# GRANDMOTHERS, MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS: TRANSFORMATIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES IN XHOSA HOUSEHOLDS IN GRAHAMSTOWN

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of master of Arts
of
Rhodes University



by

**LINDA MARY SCHWARTZ**

May 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Abstract

The aim of this oral history study is to explore the ways in which constructions of gender have brought women to the point where they now bear most of the burden of responsibility in their relationships with men and for the wellbeing of children. This study speaks into the gap of the undocumented history of women's lived experience as told by women themselves. It is a generational study which charts the transformations and coping strategies of women in Xhosa households since the 1940s.

The study found that the familial burdens related to women's sexuality and fertility, raising of children and financial responsibilities in a time of HIV/AIDS have increased. Teenage pregnancies, the discipline of children, HIV/AIDS and the ever present aspects of poverty are major issues these women face.

The stress of day to day demands on their lives precluded them the opportunity to reflect on the underlying causes and historical roots of their circumstances. Little understanding of the gendered order of their lives was expressed by the respondents. The use of feminist methodology authenticated the women's stories as they produced knowledge of their lived experience. The interview questions raised awareness of the gender bias underlying much of their struggles at home.



Key words
Gender, oral history, feminism, gender, coping, voices, transformation, generation, South Africa, HIV/AIDS, poverty

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the ten wonderful women who allowed me the honour of hearing their stories. I am truly grateful and indebted to them. I hope that their stories will be received with appreciation and respect, recognizing that their lives and experiences are inherently valuable because they belong to such unique women. Thank you one and all. Your voices have been heard.

My supervisor, Dr Julia Wells, has watched this project grow and has given me invaluable advice and guidance. Her innovative ideas, her passion for oral history, and her conviction that this was a worthwhile exercise, were a great inspiration to me.

To the Wonderful Wise Women: Theresa Edlemann, Anthea Garman, Leela Pienaar, Gillian Rennie and Janet Trisk: thank you for our conversations over dinner, they were enlightening and alleviated the loneliness of the solitary researcher. Thank you to Liz Thomas, who from afar, never ceased to offer gentle counsel and understanding.

I am grateful for funding received from the Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Trust and I appreciate their continued interest in and support of research such as this.

The financial assistance of the NRF Scholarship towards this research is acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

## Preface

For many feminist researchers, our work begins with a political commitment to produce knowledge that is useful to the lives of other women, whether through social or individual transformation. Our choice of method and research topic are in themselves political acts, designed to question the status quo and the imbalance of power that places people on the margins of society. Our research should challenge the silences in mainstream research and interrogate conventional methods of conducting research. Feminist researchers are not afraid of the personal in research, in fact, we cannot stand outside of our inquiry as very often the subject matter is in some way an extension of our personal histories. This is true for me and the choice I made to conduct research on women, and Xhosa women in particular.

Personal experience of being female in a very male dominated institution, an Anglican theological college, in the early 1990s meant that most often it was male voices and opinions that were heard. Even on the subject of women and issues that affected women deeply, it was the men who were heard speaking on behalf of women. In the church it was the male voice that was heard, the male voice that dominated discourse, and the male perspective that shaped policy. A conversion to feminism through feminist and other liberation theologies, opened a new worldview in which patriarchy and its detrimental effects on women and other marginalised groups became clear. This led to a determination to allow the voices of women to be heard in as many forums as possible. Hence this thesis.

# INTRODUCTION

Many South African women are living in social conditions that threaten their safety. The media reports daily on violence against women; of the bourgeoning spread of HIV/AIDS among women; of economically strapped and impoverished women having children; of women heading households; of dysfunctional marriages; and of grandmothers caring for grandchildren. Feminist theory attributes many of these social ills to the constructions of masculinity and femininity, power and sex, which lead men to behaviour patterns that place women at risk and force women to carry most of the responsibility for safe sexual practices.[1]

One of the greatest menaces women face, according to Western feminism, lies in their relationships with men. Their homes are often not safe and are the site of a major struggle for survival. These problems are, therefore, gendered. Women bear the gendered burden of HIV/AIDS, of sexuality, of raising children alone, of caring for extended family and of marital relationships. Questions need to be asked as to how this came about and how women are coping in their households. What causes many women to remain in dysfunctional relationships, putting their happiness, and, often, even their lives at risk? What is the gendered history that has brought women to this unprecedented state of vulnerability? Knowing what has gone before can assist us in understanding what pertains now, and we may gain some insight as to what core beliefs about gender need to be addressed in order to help men and women come to a more healthy way of relating.

Shula Marks writes that, although humanity seldom learns from the lessons of history, nevertheless

> I think history gives us a way of looking at the present. There are no simple answers, but the value of historical analogy in challenging dominant preconceptions, locating contemporary reactions in context and enabling a sense of perspective remains important.[2]

---

[1] Peter Delius and Liz Walker, 'AIDS in Context', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002. p. 6.
[2] Shula Marks, 'An Epidemic Waiting to Happen? The spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa in Social and Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002, p. 13.

It is the task of the academician to ask questions and the questions need to be asked of the women themselves. Women need tell their own stories and give their own opinions on their lived experiences in their homes and relationships. These stories are seldom told in public spaces and the home circumstances of women have not been sufficiently documented. This is due to the silence of women in history and to the perception that what happens in people's homes is not for public consumption.

Gayle Letherby writes that

> ... studying women is not new, yet studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and their social world has 'virtually no history at all'. The first step then, is to make women's lives visible, the result being not only a clearer picture of women's experience, but a better understanding of the whole cultural and historical experience of women (and men). Researchers must begin with real, concrete people and their actual lives if research is to do more than reaffirm the dominant ideologies about women and their place in the world.[3]

In order to promote the ideals described by Letherby, the foundation of this study rests on interviews with ten Xhosa speaking women aged between nineteen and sixty-four living in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. The lives and experiences of ten 'real, concrete' women have been made visible, and through the telling of their stories, they have given insight into the world of other women living similar lives.

What this research does is twofold: it allows ten Xhosa women to speak about their own lives in their own voices thus bringing women's voices into historical writing and research, making public that which is thought private; and it opens up discussion on the gendered historical roots and changes in households, giving insight into the history of current practices and attitudes.

These goals are achieved by employing feminist methodologies, including oral history, and by focusing on gender as the major category of analysis. In this way this research restores to history the voices and stories of ordinary women, and at the same time

---

[3] Gayle Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and in Practice* (London, 2003) pp. 73-74.

addresses the plight of women in a gendered, patriarchal society. Combining written academic theory and oral history sources means the latter should expand on the former. The lived experiences and opinions of the respondents often challenges accepted feminist theory.

The first chapter places this thesis within the context of other research and gives a detailed background to the need for this study. It includes discussion on gender and the place of women in historical writing. It expands on feminisms and gender in Africa, introduces the concept of 'Herstories', and introduces the ever-expanding areas that are now considered as topics for historical research.

It must be noted at the outset that some of the issues discussed here are raised from a Western perspective which is not intentional but is inevitable as the author approaches this from her own background. Indeed, Western ideas and ideals are often used as starting points for analyzing issues pertaining to other cultural groups which means that issues that may not be problematic for certain groups have been problematised because of the dominance of Western culture. So it is, for example, that 'illegitimacy', a concept with Western connotations of immorality, has been transferred to African culture and judged by Western standards, when the term is not known within Xhosa culture. As Christina Landman comments on her work as a counselor:

> It is not without bitter irony that I have used Western language to externalize the problems of township people and their spiritualities. It is because of Western intervention that townships came into being. In counselling, clients usually use Western concepts to refer to, that is to externalize, their problems.[4]

In the light of this, chapter two brings into focus the dilemmas faced by researchers who conduct studies of people different from themselves. Here we look at the problems of 'the other', and at the challenges posed by feminist and oral history research practices. In this chapter the process of choosing and naming the respondents is explained. Chapters one and two provide the context and the methodology for chapters three, four and five.

---

[4] Christina Landman, 'Journeying with Stories', in Philippe Denis and James Worthington (eds.), *The Power of Oral History: Memory, Healing and Development* Vol 4 (Pietermaritzburg, 2002) p. 1948.

During the interviews, four broad areas that concern the women respondents emerged and are grouped together as: 1. the ways in which having children changed their lives; 2. their marriage relationships; 3. the hardships brought about by HIV/AIDS infections and deaths, and 4. lives currently lived in community. These matters are explored through the words of the respondents and with reference to previous academic research. As the women are from three different age groups their ages or age-groupings are noted. Some attitudes have remained constant and sometimes there are unexpected comments and opinions from the different age groups.

The final chapter analyses what the research has achieved and summarises the opinions and experiences of the respondents, highlighting some of the continuity and contrasts between these generations. It also evaluates the research and makes suggestions for further research. At the suggestion of one of the external examiners, a postscript has been added.

Poverty is a thread that is woven into the fabric of the lives of these women, affecting almost every decision they make and shaping their lives in ways they may well not have chosen. Whether it is marriage or co-habiting, or bearing children or taking children from extended family into their homes, or the responsibility of running a home, poverty is the one constant in their world. Peter Delius and Liz Walker note that in South Africa

> ...there are stark juxtapositions of wealth and poverty. Rampant consumerism co-exists with the daily battle to make ends meet. In a society which celebrates consumption, economic insiders, new and old alike, ostentatiously parade their suitably labeled acquisitions, while the poor look on... these material disparities shape patterns of behaviour which fuel the [AIDS] epidemic. Sexuality, survival and consumption have become particularly closely intertwined.[5]

Christina Landman writes of her experiences as a therapist and oral historian with people living in the Tshwane/Pretoria area. These two roles merged as she became aware that in the oral history interviews people were in need of help to deal with their traumatic pasts. By way of explanation she relates the stories, or 'journeys', taken by herself and some of the people with whom she was in dialogue.

> These were not journeys in which I took the lead or gave sole guidance. They

[5] Delius and Walker, 'AIDS in Context', p. 7.

> were journeys in which counsellor and counsellee, interviewer and interviewee travelled as partners, learning from one another. Together we relanguaged the religious and cultural discourses governing our lives.[6]

Here Landman expresses the possibility of partnerships being formed in an essentially imbalanced relationship that offers both parties opportunity for growth and learning. This was certainly true for this project as the women enjoyed speaking about their lives and felt privileged to have been singled out, and the researcher was warmly welcomed and learnt much about lives very different form her own.

The research also shows that, despite the adversity in which many live, these women are resilient and find ways of expressing autonomy in their homes. Not all women are victims; many of them are agents of change and make choices for themselves whenever they are able.

[6] Landman, 'Journeying', p. 1950.

## CHAPTER I
## THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

The living conditions and composition of families in Xhosa society have undergone transformations over time. Many of these changes are due to increased hardships imposed upon people by economic and political circumstances in a deeply racially divided South Africa during the colonial and apartheid eras. They are also due to skewed perceptions of gender which affect both men and women and place stress on their daily lives. As stated above, the historical development of such gender constructions and assumptions will shed light on present realities.

For example, unemployment has meant that many men are no longer able to support their families financially and women are now the primary economic supporters and heads of households. A 1999 survey of households in Rini in Grahamstown indicates that nearly half are female-headed. Many women now bear the responsibility for raising and disciplining children, and supporting them financially.[1]

The current situation suggests there are serious problems in many households: there is an increase in the number of teenage pregnancies; parents are having difficulty disciplining their children; domestic violence is escalating; and the spread of HIV/AIDS is not abating; children are orphaned through AIDS; marriages are breaking up; employment opportunities are scarce; and poverty continues to cause great distress in households. Women, often considered to be the backbone of society by providing stability in households, are challenged to find ways of survival in this environment. These changes mean a departure from relationship patterns of the past forcing women to find new strategies for negotiating power in the home.

---

[1] Valerie Moller (ed.), *Living in Grahamstown East/Rini: A Social Indicators Report* Institute of Social and Economic Research, 6 (Grahamstown, 2001) p. 18.

The women in this study are grouped according to generational categories: grandmothers, mothers and daughters. They are not literal grandmothers, mothers and daughters but are grouped according to their ages. The first group, the 'grandmothers', were born in the 1940s and are now in their sixties. The middle generation, the 'mothers', were born in the 1960s, putting them in their mid- to late thirties. The last group, the 'daughters', are in their twenties, as they were born between the late 1970s and early 1980s. The generational aspect of the study attempts to chart changes in their lives and offers insights into ways in which Xhosa women have accepted or rejected past patterns of home structure and highlights the main struggles women have had in each generation. The study also attempts to identify ways in which the women are coping with stress in their home circumstances.

Assessing whether people are coping or not is a subjective exercise that needs some explanation in order to give meaning to the various coping mechanisms the women in this study have developed. People may appear, to the observer, not to be coping, when in their own minds they actually are coping or vice versa. There are various external and internal factors that will affect the choice of coping strategy, and which will suggest whether indeed the person is coping or not. Some internal factors are mental health, self-image, inner strength and a willingness to survive. External factors include economics, environmental factors such as housing, and the support of family and friends. A further important factor is culture, which could be both internal and external as people use ways of coping that are inherent to their upbringing and/or which are expected by their cultural norms.

Discussions on and measurements of coping are connected to stresses in life which include major stressful events such as death of a spouse, divorce, job problems, economic hardships, accidents, terminal illness, and the ordinary stresses of everyday living. The effects of stress on societies can be measured by increases in, for example, suicide rates, admission to psychiatric hospitals, abuse of alcohol, violence in the home and wider community, the number of welfare recipients, and the drop-out rate in high school.

Carolyn Aldwin refers to 'chronic role strain' as a major stressor which is defined as a set of

> enduring problems related to specific roles, and is a better indicator of the stressfulness of an individual's life than isolated life events – and, thus, should be a better predicator of well-being.[2]

She cites four primary roles identified by researchers to assess the strains and coping strategies specific to these roles. These are marital, parental, occupational and household economics. Issues causing strain in marriage are: non-acceptance by spouse; non-reciprocity in give and take; and frustration of role expectations. Parenting stressors include the failure of a child to live up to parental standards of behaviour; non-conformity to parental aspirations and values; and a disregard for parental status. Occupational stress is caused by inadequacy of rewards; unhealthy work environments; depersonalization in the work place; and role overload. Household economic strain is caused by the difficulties in acquiring the necessities of life and paying monthly bills. All of these criteria are manifest in the lives of the respondents in this study.

The women in this study have experienced changes in their lives through culture, economic struggles, education, marital roles, parenting roles and the attendant troubles of HIV/AIDS and the experience of 'chronic role strain'. They have found various ways of coping with these changes, some of them conscious, rational choices, and others instinctive and not under conscious control. As the various areas of home life are discussed various coping strategies they have developed are noted. These coping strategies are not named as such by the respondents, but with meaningful hearing they become apparent.

In order to determine the extent and course of some of the transformations in the lives of women, it is necessary to study the past and establish how gender roles were assigned, how marriage and power in the home were negotiated, and to uncover the meaning and purpose of cultural practices surrounding male and female relationships.

**Xhosa women in historical writing**

---

[2] Carolyn M Aldwin, *Stress, Coping and Development: An Integrative Perspective* (New Your, 1994) p. 63.

Very seldom have black women's voices been heard in historical writing and their experiences have been presented by others on their behalf which, as Tiyambe Zeleza says, often reduces them to the stereotypical reproductive roles of wives and mothers only. This study will give voice to those previously silenced and who have been mostly invisible in history. Black women speaking for themselves reduces the possible gender bias of male informants and the assumptions made by white women as to the problems of black women which has been the case in much research. Zeleza's article gives evidence of such biases in his study of histories on Africa. He critiques writing on African women by saying that

> [T]he language used often inferiorises womens' activities, or the experiences being described. Also, women's lives are cloaked in a veil of timelessness: the institutions in which their lives are discussed, such as marriage, are seen as static. In viewing them as unchanging, as guardians of some ageless tradition, women are reduced to transhistorical creatures outside the dynamics of historical development.[3]

In this study the respondents show a different reality. These women speak of ways in which they have been agents of change in their own lives, how, at times, they have found ways in which to stand against a patriarchal system that seeks to keep them in subordination to men, and how they take control of their own lives. However, often they remain within the established roles assigned to them for reasons of poverty and for fear of shame or because they do not view their situations as problematic.

South African social historians, anthropologists and sociologists have undertaken excellent research on the lives of women. However, most of these publications have to do with race, class and work, what we might call the 'public' sphere of life, and not with gender and the home lives of black women, which have been relegated to the 'private' sphere. This study deals explicitly with the 'private' lives of women and brings into 'public' view aspects of the lives of women which have, for the most part, been hidden. Bringing the private into the public forces outsiders to take note of the plight of women and this awareness may effect intervention.

There is a growing body of research literature both about African women and by African

---

[3] Tyambe Zeleza, 'Gender Biases in African Historiography', in Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama & Fatou Sow (eds.), *Engendering African Social Sciences* (Wiltshire, 1997) p. 82.

women in all academic disciplines, though this is far outweighed by similar literature on women in the United States and Europe. It must be noted, too, that much research on black African women has been done by white women, whether 'African' or not. Some of the debate surrounding this issue is discussed below.

In the 1930s research on black African women, their place in society, marriage and its accompanying customs, households and children was done by, amongst others, Eleanor Krige and Isaac Schapera.[4] Contemporary historians, like Anne Kelk Mager, and sociologists have researched the politics and culture of black Africans as they affected women from the early 1900s to the present.[5]

In the early 1960s a trilogy of works on Xhosa people and their adaptation to city life in East London was published. The second in the series is *Townsmen or Tribesmen* by Philip Mayer which is based on research into the lives of the first generation of Xhosa people who settled in the city but who still had homes in rural areas. This, as he puts it, made them 'men of two worlds'.[6]

The third in the trilogy, *Second Generation*, presents the findings of research by Dr B.A. Pauw.[7] As the title suggests, this was a study of Xhosa people who were born and raised in the city. Whilst both Mayer and Pauw used households and families as part of their studies, and whilst both have chapters on women, men are the major informants and men's lives are represented more fully. These studies offer very useful historical information, but as they were done forty years ago, further study is now needed.

Increased interest in the study of black South Africans grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Much research at this time was not specifically focused on women as a separate category, but on African society in general. These works lacked any gender analysis and

---

[4] Eleanor J Krige, 'Changing Conditions in Marital Relations and Parental Duties Among Urbanized Native', in *Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* IX, 1, 1936. Isaac Schapera, 'Premarital Pregnancy and Native Opinion: a note on social change', *Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* VI, 1933.

[5] Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan: A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959* (Cape Town, 1999).

[6] Philip Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen* (Cape Town, 1963).

[7] Berthold A Pauw, *The Second Generation: A Study of the Family Among Urbanized Bantu in East London* (Cape Town, 1969).

offered no hint that the subordination of women to men was intrinsic to existing social systems. They offer no critique of patriarchy, nor were they written from any acknowledged feminist perspective.

Academics such as Hilda Bernstein and Christine Qunta generated information about the role and circumstances of black women in the liberation struggle in South Africa.[8] They placed their research firmly in the context of class, race and political struggles, seeing the oppression of black women as part and parcel of the oppression of black people in general. The subordination of women to men, when discussed at all, was most often regarded as being rooted in the capitalist market. The notion that gender oppression existed in pre-colonial and pre-capitalist societies was not fully addressed. These studies are significant for, amongst other things, placing women on the agenda and attempting to present the notion that women are not just passive victims of their oppression.[9]

The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of publications by women on women in South Africa. Most of these publications focused on the political impact on the working lives of women. Jacklyn Cock's highly regarded *Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers Under Apartheid* (1980), and *A Talent for Tomorrow* by Suzanne Gordon (1985), as well as *Family and Factory* by Fatima Meer (1984), all document the difficulties of the lives of individual women in domestic service to white women or as factory workers. Cherryl Walker edited and published her widely known works *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (1982), and later, *Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945 (1990).* In a similar vein, Julia Wells wrote *'We Now Demand!' A Study on Women's Resistance to the Pass Laws in South Africa* (1993).[10]

---

[8] Hilda Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa* (London, 1985).
Christine Qunta (ed.), *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg, 1987).

[9] Makaziwe P Mandela, *Gender Relations and Patriarchy in South Africa's Transkei*, DPhil, University of Massachusetts, 1993.

[10] Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Johannesburg, 1980).
Suzanne Gordon, *A Talent for Tomorrow: Life Stories of South African Servants* (Johannesburg, 1985).
Fatima Meer, (ed.), *Factory and Family: the Divided Lives of South Africa's Women Workers/by 992 Workers and the Institute for Black Research* (Durban, 1984).
Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1982).
Cheryl Walker, (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990).
Julia Wells, *'We Now Demand!' A Study on Women's Resistance to the Pass Laws in South Africa* Johannesburg, 1993).

Writing in 1983 Belinda Bozzoli commented that our understanding of South African society had been radically revised during the 1970s, but that

> South African history, sociology and politics has not, by and large, been interwoven with feminist reinterpretations of conventional wisdoms ... [and that] with a few exceptions there is a lack of awareness on the part of many radical South African scholars, not concerned centrally with issues of gender, of the major issues which feminists have raised about social explanation. And, concomitantly, writers not centrally concerned with analysis of gender have not often extended their findings into wider fields of social analysis.[11]

Commenting specifically on historical research, Bozzoli suggests that most attempts at the recovery of the history of women and of women's history, have been done from what she calls the 'refractory' approach. This means historians had tried to rectify gender imbalances that exist without raising the question of female oppression as a systematic set of relations between men and women. Most of the existing literature locates women's oppression and subordinate position in the culture, in the division of labour, in state policies, as well as in the ideology of the ruling class, and not within the gendered structure of social systems.[12]

In 1987 Cherryl Walker's "Review Article: Women's Studies on the Move", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3, 3, 1987, p. 434 she states that whilst many publications on women were all directly concerned with women as a distinct social category, and whilst the gender of their subject is a central principle, there was little mention of gender relations in the family and of sexuality and reproduction. She observes that, whilst we know about sex-stereotyping in industry and of the desperate situation of women in the Bantustans where they were subjected to hardships through the political and geographical situations of the time, we know much less about how gender ideology is constructed and reproduced within black communities themselves through their ideologies, traditions and cultural practices, how this has changed historically, and how different categories of women perceive their domestic roles. Only when these are given the same critical attention as the economy and the larger political arena, she states, can a full picture of the

---

[11] Belinda Bozzoli, 'Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9, 2, 1983, p. 139.
[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

position of women begin to emerge.[13]

Thus there was room for the extension of research areas in black African societies. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s much research on black women emerged, this time with researchers using feminist theory and showing gender to be more than the result of colonialism and its concomitant economic and political oppression of women.

In 1991 Belinda Bozzoli's *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* was published. Bozzoli and Mmantho Nkotsoe wrote the life-histories of twenty-two elderly Tswana residents of Phokeng in Bophuthatswana. Their stories exemplify some of the complexities they experienced and strategies they employed in order to survive as migrants in the city.

Despite Bozzoli's insight, these studies did not specifically use gender as a category of analysis, but a more recent publication by Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan: A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959* specifically addresses gender. She has chapters on the gendering of identities, sexuality and education of women. This, too, is an extremely useful historical resource, but again, the study only deals with the problems of women forty years ago and there is a need for research on the years since then and what pertains currently. Another gender specific study was undertaken by students of the University of Zimbabwe with Julia Wells. By way of a generational study, it examines the reasons for dramatic changes in gender relations in that country. The study addressed the question of how women felt about patriarchal customs and how they themselves were agents of change in women's status over time.[14]

The above publications suggest that while there is much data available on black working-class women and the political lives of black women, calls for research firmly based on gender and on women in the family by Bozzoli and Walker in the 1980s have not yet been sufficiently met and that more research needs to be done on women in the home.

---

[13] Cherryl Walker, 'Review Article: Women's Studies on the Move', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3, 3, 1987, p. 434.

[14] Julia C Wells, 'The Sabotage of Patriarchy in Colonial Rhodesia: Rural African Women's Living Legacy to Their Daughters', *Feminist Review* 75, 2003.

The research conducted by Makaziwe Mandela on women in the Transkei town of Cofimvaba was of immense value to this study as she emphasised the absolute necessity of placing gender at the forefront of research on black women in order to fully appreciate and understand how cultural and historical events and practices affect their lives. Her concern was to discover how and when black African women struggle against events and processes that keep them subordinate and how and when they accept their inferior status. She argued that the

> study of women in South Africa has typically tended to be ahistorical, reductionistic, and/or economic. To be able to understand fully the wider variety of factors affecting black women in South Africa's Transkei, we need to fill the gaps in existing gender research.[15]

Mandela notes that much writing on black African women has focused on theoretical and/or macro-political issues. This, she suggests, depersonalises the research and women become the objects of research. Her thesis offers a people-centred description and analysis of the socio-economic and political changes in South Africa as seen in the lives of specific women.

This current study on Xhosa women brings the stories of ordinary women into the public domain. It is gender-focused and written from a feminist perspective which is expanded on in chapter two.

**Feminism and gender in historical writing**

The use of the plural, 'feminisms', is used deliberately to make clear the fact that there is diversity in motivation, method and experience among feminist academics. This diversity is in itself 'feminist' as contemporary feminism has a political commitment to a multiplicity of approaches, positions and strategies. There is no one 'feminism', and 'feminists' are not unanimous in their understanding of feminist theory and practice. However, feminist scholarship is united in its commitment to political and social change along with a determination to undermine and challenge traditional boundaries which are defined by patriarchy. Angela Mills comments that one of

---

[15] Makaziwe *Gender Relations* p. 19.

> [F]eminism's difficult but exhilarating political challenge is to build sisterhood/solidarity across differences, using the differences as resources in developing shared critiques and visions...it is feminist's deep commitment to women and uncompromising critique of patriarchal power that enables them to participate fully in anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist struggles and to affirm diverse cultures.[16]

Feminism is not confined to the academy and being a 'feminist' does not necessarily mean one is schooled in feminist thought, theory and epistemology. In fact, many people engaged in the social and political issues of everyday life who question and seek to change current oppressive and discriminatory practices, do not name themselves 'feminist', yet their strategies and goals are feminist. Feminism is as much practice as it is theory and is a way of living and of seeing the world, as well as an intellectual exercise. One could go so far as to say that feminist theory is of little value without feminist practice as feminism sets out to name and change forms of oppression and discrimination.

Chango Mannathoko writes that feminism is a broad term which encompasses a variety of conceptions of the relations between men and women in society.[17] Feminism challenges the origins of oppressive gender relations and attempts to develop strategies that would bring about changes in these relations. At their core all feminisms address the injustice of discriminatory gender relations and critique male-dominated institutions, values and social practices that are destructive to both men and women. Yet, despite sharing the same ideas in terms of what gender oppression might mean, feminisms differ in analysing the origin of oppression and what it means in practice for women to be liberated from patriarchal structures.

Current Western feminism has its roots in the women's political and civil rights movements of the 1960s conventionally known as second-wave feminism. First-wave feminism, from the 1920s onwards, was grounded in liberal rights with its major focus on women's enfranchisement and the extension of civil rights to women. By the 1960s educational opportunities for women had grown: contraception and changed legislation

---

[16]Angela Mills, 'North American Feminisms/Global Feminisms – Contradictory or Complementary', in Obioma Nnaemeka(ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ. 1998) p. 178.

[17] Chango Mannathoko, 'Feminist Theories and the Study of Gender Issues in Southern Africa', in Ruth Meena (ed.), *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues* (Harare, 1995) pp.71-72.

on abortion, equal pay and the entry into previously all-male professions by women had been started. Since then, feminist commitment to social and political change has played a significant role in the transformation of the position of women in both the public and the private lives of women. The private lives of women, an indeed of men, had not been considered important enough for public interest.

Berteke Waaldijk asks:

> Why is the history of the public sphere of politics, finance, science and art well recorded, while the private sphere has evidently not been important enough to enter the history books?[18]

She goes on to describe how studies on the private and public spheres have produced various theories. First an 'economic' approach dominated as historians adopted concepts such as 'industrialisation', 'modernisation' and 'capitalism' from Marxism. Historical studies discovered that since 1750 women gradually become consumers and reproducers of children, having lost their power over the production of goods. Now we have the modern nuclear family where there is a separation between the private world of consumption and reproduction, the bearing and raising of children, and the public world production. Within this lies the social construction of the differences between men and women. Within this approach

> [P]riority has been given mainly to the history of the white middle and lower classes in Europe and the United States. The experiences of other classes and other ethnic groups have not been taken sufficiently into account...women's history should therefore not look for female exceptions in the public sphere, but rather new ways should be developed to describe the history of women's worlds...every class and every group can examine the way in which women gave meaning to their existence, looked after their interests and aimed for change.[19]

Feminism and issues of gender go hand in hand. Gender has to do with the stereotyping of roles for men and women, discrimination against men or women on the basis of their sex, and inequality based on biological or cultural notions of what it means to be male or female. Michelle O'Sullivan quotes a broad definition of gender bias as given by Justice RI Abrams & Chief Justice JM Greaney:

> Gender bias exists when decisions are made or actions taken are based on pre-conceived or stereotypical notions about the nature, role or capacity of men and

---

[18] Berteke Waaldijk, 'Of Stories and Sources: Feminist History', in R Buikema and Anneke Smelik (eds.), *Women's Studies and Culture: A Feminist Introduction* (London, 1993) p.16.
[19] Ibid. p.18

> women. Myths and misconceptions about the economic and social realities of men's and women's lives also underlie gender bias.[20]

Throughout this study we will find incidents of gender bias and gender stereotyping in various forms and their effects on the women who experience discrimination on grounds of gender.

**Feminisms in Africa**

Obioma Nnaemeka states that there is a multiplicity of feminisms and she makes reference to the differences between Western and African feminisms so comprehensively articulated by both black and white, Western and African feminists, who attended the first conference on Women in Africa and the African Diaspora. This conference provided space for what Nnaemeka calls 'border crossings' where the discourse weaves together the personal, the practical and the theoretical aspects of feminism in Africa.[21]

Nnaemeka acknowledges the difficulty in defining 'African' feminism, not only on the African continent itself, but also as it is complicated by the African diaspora. She insists on the necessity of listening to African women speak their truths so as to discover that what emerges is

> not the necessity or desirability of a monolithic, representative political voice, but the eagerness to recognise and promote a common ground while respecting the nuances that make the emergence of a monolith impossible...The book speaks of feminism in the plural (feminisms) within Africa and between Africa and other continents because it is mindful of the multiplicity of perspectives and the need for accommodation.[22]

This, she says, extends a challenge to feminists all over the globe to find ways of living successfully with contradictions rather than obliterating difference. Contributors to her volume emphasise the power of African women to work within those patriarchal and cultural structures that are liberating whilst challenging those that are debilitating and oppressive. The emphasis of the contributors is more on the power and agency of

---

[20] Michelle O'Sullivan, 'Stereotyping and Male Identification: Keeping Women in Their Place', in Christina Murray (ed.), *Gender and the New South African Legal Order* (Cape Town, 1994) p.185.
[21] Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 1998).
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

women in bringing about change in their worlds and less on the paralysis of African women.

This image of the 'paralysed' African woman is described by Ama Ata Aidoo:

> ...she is breeding too many children she cannot take care of, and for whom she should not expect other people to pick up the tab. She is hungry, and so are her children. In fact, it has become a cliché of Western photojournalism that the African woman is old beyond her years; she is half-naked; her drooped and withered breasts are well exposed; there are flies buzzing around the faces of her children; and she has a permanent begging bowl in her hand.[23]

Christine Qunta has harsh criticism for those who are not African and yet who have written about African women, saying that, through not understanding the complexities of the issue, they have portrayed the African woman

> ...as a victim of the African male and of traditional customs and practices, with colonization playing only a minor role, if any. The African woman of the rural areas is portrayed as little more than a slave, who goes about her tasks with silent acceptance...Her consciousness about her oppression is awakened only when she comes into contact with Western women, and she is surprised by their comparative freedom. She never speaks for herself but is always spoken about.[24]

Ama Ata Aidoo charts the gradual wearing away of the power and dignity of the African woman from the slave trade through to the present day where she is faced with the plague of AIDS and the fear that neither she nor her children will survive. In modern day Africa the scene has changed greatly for many women: they may now own property in countries where this was previously prohibited; they have educational opportunities that were for so long the preserve of males; they can be granted a bank loan. Thus they no longer

> fit the accepted notion about them as beasts of burden. And they are definitely not as free and equal as African men (especially those with formal education) would have us believe. In fact, they fall somewhere between those two concepts.[25]

However, there are still a number of ways in which women are oppressed by governments, by religion, and by their own cultural practices, in Africa and in other parts of the world. Patriarchy is still systematised and therefore women are still not

---

[23] Ama Ata Aidoo, 'The African Woman Today' in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ,1998) p. 39.
[24] Christine Qunta (ed.), *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg, 1987) p. 11.
[25] Aidoo, 'The African Woman Today', p. 44.

completely free. Feminism seeks to remove patriarchy in favour of a world in which domination does not exist.

It may be common to hear feminism dismissed in Africa as a Western import. African men are perhaps the most vociferous proponents of this idea. Aidoo states rather caustically:

> Even though in many modern African states grown-up women are expected to crawl on their knees to offer food and other services to their husbands, most men still maintain that in their country, "women are not oppressed, there are roles which women and men have to play" – including crawling, obviously.[26]

Olibisi Aina maintains that the majority of African women have yet to resonate with the aims and practices of modern feminism, regarding it as elitist. If reforms in the status and plight of women in Africa are to become a reality, these women need to be apprised of the crucial role feminism can play in bringing about such changes. Before this can be done there are some significant questions that require attention:

> Are the feminist priorities for the West and for the Third World nations necessarily the same? Why is it taking so long to eradicate female subordination in the African continent? Will the feminist path in Africa be the same as that of the West? [27]

These questions raise issues of what it means to be a woman in Africa and what it means to be a woman in the West. Often they are literally and figuratively worlds apart. The lived experience of women all over the world, whilst having some similarities, is generally vastly diverse. Being female does not mean women have the same struggles, needs and goals. Thus, when engaging in feminist discourse and strategy, it is vital to take into account and understand the specific needs of women in the place in which they find themselves. The agenda for Western feminists includes and promotes a variety of issues that may not remotely affect or interest African women and vice versa.

Having said all this, it must be noted that many women would not consider themselves

---

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[26]Olibisi Aina, 'African Woman at the Grassroots: The Silent Partners of the Womens' Movement', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 1998) p. 67.

feminist, nor would they even understand some of the concepts of feminist theory. Indeed, most of the women interviewed for this study were unfamiliar with the term and with the goals and characteristics of feminism. The same applied to the concept of gender. Yet the impact of feminist thought, though not categorised or named, is to be found in the attitudes and actions of many of the respondents in this research.

**Gender and African Women**

Despite the growing body of research on African women in which gender is the central category of analysis. For the most part it would seem that most studies on women and gender have been conducted in African countries other than in South Africa. There is a need for academic research by women and on women to be funded and for women in academia to be acknowledged and supported,as it seems is the case in the universities in other parts of Africa. However, there is enough published research on South African women which would support Ruth Meena in her premise that much of the literature that has sought to explain the cause of women's oppression in Africa

> locates their oppression and their subordinate position in the culture, division of labour, state politics, as well as the ideology of the ruling elite.[28]

During the apartheid era the major discourse in academic writing in South Africa was centred on race, with particular reference to the imbalance of power relationships between black and white people. From the late seventies and into the eighties which saw the beginnings of the demise of petty apartheid, there was a shift in focus towards gender with a more specific focus on women and women's issues. Even so, much of the discourse was still race-centred and based on power relations between women of different races, for example, the relationship between black domestic workers and their white female employers.

As early as the 1950s women were increasingly becoming an integral part of the political agenda in South Africa and a force to be reckoned with. This is perhaps most clearly evidenced by the anti-pass law demonstration on 9 August 1956, when over 20 000 black, coloured and white women from various parts of the country went to the Union Buildings

---

[28] Ruth Meena (ed.), *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues* (Harare, 1992) p. 17.

in Pretoria to petition against legislation that required women to carry passes at all times. From the 1970s there were a number of protest campaigns and demonstrations which relied heavily on the participation of women in the struggle against apartheid. The trade unions have long been noted for their female activist leadership and membership.

Yet there seemed to be a tendency to locate women as part of other categories first, rather that seeing them first and foremost as women. In 1987 Christine Qunta wrote

> I take the view that we are Africans before we are women, and that the problems that we confront in our continent arise largely from the fact that between a hundred and five hundred years our land and our lives have been ruled by outsiders for their own benefit.[29]

Thus Qunta places women in a race category before a gender category.

Pamela Ryan suggests that, given the set of conditions instituted under the ideologies of apartheid, it may be understandable that gender was overruled by racial considerations and that black women writers and activists have excused the behaviour of black men out of sympathy for their plight under white domination and out of a common loyalty to the struggle. Black women, she says, have also been both the agents of resistance as well as supporters of black men. But they have also found various forms of resistance to their own oppression, both on a public and private level.[30]

Makaziwe Mandela states that the racial oppression of black women is identical to the racial oppression of black men as racial oppression knows no gender boundaries. And yet discriminatory laws and policies that oppress both black men and black women affect women more harshly. Women bear the brunt of both racial and cultural oppression as they endure internal, or customary, oppression too.

> ...black women suffer most from the intersections of race and class. Often relegated to a position of inferiority and disadvantages, they are required to fulfill their traditional roles as housewives and bearers of children, to work on the land to supplement their husband's poor wages and are denied access to wage employment and to agricultural resources such as seeds, tractor, and credit.[31]

Mandela concurs with Qunta about black women's voices and oppression but she sees

---

[29] Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa* p. 11.
[30] Pamela Ryan, 'Singing in Prison: Women Writers and the Discourse of Resistance', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 1998).

patriarchy as a fundamental tool of women's oppression.

> Women who live in a patriarchal, oppressive milieu, are usually perceived as inferior, repressed and severely constrained passive victims. This view in South Africa is particularly a result of the absence of black women's voices in the historical record of black people.[32]

Mandela continues writing of her conviction that the oppression of black African women lies not only in external policies and politics, but also within their own cultures. She writes that

> [M]ost [of these] studies on black women have emphasised their involvement in the liberation struggle rather than on such topics as how gender relations are constructed and reproduced within the black communities, how they have changed historically, or how different categories of women perceive their roles.[33]

In order for us to examine the lives of women they themselves need to be the narrators of their own histories. 'Herstories' lend themselves to in-depth fieldwork as they convey women's consciousness and experience in an authentic manner. 'Herstories' give women's voices pride of place, and reflect a specialised methodology.

**'Herstories'**

Today there are many new fields of history. We find national and international history competing with local history. History is no longer just about the state and politics but about those at grassroots levels of society. New histories are concerned with every human activity and include topics not previously thought to have a history:

> childhood, death, madness, climate, smells, dirt and cleanliness, gestures, femininity, reading, speaking, silence. What had previously been considered unchanging is now viewed as a 'cultural construction', subject to variation over time as well as space.[34]

Contemporary historians realise it is unrealistic to write an unbiased history as one cannot avoid looking at the past without bias or prejudice. Further, historians now include the voices of the previously unheard such as women, black people, the poor, the illiterate, and the oppressed. We now hear voices from all sectors of human society. As Peter

---

[31] Mazakiwe P Mandela, *Gender Relations and Patriarchy in South Africa's Transkei*, DPhil Thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1993, p. 9.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Burke states:

> We have moved from the idea of the Voice of History to that of 'heteroglossia', defined as 'varied and opposing voices'. Historians now speak in different mother tongues.[35]

History now has to do with everyday life and the challenge to historical research is to relate everyday life to the great events of history. Social historians research the impact on and the opinions of 'ordinary' people who lived through major historical events in an attempt to understand the interaction between the structures of everyday life and political change or upheaval. In order to establish this it is necessary to hear the voices of the ordinary people. It is necessary to engage in some form of narrative. Thus there has been a shift towards narrative history which, in the context of this study, offers an opportunity to ordinary people to simply tell the stories of their lives. Narrative, here, is a form of autobiographical story-telling which relies on personal memory and anecdote.

Women historians are creating a new history by using their own voices and experiences. Thus oral history is a key tool for this type of research. Women historians are challenging the traditional concepts of history by affirming everyday life as historically important. Sherna Gluck, for example, offers a comprehensive list of issues that are important to women and which form part of women's history. She writes that oral historians of women ask questions about

> ...clothing, menstruation, knowledge and attitudes about sex and birth control, childbirth, economic functions in the household, household work, the nature of relationships among women, the magazines and books they read, menopausal experiences, the relationship of the private life to public life.[36]

Amina Mama, points out the almost total lack of voice and the invisibility of women, particularly black women, in histories of Africa. One way of correcting this omission, she claims, is by way of a new method of historical inquiry, that of 'herstories'. She describes 'herstories' as

> [T]he genre which epitomizes methodological innovations that have accompanied the development of women's studies [which is] one in which women's voices are

---

[34] Peter Burke, 'Overture. The New History: Its Past and Its Future', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives in Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 2001) p. 3.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[36] Sherna Gluck, 'What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History', in K. Dunaway & Willa Baum (eds.), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* ( Walnut Creek, CA, 1996) p. 217.

> given pride of place. It is a methodological commonality which unites studies that cover diverse subject matter. "Herstories" are best sited under cultural studies because many of them address women's subjectivity and agency. For this reason they tend to rely on qualitative and in-depth field work which has clear anthropological antecedents. Because of the emphasis on conveying women's consciousness and experience, 'herstories' necessarily embody a holistic approach to women's lives which defies mainstream boundaries.[37]

Given all of the above, it is necessary to examine the implications of hearing 'herstories' and retelling them. We will also need to consider arguments surrounding historians and other researchers who carry out research on people different from themselves. Whilst race is not a category of analysis for this study, and whilst it is not the intention of this author to ignore race in this research, the controversy over white women representing black women cannot be ignored. The following chapter includes discussion on forms of representation and 'otherness' in research.

As already mentioned above, feminist methodologies have contributed a great deal to the changing face of research in all fields of study. Thus the following chapter proffers further discussion on feminist research methodology.

[37] Amina Mama, *Women Studies and the Study of Women in Africa in the 1900s* (CODESRIA Working Paper5/9, 1996) p. 48.

## CHAPTER 2

## METHODOLOGY

One of the aims of this study is to allow Xhosa women to tell their stories in their own words. In doing so they may come to understand themselves better, to hear what other Xhosa women think and experience, and it will give insight to those outside of this homogenous group as to what the lives of Xhosa women entail. This section highlights the complex issue of researching 'the other'.

### The self, 'I', and the 'other' in feminist research

At the outset of the research the author was acutely aware of some of the problems connected with interviewing and an overriding concern was the idea of representing and presenting 'the other'. This meant facing some of the dilemmas inherent in the process of doing feminist oral history research. Gayle Letherby's book *Feminist Research in Theory and in Practice*, offers a particularly useful guide as her comments and insights are pertintent to the relationship between the researcher, the respondents, the research process, writing style, and the results of the study.[1]

Using feminist methodologies means that research practices have to be interrogated and measured against what are considered feminist methods of inquiry. A basic premise of feminism is that the 'personal is political'. The personal should therefore also be present within research experiences as much as within any other experience. Excluding the personal from feminist presentations of research is to deny the importance of the personal elsewhere. Academic feminists must integrate feminist beliefs into their research.[2]

---

[1] Gayle Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and in Practice* (London, 2003).
[2] Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology* (London, 1993) p. 157.

Gayle Letherby describes what she calls an 'auto/biographical' style of academic writing. This, she says, was developed through the work of certain researchers and the British Sociological Association Study group. Using this approach means the author starts from

> the aim of making sense of the self – one's own history, development and biography – and in locating oneself in social structures, to understand and respect others' experiences, feelings and social locations.[3]

Further, the use of 'I' when writing brings the researcher closer to the research and is a challenge for the author to take responsibility for what is written. This form of writing is endorsed by current feminist research writing which challenges the supposed more objective, observer, third person writing preferred by traditional academia.[4]

Just as it is necessary to know what knowledge is produced, so it is necessary to know who produced the knowledge. Knowledge is not produced outside of ourselves and therefore it may be necessary to establish identities when undertaking research. As Letherby says

> ...knowing and doing are intimately related and it is impossible to write about one without consideration of the other...My central concern is the relationship between the process and the product....The questions we ask, and the way we chose to ask them, often determine the answers we get, and, as Stanley (1997:198) argues, are the 'key to understanding and unpacking the overlap between knowledge and power'.[5]

Feminism is both 'theory' and 'practice'. Feminist researchers start with the political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women's lives through social and individual change. They are concerned to challenge the silences in mainstream research both in relation to the issues studied and the ways in which study is undertaken. Feminist work highlights the fact that the researchers' choice of methods, choice of research topic and of study group population are always political acts. With this in mind, although there is no such thing as a feminist method, and there is debate over the usefulness and even the existence of a feminist methodology and feminist epistemology, there is a recognition that 'feminist research practice' is distinguishable

---

[3] Letherby, *Feminist Research*, p. 1.
[4] For example contributing authors in Sue Wilson and Celia Kritzinger (eds.), *Representing the Other: A Feminist and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996).
[5] Letherby, *Feminist Research*, p. 3.

from other forms of research. She writes that

> ...feminist researchers are concerned to do research which reveals what is going on in women's lives ... and to undertake research that is not exploitative. This is important because historically women and women's concerns have not been given much attention by researchers and when women were included they were presented as 'not male' and therefore generally 'other', not the 'norm', as deviant. Also, research has generally served the purpose of the researcher rather than the researched and been carried out in a way which objectifies respondents. Thus, the concern for feminists is not just what we do but how and why we do it and the relevance of the techniques and approaches we choose.[6]

A key concern in feminist research is the imbalance of power between the researcher and the 'researched'. Although it is probably unlikely that this imbalance can ever be completely eradicated, efforts can be made to lessen this by acknowledging the power of those whom we interview as central to our work. Our reliance on them far outweighs theirs on us, even if the research is an attempt to make their lives better. This became very clear to this researcher as the study progressed and as the women expanded on the subjects under discussion, giving more and more insight into their somewhat hidden lives (at least in terms of the public and in the academy).

Feminists such as Ann Oakley ditch the objective, dominant and distance approach to interviewing for a more friendly, subjective and interpersonal style.[7] Stanley and Wise remind us that research is always a human activity which comes with all the emotions, feelings, moods and prejudices that make up the human person, all of which influence how we understand and interpret what is going on. They stress the fact of the researchers' consciousness as the medium through which the research occurs. This interpersonal style was adopted by the author both because of her own personality as well as the openness and willingness on the part of the respondents to engage at a personal level.

Stanley and Wise say that placing oneself in the centre of the research (which does mean being the centre) and being open and honest with those we interview can make us very vulnerable. But, for 'the researched', vulnerability is precisely what they feel. Very

---

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[7] Anne Oakley, 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', in Helen Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (London, 1990) pp. 32-45.

seldom are they powerful enough to prevent publication or renounce the result of the study. From where they stand, they have very little control over the research. Their feelings, understandings and lives may become mangled in the interpretation, and yet will be presented as 'truth' by the researcher.[8]

The task for feminist researchers then, is to take into account the personal context of both the interviewer and the narrators. To acknowledge ourselves in the research process, and to allow for some control, if possible, to be in the hands of 'the researched'; to make space for the personal in the research and to let go of some of our objectivity and instead recognize and accept our subjectivity in the research process.

Therefore this author's identity is stated here in order to establish the differences or similarities between the author and the respondents that may well affect the interviews. Identities of the respondents are detailed later (*Appendix i)*. I am a white woman, over fifty years old, born to an English speaking middle-class South African family. Because of this all the privileges of what it meant to be white in this country were afforded me: educational opportunities, the right to vote, choice of living space, domestic help, employment and superior amenities in the suburbs and towns in which I have lived. I do not have children and have never married. Never have I had to deal with any severe illness of my own or anyone else for whom I have had to care. I am a priest in the Anglican Church and employed in by exclusive private school as a chaplain.

The author's identity and life situation are vastly different from those of the respondents, save for the fact all are female and South African. My understanding of their world as told to me is purely vicarious and not my lived experience. The dynamic between myself and those whom I interviewed, between their life-stories and my history, their struggles and mine, their language and mine, and many other variables, will have some effect on what is said and not said, and how it is received, heard and, ultimately, presented. It is possible that objectivity will be lost as the very personal and intimate relationship that develops between the researcher and the respondents through conversation necessitates a certain amount of subjectivity both on the part of the respondents and the researcher. This is not the standard way in which history has been

[8] Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out Again*, p. 69.

presented. As Letherby writes:

> Historically, research has been presented as orderly, coherent and clean: as hygienic...Yet all research is ideological because no one can separate themselves from the world – from their values and opinions, from books they read, from the people they have spoken to and so on. Thus the product cannot be separated from the means of its production and feminists not only acknowledge this, but celebrate it. Being reflexive about what we do and how we do it and the relationship between this and what is known, is crucial for the academic feminists as it allows others who read our work to understand the background to the claims that we are making.[9]

In this study, because complete objectivity is impossible, the author's feminist views on gender bias in society and culture may influence the way in which the stories of the respondents are interpreted, and which questions are asked. Once the interview process began, crucial issues around the interrelationship of the interviewer and the interviewees emerged. Questions arose about the use or abuse of the words of others; the interpretation and analysis of their stories; choosing which anecdotes to extract; and how the actual language used by the respondents should be presented. These issues developed into major research concerns with regard to oral history as a method of inquiry.

**Challenges to the oral history method**

Oral history is not a new method of doing research, nor is it essentially feminist, but it does become a feminist methodology when used in certain ways. Susan Geiger believes that oral history is only a method when the interests of the interviewer go beyond the mere pleasure of listening to the story being told. When scholars use the information derived from the interview it becomes a method, and methodological questions arise from it. It can only become feminist methodology if it is used in particular feminist ways and if the objectives for collecting the data are feminist. Key objectives in feminist oral history emphasise

> understanding rather than controlling the material or information generated and conceptualising the interpretative task as one of opening rather than of closure.[10]

Oral history is a most effective tool for hearing the voices of the previously silenced. It

---

[9] Letherby, *Feminist Research*, pp. 5-6.
[10] Susan NG Geiger, 'Women's Life Histories: Method and Content', *Signs*, 11, 2, 1986, p. 177.

lends itself to the gathering of information from those who would never write their own stories. Oral history, according to Paul Thompson, allows evidence from a new direction which makes a more accurate reconstruction of the past. It shifts the focus to the lower ranks of society and from the public to the private, from the political to the personal, from work to home. It offers a way into the previously secret areas of the home lives of families, of relationships between spouses, of how boys and girls are raised, of dependence and conflict, of sexual behaviour, the division of household labour. Through interviewing family members it is possible to develop a fuller history of the family and to establish changes in it over time.[11]

Because traditional historical methods neglected and obscured the lives of women, feminists have embraced oral history as a means of integrating women into historical scholarship and putting women's voices at the centre of history. Oral history offers a challenge to traditional historical methods of dominance in that, by listening to women tell their stories, there is the possibility that the women themselves will shape the research agenda and talk about what is important to them. Furthermore oral history is a methodology directly informed by interdisciplinary feminist debates around research objectives andquestions about the ethical use of the interview. Sangster writes that

> in order to contextualise oral histories, we also need to survey the dominant ideologies shaping women's worlds; listening to women's words, in turn will help us to see how women understood, negotiated and sometimes challenged these dominant ideals.[12]

The framing of questions, the language used, assumptions of marginality and representativeness, ways of deriving meaning and evaluating validity, ways of sharing authority will all determine whether the oral history is feminist or not.

When women become the narrators of their own stories in in-depth fieldwork, they convey women's consciousness and experience in a legitimate manner; that is, the women's voices are given pride of place and reflect a specialised methodology. Portelli writes that oral history is true to itself when it listens to those who are not already

---

[11] Paul Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past. Oral History', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 2002) pp. 25-26.
[12] Joan Sangster, 'Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 2002) p. 91.

acquainted with public speaking.[13]

The role of the researcher here is to weave the stories of the respondents into the fabric of the research so that their voices are heard, their experiences made visible and their lives given meaning in the public arena. This brings with it many complexities as the researcher has to listen for deeper meaning and nuance from the respondents and to identify subjectivity and personal opinion and memory. It is the task of the researcher to take what is said and find in them significance for the research topic.

To this end the actual words of the respondents in this study have been used extensively, without corrections to their grammar, despite the challenge this brings to readers who may be confused by 'broken' English. In this way we 'hear' their own voices express their own thoughts and experiences in an attempt to represent their words as accurately as possible. All the respondents are first language Xhosa speakers for whom English is either their second or even third language. This means that what they say in English may not be a direct translation from Xhosa. Inflections and emphases may be missed due to a limited English vocabulary.

This leads to further discussion of the complex problem of representing the stories of 'others'. As soon as we take the words or story of another and re-tell it in our words, it no longer belongs to them as it is a representation of their story. The following comments from researchers are pertinent.

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speaking subject, and you are now the center of my talk.[14]
>
> No one should ever 'speak for' or assume another's voice ...it becomes a form of colonisation.[15]
>
> The appeal of oral history to feminists is easy to understand. Women doing oral histories with other women in order to recover their stories and received

[13] Alessandro Portelli, 'Oral History as Genre', in Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (eds.), *Narrative and Genre* (London, 1998) p. 24.
[14] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, 1990) p. 151.
[15] Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kritzinger, (eds.), *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996) p. 1.

> knowledge about them have seen their work as consistent with the principle of feminist research later codified in the phrase "research by, about, and for women".[16]

The first two of the above quotations raise questions about the silence of women in history; about the risk of re-telling the story of another, about the stories of black women being told through white women; about representing the 'other'. The third quotation has to do with feminist research methodology and theory with regard to placing women at the centre of research. All of these aspects of oral history form a major part of this thesis.

bell hooks is an African American woman expressing both her own experience and that of other women like her who have been silenced through oppression, and who have been the 'subjects' of research. Their experience is not unique to their culture as this has been the experience of many women in Africa and in other places. Criticism has been leveled at white academic women speaking for or on behalf of black women.

Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kritzinger's publication consists of a series of thirty-nine articles by researchers grappling with the concept of 'othering' and representing the 'other'. These essays raise complex questions with regard to who is the 'other'; how to address power relationships between researcher and narrator; and how representing 'others' can create misunderstandings. These questions are pertinent to this study because the researcher and the narrators are of different races, cultures, languages, education levels and economic classes.

Amanda Kottler writes of the particular difficulty of conducting research in South Africa with its history and ever present consideration of racism. On the problem of black people writing only for black people, or white researchers only researching other white people, she concludes:

> Perhaps in the end, since we cannot ever totally transcend either our historical position or our prejudgments, the best that can be done, when faced with this kind of dilemma, is to interpret in such a way as to give access to our past and

[16] Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Women's Words: Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York, 1991) p. 1.

> continually open up new possibilities for the future. In South Africa in particular, we need to do this now by finding a way of speaking about difference without reinvoking a racializing discourse.[17]

Pamela Ryan states that it is mostly white and middle-class women who are writing books and doing academic research. Some of these writers and researchers, she says, make assumptions about the lives of black women and do not accurately interpret the experience of black women and that

> many black women have voiced their anger at being "research objects" and ask if it means that white and middle-class women are not oppressed in view of the fact that they are always writing about black women's oppression. I see this as academic colonialism. My response to this is: Would it not be better if there were wider consultation or collective writing on these issues?[18]

Ryan goes on to raise the question of the possibility of allowing and facilitating women who, because of the political context, have not had the ability to write their own stories. She also strongly suggests that more research on white women be carried out in order to gain a complete picture of the oppression of women in South Africa. Ryan expresses the need to empower 'grassroots women', and in order to make women's issues and movements more relevant, ways of bringing theories and praxis closer need to be investigated.

One way of doing this, she says, is to make use of the oral tradition, and for white woman academicians to collaborate with black women to write black women's stories.

> The entire process of writing could be demystified and the piece of work would emerge as more authentic due to the direct participation of black women. Such a collaborative work will contrast with some published articles consisting mostly of unacknowledged quotations by women whose stories are being written.[19]

Sometimes, in the process of interviewing women for academic purposes a relationship of friendship develops. This has been the case with one of the respondents in this study and the researcher. However, it has to be acknowledged that it was not through friendship with the respondents that contact was established, but rather through connections with

---

[17] Amanda Kottler, 'Voices in the Winds of Change', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kritzinger (eds.), *Representing the Other: A Feminist and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996) p. 62.
[18] Pamela Ryan, 'Singing in Prison: Women Writers and the Discourse of Resistance' in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 1998) p. 27.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

others known to the respondents or by chance meetings.

Sangster goes on to say how, despite her intention to allow the words of the women whom she interviewed to speak for themselves, no matter how well her own interpretation and perceptions and those of the narrators diverged, her voice would assume precedence in the writing. Thus it is very difficult for researchers to allow their own and the voices of the respondents equal value. Yet despite these inevitable imbalances, she still believes it is the responsibility of historians to convey their insights.

As already stated, the aims of this study are to give voice to Xhosa women who have lived through the many transformations in this country and to discover the struggles they have and the coping mechanisms they have developed to assist them in surviving and managing their households within different generations. In line with Russell's comment about writing about the 'other' furthering the goals of feminism, it is hoped this study will be a further contribution to the growing body of history on the lives of black women in South Africa, and give voice to the ways in which the women interviewed have provided useful insights into otherwise hidden forms of consciousness and coping strategies developed by women in a rapidly changing world. The co-operative nature of this research culminated in the final interview where the respondents heard what others had said and were asked how the findings of this research would be of benefit to a wider audience.

In South Africa we have a long history of black people having been represented by white people in government. It was acceptable practice for certain people to represent 'others' different from themselves, but who, it was thought, nonetheless understood completely the needs, aspirations and problems of those whom they represented. This is not only true for this country but universally. Societies surmised that accurate information about various groups of people could be gained through the opinions and experiences of certain individuals who were not themselves part of the group under discussion. These individuals were mostly male, educated, and thought to be reliable in their presentation of certain facts, events and opinions. Thus it was that men spoke on behalf of women, white people on behalf of black people, the educated and articulate on behalf of the illiterate, the wealthy on behalf of the poor, husbands on behalf of wives, and adults on behalf of children and, perhaps less obviously, the heterosexual on behalf of the

homosexual.

All of these dualistic relationships suggest an imbalance of power, with those perceived to be weaker, abnormal or less significant, being placed at the mercy of those who regard themselves as more knowledgeable, normal and important. Perhaps what is described here are forms of colonisation in which the 'other' is regarded as a subject that is foreign, and that needs to be examined.

Feminist researchers are convinced that research should in some way contribute to the betterment of the lives of the 'researched' and not merely be an end in itself. South Africans have long lived with power imbalances and exclusion. In recent times a new awareness of this has emerged and action is being taken to correct such imbalances through affirmative action, transparency and the acknowledgement of the need for transformation in political and social life. This raised questions as to what possible political or social change this study would bring about, given the fact that the audience or readership of this, and many academic studies, may only be a small group of academic researchers.

With this goal in mind, the respondents were interviewed a third time once all the data from the first two interviews had been analysed. For this interview they were each given a brief summary of the findings of the research and taped copies of their interviews for their own use. They were taken through the summary a section at a time and asked for their comments as to whether they agreed or disagreed with the findings, and they were invited to make further comments. At the end of the summary they were asked who else they thought might benefit form the information gathered from the research. [20] This is discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

In this way the respondents were made aware of the contribution they made to the research and they were able to hear some of the comments made by the others. They were encouraged to agree or disagree with the other respondents. They were also given the opportunity to make suggestions about taking the findings to others, though some found this a difficult question to answer. This is a fairly new departure from the canon

[20] See *Appendix ii.*

of research practices where respondents are not given feedback, nor asked to appraise the results, nor is their advice solicited as to further uses of the research. The respondents were immensely interested in the findings of the research and were proud of their involvement. This feedback gave them a sense of affiliation with the other women and gave them a much deserved appreciation of the purpose of their connection to the research. They were also made aware of how much the researcher had to rely on them for the information and knowledge.

Having said all this, no matter how well intentioned the motivations are for speaking for or representing the other, there will always be problems due to difference and reward. These issues need to be taken seriously even if they are not solved. Difference cannot be ignored, researchers cannot be completely objective and the final product will benefit the researcher and the participants in different ways. Wilkinson and Kritzinger remind us that

> [A] key issue in feminist theory and practice is whether and how we should represent members of groups to which we do not belong – in particular members of groups oppressed in ways we are not.[21]

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise take up this issue and comment that although all women share oppression, they are not all oppressed in the same way and they cannot fully understand the ways in which other women are oppressed because 'the material forms of the oppression differ'.[22]

Whilst recognising the 'otherness' of the women in this study, it has to be acknowledged that the researcher is 'other' to them. And because of this otherness each would choose what to say and what not to say, to understand or misinterpret what is being implied, and would perform for each other in ways deemed appropriate and acceptable to the other.

Indeed, if we are to take the idea of the 'other' to be those different from ourselves, whether in class, gender or even experience, then, in line with Russell's comment quoted earlier, we would always only have permission to speak for ourselves alone. Perhaps we do indeed speak only for ourselves when we give only our opinion, our understanding of how things are presented to us.

---

[21] Wilkinson and Kritzinger, *Representing the Other*, p. 1.

Portelli comments on the crucial role oral historians play in the interview situation itself and in the presentation of the material.

> The expression oral history therefore contains ambivalence ...: it refers both to what the historians hear (the oral sources) and to what the historians say or write. On a more cogent plane, it refers to what the source and the historian do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview.[23]

Stanley and Wise are scathing in their attack on any research that would treat people as 'objects' for the researcher to do research 'on'. For them, the more morally acceptable form of research would be research 'with'. This implies the 'researched' would be involved in the designing the research method.[24]

Whilst this may be an extremely well-intentioned means of including the 'researched' in the research and diminishing the objectification or what could be termed 'the commodification of persons', in reality it may be very difficult to do this for a number of reasons.[25] The researcher has a specific agenda of her own which is to gain certain information about certain issues. The participant may not have the confidence to shape the interview for herself, preferring to be asked questions rather than pose them or to speak without any indication of what she should say. In the case of this study, for example, the respondents have had little, if any, experience of academic research and were not entirely familiar with the goals and purposes of the project.

This was borne out in the last interviews with the respondents when they were asked to suggest where the research findings may be helpful to others. Because they are not familiar with the aims of academic research and because their world seldom includes the ideas of workshops and seminars or of suggesting to authority figures what the needs of communities are, they found this a difficult question. However, what they said led me to recognise potential target groups of people who may find the research useful. Their comments on marriages for example, could encourage the faith communities to give attention to marriage preparation and post-marriage counselling, not only when a couple is in crisis, but as a matter of course.

---

[22] Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out Again*, p. 170.
[23] Portelli, 'Oral History as Genre' p. 23.
[24] Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out Again*, p. 168.

There is scope, however, for the participant to guide the discussion if the interviewer allows for 'digressions' and between the two they renegotiate the course of the conversation. Personal testimony may raise other issues which lead the interviewer to ask new questions and add another dimension to the lives of the speakers.

No matter in what language we couch this concept, there remains the very real fact that the academic researcher's dependence on the participant is far greater than the other way around. Whilst connectedness and conversation and community may be a by-product of interviews and life story telling, it is the academic researcher who will benefit first and foremost. Any social or economic benefit to the participants will be 'by products', however useful.

The social and personal relationship between the narrator and the interviewer plays a significant role in how the interview will take shape. In this research the participants and the researcher share only minimal similar life experiences. Given the history of racial bias in this country the race differences had the potential to place the black woman participant in a position, albeit in our minds only, at a disadvantage because of the power so long held in the hands of white people. An example of this is when one interviewee insisted on addressing the interviewer as "ma'am", possibly as she is young, is employed as a domestic worker and sees the designation as a way of showing respect. In reality this form of address places the interviewer in a position of authority.

Once the research is concluded and the active role of the respondents is over, the possibility for inequality, betrayal, exploitation by the researcher arises. The researchers have their own values, beliefs and prejudices and research involves selection, explanation, interpretation and judgments. This makes our work more accountable to our respondents and to the wider feminist and academic community.[26]

**Representation**

---

[25] A phrase coined by Janet Trisk in the course of an academic conversation on 'otherness'.
[26] Letherby, *Feminist Research*, p. 18.

Having heard the voices of ten women answer very much the same questions, can we conclude that what they have said is representative of other women of their age, class, marital status and educational qualifications? Feminist scholars would challenge the assumption that individual stories typify the cultural norm. We need to consider the subjectivity of the narrators and the motives and interests of those who are recording.

> The personal contextualisation of women's lives found in life stories makes them invaluable for deepening cross-cultural comparisons, preventing facile generalisations, and evaluating theories about women's experience or oppression.[27]

Do individual stories typify or deviate from the cultural norm? Whichever way we answer this implies knowledge against which the individual's story can be evaluated or compared. Some feminist researchers have challenged this because there is not enough research done by, on and for women. The cultural norm with which we have been presented is often a male norm, with men representing the experiences of women.[28]

This view also presumes that one set of circumstances can be applied to others which are seen to be 'the same'. The counter argument to this is that knowledge is contextually specific with the narrator and the interviewers/researchers are active agents, constructing a viewpoint that is partial in its representativeness and understanding.[29]

If the women in the study are not representative of other women, then what is the significance, if any, of their stories? Could it be enough to say that life stories and narrations of personal experiences are inherently valuable because they are individual, subjective and personal? Can we value these stories for what they tell us of how individual women made their own lives under the conditions that are specific to them?

> Whilst each life is different, they may provide evidence of historical activity – the working out within a specific life situation of deliberate courses of action that in turn have the potential to undermine or perpetuate the conditions and relationships

---

[27] Geiger, 'What's so Feminist About Doing Women's Oral History?', in C Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel (eds.), *Expanding the Boundaries of Women's History: Essays on Women in the Third World* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1992) p. 338.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 338.
[29] Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out Again*, p. 112.

in which the life is involved.[30]

Stanley and Wise warn against the impression that there exists a generalised history or reality that fits all groups of people and which then diminishes the uniqueness of individuals.

> In order to see these individual stories as inherently valuable, it is necessary to let go of the notion that there is a single unseamed reality existing 'out there' which the special expertise of science can investigate and explain as it 'really' is, independent of observer-effects.[31]

Letherby writes

> ... that while feminist research cannot claim to have epistemic privilege and thus is unable to reveal 'truth', it is possible to argue that, while recognizing that we do not uncover the one and only truth, we should aim to make our work illustrative of women's experience... small scale studies do not tell us everything we need to know about women's lives.[32]

Thus the limitations of this study are to be noted. The personal accounts in life stories, whilst they may be indicative of the lives of others, may tell us more about the individual's character and unique experience rather than the experience of all women, or even most women in similar circumstances. But this may well be the point we want to make: that experiences differ and that no one woman can fully represent another. At the same time, life histories may facilitate connections between women and they may give insights into the lives of many.

**Choosing the respondents**

Once the decision was made to conduct a generational study on not less than ten and not more than fifteen women, the task of finding respondents began. It was vital to interview women who could speak English as the researcher has no skills in speaking Xhosa and the use of an interpreter was rejected in favour of a dialogue through the medium of English in order not to have their words filtered through a third party. This may have resulted in the respondents being unconfident about their language skills and perhaps not saying as much as they could have due to this deficit in language.

---

[30] Personal Narratives Group (eds.), *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1989) p. 6.
[31] Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out Again*, p. 6.

Through various contacts ten women were approached and interviews were set up and conducted over three years. Eight women were interviewed twice; two had left Grahamstown before they could have their second interview. When arranging the interviews, the women were told about the subject, the basis for the interviews and were assured of confidentiality.

This was explained again at the first interview and they were given the option to stop the interview at any time or to decline to answer any questions they were not comfortable answering, which was the case for one woman when asked if she would elaborate on an episode of violence in her home. The interviews were conducted either in the researcher's office or at the workplace of the respondent. In one case we met in the home of the respondent. In general the women gave the impression of being relaxed and interested in the process and most asked questions for clarification when uncertain about a question. Only two of the women were related, for the rest, none knew the others. The women have varying educational qualifications ranging from leaving school in standard five to university degrees. Three are not married and do not have children. One is divorced and two are widows. Two of the women are school teachers, one works as a secretary, one is a law student, one is a volunteer worker for an AIDS awareness organization, and the remaining five are in domestic work.

In research projects, the 'researched' are referred to in various ways: respondent, subject, participant, informants, or interviewees. None of these gives satisfactory acknowledgement to the individuals who allow their words to be used and their lives exposed.[33] In his novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Njabulo Ndebele has one of his characters comment on the free use of first names which is popular amongst Western people. According to the character, this familiarity is uncomfortable for black people. These are the words of the character, as given to her by Ndebele:

> I'm thinking how white people charge away, calling everyone by their first names...Africans are unable to exchange names outside of a framework of social positioning. Beyond this, I'm thinking, first names are useless to Africans. First names provide no leads to genealogy. And Africans are obsessed with genealogy! They look for relationships everywhere...The formality of titles and

[32] Letherby, *Feminist Research*, p. 86.
[33] See *Appendix i* for a brief biography of each respondent.

> last names must have something to do with recognizing, acknowledging, and honouring strangeness. There is a democracy behind the formality of titles. Everyone is accorded initial respect and recognition. The formal address is a universal place of temporary refuge, offering recognition and equality. First names are the reward for increasing intimacy. They have to be earned.[34]

In order to honour the women who shared their stories with their own identities, it would have been preferable to use both their first and last names. But, in order to respect their privacy, and in negotiation with the respondents, they were given other names. Naming is in itself a political act so, in choosing pseudonyms for the respondents, those who use English names were given another English name and those who use their Xhosa names have substitute Xhosa names.

The next three chapters will give voice to these ten women, each telling 'Herstory' of how having children affected her life; about the difficulties she experience in marriage and with their partners; and of the effects of HIV/AIDS on her households. We will gain understanding of the way customs and attitudes of the past shape current perceptions and circumstances. We turn first to the problems the women have with unplanned pregnancies, whether they are married or not. They speak for themselves, but their particular stories will resonate with those of their friends and women in their communities.

[34] Njabulo S Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Claremont, 2003) pp. 54 -55.

## CHAPTER 3
## CHILDREN TOO SOON

Q: So would you say around then, what was people's attitude towards sex before marriage or babies that are born before marriage? What would the community have thought of something like that?

A: Oh, if you do something like that you must be away. Say as if you... as if with my friend, if I have a child, I've got be away to my friend. No, don't mix with them anymore because they said, "You can't be with that one. She's got a baby now she ... so she's off your side."[1]

This is how one of the respondents of the 'grandmother' generation described the social position of a young woman in her day should she be pregnant before marriage. Her comment suggests a social code amongst the community that indicated disapproval of such sexual behaviour, possibly placing most of the responsibility on the woman as there is no reference to ostracism of the male sexual partner. This attitude to pre-marital sex and pregnancy changed over the years to, if not approval, at least acceptance of the situation. However, women still carry a disproportionate amount of shame and blame compared to men.

One of the major issues that faced the respondents in this study was the fact that they, or their mothers, or their daughters had unplanned pregnancies and gave birth to children 'too soon'. This chapter looks at the consequences of women having children too soon and also at the fact that some of them were unprepared for and uniformed about their own fertility and sexuality. Whilst the circumstances surrounding an unplanned pregnancy may be similar, the responses from parents and the community evolved over time. The older women report far more disapproval of babies conceived outside of marriage than the younger.

Five of the ten women in this study had children of their own before they were married, two were themselves born out of marriage, and two are looking after grandchildren who were born outside of marriage. The women also told of children born to their husbands

[1] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2002.

and fathers as a result of extra- or pre-marital relationships and how these children were accepted or, in some cases, ignored by their mothers or fathers.

The notion of shame felt by all members of the family when a child was born outside of marriage was mentioned by the respondents, but more from the older women (60-64 years of age) than the mother and daughter generations. For the latter it was more an issue of lost educational opportunities, further economic burdens, and a feeling of not allowing the irresponsible behaviour of fathers (and mothers) to warrant the rejection of their children.

**Children born out of marriage**

Social stigma attached to children born outside of wedlock is not confined to black African societies. On the contrary it has formed part of Western society's ideas of morality and the need to control human sexuality since at least the eighteenth century. Both State and Church encouraged marriage primarily for economic reasons though often disguised under morality. Church and State in Britain and other Western countries were responsible for the relief of poverty and children born out of wedlock meant the mothers and children were the main claimants of subsistence. This was due to the disadvantageous position of women in the labour market. Diana Gittins comments on the history of marriage and illegitimacy.

> Church and State have used the patriarchal assumption that women must be dependent on a man to inform harsh policies on illegitimacy since Elizabethan times...Through marriage the Church was able to abrogate any financial responsibility by assuming a wife and children to be dependant on the male. Marriage has thus been an important means for delineating responsibility for dependants ...[2]

From the eighteenth century in Britain Church and State established a public marriage ceremony so that they could recognize and control dereliction of parental and family duties. Marriage became a moral issue with the burden of moral responsibility increasingly placed on women, and not merely an economic one. To have sex and children outside of marriage was regarded as immoral. Gittins goes on to say that in the nineteenth century

---

[2] Diana Gittins, *The Family in Question: Changing Households & Familial Ideologies* (London, 1993) p. 82.

> ...patriarchal attitudes to women, childbearing and marriage, informed by economic 'rationalisation', were becoming more severe. Women were no longer encouraged to name the father, but were wholly condemned for their 'immorality'. Men were seldom penalized at all.[3]

The gender bias is glaring and these attitudes remain in some areas of society today, especially in the Church. Given the fact that South Africa was a British colony, populated by Europeans who brought their moral and social mores with them, it is not surprising that these ideas took root in this country. The nineteenth century missionaries instilled this same morality in their converts, continuing to support gender bias under the authority of scripture and church law. Children born out of wedlock were regarded by the Church as 'illegitimate' despite the different familial arrangements present in indigenous societies that did not use such terminology.

Sandra Burman and Eleanore Preston-Whyte, editors of *Questionable Issue: Illegitimacy in South Africa*, define illegitimacy as

> being concerned with births resulting from unions deemed unlawful by either state or religious law.[4]

However, they note that such a definition of illegitimacy carries with it a number of connotations which differ according to societal mores and of degrees of acceptance of children born out of marriage. Some unions may carry with them stigmatisation and sanction, depending on cultural, religious and legal definitions in operation within South Africa. The legal system was embedded in Western notions of illegitimacy which applied to all citizens regardless of religious or cultural settings. Many groups of people operate within other paradigms of what constitutes illegitimacy, some of which clashed with national laws. This applied to African marriages where it may have been the case that a marriage was sanctioned by the community but not necessarily by state law of the state. Mbalekwa, in her unpublished thesis, 'A Comparison of the Changing Views on Illegitimacy in Two Xhosa Communities through the Twentieth Century', notes that ideas of legitimacy, illegitimacy and illicit relationships were different for Westerners and Africans, which made definitions of these terms problematic. She says African marriage includes

---

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[4] Sandra Burman and Eleanore Preston-Whyte (eds.), *Questionable Issue: Illegitimacy in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992) p. *xi*.

> polygamous marriages, marriages without Christian or legal rights and concubinage which is also an accepted option to marriage.[5]

Brigitte Clark and Belinda van Heerden, writing in 1992, point out that the law in South Africa refused to acknowledge marriage according to customary rites. Such marriages were termed 'customary unions' in order to distinguish them from civil marriages. People, more importantly women and children, in these relationships were unprotected by the law.[6]

The law has subsequently changed in South Africa and customary marriages currently enjoy propriety rights, and wives and children of such unions are protected even though the union is not recognised as a marriage. All the legal consequences of legitimate children now apply to the children of such unions. This change came about as a result of constitutional revisions to South African laws which now recognise cultural and religious rites of various groups including marriage.

Anthropologists have raised the question as to whether illegitimacy was known to black African people before the advent of outsiders, particularly missionaries, who brought Western and Christian marriage and ideas of exclusion into indigenous cultures. Whereas in Europe a child born outside of marriage,

> the stereotypical 'bastard' ...may have no recognized kin ...may be a person without honour ... [and] without title to a name. Anthropologists in Africa have argued that the disabilities suffered by a child born out of wedlock are (and, to an even greater extent in pre-colonial times, were) far less than in Western European society. This has led them to caution against the use of the term 'illegitimacy' in the African context.[7]

This explanation is based on the African custom that a child born to an unmarried woman is incorporated into the family of the maternal grandfather who immediately becomes the child's guardian. Indeed, it is often believed that no child in an African family is ever 'illegitimate' as every child is everyone's child and every parent is parent to every child.

---

[5] Zibia Mbalekwa, 'A Comparison of the Changing Views on Illegitimacy in Two Xhosa Communities through the Twentieth Century', Rhodes University, Department of History, Honours Paper, 1996, p. 10.
[6] Brigitte Clark and Belinda van Heerden, 'The Legal Position of Children Born out of Wedlock', in Sandra Burman and Eleanor Preston-Whyte (eds.), *Questionable Issue: Illegitimacy in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992) p. 36.
[7] Burman and Preston-Whyte (eds.), *Questionable Issue*, p. *xiii*.

This is borne out by the 'brother-cousin' relationship between children of the same extended family, and the way in which a black person may have more than one 'mother', only one being the biological mother, the others are aunts.

The Christian missionaries of the nineteenth century were disturbed to find what they perceived as a complete lack of domestic order among African people. Attempts were made to rectify this by their condemnation of polygamy, lobola, male and female circumcision. The missionaries approached these social customs with all the outrage of their Victorian morality, the teachings of the Evangelical Revival, patriarchy and the understanding that Western European civilisation was superior and correct.[8]

Right up until the end of the twentieth century and to date, at least in some Anglican congregations, black unmarried pregnant women were required to sit on the 'penitent's bench' at the back of the church during services which drew attention to their 'sinful' or 'fallen' state. They were excluded from receiving communion and were required to attend 'penitent's classes', a time during which the priest or minister would inform them of their wrongdoing and persuade them to change their behaviour in the future. The majority of those in attendance were young girls, the fathers of their children were said to be 'unknown' or could not be found. Little, if anything, was done to find the fathers of the children and, if the fathers were unknown, there was no acknowledgement that the girl may have been raped. Neither were questions asked as to why the girl may be afraid to name the father of her child. The gender bias is obvious: girls were blamed and took full responsibility for the pregnancy and bore the shame and guilt alone. In some church communities today the unmarried mothers and their children are still stigmatised.[9]

The mission churches preached sexual purity, particularly to women and young girls, promoting a 'cult of domesticity' in which women were confined in subordinate roles at home and were excluded from the larger society. The goals of purity were adopted by many church women's organisations, such as in the Purity League in Natal in the 1920s,

---

[8] David Chidester, 'The Politics of Exclusion: Christian Images of Illegitimacy', in Sandra Burman and Eleanor Preston-Whyte (eds.), *Questionable Issue: Illegitimacy in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992) p. 154.
[9] This is an observation from the author's personal experience when working in a Zulu congregation in the 1990s.

and hostels were established to train girls for female roles and to teach them to 'live clean lives'.[10]

There is evidence that there was some stigmatisation of unmarried motherhood within African societies before Christianity came to the country and, in some cultures, unmarried mothers were considered to be ritually impure until certain cleansing ceremonies had been carried out. In some cases reparation had to be made to the family of the girl, and, in some, having a baby before marriage would reduce the lobola price considerably, or remove the chance of lobola altogether.

**The influence of Christianity on sexual custom**

Concerns surrounding births outside of marriage were different from those introduced by Christianity in that they were of a ritual and economic nature and did not necessarily have anything to do with morality.[11] This is corroborated by Mbalekwa from her study on Pondo people who took a far more pragmatic approach to the problem, insisting the man responsible for the pregnancy should admit paternity and pay reparations to the family by giving them a number of cattle. For them the most important issue at stake was the welfare of the child and not the morality of the young woman.[12]

Converts to Christianity took on the moralistic view of premarital pregnancy and mothers of unmarried pregnant girls felt they were responsible for their daughter's behaviour. In her article '"Wailing for purity": Prayer Unions, African Mothers and Adolescent Daughters 1912-1940', Deborah Gaitskell examines the uniformed prayer groups and associations attended regularly by women in the various churches in South Africa. It is to be noted that, although these were associations for women, the *isililo* was initiated by men who were angry at the sexual impurity of their daughters and blamed their wives for this.[13]

Gaitskill found that

---

[10] Chidester, 'The Politics of Exclusion' p. 155.
[11] Burman and Preston-Whyte, *Questionable Issue*, p. *xiii*.
[12] Mbalekwa, A Comparison, p. 7.
[13] Wailing or crying, lamenting.

> the views on courtship, marriage and the role of the mother within the family ran counter to the assumptions of African, particularly Nguni, society. Consequently, the evidence suggests, the manyano and its American Board equivalent isililo, should be seen in part as the attempt by African women converts to internalise new domestic norms or perhaps lament the difficulty of doing so under the destructive influence of South Africa's industrial revolution...as new economic and social forces increasingly conflicted with new religious prescriptions, certain features of the Christian culture which female Africans were being urged to adopt, struggled to take root in urban working-class society.[14]

Anne Kelk Mager discusses the roles of mothers and fathers in the raising of their offspring. In the 1940s and 1950s fathers took little if any responsibility for their daughters' sexual education and played scant attention to their daughters' sexual activity. This was the role of the mother. She notes that

> [W]hile fathers might be aware of boys having metsha relationships with their daughters, women were responsible for girls' bodies and their sexuality. It was women's business to find out if a girl had a lover or metsha partner. Their duty was not to forbid the liaison but to keep a watchful eye over the young girls. Most importantly, girls were examined to ensure that no boy "had reached where he was not supposed to".[15]

Mager does not give any indication of what would happen to a girl should the examination prove that she had been inappropriately intimate with boy, nor does she say whether the boy would be punished for his behaviour. It was the mothers of the girls who took the blame. When there were contraventions of the accepted courting code, the mothers of the girls were held responsible and were accused of allowing their daughters too much freedom. Christian African mothers were urged to stop the practice of 'parentally-condoned private lovemaking' and women at the Native Annual Meeting of the church in Groutville, Natal in 1912

> were moved to tears over the matter of low morals among the youth during those days. Young girls were getting pregnant before marriage whilst living in their parents' homes. The male members complained that it was the women who were giving the youth opportunities for immoral behaviour, accepting gladly and without reproach, gifts from their boys' and girls' lovers and also helping to entertain their daughters' lovers in their homes and giving them opportunity for privacy. Then there followed a great spiritual uproar, as at Pentecost, where women who were present confessed their own sins and failure in this matter.[16]

---

[14] Deborah Gaitskill, 'Wailing for purity': Prayer Unions, African Mothers and Adolescent Daughters 1912-1940', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness 1870-1930* (Hong Kong, 1985) p. 338.
[15] Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan: A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959* (Cape Town, 1999) p.137. *Metsha* is external intercourse.
[16] Gaitskill, 'Wailing', p. 341.

David Chidester writes about the findings of anthropological research conducted in the 1930s and 1940s on illegitimacy in South Africa. Researchers such as Eileen Krige and Isaac Schapera found that traditional African marriage did indeed exist and that, in her assessment, they worked because they

> were sustained by ritual, ethics, law, and social sanctions. The occurrence of illegitimate births was thereby minimized. When they did occur, they were easily accommodated in ways that restored and maintained a social equilibrium. Second, although not a 'traditional' problem, illegitimacy was very much a modern problem in southern Africa.[17]

In contrast to the Christian missionaries, the social anthropologists did not see the problem as rooted in sexual impurity, but they

> identified the problem of illegitimacy as the very process of westernisation, modernisation and even religious conversion with which the Christian missions were intimately concerned...Isaac Schapera and Eileen Krige went even further in identifying illegitimacy as the critical symptom of a total disintegration that could be attributed to a single cause – contact with Europeans.[18]

It seems that the messages given to mothers about their daughters' morality were mixed. On the one hand their Christian teachers and husbands were blaming them and holding them responsible and on the other hand in their cultures pre-marital pregnancy was not so much a moral issue as an economic one.

Delius and Walker point a finger at Christian missionaries who, they say, undermined pre-existing sexual socialisation of black African people, which led to an increase in pre-marital pregnancies. In their opinion Christianity

> ...led to the dismantling of the forms of youth organization which played a key role in this process. It contributed to the abandonment of techniques like limited intercourse which had provided a controlled outlet for adolescent sexuality. And the growing influence of Christian values helped shape an inter-generational silence on sexual matters that became especially damaging as other forms of sexual education withered.[19]

They go on to say that at least until the 1930s in some areas that had resisted Christianity people were more successful in equipping young people with the means to manage their

---

[17] Chidester, 'The Politics of Exclusion' p.157.
[18] *Ibid.*, p.157.
[19] Peter Delius and Liz Walker, 'AIDS in Context' *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002, p. 37.

sexuality. However, Christianity was not the only influence on the demise of sexual socialization practices. Other factors such a migratory labour and the pursuit of modernity contributed to the changes in the way young people were sexually socialised.

Gaitskell writes that the missionaries of the early twentieth century assumed it was the duty of parents, especially mothers, to tell their daughters about sex and to 'appropriately mould her attitudes towards sex'. Gaitskell quotes one missionary who wrote in 1935:

> Even in the earliest days of a girl's life the mother should find a way to inculcate those attitudes of self-respect and regard for womanly purity, or reserve and modesty, of dignity, of appreciation of the position of wife and mother, that these things will consciously or unconsciously influence every later act.[20]

The missionary completely misunderstood or wanted to change the ways in which African society in those days dealt with sex education of their youngsters. For one thing, the parents were not the only people who trained and raised their children. Other relatives shared this responsibility, and the peer group, the community at large and initiation all had key roles in sex education. In fact, according to Gaitskell,

> [A]n adolescent girl refrained, on grounds of respect, from speaking about sex in the presence of her mother, feeling less restraint with a grandmother. In this important aspect of socialisation, then, mothers were not customarily expected to be the sole or even primary teacher... the most explicit sex education did not come from a girl's mother. Female initiation schools among the Lobedu, Venda, Pedi, Southern Sotho and Tswana gave instruction on women's rights and duties, and etiquette in marriage, while sexual frankness, which would have been obscene out of context, characterised Zulu girls' coming-of-age songs.[21]

When asked if there were similar initiation schools amongst the Xhosa people, the respondents said they did not know of any and had never themselves attended such a thing. So who was meant to instruct these young women, and what did they know of sexual intercourse and courtship and the parameters of sexual activity?

Schapera wrote that attitudes towards premarital sexual relations differed widely amongst African peoples. In the 1930s for the Sotho-Tswana speaking people, such sexual activity was not permitted and offenders would be brought to account. In the Ba-Pedi tradition, the virginity of young brides was tested by older women and if the girl was

---

[20] Gaitskill, 'Wailing', quoting RE Philips, *African Youth and Sexual Hygiene* (Durban, 1935) p. 43.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 340.

found not to be a virgin, the marriage could be called off, or the bride price reduced.[22]

Although Schapera concluded in the 1930s that illegitimacy was not a 'traditional' problem i.e. births outside of marriages were not regarded as problematic by the communities, the community did acknowledge that the proportion of premarital births was very high. According to Schapera, also in the 1930s, the Zulu-Xhosa people allowed unmarried couples a 'good deal of license' and some had 'institutional' forms of premarital sexual experience. He makes the point that, no matter what the rules were regarding premarital sexual activity, pregnancy before marriage at that time was not advocated and such pregnancies carried with them economic penalties and social degradation for both the man and the woman. But, he contends, this strictness was more a thing of the past, and at the time of his research, the attitude towards premarital pregnancy had changed.

> Administrators, missionaries and others, and even the natives themselves admit that the old standards of morality have changed and the sanctions which used to prevail have largely broken down. It is no longer so serious an offence as it was for an unmarried girl to have a child, and, correspondingly, the treatment meted out to her has grown less severe.[23]

Mager writes that boys and young men's associations placed certain curbs on the sexual behaviour and activities of the unmarried. The rules drawn up by these associations were in part an attempt at controlling female fertility.[24]

If a girl was penetrated by her lover, the custom was that she could 'emit a scream of indignation as she entered the homestead'. The mother of the girl would have the right to take a cow from the young man's kraal and slaughter it as a cleansing ritual for her daughter's 'defiled body'. However, this practice had virtually disappeared by the late 1940s and it would be dangerous to suppose that every girl would be protected in this way. There is no allusion here to violent forms of intimidation of women by men, perhaps because here the girl was with her 'lover' and the assumption was that he would not rape her. Delius and Walker point out, from the 1930s and 40s onwards, there was

---

[22] Isaac Schapera, 'Premarital Pregnancy and Native Opinion: a Note on Social Change', *Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures*, I, 1933, p.60
[23] Ibid, p. 61.
[24] Mager, *The Making*, p. 127.

> [A]n alarming trend that emerged was the growing levels of violence amongst young men. Violent behaviour and especially stick fighting had long since been a central part in the making and manifestation of pre-initiates masculine identity. But youth organizations and adult authority had set limits on its expression. The erosion of these forms of control and the infusion of values from a violent urban world ...often contributed to an upward spiral in violence in some communities...Young men did not only brutalise one another but also increasingly directed violence, especially sexual violence, against young women.[25]

This means that violence against women is not a new phenomenon but has been growing in society for some sixty years. What we see now cannot simply be attributed to apartheid laws. However, the current disharmony within families, family dysfunction and disintegration, and violence against women are undeniably the consequences of repressive social engineering by the state.

**Sexual socialisation**

Mager describes how migrancy changed the social environment in the rural areas. As more and more women left for the cities the established hierarchies and gendered identities which were previously constructed in such a way that

> [I]ndividual lives were mapped out and demarcated into stages on the basis of biological sex and age. Parallel and hierarchical processes ascribed appropriate behaviours and social meanings to individuals and groups along biological axes throughout their lives.[26]

In early childhood, boys and girls were treated and raised similarly until about the age of eight when they were divided into 'little girls' and 'little boys'. From then on the 'gendering of girls was tightly tied to biology', specifically when their bodies made them capable of producing children of their own. Once that happened, gender roles and differences were more clearly demarcated and certain initiation ceremonies of slaughtering and dancing showed the girl to be marriageable. But these ceremonies died out by the mid-1940s, probably due to parents leaving the rural areas.[27]

---

[25] Delius and Walker, 'Sexual Socialisation', p 38.
[26] Mager, *The Making*, p. 128.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 129. *Imitshotsho* are all night dance sessions.

For boys, the rites of passage were retained. Increases in social duties and responsibilities came with the initiation ceremony of circumcision, the turning point from boyhood into manhood. The initiation included instruction on how to be an adult male and teaching of the Xhosa law, part of which meant understanding the established gender behaviour. The pecking order amongst boys and young men was set out and identities established. When they met together they found ways of showing off their male prowess. Boys' and young men's associations developed and were constructed along lines of separation according to age and circumcision. In constructing male identity, these organisations also constructed female identities. Male supremacy and authority were entrenched, with girls being given the roles of servants and lovers to men and boys. These groups placed certain curbs on the sexual activities of the unmarried. The rules were drawn up partly in an attempt to curb female fertility. Whilst sexual activity had to be conducted 'openly and publicly',

> [L]over's time and space, too, were ritually prescribed. In boys' associations, boys and girls engaged freely in love talk inside the *imitshotsho* hut. But couples were permitted to *metsha* (external sex) outside only, under cover of darkness but not beneath blankets. This erotic space was confined to peers. Adult involvement was removed and limited to the role of older women routinely examining girls' vaginas.[28]

**Virginity testing**

Cora is the only one of the respondents in this study who mentioned that virginity testing was taking place in the 1950s.

> C: In the township there was the ladies who were looking for the girls. Every now and then we have got to go to this rondavel where these ladies they are going to check us that if anybody has had sex.
> LS: How did you feel about that?
> C: No, we didn't worry because there was nothing that we were doing. But those who were sex, they would get cross. But sometimes they would make excuse of saying they were going somewhere, that they were going to be too busy- they not. Then we know, ah, this one, there's something![29]

Cora seemingly approved of the virginity testing because she felt secure in the knowledge

---

[28] Mager, *Gender and the Making*, p. 136.
[29] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2001.

that her virginity was intact. It seems these women in the rondavel also prepared the young girls for marriage and gave them some sex education and Cora says she benefited from these women as they prepared her for her marriage.

> They train you and tell you not to rush to have sex, not to rush to get married, when you get married there's this ... so by the time I got married I knew everything that I was told.[30]

None of the other older generation (born in 1940s) of respondents mentioned receiving sex education in this or any other way, but research suggests that virginity testing was still practiced in the 1940s. None of the middle or younger generations (born 1960s – 1980s) had heard of such practice in their communities in their lifetime. In recent years, calls have been made for the reintroduction of virginity testing on grounds that it will increase sexual morality in young women. Proponents of virginity testing for young women believe it would be a deterrent to young girls who may think of engaging in sexual intercourse because they would be punished if they are found not to be virgins. Once again no mention is made of any form of testing of young men, one obvious reason being that it is biologically impossible to do so. But, more importantly, this practice perpetuates the placing of shame and responsibility for sexual morality on women and girls. Virginity testing, it has been said, is not primarily to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS, but to 'restore dignity and pride' in young women. Fiona Scorgie writes of the practice in Zulu communities:

> ...the concern to ensure girls were virgins...signaled to others that she was morally pure and, perhaps more importantly, that the conventions of authority based on generation and gender were being observed and respected.[31]

But, as Scorgie notes, money is a factor here, too. Many households are multi-generational with several young unmarried women and their children living with their grandmothers and depending on the grandmother's pension for survival. This means that emphasis placed on pre-martial virginity by older women may have as much to do with practical concerns as it has to do with morality and purity. Virginity testing is a way of controlling fertility and enhancing the marriageability of young women.[32]

---

[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Fiona Scorgie, 'Virginity Testing and the Politics of Sexual Responsibility: Implications for AIDS Intervention', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002, p, 61.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Whatever the cultural norms were, most of the respondents in this study viewed pregnancy and childbirth before marriage in a negative light, though two of the younger women seemed less concerned about the stigma attached to such births today. Mothering and motherhood has had profound effects on the lives of these women, as indeed would be the case for women everywhere. Some of them were affected by their own 'illegitimacy'. Those who were unmarried at the time of the interview and have chosen not to have children, indicated that these issues were important. Further, their negative perceptions of marriage have affected this choice. Others had their lives irrevocably changed by having children before their marriage and after.

**Born outside of marriage**

The respondents who were born to single mothers tell of their experience of not having a father and of living with extended family for part of their childhood. For one woman, not having a father has been a huge issue in her life and she has longed for his acceptance of her. For another, the experience was less troublesome and she was able to accept the situation.

Nosipho (28) was open to the possibility that she may well decide to have a child but that she would not necessarily marry the child's father. She would like the child to know who its father is, probably as a result of her not knowing her own father's identity, even though she says it was not a problem for her. She was raised by extended family members in the early years of her life. Her father apparently died when she was very young and her mother's brother and his family raised Nosipho until her mother married again. It is unclear as to whether her mother was actually married to Nosipho's father. During the time she lived with her uncle and his family she did not know that they were not her biological parents. It has always been customary for the brothers of a widow to assist in the raising of her children. Nosipho describes her early relationship with her mother whist living in her uncle's home:

> I knew my mother. But I didn't know my father. I didn't know anything about him. I knew my mother, but I didn't know she was my mother. But there was just this connection when she comes in I used to be happy. Oh, Sissie. And I'd

> be so happy she'd give me nice things. And the others, of course. But I didn't know she is my mother. I didn't know my mother.[33]

When asked why she was not told the facts of the relationships she replied:

> Because ... it's ... it's a Xhosa tradition. Maybe if they would have told me, maybe I would assume that I don't belong here. They wanted me to have a sense of belonging and they treated me like one of their kids and all. But it was within us the children, some stuff.[34]

Asked as to what possible effects this may have had on her personal identity, Nosipho was matter-of-fact about it and felt the issue was handled in accordance with the Xhosa custom of inclusion.

> Actually ... I don't even think about that. I don't even think about that because it was not actually a problem. I just had those nice cousins and ... my uncle. You know, with us, if my mother says, This is my uncle. We also say 'uncle' even if its an old man. You just say uncle, uncle. We go aunt, aunt, it's like that kind of thing. So I didn't have to go back there. As a child I never thought about it.[35]

This is an example, as mentioned above, of children being absorbed into the extended family. Mothers often sent their children to live with relatives. Some children knew their biological mothers, others not. This was a way of coping with the lack of finances and may also have been a way of allowing the unmarried mother time and space to meet a potential husband without her child being around. In Nosipho's case her mother used this as a way of ensuring her daughter felt included. Whether the child would have felt excluded by society should she remain with her unmarried or widowed mother is not clear. Nosipho has been unaffected by her early familial relationships and accepts her life at that time as being part and parcel of a practice in her culture that solved some issues, for the mothers and children at least, around illegitimacy and poverty.

The situation was not as easy for Zinzi (19) who went to live with extended family for some years. Zinzi's mother and father did not marry and her father refused to acknowledge Zinzi as his child. This has been a source of hurt for her all her life. It seems she did not feel a sense of shame, but of abandonment.

---

[33] Interview with Nosipho, Grahamstown, 2001.
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] *Ibid.*

When asked to speak of some of the struggles she has had to cope with in her life, she cites not having a father as one of the biggest.

> ...the first one is growing up without a father, you know. 'Cause every household is regarded as a family where there is a father there. If ever that household doesn't have a father, then people don't recognise that house. They will say, Oh, that cherry's house! You know. But if ever a father is living there, then fine, there is a strong man living over there so we cannot go over there and mess up at that house. If ever you do you will get the best of that man living there ...
>
> Even though my mum and my gran tried very hard, but I always wanted that father figure in my life, you know. And um ... you know going to school, knowing that kids are going to tell you about their family, abut their loving fathers and me, you know, got nothing to say when they ... When my friends were asking me... like saying ... Zinzi, what happened...what's happening, we never heard you say anything about your father? I just told them, No man, forget about it. You know it's not like I had anything to say about my father.[36]

Although female headed households are common and accepted in the community in which Zinzi grew up, for her, there is still a sense of not being normal, a sense of something missing. Perhaps a household with a man as head, a father, is still considered ideal. When she was in primary school Zinzi went to live with family members in Port Elizabeth, leaving her mother and grandmother in Grahamstown. This was not a happy time for her as she was treated with some measure of contempt by her aunt and cousins. She was not given the material things the other children were given, was excluded from treats and sometimes even basic necessities as money had to come from her own mother for such things. Her aunt's attitude may have been prompted by financial concerns only or it may have had something to do with the relationship between Zinzi's mother and the aunt. This is how she describes her time in Port Elizabeth:

> I was living with my mum's sister. And then with her two kids. But the way were living was not nice, 'cause I was the one who was doing everything and my mum had to send me money, send me groceries, every month. And then, like if I call and say, I don't have shoes. And then she sends money. That money won't buy the shoes – will buy something else and I will not go ... I won't have shoes, and that sometimes I didn't go to school 'cause I didn't have shoes and when it was raining I will just sit at home and not go to school 'cause I didn't have shoes... and they had nicer things than me 'cause their mum was working and every Friday she will come home with something nice or something new for them. And then she will tell me, No. You have your own mum and when she comes here she will bring you something nice as well. So I can't deprive my kids

[36] Interview with Zinzi, Grahamstown, 2001. 'Cherry' is slang for girl.

> the privilege of buying them something knowing that your mum is going to buy you something as well.[37]

It is interesting to note that the ideal of all children being everyone's children does not always pertain and this may be due to economic circumstances or simply due to the personality of the aunt and extended family relationships. The areas of family life from which Zinzi was excluded seem to be connected to matters of finance – the shoes, the treats. The aunt had her own children for whom she was providing and Zinzi was to be provided for by her own mother, regardless of whether the mother had sent money or not. This change in attitude from children being absorbed into extended families as if they were direct offspring to clearer demarcations of parenthood, may be due to a loss of the African ideal of the extended family overlapping with modern Western understandings of family.

When asked what her mother's response was likely to be should she, Zinzi, become pregnant outside of a marriage she indicated that at one time her mother would have found the idea abhorrent.

> ... the first thing like she told me that if ever I became pregnant without being married, then she told me, I won't have anything to do with you. You just go to the place where you got pregnant and then you live with him. You will be no longer my child. So that's what she said to me.[38]

Saying she would send Zinzi to the family of the father her child, is an indication that Zinzi's mother would expect that family to take responsibility for the child. She would not be the one to bear the brunt of raising an unwanted child. Perhaps her view stems from her own experience of being unfairly abandoned by Zinzi's father to raise their child alone. On the other hand the mother may view pregnancy outside of marriage as morally abhorrent. However, Zinzi says her mother may have relaxed her attitude the matter recently,

> ...'cause now that I am talking to her and she is watching TV and listening to the radio, so I don't think she'll still be like that.[39]

---

[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*

Here we have an example of a family potentially coming adrift due to an unwanted pregnancy as the mother is so strongly against the idea that she would be willing to disown her only child. And yet Zinzi's mother was not rejected by her own mother who instead helped her raise her granddaughter despite there being no father.

Despite her mother's more relaxed attitude, and despite what people may be hearing on the radio that may lead them to accept a different moral standard, Zinzi feels strongly that in the community in which she lives, a great deal of shame is still attached to pregnancy outside of marriage. She illustrates this by telling the story of a girl known to her.

> They do take kind of a bad view for it, 'cause there is this particular girl who got pregnant and her mother sent her to PE (Port Elizabeth) to live in PE and study in PE so that like the people in our location can't see that she is pregnant. And when she came back with the kid we were wondering where does she get the kid? And she told us, No. The time I was leaving Grahamstown I was already pregnant but my mum said to me I cannot live here. No I will be a disgrace and I will be disgracing her. Like people would think my mum was not disciplining me, was not telling me good things. And I was an unruly child, you know. So she had to go to PE 'cause her mum said so.[40]

This notion of shame brought on a family when a baby is born before or outside a marriage is reinforced by Protus Kemdirim who states that there are various forms of 'symbolic marriages' in African culture which render children legitimate and therefore accepted by the society. However he comments on what he calls 'public morality' being the chief concern of the family or community. The shame brought on the family is the overriding concern in such cases.

> But, it may be asked, what about a young girl who gets pregnant before marriage? Of course there is no gainsaying that in some African cultures a child born out of wedlock is looked down upon. It seems to me, however, that this negative attitude derives more from the need to maintain public morality than concerns about illegitimacy.[41]

This need to maintain 'public morality' can lead to unmarried women taking drastic action to avoid being abused or rejected by the family if they become pregnant.. A seventy-year old respondent in Mbalekwa's study spoke of the shame brought on the mother of a child born before marriage being so severe that it sometimes led to infanticide.

---

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Protus Kemdirim, 'African Culture and Womanhood: The Issues of Single-parenthood', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.) *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ, 1998) p. 455.

> Some women were not able to face the problems of being an outcast, as a result many of the babies born to single mothers were left to die in the locations' pit lavatories and in the street gutters. There were many sad incidents that were directly or indirectly related to pre-marital and extra-marital relations ...Illegitimacy was a serious problem during our time. One could not even go to church with the child until she showed repentance and even could only sit on the bench next door.[42]

Mager also describes how young unmarried women in the 1940s and 1950s tried to dispose of their unwanted babies.

> Some were still at school; most were afraid of their fathers. For many, this fear was powerfully informed by a sense of having failed to fulfill social ideals of femininity. One eighteen-year-old pupil said she did not know she was pregnant until the baby was born. Sobbing bitterly in the dock she told how she had been "terrified of her father" when she hid the baby in a bag, placing a stone on top to hush the infant's cries ...The testimonies of adult women who killed their infants were powerfully charged with a sense of severely limited options...If some women found disposing of their infants as the only way of coping, they did so out of fear of the implications of their own failure to conform to accepted feminine behaviours and of abandonment by men.[43]

Today there are reports of babies being found in latrines and dust bins and left in the veld. The public outcry is often horrified astonishment that a mother could do such a thing to her own baby. However, the shame and fear and possibility of being disowned, beaten and sent away from the household, could still be so strong that women would rather commit infanticide than face their families. Thus, in extreme cases, they 'cope' by killing their babies. From this it seems that not a great deal has changed for some women today, sixty years on.

The gendered nature of all this is apparent: women fear male authority figures who set the standard for what is acceptable feminine behaviour and who, through their abuse and rejection of the woman and her baby, can cause her to do what she most naturally would not even consider. Bringing shame upon her family is viewed in such a severe light that a woman may feel she has no option but to commit infanticide.

---

[42] Mbalekwa, 'A Comparison', p. 75.
[43] Mager, *Gender and the Making*, pp. 186-187.

Many men and boys do not seem to be affected in the same way when they father a child when they are not married. It would seem that their lives do not change very much as they are not taking equal responsibility for their children.

**Pregnancy before marriage**

The women from the older generation (1940s) had varying stories about pregnancies outside of marriage. Of the three of them, only Cora did not have a baby before her marriage. Both Daphne and Muriel became pregnant and share their experiences of strong parental disapproval of their behaviour that was considered shameful and 'wrong'. In their generation babies born outside of marriage was a moral issue.

Although Cora (64) did not have any children before her marriage, her daughter had two by two different men, and neither of the fathers of the children has contributed towards their upkeep. One father is dead, and attempts to force the other to pay maintenance have failed. Cora's response to questions about raising her grandchildren is amusing in her choice of metaphor, but her disapproval is clear. It is not her daughter's lack of morals that upsets Cora as much as does the fact that the child will be left with Cora to raise.

> All these children of hers, the other one it's a ...they got different fathers. But another thing that happened to our children which is wrong, I said to her: You shouldn't ... it was terrible for you to get a child when then get another child. That's when we had a big fight here in this house when she got the second child. I said: You take for granted because I didn't say anything for that, for the first one. Now you thought now you have another one, which is loaded to me... And there you get it from the other father now. That means just like assorted biscuits!...Yes, its assorted biscuits when you look at it. I was very cross with her![44]

Cora's son married a woman who had a child from a previous relationship and Cora ended up caring for this child as her son did not marry the mother of the child. This is an example of how children can be absorbed into households even if they are not blood relatives. As a domestic worker and now a pensioner, Cora continues to take care of three grandchildren whose biological fathers do not make any contribution to their welfare. Unlike her comments on her daughter's sexual behaviour, Cora makes no

[44] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2003.

judgment on that of her son, nor does she mention the fact the 'load' this child brought into her home.

Daphne (63), when speaking of her first child who was born from a relationship with a man she never married, described her behaviour by saying:

> I didn't go back to school. But my dad wanted me to go back to school. But the thing is I got pregnant. That was very naughty... My dad was very cross but my mum talked to him. And after that he was quite alright. But he was very, very, cross because he wanted me to get an education. And I didn't go as far as teaching or nursing – all these things. He wanted me to be one of them. To take nursing courses or be a teacher. But I couldn't do it. All my sisters were out of school. It was me and my other sister and my brother went to school.[45]

Daphne makes no mention of her father being angry with her because of the morality of having a baby outside of a marriage, but only his disappointment and anger that she had to stop her schooling.

The family of the father of the child paid half the lobola and when the marriage was called off by Daphne's father, they let Daphne's father keep the money to pay for the upkeep of the child. The child died of measles when he was two years old. When asked if she would have liked to have married the father of her child or not, Daphne answered:

> The thing is this ... in olden days when parents say No, you just listen.[46]

On the face of it, Daphne acceded to her father's order for her not to marry the father of her child because of parental control. Yet the fact that she became pregnant in the first place suggests a defiance of parental rules. Daphne's sisters also became pregnant before they were married. Her eldest sister wanted to marry the father of her child, too, but her own father would not allow it as 'he wanted her to look after my mother. So they didn't get married.'[47] If morality were at stake in these instances, her father would surely have encouraged the marriages, but it seems familial duties overrode morality. This would support the earlier statements about 'illegitimacy' and morality being Western imports into black society.

---

[45] Interview with Daphne, Grahamstown, 2001.
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*

The girls in this family gave lip service to their father's injunctions about pregnancy and marriage but each did what she wanted to do. Only after their father's death did Daphne and her sister marry. Their brother married and had children and he also has three children from two different girlfriends. The son was not prevented by the father from marrying, nor was he expected to care for the mother, and he went on to have extra-marital relationships and children outside of his marriage. Here we see the double standard of the gender roles for men and women. Typically, the daughters had to do what the father wanted and they were expected to put aside their needs and wants in order to fulfill family responsibilities, but the male child was free to do as he wished. There is no mention from Daphne as to whether her father and mother thought her brother was 'naughty', but she was not specifically asked to comment on this.

Muriel (60) said that when she was young girls were not given any sex education but seemed to know what was 'wrong'. Nevertheless the parents would be 'cross' if their daughters became pregnant before marriage.

> But we know when our parents did not like something. We know about that. Ja. What is wrong. But the mistake ... you know the mistake just come...[48]

She herself made that 'mistake' and had a baby by a man she never married. A marriage was arranged when the baby was two years old. She did not want to marry the man but her marriage turned out to be happy.

> Because I got pregnant with another one and then my mother said I must stay at home ...if...someone come at home ...but its my mother's friend tell my mother his cousin need a wife and then he saw me.[49]

Daphne and Muriel use the words 'naughty' and 'cross' to describe their own and their parents' behaviour and feelings. Just why the parents were cross can only be assumed. In Daphne's case she was 'naughty' because she went against her parents' rules and her father was 'cross' because the pregnancy put an end to her schooling. Muriel's parent's were 'cross' and then a marriage to someone else was arranged for her. Her parents' anger may have stemmed from the fact that not only had she gone against their wishes,

---

[48] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2003.
[49] *Ibid.*

but that she was less likely to be married once she had a child, or at least lobola would be reduced.

The women in the 60-64 year age group tell of parental displeasure over pre-marital sexual relationships and pregnancies. However, the reason for their censure is not so much shame but economic hardships and the fact that the girls would have to stop their education. There is a definite shift towards how the pregnancy would affect a young girl's future as a wage earner, though the morality of the matter is still an issue.

Neli (33) did not herself become pregnant before her marriage, but when asked about how the community was likely to respond to premarital pregnancy she said:

> The old time, it was embarrassed and the parents, they don't want us to communicate with that girl. So it was something terrible she did that time. But now, nothing. Nothing.[50]

Neli intimates that parents are no longer ashamed of their daughter's pregnancies and that girls who have children outside of marriage now are no longer discriminated against but accepted. Neli's words indicate her disagreement with the way in which young unmarried mothers are accepted into the community.

Nandi (38) had her dreams and ambitions for a good education dispelled when she became pregnant in high school. Her father had two wives and thirteen children. Nandi's two sisters were older than her and they left school at the end of standard six. This, she says, was due to the traditional thinking of the time that there was no need to educate girls. However,

> then I was lucky that my father was said to me, You know nothing about work. The only thing you know is to go after some cattle and some sheep and things. And now I've got nothing for you to look so I think I must give you something so that you can sit behind a desk and write something.[51]

Sadly, her father died and money for school became scarce and for a while she did not attend school. The family decided she should continue and her sisters financed her education until she became pregnant and had to leave school. One sister lived in Johannesburg and before the pregnancy

---

[50] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2001.

> [S]he wrote a letter telling my mum that I have a little job. And the first thing I told her is I want to go back to school. "If you are working, please, take me back to school." The other sister was here in Grahamstown. That's why I end up here.[52]

Nandi passed grades ten and eleven and was promoted to grade twelve. This is when her education came to an end.

> When I was still in standard ten I met my husband...Then I had a baby. In the middle. But I managed to go and write, but I didn't pass. ... and then after that we got married. We try to grow my baby up. We were not working both of us because he was busy with his mother's business things. But in between those things his mother died and then we stayed together with this little boy. It was so difficult and I think I must look for a job. Any kind of job. There's nothing now with my marriage.[53]

Once again the response from her family was one of outrage about her having to drop out of school, not at her lack of morals. This was her memory of her mother's reaction:

> Woo! My mother was so cross because she said to me, You stay here for four years and more than that doing nothing, and now you go back (to school) and get pregnant![54]

Nandi's primary concerns about this unwanted pregnancy were not being able to finish her education, and economic worries, not about the morality of the situation.

> I was worried. I was very worried. It worried me because this child is bringing a delay to me. And I am also not working, how am I going to grow up this child? And the father is not working too. How are we going to do it? [55]

Harriet (33) met the man who was to become the father of her son and her husband when she was in standard six. The relationship started then and became more serious as they grew older. Harriet had many breaks in her education but due to financial constraints and not because of her pregnancy as she had the child after she left school. Her parents were also very angry when they heard she was pregnant. She now has plans to marry the boy's father.

> They got angry with me. My daddy didn't even want to make food. Ja, we were not talking and I was still pregnant until my child was born. And as time goes by he admitted and made peace, and we came together like father and daughter, and we are now on good terms. But I think that because we didn't married as soon as

---

[51] *Ibid.*
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Interview with Nandi, Grahamstown, 2001.

> possible my father was kind of worried but he didn't want me to see that. And then this year I told them I was getting married and then they told me everything that we are happy, they were worried, especially by the fact that he is very much close to his father, and they were worried that if we don't get married and our relationship ends like now, my son might get sick or something. And then I saw that they like the relationship.[56]

This is another example of the tension that an unwanted pregnancy brings into a household. From the story of her family it seems Harriet and her father had a good relationship until her pregnancy which angered and possibly disappointed her father. Financial worries may have formed part of her father's disapproval of her pregnancy as Harriet was not married. However, the father of the child supported him and, according to her, her father gained financially by having her live with and contribute to the family.

Many women have had to face the fact that their husbands have relationships outside of their marriage and that children are born of these liaisons. Some accept these 'outside' children into their own homes. Sinazo's (38) mother took in the children born to her husband by other women.

> LS: And your mother accepts those children?
> S: Yes. They were staying with us. They were staying with us and when I ask her ... when I was my first year, I ask her, Why is it with you that you accept my father's children? You give them this house...And then the one, the other daughter, she was even staying with my mother.
> LS: Your mother just sounds incredible.
> S: You know, when they had problems in their lives, they come straight to my mother with them. Because they call her 'ma'. They would report their friends striking them. So she had the duty of go to also friendly to their mothers. If I can visit home in the holidays, then after two days or a day at home, I do visit their mothers. Then from their places, then straight home. We do sleep for a night. [57]

This vignette from the interview illustrates the ease of relationship between the interviewer and the respondent as the interviewer is able to comment on the mother's attitude. It also illustrates the bias of the interviewer towards men who are unfaithful in marriage, imagining that any woman who took in the children of her husband's extra-marital affairs was 'incredible'. It is also an example of how a researcher's objectivity is compromised when listening to others who are different from herself as discussed in

---

[56] Interview with Harriet, Grahamstown, 2002.
[57] Interview with Sinazo, Grahamstown, 2001.

chapter two.

Patricia, Nosipho and Zinzi, all from the youngest group (born between 1970 and 1980), indicate that the shame aspect of children born before marriage is still part of parental and community disapproval, but now, most of the respondents say, people are far more accepting of this. In fact, Nosipho is not sure she will marry but she would consider having a child. For some young women it would seem that as they become more independent the idea of single parenthood becomes more acceptable. However there are many young women who are becoming pregnant precisely because they are dependent and are in need of a husband or boyfriend to support them.

Patricia (27) had a baby when she was in standard nine and her mother was furious with her. Patricia says she will be just as angry with her daughter if she does the same thing and jeopardises her education.

> It is bad. I feel bad for her because I wasn't supposed to be having a child by that time. That's why I told her if ... when you keep on growing you must wait and you must read, study. Your studies up to finish and then when you've got to eighteen years you can start to have ...having boyfriend, but you can't sleep with him. Yes, because you are going to be like me, you are going to find a child before time.[58]

Patricia's feeling 'bad' could mean that she was feeling ashamed of her sexual behaviour, but her comment that she was not 'supposed to be having a child' at that time may indicate, not a moral lapse, but the disruption of the normal course of events she expected her life to follow. Similarly we see that her concern for her daughter's future is that her schooling not be interrupted by an unwanted pregnancy, the way her own was. She does not mention the moral aspect of a pregnancy before marriage, just the fact that her daughter must finish school.

Kemdirim writes that

> in cultures we are familiar with, no child is ever thought of as useless; such a thought itself constitutes a taboo. On the contrary, in Africa a child is thought of as wealth, as a gift from God and as such every effort is made not only to have the child in the family but to sustain, educate and protect him/her. This is the tradition.[59]

---

[58] Interview with Patricia, Grahamstown, 2003.
[59] Kemdirim, 'African Culture', p. 455.

One cannot argue with 'the tradition' but it may not be so easy for many women to regard their children as wealth, given the poverty into which many are born without much chance of shedding their economic burdens in African countries, including South Africa. However, children in poorer African societies are often seen as social security as children share the domestic burdens of the family and may eventually provide income for the family.

With the number of unplanned pregnancies before their marriage, the question arose as to why women become pregnant outside of marriage or at least without the security of a home and an income to provide both for herself and her child. Why do they do not prevent pregnancy and what knowledge they have about sex and sexuality that may influence these decisions? Given the fact that unplanned pregnancies and children brought economic struggles, shame and halted or completely ruined their chances of finishing school, how was it that so many of them actually became pregnant? Were they just ignoring their parents' teaching, or were they ignorant? None of the respondents indicated any sexual coercion nor did any say they were raped. This may have been because they were asked specifically to comment only on their early sexual relationships, or because they were willing partners, or because they did not know how to assign responsibility to unscrupulous young men. This led to questions about sex education.

**Sex education**

Peter Delius and Clive Glaser write about sexual socialization amongst South Africa youth, a subject raised by the HIV/ADIS pandemic. The research reveals the lack of communication between parents and children with regard to sex. According to research, parents find it hard to broach the subject with their children, leaving the children to find alternative informants, usually their peers.

> There is also now a considerable body of work on sexual attitudes and practices which paints a bleak picture of contemporary realities. There are high levels of premarital sexual activity and teenage pregnancy. But perhaps the most disturbing of all is the research on youth sexuality that suggests that sex – especially for young girls – is often coercive and violent, and that it is, to some extent, accepted as the norm by both males and females.[60]

[60] Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, 'Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: A Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002, p. 27.

The idea of older women teaching younger ones about sex was not known to the women in this study. In fact, none of them received any specific sex education or explanations of sexuality and relationships with boys and men from their parents or from anyone else. When asked what her parents told her about sex, codes of sexual conduct and relationships with boys, Daphne replied:

> At olden days parents don't talk with children about getting pregnant. They just say you must keep away from boys, they don't tell you why... and you don't ask. You are not supposed to ask older people questions. You just have to accept what they say, and know that they don't tell you something that is not right.[61]

Daphne's comment suggests that parents assumed their daughters would heed their parents' injunction to stay away from boys simply because the parents told them to. There was no explanation given as to why this was necessary, an order was meant to suffice. This style of discipline no longer serves to keep children in check as was discussed in the third interviews where respondents spoke of the lack parental authority in the present day.[62]

None of the respondents reported receiving any sex education at all, least of all from their parents and they mention the lack of communication between parents and children on this subject of sex. The middle and younger group are emphatic that they will and do speak to their own children about sex. Freedom to do so may come from our contemporary society where almost anything and everything is spoken about in public. It also has to do with trying to protect their children from contracting HIV.

In the older generation the expectation of parents was that their children should simply comply with the rules without asking questions and the children's belief that parents knew best and that rules were made in the children's best interest. A lack of any depth of communication between children and parents on such intimate matters is indicated, but at the same time there is also a strong indication that parents wished to control their daughter's sexuality and fertility prior to her marriage.

---

[61] Interview with Daphne, Grahamstown, 2001.
[62] See chapter 5 for further discussion on this

Muriel (60), like Daphne (63), endorsed Cora's comments (above) about obedience to parents helping the girls set boundaries on their sexual behaviour.

> LS: And did your mother or father tell you about boys and about sex education and all that?
> M: No, that time. But we know when our parents did not like something. We know about that. Ja, what is wrong. We know this is wrong. But the mistake ...you know...the mistake just come.
> LS: Ja, so if some of the children in your family or in the community had children and they weren't married, would the parents be very displeased with that? The parents would be cross if the children...if you have babies without being married?
> M: Yes! They cross.
> LS: But they never explained about sex?
> M: No, they never.
> LS: Who told children about sex when you were young?
> M: That time, no one tell the children but they say they don't like to go to the boys. But they don't explain, ja, about that.[63]

Muriel speaks about 'mistakes'. What this may mean is that although the children knew what was right and wrong in their parents eyes, they engaged in sexual intercourse without parental consent and the 'mistake' of a pregnancy showed their disobedience. Alternatively her use of the word 'mistake' may not mean any of this but simply that she does not have another English word describe what she meant.

Women of the mother generation had similar experiences of parental injunctions not to be with boys but with no explanation given as to why they should avoid boys. This is what Harriet (33) said about her father's response to situations which would involve boys:

> H: We were we not allowed (to go out with boys). My dad wouldn't allow us to go. Only if it's a school thing, then we can go. Otherwise movies and things, we need to hide, hide them when we go. Other than that, hard luck.
> LS: You said your parents, especially your dad, would have been angry if you went out with a boy, but they never gave you any ...
> H: ...reasons.
> LS: ...reasons. But you did have boyfriends?
> H: Ja, I do.
> LS: And did you just keep them secret from you parents?
> H: Ja, and my sisters.[64]

It seems her father set the rules out very clearly and was very strict about sexual conduct and yet Harriet ignored the restrictions and found ways to meet with boys, just the way the older generation of women did.

---

[63] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2003.

Nandi (38) is adamant that she will speak to her children as her experience of her first menstrual period shocked her, and fear of her mother forced her to speak to girl friends for information.

> I remember when I ...I start my periods. I think I was thirteen ...fifteen or fourteen, I didn't speak to anyone in the house because nobody speak to me things like that. But because I was already at the secondary school so I hear from other girls of my age which of them were lucky to have outspoken mothers which told them. So, I mean, everything I got from friends at school, not from my mother. I get so scared to tell him that I see something like this on my first period. I so get scared I think my mother is going to smack me and ask me, "Where you get this?" I felt guilty because she'd not telling me anything.[65]

Neli (33) was also not given any sex education and at the onset of menses she was not given any information about it. She was simply washed and told not to go near boys. As with Cora, Muriel and Daphne the grandmothers, here Neli and Harriet, of the next generation, are told to stay away from boys without any explanation. The women of the granddaughter generation (born 1970to 1980s) were given more information about sex, perhaps, as already stated, because these matters were being brought into the open at school and by the media when they were growing up, and the threat of rape was increasing. Nosipho (28) was an adolescent in the 1980s and did receive sex education from her mother. She was put on the Pill against her will to prevent pregnancy should she be raped.

> My mother told me briefly about that (sex). When I started my periods she said that I should go to the clinic, the contraception clinic. And I was against it. I said, I don't have a boyfriends. Why should I go there? She said, No, we are not doing it only because you have a boyfriend, maybe someone will rape you and you'll get pregnant and also for protection. And then my step dad took me to the clinic because he was working at the hospital at the time. He took me to the family planning clinic and when I got there the nurses told me, You've got boys! Oh no, you so young and you gonna get pregnant! [66]

Nosipho was so incensed by the accusations of the clinic staff that she flatly refused to return there for contraception. Her parents were not that easily dissuaded and she was taken to a private doctor who prescribed the Pill for her. The women at the clinic show

---

[65] *Ibid.*
[66] Interview with Nosipho, Grahamstown, 2001.

their disapproval of what they perceive as Nosipho's promiscuity and at the same time imply that she is solely responsible for any sexual intimacy with boys. The bias of women against girls is often expressed by other women and this yet another incident.

But the lack of sex education is not the only reason for premarital sex and births. A recent survey conducted by Julien Zwang amongst Shangaan people living in the area of Bushbuckridge offers other explanations. The research was focused on unmarried women between the ages of 17 and 30, the majority of whom expressed negative attitudes towards premarital births because of the problems they bring: school drop out for the mother; economic hardships; parental stigmatisation; health risk for the mother because of unprotected sex and the spread of STIs/HIV. Reasons given for the increase of premarital births are: changes in parental control over their adolescent children; women hoping to get married and have financial links with the fathers; women hoping to get a child support grant. The fact of the matter though is that often paternity is denied, marriage does not take place or the social grant does not materialise. Thus the young mother is exposed to more and more difficulty.

Zwang quotes a South African Demographic health survey which states that

> [I]n 1998, close to 39% of births were premarital and about 65% of women under age 25 had had premarital births.[67]

It is interesting to note that the respondents and the findings of the above survey show that girls and women want to improve their social status and their financial situation by having children before they are married. Marriage, they believe would bring financial security which suggests that women are much more vulnerable to economic hardships than men. Further, the findings show a distinct bias towards women being held responsible for premarital births. There is no mention from the respondents in the findings that young men are coercing young women into sexual intercourse, neither is there reference to rape as the cause of unwanted pregnancy.. This may be because the researcher never asked questions about power relations.

---

[67] Julien Zwang, Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Late Marriage and Premarital Fertility in Rural South Africa: A study on social changes and health risks among young adults' *Les Nouveaux Cahiers de l'IFAS/IFAS*, 4, 2004, p. 7

**The fathers**

It would be easy to simplify the absence of fathers in their children's lives by taking at face value their lack of responsibility as being inherent to the male psyche. This would be neither fair nor accurate. It would be irresponsible to suggest that women are always the innocent victims of male sexual dominance. It would, however, be true to say that in the majority of sexual partnerships it is the women who are less powerful and who, in the end, are the ones who are recipients of male aggression and who land up taking care of the children. This is substantiated by the comments made by the respondents and by the statistics of female headed households and applications for child grants made by single mothers.

Thus, the fathers of these children cannot go without mention. As noted by researchers, historically fathers of children born out of marriage were not simply allowed to get off without certain penalties, and the father and his family had to make reparations for his action. Mager tells of one woman who took matters into her own hands and handed her seventeen-year-old daughter's baby to the father's family, saying, "I have brought your child. Your son is the father of the child. Take your damage." [68]

Despite these apparent customary rules for paternity with regard to pre-marital pregnancy, the women in this study assigned very little blame and no shame to the fathers of their children. They seem to have allowed themselves to bear the brunt of the anger and shame placed on them by their parents and the community. In addition, they seem to have borne sole economic responsibility for the child(ren) if they did not marry the father.

In some cases, as with Daphne (63), her own father preferred not to have the father of her baby take any role in either economic support or in raising the child. Connie's (63) anger over the children her daughter had was directed at the daughter and no mention was made of the irresponsible behaviour of the fathers. Muriel (60) only reports that she became pregnant, had a child and did not marry the father. She does not mention him at all other than that. Nandi (38) married the father of her child, but does not make reference to his part in the fact that she had to terminate her schooling because of the

[68] Mager, *The Making*, p. 187.

baby.

Nandi's (38) husband had a child by another woman before his marriage. At first the child lived with its mother but, Nandi explained, the mother kept asking for money. Nandi and her husband had no way of knowing if the money was actually being spent on the child and the mother's demands for money increased. In the end it was thought expedient that the child live with Nandi and her husband in order to alleviate the situation. Nandi accepts and treats the child as if he were her own. This may be her way of coping with the situation. She takes control over the child and thereby takes control over the finances.

Neli (33) knew that her husband had fathered two children by two different women prior to her marriage to him. She blamed the women, not her husband, saying that they should have prevented their pregnancies. She agreed to accept the two children as her husband's and to do what she could to support them. The children live with their mothers but Neli and her husband pay school fees and buy clothing for the children. This means that on their salaries they support five children. By accepting responsibility for the children and by not blaming her husband, Neli makes the situation easier to handle. In this way she does not have to live with animosity towards her husband and the mothers of his children become the objects of her anger.

Zinzi (19) has a different attitude to irresponsible fathers. She does blame her father for his behaviour. She is outraged and hurt by her father's refusal to recognise her as his own and feels very strongly that he should have been forced to acknowledge her and to take care of her. His refusal to accept her as his own is also his indictment on her mother's moral behaviour, suggesting she had more than one sexual partner or at least that she was not being truthful about the paternity of her child. Zinzi, who works with boys and girls on issues of sexuality, is perhaps more aware of what might be called feminist views on matters of gender bias, unlike some of the other respondents whose understanding and knowledge of feminism is limited or non-existent.

When discussing marriage and what women expect from husbands, many of the respondents talked of men having extra-marital affairs and children outside of their marriage. Whilst there is open condemnation of such behaviour, it is almost taken as

inevitable that men will behave in this way. This may account for the lack of censure of young men who father children before marriage.

# CHAPTER 4

## MARRIAGE AND OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

> I don't think so it's kind of we are bought. There is a belief that, yes, in a way, I can say it should be a two way thing. But I didn't ask him to get married, to marry me, though I wanted to. OK. First thing, my fiancée, it's a way of saying thanks to my parents to grow me up the way they did. I am proud of myself, and I would love to show the appreciation of having me in his life. Bringing joy to him. Both a sort of two way thing. Yes, I am glad to have him in my life, but maybe he is more happier than me, you see what I mean. So we are saying thanks to my parents.[1]

Discussions on children and pregnancy led to talk on marriage and relationships with men. All but two of the women interviewed were married or in committed relationships with male partners. Marriage and relationships with male partners are important in the lives of women and the majority of women do have men in their lives, either as husbands, lovers or partners. These relationships are fundamental to their economic welfare and their physical and emotional well-being, whether the relationships are healthy or not. In this chapter we investigate marriage customs and praxis with the view to finding out how women relate to the men in their lives.

At the start of discussions on marriage the respondents were asked to comment on their ideas of the purpose and meaning of lobola. Their opinions differed with some seeing it as the way in which a man can show his respect for his future bride, and others regarding it as a way in which a man has power over his wife because he has paid for her and she belongs to him and his family to do with as they please. When this was suggested to Harriet (38) she acknowledged that such an understanding exists but not in her mind or in her relationship. This was not the case for all the women.

---

[1] Interview with Harriet, Grahamstown 2001.

**'Lobola': connotations and practices**

A key aspect of marriage in Xhosa and other African cultures is lobola, or bridewealth. Burman and van der Werff define bridewealth as the 'transfer of property by the husband (or his guardian) to the wife's family as part of the process of constituting a marriage'. [2] Historically, the 'property' in question was cattle but today it is in fact a cash transaction, particularly for urban dwellers. Once the lobola has been paid the marriage is sanctioned by the family and community, though Christians may feel a church ceremony is necessary to validate the marriage. The payment of lobola is the formalization of an already established relationship, though no certificate of marriage is issued with the transfer of lobola, as only a civil or church marriage confers this.

The fact that lobola sanctioned a relationship as a marriage is substantiated by Mbalekwa, who maintains that Western ideas of what makes a marriage legitimate, a Western concept in itself, and Xhosa notions of legitimacy are not comparable.[3] In the first instance in Western and Christian law marriages are only legitimate if monogamous, but polygamous marriages in African life were (and in some cases still are) a reality and, according to custom, legitimate. Secondly, in Western societies marriages are considered legal if endorsed by a government official or by a person from a religious group who is authorised by the state to conduct marital unions. All other unions, until recently, were not regarded as marriage and therefore the laws and benefits concomitant with marriage did not apply to partners in other unions. This was detrimental to women in such relationships as, in particular, they did not have recourse to the laws of inheritance. But, in Xhosa culture and practice a marriage was and is regarded as legitimate once certain rituals and economic requirements have been fulfilled, regardless of any formal state or religious sanction. However, it is common practice now that marriages take place either in a church or in the magistrate's court, with the possibility of a customary marriage afterwards.

---

[2] Sandra Burman and Nicolette van der Werff, 'Rethinking Customary Law on Bridewealth', *Social Dynamics*, 19, 2, 1993, p. 111.

[3] Zibia Mbalekwa, 'A Comparison of the Changing Views on Illegitimacy in Two Xhosa Communities Through the Twentieth Century', Rhodes University, Department of History, Honours Paper, 1996, p. 14.

John Comaroff, writing of Tswana marriage customs in the 1930s, says that of all the rituals and customs that accompany marriage, public recognition by kin and neighbours and bridewealth are the only two that are of any real significance, and that it is the latter that is the one 'non-negotiable incident in the conjugal process'. Once bridewealth has been transferred the union is certainly a marriage.[4]

Elderly respondents in Mbalekwa's study (women who married in the 1940s) confirmed this when telling how they considered their own marriages legitimate through the customs of lobola and the ritual welcome of the wives at their husbands' homes.

> Women were legally married if lobola had been paid and on arrival at her new home was welcomed in the ceremony of *ukutyiswa amasi.*[5]

Sandra Burman and Nicolette van der Werff conducted a survey among black African students at the University of Cape Town, and black African teachers and social workers in the Durban metropolitan area in 1991. Some of the aims of the survey were: to ascertain what black people believed to be the original purposes of bridewealth; whether they thought any changes had taken place; and whether they thought the custom would survive. Small and limited as the study was, some interesting views came to light.

Over half of the respondents thought the purposes of lobola had changed but the survey did not allow for the respondents to state clearly what they thought the original purposes were. There was little consensus of opinion as to whether the practice would die out, 44 per cent of Xhosa respondents compared to 70 per cent of Zulu respondents thought the practice would survive. Subsequent research later in the 1990s by Sandra Burman in Cape Town showed no decline in the custom at all, and indicated an increase in the cost of bridewealth.[6]

In the same survey, respondents were asked what they thought were the positive and negative aspects of the current system of lobola. Some of the 'good' aspects mentioned were that it strengthens marriage and discourages divorce; it makes a husband respect his

---

[4] Joan Comaroff (ed.), *The Meaning of Marriage Payments*, (London, 1980) p.169.
[5] Mblekekwa, 'A Comparison', p. 16. Literally: to be fed sour milk, a ritual to welcome a new bride.
[6] Burman and Nicolette van der Werff, 'Rethinking', p. 117.

wife; it makes a wife feel proud that money has been paid for her and gives him a gives a sense of pride in having paid; it gives men the right to enjoy sex.[7]

From these comments it would seem that people believe lobola is intended to promote attitudes of pride, unity, security, responsibility and respect. In reality this may be far from the truth as some women in this study report violence, neglect, infidelity and lack of financial support despite lobola having been paid for them. The unmarried women interviewed for this current study are at best ambivalent to marriage if not adamantly against it, and therefore they do not regard lobola as a tradition that needs to be continued. It is to be noted that lobola 'gives men the right to enjoy sex' which could mean that once lobola has been paid a man holds the rights to his wife's body. The respondents did not comment on the sexual aspect of lobola and women.

These negative attitudes run counter to the original meaning of the custom. The custom is now regarded by some women as a commercial transaction in which women are seen as the property of their husbands and hold inferior status in the marriage. The understanding is that if men think they have bought a woman, they then feel they had the right to 'abuse them sexually, physically and emotionally' and 'the fathers of the ladies regard their daughters as their business, not their children'. Also mentioned in a negative light is the greed of the bride's family. Some respondents believe families are exploiting each other by making unreasonable financial demands through lobola.[8]

All the women in this study agreed that lobola should be retained as a traditional part of marriage negotiations, though some of them have different connotations of the practice. For example, the amount of money for some was not important, whilst for others the amount was significant. The younger generation (born between the late 1970's and early 1980's) place less emphasis on lobola than the older and middle age groups which share very similar opinions on the custom, seeing it as integral to any marriage.

> It's our tradition. You can't run away from it. Though it must not be as if you are being sold. And lots and lots of money like twenty thousand. Because you find the father saying, Look, we educated this one. It's their duty! You know I think the other reason for other parents charging lots of money for lobola is

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 118.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

> because you find that the others they get married immediately after school and they don't do anything at home or for anyone. So they think now that you are going to work for that family. Because others they don't have the love ... [9]

Here the amount of money is connected to what the wife can do for the husband's family once she is married into that family. The wife's economic value to her in-laws is taken into account when deciding the price of the lobola. The wife's family, in turn, assumes they are owed something by her new family because of her abilities and skills through her education for which they paid. This could well be perceived as a financial deal with the woman being bartered for according to her potential worth and what has already been invested in her.

Two of the women from the middle generation group interviewed for this study did not go through the normal lobola process initially. Neli (33) said that though negotiations for lobola were made by her husband's family, she and her husband 'just escaped and go...' They took themselves off to the magistrate's court and were married. Later they had a Xhosa wedding and a small ceremony in the church. It's not clear as to whether lobola was ever paid. Her husband came from a poor family and he had little education and therefore probably could not afford the lobola. Thus they took matters into their own hands, disregarded the tradition and did what they wanted to do. It was not lobola that validated their marriage but the civil ceremony. The women of the older generation disagree in that, for them, lobola is an absolute necessity, even if it is paid in installments.

Patricia (27) and her husband also went off by themselves to get married in the magistrate's court. This was because she knew that her family would ask for lobola and she knew her husband would not be able to afford the payment. They had been married for two years before her husband began the negotiations associated with asking her family if he could marry her. He could not afford the ten thousand rand requested by her family. For Patricia, the amount of money is not at all important. What is important is that the man values and loves the woman and takes care of her. She would not mind, she said, if her daughter does not receive a large amount of lobola, but she would like to know that her daughter is valued by her husband.

---

[9] Interview with Sinazo, Grahamstown, 2001

By getting married before lobola had been paid Patricia found a way of acting out her convictions. She and her husband then paid the lobola later as they believed her mother should be paid for having raised Patricia and her mother was in need of money. Their reasoning had more to do with her mother's financial situation that it did with any of the purposes of lobola mentioned above. Thus, for them, lobola was just a way of improving her mother's economic situation rather than a transaction between families.

One of the women from the youngest age group, Zinzi (19), who is not married, suggested that

> if ever there should be the lobola thing, I think it should be fifty-fifty. You know, I contribute and he contributes so that when they tend to be bossy they know, fine... if ever he gets bossy, you know, I just tell him, "You know what? You are just messing your own fifty. And if ever I leave, I will leave with my own fifty and then you'll see what you have - your own fifty."[10]

Zinzi sees that each partner in the marriage can leave with whatever he or she put into it. This affords her the power to leave with something, and also suggests that she has not been 'paid for' or 'bought'. It also suggests a more modern concept of equality in the relationship. Her view also has connotations, though not clearly expressed in such a sophisticated manner by Zinzi, of the accrual system which many marriage partners opt for today. Her suggestion does not place the money in the hands of the bride's parents for them to use as they please, rather it is a form of investment for the couple as they begin their married life. This way the bride's parents are not compensated for their investment in their daughter and it does not have any of the original intention of lobola uniting families. Rather it will give each partner a stake in the marriage finances on which they can build. It also allows for the bride to feel she is making a contribution and may give her a position of strength from which to begin her married life. Zinzi is a young, independent woman, determined to keep a measure of autonomy in her marriage.

[10] Interview with Zinzi, Grahamstown, 2001

This is a very different attitude from the older generations who insist that lobola is essentially a sign of respect, a show of how much a man will sacrifice for someone he loves and a sign of gratitude for the investment made by the parents in the life of their daughter.

By parents insisting on a price commensurate with the investment made in their daughter's education, it would seem that daughters are being educated, not for their own sake, or because it is the duty of parents to see to their daughter's education, but that they are educated for a man. This may not be in the minds of the parents as their daughters start off their education, but it certainly seems the case later when negotiations take place. Instead of parents benefiting from their daughter's education, the husband will benefit, so he has to compensate the parents for their investment.

Sandra Burman and Nicolette van der Werff suggest a similar system of reform to the practice of lobola whereby a 'Bridewealth Fund' to which people would have the option of contributing, either by way of a single lump sum or monthly or annual payments, by the groom or his family. This fund would have to be managed by appropriate trustees with rules regarding disbursements and liabilities. This scheme would again not be to the immediate benefit of the brides' family but would instead be an investment for the future, a form of saving for the future needs of the married couple. One of their respondents made it clear that the money was not, in fact, for the benefit of the couple, but solely for the bride's parents.

> '...in fact this (insurance) will only work if a traditional way of wedding is abolished. There is so much that is needed one finds that the lobola money is nothing when compared with the expenses that has to be incurred by the bride'.[11]

They suggest that sums of money could be paid to the bride's family at certain intervals. This proposal offers some form of insurance to the bride should the marriage end due to the groom's behaviour and is in keeping with the practice which allowed the bride's family to keep part of the lobola should such a situation occur. The bridewealth was intended to be available to the wife to sustain her if she returned to her own family. As the situation stands today, most of the money paid for lobola is spent by the wife's

---

[11] Burman and van der Werff, 'Rethinking Customary Law', p. 123.

family, albeit on the wedding, which means there would be no funds to sustain her should she return to them in the case of her husband's poor treatment of her. Should she wish to return, the financial burden on her family would increase and she may not be welcomed home. Thus women may well remain in abusive and unhappy marriages as they have no financial means with which to support themselves. A survey by Burman in the early 1980s showed that much of the money was, in fact, spent by the parents on their daughter as they bought, for example, furniture for her, bridal gifts, food, rent and education of younger children.

The practice of lobola, too, is a gendered one, for the money offers little security for women. Men, though they have to pay the money and take the risk of perhaps not getting their money back should the woman decide she does not want to go through with marriage, benefit from having a wife. It is the wife who will do the housework and take care of his children and who will bear the bulk of responsibility for the relationship. Lobola may not offer financial security but marriage may increase a woman's wealth if both she and her husband have jobs and live on a double income.

Burman and van der Werff conclude the report on their study by making an appeal for further consideration of bride wealth customs in general and the possibility of an insurance scheme in particular.

> Whether or not bridewealth customs are adapted, it is essential to promote awareness of what the international literature calls 'remnant families', and the need for the ex-husband to remain responsible for them. Areas for investigation should include the advantages and disadvantages of bridewealth schemes, and the advantages of those administered by the government, as opposed to the insurance companies, should also be debated.[12]

The researchers list possible existing forums in which such a discussion could take place: the various media, churches, political groups, women's groups, youth groups. Once discussion is underway they suggest a nationwide survey be implemented to gauge reactions to the various options. Their final comment in the paper bears noting:

> Whatever the nation decides, it should not fear to allow custom to develop and change with the times...With the end of apartheid, Africans will no longer need to fear that their own customs will be swept away by outside influences. It will not be necessary to refer to the past to discover how African social structures should

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

> be organised; a confident and developing society can take note of its changing needs and create new structures which preserve the spirit of its traditions while accommodating the demands of the future.[13]

Though the idea of lobola being an insurance policy is not by any means a standard by which lobola should be measured, and whilst this idea does not hold currency in all critiques of the system, the idea was floated by this researcher in discussion with the respondents. When they were asked what they thought about lobola being made into an insurance policy they were unanimously against it, saying that the bride's parents deserved the money and that, in any case, the money was spent on the bride and groom by way of household gifts and the wedding party, ensuring immediate benefit to the couple. In fact Cora believes the money should go to the bride's parents only because of what they have spent on their daughter. Once a couple is married the wife becomes part of her husband's family and all future costs and benefits rest with his family. So, indirectly, the husband's family will benefit more from the marriage than the wife's. Cora's comments on the financial costs of raising a daughter almost suggest that the parents raised their daughter with the specific intention of her becoming someone's wife.

> It should go to the parents because what the parents got educating the child, feeding the child, doing all sorts of things and then they get nothing. I think it should be the parents.[14]

In most cases the negotiations for lobola are the responsibility of the male family members of both the bride and groom. None of the respondents in this study mentioned the men discussing anything other than the financial aspect of the marriage. Whether the groom's relatives are asked about his suitability as a husband or whether the bride's family is questioned about the character of the woman is not mentioned. On the surface it would appear that only financial matters are discussed. There are instances where women find ways of being part of the lobola negotiations, but this is unusual and the women of the older and middle generations implied that the negotiations were purely the duty and preserve of men.

Nandi (38) , of the middle generation, tells with some pride that her mother, despite being a widow, and though her male relatives did the actual negotiating, insisted on being kept

---

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 125.
[14] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2002.

apprised of negotiations all the way through and that the money was given to her. Nandi continued speaking of her lobola negotiations which took place in the 1990s. The amount agreed upon was ten head of cattle. The proceedings are described by her as follows:

> So they (her boyfriend's uncles) said they looking for this daughter of yours and we ask your daughter and she said, Yes, she do know them, and we told them that for our daughter we used to ask for TEN cattles. Five with four legs ...and five from the pocket. (She puts her hand on her bottom to indicate a back pocket.) ... and you also need a horse ... a horse with everything. A saddle and everything on it. That's what we told them. From that MONEY we only want four. The cattle is a thousand rand EACH. So they ask five thousand from the pocket but they need four for cash and the last one she can go and work for it, the husband.[15]

In Nandi's opinion, the giving of cattle is of little practical use for urban dwellers as cattle are prey to theft or disease which means they have no lasting value. She does not mention the fact that cattle can be a source of income. As they reproduce the herd increases, which increases wealth. This was partly the reason for the giving of cattle. She also mentioned other items that were to be brought to her family, for example a stick which would be used to herd the cattle, again of little value to an urban dweller. Items such as this were actually converted into their relevant monetary value and cash was given instead. When asked if the groom's family actually brought the cattle and the stick and other items her reply was:

> Because these days we can change the cattle to money. So, I mean no cattle. And most of the time we don't need cattle because people are stealing some cattle. And then cattle are useless because they can DIE...And it's cheaper to get some money than to go and buy cattle. So you negotiate with them, especially my husband was from Grahamstown, which is not the Homeland.[16]

Another reason for the giving of cattle was to ensure the groom's family would be able to take them back should the marriage not work. This is rarely, if ever, possible with the giving of cash, as the bride's family would have spent the money long before the marriage ends. Burman and van der Werff state that

> [R]esearch in Cape Town has shown that, although some three-fifths of marriages or customary unions end in at lest de facto divorce, there has been a sharp decrease in claims for the refund for bridewealth when marriages break up, even when there are no children and the marriage has been of fairly short duration

---

[15] When speaking English, Xhosa speakers often make errors with pronouns of he and she. Interview with Nandi, Grahamstown, 2001.

[16] Nandi was from a rural area in the Ciskei, and her husband's family were living in urban Grahamstown which possibly meant they did not own cattle. Interview with Nandi, Grahamstown, 2001.

> (Burman, 1984; Burman and Fuchs, 1986). Where claims for the return of bridewealth are made, interviews indicate that it is seldom actually repaid, although much acrimony results.[17]

Though it was and is seldom customary for a bride to decide on her own lobola, Harriet (33) says she and her father had a conversation about how much should be paid by her boyfriend. They decided on an amount of R20 000. Harriet then went to her boyfriend and asked him what he considered to be an acceptable amount to pay. Harriet's confidence in this matter may stem from her own education and ideas on women which allow her to express her opinion on matters that would ordinarily be the preserve of men.

> We did talk to my dad and he was not supposed to talk to me, ok, but sideways we did. And I told him what I want because at the end of the day my husband should be happy of paying the amount he did, you see. Actually, I went to him first, to my husband and then I said to him: how much do you think you should pay for lobola for me? And then he said: No, I don't know. I don't even think now, Harriet. And then I said to him: No, think just the overall amount. How much would you be happy to pay for me? And then he said: Perhaps R20 000, I don't know. And then I said: Ok, fine. Because in the long run, sometimes problems come up, you see, when somebody pays big lobola so when he is I did not deserve that.[18]

Harriet and her boyfriend continued with this line of conversation until he agreed that she 'deserved' R20 000. When the boyfriend's family then approached Harriet's uncles they thought he should have paid more because she is very well educated. Her father was satisfied with the amount as he said they were 'building a relationship' so they did not need to make it more. Her boyfriend paid the amount in installments of R5 000. Harriet mentioned the fact that, as her son had been brought up in her own father's home, it was considered right that the boy's father should pay as much as he could for her lobola to compensate the grandfather for all he spent on the child. She also mentioned what she called a 'Xhosa belief' that the man should not pay all the money in case he

> messes me up and I go back home. By the time I have to go back him, he is supposed to pay the remaining amount. But I don't believe in that. He won't. So I want him to pay all the amount.[19]

For Harriet, her husband's economic sacrifice was a sign of how much he valued her. By making her own suggestions on a price to her boyfriend she ensured that an amount of money acceptable to her was offered, and she took control of a situation that would

---

[17] Burman and van der Werff, 'Rethinking', p.112.
[18] Interview with Harriet, Grahamstown, 2001.
[19] Ibid.

ordinarily be out of her hands. In setting the price herself she may have been aware of what he earned and so may not have placed too much of a burden on him, in order to ensure their financial position was not compromised.

The linking of a woman's worth and status to the payment of money is a gender issue and as such is discussed by Mager who writes that in the 1940s lobola was widely practiced amongst the Xhosa people in the Ciskei. The payment of lobola had more than one aspect to it: the father could get cattle to increase his herd, and the woman gained status in her husband's home if the lobola had been paid. Mager writes:

> This linking of female status and lobola centred on the social values of women's capacities for reproduction and agricultural production in a precapitalist society. Binding women's place to the male-controlled practice of lobola ensured that formal feminine ideals reinforced women's place in patriarchal society.[20]

Though there is no official record of how much money lobola involves on a national level, Burman and van der Werff write that

> If it is assumed that 70 percent of African women marry between the ages of 20 and 24 by either civil or customary law, and that bridewealth is actually paid in 80 percent of marriages at an average of R2500 million rand is involved per annum.[21]

These statistics are not considered accurate but the research does show that the amount of bridewealth is not fixed and in some cases the amount is paid over a protracted period. They report that informants in the Transkei mentioned amounts in the region of R13 000 being paid for 'attractive and well-educated girls'. This, according to the researchers, represents a rapid escalation since the 1980s. However, girls in areas of the country that are poor, will not receive anywhere near this amount, if payment is made at all.[22]

All in all, the gist of the information around bridewealth available ten years ago suggests that substantial amounts of money changed hands. The amounts quoted by the women in this study, suggest that amounts in excess of R13 000 were agreed upon, or at least requested, which are thought to be commensurate with the monetary worth of cattle. It also seems that cattle are still used as a yardstick for pricing, although cattle do not

---

[20] Mager, *Gender and the Making*, p. 175.
[21] Burman and van der Werff, '*Rethinking*', p. 111.
[22] *Ibid.*, p 112.

actually change hands, and in some cases are neither owned by the bridegroom's family nor wanted by the bride's.

Cora (64) tells of the lobola amount that was to be paid for her. According to Cora, her uncle could have asked for ten cows but, because her boyfriend was caring for his mother, the uncle decided to reduce the number to eight. When asked whether they actually received cattle, the conversation with her went as follows:

> C: No. With cows you can make as money... And at that time the cow is was five hundred.
> LS: So then he had to save up for that money. How did your husband get that money?
> C: He saved before he started to think about this. He saved...And then to show that he wants the wife he's got to have half of what the people want... He don't have to put it all.[23]

Cora was married before 1961 when South African currency changed from pounds to rand. According to Mager, the going price for cattle in the 1950s was five pounds. It is not clear if Cora has translated the five pounds into five hundred rand, but it is her intention to show that her husband made a financial sacrifice to pay the lobola and that the amount was an indication of just how valued she was by both families. Despite this her husband turned out to be abusive and she divorced him. Payment of lobola in this case was no guarantee of faithfulness on the part of her husband.

Krige writes of the traditionally prolonged process of marriage negotiations which was unsuited to the way people were living in the 1930s. Urban and rural people had difficulty in making the necessary connections between the families due to distance and work obligations. Sometime negotiations were carried out through the mail which was unsatisfactory. Distance also meant increased expenses with visits to far off places. These, and other complications to do with distance, meant adaptations had to be made, but still the general framework of marriage negotiations, including lobola were maintained.[24]

---

[23] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2001.
[24] Eleanor J Krige, 'Changing Conditions' in Marital Relations and Parental Duties Among Urbanized natives, in *Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures,* IX, 1, 1936, pp. 17-18.

The respondents in this study spoke about the lengthy process of marriage negotiations and of the husband-to-be paying off in installments. This is a way of coping with economic constraints when cash, not cattle, is the currency of lobola, but at the same time holding onto the custom of lobola.

Nandi's thoughts on lobola express her view of it as a negative custom.

> Because after all that lobola paying and all those things, this husband of yours would almost tell you that, I pay for you! So you don't feel happy because you are feared because he is staying with you because he bought you. I mean to me it means he doesn't LOVE you but he stay with you because he buy you. But days before it was something to keep the two of them together... And I, for my children, prefer not to get lobola. I prefer so that if she feel not happy, she can come home.[25]

The women in this study are divided over the meaning, purpose and necessity of the payment of lobola. Those in the youngest generation are not entirely sure it is necessary, except as a financial support to the bride's parents. The middle generation are divided as to whether it is a positive custom for women, and the older generation see it as a custom that shows how the husband and his family value the young woman and how her parents are recompensed for the cost of raising a girl to be a good wife. According to Cora of the grandmother generation lobola is never to be changed.

> C. I think it must be. NO Change with that lobola. Although some of the people they don't ...they will make agreement...so they say, 'I will give you five cows now and pay for later.' And then you find its not coming later. And then you find, even the daughter, she doesn't mind that not being paid. Which for us if you are looking for a woman, you must lobola.
> LS. The whole amount?
> C: Yes, you must lobola, even if you pay in some lumps but you MUST lobola if you wan this girl to be your wife. Not just take her and say, 'You are my wife.'[26]

As to whether the women see marriage in a positive light and just how they view husbands, formed the basis of the next topic of conversation introduced by a statement made by a black woman on the radio in 2000.[27]

**'A husband is too much trouble'**

---

[25] Interview with Nandi, Grahamstown, 2003.
[26] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2005.
[27] Heard in an interview on SAfm in 2000.

In the modern world under Western influences marriages are usually deemed to be based on romantic love which brings with it the expectation of mutual fidelity and emotional and material support. This, however, was not always the case and decisions to marry are informed by various other factors which often differ for men and women. In Western societies before industrialization marriage was an economic transaction, although the notion of love was not absent, it was primarily about economics, property and resources. Women were more dependent on marriage than men and patriarchal attitudes regarded women, particularly women who did not work, as dependents as they were financially reliant, first on their fathers, and then their husbands. When a woman married, particularly in the middle and upper-classes, all her personal property was transferred to her husband, and it was her duty to serve her husband, children and other members of the household. On the other hand, marriage for men brought authority and way of life in which they could expect service and honour from their wives and children in return for providing for their welfare.

Marriage in Xhosa society brought a certain increase of wealth to the bride's family, but as with Western marriage customs, women continued to be dependent on men economically and were expected to serve their in-laws. Marriage rates are often dependent on employment opportunities: where employment is scarce for women they tend to marry at a younger age than when there is plentiful employment and personal economic security a possibility.[28]

Mbolekwa found that attitudes towards marriage had changed by the 1990s. Many women no longer saw marriage as their only option. She offers a number of reasons for this shift, one being an improvement of women's economic position which means that women are not totally dependent on a husband for financial support in the raising of children.[29]

We see this trend today, where jobs are scarce and money is a huge problem, young women and girls look for men who can provide for them. Some have relationships with a 'Sugar Daddy' who can bring gifts and money into her home in return for sexual

[28] Diana Gittins, *The Family in Question: Changing Households & Familiar Ideologies* (London, 1993).
[29] Zibia Mbolekwa, A Comparison of the Changing Views on Illegitimacy in Two Xhosa Communities Through the Twentieth Century, Rhodes University, Department of History, Honours Paper, p. 41.

favours. Some are materialistic and are looking for a man who will provide her with the 'three c's' – car, cellphone and cash. Others choose to become pregnant in the hope of getting married or at least getting the child grant. Then there are young women who are forced into sexual relationships with men in order to be protected from gangs. Poverty and powerlessness drive women into relationships of dependency. These are ways of coping with the harsh realities of the gendered side of poverty.[30]

Diana Gittins rather acerbically writes:

> Unfortunately, the development of ideals of romance and romantic love in contemporary society has been so strongly all-pervasive that few people are aware of the bitter pill beneath the sugar coating in marriage...Contemporary ideology of the family presents marriage as an equal partnership between a man and a woman who love each other. In reality, the social, political and economic structures of modern industrial society are such that only in the rarest cases can marriage ever be equal. It is founded on a patriarchal ideology with concepts of men's and women's duties as responsibilities which are by definition the basis of an unequal relationship.[31]

Gittins is discussing marriage in Western society and yet the same could be true for many married black women. The ideals of marriage and partnerships are seldom achieved as evidenced by the high divorce rate in South Africa. Statistics for 2003 show there were 31 566 divorces and that the duration of those marriages was between five and nine years. In the same year there were 178 689 officially recorded marriages.[32] Why is it that most women of all races are still choosing marriage despite the high failure rate? Many more remain in dysfunctional marriages? What are the alternatives for women who do not wish to marry? In black South African society it may be because poverty offers them few alternatives as double income households bring in more money and men are usually paid more than women. This may be the ideal, but in reality many men are unemployed and women find themselves the sole breadwinners. It may also be because some women of all classes and cultures have been raised with the expectation of marriage and children, of having a husband who will provide for and protect them. It may be that they have been raised in this patriarchal system and they see it as the norm.

---

[30] Peter Delius and Liz Walker, 'AIDS in Context', in *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002, p. 37.
[31] Gittins, *The Family*, pp. 90-91.
[32] Statistics South Africa, Statistical Release PO307, *Marriages and Divorces 2003*. www.statssa.gov.za

A comment made by a black woman that 'husbands are too much trouble' sparked off conversation with the respondents about what women expect from marriage today and what makes marriage succeed or fail. Cora (64) puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of men with regard to the failure of marriages.

> I would say, even to my daughter: don't get married. Marriage these days it is just ...I don't know what to call it. It's just not right... It's mostly the man. They abusing the women like anything. You come to marriage and when you come it's nice for those few days, you get happy and after that ...like my son, the eldest one, they are about to divorce, he and his wife...So ...and I don't blame her because he is rude to her....Another thing of the husbands: they get married and after marriage they still looking for other womens in the street which is not right. Especially now there is these AIDS business.[33]

Muriel (60) noted that not all men are the same; some do the right things and others not. A 'good' husband in her opinion is one who 'must understand everything in his family'. A bad husband on the other hand

> always drink like that then they make bad things to the family. Beating his wife and children, like that. They don't support, ja, and the wife is suffering, looking to the children and the man is going to the shebeen and drunk, like that.[34]

Sinazo (38) was blunt in her response when asked why she has chosen not to be married. She would rather just have a relationship without marriage.

> Otherwise I do have an affair. But it's just that I don't take the shit. I prefer to be on my own than be with somebody else. I don't want to be fucked around.[35]

Remaining single is a way for her to hold onto her individuality and independence. In what she sees in the men around her, she feels there is little scope for a marriage based on mutuality. Sinazo is an educated woman who is employed as a teacher and economically is able to live on her own in her own house. Her situation may support her decision not to marry. Though marriage is not for her, Sinazo said that many women her age are very keen to marry. This is something she cannot understand as she enjoys the independence the single life offers her. She has had conversations with other women about marriage and cannot understand what it offers them.

> Because when I ask them, "What is this marriage business?" Because you are staying on your own. You do your own things and no one is telling you what do. You've got a house. Why is that? Because if you get married you are going to be under somebody who is going to control you and tell what you are not to do.

---

[33] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2003.
[34] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2004. A shebeen is an informal and usually unlicensed bar.
[35] Interview with Sinazo, Grahamstown, 2001.

> And it means you are the one who is going to be responsible for that house. Because in many marriages, the woman is the key to that marriage. So if I can be on my own and have this on my own, what's the point?[36]

Nandi (38) agrees with the sentiment that a husband is too much trouble, mostly because of the abuse they inflict on their wives, caused mainly through drinking and lack of money. In fact, for her, husbands are often just useless beings.

> They hitting people, they are abusing emotionally. Abusing physically. They are just abusive. Drinking. It's drinking. And also they are so aggressive. Like somebody ...one is not working and its poverty. I can say its poverty. Its poverty. Because if there is poverty in the house, too much friction. Always fight because everyone is blaming each other. But the men they always blame to the wives. You understand. I mean you can see now, you are married, a wife and a husband, this husband is useless. He is not working, the only thing he is doing is to make children. You have to look after the children. You have to maintain the house and then you tell yourself, ag, I'll stay alone with my children because I am doing everything in this house.[37]

Despite her assertions of women choosing independence over a confining marriage, Nandi herself remains in an unhappy marriage. At present this is her choice as she percieves it serves her need for a home in which to raise her child and while she is studying to be a pre-school teacher.

Neli (33) suggested that this cynical attitude towards marriage by some women has to do with bad experiences and therefore they have the right to make such comments. Marriage, for Neli, is a good thing, but not just marriage in itself. She had been proposed to by another man prior to her husband asking her to marry him. The proposal made her feel good about herself but as she couldn't see herself with him for the rest of her life, she declined. What she actually meant by the proposal making her feel good about herself is not clear. It may be that she felt attractive and valued or validated by having a man want to marry her. In her last interview she spoke of herself as 'lucky' that her husband does not beat her and said that some women who are not 'lucky to get married' may want children.[38]

She did concede that marriage for women is not always easy due to the lack of support they receive from their husbands. She and her husband work at the same place and work

---

[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Interview with Nandi, Grahamstown, 2003.
[38] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2005.

the same hours, nevertheless she bears the brunt of the housework and childcare. This, she says is a struggle for many women and is often a losing battle as their husbands do not want to change and the women do not try hard enough to change them.

> I wake up every morning, I have to wash my kids, I have to make the porridge for us and all that. Everything is waiting for me and he is lying (in bed) and then when its time for him to wake up, he just wake up, and wash himself, and, you know, those are things that really need to be ... we did try, but maybe we are not trying enough. We did try to say to them, Hey, you do this and I do this. We must share the work at home but it's difficult especially from our husbands.[39]

Nosipho (28) is unmarried and admits to not knowing much about what having a husband means in a woman's life. She believes people should marry for love, but there are cases of which she knows where people marry because they have a child and they try to create a perfect family by marrying, or they marry for status and financial security.

> Another thing, other people, they want to get married for status. If a guy is a teacher, for instance, they will get married because she will be called a mistress or something. Other people they want to get married because the guy is rich, so they will get all these cars, the fancy houses and all... and some just get married to get their ex's jealous![40]

From the above quotes it is clear that, generally, the women do not hold marriage, or at least husbands, in high esteem. Although they do not name it as such, they see how the patriarchal system in which society operates works against women and for men. Women are staying in marriages with husbands who drink excessively, who do not work, who are unfaithful, who put their wives' health at risk and who do not help with household chores. But some women, like Cora (64), decided not to allow her husband to ruin her life, and chose to divorce him. Some, like Nosipho (28) and Sinazo (38) have made up their minds not be married if it means living in an unhappy relationship, preferring the single life. They are confident they can take care of themselves and do not need a husband to validate their existence.

**Remaining faithful**

The respondents in this study spoke about infidelity on the part of husbands, though not necessarily their own husbands, as a common occurrence. From what they said women

[39] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2003.

seem to expect their husbands to be unfaithful. They go into marriage with the knowledge that their husbands may cheat on them. They are not happy with the situation, but they live with it despite its sometimes fatal consequences.

Cora's husband was a heavy drinker, a violent man and a womaniser. His behaviour was so unruly and dangerous that Cora, afraid for herself and her four children, decided to consult a lawyer after a particularly vicious attack. Cora told her employer the next morning that she wanted to consult a lawyer.

> Then I came to tell her and I said: Tomorrow I want to go to this lawyer and go and lay down all this things and I need a divorce. She [her employer] said: You are just right. He has been nonsense for all this time and you have been working so hard for him. So I went to the lawyer and I told him.[41]

In the 1980s Cora's husband had a restraining order issued against him warning him that further violence against his wife would cost him a jail sentence. Unfortunately for Cora she could not trust her husband to stay away or for the police to protect her so, in order to be safe, she had to leave her house with him in it so that her children had a home. She had a place to live with her employer. Cora bravely and assertively took control of the circumstances in which she found herself and made use of the legal system which was able to support her. Cora never re-married saying,

> There's one thing that I thought: I am not going to marry. I don't want a man ever after that.[42]

Cora's marriage was so awful that she lost her trust in all men after her divorce. It was unusual for women of her generation (1940-1960) to institute divorce proceedings and Cora showed great courage and determination in freeing herself from this abusive relationship. Her own mother was divorced which was even more unusual which have set an example for Cora.

Daphne's husband did not mention to her that he had been married and had a child before she married him. The first she heard of his previous marriage was when she went to visit his mother and saw a little boy who turned out to be her husband's son from his previous marriage. It is not clear whether he was already divorced when he met Daphne or if he decided to get divorced once he had met her. But she did say he may have kept it a

---

[40] Interview with Nosipho, Grahamstown, 2003. 'Mistress' here means a school teacher.
[41] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2001.

secret as she had mentioned that she did not want to marry someone who had been married already. Daphne has never met his first wife and does not know very much about her at all, preferring, she says, not to know. This desire for ignorance may be a way of coping with something she cannot change.[43]

Muriel (60), when asked for her opinions on the assumption by some wives that their husbands will have an extra-marital affair but may prefer not to know about it, she said:

> It's too difficult because other womans they doesn't ... they doesn't like their husbands to got affair. The others, they don't care about that. Because I think it's the feeling inside and then they just leaving and the husband got jealous with the wife for that one... why she quiet like that? Ja, he said, maybe she is doing something wrong, but it's not like that, she was staying with the children, making everything in the house, and the mans, the husbands, is going out to his affair and the wife is staying in the house.[44]

When asked why many wives do not leave such husbands, Muriel suggested some women did not mind such behaviour and some want to stay in the house and be with their children so they put up with the extra-marital affairs.

When asked about the infidelity of husbands, and that women choose not to marry because 'a husband is too much trouble', Neli (38) was pensive at first and then commented on the fact that unless a woman has been married she would not know whether men are trouble or not. It is only through personal experience, she believes, that one can make such a judgment. She does agree that many husbands drink and have extra-marital affairs and that some women just don't want to know about it.

> It's true. It's true. It is painful more when you know about it. It must be a secret, and when he comes back at home he mustn't show me he was happy wherever he were. He must respect me.[45]

Not wanting to know could be a way of coping with this difficult and painful situation. Seeing the secrecy as a sign of respect is also a coping mechanism in that the husband shows love for his wife by not shaming or hurting her with information about his affair.

---

[42] *Ibid.*
[43] Interview with Daphne, Grahamstown, 2001.
[44] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2004.
[45] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2003.

Neli does not think her husband has had an affair and says she just has to believe that he will remain faithful to her.

> I am not always with (my husband) and I do not know what he is doing when he is not with me. So I can say he is not having an affair. It will be a shock when I know that, but otherwise I am telling myself that...I trust him a lot.[46]

> I am sure marriage is something you must believe in. You know if I don't trust (my husband) you know he is driving around everywhere he doesn't sleep at home. I don't worry. I don't say, He must be having a girlfriend and doing something. No, I don't have those things and I'm sure they help me a lot because I am sitting with my kids eating, having fun and all that.[47]

Nosipho (28) quoted a male friend her own age:

> 'My father was a player, and I am a player'. So they sort of look at their parents' behaviour , I would say, and then they try to do the same thing so they that the would look men. Because there's a saying African traditions: it's ok to have a wife and you can have a mistress; but a man with one wife is useless.[48]

Neli says that although many men leave their wives without support, they are often forced to pay maintenance to the children if their wives go to court, but this, she says is a cheaper option than maintaining a home.

> But sometimes they are forced to support the children, just to support the children... it's much better than providing a house or a car.[49]

The sanctioning of, or at least turning a blind eye, to infidelity and the fathering of children out of marriage, may have something to do with the understanding of male sexual prowess. Mbolekwa states that when a man had 'outside children', 'society as a whole seemed to applaud his male virility' and that extra-marital relationships were not regarded as abnormal. She concludes that the countenancing of such male behaviour 'highlights male chauvinism'.[50]

Marriage, whether based on love and/or other more practical factors, brings men and women into a relationship with each other's families and new families are made. Within these relationships roles are assigned and expectations held as to what the ideal way of life for a family should be. We have seen how these ideals do not match the reality of

---

[46] *Ibid.*
[47] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2005.
[48] Interview with Nosipho, Grahamstown, 2003.
[49] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2003.
[50] Mbolekwa, 'A comparison', p. 20.

the lives of many. Disruptions and disappointments in marriage cause heartache and hardships, often more so for women than men as it would appear from what the women have said, that it is more frequently men who leave the marriage and women who are left to continue raising the children . Yet women still choose marriage over the single life whether for reasons of income, protection, status, the raising of children or because they genuinely love their partners and want to spend their lives with them.

Marriage brings families together and in the next chapter we will examine some of the changes in roles of extended family and how women are managing to survive in the age of HIV/AIDS and increasing economic deprivation.

# CHAPTER 5
# LIVES INTERTWINED

> It's not easy. It's not easy. It is hard. Most of the people that I visit it is hard, it's not easy. Especially with the finance. When you look at that, see a gran who's getting a pension. She has to sort out for all these things for the grandchildren, like maybe five grandchildren. Some of them have got five grandchildren to look after when the mother or the father dies.[1]

Here Cora expresses the difficulty faced by grandparents, more particularly grandmothers, who are obliged to take care of their orphaned grandchildren. The role of grandmothers has shifted from them being cared for in their old age to being caretakers. Family relationships and roles continue to be affected and transformed by social issues. The lives of family members remain intertwined despite changes they have undergone over the past years.

In this chapter we will discuss the ways in which families were structured and how the roles of family members have been transformed due to HIV/AIDS, poverty, shifts in marital relationships and children being born to unmarried women. The issue of parental authority is also discussed.

**The extended family**

During the apartheid era families underwent transformations when men left their homes to find work in the cities. Men suffered separation from their families causing a shift in familial responsibilities for household management and the raising and disciplining of children. Many men took new wives or girlfriends and had more children in the cities where they worked and often abandoned their original families. As fathers left to find work outside of the rural areas, mothers assumed the major burden of responsibility for

[1] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2003.

the household and, then mothers, too, left rural areas to seek employment in the urban areas and children were placed in the care of grandmothers. Usually the parents supported their children economically and grandparents were not always expected to be the sole providers for their grandchildren. Further disruption in family life came with moves into town and access to the extended family was reduced.

Yet, given all the disruptions of family structure and the problems discussed in the above chapters, the family remains central to the lives of Xhosa women. They continue to live in familial households and the family plays a key role in their lives. Though there may be an increased sense of individuality in the lives of modern Xhosa people, there is little scope for individualism. Whilst the intention is not to pathologise all current family relationships as dysfunctional, we need to note the increase in family problems. It is important to note that there was never a 'golden age' of family life where all relationships were stable and everyone was satisfied with their familial relationships and fulfilled their given roles adequately and willingly. Some of the women from the older generation give the impression that when they were younger there were fewer problems in families, notably children respecting the authority of their elders.

Families have undergone changes in all societies and they continue to evolve as sexual mores, fluctuations in the economy, employment and other social factors change. The 'family' in Western society has shifted from the extended family to the nuclear family and is no longer confined to the stereotype of married heterosexual parents with their own offspring living in one household. Families now include, for example, homosexual parents and single parents of both sexes. Xhosa households and families have also undergone changes. Notions of family have narrowed to smaller units due to urbanization which has meant reduced physical space. But the notion of the extended family continues and family members continue to be involved in each other's lives.

The respondents in this study illustrate some of the changes in Xhosa family structures. The older generation depicts more traditional families, whilst the younger women came from and intend living in different households and relationships which may include customs from the past.

Anthropologists describe 'traditional' African families as including the following:

> ...no public displays of affection between spouses; strong parental authority; family care for the elderly; cooperation between relatives; no assistance from the husband in domestic work; involvement of parents in the choice of spouse; polygamy; no marriage ceremony; early marriage for women; large families living together; no courtship; little privacy; no emphasis on love-making; payment of bridewealth; no freedom of communication between parents and children; families not eating together as a group; children reared by a large number of relatives; marriage based on economic motives; and families not sharing leisure.[2]

If we consider the above as stereotypical features then we will note how families have changed. In the chapters on children and marriage, respondents mention some of these features as being part of their family life, for example the husband's lack of involvement in housework and the continued practice of lobola. But it is the areas of parental communication and authority, the raising of children and family care for the aged that the respondents addressed that will hold our attention here as it has a bearing on the ways in which families function today.

**Raising and disciplining children**

In their third interviews, when the women were given an overview of the ideas and comments of the other respondents, many of them focused their attention on current parenting styles, citing these as a major reason for what they see as unacceptable behaviour of young people. The respondents of the older and middle generation referred to the ways in which they were disciplined as well as their own parenting style as being acceptable and satisfactory, regarding parents of today as lacking authority over their children and not taking their parental duties seriously enough to discipline and punish their children. The respondents cited parental abdication in the socialization of their children and the negative influence of the 'white' schooling system upon the expected behaviour of Xhosa children as reasons for ill-disciplined children. According to the respondents, children now question adults and are no longer open to the correction of either their parents or other adults in the community.

---

[2] Diane Kayongo-Male and Philista Onyango, *The Sociology of the African Family* (London and New York) 1984, p. 5.

In the past punishment meted out by parents included beatings. The respondents spoke of beatings and lamented the fact that parents can no longer beat their children which they see as another cause of bad behaviour in children.

The government ban on corporal punishment in schools and raised awareness of child abuse is, for some, a contributing factor to the loss of parental control over their children. Daphne, a grandmother, said

> ...this government said it's not right to punish the children and now it is just free, everything they do. In olden days you know that you are going to be punished so you don't go for it. Now it's free. Nobody have to talk to your child, she will just say you are abusing her. I said to my husband before he died, this law, its better after my children are grown up because I used to beat them, even the boys if they do something wrong. And I said to him, if I could have a child I will teach her as I was teached, but if the government say I am abusing her, then the government must take her and keep her.[3]

Daphne went on to say that, in her opinion, because parents are not able to discipline their children there are far too many teenage pregnancies these days compared with the past. And yet in her first interview she told of her sisters and herself becoming pregnant before their marriages despite their authoritarian father.

Cora spoke of the strict discipline she exercised over her children and the anger she felt when her daughter became pregnant and was not married. This happened just at the time when Cora was getting divorced and she was furious with her child.

> You see for a child to bring something like this just when you've got something that you don't feel happy and then another thing comes now. And I did not talk to her for a while. I just couldn't talk. I couldn't even look at her. To think of what a shame, what she has done, and what a stupid thing for her to do it. Why didn't she think about me from the way that I have just come from then she is starting with this.[4]

Cora was extremely angry with her daughter and the shame she brought into the home and her reaction response to the pregnancy was to impose strict isolation on her daughter, not allowing her friends to visit her and keeping her at home. Despite this disciplinary action her daughter had a second child and did not marry that father either.

---

[3] Interview with Daphne, Grahamstown, 2005.
[4] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2005.

Sinazo, from the middle age group, says parents should 'do their job' in order to prevent teen pregnancies and to curb the bad behaviour of their children and not leave the discipline up to the schools. She says

> ...the whole responsibility lies with the parents...Like for instance, we blacks take our children to white schools and we think it's the duty of the school to do everything. And you find the children they learn a lot of things from the bad ones. They know with us blacks and the Afrikaans speaking people 'no' is no. We don't answer back, we don't question why. But immediately we take our children to white schools we forget our fair share because it's the parents' duty to say, ' Well at school that's what you do but not in my home. This is what you are supposed to do.' They know but they are lax.[5]

Whilst her assessment of the influence of white English culture on the children may be accurate, her view does not account for the poor behaviour of black children in black run schools where there is no 'white' (Western) influence. Sinazo blames the increase in teen pregnancies on lack of parental guidance.

> I've noticed in Grahamstown the girls are getting pregnant before time because of the lack of direction from their parents. In our days we were not allowed to have an affair with older people, especially working guys, because he does not know anything about homework and assignments. He will not encourage you to do that. What he needs is you. But with a scholar then he will understand when you say, 'Look, I won't be able to see you this evening because of so and so.' So you will find the parents don't guide their children wisely.[6]

Now that many grandmothers are caring for their grandchildren, they are responsible for the discipline of the children. These grandmothers sometimes have difficulty with this, trying to impose the same standards and punishments on the young generation as they did on their children. Cora says.

> ...no child listens now. It's very lucky when you've got a child who listens. And for us, the old people, that how they call us, old *mkulu*, old *gogos*, and its not so easy but you've got to keep your... you can't just let a child do whatever she want to. That's one thing I even said here in this house, If somebody does something wrong, out of my roof. We can't both be here. We can't bully. I am the only one in this roof, so if anyone wants to stay here, just listen to my rules.[7]

The above comments on parental discipline suggest that Cora, and some of the other women, see the discipline of children resting on rules being laid down and children having to abide by the rules. However, as has been discussed in chapter three, even

---

[5] Interview with Sinazo, Grahamstown, 2005.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2005.

when the grandmother generation was young, a set of rules imposed by parents did not guarantee obedience. Simply punishing and using physical discipline does not address the impact dysfunctional, poor and uncommunicative parents have on their children which may lead to bad behaviour. If what the respondents say is true then it seems parents are certainly not coping with the discipline of their children and the methods they are using are not sufficient to make positive changes in how the children behave.

This brings us to the issue of the role of grandparents in the lives and households of Xhosa families in which they traditionally played a crucial role in raising their grandchildren.

**The role of grandparents**

An essential component of black African societies is the close, extended family structure which is intended to ensure the welfare of all its members. In this societal framework the intention is that children as well as the elderly are cared for by the community as a whole. Retirement and geriatric homes are not part of African social structure due, not only to economic disempowerment, but also to the understanding of family life. As in all societies, the expected norm is that people die when they are old, that children and grandchildren will outlive their grandparents. The expectation may be that grandparents will assist in caring for their grandchildren, but not that they would not have full responsibility for their welfare. As Miriam (60) said, referring to premature deaths from AIDS:

> ...when we were young, we think our parents die first. We don't think about these deaths at that time. We don't think about death. But this times it's the deaths. Even the youngsters. Children, ja.[8]

Onyango writes that children were disciplined and socialized, not only by their parents, but also by their grandparents who played a significant role in raising children.

> Grandparents were other important agents in socialization in African society. They were instrumental in introducing young people to more sensitive topics such as husband-wife relationships, and sexual behaviour, as well as the larger societal roles, values and traditions.[9]

---

[8] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2004.
[9] Koyongo-Male and Onyango, *The Sociology*, p. 20.

Some of the women in this study were raised by their grandparents at a particular stage of their lives, but this was a mutually agreed upon arrangement between the parents and grandparents; it was not that the grandparents felt obliged or forced into caring for their grandchildren. It was not uncommon that children should be sent to assist grandparents in their homes. Cora (64) for instance, went to live with her grandparents when she was in primary school and told of how she became a help to the elderly people as they grew older and less able to manage by themselves.[10] Her grandparents had a better house and more stable home life in Grahamstown than did Cora's mother in Cape Town.

Daphne (63) and her mother and sisters went to live with a set of grandparents when their mother was not well, but their father visited regularly and the arrangement was agreed upon by all concerned. Their father continued to be financially responsible for his family.[11] In the cases of both Cora and Daphne the grandchildren were not regarded as a burden on the grandparents. The situation is radically different today.

Grandmothers, women who, by virtue of their age, have been less at risk of contracting the HI virus now out live their children. AIDS takes its toll on younger people and thousands of parents of young children are dying, it is grandmothers in particular who now find themselves the providers of homes for their grandchildren. At a time when resources are even further reduced by retirement and when old age is taking its toll on their health, these elderly people have to continue to be providers for and caregivers of the younger generation instead of being cared for by their children and they assume the role of parent once again, this time to the third generation.

In order to assess some of the psychological and emotional distress faced by women whose children have died of AIDS related illnesses, Mary Burt interviewed three Xhosa speaking grandmothers living in informal settlements in Grahamstown. Her research found that

> [A]lthough it was considered culturally appropriate for older women to care for their children and grandchildren, their caregiver roles caused significant psychological distress. This distress was related to: emotional and physical

[10] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2001.
[11] Interview with Daphne, Grahamstown, 2001.

> exhaustion, complicated grief reactions and ongoing emotional and physical upheaval related to foster care responsibilities.[12]

Burt's literature review substantiates the increasing care-giving role of the elderly throughout Africa as they look after adult children who are infected with the virus and who will eventually die, and as they care for grandchildren who may or may not be infected. It is women who are affected by the burdens of care as in most societies it is women who are socialised and expected to care for the sick in the family and community, this is why there are more grandmothers than grandfathers who are taking care of grandchildren. The burden 'naturally' falls on the grandmothers. Here we have an example of the 'chronic role strain' referred to in the introduction to this thesis.

> This tradition is exemplified by the numerous older women in South Africa taking up the role of parental caregiver to their children with AIDS and their orphaned grandchildren. To be called mother in the African family brings many obligations ... It is not likely that the African family system will disintegrate due to the AIDS crisis however it is evident that its survival comes at great cost to Africa's elderly women.[13]

Grandmothers are not only caring for their orphaned grandchildren but for the children whose mothers do not or cannot care for them. Miriam tells of a case where a woman had a child, then her marriage failed and she married another man, leaving the child of the first marriage with her mother. However, in this case, the child turned out to be a blessing, or 'useful' as Miriam puts it.

> M: And then her mother stay with that little child and her go marry another man again. And that mother was blind. That old woman was blind, and that little child stay with that woman and just look for her. Sometimes, I don't know if it's from God, or where, but sometimes those children, when they come from the earth they are useful, sometimes they are no useful.
> LS: They don't do anything. So would you say that children don't always help their parents and they leave their babies with their babies with their parents?
> M: Ja!! Old, old women like five or six grandchildren... I don't know what's going on because our children just bring babies to the other grannies and go and when she comes again, she got another one. And the gran was too old, older than me, she has to wash the clothes for those children.
> LS: And do the mothers of the children give the granny any money?
> M: Nothing. Nothing. If they get the grant they sometimes take that grant money and go to another man.[14]

---

[12] Mary Burt, 'An Exploration of AIDS-Related Losses and Role Changes on Grandmothers', unpublished MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 2003, ii.
[13] *Ibid.*, p 5.
[14] Interview with Miriam, Grahamstown, 2005.

This situation is in complete contrast to the world in which Miriam grew up where she and other young unmarried women were expected to care for their own children. The children may have been raised in their grandparents' homes, but it was not usual for the mothers to abandon their offspring and leave them with grandparents. Whilst some grandchildren are a help to their grandmothers, generally it would seem that most grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren do so on a limited budget without necessarily getting financial assistance form the parents of the children.

**Coping with HIV/AIDS in the home**

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has placed a heavy burden on other family members as they attempt to provide adequate care for those who are ill with the virus. They also live with the stigma attached to those living with the virus. Along with the physical and economic load placed on families who care for members with the virus goes the shame and fear of being ostracised by the community. Thus illness is hidden and HIV or AIDS are not disclosed. Mostly people will state that a family member died of tuberculosis or some other illness. Following the death from AIDS of a family member the survivors may experience complicated grief reactions. Denial of impending death may serve as a mechanism for delaying grief, but if this denial is not only a temporary defense, acceptance of the death may be prolonged and psychological health may be at risk.[15] When people live with something that is not socially acceptable they are denied, or deny themselves, opportunities for emotional healing as they cannot speak about their troubles or ask for help.

Muriel (60) acknowledges that two of her daughters died of an AIDS related illnesses. In the interview she mentions one daughter only at first and then spoke of the second one. At the time of the death her family spoke only of her having had TB, one of the most prevalent opportunistic diseases associated with HIV/AIDS. Muriel talks about her ignorance at first about what was wrong with her daughter, but that now, people are informed about the disease even if they do not disclose their status.

> That time ... the age was that time I don't know it was starting already. It's better now. Everybody knows about that. Ja. At that time there's no one

[15] Mary Burt, 'An Exploration', pp. 14-15.

> knows about that. Because if we know about that, about AIDS, it was going for treatment. It was serious get treatment.[16]

Muriel did not tell people the cause of her daughter's death, but she says people 'they know that'. She did not have to name the disease, people would surmise, but she did not have to disclose and confirm their suspicions. In this way the family kept a measure of respectability. She describes how her daughter was first cared for at home and then was admitted to the hospital. She was not on medication for the virus.

> At that time there's no medicine. It's a better this time like that time we don't know about AIDS. But she just weight and we don't know how [s]he lost weight and then I go to the hospital and then they told me.[17]

Her second daughter died in Themba Hospital, a TB hospital in Grahamstown. Many people who are HIV positive contract TB which causes their death. Now Muriel lives with her remaining daughter who does not have the virus and two granddaughters, another all female household.

Sinazo (38) spoke of a woman whom she knows through a church AIDS Task Team who is HIV positive and who disclosed her status to others. Her children were very uncomfortable about her disclosure fearing rejection from their friends. The members of the team feel they cannot speak to others about being open about the virus unless they themselves know their status and declare it.

> So there is a lady there who knows her status and she said the day she decided to go out for this she didn't even tell her children. And they all went out to church that day. It was after the service when she stood up and she told the whole congregation that I am HIV positive. She said her children were very cross with her. They were frustrated and they were thinking of the people and how they are going to look at them and how are they going to relate to them.[18]

Neli (33) has two sisters who are HIV positive. She has cared for both in her home. One now lives with their parents and the other continues to live with Neli and her family.

> I've got two sisters who are HIV and the one is talking about it freely, and the one was hiding it. It was her secret. And after a while I try to make her feel free to talk to us about that. And when she realised there's no cure really, but there is the delay, sure. You delay and treat like you taking pills for high blood pressure and there's a cure for high blood pressure ... And I talk to her and she accepted and she tell us. And we were aware but we wanted her to accept it and it comes

---

[16] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2004.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Interview with Sinazo, Grahamstown, 2003.

> from her mouth that she is HIV... I believe she talk to us because we promised that there is the medicine that we can buy for you. Then she feels she can be helped.[19]

Making this promise and getting her sister to disclose her status to the rest of the family and to herself, placed responsibilities on Neli and her family as the sister moved into their home. Neli says that, although she feels strongly that people should disclose their status and talk about it, families who have someone who is HIV positive have difficulties. These difficulties can be overcome, she says, and there ways of preventing the rest of the family being infected. Her love and support for her sister has helped the sister move from denial that she was ill to acceptance and has helped family members cope with her illness. But living with someone who is HIV positive brings problems to the care-givers.

> One of my sisters, I stay with her and its difficult because I watch her step. You watch when she goes to the water. You watch when she washes herself, what she did with her things, you know? So I think they hide because someone will say it was this cup, I saw her drink with this cup. I saw her eating with ... you know? It can go like that. And I think there's a problem with our families not to talk about it so that because you can be prevented when you stay with someone with HIV...You buy Jik, you wash your dishes, even her dish with your in the Jik and all that, her clothes. You know you can stay with them. You can prevent yourself.[20]

Nandi (33) says the rate of HIV infection in the area in which she lives is very high but that people are not acknowledging their status. People are not willing, she says, to talk about it even though their physical appearance would suggest they are positive. There is a strong culture of denial in the community.

The financial obligation on Neli and her husband includes her sister's treatment costs. Her sister receives a pension of R700 per month but the treatment she has costs R1 200. The added frustration and disappointment for Neli is that her sister does not use any of her pension for her medication and expects Neli to pay for it. Neli says many households are in the same predicament when it comes to financing family members with HIV and related illnesses.

HIV/AIDS is one of the chief worries for young people, as Nosipho (28) confirmed when asked what young people are struggling with today.

---

[19] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2003.
[20] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2003. Jik is bleach.

> Is the HIV/AIDS because people are dying like flies today. And people think that AIDS is just a myth, whereas AIDS is killing people and people don't want to own up and say, I've got AIDS. They don't want to get tested. They are dying.[21]

When asked whether people are being cautious and using condoms Nosipho replied,

> No. The only people who are being cautious are the ones who told themselves from the beginning that, "I don't want to get pregnant." Like me, if you still remember, I told you I was using the contraception and then I stopped using that because I had some problems with that and then from a young age I started using condoms. So, for me, even today, I know that AIDS is killing, and I also know that I don't want to get pregnant. So for me to keep that, I have to use a condom. So those who were not using the Pill, depending on contraception are the victims. Because they don't know they've got AIDS, they don't know if they do have it. So they just do it over and over and over.[22]

Nosipho is candid in talking about her own sexual activity and, from what she says, it seems many other young women like her are sexually active, but that some are not taking any precaution against contracting HIV. She says some young people avoid testing as they do not want to know their status. She herself has been tested once for HIV and thinks she should go for another as she has to be 'careful'. The reluctance to know their HIV status may be motivated by a fear of being ostracised but it may also stem from the fear of being given a 'death sentence' as some people are unsure of the prognosis for living with HIV/AIDS. Added to this is the lack of certainty about being given anti-retrovirals.

Zinzi (19) says that young people have a very 'negative' attitude towards HIV/AIDS and that they do not act responsibly when it comes to sexual practice.

> ...they go to the taverns, they drink, they smoke, so ... and there is a thing of poverty ... they said if ever you are poor, you go to the older men, older people are rich and then you sell yourself to that person so that you can get money. And then you come home and you buy some food. So I think the government can contribute a lot by giving people food, making sure that our youth have some lot of creational facilities so that they cannot go to the shebeens... that they are going to give them something to do. 'Cause the reason why we get AIDS is that we don't have anything to do. We are just sitting around.[23]

Zinzi lists some of the reasons why young people engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour. Alcohol impairs their ability to make sensible choices; poverty leds young

---

[21] Interview with Nosipho, Grahamstown, 2003.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Interview with Zinzi, Grahamstown, 2001.

women to find sexual partners who are willing to support them, and indirectly the girl's family, financially; and boredom leaves youngsters with little to do and this leads to sexual activity. She sees the government as responsible for much of this as poverty and the lack of amenities lie at the root of this behaviour. Although most young people in educational institutions are constantly bombarded with AIDS awareness campaigns and are informed on the dangers of unsafe sex, they are still not taking the necessary precautions. What it is that will change their minds is not known. It seems that denial is the most common way of coping with this disease and not abstinence.

**Finding financial support with friends**

Households headed by grandmothers living on the government pension; families with members who are ill and unable to work; families supporting a number of children; and single parent families are stricken by poverty. This leaves them vulnerable to behaviours that are detrimental to their general welfare: young women having relationships with older and perhaps unscrupulous men, for example. But women are resourceful and find ways of coping with the shortage of money. One way of managing is to form money-lending schemes with friends.

The problem of poverty is a thread that runs through the lives of the women interviewed for this research. At every turn, whether it has to do with schooling, marriage, raising children or caring for relatives, money is a serious and perennial problem for them, affecting their choices and causing anxiety. In order to find ways of providing for their families and themselves many women belong to saving and money lending schemes sometimes referred to as *stokvels* but are known formally as Rotating Credit Associations (RCAs).

Kurtz cited in Buijs and Atherford,

> ...states that if poverty is to be fully understood, then the way of life of poor people must be viewed and analysed as adaptations to the conditions which create poverty. He suggests that RCAs represent an adaptive response to a condition of poverty or relative deprivation among both peasant and urban populations. In the context of poor, urban populations in an industrial, stratified society such as the

> United States (or South Africa) RCAs serve as an adaptive mechanism which provides an alternative to the mainstream, which mostly excludes the poor.[24]

In 1995 the Rhodes University Anthropology Department conducted a study on the different types of clubs to which low income families belonged in Rini in Grahamstown and Zwelitsha in King William's Town. Most of the members of such schemes were female heads of households with low income. The primary reason for membership was financial but the groups provided other forms of social interaction and support. An earlier study (1982) on married informants conducted by Van der Vliet showed that men tended to keep some of their earnings for their own recreational use, including girlfriends. The women, however, used most of their income to support family members. In the Rini study it was found that

> [T]he women interviewed here used rotating credit associations and other forms of voluntary savings schemes as support mechanisms in their search for income-earning activities. Most of these activities took place outside the formal sector and the women made use of many different strategies to maximise their resources, including calling on kin and neighbours for assistance in both child care and business, usually small-scale trading. Men, on the other hand, seemed less successful in starting or maintaining savings schemes and this appears to be related to an unwillingness to forego spending available cash for future benefits.[25]

Mutual aid amongst women is important particularly for those who are raising families alone, who are in the lower income brackets, whether married or not. Women who are employed also rely on others for assistance with child care. The 1995 study showed that women are more likely to have members of the extended families living in their house than their male counterparts.

Revolving Credit Associations provide members, in most cases women, with a source of funds which they can use to purchase anything from groceries to larger, more expensive household items. As poor people are less able to obtain loans in the formal sector these informal schemes offer a means accessing lump sum funds without interest. In some cases the RCAs allow members to draw funds in an emergency as well as being paid out on a rotational basis. The groups also help members to build up reserves of finance to be

---

[24] Gina Buijs and Glen Atherford, *Savings and Money-Lending Schemes: How Credit Associations Help Poor Families* (Pretoria, 1995) p. 11.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

used in an emergency or for an anticipated expense such as school fees or a wedding. The rotation is determined by agreement and the monthly meetings may move from house to house so that each person has a chance to be the host and provide the refreshments. Thus the RCAs provide a social function as well as a financial one.

Muriel (60) belongs to an RCA but she says her group talks only about the money at the monthly meetings as, she says, if they share some of the details of their lives with each other, there is a high risk of their problems becoming the subject of public gossip. There is a lack of trust that members will keep confidences,

> because when you talk these days is better in our family times. These days if you gather and talk about your family to the people they going to go and spread everything. It is wrong that way... If you've got a friend, a close friend, you going to trust her, you going to talk everything, because when you keep it inside it is not good. You must talk it and speak out about that, ja.[26]

Nandi belongs to two groups and members do offer more than financial support to one another by visiting each other when they are ill, with child care or by discussing problems. If the problem is financial, they may make contributions to the one in trouble, but the monthly contribution to the bank account is never used.

Neli's (33) RCA meets regularly and at the end-of-year party she makes sure that they do not just engage in gossip. She makes use of the opportunity to get women talking about family matters and in that way to offer support for one another.

> I make sure that we don't braai and not do something, because we are young women and we've got problems with our husbands and we've got children and all that HIV now. I use that time to share with them. Like: Hey, guys we mustn't treat our husbands so that they can leave us. We must treat him so that wherever he is, he is feel like I am going home and I will be having this and this. ...I use that.[27]

Nosipho (28), belongs to two RCAs, one has six members and the other seven, all university students. When asked if these friends form part of her support group, Nosipho said that one group is all female and, though she listens to the problems the others have, but seldom shares her own. She finds it easier to talk in the group which has male and

[26] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2004.
[27] Interview with Neli, 2003.

female members.[28] Some groups are purely practical in nature and function, whilst others provide more than just a way to save money.

Most women are currently living in difficult circumstances whether with AIDS orphans, sick relatives, recalcitrant children, and money problems. But they are resilient women and find ways of coping. Through all the conversations there runs the thread of knowing they are not alone in their problems as they have church groups, RCAs and friendships that offer them support.

[28] Interview with Nosipho, Grahamstown, 2004.

# CHAPTER 6
# CONCLUSION

**The value of 'herstories'**

This research partly fills the gap in the history of women, and in particular Xhosa women, and their domestic situations. Based on feminist principles of research, it is a people-centred enterprise which has the betterment of the lives of women at its core. Oral history and feminist history seek to allow new ways in which the researcher and the 'researched' connect in order to eradicate as far as possible the power imbalance between them. This researcher and the respondents engaged in conversations about things that are intimate and important in the personal lives of the respondents. Mutual engagement with the questions across race, class, age and language barriers led to relationships that extended beyond that of researcher and researched to closeness and friendship. An illustration of the ease of relationship between the researcher and the respondents is when during the first interview Muriel asked if the researcher could say something abut herself. Once the researcher had finished asking the planned questions, Muriel said:

> I don't know about your work. But now you must explain about you. I must know about you.[1]

By the third interview a relationship of mutual interest in each other's lives had developed and Muriel asked to show the researcher the photographs of her daughter's wedding.[2] This intimacy and openness was a component of the relationship between the researcher and all the respondents.

Diane Bell writes that she has proposed

> that feminists think seriously about the possibilities of actual friendship and personal trust as the context for dialogue...if we think of race as a given, all we

[1] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2003.
[2] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2005.

> can do is react. In such situations our modes of interaction are circumscribed by the 'race' and the boundaries of the person become fixed. Before we can engage in dialogue, we have to breach these socially constructed boundaries. Whereas if we emphasize relationality, and ground our analysis in the specifics of place and personal history, we can focus on connectedness and the rigidity of the bounded category of race gives way to permeable membranes...our possibilities are not exhausted by our predicates (*white* woman, *Aboriginal* woman, *racial* feminist, *social* feminist).[3]

It is accepted practice for researchers to interview respondents and gather information from their conversations and then for the researcher to write up and analyse the data without further reference to the respondents. This researcher took the process a step further by going back to the respondents with an outline of the analysis and asking for comment. At these third and last interviews the respondents were given copies of their taped interviews. This gave them the opportunity to listen to themselves speak and, if they so wished, to play the tape for family and friends by way of explanation as to what they had been involved in.

The third interviews hinged on the collation of all the information given by all the respondents to the various topics of conversation into a hand-out which formed the basis of this last interview.[4] Each section was read to the respondents and she was invited to comment on and compare her opinions with those of the other respondents. This proved to be a valuable exercise in that the respondents took the debate further and felt included in the research process and valued for their contribution to the production of knowledge. Had time and logistics permitted, a conversation with all of the respondents together may have been an exceptionally valuable exercise both for them and for the researcher.

When asked if she liked talking to the researcher, Muriel exclaimed, 'Ja, I like it! I like it!'[5] Neli said, 'I feel more comfortable that someone can listen to me.'[6]

Nandi's response shows that she had told friends about the interview and indicates that there may well be more women who would welcome the chance to tell their stories and

---

[3] Diane Bell, 'White Women Can't Speak?', in Sue Wilkinson & Celia Kritzinger (eds.) *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996) p. 111.
[4] *Appendix ii*

[5] Interview with Muriel, Grahamstown, 2003.
[6] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2001.

that there is something inherently therapeutic in both being asked to tell our stories and in the telling itself.

> LS: How did it feel to talk to somebody about these issues? You don't know me, and I sit here with my tape recorder and I asked you the questions. What thoughts and feelings do you have when we do this?
> N: *Exclamation of surprise and laughter.* When I am thinking about it, like, when I am talking to other people ... I mean when I was talking to you ... I was talking to you and then a couple of days I talk to friends about you and the friends they wanted to know, "How do you get her? Why don't she come to us?" Things like that. I mean they were so interested. They wanted to ... I said maybe one day she will go and go and go. Maybe she will meet you.[7]

As stated in chapter one, it is not only what knowledge is produced but who produces that knowledge that should be investigated. Here ten women have produced knowledge on subjects which are clearly integral to their lives and such knowledge is to be regarded as original and authentic.

Historians and other academic researchers represent others by seeking them out, placing them on an agenda not their own and then make them known in ways they have not been accustomed to. These representations can be misleading and are often stereotypes that say more about the historian than the 'subject'. Thus it is that various stereotypes of the African woman have presented her as poor and simple with too many children and no control over her life. Whilst in some cases this may be somewhat accurate, the women respondents in this study certainly present us with a different picture. They are women of strength who find ways of coping with poverty, with errant husbands, with HIV/AIDS, with child rearing and with cultural customs that may be oppressive.

Whilst it is true that the stories told by these respondents are in themselves valuable for all the reasons specified in the first chapter with regard to feminist oral history research, the respondents have also added to the expanding knowledge of the lives of Xhosa women. Much of what they said may already be known to social, anthropological and historical researchers as well as to institutions and organizations that are involved in the betterment of the lives of women. For example, the number of and reasons for teenage pregnancies, the question of marital infidelity and spousal violence, the impact of HIV/AIDS on households, and the effects of poverty on households, may all already form

[7] Interview with Nandi, Grahamstown, 2002.

part of the body of knowledge surrounding these issues.

Yet, each respondent told 'her-story' which added to the body of knowledge and confirms what is presently known. It must be noted that each of the respondents spoke from within her own experiences which influenced her opinions, and each drew on her own memory when talking about the past. Memory is essential to historical research, but memories can be clouded by distance and emotion which may mean that the 'facts' are blurred. However, this does not mean we are to discount what is said.

**Analysis of the data**

This study is based on feminist research methods and goals which have at their core a commitment to political and social change for women which will undermine and challenge patriarchal systems that oppress and subjugate women. The task of the oral historian, as stated in chapter two, is to take the stories of the respondents and weave them into the fabric of the research. This means that the opinions and life experiences of the respondents are to be measured against the theoretical background to the research in order to find similarities and differences between the lived experience of women and the theoretical views of academicians. The process is designed to show the synthesis between lived reality and feminist theory.

As already stated above, the researcher is unable to approach any research with impartiality, nor is complete objectivity expected. In order to authenticate research, a certain degree of objectivity is required. In reality the oral historian's preconceived ideas and objectives will influence the design of the research and the direction of conversations with respondents. In this thesis the researcher's lived experience as a Western feminist determined the areas chosen for discussion with the respondents i.e. the gendered home lives of black African women and how they live within the patriarchal structures of society. It has to be acknowledged that these themes may not have been of interest to the women respondents and, if they had discussed these issues in other forums, they may not necessarily have named their feminist views or oppression.

For most of the respondents feminism and gender were unknown, or at best,

underdeveloped notions and for the most part their observations stem from what they know to be true for themselves regardless of how they fit with feminist theories and gender biases. Though these terms were not used by the respondents, their stories confirm that gender bias, both past and present, disempowers women in a male dominated world. This has led to women being disadvantaged in many areas of home and family life. The increase in the number of female headed households; grandmothers raising grandchildren when their mothers have died of AIDS; an increasing number of teenage pregnancies; the abdication of paternal responsibility in households; economic deprivation and obligations; all substantiate the argument that women are facing critical issues in their lives. It is women who have and still bear the brunt of the responsibility for households, of unplanned pregnancies, marital infidelity and raising children.

And yet, the respondents do not always recognise this gender bias and they themselves at times support such bias by laying the burden of responsibility on women for many of the social ills in their society. Neli, for example, speaks of the oppression of women in the church at work:

> LS: Do you see any difference in your life now from 1994?
> N: No. No, there's nothing changed...because then we women believed after 1994 that they are so oppressed the women. They are oppressed in the churches. They are oppressed even at work. The by 1994 there were those changes...
> LS: There's changes in the church for women... Where did that come from do you think?
> N: To know we can't just sit there and listen to the mens...everything to do, they do. But there are, truly speaking, like, if he stands there and reads for us and takes so long you say to yourself, I will be finish by now.[8]

> I wake up every morning, I have to wash my kids, I have to make porridge for us and all that. Everything is waiting for me. He just wake up and wash himself, and, you know...we did try but maybe we are not trying enough. We did try to get them to say, Hey, you do this and I do this, we must share the work at home. But it is difficult especially from our husbands.[9]

But when it comes to sexual responsibility, Neli places the blame squarely on the shoulders of women. Her husband had two children by two different women prior to his marriage to Neli and she sees the women as being responsible for this.

> He's got two children before she's got married and fortunately I have got none. And I said to him, those kids will be mine too because she get them before she get married. So I blame those ladies. Why they don't protect not to get kids because

[8] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2001.
[9] *Ibid.*

they were not married. You know. So I blame them...[10]

Neli is not alone in her thinking. Sexual responsibility has been and still is placed on women and girls by the church, society and families. They are blamed for unwanted pregnancies and they carry the bulk of the burden of child rearing.

Having children outside of marriage affected all the women in this study in one way or another, across all generations. Some of the problems resulting from unwanted pregnancies are: disruption of schooling, family shame, parental anger, increased economic responsibilities and reduction in lobola price. Concerns over public morality and family shame connected with pre-marital pregnancies are thought to have generally dissipated somewhat, but the respondents still believe there are elements of shame and anger in families when a girl becomes pregnant before marriage.

Whilst parents try to control their daughter's fertility and contraception is freely available, and whilst unwanted pregnancies and children born into poor families bring extra hardships, there is an increase in the number of teenage pregnancies. Other than the need to qualify for the meager government grant to unmarried mothers and conception through rape, the reasons for this increase are not clear. Feminists would not lay the blame at the door of the young women but would, rightly in many cases, see that they are coerced and trapped into early pregnancy through poverty, male sexual dominance and the need to please men. Is it possible that some young women would deliberately place themselves in the position of having a child they will be hard pressed to raise? This question requires further reflection and perhaps it is the young mothers themselves who would be able to offer answers.

Children born out of marriage are still being absorbed into the extended family but this is not unproblematic. Some children are stigmatised by others in the family and, again, economic responsibility for the child has to be assumed by someone and there may be resentment at this added burden in already cash-strapped households. The women of the older generation were more likely to take children from extra-marital unions into their homes than those of the younger generation. This may be a sign of an increase in

[10] Interview with Neli, Grahamstown, 2005.

poverty and that they simply cannot afford to feed more children, or that younger women are less tolerant of their husbands' errant behaviour. The women from the middle generation were less happy about accommodating such children than the older group, but saw this as an alternative to their husbands paying money to the mothers of these children. With rising materialism it may be that these wives would rather keep the money in their own homes and to have some control over how the money is spent.

The older generation (born in the 1940s) of women spoke of strict parental control over adolescents when they were young which went some way to controlling their daughter's fertility, though pre-marital pregnancies were not unknown. Though attempts to control girls and boys in that generation were not always successful, they see a deterioration in parental discipline over boys and girls and a lack of respect for parents by children. These older women and the middle generation see the lack of parental authority as being key in the number of pre-marital pregnancies

Violence against women by men is reported from at least the 1940s and continues to escalate. Two of the older generation mentioned domestic violence, but only one gave any details. The latter divorced her husband to escape the violence. Male sexual behaviour was curtailed to a very limited degree before the 1940s. Mager, as noted above, tells of rules imposed by young men's association designed to curb sexual behaviour.[11] Information from Delius and Walker suggests that parents had some recourse to compensation from a boy's family for an unwanted pregnancy by way of taking a cow from them, which may have been a deterrent to the young men.[12] Violence against women today is escalating and is very difficult to prevent.

The older and middle generations of women reported that girls had to leave school if they became pregnant and very few resumed their education. The situation is somewhat different today. For one thing, the law does not require that a pregnant girl leave school and some girls do go back to school, leaving their child in the care of its grandmother. If the young mother receives an education she may stand a better chance of finding

---

[11] Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan: A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959* (Cape Town, 1999) p. 128.
[12] Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, 'Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: A Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002.

employment which will benefit her family and herself. It was reported that some older women leave their children in the care of grandmothers when the mother wishes to marry and does not want to take the child into her new home. This may be because her new husband refuses to have the child, in which case the mother is forced to make a choice. She may see that having her mother raise the child would be preferable to the child growing up in a hostile environment. There are cases where the mother has nothing to do with the child once she leaves and some women leave their children with the grandmothers knowing that the grandmother will be disadvantaged by having to care for the children. Such deliberate exploitation of women by women is difficult to justify in the mind of the researcher and is certainly very anti-feminist behaviour.

All the women reported having received either inadequate sex education or none at all. Both middle and older generation women spoke of their ignorance in sexual matters, but this was not true for them all. The middle and younger generations are adamant that they will give their children as much information as they can on sexual issues in the hope that this will keep them safe from HIV/AIDS and from unwanted pregnancies which may mean the end to educational opportunities and added financial strain.

The women in this study and respondents in other studies have varying ideas on the value and meaning of the custom of lobola. All are agreed that it is here to stay, even if it should undergo some modifications. In the third interviews when the suggestion of insurance being tied to lobola was mentioned, none of the women were particularly interested in the idea and thought that it would remove the purpose of lobola which was to pay for the wedding and for setting up their daughter in her new home.

On the issue of 'husbands being too much trouble' some agreed very strongly with this sentiment whilst others felt that women and wives can be just as problematic. In the third interview some of the respondents cited poverty as a reason for marital disharmony. Some of the women from each of the generations see marriage in a very negative light and stated their intentions not to marry so as to keep their freedom. For some young women today marriage apparently offers status and security. Most of the women agreed that husbands are usually unfaithful to their wives but that they would expect their husbands to show respect by not telling their wives. Some see other women as predatory

and also that women, too, have relationships outside of their marriages. There seems to be some prestige in women having men in their lives as partners and it was mentioned that there are women who deliberately seek out married men as a way of feeling superior to the wives.

All of the respondents are affected in some way by HIV/AIDS. Grief in families is commonplace with parents burying their children who have died of AIDS related illnesses. The feeling of shame and fear of being ostracised keeps many from disclosing their status. Grandmothers are raising grandchildren on their pensions. Family members have to care for their ill relatives.

Poverty is a common denominator in all of these matters. The lack of money prevents the sick from receiving adequate health care, and raising children on a government pension stretches a grandmother's already meagre resources, therefore most of the women belong to a Revolving Credit Association. These informal savings groups assist with coping with financial difficulties as well as offering social support to one another. Most of the women are connected to a church community to some degree or another.

Reflecting on what the respondents have said it is clear that whilst they are most definitely aware of some oppression, and whilst they do recognise gender bias, they are not always willing to place more blame on men than on women for the difficulties women suffer. This may be due to a lack of awareness or a feeling of powerlessness against an entrenched patriarchal system, or because they simply do not have the luxury of time and energy to invest in thinking about such matters. Raising children, paying bills and going to work may not leave them with very many resources to challenge existing patterns of behaviour. Coping with the stresses of day to day living is enough for them to deal with and any attempts to change established ways of relating will be met with resistance by the men. Such confrontations may just not be what is important to these women.

**Recommendations for further research and action**

The women seemed to welcome the opportunity to speak about matters of importance to

them. We can infer from this that not only do these ten women have a great deal to say, but that other women may also find such an experience worthwhile. It is feasible to imagine that so much more information can be gleaned from further conversations such as these, by hearing the stories and contributions to knowledge in this field.

In the last interview the respondents were asked to make suggestions as to who they thought could benefit from what has been discovered in this research. This seemed to be a difficult question for them to answer and only one specific recommendation was made: young people in schools. However, listening to what the respondents said about families when discussing the findings of the research, three particular possibilities emerged as to what issues need further attention in the wider community: marriage counselling as to expectations of partners and how to deal with conflict; assistance for parents on how to discipline children; and stopping unwanted pregnancies.

When commenting on marriage related issues the respondents suggested that husbands and wives have few skills in negotiating acceptable marital behaviour and in assuming spousal and parental responsibilities. Financial matters cause stress and argument, children from other relationships add economic and emotional burdens, and marital infidelity brings illness, anger and heartache. Marriage counselling and pre-marital preparation could be earnestly addressed in churches in order to assist couples in determining goals and expectations they have of marriage and of their partners. High school Life Orientation curricula could include a marriage component which would equip young people to make better marriage partners. The payment of lobola and familial acceptance of the partnership are no longer sufficient to ensure sound marriages and asking for assistance from the elders who themselves have problems is not always a solution.

The respondents, particularly the older and middle generations, were quite despairing of the lack of parental control over their children. For them, corporal punishment was and could still be the major deterrent to bad behaviour. Now that this form of punishment is banned in schools, and parents are afraid to beat their children for fear of being reported as abusive but see no alternative ways of checking the behaviour of their children. Old patterns of parent/child relationships have changed and children no longer simply obey

their parents without question thus eroding old values and causing moral decay. It is disturbing for many parents and grandparents that their rules and values are not respected

Insufficient parental authority over their children, according to the respondents, has led to a lack of control over their children's sexual behaviour. They believe teenagers are sexually promiscuous and consequently there is an increase in unwanted pregnancies and sexually acquired diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Despite campaigns such as loveLife, current statistics of HIV infections amongst young women and girls and unmarried mothers would prove their assumptions correct. This raises questions about the efficacy of such campaigns and more research is needed as to what would impress young people enough to encourage them to change their sexual behaviour. This is a hugely complex matter which involves issues of economics, family background, gender and violence.

Shula Marks, who is quoted at the beginning of this thesis, says that humanity seldom learns from the past. But she is optimistic about the value of historical research as a means to social change. She writes that

> ...[I]ndividuals and communities can be empowered, even if these are complex and tangled processes, and this empowerment can transform behaviour. It is in understanding the complex meanings that lie behind behaviour, and in exploring the conditions of the possibility of effecting such changes, that the challenge to social scientist lies.[13]

**Final comments**

This enterprise was of value for the researcher in so many ways, not least of all because of the delight the women took in being interviewed and how the interaction between them and the researcher generated some sense of common purpose in a valuable exercise. The value for the respondents is less clear. They were 'given voice' but perhaps also the respondents were made more aware of what it is that feminist theory seeks to do for women and men: to help them take cognisance of oppressive patriarchal beliefs and to be challenged to find ways to transform their marital and familial relationships in which all are valued.

---

[13] Shula Marks, 'An Epidemic Waiting to Happen? The Spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa in Social and Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002, p. 22.

Wilkinson and Kritzinger make the point that the

> two commitments - to 'giving voice' and to effecting social change – do not always sit easily together... these two commitments may appear incompatible because others to whom researchers are committed to 'giving voice' very often do not share the researcher's commitment to social change. The voices of Others rarely speak in a direct and straightforward way for the need for feminist revolution, or for the overthrow of systems of power and domination.[14]

The last words go to Cora, who, during conversation in her last interview, spontaneously said

> Oh, I am loving this morning![15]

[14] Sue Wilkinson and Sue Wilkinson & Celia Kritzinger (eds.) *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996) p. 21.
[15] Interview with Cora, Grahamstown, 2002.

## POST SCRIPT

This post script is both a reflection on the process of writing and an expansion on some of the ideas expressed, particularly in the methodology chapter. It can be seen, perhaps, as a post-research diary. What follows, in no particular order of importance, are some thoughts on my research.

In the methodology section I state that it would be my intention to write up the data in what is described as an 'autobiographical' style. This really appealed to my sense of making the research familiar to both myself and my readers. This would, in my view, make the research less objective and the researcher more human. I substantiated the use of the first person in research by appealing to other feminist academics who are proponents of more subjectivity in research writing. However, within the university there are requirements that are to be met by students and I had to respect the standard expected by the faculty and write in a more formal style.

Once the research was underway and the writing began I was confronted with the difficulty of matching the theory to the practice of employing an objective stance towards the research and the respondents. The theory suggested there be a devolution of power between the researcher and the respondents and that the respondents should be able to speak for themselves, their words being enough explanation of what they mean and know. I subscribed wholeheartedly to this, and endeavoured to be aware of instances where imbalances of power and voice tended to be firmly in my favour. But the question

inevitably arose as to whether simply hearing and reading the biographies of people's personal accounts or opinions, can be construed as academic research.

It is the role of the researcher to engage in academic enquiry and it is therefore a necessary, in order to be true to this task, for the researcher to become involved in areas beyond her or his own fields of reference. Historians do not only research within their specific individual frames of reference, such as race, class, gender or experiences. We will extend our research beyond these personal borders in order to discover and know more about others. Historians can never present the exact truth, nor can they ever be entirely objective in their research, whether it is based within or outside of their own knowledge areas. They are not expected to do either of these things. Perhaps the best we can say is that historians grapple with issues of truths and voices and facts, knowing just how delicate the balance is between presenting their findings in a way that lies somewhere between the apologetic and the arrogant.

Whilst I subscribe to this theory and hope for research to be conducted in this way, I realized that no matter how much the researcher would prefer a complete balance of power in the relationship with respondents, this is well nigh impossible. In the case of this research process some of the reasons for the imbalance of power were that I spoke my own language; my culture and world-view dictated my hermeneutic; I set the agenda for the conversations by introducing topics for discussion; and I selected words from the conversations that would be used in the thesis to substantiate my argument. This, too, is almost inevitable, as, if we are to present specific subjects and issues for research purposes, it is hugely difficult for a researcher to allow respondents to set the agenda for an interview. If the researcher does not have specific agenda for the research, the

interviews could easily slip into conversations of a general nature, not coming to grips with what the researcher really wants to discover.

Following on from this is the debate over who speaks for whom, and this was something I grappled with intently. I stated in the prologue that I had heard too many men speak on behalf of women, and yet I embarked on a project in which I would speak on behalf of Xhosa women. I read books and papers, and listened to argument on whether it is feasible and ethical for people to speak or write about persons who are 'other'. I decided that, despite enormous possibilities for errors of judgment and the objectification of persons, this is indeed possible with the proviso that what is written would always be open to criticism by those who belong to the 'researched'. Perhaps this research would best be assessed by Xhosa women, but, again, given the current circumstances in historical, academic research faculties, this may not have been a possibility.

An article by Yvette Abrahams[16], read after the completion of this thesis, gave me much pause for thought about researching and talking about the lives of others.
In Abrahams' words, when doing research on Sarah Bartmann, she

> was struck by the frequency with which insults, masquerading as neutral academic discourse, appeared in what purported to be scholarly analysis...that this 'academic' display was not benign ...that it was an exercise in racial and sexual hatred.

Abrahams' comments are harsh, and deservedly so, and being a white woman writing about black women, the challenge for me was to scrutinize the text for assumptions and

[16] **Yvette Abrahams, 'Ambiguity' Is My Middle Name: A Research Diary in Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela and Zina Magubane (eds),** ***Hear our voices: race, gender and the status of black South African women in the academy.*** **(Pretoria, 2004) p.11**

judgments I made about what I heard and what I asked, what I wrote and how I interpreted what was said. I could not eradicate entirely all of my own assumptions and 'voice-overs', but that is perhaps an impossibility when writing anything about anyone other than ourselves. The researcher's context must always be taken into account, but it cannot be removed from the text. Abrahams herself intended to write her research on Sarah Bartmann that was

> anti-text, texts that did not other black women, texts that conceived the black woman as self.[17]

I am still left with the question: can we ever write authentically, objectively, subjectively or authoritatively about anyone else, even if we belong to the same group/gender/ race/class, without placing ourselves in the writing and obscuring what the 'researched' tell us? Is it possible for the 'researched' to ever be a subject instead of an object?

The attempt to make connections between what was told to me by the respondents with texts by other researchers added to the complexity of this research. Whilst wanting to take what the respondents said as knowledge in itself, there were the written texts on similar topics already put forward as knowledge by other academic researchers. Holding these in tension was not as easy as it seemed, but it was entirely necessary to do so as I saw my research as furthering, adding on to, the body of research already in existence.

I am grateful to my supervisor who suggested that the findings of the research be shared with the respondents. This went some way to helping me take leave of these women by bringing closure to the relationship we had developed as researcher and researched. When they received copies of their taped interviews they seemed genuinely pleased by the fact

[17] Ibid p. 16

that their words were, in a sense, given back to them, and their contribution to the research had been acknowledged.

Feminist academics, I discovered, have a commitment to making their research not only by and about women, but also *for* women. Feminist research has a commitment to redress unjust social and cultural practices. If this means exposure of harmful cultural norms in order to bring about a more egalitarian society, then the researcher is obliged to make such a critique, whether or not she or he is a member of that particular society or not. Making a difference through my research was a significant point to ponder. I so wanted the respondents to make suggestions as to who would possibly benefit from hearing about this research, but they were not able to so. Thus the burden fell on me to find ways of using this research for the benefit of others. However, this is and will be a challenge for me for some time as I search for wider audiences, not for my own gain, but with the genuine desire to make a difference.

In conjunction with this theme, narrative pastoral therapy, an area of interest to me in my work as a counselor, suggests that when we engage with people who are in pain and who are suffering, we should make an ethical commitment to assisting transformation in their lives. The stories we are told invite us, the listeners, to challenge and resist structures and discourses that are oppressive and exploitative. Mutual, transformative relationships come about when there is empathy, compassion, a desire for understanding and a delight in otherness when listening to others.

Listening to and analyzing the talk and stories of others should be neither patronizing nor supporting of the self-other distinction. It should bring about a participatory consciousness in which knowledge is shared. Constant deconstructing and questioning of dominant and inherited discourses and practices needs to happen, regardless of the final outcomes.[18]

[18] Elmarie Kotze and Dirk Coetzee (eds.), *Telling Narratives: Spellbound Edition.* (Pretoria, 2001). pp. 2-7

## BIBLIOGRAPHY


Jane Aaron and Sylvia Walby (eds.), *Out of the Margins: Women's Studies in the Nineties* (London, 1991)

Yvette Abrahams, 'Ambiguity Is My Middle Name: A Research Diary', in Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela and Zina Magubane (eds.), *Hear Our Voices: Race, Gender and the Status of Black South African Women in the Academy.* (Pretoria, 2004)

Ama Ata Aidoo, 'The African Woman Today', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, New Jersey, 1999)

Olibisi Aina, 'African Women at the Grassroots: The Silent Partners of the Women's Movement', in O Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, New Jersey, 1999)

Carolyn M Aldwin, *Stress, Coping and Development: An Integrative Perspective* (New York, 1994)

Michelle Barrett and Anne Phillips (eds.), *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Oxford, 1992)

William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930* (Johannesburg, 1987)

Diane Bell, 'White Women Can't Speak?', in Sue Wilkinson & Celia Kritzinger (eds.), *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996)

Hilda Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa* (London, 1985)

Belinda Bozzoli, 'Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9, 2 ,1983

Brenda Brown, 'Where are the Men? An Investigation Into Female-Headed Households in Rini, With Reference to Household Structures, the Dynamics of Gender, and Strategies Against Poverty', MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1996

Gina Buijs and Glen Atherford, *Savings and Money-Lending Schemes: How Rotating Credit Associations Help Poor Families* (Pretoria, 1995)

Peter Burke, 'Overture. The New History: Its Past and its Future', in P. Burke, (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 2001)

Sandra Burman and Eleanore Preston-Whyte (eds.), *Questionable Issue: Illegitimacy in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992)

Sandra Burman and Nicolette van der Werff, 'Rethinking Customary Law on Bridewealth', *Social Dynamics* 19,2, 1993

Mary Burt, 'An Exploration of the Impact of AIDS-Related Losses and Role Changes on Grandmothers', MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 2003

John Comaroff (ed.), *The Meaning of Marriage Payments* (London, 1980)

Gwendolyn Carter, Thomas Karis and Newell M Stultz (eds.), *South Africa's Transkei* (London, 1967)

Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (eds.), *Narrative and Genre* (London, 1998)

David Chidester, 'The Politics of Exclusion: Christian Images of Illegitimacy', in Sandra Burman and Eleanor Preston-Whyte (eds.), *Questionable Issue: Illegitimacy in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992)

D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco, 2000)

Brigitte Clark and Belinda van Heerden, 'The Legal Position of Children Born Out of Wedlock', in Sandra Burman and Eleanor Preston-Whyte (eds.), *Questionable Issue: Illegitimacy in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992)

Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Johannesburg, 1980)

Colin Creighton and Cuthbert K Omari (eds.), *Gender, Family and Work in Tanzania* (Aldershot, 2000)

Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, 'Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: a Historical Perspective', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002

Peter Delius and Liz Walker, 'AIDS in Context', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002

K. Dunaway & Willa Baum (eds.), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Walnut Creek, California, 1996)

Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook (eds.), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Indianapolis, 1991)

Deborah Gaitskell, ''Wailing for purity': Prayer Unions, African Mothers and Adolescent Daughters 1912-1940', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness 1870-1930* (Hong Kong,1985)

Susan NG Geiger, 'Women's Life Histories: Method and Content', *Signs*, 11, 2, 1986

Susan Geiger, 'What's so Feminist About Doing Women's Oral History?' in C. Johnson-Odim and Margaret Strobel (eds.), *Expanding the Boundaries of Women's History: Essays on Women in the Third World* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1992)

Mary Gergen, *Feminist Reconstructions in Psychology: Narrative, Gender, and Performance* (London, 2001)

Diana Gittins, *The Family in Question: Changing Households & Familial Ideologies* (London, 1993)

Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Women's Words: Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York, 1991)

Sherna Gluck, 'What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History', in K. Dunaway & Willa Baum (eds.), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Walnut Creek, California, 1996)

Suzanne Gordon, *A Talent for Tomorrow: Life Stories of South African Servants* (Johannesburg, 1985)

bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, 1990)

Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (Cape Town,1979)

Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama and Fatou Sow (eds.), *Engendering African Social Sciences* (Wiltshire,1997)

Edward D Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History* (Knoxville, 1980)

Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich (eds.), *The Narrative Study of Lives* (London, 1993)

Diane Kayongo-Male and Philista Onyango, *The Sociology of the African Family* (London and New York) 1984

Protus Kemdirim, 'African Culture and Womanhood: The Issue of Single-parenthood' in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, New Jersey,1998)

Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984)

Amanda Kottler, 'Voices in the Winds of Change' in Sue Wilkinson & Celia Kritzinger (eds.), *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996)

Elmarie Kotze and Dirk Coetzee (eds.), *Telling Narratives: Spellbound Edition.* (Pretoria, 2001)

Eleanor J Krige, 'Changing Conditions in Marital Relations and Parental Duties Among Urbanized Natives', in *Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* IX, 1, 1936

Christina Landman, 'Journeying with Stories', in Philippe Denis and James Worthington (eds.), *The Power of Oral History: Memory, Healing and Development,* Vol 4 (Pietermaritzburg, 2002)

Gayle Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and in Practice* (London, 2003)

Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan: A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959* (Cape Town, 1999)

Amina Mama, *Women's Studies and the Study of Women in Africa in the 1990s* (CODESRIA Working Paper 5/9, 1996)

Makaziwe P Mandela, *Gender Relations and Patriarchy in South Africa's Transkei*, DPhil Thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1993

Changu Mannathoko, 'Feminist Theories and the Study of Gender Issues in Southern Africa', in Ruth Meena (ed.), *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical*

*Issues* (Harare, 1992)

Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social change in South Africa. African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1930* (Hong Kong, 1985)

Shula Marks, 'An Epidemic Waiting to Happen? The Spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa in Social and Historical Perspective' *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002

Zibia Mbalekwa, 'A Comparison of the Changing Views on Illegitimacy in Two Xhosa Communities Through the Twentieth Century', Rhodes University, Department of History, Honours Paper, 1996

Ruth Meena (ed.), *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical Iissues* (Harare, 1992)

Fatima Meer (ed.), *Factory and Family: The Divided Lives of South Africa's Women Workers/by 992 Workers and the Institute for Black Research* (Durban, 1984).

Diana T Meyers (ed.), *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder, Colorado, 1997)

Angela Mills, 'North American Feminisms/Global Feminisms – Contradictory or Complementary?', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, New Jersey,1998)

Valerie Moller (ed.), *Living in Grahamstown East/Rini. A Social Indicators Report.* Institute of Social and Economic Research, Research Report Series 6, Rhodes University. Grahamstown, 2001

Njabulo S Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Claremont, 2003)

Linda Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York, 1986)

Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, New Jersey, 1998)

Anne Oakley, 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', in Helen Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (London, 1990)

Christine Obbo, *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence* (London, 1980)

Michelle O'Sullivan, 'Stereotyping and Male Identification: Keeping Women in Their Place', in Christine Murray (ed.), *Gender and the New South African Legal Order* (Cape Town, 1994)

Berthold A Pauw, *The Second Generation: A Study of the Family Among Urbanized Bantu in East London* (Cape Town, 1969)

Robert Perks & Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 2002)

Alessandro Portelli, 'Oral History as Genre', in Mary Chamberlain & Paul Thompson (eds.), *Narrative and Genre* (London, 1998)

Personal Narratives Group (eds.), *Interpreting Women's Lives; Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1989)

Michael Pickering, *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* (New York, 2001)

Christine Qunta (ed.), *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg, 1987)

Herbert Rubin & Irene S Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, California, 1995)

Diana Russell, 'Between a Rock and Hard Place: The Politics of White Feminists Conducting Research on Black Women in South Africa', in Sue Wilkinson & Celia

Kritzinger (eds.), *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996)

Pamela Ryan, 'Singing in Prison: Women Writers and the Discourse of Resistance' in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power from Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, New Jersey, 1998)

Joan Sangster, 'Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History', in Robert Perks & Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 2002)

Isaac Schapera, 'Premarital Pregnancy and Native Opinion: A Note on Social Change', *Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African languages and Cultures* VI, 1933.

Fiona Scorgie, 'Virginity Testing and the Politics of Sexual Responsibility: Implications for AIDS Intervention', *African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002

Irving E Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (New York, 1998)

Harold J Simons, *African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa* (London, 1968)

Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology* (London, 1993)

Paul Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past. Oral History' in Robert Perks & Alistair Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 2002)

Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge, 1992)

Berteke Waaldijk, 'Of Stories and Sources: Feminist History', in R Buikema and Anneke Smelik (eds.), *Women's Studies and Culture: A Feminist Introduction* (London, 1993)

Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1991)

Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1982)

Cherryl Walker, Review Article, 'Women's Studies on the Move', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 13, 3, 1987.

Cheryl Walker, (ed.) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990).

Julia Wells, *'We now demand!' A Study on Women's Resistance to the Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1993).

Julia C Wells, 'The Sabotage of Patriarchy in Colonial Rhodesia: Rural African Women's Living Legacy to Their Daughters" *Feminist Review,* 75, 2003.

Sue Wilkinson & Celia Kritzinger (eds.), *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader* (London, 1996)

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (London, 1994)

Tiyambe Zeleza, 'Gender Biases in African Historiography' in Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama, & Fatou Sow (eds.), *Engendering African Social Sciences* (Wiltshire, 1997)

Julien Zwang, 'Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Late Marriage and Premarital Fertility in Rural South Africa: A study on social changes and health risks among young adults' *Les Nouveaux Cahiers de l'IFAS/IFAS,* 4, 2004

## Meet the respondents

**Cora,** born in 1937, was raised by her grandparents after her mother divorced and went to Cape Town to look for work. Cora spent some years being raised by her mother and step father in Cape Town, but returned to Grahamstown whilst she was still a school girl in order to care for her aging grandparents. After the death of both her grandparents, Cora went to live with her uncle. She married and had four children but divorced her husband because of his abusive behaviour. She was a domestic worker and is now retired.

**Daphne** was born in 1939 and lived with her mother, father and siblings in George until her mother became ill and she and the children moved to Grahamstown, leaving their father to continue his work as an evangelist in George. He visited them every month for a week. The mother and children lived with an uncle at first and then with her maternal grandparents. Daphne stayed on with the uncle for a while and then joined the rest of her family. She had a baby and did not marry the father of the child. The child died. She married a man who had children from his first marriage. Daphne and her husband had a child but it, too, died. She raised his children and has been in domestic work all her working life.

**Muriel,** born in 1943, and her eight siblings, was raised mostly by her mother who remained in Peddie whilst her father worked in Port Elizabeth. He visited once a month for a weekend. Her father owned some land on which he raised cattle and sheep. Her mother came to Grahamstown to look for work whilst she remained in Peddie with her brothers and sisters and her father visited monthly. It is unclear why they moved or who had ownership of the land, but the family were moved by the government to Breakfastvlei. This was not, she said, a forced removal. She had a child and did not marry the father. When her child was two years old she married and had another three children. She has been in domestic employment most of her life. She is widowed and lives with a daughter and granddaughter.

**Nandi** was born in 1963. Her father had two wives with thirteen children between them. Her mother was the younger of the two wives. Her father had nine children by his first wife and four by her mother. The wives knew each other and before Nandi's birth they all lived together in the same household on the father's property. However, the children of the first wife refused to acknowledge Nandi's mother as their mother and problems set in. Nandi's father was a lot older than her mother and he died when Nandi was still at school. She and her mother and sister then lived alone and had to fend for themselves. They moved to King William's Town where they farmed with cattle, sheep and goats. Nandi did not finish matric as she had a baby and could not return to school. She is married to the child's father and she is in domestic work. Nandi is currently studying to become a pre-school teacher.

**Sinazo** was born in 1964, the youngest of two girls. Her mother bore seven other children but all died. Her father was employed and spent time away from the home leaving her mother to raise the children alone most of the time. Her father had relationships with other women who bore four children. These children were taken in by Sinazo's mother and raised by her along with her own two daughters on her salary as a domestic worker. In addition it seems that various cousins lived in the home, too. Sinazo is unmarried and is a school teacher. She is actively involved in HIV/AIDS work in her church.

**Neli** was born in 1968 and was raised on a farm by both her parents who were unschooled farm workers. After some time the family moved in to Grahamstown to look for work due to financial constraints on the farm. She completed matric and worked in various clerical positions. She is married and has three children. Her husband has two children from two other women.

**Harriet**, born in 1969, is one of eight children raised by both her parents. At first Harriet's family lived in her grandmother's house with extended family members including her father's three brothers and their wives and children. Her father eventually found a house for the nuclear family and they moved in together. Harriet has a university degree and married the father of her son when the child was ten years old.

**Patricia** was born in 1976 in Fort Beaufort, the seventh of eight children. Her mother was a domestic worker and her father a gardener. Her father died when she was four years old and her mother raised the eight children on her own, with the support of Patricia's uncle. She had a baby before marrying the child's father. She has a second child and is a domestic worker.

**Nosipho's** mother and father were married at the time of her birth in 1974 but her father died when Nosipho was very young and she does not remember him. She and her mother then lived with her maternal grandparents in Port Elizabeth. They then moved to East London with the maternal grandfather. Her mother remarried and Nosipho lived with her mother and her step-father and the three siblings that came of that marriage. At one stage Nosipho lived with her mother's uncle in Mdantsane. He had a wife and children. At that time she did not know that the woman who came to visit her was in fact her mother. Later, her step-father had an affair with another woman and her mother divorced him. Nosipho is unmarried and is a university student.

**Zinzi** was born in 1983 and is the only one who was raised by her mother and grandmother without support from her father who refused to acknowledge her as his child. Her mother became pregnant and never married Zinzi's father. She also never had any other children. Zinzi is unemployed, single and is a volunteer for an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign.

# REPORT ON THE FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

**(Shared with Informants)**

## Grandmothers, mothers and daughters: transformations in coping strategies within Xhosa households in Grahamstown

Research conducted by Linda Schwartz and assisted by ten women in Grahamstown

# REPORT ON FINDINGS

## A. History and stories

1. Men were the people who wrote history.
2. Now women are writing history.
3. They write about women.
4. Now ordinary women are getting a chance to tell their stories.
5. Now history is also about homes and the struggles of ordinary women:
   - Childbirth
   - Children
   - Education
   - Marriage
   - HIV/AIDS
   - Grandparents

It is difficult to speak and hear in another language and for two people who are different to understand each other.
But we can make this happen if we listen and speak with respect and if we really want to learn and share our lives.
What one person says can help us understand about other people.

## B. Children too soon

What are the problems women have when they have children before they are married or ready for them?

1. Their parents are very angry.
2. They feel ashamed and the family feels ashamed.
3. They have to stop their education.
4. Their lobola is less.
5. The church does not approve.
6. Other girls were not to be friends with the young mother.
7. They have to find the money to raise the child.
8. Parents may kick their child out or fight with them at home.

Why are young girls getting pregnant?

1. Parents are no longer in control.
2. They have more freedom.
3. There is often drink available.
4. Men do not like condoms.
5. They want the child grant.
6. They are raped.
7. They did not have any sex education.
8. Some people think you must not tell young people about sex or they will go and do it.

C. **Where are the fathers?**

1. They do not admit to being the father.
2. They are not forced to take responsibility.
3. They raped the girl and she is too afraid to say who he is.
4. They do not feel ashamed.
5. Their education is not stopped.

D. **Lobola**

Women have different ideas about lobola:

1. It buys a woman and the man can treat her as he wants.
2. It makes a woman feel she is wanted.
3. The amount of money shows what she is worth to her husband.
4. The amount of money is not important.
5. It makes wives feel they are to work for their husband's family.

Lobola and the tradition and now:

1. Cows were given to the girl's family. The cows would have calves and the wealth would increase.
2. Now money is given and it is spent on the wedding, on gifts, or on the bride's family.
3. Cows are not useful to people in town.
4. The negotiations were and still are done by the men.
5. Sometimes women today will suggest a price.
6. Sometimes men have to pay about R20 000 today and they have not got that money.
7. The amount is paid in installments.
8. Sometimes the bride was abducted from her home so that the man did not have to pay.
9. Today some couples go to the court and do not tell their parents because the man cannot afford the payment.
10. Could the lobola be made into an insurance policy for the couple?

Everyone agreed that lobola is here to stay.

E. **Are husbands too much trouble?**

Many women spoke of the bad behaviour of husbands. This is what they said:

1. They are abusing their wives by hitting them, not giving them money, having affairs.
2. Younger women do not want to have a husband because of this.
3. Husbands do not help at home.
4. Husbands have children from other women and then leave their own children.
5. Husbands bring HIV/AIDS into the marriage from their girlfriends.
6. Some young men copy their father's behaviour with women and have affairs.

When their husband's have affairs the wives do not want to know because they want to keep respect in the community.

Most women expect that their husband will have an affair.

Some girls want to get married because they need security and status.

Some women will have children but they do not see the need for a husband because the husband will not be faithful and will control them.

**F. HIV/AIDS**

1. Most families have someone who has HIV/AIDS.
2. Many mothers have buried their children which is very, very sad for them.
3. Many grandmothers are raising their grandchildren which is expensive for them.
4. Most people will not say they have HIV/AIDS because they are afraid.
5. When someone dies of TB they do not say it is also because of AIDS.
6. The family and the people who have HIV/AIDS are afraid of being pushed out.
7. The family and the infected person feel ashamed.
8. Some people will not be tested.
9. Some young people are still not being careful when they have sex.
10. Some people think they will die anyway so they don't want to know their status.
11. Some churches are talking and teaching about HIV/AIDS, some are not.
12. It is hard to look after a sick person in your home and it costs money.

**G. Money**

When people are poor there are a lot of problems. Some of the problems are:

1. No money to raise children, even when there is a husband and a wife.
2. Poverty causes problems between the husband and the wife and they fight about money.
3. Lobola cannot be paid so a couple cannot be married.
4. HIV/AIDS is expensive.
5. Grandmothers cannot afford to care properly for grandchildren when the parents die.
6. Women cannot afford to go back to school after they have had a child.
7. People cannot support others as they used to be able to when there was more money.
8. Girls get pregnant and look for the child support as an income.
9. Girls and women sell themselves to men for money and this can mean HIV/AIDS and pregnancy.
10. People cannot afford to pay for medication for family with HIV/AIDS.

**Who do you think should have this information?**