883 - John Culleton attacked a 12 year old girl, Jeanette Oakley. Found guilty of indecency. Fined £5 or 1 month imprisonment with hard labour.

[Dispatch, 18.4.1883]

1883 - Colin McKenzie, charged with the rape of Katie Marsh a child of under nine years. Adjudicated on 'indecent assault' only, in spite of the fact that the newspaper felt that the details were too dreadful for publication. Found guilty and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment with hard labour.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/5. Also published in the Dispatch on 24-30.9.1883 and 1.10.1884].

1883 - John Culleton, attacked an 11 year old girl, Elizabeth Pound. Tried in the Supreme Court, found guilty of attempted rape and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment with hard labour.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/5. Also recorded in the Dispatch on 8.12.1883 and 30.9.1884].

1896 - Pieter Henning raped a 7 year old girl, Katrina Lombard. Found guilty of rape and sentenced to four years imprisonment with hard labour and had to pay her parents £5.

[East London Standard, 2.4.1896 and CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/17]]

1898 - Joseph Krause, a schoolmaster, is guilty of assault on Auguste Kretschmann, aged 13. No sentence recorded.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/19]

1900 - Peter Delport found guilty of the crime of incest on Frances Viljoen. Sentenced to £5 or one week in gaol with hard labour.

[CA 1/ELN 1/1/2/2/24]

1902 - John Nelson, a 60 year old European man indecently assaulted a 15 year old girl, Josephine Clyde, employed as a nurse girl. Found guilty and sentenced to a fine of £150 or 9 months in gaol.

[Dispatch, 24.3.1902].

## APPENDIX 5

## WALTER AND DEENA RUBUSANA

Educated at Lovedale, he was ordained as a minister in the Congregational Church in 1876 and moved to the East Bank Location, where he lived for the rest of his life. Educational and religious facilities flourished under his guidance. An author and translator of some note, he played a leading role in the formation of the African National Congress. Through his influence, East London became one of the areas where black resistance flourished. He was involved in the formation of the Native Educational Association (NEA) in 1879, a founder member and on the Executive Council of the South African Native Congress (SANC) and he played a part in the establishment of Izwi Labantu in 1898.

[Ref., Karis, T., and Carter, G., Eds, From Protest to Challenge, Vol.4, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 134-135.]

By 1903 the SANC was drawing an attendance of 400 at their monthly meetings in East London. The tenor of their beliefs at the time were that war and aggression were unacceptable, that education was important, and influence should be sought through the newspapers.

[Ref., Odendaal, Andre, Vukani Bantu: The Beginning of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912, (Cape Town, Davis Philip, 1984), pp. 7, 15, 41 and 5].

Rubusana's wife, Deena, was an educated woman in her own right and a leader in the black community. She died on 14th July 1920. That she had friends across the colour line is indicated on the headstone of her grave. A translation from the Xhosa: "This stone was laid by the independent congregations, consisting of Coloureds and Blacks under the supervision of her husband. It was also laid by Black and White friends from other places" (See Figure 19).

[Translation kindly done by Mrs Dorothy Gwavu]