

**Network as Survival Strategy:**

**An ethnographic study of the social manoeuvres employed by a sample of twenty-five African men and women living in a core city informal settlement.**

**By**

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This dissertation examines the important function of kin-based survival networks for a sample of twenty-five African men and women living in a core city informal settlement in Durban. It focuses upon the social manoeuvres or strategies employed by these highly mobile individuals who manipulated ties to consanguineal and affinal kinsfolk in an effort to establish themselves in Durban and, ultimately, in the settlement of Old Dunbar. Such kinsfolk acted as gatekeepers whose positions of urban employment and residence were used by respondents to access the city and its resources. Furthermore, an analysis of the process of domestic survival, especially where this involves the welfare of dependent children, reveals the importance of co-operative ties between or amongst kinswomen. The wider argument espoused here is not one which would suggest that the processes of rural-urban migration and intra-urban mobility strengthen kinship ties, or a subset of kinship ties. Rather, this thesis highlights the way in which mobility and migration place strains on marital relationships, split up family units, and ultimately foster a system of domestic linkages based primarily on the dispersal and exchange of dependants. Within a context of rapidly shifting material and social resources, I argue that survival depends on the extent to which individuals can strategically manipulate those physically and / or socially proximate relationships within their respective personal networks.

The kin-based networks described in this dissertation constitute temporary fields of support because respondents mobilised parts of their personal networks during various phases, or at critical points in their lives. For example, respondents sought help from

those well-placed relatives when seeking their first job on leaving school and / or their natal home, or later in their lives when they needed assistance with the care of dependent children. Other circumstances in which kin were called upon for help include sudden domestic crises brought on by personal misfortune surrounding illness, injury, or marital dissolution. What one observes, then, is the indiscriminate manipulation of ties to a relatively narrow band of kinsfolk given that a number of factors, namely, premarital procreation, widowhood and marital dissolution restricted the potential number of kinsfolk on whom respondents could call upon for help. I highlight the multipurpose nature of a subset of kinship ties, revealing how male and female respondents mobilised ties to mothers, adult children and siblings when they required assistance. It is this tendency of respondents to draw repeatedly from that part of their personal networks comprising close kin that accounts for the fact that their personal networks are loosely described as kin-based. One sub-theme within this dissertation is an analysis of the strategic alliances forged amongst female respondents and their close female kin who found themselves unmarried, divorced or widowed and hence solely responsible for the care of dependent children.

I argue that these kin-based networks are particularly adaptive survival strategies for those individuals who find themselves constantly on the move in search of scarce employment and shelter. Demographic studies of population movement in KwaZulu/Natal have well illustrated the way in which African men and women, whether they are of urban or rural origin, attempt to establish a base for themselves in urban areas through a series of intra-urban moves. This fits in with Russell's (1998) argument that low-income co-residential or localised family units in South Africa cannot be broadly described as enduring or autonomous systems of support for their members.

Consequently, another sub-theme with which this dissertation grapples is that of the complex links between residential or domestic units and the wider support networks within which they exist. In Old Dunbar, ties amongst clusters of neighbours involved small, daily exchanges of goods, services and information. These relationships helped to smooth ties amongst this large, shifting and heterogeneous urban population. The development of multiplex relationships amongst neighbours also provided some measure of stability within an impermanent social landscape. For example, the establishment of relationships amongst neighbours served to keep quarrels in check by providing a forum for the settlement of local disputes. However, the creation of a broader community of interests in Old Dunbar was largely centred on initial efforts by residents to secure basic rights of tenure. Once the settlement had achieved quasi-legal recognition from local government, community activities were largely sporadic, and emerged only in part when sections of Old Dunbar took it upon themselves to evict suspected criminals from the settlement. The important point to note here is that the formation of this informal settlement did not guarantee a permanent place of residence for those men, women and children who arrived from 1994 onwards. This meant that kinsfolk, especially female kin, were extremely important in managing crises that threatened to disrupt attempts at domestic consolidation in Old Dunbar, and ultimately, to draw families apart.

The question that arises from an observation of the constantly shifting nature of Old Dunbar's populace, is whether the methodological tools to cope with such a phenomena, exist within the discipline of social anthropology. Certainly, Colson (1985: 192) has argued that populations on the move are extremely relevant to a discipline that purports to care about "people who are very much alive and have a future". Nevertheless, I argue that there are well-established methods for dealing with rural-urban migration and

residential mobility. Firstly, this dissertation follows the holistic method of 'situational analysis' pioneered by Gluckman (1940). Only a holistic study that encompasses both the 'situation' or the insider's perspective, and the wider 'context', which as Devons and Gluckman (1964: 162) indicate is determined and limited by the analyst, can begin to deal with complex urban phenomena:

"For Mitchell the situation has a logic of its own. It is both a 'practice of structure' and a 'structure of practice'. Thus it is formed in the structural processes governing a wider political and socio-economic order, yet it is not entirely reducible to these processes nor to their underlying principles" (Kapferer, B. 1987: viii)

Rather than reducing domestic life to a cause or consequence of poverty, this dissertation examines the struggle individuals and families face in their attempts to mobilise both material and social resources. It examines the 'reconstruction' of domestic units in Old Dunbar and the attempts made by respondents to maintain some form of residential stability within a rapidly shifting context. Kinship ties certainly do not negate the effects of poverty, and this dissertation avoids a viewpoint that would suggest otherwise. An examination of the types of the economic survival strategies respondents engaged in reveals their struggle to make a living, and hence, the necessity to invest in social relationships.

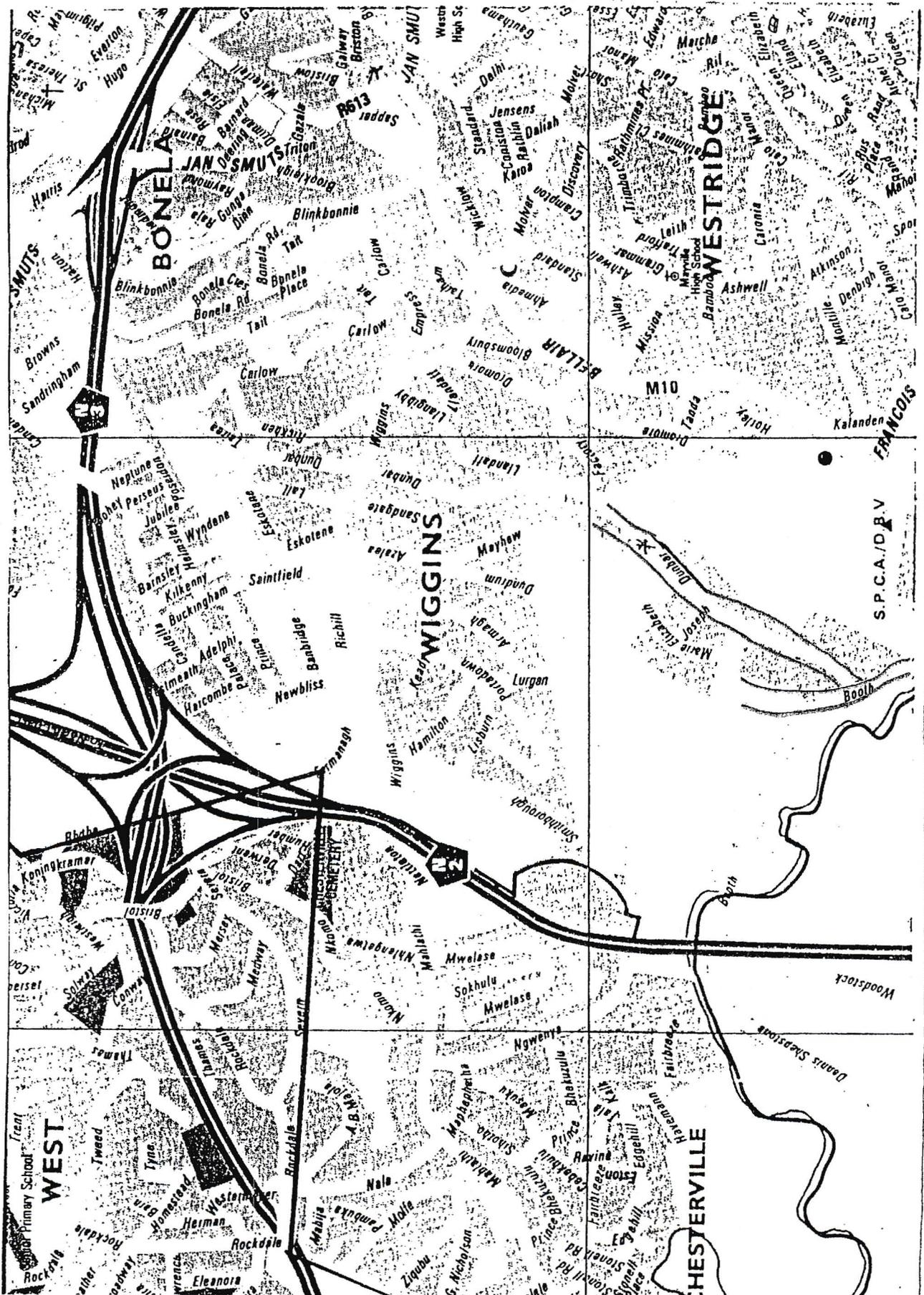
Secondly, the Zambian 'Copperbelt Studies' pioneered a method of dealing with large, complex social groupings, and it is the *social network* approach that this dissertation utilises (Epstein, E. 1969). Each individual's egocentric network potentially comprises kin, non-kin, and affines, on whose support he or she must draw. Hence, a good part of this study examines 'cognatic' (Fox, R, 1967: 169) or 'personal kindreds' (Stack, C,

1974: 54-5). These fall within the area of kinship studies concerned with moral and instrumental links between individuals and not specifically with relations between groups of individuals. This echoes the distinction that Evans-Pritchard (1940) drew between studies of kinship systems and those of lineage systems. Fox (1967:pp164-168) notes that the former focuses upon the individual and his or her kin, whilst the latter takes the kin group, as a unit, into account. A kindred, comprising a quasi-group at best, consists of individuals linked to ego in particular degrees of relatedness. Most importantly, the group does not exist independently of ego. In other words, it does not form an enduring corporate unit, nor does it assume the functions of a descent group.

#### **A brief overview of the setting** (See Maps 1, 2 and 3)

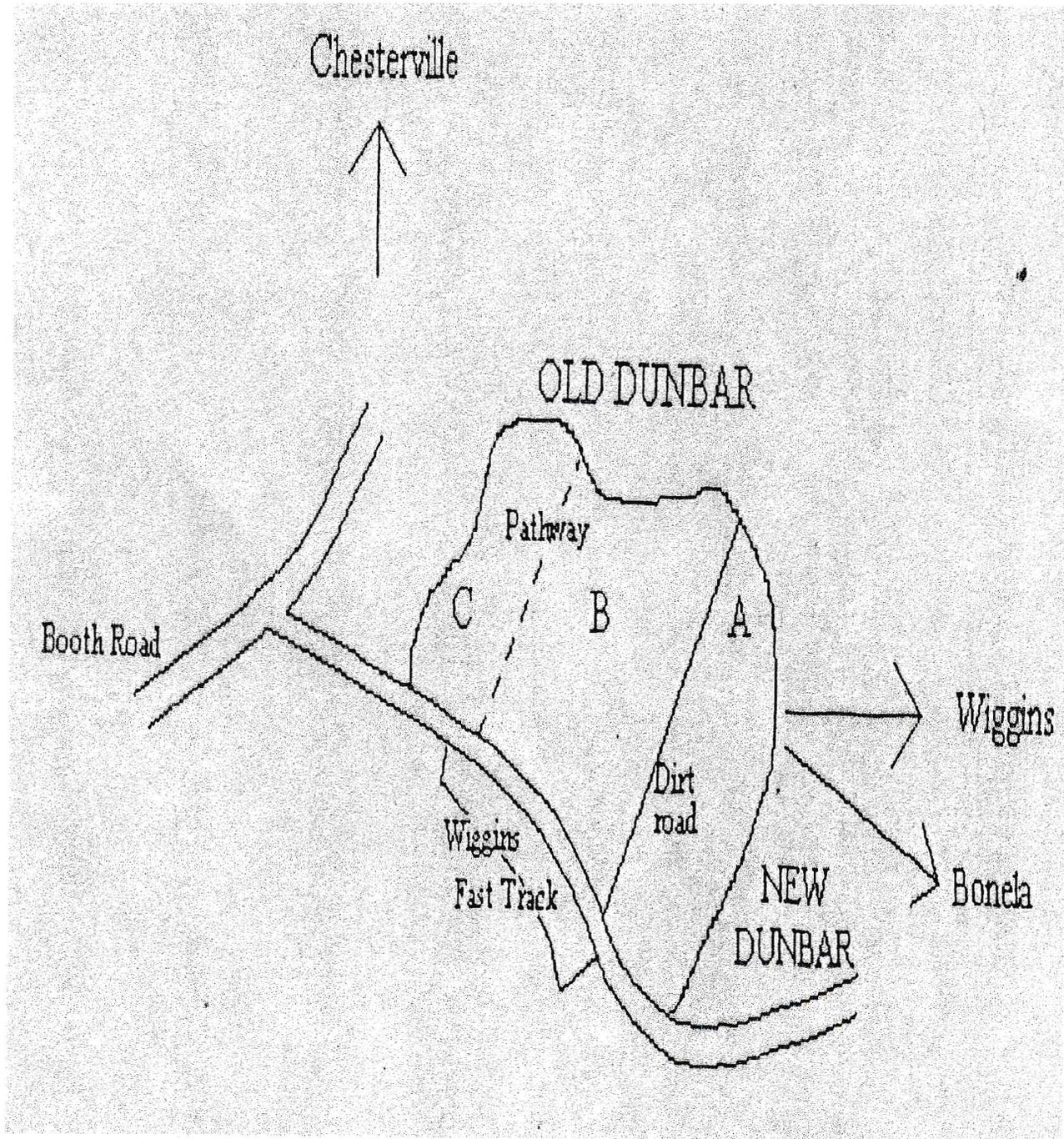
Old Dunbar informal settlement is situated within Cato Manor, Durban and is only one of several core city informal settlements in this core city area. Informal settlements, such as old Dunbar, are a common form of shelter in a province in which a large proportion of its population does not have access to formal housing with basic services. According to one estimate, in 1992, over two million people in KwaZulu/Natal, or 26.1% of the province's total population, were living in urban informal settlements (Hindson, D. and J. McCarthy 1994: 3 - Table 2: Population of KwaZulu/Natal 1992). This highlights the importance of '*imijondolo*' or shacks for significant numbers of African men, women and children, who find themselves in a process of onward migration, either fleeing violence or seeking more suitable sites and amenities (Cross et al 1994: 86). Furthermore, most settlements within the core Durban Functional Region (D.F.R.) were established after 1990 (Cross et al 1994: 93) which means that the research sample at hand forms part of a new and still shifting population.

Map 1: Wiggins / Bonela Areas

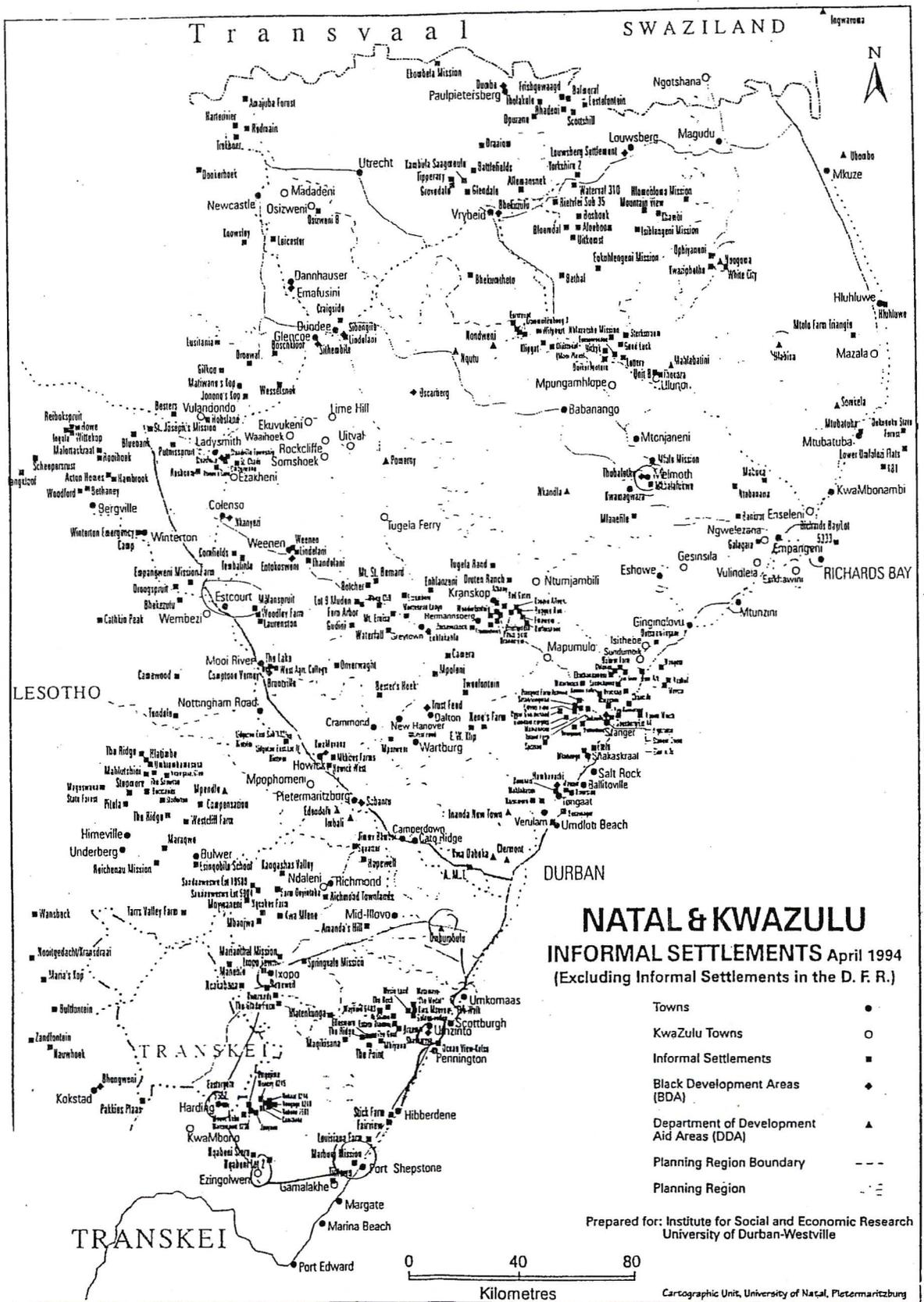


Map 2: Old Dunbar informal settlement

HAND DRAWN : NOT TO SCALE



Map 3: Informal Settlements in KwaZulu-Natal



Historically, Old Dunbar lies within the old Umkumbaan / Esikoweni shantytown, which was demolished by authorities in the late 1950s subsequent to which residents were removed to the newly built KwaMashu and Umlazi townships (Maasdorp, G and A. Humphries 1975). From mid-1993 onwards, a relatively small number of men and women began to settle in Old Dunbar, but at this early stage this illegal 'squatting' was largely hidden from the authorities. During the course of 1994, settlement on the land gained momentum, when five hundred shacks were rapidly built on land designated for low-cost household development. This invasion was organised by 'bridgeheads' from the already established Cato Crest informal settlement. However, the sizeable number of shacks built on the land in question spearheaded the arrival of more settlers. The word that people were building shacks or '*imijondolo*' on a piece of land in Cato Manor gradually spread along a grapevine of information to Durban's surrounding areas where respondents were living in a variety of accommodation that included servant's quarters, mission schools, hostels / barracks, infill and freestanding shacks.

Old Dunbar informal settlement itself lies on a narrow strip of southwest facing slope. Dunbar Road, tarred in 1996 as part of the Reconstruction and Development Project (R.D.P.) project for the Greater Cato Manor Area, borders this stretch of hillside on its eastern side. The western border of the settlement that runs along the base of the hill has been prevented from expanding further by the presence of a streambed. The other two borders include a main road (planned as a major artery road) and the informal settlement of New Dunbar. Until June of 1996, Old Dunbar had a civic organisation and a youth league. However, some of the residents evicted these bodies from the informal settlement leaving Old Dunbar without spokespersons to liaise with outside agencies.

The informal settlement is not electrified nor do the shacks have running water. Except for those shacks bordering Dunbar Road, there are no lights within the informal settlement. Numerous well-worn pathways run through the settlement separating shacks constructed of various materials, such as, mud, planks, reeds, corrugated iron, brick, plywood, and cardboard. Residents collect water in buckets and plastic drums from the standpipe, that is, tap in each section. Most residents, whilst living in unelectrified and poorly insulated structures, kept their small homes clean and tidy. Old Dunbar connects to the city through taxis that run back and forth between this settlement, Cato Crest and the lower end of Durban's C.B.D. There are no clinics, schools or supermarkets within the immediate vicinity of the informal settlement.

## **Research Methodology:**

### **Sampling**

The research was primarily of a qualitative nature and formed part of the Urban Domestic Energy Project (U.D.E.P), which sought information relating to domestic fuel use in low-income domestic units. The U.D.E.P. had randomly selected two samples of ten shacks, or domestic units, in 1995, which I then utilised over the course of 1996 and 1997 for gathering information relating to domestic fuel usage and social survival strategies. Each shack or domestic unit was administered a questionnaire in September of 1995 entitled "Social and Economic Determinants of Urban Domestic Energy Use". All twenty shacks stood within section B of Old Dunbar informal settlement and during the course of 1995, the project experienced an attrition rate of one out of the twenty "shacks". The remaining nineteen shacks then formed an initial basis upon which to start research in June of 1996.

The first task of fieldwork was to locate the original sample of shacks, in order to determine whether these respondents would consent to a continued study. This was a lesson in itself and a clue to the high levels of domestic fluidity in Old Dunbar. Whilst twelve of the nineteen shacks each retained at least one of the original household members, the remaining seven households could not be located. However, within the initial period of fieldwork, two of the absent shack owners respectively sold or lent their abandoned homes to their kin. Overall, this left a sample of fourteen shacks for continued research.

Through the snowballing technique I increased the original sample by selecting neighbouring shacks. From this sample, which I refer to as Sample 'A', fifteen domestic units which were comprised of twenty-one respondents became part of an in-depth study. Sample 'A' incorporated some shacks within section C of Old Dunbar because an arbitrary pathway between otherwise adjacent shacks constituted the border separating Sections B from C. In November 1996, a questionnaire of the same title as the September 1995 survey was administered to this sample. Ethnographic research amongst these respondents began in June 1996 and ended in April of 1997. Details of these respondents can be found in Table 1: Household Numbers 1 to 15.

I also selected a second total sample of a block of shacks to gather information regarding informal sector activity. My assistant and I, using a road, a pathway and a line of gum trees as natural borders isolated a subsection of section B. This sample, which I refer to as sample 'B', was comprised of twenty-eight shacks. The purpose of this sample was to determine the proportion of domestic units engaging in informal sector activities. All twenty-eight domestic units were administered an initial questionnaire in January of

1997 entitled "Informal Sector Activities and Fuel Use Questionnaire". Ten domestic units engaging in informal sector activities were administered a second questionnaire of the same title in February of 1997. Three domestic units were selected for further in-depth study between January and April of 1997. Through the snowballing technique, a fourth domestic unit outside the boundaries of this sample was also selected for in-depth study. In total Sample B was comprised of four respondents whose details can be found in Table 1: Household Numbers 16 to 19. Thus, from Sample 'A' and Sample 'B' combined, some nineteen domestic units incorporating twenty-five respondents participated in an in-depth qualitative study. These twenty-five respondents consisted of sixteen female and nine male subjects.

### **Time Frame**

I visited Old Dunbar on a daily basis between June and August of 1996 and then from November 1996 to April 1997. During September and October of 1996, U.D.E.P. community workshops were held with residents from Old Dunbar and Chesterville. I conducted research, during weekdays, between mid-morning and mid-afternoon, regrettably the hottest part of the day during summer. However, this was more convenient for participants busy with early morning chores. Over time, I established frequent contacts with a number of respondents, visiting these men and women on a weekly basis. In some cases, I visited key respondents more than once a week.

### **Accessing the research site**

Although I had decided not to stay over night in Old Dunbar, given the incidence of crime at night, the close proximity of the informal settlement to the U.N.D. campus

TABLE 1 : LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Household No.	Respondent's name <sup>1</sup> (Surname, first name)	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Marital Status <sup>2</sup>	Is spouse/ partner co- resident?	No. of co-resident children or adult dependants	No. of dispersed minors
1.	Shezi, Membrey	62	Female	Ndwedwe	Widow	N/A	10	0
2.	Ngcobo, Elias	45	Male	Lamontville	Married	Yes	1	2
3.	Sithole, Betty	62	Female	Harding	Single	N/A	0	0
4.	a. Thembi, Vincent	28	Male	Umkomaas	Single	N/A	0	2
	b. Thembi, Milazi (4a's brother)	31	Male	Umkomaas	Single	N/A	0	1
5.	Ngidi, Zandile	37	Female	Nongoma	Unmarried	No	0	1
6.	Bhengu, Vuyani	34	Male	Hlabisa	Married	No	0	2
7.	Makgoba, Pearl	30	Female	Inanda	Separated	No	2	2
8.	Nsene, Mlungisi	32	Male	KwaMashu	Single	N/A	0	2
9.	Phungula, Nomusa	24	Female	Uzwatini	Unmarried	Yes	2	0
10.	a. Dlamini, Thabo	26	Male	Hammarsdale	Unmarried	Yes	1	0
	b. Dlamini, Christina (10a's mother)	55	Female	Estcourt	Widowed	N/A	0	0
	c. Gwela, Thandi (10a's girlfriend)	17	Female	Ndwedwe	Unmarried	Yes	1	0

<sup>1</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> 'Single' refers to individuals living without partners; 'unmarried' refers specifically to cohabiting adults.

Household no.	Respondent's name (Surname, first name)	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Marital Status	Is Spouse/partner co-resident?	No. of co-resident children or adult dependants	No of dispersed children
11.	11a. Shezi, Valentina	22	Female	Melmoth	Single	N/A	1	0
	11b. Shezi, Agnes (11a's mother)	45	Female	Eshowe	Divorced	N/A	1	0
12.	12a. Cele, Sandile	56	Male	Ndwedwe	Married	Yes	4	3
	12b. Cele, Nabane (12a's wife)	34	Female	KwaMashu	Married	Yes	4	2
13.	Nzuza, Nokulunga	32	Female	Mbumbulo	Single	N/A	0	0
14.	Radebe, Seni	30	Male	Ntabankulu	Unmarried	Yes	1	1
15.	15a. Molefe, Cynthia	35	Female	Umkomaas	Married	Yes	4	0
	15b. Molefe, Thandeka (15a's daughter)	14	Female	Umkomaas	N/A	N/A	0	0
16.	Radebe, Dennis	51	Male	Esikaweni	Single	N/A	0	2
17.	Myeni, Eunice	35	Female	Kobodi	Single	N/A	2	3
18.	Xolani, Nompumelelo	33	Female	Umtata	Married	Yes	3	0
19.	Ngwenya, Nkanza	32	Female	Melmoth	Unmarried	Yes	1	1

made intensive fieldwork possible. The settlement was poorly lit at night as there are streetlights only along the eastern perimeter of the settlement, and residents themselves complained of the lack of lighting and poor police presence in the area. Four U.D.E.P. researchers working in the Cato Manor area including myself shared a departmental vehicle. During the day, the vehicle was initially parked in an open area next to a spaza. However, after someone broke the vehicle's locks, it was parked further down the road in a fenced off area belonging to the Fast Track Housing Project. The U.D.E.P. employed a research assistant, who served initially to introduce me to respondents, to interpret from Zulu to English where necessary, and to accompany me within Old Dunbar. During the first two months of research, a young male resident called Muzi, acted as my research assistant. However, it soon transpired that he did not feel comfortable being seen in the company of women when I interviewed female respondents in their yards. A second assistant, Simon, a former resident of Old Dunbar living with his mother and siblings in a nearby low-cost housing project, was hired for the remainder of the fieldwork period.

### **Qualitative Methods**

In keeping with social anthropological tradition participant observation was the primary tool used to gather ethnographic material. The collection of detailed case studies served to 'root' the otherwise transient lives of these shack dwellers. The case study method also proved invaluable in unravelling the phenomenon of domestic fluidity that characterised this informal settlement. Domestic fluidity clearly presents methodological difficulties despite its being of sociological interest. However, scholars of domestic fluidity suggest that one examine the processes of domestic unit formation

and reformation, that is, the movement of individuals and incomes between these units, through qualitative research methods (Spiegel *et al* 1996: 25):

“If we are interested in tracking patterns of domestic fluidity, research procedures must be designed around two commitments. The first is to undertake relatively long term, ‘longitudinal’ studies of a number of domestic units, rather than one-off ‘snapshots’ represented by a single interview. The second is to assemble detailed biographies - urbanization and employment histories, as well as domestic or household histories - of selected individuals within at least some of these domestic units”

I conducted numerous in-depth, unstructured and semi-structured interviews with those who became my case studies. Several of these detailed case studies of respondents begin in chapter four and continue through subsequent chapters. Biographical information, providing details of respondents' work and residence histories, served as an important context to the social relationships that developed in the informal settlement. Pelto (1970 p98-100) cautions that life histories can never be representative of the population in question because it is only from those individuals who are unusual or distinct that life histories can be collected. This contains two implicit assumptions. Firstly, only from a certain type of individual can one collect life histories. Pelto (1970: 99) gives the example of adventurer John Tanner, “a skilled raconteur”, whose life history was collected by Dr Edwin James in the early nineteenth century. Secondly, he assumes that the fieldworker cannot elicit life histories from those who do not fall into the category of “skilled raconteur”. Intensive, qualitative fieldwork should enable the fieldworker to gather sufficient information from a variety of individuals, whose verbal skills may vary along a continuum. By placing myself within the “social situation” of the informal settlement, over a relatively long period of time, I was more likely, in some cases, to ‘stumble’ across relevant information, that might never had come to my

attention. Multiple interviews with more than one family member, in some cases, enabled me to check the consistency of information that I received.

Participant observation is unique in that the researcher enters the field as an outsider initially, but through intensive research, gradually achieves the status of both insider and outsider (Spradley, J. 1980: 57). However, being both insider and outsider forms part of the ambiguity of participant observation. Ellen (1984) suggests that the qualitative data gathering techniques, entailed in ethnographic fieldwork, do not constitute a method of research *per se*. Rather, the researcher herself or himself is the tool. Ellen (1984: 221) points out that:

"anthropology is characterised methodologically by the research worker's being the medium as well as the recorder and interpreter of his or her research"

Spradley (1980: 53) reiterates this, explaining that "[b]ecause you feel like a stranger, because you don't know the tacit rules for behaviour, you will fall naturally into the role of participant observer." On entering the research site, I gradually developed a rapport with a limited number of respondents. Thus, the qualitative research method makes it possible for the researcher to document, as far as is possible, the emic or insider's viewpoint (Pelto, P. 1970: 68). The latter of course does not exist on its own, by the very fact that the researcher encodes the information, integrating it with his or her pre-existing theoretical concepts. Hence, social anthropologists engage in a type of methodology that contains both "inductive and deductive procedures" (Holy, L. 1984: 17). Emic and etic analysis takes place at once within the research setting in that even in the most unstructured interview the researcher is both participant and observer. This

emphasizes the close relationship between theory and method, as Holy (1984: 18)

reiterates:

"A specific theory about the constitution of the investigated object does not only shape the method of investigation; it also defines research problems and directs the researchers observation of specific aspects of the object deemed theoretically significant."

However, the first step in making friends amongst strangers, was to obtain the consent of participants to the research. Thus, I had to enter the research participants' homes to obtain their consent before becoming a welcomed or acceptable visitor. The limits of participation depended on whether my assistant and I could gain entry into the participant's "yard" or home. My assistant and I had to carefully determine where to sit or stand, whether to remove our shoes or not, how to introduce ourselves, how long to stay in the participant's home, and when and how to leave.

The obvious discrepancy in terms of wealth between the research participants and myself raised the important question as to whether the research was justified, that is, ethically sound (See Jorgensen, J. 1982: 44, Preston-Whyte, E. 1989: 228). In order to do no harm and to fall within the ambit of the Association for Anthropology's (A.A.S.A) ethical guidelines, my assistant and I informed respondents as to the aims of research, and that they would not be rewarded monetarily. Firstly, my assistant and I informed participants that we sought specific information relating to fuel-use and fuel-budgeting. Secondly, we informed respondents of our broader aim to find out how they 'coped' with life in Old Dunbar, seeking information about their family and employment histories. We also informed research participants that they would remain anonymous (See Jorgensen, J. 1982: 48). No person objected to the research on moral grounds, although

some respondents declined because they were too busy or had to go out to work during the week. A few respondents initially agreed to the research, but later found they did not have time to participate. However, I respected the decisions of these individuals to discontinue their participation shortly after consenting to the research.

Although twenty domestic units comprised the total qualitative research sample, I also spoke with friends and family members of respondents who visited the settlement for a short period of time from a day to a few weeks. In some cases, these casual visitors became semi-permanent residents of domestic units participating in the research project. I also encountered visitors to Old Dunbar without any connection to respondents, such as a social worker, an unemployed ex-MK cadre, and travelling salesmen selling various items from spices to 'medicines'. On occasion residents stopped to speak to Simon and I, but once they had determined that we had no connection with "Metro Water" or the Cato Manor Development Association (C.M.D.A), let us go on our way.

Some respondents and other residents asked for lifts, which I could not always offer. However, I did on occasion take groups of friends to the swimming pool, police station and hospital. Some respondents asked me to telephone welfare centres, schools, or labour recruiters, where I attempted to obtain the relevant information for them. Most participants were extremely hospitable, inviting my research participant and me into their home or "yard" and providing us with a bench or chair to sit on. In some cases, respondents offered my assistant and me cooldrinks on hot days. I, in turn, lent R50-00 to a research participant and bought food for two other research participants when they had nothing to eat.

## **Outline of chapters**

I start, in chapter two, by way of providing a context to the theoretical issues with which this dissertation grapples. One subtheme within this chapter is an exploration of the way in which migrant labour has shaped or transformed kinship systems in southern Africa, and I examine its impact upon rural and urban families. Chapter two also discusses the impact of migrant labour within the frameworks of the detribalisation, alternation and social network approaches to urbanisation. Of relevance to my study is the way in which the exigencies of migrancy and mobility have both loosened and strengthened features associated with agnatic kinship systems. I draw particular attention to local and cross-cultural studies documenting the importance of kinship ties in mediating urban poverty. This includes a discussion of the emergence of consanguineal and female-headed families. Finally, chapter two integrates a critique of the Westernised notion of the 'household' as a bounded, income-pooling unit.

Chapter three examines the formation of Old Dunbar informal settlement within the local context of core settlements in Durban and the wider framework of legislative reform. It traces the initial invasion that led to the movement of individuals from various parts of the city and province to this informal settlement. This chapter indicates how legislative reforms eased the way for the building of shack settlements in formerly white residential areas. It also places the formation of Old Dunbar within the wider historical context of Apartheid urbanisation policy. The second part of chapter three describes the physical conditions of Old Dunbar informal settlement, namely, the land on which the settlement stands, the material used to build shacks and the domestic fuels

used. It also describes the violent changes that occurred at the level of Old Dunbar's leadership during 1996.

Chapter four utilises biographical material elicited from respondents as a means of examining the role played by kinsfolk as gatekeepers to scarce urban resources. It looks at the way in which male and female drew indiscriminately on kinsfolk, such as, mothers, grandmothers, siblings, adult children, or spouses in accessing employment and / or shelter in Durban. However, I concentrate on the experiences of unmarried mothers specifically because they were forced to move about with dependent children, a burden which unmarried (*and* some married) male respondents managed to avoid. As such, chapter four examines the strategies employed by such women in their quest to obtain shelter, work and to see to the welfare of their children, and analyses strategic alliances forged amongst these women and their unmarried daughters. Chapter four is centred on one particular case study, that of female respondent Pearl Makgoba, drawing on case studies of several other respondents for comparative purposes.

Chapter five looks at the domestic units established by respondents in Old Dunbar, but because of the variation in residential compositions and also the fluidity of these units, I make use of Verdon's (1979) concept of the residential sponsor. This enables one to look at the transactions or deals made amongst respondents and their kinsfolk who agreed to co-reside in Old Dunbar. The chapter goes on to discuss the temporary and instrumental nature of many of these residential arrangements. Of interest to this dissertation is the co-residence of mothers and their adult children, and of adult siblings because such arrangements point to a high level of dependency amongst what one might term relatively isolated female-linked units. Finally, this chapter looks at the way in

which domestic units are embedded within wider networks of support that cut across the physical boundaries of the informal settlement. Of concern here, is the need for women who set up ostensibly nuclear family units to retain ties to their kinsfolk as a means of insurance.

Chapter six describes the economic survival strategies employed by respondents, namely, casual or piecework and informal sector activities. It examines the impact of erratic employment patterns on domestic arrangements, revealing how the instability of employment forces families to split up, and at the same time means that social relationships must become as fluid and flexible as the shifting socio-economic environment. The chapter goes on to show how individuals must employ a number of interconnected strategies to sustain their domestic units. I illustrate how respondents were desperate to access the cash incomes of other individuals, whether this was to buy food to eat, to set up informal sector enterprises, or to tide them over until they had found wage work again.

Chapter seven examines the way in which respondents mobilised help from their kin-based networks when faced with domestic crises, such as illness, injury or a spouse's desertion. This chapter is especially concerned with the way in which female kin provided support when a crisis threatened to disrupt the structure of a domestic unit. An analysis of three crises, affecting two female and one male respondent, highlights the way in which kinswomen either cushion the strain placed upon the domestic unit or make structural adaptations to it. The redistribution of dependent children to kinswomen raises the question as to whether one might speak of female-linked domestic unit or female-linked survival networks. Importantly, this chapter looks at the transactions which underpin the redistribution of dependents amongst domestic units. In this way, it attempts to contribute, in some way, to an understanding of the complicated phenomenon of domestic fluidity.

## **Chapter two: Theoretical issues in the study of kinship**

### **Migrant labour and kinship studies:**

A common theme running through the literature documenting changing family and kinship systems in Southern Africa is an overwhelming concern with the effects of migrant labour in both rural and urban settings. Various theoretical models dealing with urbanisation, namely, the 'detrribalisation', 'alternation and social network or sets of relations approaches have guided these studies (See Howard Ross, M. and Weisner, T. 1977, Mayer, P. 1962). The earliest of these studies operated largely within a detrribalisation framework, which focussed on the concomitant decline of agnatic territorial systems and growing urban individuation. These formative studies of urbanisation and migrant labour raised two crucial topics. Firstly, Hellman's (1935, 1937, 1948) study of Rooiyard, a urban slum housing rural migrants in Johannesburg, highlighted the way in which men and women manipulated kinship ties to gain access to accommodation. Secondly, studies conducted by Wilson et al (1952) and Schapera (1947) amongst rural communities in the Eastern Cape and former Bechuanaland Protectorate, respectively, revealed the growing instability of marital unions amongst rural families.

### **Kinship ties in urban slums of the 1930s**

Hellman (1935) conducted one of the earliest studies of the effects of migrant labour in a Witwatersrand slumyard. Not only is Hellman's (1935) work "Rooiyard: Social

Structure of a Johannesburg Slum" one of the few social anthropological studies of urban slums in South Africa, it is amongst the earliest studies of urban slums in the world (Mitchell, J. 1987: 252-5). This work deals broadly with the changing nature of family and kinship systems in Southern Africa, pointing indirectly to the importance of social ties in mediating economic insecurity. Concerned with the processes of urbanisation and detribalisation within a functionalist framework (Hellman, E. 1935: 188), she found that Rooiyard contained a heterogeneous population of African men and women from various parts of Southern Africa. Hellman (1949: 271 cited in A. Epstein 1969: 89) noted that 'no typical urban African' existed.

The movement of African migrants in and out of this New Doornfontein slumyard presented for Hellman (1935) a primarily methodological problem, and she described the fluidity of Rooiyard's population as a "constant menace" (1948: 201):

"The shifting nature of the yard populace was also a hindrance. Several times I succeeded in gaining the confidence of an informant only to find that she was about to leave the yard owing to arrear rent, a desire to return home to the country or for the purpose of taking up employment." (1935: 2)

Although Hellman (1935: 2, 11, 1948: 201-2) did not explicitly recognise the sociological importance of domestic fluidity *per se*, she noted that Rooiyard and the rooms within it served as a base from which rural migrants sought work. The illegal nature of Rooiyard, situated within the centre of Johannesburg, derived partly from the fact that many of the women who passed through the slum engaged in an illicit income generating activity, namely, beer brewing. (1935: 5-6). Hellman (1935, 1948) noted, although not without bringing suspicion upon herself of being a police spy, that beer

brewing was a more lucrative means of generating an income than wages offered within Johannesburg's manufacturing sector (See Koch, E. 1983: 159).

Possibly, many individuals used the rooms of their kin as a means of establishing themselves in Johannesburg. Furthermore, the fact that seventy-four percent of her sample of households had placed either a child or an adult member with their rural kin illustrates that kinship ties were not completely dissolving (Hellman, E 1935: 111). A contradiction thus arose between the persistence of kinship ties across spatial separations and the decline of territorial kinship systems in rural areas. Hellman's data did not fit readily with the notion of growing individuation of rural migrants in town. This is evident in the following passage:

"The continued existence of strong kinship ties between some urban Natives and their rural kinsfolk, despite their spatial separation, proves clearly that kinship bonds can be maintained irrespective of close territorial bonds. In such cases, however, children brought up under the care of rural relatives often form the unifying bond... Thus it is probable that kinship bonds alone, despite their numerous proofs of mutual interdependence- both economic and social- between relatives are not sufficient to overcome great territorial separation." (Hellman, E. 1935: 87)

This suggests that kinship ties facilitated the movement of adults and children between urban and rural areas. Whilst systems of descent, and territorial groupings according to tribal affiliation did not apply in town (Hellman, E. 1948: 191), it appeared that obligations to kin and affines had certainly not declined. The persistence of such obligations, whilst obviously not relicts of a decaying social system, were responses to the exigencies facing African families in the 1930s. It appeared, then, that the changes wrought on kinship systems were not unidirectional, and that these involved a restructuring of family life and marital transactions.

### **Migrant labour and growing marital instability amongst rural families**

Scholars of changes taking place in rural African families during the 1940s pointed to the deleterious effects of migrant labour on agnatic kinship systems. Historically, one of the primary effects of migrant labour is its perpetuation of non-marriage or delayed marriage for those women left behind in rural areas, such as the former Bechuanaland Protectorate (Schapera, I. 1947: 63-65). Schapera (1947) noted that a large proportion of working age men were absent from the Bechuanaland Protectorate during the 1940s (p124), which meant decreased chances of contracting marriages for the women left behind (p118). For those Tswana wives left at home in rural areas, increased periods of separation from their working husbands correlated with higher incidences of conjugal separation or marital dissolution (Schapera, I. 1947: 183-4). Christianisation also meant that polygynous unions were not acceptable or available to these women (p171). Wilson noted a similar pattern amongst Christianised Xhosa-speaking women (Wilson, M. 1981: 143).

Wilson (1981: 136) observed that lengthy periods of migrant labour made protracted marriage negotiations unsuitable for men with little free time to return home to Keiskammahoek in the Eastern Cape. Furthermore, cash remittances from migrant labour - swallowed by rural household consumption (Wilson, M. 1981: 141) - made it difficult, if not impossible, for migrants to discharge their *ilobolo* obligations to their wives' kin. Thus, new forms of marriage such as '*ukuthwala*', a form of elopement with or without parental consent (Wilson, M. et al 1952, Wilson, M. 1981: 135), gradually emerged.

Besides disrupting married life, migrant labour combined with land shortages in Keiskammahoeck, Eastern Cape, had the effect of dispersing agnates (Wilson, M. *et al* 1952: 50, 58). By the 1940s and 1950s the size of rural homesteads had decreased significantly in the Eastern Cape (Wilson, M. *et al* 1952) and Southern Natal (now KwaZulu/Natal) (Reader, D. 1966). Hence, this may explain why rural studies purported that homesteads resembled Western forms of elementary or nuclear families (Wilson, M. *et al* 1952, Reader, D. 1966). In Keiskammahoeck, Eastern Cape, in the 1940s, kin left at home depended on the help of non-kin neighbours in carrying out agricultural tasks, which Wilson *et al* (1952: 69) described as “symptomatic of the general weakening of agnatic ties.” Agnates no longer formed corporate units sharing inheritance and succession rights (Dubb, A. 1974: 460-462).

Whilst these studies of rural families highlighted the decay of agnatic kinship systems, studies of migrant labourers in southern Africa towns focussed upon the reconstruction of social relationships according to tribal categories, kinship and fictive kinship. Mayer (1962: 579) pointed out that the weakness of the detribalisation model did not relate to its observation of changing kinship systems, but its suggestion that this change was 'one-way'. Urbanisation did not necessarily lead to the decay of rural institutions but in some cases, involved the resurfacing of so-called tradition in the urban *work* setting (Epstein, A. 1969: 283), or what Mayer (1962: 587) refers to as "a form of situational selection".

## **Reactions to models of one-way change**

The alternation model developed by the Rhodes-Livingston scholars (Epstein, A. 1969: 275) within Copperbelt mining towns proposed that the rural and urban settings were 'discrete social fields' (See Harries-Jones, P. 1969: 297-8, Howard Ross, M. and T. Weisner 1977, Mayer 1962:576). This is epitomized in Gluckman's (1960 cited in Mayer, P. 1962: 576) statement: "an African miner is a miner". However, the alternation model could not "handle so readily the problem of variation in urban social systems" (Epstein, A. 1969:276). Hence, the social network approach developed in response to rapid urbanisation in southern Africa, in which the complexity of urban populations highlighted the weakness of the structural approach to changing social contexts (Kapferer, B. 1969: 183).

The use of social networks, within an analytical framework (Mitchell, C. 1969: 2), created a new tool for students of large, heterogeneous African populations. Within the social network approach, the content or nature of links "among a defined set of persons" (Mitchell, C. 1969: 2) became the particular focus. The nature of the total links within a network of individuals were "used to interpret the social behaviour of the persons involved" (Mitchell, C. 1969: 2). Epstein (1969: 109) indicates that tracing the egocentric or personal networks of informants in complex urban settings revealed that social relationships, rather than being disorganised, exhibited distinct patterns. Epstein (1969: 79-80) notes:

"Yet despite this apparent confusion of the urban scene, it is equally patent that the Africans who live in Ndola do not compose a mere aggregation of individuals nor a disorganized rabble... It also becomes apparent that within this

framework the Africans have elaborated a complex system of organizing social relationships among themselves...The fact is that each individual African is involved in a *network* of social ties" (italics mine).

Epstein (1969: 90-94) also pointed out that those urban Zambian conditions during the 1960s included limited work opportunities and accommodation reserved for employed residents only. An analysis of the personal network of Chanda, a resident of Ndola, illustrated the importance of *kinship*, including classificatory kinship, which served as a form of insurance for town-dwellers (p99):

"The wide extent and range of kinship recognized in the towns thus introduces an important element of stability into what is an extremely fluid situation."

### **South African labour migrants and their kinship networks**

Similarly, in South Africa, although the process of urbanisation was associated with the 'loosening of kinship ties' in town (Dubb, A. 1974: 458), kinship and fictive kinship became significant categories for interaction. Hence, in town, certain kinship relations 'dissolved' whilst others, particularly adapted to urban conditions, were restructured or reformed. For male migrants to urban areas, the migrant labour experience itself revived ties between rural kinsmen - *amakhaya* - within the urban setting (Mayer, P. 1961, McNamara, J. 1980) or simply ties between men from common rural districts (Wilson, M. and A. Mefeje 1963: 50). In town, then, these links became a 'basis for association' (Dubb, A. 1974: 462).

Concerned with the "process of urbanisation" (Mayer, P. 1962: 580) in South Africa, Mayer (1961, 1962) proposed that scholars trace the personal networks of labour migrants. He noted that urbanisation entailed a complex "balance between within-town

and extra-town ties" (Harries-Jones, P. 1969: 298). Mayer (1962: 576-7) observed that labour migrants to East London retained ties to their rural homes through home visits and their personal networks in town. Mayer (1961, 1962) also highlighted the role of kin in facilitating the move of these individuals to East London despite periods of mutual absences. Both Christianised and conservative migrants to East London drew upon kinship ties in finding shelter, although the range of kin drawn upon differed for the two categories. Conservative male migrants drew solely upon agnatic kin links, whilst 'school' migrants utilised a wider category of maternal and paternal kin. The close-knit or dense networks of conservative or 'Red' migrants to East London, during the 1950s, served to 'encapsulate' (Mayer 1980: 59) these rural migrants. In contrast the networks of 'School' or christianised Xhosa did not encompass a uniform set of norms and values, predominantly because these individuals were scattered within different types of voluntary associations, such as church groups or social clubs (Mayer, P. 1961 pp. 206-223).

### **Multiplex and dormant relationships**

From Mayer's (1961, 1962, 1980) study, two particular concepts emerge that relate to the types of support networks that have developed within the context of the Southern African migrant labour system, namely, multiplex and dormant relationships.

Multiplexity within the social network approach refers to the greater ability of individuals to mobilise or to obligate one another, where their relationship contains more than one aspect or dimension (Mitchell, C. 1969: 23, Kapferer, B. 1969:213). For example, the links amongst homeboy networks were 'multiplex' or 'many stranded' (Mitchell, C. 1969: 22) in that membership of homeboy units was prescribed by both

agnatic ties *and* common rural origin (Mayer, P. 1981: 59). As such, these close-knit networks curtailed the behaviour and choices of individual migrants. Hence, whilst a network does not exist as a corporate entity, it may encompass a collective moral sphere or a shared set of norms and values. For example, Mayer (1981: 58) noted of red migrants that 'going home is a moral duty'. This derives in part from Gluckman's (1962, 1965:256-7) thesis that within small-scale, that is, 'diffuse' or multiplex societies, various social relationships fall within overlapping subsystems, which must be separated from one another by the 'ritualization of social relationships' (1962: 25). In other words, prescribed behaviour serves to differentiate roles that are not morally separate (1962: 27-29).

Despite the moral duty to return home, the system of South African state control during the 1950s and 1960s made it difficult for urban workers to visit their rural homes without jeopardizing their rights to urban work and residence (Harries-Jones 1969: 298). Mayer (1962: 583) noted the tendency for labour migrants to reside permanently in town in between "frequent [but] brief visits" to their rural homes. This suggests that links between urban workers and their rural kin remained dormant for periods of time. It is clear that then heightened levels of mobility combined with rural-urban migration had recreated kinship ties. Subsequent studies of urban families in Southern Africa during the 1960s also revealed how consanguineal relationships, especially links to mothers, siblings and other maternal cognates, gradually became a basis for organising family life in urban areas.

## **Uterine kin and urban households**

Marwick (1978) and Pauw (1963 [1979]) highlighted the emergence of urban households extended through uterine kin, especially, mothers and daughters, in East London and the Witwatersrand, respectively. In 1961, Marwick (1978) conducted a random sample survey of five hundred households in a Witwatersrand Township. The survey highlighted two seemingly incompatible patterns of household formation, with respect to the extended families that comprised just over a quarter of the sample (1978:43). Two forms of household extension existed: one through male heads and one through the daughters of the male heads (p43). The latter referred to the incorporation of the extra-marital children of these daughters (p43). Marwick conceded the existence of "a somewhat larger proportion [than he expected] of extended families, among a few of which traditional principles of social organization have been superseded by the more elemental link between mother and child" (1978: 46). Marwick's (1978) relatively small fraction of households extended to include a daughter's children or a wife's cognates, or headed by women, constituted a greater proportion of Pauw's (1979) sample of East London households.

Pauw (1979: 149) noted that "the elementary family is not the predominant form of domestic family among that part of the population that has been established in town [East London] the longest". Pauw's (1979: 144-5) study showed that male-headed and, to a lesser extent, female-headed, multi-generation households predominated. This seminal study also revealed that "maternal kin had assumed far greater importance than in the traditional system. These kin included the mother's patrilineage and other cognates related through women and even the wife's parents and family" (Dubb, A.

1974: 467). Here one also notes the growth of a small category of (post-marital) 'multi-generation *female-headed* households' (Pauw, B. 1979: 111, italics mine) and of "the overriding importance of the mother in the household structure." (p.139). Pauw (1978) observed that it was normal for children to be born before men or women married. Hence, a single woman and her pre-marital children were simply incorporated her mother's (p111) or father's household (p152). Thus, Pauw noted "the presence of a category of women who rear children without ever getting married, as part of their own mother's domestic families" (p111). Thus, a woman who married after the birth of a child or children left these children with her mother, unless she married their father. In these cases, the children were incorporated into two-generation male-headed families (p. 139). Hence, the proportion of Pauw's single, as opposed to post-marital, female heads was relatively small. This highlights that both Marwick (1978) and Pauw's (1979) studies of urban households did not point to the instability of marriage per se. However, Preston-Whyte (1969, 1978, 1981, 1988) observed amongst female migrants to Durban during the 1960s, a category of mothers and daughters that both remained unmarried.

### **Female-linked families: a response to conjugal instability and female migrancy**

Preston-Whyte's (1969) study of female migrants revealed the existence of families consisting primarily of close female kin that coped with the need to combine full-time domestic work with the care of dependent children. Mother-daughter, and to a lesser extent, sororal dyads presented examples of multiplex social relationships adapted to the exigencies of migrant labour (Preston-Whyte, E. 1978: 69-70). Each woman took turns to switch back and forth between the role of (sociological) mother and breadwinner (p74). Adult men, such as brothers or sons, although not completely absent from such

families, tended not to maintain long-term supportive links to their female kin, especially after they had married and set up their own households (p. 75-77).

Preston-Whyte (1978: 69-70) points out that consanguineal ties and not conjugal relationships provided a source of *long-term* support for these female migrants. Possibly, these dyadic arrangements illustrated "that resources under the control of women are more likely to be devoted to children than are resources in the hands of men" (Moore, H. 1994: 8). The reasons why some of the migrants left their rural homes clearly illustrate the difficulties faced by rural women, who by circumstance or choice obtained no material support from spouses and affines. Firstly, over a third of Preston-Whyte's (1981:161-2) sample of Zulu-speaking female migrants living in Durban during the 1960s, had left their rural homes following widowhood, a husband's desertion or conflict with their affines. Secondly, unmarried women in KwaZulu and the former Natal provinces "could not hold residential or arable land in [their] own right" (Preston-Whyte, E 1981: 164). Thirdly, some of these migrants were Christians who came to work in Durban so as to avoid entering into polygynous unions (Preston-Whyte, E. 1981: 162, 165). Hence, a single woman increased her chances of contracting a marriage through her migration to an urban area (Preston-Whyte, E. 1981:164). Of course, some married women migrated to Durban to join their husbands (Preston-Whyte, E. 1981).

Preston-Whyte (1969) initially described the types of families that formed around female migrants as 'female-dominated'. However, she later renamed these 'female-centered' or 'female-linked' families (1978: 59, 1981: 171, 1988, 1992), partly to avoid confusion with Smith's (1956) concept of the matrifocal family. Smith's (1956) earlier work among 'matrifocal' families in the Caribbean revealed the existence of adaptive mother-headed

households amongst low socio-economic groupings. However, subsequent studies of female-headed households or families in Southern Africa revealed clear differences between these respective models. The term 'female-headed household' refers primarily to a structural feature of African families, in which men, as husbands or fathers, are absent from domestic units (Preston-Whyte, E. 1978). Smith's (1956) matrifocal model derived from his research in three villages in British Guiana, where he noted the existence of affective and economic ties between a woman and her children (p115). However, when Smith (p148) pointed to the marginal position of the husband-father in relation to the mother-child unit, he did not imply the husband to be absent from this unit. The husband-father was the acknowledged and effective head of the family, expected to provide the goods and services necessary for its survival. However, the high status accorded to the wife as a *mother*, meant that in the post-marital stage, she was more likely to step into the role of primary decision-maker with authority over her adult children and dependent grandchildren (1956: 227-8).

Preston-Whyte (1988: 64) cautions that a *de facto* resident African woman, living without a spouse or other kinsmen, does not necessarily stand as head of her co-residential unit. Although such a woman may bear responsibility for the material wellbeing of her family, this woman may not necessarily be able to make decisions in her husband or son's absence. This highlights the role strain that a married woman faces, as well as, the ambiguity of the ubiquitous descriptor: 'female-head'.

"[It] is unwise to treat female headship as a unitary phenomenon. The very definition of headship complicates the picture because of the variable relationship between economic provision, decision-making and power/authority structures. Women, for example, are rarely classified as heads even when they are the major economic providers if there is a male over 15 in the household, while men are frequently designated as the head even when they are not the major provider" (Moore, H. 1994: 8).

Marwick's (1978), Pauw's (1963) and Preston-Whyte's (1969) studies of urban families revealed the growing importance of consanguineal ties, especially those between female kin. Yet, rural studies in the 1970s examining the impact of migrant labour revealed contradictory patterns, such as the persistence of virilocal marriage coupled with household extension through women. Rural studies noted the vulnerability, in economic terms, of small female-headed households without men to enter labour migrancy (Sharp, J. 1994: 75).

James (1985) found amongst her sample of Pedi and Ndebele families in Morotse, Lebowa that small female-headed households -those without links to a woman's agnates - were amongst the most isolated and destitute of all family types. Spiegel (1981) also described female-headed households in Lesotho as "fallen by the wayside of the typical development cycle". This suggests that migrant labour did not necessarily engender a one-way change from agnatic kinship principles to families consisting primarily of maternal cognates. James (1985) notes that the disintegration of certain features associated with agnatic family systems involved rather a restructuring of social relations. James (1985: 162) highlights this point in her study of rural Lebowa households:

"Rather than seeing the resulting family and households types of this village as fragmented or altered survivals of original, functional whole, it seems more useful to look at these structures as having evolved via a series of complex historical processes, and as having some underlying logic of their own. I thus follow Schapera in preferring the word "reconstruction" when describing the changes in family life, rather than "disintegration" (1940: 356)".

## **The differential impact of migrant labour during the 1970s and 1980s**

Detailed ethnographic studies, such as Murray's (1980, 1981), of the impact of migrant labour in South Africa during the 1970s addressed the dichotomy between inter-household ties through men and intra-household ties through women (1980: 146). Murray (1980, 1981) cautioned that critiques of the migrant labour system, whilst rightfully illustrating the negative impact of migrant labour on family life, carry with them particular assumptions or stereotypes of African family systems. These stereotypes purport that either the nuclear family or the extended family forms a 'baseline' from which to measure the effects of the migrant labour system (Murray, C. 1980: 148-152, 1981:100-104). For example, Murray cautions against critiques that refute the existence of nuclear families by pointing to the alleged presence of extended families (1981: 103). These critiques fail to take into account "the diverse *temporal* processes" (1981: 107, italics mine) that shape family systems in Southern Africa, and that the process of change within African families is not unidirectional, but complexly linked to macro-economic forces and, to a lesser extent, the domestic cycle.

The dependence of Basotho migrants upon migrant wage-earnings entailed both a 'dissolving' and 'conserving' of kinship relations (1981:143). Hence, whilst Schapera and Roberts (1975) observed that the basic agnatic principles of a Tswana ward remained in place between Schapera's (1935) survey in 1934 and Roberts' survey in 1973:

"Roberts also found the following features: firstly, a high rate of individual mobility, in the sense that many people who nominally belonged to the ward were absent, mostly as temporary labour migrants to South Africa...; secondly, a high proportion of adult women (40 out of 73) who had never married; and,

thirdly, a high proportion of children (65 out of 162)...born to such women."  
(Murray, C. 1980:145)

Murray's (1981, 1980) own work amongst rural Basotho households parallels this contradiction between inter- and intra- household relationships. Murray (1981) indicated that relationships between household heads were predominantly along agnatic lines, noting the presence of virilocal marriage, the passage of bridewealth (*bohali*), and the persistence of deference behaviour (*hlonipha*) expected of young wives vis-à-vis their affines. However, high levels of pre-marital births and marital or conjugal dissolution characterised intra-household relationships. Yet Murray (1980: 146) indicates that this apparent contradiction between inter-household and intra-household relationships is understandable in terms of "the dual role of the labour reserve" (1980: 143). The labour reserve served to reproduce the labour force, but also discharged the state's duty to provide adequate social security for migrant workers and their families. The passage of bridewealth and the persistence of virilocal marriage in Basotho households did not imply the conservatism of such people. Rather, the persistence of such features of traditional agnatic systems, highlighted that "bridewealth payments are critical budget items in household strategies of subsistence" (Murray, C. 1976: 100).

In Burnshill in the Eastern Cape, migrant wages made neolocal residence possible for some migrant workers, and perhaps even necessitated the setting up of independent households (Manona, C. 1981: 201). With no time for lengthy negotiations, and unable to afford *ilobolo* payments (Manona, C. 1981: 191-2) some residents simply 'eloped', by entering '*ukuthwala*' arrangements (Manona, M. 1981:189). Yet, migrancy was also associated with increased dissolution of marriages amongst Xhosa-speaking residents in Burnshill (Manona, C. 1981: 197-8). The migrant labour system weighed heavily upon

conjugal relationships, prolonged absences making it difficult for stable relationships to develop between husbands and wives (Murray, C. 1981). Marital dissolution and conflict with affines led some women to migrate from Keiskammahoek (Manona, C. 1981: 198). Some women coped by migrating from Burnshill to join their husbands in town (Manona, C. 1981: 188).

Manona's (1981) and Murray's (1976, 1980, 1981) studies of the impact of migrant labour reveal both the persistence of, and burden placed upon, agnatic family systems and marital relationships. Consequently, nuclear (or conjugal) *and* extended (or consanguineal) households emerge in various urban and rural settings as situational adaptations to the exigencies of labour migrancy. Murray (1980, 1981) makes an invaluable contribution in pointing out the changing nature of rural households over time, in noting the diverse types of households, and, especially, in distinguishing *de jure* from *de facto* household members. For his sample of households in Lesotho, Murray (1981:48) chooses co-residence as the determining factor for *de facto* membership, and a maximum period of absence plus some form of income sharing, as criteria for *de jure* membership. Without refuting the relevance of such terms to Murray's (1981) Lesotho sample, his use of two different types of household membership masks the actual *movement* of individuals between households:

"[T]he *actual* processes whereby individuals enter and exit the spatial boundaries of the household, and by which households are formed, joined dissolved, and reformed through time *and across space*, have remained largely invisible" (Jones, S. 1993a: 3, italics original)

However, a concern with the movement of individuals between households also points to limitations with the concept, household, itself. Cross-cultural studies of kinship networks in the context of rural-urban migration and intra-urban mobility have raised questions as to whether the concept of 'household' is a significant unit of analysis. This is especially so where survival is not dependent on an autonomous income-pooling unit, but on the mobilisation of a wider range of social relationships based on physical and / or social proximity.

### **Kinship networks in cross-cultural perspective**

Studies of impoverished shack dwellers in Latin America (Lomnitz, L. 1977) and among black American families (Stack, C. 1974a, 1974b) highlighted the importance of *kinship networks* in mediating economic insecurity. Cross-cultural studies of Latin American shantytowns or shack settlements in the 1960's and 1970's contributed significantly to an understanding of the structuring (or restructuring) of social relationships in contexts of scarce resources. Lomnitz (1977: 102-4) examined the role of extended family networks in the context of rural-urban migration, highlighting that the exigency of poverty and migration did not necessarily break-up families but resulted in the mobilisation of ties between kin and affines. Hence, she noted "the characteristic evolution of family-kinship patterns in the shantytown are actually conditioned by the imperatives of economic and social survival" (1977:93).

Rural migrants to New Mexico, as well as those moving within Mexico's Federal District itself, drew upon relatives in their initial move to the city, then moving on to establish homes for themselves (1977:2). Some of these migrants eventually lost touch

with relatives who remained behind in the countryside. At the time of Lomnitz's research, C errada del Condor was approximately twenty-years-old (1977: 25). Like this settlement, the older settlements in New Mexico contained more extended families, whilst more recently established settlements were populated with nuclear families (Ward 1976: 336 cited in Lomnitz, L. 1977: 117). This suggests that migrant either joined or were later joined by their kin and affines.

The types of supportive arrangements that developed in the C errada del Condor shantytown comprised networks of extended family members, fictive kin, neighbours and friends. These individuals and families who lived in close proximity to one another and experienced the same degree of material insecurity, engaged in intensive, daily exchanges of goods and services, (Lomnitz, L. 1977: 100-2, 117, 132-4, 156-7). Peattie (1972:51-2, 55) also observed that localised kinship networks in Barrio La Laja comprised both kin and fictive kin. For Lomnitz (1977), however, localised kinship ties constituted the core of reciprocity networks in C errada del Condor, as kinship ties constituted "long-term social relationship[s]" (1977: 3).

### **'Kin-structured domestic networks': an early household critique:**

Stack's (1974a, 1974b) study of the movement of adults and children between domestic units within a Black ghetto presents one of the earliest critiques of the concept of the household. Stack (1974a, 1974b) looks closely at the crucial links between domestic fluidity and 'kin-structured domestic networks' (1974b: .94). Stack's (1974a, 1974b: 31) research in The Flats, a slum in the American Midwest, illustrated that households do not necessarily have long-term boundaries. As Preston-Whyte (1988: 69) comments,

“...Stack pointed out that black American households actually consist of people who are related to each other but whom the exigency of poverty and migration often disperse for longer or shorter periods of time. In processual terms these households seem to ‘come and go’”.

Commensal, residential and child-care units were spread across the slum, and the composition of these units frequently shifted. However, adaptive ego-centered support networks, comprising kin and non-kin members, mobilised to provide accommodation and meet childcare needs. Female kin and affines formed 'domestic networks' that organised the care of children (Stack, C. 1974b: 114). Stack (1974b: 29) recognised that both kin (blood relatives and affines) and non-kin (friends and neighbours) participated equally in the various domestic activities spread across several residential units. However, socially recognised close kin formed the core of the "localized kin-based...coalitions" (1974b: 94).

"Of the two, the kin network is *more enduring* because all of an individual's essential kin are "recognized as having same duties toward him and some claims on him" (Fox 1967, p167). Friendships end and that is to be expected; new friendships can be formed. But the number of relatives who can be called upon for help from personal kinship networks is *limited*" (1974b: 61, italics mine).

Each network of kin comprised a limited number of individuals who recognised their obligations towards one other, but could not necessarily provide support at any one point. This suggests that individuals in The Flats mobilised support from those friends, affines and neighbours, whilst links between some kin members remained dormant.

## **Domestic fluidity and the household critique in South Africa: recent studies**

A concern with the relevance of the household as a significant unit of analysis emerged in South Africa in the 1990s from studies, such as Ross' (1993) in Cape Town, which revealed extremely high levels of domestic fluidity amongst residents of an informal settlement. Initially, scholars such as Spiegel (1986: 33) had suggested the need to document "the distribution and re-allocation of *people* between households" (1986: 33, italics original). However, the growing realisation that amongst low-income black families in Southern Africa, adults and children did not necessarily reside within permanently within 'discrete, persisting, resource-sharing residential units on the basis of marriage and progeny' (Russell, M 1998: 174), has highlighted the sociological significance of domestic fluidity.

Ross' (1993, 1996) recent study of the impoverished 'coloured' residents of a squatter settlement in Somerset West, Cape Town, revealed extremely high levels of residential mobility. The composition of domestic units constantly changed in response to unpredictable factors such as, shack fires, domestic violence, and seasonal or temporary employment (Ross, F. 1993, 1996). The mobility of men, women and children highlighted the limitations of a concept such as the 'household'. Ross' (1993, 1996) main contention is that in certain contexts the processes of consumption and reproduction, normally associated with a bounded unit such as the household, do not necessarily overlap. These respective processes displayed little regularity in terms of when or where individuals carried them out. The composition of residential and commensal units in Die Bos squatter settlement in Somerset West, changed so frequently that Ross (1996: 56) concluded:

"[Households] in Die Bos did not appear to be unique, autonomous entities with occasional mis- or re-placed elements. Rather, they were the (temporary) loci of densely packed social conglomerates that altered rapidly over time."

Ross (1993: 158) noted that mothers, fathers and children did not necessarily move from place to place as one unit. In a similar vein, Jones' (1993: 2) biographical study of the experiences of children living in Guguletu hostels challenge the notion that the children of migrants remain ensconced within grandparent families. Ross (1993:158, italics mine) concluded:

"[No] longer can a domestic unit be assumed to be simply a reproductive unit. Indeed, its reproductive functions cannot be taken for granted. Instead we need to examine *individuals, their movements and their social networks* in order to make sense of the larger social aggregations in which they live"

Ross' (1993: 153) observation that groupings formed and dissolved around the activities associated with residence, commensality, fuel-collection and fuel-use did not automatically imply an absence of a sense of belonging to a particular place or space. The high levels of intra-settlement mobility masked intense, short-term, reciprocal arrangements (Ross, F. 1993: 146, 1996: 60) in which residents created both instrumental and moral links to those kin, non-kin or friends, at hand. However, Ross (1996: 60) noted that residents of Die Bos preferred not to obligate neighbouring kin "because kinship required maintenance of social relationships over extended periods". Hence, long-term obligations to kin were incompatible with the rapidly shifting nature of this unauthorised settlement.

### **Challenging assumptions: matrifilial, female-headed and sibling families**

Studies of matrifilial families (Jones, S 1993c, 1996), female-headed (Van der Vliet, V. 1984) and sibling households (Niehaus, I. 1988, 1994) have also challenged the assumption that households (or domestic units) necessarily incorporate marital or conjugal unions. These studies have highlighted that consanguineal and not conjugal relationships provided a source of economic support for women. Jones (1993, 1996) study of African women living in a peri-urban settlement in Bathurst, Eastern Cape noted the presence of matrifilial families consisting of unmarried mothers and daughters. The decision of these women to remain unmarried related partly to the absence of working-age men.

In her study of black women living in Grahamstown's townships, Van der Vliet (1984) noted that single and married women viewed husbands (and marriage) as an economic drain. Black women, of varying occupational statuses, pointed to "his [the husband's] unwillingness to pull his weight financially" (1984: 4). Van der Vliet (1984: 4-6) observed that some Black women viewed husbands as liabilities, unwilling to share their income equitably, but seeking to control their wives' personal decisions regarding such matters as contraception or employment. However, Van der Vliet (1984: 7) also noted that male kin formed part of these women's 'emotional' support networks. Whisson (1979) cited in Van der Vliet (1984: 14) highlights the economic marginality of men in respect of mother-child units:

"In short, the adult male, regardless of his self-image, is economically superfluous in a small but growing proportion of families at certain points in the economic spectrum."

Similarly, Boonzaier and Ramphele's (1988) description of living conditions in Western Cape hostels, especially the relationships between male bedholders and female migrants (their wives or girlfriends) reveals the tensions that limited urban accommodation created between conjugal or marital couples. The authors note the desperation engendered by extremely limited urban accommodation:

" [This] places men in an enormously powerful position over women, making the hostels truly 'a man's world'. This power manifests itself in various forms - such as denying women the right to participate in decision-making and placing on them the burden of complete responsibility for domestic chores" (1988: 158).

Although single women in the hostels found themselves in a slightly more vulnerable position than married women (Boonzaier, E. and M. Ramphele 1988: 159), some of these women actively chose to remain unmarried, manipulating sexual relationships as a means to access scarce accommodation.

Niehaus' (1988, 1994: 136) study of sibling households in a QwaQwa township challenged the assumption that households necessarily include conjugal or mother-child units. Here, women were forced to enter the labour force through economic necessity. This meant that married women had to manage a "double workload" (Cock et al 1986, cited in Niehaus 1994: 131), in order to meet notions of domesticity as well as to support their families. However, sibling households effectively reduced the role strain that women in conjugal households experienced:

"It is argued that a situation of patriarchal dominance has undermined stable employment among married workers. However, single workers were without such responsibilities and could achieve greater economic status." (1994: 123)

The dichotomy between sibling relationships and marital relationships in Qwaqwa parallels such relationships in South America (Lomnitz, L. 1977). Amongst shantytown families in Mexico, Lomnitz (1977: 95-6) noted that marital relationships were inherently restrictive for women. Husbands disapproved of their wives taking up employment. However, both partners formed intense social relationships outside of the marital unit, a husband with his friends and a wife with her siblings and children. Niehaus (1994: 118) explains the contradiction between sibling and marital households in Qwaqwa by drawing upon Levi-Strauss' (1968) observation of the "structural opposition between relations of consanguinity (among siblings) and affinity (among spouses)". Within classical (African) kinship systems, Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 19-20) highlighted the structural equivalence of siblings on ego's mother's and father's sides respectively. Hence, the affective bond between a mother and her children extended to the mother's kin, especially the mother's brother, as well as to maternal ancestors. Unlike the paternal ancestors, maternal ancestors are perceived not as punitive agents, but as protectors who can be appealed to for help (Niehaus 1994: 127-8). However, in QwaQwa, sibling families allowed for the switching of gender roles:

“As a malome (mother’s brother) he was content to look after and care for J.T’s four-year-old daughter while J.T. was at work.” (Niehaus, I 1994: 125)

Niehaus (1988, 1994) recognises the differential effects of migrant labour and particular ways of coping, that is, "reconstructing households", in the midst of poverty, dislocation and limited employment. Hence, sibling households as well as the wider role of siblingship, in Qwaqwa, suggested that men did at times form supportive relationships with their female kin. Of course, such domestic arrangements also related to the decaying basis of domestic patriarchy. Bank illustrates that:

"The basis of domestic patriarchy in urban households rested rather on the economic power of male wages and on men's superior access to urban resources such as residence rights, accommodation and social services" (1994: 96)

For example, in Qwaqwa, during the 1970s, labour recruitment offices reserved employment contracts for men only leaving domestic units without working-age men extremely disadvantaged (Sharp, J. 1994: 75). However, by the 1980s, factories in Phuthaditjaba (Qwaqwa) were employing more women, a cheap labour supply (Sharp, J. 1994: 82-5). For men, the changes in Qwaqwa in the 1980s challenged their "male domestic authority" (Sharp, J. 1994: 84). These patterns challenge assumptions that households form bounded income-pooling units, assumptions which mask 'intra-household' conflict over the allocation of resources.

For example, Wilk and Netting (1984) note the lack of information regarding the presence or absence of income sharing within domestic units. Observations that individuals within some low-income domestic units rely on income derived from vulnerable economic sectors (See Rogerson, C. 1991: 209) suggests that the function of 'income-pooling' obscures desperation strategies to earn a living. One such strategy is for women to engage in informal sector or low-paid factory work. Whilst some income-generating strategies fall within the ideological and practical boundaries of domesticity (See Preston-Whyte, E. 1991, 1992, Preston-Whyte and Nene 1984), others create conflict between husbands and wives (see Niehaus, I. 1988, 1994, Bank, L. 1994).

It appears, then, that ethnographic studies of domestic fluidity highlight the fact that households or domestic units subsume a number of *logically and empirically* distinct variables, namely, kinship, residence and domestic functions (See Bender, D. 1967,

Clark, M. 1984, Wilk, R. *et al* 1984). Bohannan (1963: 86, cited in Bender 1967) reiterates that reducing family to localised residential unit, or vice versa, by defining one according to the other, constitutes unsound reasoning. The degree to which relationships of affinity or consanguinity overlap with a localised residential unit is ethnographically specific (Bender, D. 1967). Thus, in some contexts, kinship relationships are described in a metaphorical (Moore, H. 1994: 3) or analytical sense, as networks (Segalen, M. 1984: 163), such as Stack's (1974a: 94, 1974b: 115-6) 'kin-structured domestic networks'. It is perhaps understandable that Russell (1998) cautions against research that attempts draw conclusions about black family patterns in South Africa through one-off surveys of residential compositions.

However, Verdon (1979, 1980) provides a useful mechanism for examining the relationship between kinship and residence, without reducing one to the other. Verdon (1979, 1980), in adopting an operational approach to the study of localised grouping, suggests that residence simply refers to "the occupation of a dwelling place for the purpose of sleeping" (1979: 402). Verdon (1979: 405) proposes that an analysis of the links between a residential sponsor (or amongst sponsors) and co-resident members would provide some insight as the criteria for membership of a co-resident grouping. This method could provide some insight into the processes that govern residence (or domesticity), without necessarily reducing residence to kinship or marriage.

### **The unit of the present study:**

The present study traces the movement of individuals and families, viewed as part of the quest by these men and women to manage scarce resources. This takes heed of the emphasis placed on the importance of co-operative links between low-income domestic units. Of course, such a focus begs the question of what constitutes a basic unit of analysis, such as domestic unit, family or social network. The emphasis placed on individuals and their personal or ego-centred networks suggests that particular types of social relationships underpin domestic fluidity as a survival strategy. Whether or not consanguineal or affinal relationships underpin the phenomenon requires further exploration. The 'domestic unit' is the manifestation of a particular set of social relationships, and as such, its fluid nature may simply reflect these relationships.

In other words, the domestic unit emerges as some combination of one or more of the functional criteria of co-residence, income sharing, commensality and reproduction (Spiegel, A. 1986, Spiegel, A. et al 1996). These criteria are in themselves obviously the particular product of a social relationship between two or more persons. If one recognises this, then, concepts such as the household or domestic unit are relatively unproblematic. However, it is crucial that the type and form those social relationships take, be given *a priori* status. Hence, an examination of individuals and their social networks provides a way of exploring domestic fluidity without assuming an overlap between kinship ties and localised residential units. The domestic unit necessarily represents *something else*, and it is imperative to elicit its particular workings through detailed investigation. Paradoxically, this may explain why Preston-Whyte (1988)

accorded the term 'household' a neutral status, as the concept itself does not indicate the nature of social relationships between its constituent members.

### **Chapter Three: Contextualising Old Dunbar informal settlement**

This chapter places the establishment of Old Dunbar within the context of local events in Durban in 1994, namely, the role played by individuals or 'bridgeheads' in organisation the initial illegal settlement on the land in question. However, I also point to changes in the legislative system during the 1980s which eased the movement of informal settlers into core areas of the city originally designated for 'whites' only. From a broader perspective, the growth of informal settlement in Durban has to be situated within the wider historical framework of urbanisation policy in South Africa. Informal settlements are certainly not a phenomenon limited to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nor to the city of Durban. They represent desperate efforts by individuals and families to access scarce urban resources within a context of limited township housing, and partial or total exclusion of black individuals from urban areas. As such, chapter three also examines the poor conditions under which men, women and children live in Old Dunbar.

#### **The Formation of 'Old Dunbar'**

Informal settlements including Old Dunbar have grown steadily on areas of land in the Wiggins / Umkumbaan area since 1989. During 1993 and early 1994, the settlement of Old Dunbar was largely hidden from the authorities as relatively few squatters had as yet built their shacks in this area (Makhatini, M. 1994). The mass movement of informal settlers into Old Dunbar in July 1994 coincided with the launching of plans to develop the area. The government appointed land developer, the Cato Manor Development Association (C.M.D.A.), in consultation with the Regional Housing Board (R.H.B.) earmarked the land on which Old Dunbar now falls for the development of low-cost housing. However, shortly after the C.M.D.A. had surveyed the site, the building of between 150 and 500

shacks on the land in question brought matters to a head. It was reported that a network of marshals or 'bridgeheads', operating from the established settlement of Cato Crest, had moved onto municipal land (R.H.B. Agenda Document 72/94-08-17, Daily News 23/08/94).

The former Natal Provincial Administration had granted Cato Crest informal settlement qualified recognition in 1987 (Hindson, D. et al 1994: 3) after the proclamation of the Abolition of Influx Control Act 68/1986 (Robertson, M. 1990: 122). Six years later it was estimated that 10 000 'squatters' were living in this area dubbed "shackland" (Sunday Times 12/9/93, Natal Mercury 21/10/93). The Cato Crest bridgeheads built shacks in Old Dunbar, which they then sold or leased to newcomers. Tensions ran high, and the former Minister of Housing and Local Government, Peter Miller, was quoted as saying of these individuals:

" They are a bunch of land grabbing renegades and opportunists " (Weekly Mail and Guardian 18/08/94)

At this point, ownership of the land on which Old Dunbar now stands had not transferred from the legal landowner to the C.M.D.A. The R.H.B. instructed the *de jure* owner of the land, that is, the National Housing Board, to apply for an eviction order, to be carried out only on further instruction from the R.H.B.'s office (R.H.B. Agenda Document). However, the Legal Resources Centre brought an application to the Supreme Court on behalf of four resident squatters in Old Dunbar. This application attempted to prevent the intended evictions by challenging the constitutionality of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act 52/1951 (R.H.B. Agenda Document, Daily News 17/08/94, Sunday Times 14/08/94). Sutcliffe et al (1990: 91) point out that amendments to the Prevention of Illegal Squatting

Act in 1988 attempted to replace certain functions of influx control abolished in 1986, as part of the states' policy of "orderly urbanisation".

However, an out of court agreement<sup>1</sup> was reached, leading to negotiations between the squatters, the C.M.D.A, South African National Civic Organisation (S.A.N.C.A) and People's Dialogue (also known as Homeless Peoples Project). In an unwritten agreement between these parties, the C.M.D.A. conceded that the informal settlers who were living in Old Dunbar Road could remain, but that no further settlement was to take place. On the 28 August 1994, the C.M.D.A. organised three buses to take residents to the City Hall where details of the agreement were conveyed to them. Residents who were *bone fide*, that is, who had no other homes in Cato Crest or elsewhere in Durban could stay but the C.M.D.A. intended to move them to a reception area, with rudimentary services, adjacent to Old Dunbar Road. These residents would then be entitled to low-cost housing developed in Old Dunbar Road.

On 31 August 1994 and the 1 September 1994, the Institute for Social and Economic Reform (I.S.E.R.) began registration of the informal settlers, giving 'eligible' residents red coupons. However, within the first week of September 1994, the C.M.D.A. noted that more new people were still moving into Old Dunbar Road. A count in October 1994 by the former Old Dunbar civic executive revealed that Old Dunbar numbered some 2000 shacks and 11000 residents (Jones, S. et al 1996: 11). Initially, residents had arrived from the nearby 'squatter' settlements of Cato Crest, Ensebene, and Ematendene. However, once a considerable number of shacks were built on the land in question, people from further afield decided to take the risk and move to Old Dunbar because the land was 'free'.

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<sup>1</sup> I obtained this information in an interview with Clive Forster, C.E.O. of the C.M.D.A.

These individuals and families came from Durban's overcrowded townships, their adjoining squatter settlements, and further removed peri-urban districts.

The increasing numbers of individuals moving into Old Dunbar led one of the joint landowners, the N.P.A. to successfully apply, on the 21 September 1994, for a court order to evict the squatters (Daily News 22/09/94). This meant that authorities had to deliver eviction notices *before* the demolition of shacks could begin. Although the authorities did not have the legal right to evict the residents en masse, they did make use of a loophole in the law. Notably, the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act 51/1952, subsequently amended in 1988 does grant "landowners, local authorities and provincial officials powers of summary demolition" (O'Regan, C 1990: 172). Amendments to the act in March of 1988 intended to increase the powers of the municipal authorities to prevent informal settlements regarded as "disorderly". The amendments intended to rule out permission granted by the landowner, or a lack of alternative accommodation, as sufficient reasons to remain (Raubenheimer, R. 1988: 6). In other words, structures erected on land without the permission of the landowner or legal land occupier could be demolished without a court order.

The authorities hired a private security company to demolish shacks, and residents referred to this period, from the end of September 1994 onwards, as 'the time of George'. George was a white security guard employed to dismantle shacks, which he did when residents left their homes during the day for various reasons. Hence, most of people who arrived before or during this period had to rebuild their homes several times. However, attempts to deter residents by demolishing their shacks had little effect as residents simply rebuilt their dwellings speedily.

The residents defied the eviction threats on mass by opposing to a summons that selected only the ringleaders to appear in court. Nkanza Ngwenya, one of the residents in the forefront of trying to resist eviction, recalled her version of events:

"They said, 'please, we just want to give you these pieces of paper [eviction notices]'. I shouted, 'don't come here! If you want to send something just drop the paper out of the helicopter.' " Eventually all residents had been given eviction notices, but only the four 'squatter' ringleaders were requested to be present in court. "Why should we just go when everyone was given a piece of paper? We are not like cats you know - we cannot be bribed. Why did they give everyone pieces of paper, but they say the court is too small? We all went to court in Smith Street in six buses, cars and taxis. We all stood outside the court and told the magistrate to come outside and speak to us. Clive Forster and Dan Smit told us to go back to Old Dunbar. They would develop the land. I told them they must move in here and develop it. They must remember what the court said."

On 21 October 1994, the C.M.D.A., the Old Dunbar marshals (community policing), and People's Dialogue formulated a written agreement. Again, the parties agreed that the current residents of Old Dunbar could remain within a demarcated area, as long as the team of marshals in Old Dunbar prevented more people from moving into the settlement. In February 1995, I.S.E.R. undertook yet another survey and registration of the shack dwellers. In June 1995, a Development Committee (DEVCO.) was formed in order to submit a Provincial Housing Board Subsidy application in order to develop the area.

As planned, by June of 1996, the municipality had widened and tarred Dunbar Road, and added a water main to the road. Some of the shack dwellers whose homes had been demolished to make way for the road were provided with low cost housing in the adjacent Fast Track housing project in East Wiggins. However, in June of 1996, just before fieldwork commenced, conflict erupted between the Old Dunbar residents and their leadership. The latter comprised a civic organisation, local A.N.C. youth league, and a team of marshals. The incident that sparked the conflict involved the price of water.

Residents disputed the high price of 25 cents per twenty-five litres of water. Some individual or individuals within the ranks of the leadership vandalised one of the few taps in Old Dunbar, seemingly to prevent residents from taking water without paying. This action meant that the residents had to walk some distance to the nearest tap, an arduous task given the weight of a twenty-five-litre drum of water. The residents of Old Dunbar responded by reporting the vandalisers to the police and ejecting the bulk of their leadership from the settlement. The residents also accused the head of the civic organisation, Mr. Ben Ntembu, of corruption. Mr. Ntembu, a middle-aged man, purportedly representing the best interests of the community, had allegedly sold non-existent houses and plots of land to desperate outsiders. He and some of his followers represented what Lucas (1990) has described as a type of self-styled leadership comprising a synthesis of coercive and charismatic elements. The residents of Old Dunbar insisted that they would rather not have a civic organisation, and the let Lucky C., a indigent old man, take up residence in the former community meeting hall.

Several murders in Old Dunbar, following the events in June 1996, appeared to take the form of reprisals and counter reprisals following the leadership's eviction. In June of 1996, a car drove past the old community meeting room, firing random shots. No one was injured. However, on another occasion a spaza shop owner called Benjamin M., linked to a local network of 'Twelve Apostolic' church members, was shot and killed allegedly by some individual or individuals from the ejected leadership. Shortly afterwards two men accused of Benjamin's murder were killed in retribution by some 'unknown' individuals. However, the end-result was that Old Dunbar settlement was placed last on the C.M.D.A.'s list for development.

## Legislative Reforms

Of course, the formation of Old Dunbar Road shack settlement represents a microcosm of events occurring within the wider provincial and national context. During the 1980s and 1990s a number of significant legislative reforms occurred that eased by way for impoverished African men and women to gradually move into core city areas. In 1986, the abolition of the Urban Areas Act did away with influx control and the pass laws. Further, the Group Areas Act was revoked in 1992. These reforms coincided with deteriorating socio-economic conditions in KwaZulu-Natal, creating a situation in which informal settlements burgeoned in Cato Crest and Wiggins (Hindson, D. et al 1994: 2-4). The population of Cato Crest shack settlement had remained relatively stable until further land invasions in June 1993, which created divisions between the former Natal Provincial Administration and the leadership of Cato Crest. Hindson et al (1994: 7-8) indicate that a new agreement was reached between the Durban City Council and this shack settlement, in which a boundary was defined and a new system of monitors formed to police the settlement. In December 1993, people from Chesterville and other parts of Cato Manor invaded 800 empty houses built by the former House of Delegates and, until then, reserved for poor Indian families.

Besides Cato Crest and Wiggins, shack settlements grew in other core city areas, such as Canaan in Clare Estate, a historically Indian residential area. Here, from the late 1980s onwards, African residents from violence stricken areas began to build "*dog shacks*" hidden in the long grass on empty pieces of land (Singh, A. and S. Vawda 1997: 10). The Indian residents living in Clare Estate felt increasingly threatened by the growing numbers of Africans moving onto vacant land, bringing their property prices down. The Africans

residents were just as desperate to find somewhere to live, closer to the city and to job opportunities. Singh (1997: 39) interviewed one of the earliest residents to arrive:

“[Amos] recalled that as African anger against apartheid intensified and people were no longer prepared to return to either the troubled townships or the impoverished rural areas, they became resilient and began building more ‘dog shacks’. As their number grew and the reign of P.W. Botha was being evidently increasingly challenged and loosened, bigger shacks were being built.”

### **Past Urbanisation Policies**

Of course, one has to situate events in Cato Crest, Wiggins, and other parts of Durban within the wider historical context. Their antecedents lie in past urbanisation policies during, although not exclusive to, the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Neither the former Nationalist government, nor the Smuts government before 1948 could wholly prevent the growth of informal or unauthorised settlements. Nationwide and locally informal settlements have been part and parcel of meeting the needs of a growing black urban population, that were at once included and excluded from “white” metropolitan areas. It is this aspect of past urbanisation policies, which is fundamentally ambiguous, rippling into the reformist era of the 1980s with the coming of “orderly urbanisation”. Murray (1988: 119) describes this policy as “partial labour market inclusion and controlled residential exclusion”. Hence, informal settlements were inevitable responses to such conditions.

Maylam (1983: 413) suggests that the emergence of informal settlements at different times reflect the “contradictions within the South African political economy and the tensions within the *apartheid* system”. Capital required a cheap labour force, which it, as well as the local and national state could exercise control over, preferably without burdening municipal or state coffers. Control, however, meant providing just enough formal regulated housing, without creating a permanent African urban population. However, the

“housing crisis” (Hendler, P. 1991: 198) remained. In a 1988 seminar held under the auspices of the University of Natal to address the dilemma of informal settlements in Durban, Councilor H.P. Klotz aptly summed up the matter in his welcoming address:

“Of course, concern for a relationship between informal settlements and the Durban Municipality is not entirely new. If one goes back to the late 1920s, when the borough was bounded by the Berea Ridge and the Umbilo and Umgeni Rivers, what had happened then was that large numbers of informal settlements had developed on the perimeter of our borders. The Borough Boundaries Commission of 1930 recommended the incorporation of such areas into the borough...” (Informal Settlements and the Core City Seminar 1988: 3)

In Cato Manor, which includes the Dunbar Road area, shack settlements burgeoned during and after the Second World War. In 1952, before this area was rezoned for whites, the settlement numbered some 10 100 shacks with 70 000 African residents (Maasdorp, G. and P. Ellison 1973: 15). These individuals and families, some of whom were rural migrants, reduced their cost of living by renting small plots of land from Indian landowners on which they built shacks (Maasdorp, G. and P. Ellison 1973: 14). Hence, the 'squatters' were loath to move to the resettlement townships of KwaMashu and Umlazi, a move that would not only increase subsistence costs, such as, rentals and transport, but would also destroy their independent beer brewing activities. By 1966, the resettlement program had taken place and the land in Cato Manor lay empty (Maasdorp, G and P. Ellison 1973: 61). However, not all residents of Cato Manor were resettled:

"[Only] those families which had permits to be in Durban were rehoused, and it appears that some 30 000 to 40 000 persons must have "disappeared" during the program, either returning to their rural areas or else taking up illegal residence elsewhere in the city." (1973: 61)

Some of the individuals who disappeared probably joined informal settlements that grew substantially in the 1960s. These settlements developed on Durban's periphery, in areas such as Pinetown, Marianhill, Clermont and Inanda (Maasdorp, G. and P. Ellison 1973: 70).

However, it was not only in Durban that informal settlements grew during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the years between the two world wars, with the boom in the manufacturing industry and concomitant decline of the reserves, networks of slumyards flourished in the western, central and eastern parts of Johannesburg (Hellman, E. 1935, Koch, E. 1983, Stadler, A. 1979). Deteriorating conditions in the reserves and on white farms spurred increasing numbers of rural *families* (and not simply men alone) to Johannesburg (Stadler, A. 1979: 109). Although the war had created more jobs, Stadler (1979: 112) indicates that wages paid to African labourers remained appallingly low:

"Squatting was a response to a situation in which, the costs of family subsistence had to be met entirely from wages, yet one in which wages were below the costs of subsistence. Squatting should be seen, then, as an attempt to reduce the costs of subsistence in a situation in which, because of the swollen 'reserve army' moving into the city, relatively unimpeded by influx controls, wages could be held down despite the rapid increase in living costs."

The growth of Durban's secondary industry during and after the Second World War combined with the requirements of capital for a conveniently situated and cheaply housed workforce meant that authorities ignored shantytowns, such as those within Cato Manor, until the 1960s (Maylam, P. 1983: 425). The eradication of slumyards in Durban and Johannesburg and subsequent removals to authorised townships such as Umlazi, KwaMashu (Maasdorp, G. and Humphries, A. 1975) and Orlando (Koch, E. 1983: 160, 169) respectively, destroyed the independent economic activities of the slumyard residents. With the coming to power of the Nationalist government in 1948, a debate arose as to whether or not the African workforce should become a permanent feature of urban areas. On the one hand, the growing manufacturing sector required a more permanent skilled African labour force and consumer market, whilst it suited mining capital (and skilled white workers) to utilise a high turnover of unskilled migrant workers (Platsky, L. and C.

Walker 1985: 96). All three interests – mining, manufacturing and white labour - were merged together through the tightening up of influx control and the pass laws from the 1950s onwards. Only a small proportion of the urban black labour force were accorded the privilege of qualifying for 'section 10' rights in terms of the Urban Areas Act (Platsky, L. and C. Walker 1985: 105). So began an era of forced removals and resistance in which millions of black South Africans were evicted and / or relocated to various settlements (Platsky, C and L. Walker 1985: 9)

One of the outcomes of the policy of shifting the African population into bantustans, was the creation of large numbers of “frontier commuters” (Murray, C. 1988: 117) situated near or on the borders of bantustans. These men and women were economically dependent upon wage labour in white metropolitan areas, generating little or nothing from subsistence agriculture. Access to a cash income was vital to household survival (See Sharp, J. and A. Spiegel 1985). Niehaus describes the lives of these daily commuters from Phuthaditjhaba in Qwaqwa who had to travel to Harrismith:

“ Commuting imposed a rigid time structure on the working day. Most commuters left their homes for the bus stop at four in the morning and returned at six o'clock at night. Women commuters in particular experienced great strain. Many woke at three in the morning to prepare food for themselves and their dependants. After work they cooked, cleaned the house and washed their children.” (1994: 120-121, See also 1988: 133)

Many of the informal settlements that grew up on the fringes of white metropolitan areas in KwaZulu-Natal differed from those within Qwaqwa and the Transkei in respect of KwaZulu's close proximity to the borders of these areas (Minnaar, A. 1992a: 67, Murray 1988: 131-2, Platsky, L. and C. Walker 1985: 53). During the 1960's and 1970's, forced removals from “black spots”, the expansion and mechanisation of commercial agriculture, and the abolition of labour tenancy (in 1969) exacerbated the rate of migration of Africans

from reserves and white farms to the Greater Durban Area (Minnaar, A. 1992b: 20). In turn, the 1980's were characterised by declining jobs in the coal and gold mining industries in Northern Natal and on the Reef respectively, cutting many migrant workers off from a vital source of income (Minnaar, A 1992b: 21). Further, Minnaar (1992b) also illustrates how the nationwide drought of the 1980's served to worsen the already eroded reserves. One estimate suggests that during the 1980s, 100 000 migrants arrived in the Greater Durban Region each year. Given the newly arriving migrants, coupled with the expansions of families already living in the townships where the building of new houses had been frozen, peri-urban informal settlements mushroomed. This reflected that fact that the government simply could not afford to carry out influx control.

Hence, the President's Council Report of 1985 led to the abolition of the largely ineffective pass laws and influx control measures. The state decided to reform its policies under the general perception that urbanisation was "inevitable and in some cases desirable" (Sutcliffe, M. et al 1991: 87). However, this did not entail residential desegregation as the Group Areas Act was formally repealed only in 1992. Neither did it entail an attempt at redressing the pervading housing crisis in African townships. Through fiscal incentives and disincentives industrial development was channeled to growth points, not in the centres of impoverished bantustans but on their fringes so as to form satellites around metropolitan and medium industrial towns (Hindson, D. 1986a; 1986b).

### **Informal Settlement in KwaZulu/Natal**

The significance of informal settlements within the Greater Durban Area lay not simply in the sheer numbers of people living within them. Rather, these settlements initially burgeoned on land administered by the KwaZulu government, and so fell under the

authority of KwaZulu. As these informal settlements lay outside of the authority of the white municipality, they were relatively ignored (Smit, D. 1988: 47). The KwaZulu authorities were not able to provide the number of houses<sup>1</sup> that its burgeoning population required, but neither was it willing to implement influx control. The incorporation of townships, such as, KwaMashu and Umlazi (Robertson, M. 1991: 127) into KwaZulu in 1986 and peri-urban areas such as Inanda after the August 1985 riots, certainly did not help the housing crisis faced by the bantustan (Hughes, H. 1987: 342). The population of Inanda, living in shacks rented from Indian landholders, grew from 68 000 in 1977 to 250000 in 1985 (Hughes, H. 1987: 342). Hindson and McCarthy (1994) argue that the growth of shack settlements in the Greater Durban Area was both a cause and a consequence of weakening tribal and black local authorities.

However, what is of relevance here is the type of leadership style which arose in a situation of land and housing shortage as well as a dearth of private ownership. A leadership style developed in those extremely impoverished shack settlements on the peripheries of the city that could extract tribute from and provide patronage (and protection) for its subjects. One striking example is that of Thomas Shabalala, the '*warlord*' of Lindelani shack settlement, adjoining KwaMashu Township. Shabalala was a member of the former KwaZulu Legislative Assembly (K.L.A.) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (I.F.P.) (Xaba, M. 1991) who, through his henchmen, extracted tribute from Lindelani shack dwellers in the form of illicit rent, tax and fines (Minnaar, A. 1992a: 68). Through his membership of the K.L.A. and I.F.P., he was able to ensure more infrastructural development for Lindelani than KwaMashu, the residents of which had refused to vote for their corrupt town council (Xaba, M. 1991). Hence, some of the warlords in shack settlements were linked to the

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<sup>1</sup> The KwaZulu government built 2700 houses between 1978 and 1985, whilst central government had built only 227 houses since KwaMashu was completed in 1964 (Minnaar, A 1992b: 37).

KwaZulu bantustan authority structure, and those residents who would not submit to their leadership were accused of anti-apartheid or anti-KwaZulu sentiments. Many became refugees from violent attacks.

The informal settlements that grew up around Umlazi and KwaMashu in the late 1980's and which elected their own civic organisations were met with brutal responses from the KwaZulu authorities. Many settlements such as The Lebanon, Ekutheleni, and Uganda, were left relatively depopulated, and in some cases totally deserted after attacks allegedly by KwaZulu police (Schlachmuis, L. 1992: 22). Although the violence in shack settlements in the 1980's did take place along political lines, Minnaar (1992a, 1992b) indicates that it was mediated by socio-economic conditions, understandable given that political struggles often involve the contestation of a limited material base. Minnaar (1992b: 41) points to the interconnection between material and ideological struggle in his description of the warlords:

" [The] warlords have both a political and a material interest in disrupting any peace initiative since they feed off and survive on the violence. They have no other livelihood and if peace were imposed on their areas they would lose their main sources of income – the provision of protection, arms procurement and the smuggling of weapons, killing for hire and acting as bodyguards to community leaders."

The violence in townships and informal settlements surrounding the Greater Durban Area, coupled with the overcrowding of families, gradually pushed people to build shacks in core city areas, such as Cato Crest, Wiggins and Clare Estate. Until this point "[s]trict and almost complete controls over illegal settlements continued within the core city areas until the late 1980s" (Hindson, D. et al 1992: 3). In the interim period before the election of a new government in 1994, the Durban municipality tolerated informal settlements, which it

either could not or would not attempt to address. As had happened in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it appeared as if Durban's African population had set out once again to meet its own housing needs, leading the way for informal settlements such as Old Dunbar Road. The settlement, which is comprised of informal and unserviced shelters, represents a niche for many individuals who seek to access jobs, formal housing, schools, and health services.

### **Living conditions in Old Dunbar informal settlement**

The shacks that comprise Old Dunbar informal settlement are scattered down the hillside in a random fashion, highlighting the fact that this settlement is of the unplanned type. Old Dunbar is divided into three sections named A, B, and C. A small dirt pathway separates sections B and C, whilst a slightly wider dirt road useable only by larger vehicles, separates sections B from A. Section A adjoins the settlement of 'New Dunbar'. Several efforts by I.S.E.R. to register the residents mean that the shacks bear different numbers sprayed or pointed onto doors. This numbering is not sequential and so of no use in locating a particular shack. Most doorways face the slope's decline, although some people have placed their entrances at different orientations. Dunbar Road itself forms the eastern border of this informal settlement. The main road to Chesterville Township runs past Old Dunbar. Except for those shacks that run alongside Dunbar Road, residents and visitors must reach other shacks by walking along the numerous well-worn pathways. The lack of street lighting makes the residents of Old Dunbar hesitant to venture outside at night.

There are no clinics, hospitals, schools or large stores in the immediate vicinity of the informal settlement, although the residents can make use of health clinics situated in Chesterville, Cato Crest and Mayville. Several informal 'pre-schools' or crèches operate in Old Dunbar, charging around R50- per child per month. These basic facilities care for

children during the daytime whilst their mothers and fathers are away at work, but do not keep children in their care overnight. Resident children of school-going age attend primary schools in central areas such as Bonella, Mayville, Sydenam and Carrington Heights. However, I met very few children of high school going age in Old Dunbar. Possibly, teenage children remained behind with kin when their parent or parents decided to move to the settlement to avoid disrupting their education.

In its initial phase of settlement, Old Dunbar did not have standpipes, which meant that residents had to walk to other informal settlements, such as Ensembini and Cato Crest, to fetch water. This is a difficult task, given that a 25-litre water drum weighs some twenty-five kilograms. The owner of one of the larger spazas in Old Dunbar installed a tap on his premises, which he then extended to the front of his shop, charging residents at that time approximately 15 cents per 25 litres. However, this arrangement ended in 1996 when the municipality added a water main with three standpipes (or taps) placed at various points along Dunbar Road. Each standpipe is 'owned' by a local resident who paid for its installation. A portion of the money accrued from the sale of water goes to offset this amount paid by the resident. Within section B, the water issue has sparked off several confrontations between residents. In June of 1996, arguments over the payment of water the resulted in the expulsion of the former leadership from Old Dunbar. In April of 1997, residents expelled the 'tap man' and his family from Old Dunbar after allegations of corruption against him.

Three types of shelters exist in Old Dunbar, most of which comprise no more than two rooms. Residents minimised the cost of building a new home by obtaining materials from dumpsites. Firstly, there are the wattle-and-daub type dwellings constructed from a reed or

wood framework and plastered with a mud mixture. Although these shelters are cool in summer, they tend to collapse under heavy rains. Secondly, there are those dwelling constructed from corrugated iron sheets. These dwellings are sturdier than the wattle and daub types, however, where there is limited ventilation, they become extremely hot in the summer months but cold in the winter. Thirdly, there are those homes are build with plywood, crating or wooden planks. Residents built the walls of their shacks from a variety of materials, such as reeds, mud, wooden beams, iron sheets, crating, or plywood. Some residents insulated the inside of their walls with plastic, newspaper or magazine pages. Residents used corrugated iron sheets and tarpaulins as roofing materials, which they fixed with rope or weighted down with bricks or tyres. Except for a handful of homes with concrete floor, most homes stood directly on the soil. Those residents who could afford to buy linoleum or carpeting were able to make their floors more attractive.

However, after heavy rains, water seeped up through the floor to soak carpets.

Despite measures to protect homes from the elements, rains turned the soil in Old Dunbar into a mudslide. In the first week of July in 1997, seventy-five homes collapsed after a week of heavy rains. Welfare organisations, such as 'The Red Cross' and 'The Child, Family and Community Care Centre', which dealt with such events were not equipped to cope with the numbers of people effected. The above-mentioned social worker from D.C.F.C.C. was sent to find out how many residents needed shelter and blankets.

However, she claimed to have only fifteen blankets and temporary shelter, in a school hall, for seventy-five residents. Further, she did not believe that all the flood victims were genuine:

"...I don't want to promise [more blankets]. If I do then everybody expects to get something. What happens is that even if deep down in their hearts they really do not need help they will still come and take [blankets and foodstuffs]. Now people who

have been living with relatives come to us to ask for a home. We can deal with fifteen people and find them places to live but not everyone."

Besides the basic materials from which homes were constructed, very few respondents owned store-bought furniture, such as a lounge suite or a base set and mattress. Furniture was limited to a few plastic or metal frame chairs, or small makeshift wooden bench and mattresses with (or without) second-hand bases. The bedroom, lounge and kitchen was usually combined in one or two rooms, which meant that few residents had separate work surfaces for food preparation. The only woman, whose modest home had a small kitchen with homemade shelves, lounge suite, wall unit, double bed with bedcover set, and numerous ornaments, was married to a full-time train controller. She, like a few other residents had fenced off her home, and planted grass outside her front door. For many residents however, there was not enough space between shacks to do this. Frequently used pathways trampled out any foliage. In the sections in which I conducted research, I met only two residents who owned dogs. A few of the rather mangy-looking dogs found in Old Dunbar were actually strays taken in as pets by some residents.

### **Domestic fuels**

As Old Dunbar is not electrified, residents used paraffin stoves for cooking food and heating water and space. Paraffin-stoves are relatively cheap investments that take up little room-space. For some individuals or families, this stove was the only appliance that they possessed. Hence, most respondents who lived under the same roof formed one commensal unit that did not necessarily eat at the same time. During the fieldwork period, paraffin ranged from R1, 40 to R1, 90 per litre depending on the quantity bought at a time. Paraffin bought in one-litre glass-bottles cost more per litre than that bought in five, ten or twenty-five litre containers.

The spaza shop owners who could afford to buy 100 to 200 litres at a time, obtained paraffin from wholesalers at a price of R1, 35 to R1, 48 per litre. Local residents reported very few incidents of poisoning caused by the accidental inhalation or ingestion of paraffin. However, paraffin stoves tended to wear quickly, and I learned that the shack of a respondent had burned to the ground when her paraffin stove exploded. Frequency of use combined with the inferior quality of most stoves means that their life spans are short, lasting three or four months, before one or more of their parts need repairing. Residents did make some efforts to maintain their stoves, by taking the parts of their stove to pieces and cleaning them.

However, some residents still preferred paraffin to gas stoves. The liquid nature enabled residents to control, that is, *see* the amount of fuel that they used each day or week. Although paraffin stoves, both pump and wick, were of an inferior quality to most gas stoves, some individuals expressed a fear of gas, describing it as invisible and hence dangerous. The limited space in Old Dunbar meant that very few people cooked food on wood stoves. Further, there were few sources of firewood within the immediate environs of the informal settlement. Those individuals who possessed appliances, such as radios, 'hi-fi's', or televisions ran these on dry cell or car batteries. At night, residents used candles or paraffin lamps for lighting purposes.

Residents employed a number of fuel-strategies to minimise their domestic costs. The individual or family either relied solely upon paraffin and candles or supplemented this with wood or gas. Some shacks received a "backyard shack" or pirated form of electricity which enabled occupants to use appliances, such as, sewing machines in their homes.

However, the electrical wiring was not of a safe standard with wires running along walls and ceilings. Of course, the topic of pirated electricity use was an extremely sensitive one. Some individuals claimed, for example, to use candles at night whilst electric light bulbs hung visibly from the ceiling. One woman, fearing that I was a spy for Durban Metro, claimed that her son worked for 'Eskom', possibly as a means of legitimising the supply of electricity to her home. Not all electrified shacks had pirated it from overhead lines. The main spaza shop in section B was legally electrified, and the owner of the second largest spaza in same section ran his refrigerators on a 6 volt generator.

#### **Old Dunbar as a community of interests:**

Although some residents chose to move to Old Dunbar, to escape criminal or political violence in other parts of the city or province, incidents of murder and robbery were not completely absent from the settlement. In some cases, accusations of criminal activity between residents led to murder or assault. One fourteen year old girl complained to me that "there are too many tsotsis in Old Dunbar". This girl's mother subsequently removed her daughter to a rural area of Umkomaas. This was despite the fact that the family had moved to Durban after their rural home was burned to the ground, because in the young girl's words, "the community was fighting". Although residents did not allow "strongmen" to establish power bases in Old Dunbar, the systematic purges of alleged murderers, thieves and fraudsters were violent in themselves. Hence, the residents of Old Dunbar became a 'moral' community from time to time in actively supporting or silently condoning such incidents. The following extract from fieldnotes reveals the efforts of some individuals to eject alleged criminals or 'tsotsis' from Old Dunbar:

Simon and I sat talking to Dumisani outside his shack, whilst his baby daughter played in the yard. The subject of the following conversation appears, initially at least, a victim of crime. However, Simon and Dumisani explained his murder as retribution by certain members of 'the community' for theft. This discussion is cut short when Mr Ndlovu, who owns a nearby spaza shop, requested Dumisani's assistance.

Simon: "They [the police] found the body of a man down at the bottom [of Old Dunbar]"

Dumisani: "This place is terrible. It's not safe to stay here."

Author: "Why was he killed?"

Dumisani: "He was a tsotsi."

Mr Ndlovu shouts to Dumisani from a few metres away:

"There's a car thief in the house near the main road. Let's go and cut his ankles. That will teach him a lesson."

As Mr Ndlovu appeared serious in his intentions by waving his penknife about whilst talking, Simon and I ended fieldwork for the day, heading back towards the van.

Ironically, the lack of a formal leadership in Old Dunbar created problems for outside agencies, such as the C.M.D.A. who needed to liaise with some group 'representing' the residents of Old Dunbar. This extended to individuals, such as social workers and engineers, who visited Old Dunbar occasionally. One social worker from Durban Child and Family Community Welfare Centre (D.C.F.C.C) sent to aid the July 1996 flood-victims, complained about the absence of a civic organisation. She believed that by ousting of the former civic organisation, residents had alienated themselves from their local A.N.C. councillor. Her statement also revealed the discrepancy between an outsider's perceptions of events and those of local residents.:

"You see there is no organisation in Old Dunbar. Communities are supposed to report the extent of the damages to the leader... That civic [organisation] was helping these people... You see everything here is political affiliation."

Overall, this chapter has broadly highlighted the extremely scarce material resources at the disposal of these urban shack dwellers. The difficult living conditions contrast with the steadfast efforts, both individually and as a collective, these residents made to secure their right to reside within Cato Manor. However, one also needs to examine the way in which the scarcity of material resources effected social relationships. In the following chapters, I examine the past and present coping-strategies of respondents, focusing on the extent to which respondents manipulated relationships to their kin, neighbours or friends in the process of finding work and establishing homes.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **The Road to Old Dunbar: Grandmothers and other gatekeepers of access to urban resources**

For the respondents from whom I collected twenty-five biographies, the process of moving to Durban and ultimately to Old Dunbar involved the indiscriminate manipulation of ties to networks of kin. Male and female respondents drew upon help from a range of individuals - mothers, grandmothers, siblings, adult children and affines - in accessing scarce urban resources. These well-placed individuals acted as gatekeepers to the city and its resources, providing kin on the move with more or less temporary shelter. Even mere bed-space within overcrowded homes provided men and women with a foothold in the city. Some respondents found casual work in Durban through the assistance of employed relatives, so setting themselves on a path, albeit tenuous, towards economic independence.

Although vital to making some sort of endeavor in Durban, help given and received did not simply entail the obligatory discharge of kinship duties. Certainly, a moral dimension existed in that individuals sought to make claims upon their kin, but only from those individuals who held access to needed resources. Male and female respondents mobilised loose-knit kin-based networks from time to time so activating and reactivating otherwise dormant (or non-effective) kinship ties. These continually shifting survival networks reflected the impermanent landscape of housing, jobs, schools and personal safety.

The biographies of both urban and rural-born respondents reveal the constant struggle for survival and the shared experience of moving from one place to another in this quest. However, a more complicated picture emerges where dependent children move about with adults. One common thread running through the disparate biographies is that of pre-marital procreation, a situation whereby unmarried women shoulder responsibility not only for their own survival but also that of their children. Most of the twenty-five respondents save for two widows had given birth to one or more children outside of a formalised marital union.

The phenomenon of pre-marital procreation fits into a wider context in which the rural countryside offers few African men economic or social prospects. Chapter three illustrated the effects of drought, the introduction of commercial agriculture and the abolition of labour tenancy on already impoverished reserves. Rural-born men face the problem, then, of having limited material resources with which to contract marriages. Preston-Whyte (1981) suggests that these resources are extremely important given the intimate connection between marriage, land and promotion to full adult status in rural areas of KwaZulu/Natal. One solution for men wishing to enter into or to consolidate marital unions is the take up work in urban areas. However, studies of the effects of migrant labour on family life, such as Murray's (1981) of migrant labour from Lesotho and Manona's (1980) of migrant labour from the Eastern Cape, note a correlation between the prolonged separation of spouses and increased levels of wife desertion and marital dissolution. Besides this, the dearth of eligible working-age men that labour migration creates, leaves

rural women with few economic prospects, leading to their migration to urban areas so as to seek employment. This pattern of female migration following from male migration is seen in numerous other studies of migrancy, such as, Schapera's earlier (1947: 119) study of migration from the former Betuachanaland Protectorate, Preston-Whyte's (1969, 1978, 1981) study of migrant domestic workers in Durban, and more recently Buijs' (1993: 190) study of female migrants from the Transkei.

Of the present sample of rural-born male respondents who migrated to Durban, many joined the ranks of their underemployed counterparts, making it difficult for these men to enter into, formalise or sustain marital unions. The children of most rural and urban born respondents, that is, the children of consensual or informal unions were thus affiliated to their mothers who then bore full responsibility for nurturing such children. Given the overwhelming nature of this task, an analysis of the biographical material illustrates that female respondents adopted a number of interconnected strategies to cope with the demands of single motherhood.

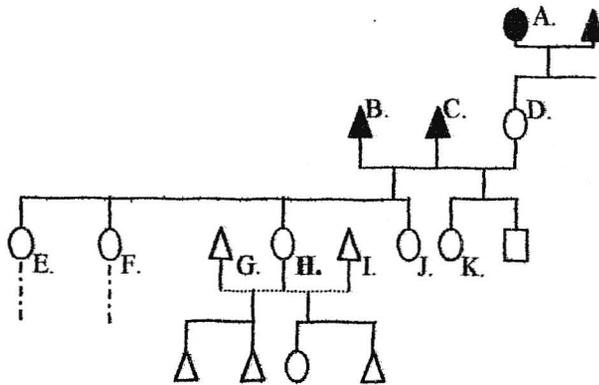
#### **Strategies for survival:**

Firstly, the redistribution of dependent children to sociological mothers, usually maternal grandmothers, alleviated the overcrowding of homes, lessened domestic budgets and enabled mothers to take up employment. Secondly, the sloughing off of mature children onto other kinsfolk or into casual work also lessened the economic burden they presented. Together these two strategies enabled women not

only to enter into the workforce but also to enter into consensual or marital unions, so connecting to the third strategy of attracting and attaching male earners. The overall benefit that flowed from the redistribution of dependents and not from the status of wife or unmarried woman *per se*, was that this enabled female migrants to act as free agents, whether their goal was to find work in Durban or to be a 'stay at home' wife.

**Redistributing dependents**

**Case 1: A family extended in the 'matriline' (Pauw, B. 1979) through pre-marital procreation.**



Thirty-year old Pearl Makgoba (H.) was born in Inanda, a densified rural settlement on the outskirts of Durban. Pearl and her six siblings lived with their parents in a four-roomed house without running water or electricity. Pearl's father (B.) was periodically out of work and the family had no land to farm. They owned little, save for a few chickens. It was Pearl's maternal grandmother (A.) who looked after

Pearl and her siblings whilst the parents were at work. In 1982, when Pearl was sixteen years old, her father died of an illness. She recalled little of her father, finding few words to describe him except for the observation that he smoke and drank. Pearl's widowed mother (D.) remarried and moved to Umlazi, an African township south of Durban's central business district. However, she did not take her children with her, leaving them for several years with her own slightly better-off mother who owned a few head of cattle.

The placement of Pearl and her siblings with their maternal grandmother appears commonplace, deserving little comment, but it disguises a second strategy attached to the redistribution of minors. Following her widowhood, Pearl's mother attached herself to a man (C.) with rights to urban residence. As a rural widow without the means to support her family, moving to town of her own accord with dependent children would have presented her with obvious difficulties, such as, finding work and a place to stay. The availability of land for informal settlement in Durban's core city areas had not as yet fully developed and township accommodation was notoriously scarce. Her reliance on this man as a gatekeeper to the city is seen most clearly in the consequences following from his death. Pearl's mother lost the right to remain living in her Umlazi home, so returning to Inanda with her daughters who had joined her following the death of their grandmother.

Prior to their return to Inanda, Pearl and her elder sisters gave birth to seven pre-marital children amongst them. The family, consisting of mother, stepfather,

daughters and daughter's children was thus extended through the 'matriline' (Pauw 1979). Gluckman (1950) indicates that there is no historical precedent pointing to the stigmatising of extra-marital children amongst Zulu-speaking people. The child born outside of a marital union belonged to its mother's agnatic lineage unless rights in children were transferred to another man through *ilobolo* (ibid). Further, Preston-Whyte (1992) indicates that Zulu-speaking women perceive of pre-marital birth as the material evidence of female fertility, thus illustrating the cultural specificity of the notion that childbirth and marriage necessarily constitute one sphere.

However, Pearl's premarital children were not absorbed within a large agnatic family system, but into the home of a widow. This senior woman was faced with the impossible task of feeding and clothing her adult children and grandchildren. Her only option was to keep her grandchildren in her Inanda home whilst sending her adult daughters into domestic service, repeating to some extent a strategy (of child distribution) that she herself had previously employed. In this case, Pearl's elder sister, Agnes (F.), took up live-in domestic service in Clairwood, Durban. Pearl then followed her sister, using Agnes' live-in accommodation as a base from which to find domestic work. Pearl found work with various employers in the suburbs of 'Woodlands', 'Springfield' and 'The Bluff', sometimes living with her sister and other times with her employers. Both women remitted money to their mother in Inanda. The sloughing off of adult daughters is therefore a partial process, given that dependent children remain within the homes of their

grandmothers. I suggest that child redistribution from mother to grandmother is as much a strategy employed by senior women to access the incomes of their employed daughters, as it is a stepping stone for young rural women to establish a base for themselves in the city.

Another rural-born female respondent, Zandile Ngidi, moved to Umlazi with her mother and siblings (all premarital children) when their mother married. She was later sent away from home to live with her widowed maternal aunt, on the pretext that this older woman should not live alone. However, from this point onwards Zandile had to fend for herself by vending food in the township, an activity she had already been carrying out on a part-time basis. Her mother could no longer pay for her high school education, so forcing Zandile to drop out of school in 1980 before completing standard nine. Zandile subsequently left her aunt's house to live with her boyfriend with whom she had a son in 1988. It is interesting that Zandile later relied on her mother to help look after her son whilst out working. This again suggests that the sloughing off of adult daughters is checked somewhat by the births of their premarital children. However, I argue that the co-operation between mothers and daughters, as seen in Pearl's and Zandile's cases, is borne out of economic necessity rather than simple moral bonds between mothers and daughters.

In Pearl Makgoba's case the strategy of mother-daughter co-operation gave way to that of domestic dispersal. When Pearl gave birth to her third child in 1992, she stopped working and returned to her mother's home. However, there came a time

when her mother simply could not support Pearl and her children - the four bedroomed home in Inanda was overcrowded - and Pearl needed her own space. Pearl decided to move to Old Dunbar with the father of her third child, a casual worker. She also took her elder two children with her and this man, explaining her need to move to her own home succinctly: "I am big now". The reliance then of individuals on their maternal kin, especially daughters, does not relate to the persistence of mythical bonds between kinswomen. These relationships like any others are open to failure, given limited material conditions. Further, the heavy reliance of individuals on their maternal kin also relates to the pervasive absence of ties to fathers and other paternal kin, which itself hinges on premarital procreation combined with the non-payment of *ilobolo*. This leaves relatively small family units comprised of mothers and daughters to cope with the difficulties of caring for infants, school-age and mature children.

However, I do concede that widowhood and marital dissolution also contribute to this phenomenon. Two elderly rural women, Christina Dladla and Membrey Shezi, migrated to Durban following their respective widowhood. Both joined the domestic units of their adult children. When the mothers of two female respondents, Eunice Myeni and Cynthia Molefe were widowed, these senior women found themselves solely responsible for the welfare of their children. As in Pearl Makgoba's case, her mother's widowhood plus premarital procreation in Pearl's generation is illustrative of a system in which responsibility for a family's

survival falls on a senior woman rather than a senior man. A similar pattern is also noted in Dennis Radebe's case.

### **Case 2: The role of a senior woman as a gatekeeper for her grandson**

Dennis Radebe was born in 1945 in Esinkaweni shantytown in Cato Manor, Durban. Dennis lived with his maternal grandmother along with his mother and other siblings as his parents were not married. When his mother died in 1956, Dennis and his siblings remained in their grandmother's home as his father had married and settled with another woman in the nearby settlement of Umkumbaan. Esinkaweni shantytown was demolished in 1959 and many residents were relocated to the newly built township of KwaMashu, some distance north of Durban's city centre. Dennis had completed standard five before the family was relocated, however once in KwaMashu he no longer continued his schooling. It was not until 1965 that Dennis began working, as he had to wait to acquire a work permit. His grandmother worked in the then 'white's only' suburb of Durban North as a domestic worker and she used her influence to get him a gardening job in one of the suburb's residences.

This marked the beginning of a period of shifting employment combined with frequent residential mobility. Dennis had a child by his girlfriend but remained living in his grandmother's overcrowded home. He eventually set up a home with his girlfriend and their child in 1973. The couple and their daughter lived in

Ntuzuma until 1979 when violence forced them to relocate to Umlazi for a year, returning to Ntuzuma in 1980. Three years later, Dennis and his family of procreation moved to Lindelani shack settlement, during which time he began repairing paraffin stoves in an effort to earn a living. In 1993, Dennis moved to Old Dunbar in the hope of escaping the growing violence in Lindelani. However, his girlfriend, for whom he claimed to have paid *ilobolo*, deserted him on the eve of his departure for this informal settlement.

The specific reason why she deserted Dennis is unclear. However, her desertion of him is perhaps indicative of the strains created by domestic mobility and associated underemployment, resulting in a lack of domestic consolidation. Possibly, she was no longer willing to invest in a domestic unit that lack a reliable cash input. For example, Manona's (1980: 198) study of the impact of migrant labour, on rural families in Keiskammahoeck in the Eastern Cape, revealed that women, especially those without access to land, whose husband's failed to remit money home on a regular basis, simply deserted their spouses.

#### **Plural strategies: remaining single - attaching male earners**

Despite the extreme poverty and social dislocation experienced by my respondents, the case material does not point to an overall trend towards marital dissolution nor the formalisation of marital unions vis-à-vis the discharge of *ilobolo* obligations. Rather, the biographical material emphasizes the plurality of strategies adopted by

male and female respondents. For some respondents, remaining unmarried and living singly constituted a better option, whilst others made conscious choices to enter into consensual or marital unions. In other words, neither strategy was mutually exclusive of the other. For example, Nkanza Ngwenya and her mother had both oscillated between living on their own or with kinsfolk and living with their spouses. In Nkanza's case, she married twice, returning to her mother's home when her first marriage failed, then moving to Old Dunbar to establish her second marital home, but leaving her daughter in her mother's care.

For a woman with pre-marital children making a decision to set up a domestic unit with a man, not always the father of her children, required that she modify her existing domestic situation. Firstly, the most pressing question was whether to incorporate her children or redistribute these dependents to kinsfolk. Unlike Pearl Makgoba, Nkanza Ngwenya did not bring her daughter into her marital home. However, Nkanza had considerably more choices than Pearl. She only had one daughter (her mother's only grandchild) compared with Pearl's three children. Furthermore, Nkanza was also in a position to include her younger sister in her domestic unit, so lessening her mother's domestic expenses. Secondly, most women had to become mobile so as to join their husbands, especially where this man was urban-based. A less common option noted in the case of Sandile Cele, a rural-born man, was to absorb a man into a woman's existing domestic unit.

### **Case 3: How a female domestic unit successfully attaches to a marital male.**

Cynthia Molefe's case study illustrates how a female core consisting of widowed mother, adult daughters and dependent grandchildren attached themselves to a marital male. Although Pearl Makgoba's mother also migrated to town to set up a domestic unit with her second husband, she initially went alone. Cynthia and her kinswomen migrated as a female domestic unit to join Cynthia's husband in Old Dunbar. Thirty-year old seamstress Cynthia and her husband Thulubuke, a construction worker, both originated from the rural town of Umkomaas but had lived apart for most of their married life. Thulubuke migrated to Durban in search of work, joining his father's household in KwaMashu, whilst Cynthia remained with her kin in Umkomaas. She generated an income by travelling between coastal towns selling dresses. When violence erupted in Umkomaas in 1992, Cynthia's home was burned down. The kinswomen fled to Durban, renting a backroom in Clermont, one of Durban's townships. The room soon proved too expensive to rent and too cramped for six adults plus three children. Thulubuke eventually built a shack for himself and his family in Old Dunbar, so acting as a gatekeeper for these rural women desperate to carve a niche for themselves in town.

The question posed by this case study is whether Cynthia and her kinswomen formed a co-operative alliance. There is some evidence to suggest that this female domestic unit formed a source of insurance for each individual woman. Cynthia obviously depended on her kinswomen to look after her children on her trips out of

towns and during brief periods of domestic work in Durban. However, biographical material elicited from Cynthia's eldest daughter, Thandi, revealed that it was she who minded her younger siblings and was also responsible for collecting firewood and water in Umkomaas. Nevertheless, Cynthia's kinswomen attached themselves to her and in turn she attached herself to her employed husband. The move to Durban did prove economically productive because Cynthia eventually obtained a sewing machine and revived her trading activities. Her eldest two children resumed their schooling in Durban and her mother and sisters began selling fruit in Durban's central business district, eventually obtaining their own shack in Old Dunbar. Cynthia, much like Pearl Molefe, made use of those relationships at hand in her efforts to establish herself in town.

Thus far, the biographies presented highlight the use of social networks as survival strategies and not that of households or domestic units whether based on consanguineal or conjugal ties. The case material does point to the operation of families extended in the matriline, however, it also reveals that such families tend towards eventual fission. In other words, families based on consanguineal ties are no less subject to the strains associated with poverty and unemployment than are nuclear families. This is seen in Pearl Molefe's case where she breaks away from her mother to establish her own nuclear family. Citing work by Spiegel, Watson and Wilkinson (1996) and commenting on the debate of whether or not African families are evolving towards Westernised nuclear forms, Russell (1998:176) argues that no *qualitative* ethnographic studies have documented such a process.

Russell (1998) brings attention to the phenomenon of " 'domestic fluidity' in Cape Town, of people repeatedly constituting their domestic arrangement, of diffused domesticity." (p. 176). I agree that no particular family type, whether of an extended or nuclear form, in itself constitutes a type of survival strategy, or that one type is more adaptive than another. What underpins domestic fluidity is the indiscriminate mobilisation of kinship ties by men and women in their efforts to survive. These individuals must make choices that are informed by their current needs and limited by what help is available. Most importantly, these strategies for survival are not infallible. When one strategy fails, it must be replaced by another.

For example, Eunice Myeni's efforts to attach herself to a male earner were largely unsuccessful because of the number of dependents she brought into her boyfriend's domestic unit, which ultimately placed too great a strain on their relationship.

Much like Pearl Makgoba, Eunice decided to move in with her boyfriend after a period of independence and the birth of several pre-marital children. However, this was largely forced on Eunice because the shack in which she, her children and her younger brothers lived was burned down in endemic violence that swept through Lindelani settlement during the 1980s.

#### **Case 4: Conjugal dissolution - failed efforts to attach to an urban male**

Unlike other respondents, such as, Pearl Makgoba and Cynthia Molefe, no kinsman or woman acted as a gatekeeper when Eunice, only nineteen years old, arrived in

Durban in 1981. Eunice and a friend from her home in Kobodi, Transkei, simply absconded to Durban. The pair found shelter in the 'backroom' of a house, as well as domestic work, with relative ease. Other young friends from home used the room as a stepping stone in their migration to Durban. In this way, Eunice and Angel acted as gatekeepers for their home friends. Eunice eventually found better-paid work in a butchery, in KwaMashu, so beginning her period of independence. However, this was short lived because Eunice's widowed mother, with whom she had re-established contact, sent Eunice's younger brothers to Durban to live with their sister. Eunice and her brother moved to the outskirts of Durban where African men and women were building shacks in Lindelani. Eunice gave birth to three children during the 1980s but did not formalise her relationship with the father of these children because of his abusive behaviour. This man subsequently disappeared, failing to make child maintenance payments. By 1990, Eunice had established a relatively successful business selling food, such as *vetkoekies* (dough cakes), flavoured ice blocks, popcorn, and chips outside the various schools in and around Lindelani. Further, she had obtained a sewing machine to make tracksuits for children, which she sold locally for R10-00 to R20-00.

This period of independence ended when her shack was burned down in 1990. She and her family moved to Ntuzuma, into the home of her boyfriend whom she had known for three years. Eunice sought to re-establish her informal trading by selling food outside schools in Ntuzuma, eventually expanding her trading to Inanda.

During the four years that Eunice and her kin spent in this man's home, he became

increasingly resentful of having to support Eunice, her children from a previous relationship and her brothers, gradually leading to the breakdown of their relationship. If, as Van der Vliet (1984) suggests, some African women perceive of men and marriage as an economic liability then it is equally plausible that men may also view the women with whom they co-reside as economic drains. Eunice's brother Lulama was the first to leave, moving to Old Dunbar to build himself a shack in November 1994. Eunice, Velisa and the children followed shortly. Eunice had decided to end the relationship with her boyfriend and to restart her informal trade from Old Dunbar, rather than loose contact with her brother. Eunice lessened her domestic expenses by sending her elder three to live with her pensioned mother in the Transkei.

The burdens that Eunice's extended family placed on her consensual union illustrates that extended families do not necessarily form cushions of support for their individual members. Extended families, such as Eunice's, are more likely to constitute clusters of dependents given the context of rural impoverishment combined with limited opportunities for work in cities such as Durban. Added to this, insecure rights of tenure in backyard or informal residences, limited space and the sporadic destruction of homes through political violence place pressures on domestic units, forcing individuals to co-reside where, under 'normal' conditions, they would more readily establish their own independent homes. The coping strategy that Eunice's mother employed, in dispersing her sons to live with their sister, obviously hindered Eunice's efforts to make claims upon her boyfriend's

income. Unlike Cynthia Molefe who could make claims upon her husband, a Zionist lay preacher and migrant who had kept in contact with his rural family over the years, if Eunice's boyfriend failed or refused to provide for her kin, no public disgrace would follow.

The conflict that developed between Eunice and her boyfriend illustrates the point that the individual members of a domestic unit do not necessarily agree as to the distribution of incomes. This is inevitable where couples reside with relatives who act as a drain on their respective incomes. Perhaps the best solution is for a couple to live apart from kin. On the other hand, the risk that a marital or consensual union will fail means that rural women, such as Eunice and Pearl, may not wish to cut ties to their kin completely.

Not all female migrants who sought to enter into consensual unions, especially unions with the potential for formalisation, were hindered in their efforts by dependent kinsfolk. Pearl Makgoba and Zandile Ngidi, whose cases have been described in this chapter, left their natal homes with ease because their departure lessened their respective mothers' domestic expenses. Nkanza Ngwenya and her mother formed a stable alliance that actively facilitated the younger woman's efforts to enter into two consecutive marital unions. Like many of the female respondents, Nkanza's only daughter was born outside of a marital union. However, Nkanza's mother kept her granddaughter in her home so that Nkanza could act as a 'free agent', unhindered by maternal duties. Niehaus (1994:136) describes the different

'payoffs' that single and married African women, living in the impoverished resettlement town of Qwaqwa, Transkei, experienced:

"By remaining single and/or childless, women avoid many domestic pressures and attain greater stability of employment. By terminating employment and devoting attention exclusively to the home, on the other hand, married women are relieved of much tension resulting from such a conflict of roles, despite losses incurred with regard to economic freedom and independence."

If one agrees that marriage constitutes as much a strategy as does remaining single, then surely women who wish to enter into such arrangements need to be free from the burden of kinship obligations. Yet, contracting a successful marriage is more difficult for women who find themselves responsible for the care of their own pre-marital children. Such women obviously need assistance from a kinswoman who will raise such children on their behalf. However, women such as Nkanza's mother, who provided this assistance were not necessarily acting with complete altruism. I suggest that pre-marital procreation gives rise to a situation in which unmarried (or post-marital) mothers have a vested interest in their adult daughters' marital unions. Nkanza's mother invested in her daughter's marriages because she, as an unmarried mother herself, stood to gain through the transference of *ilobolo* to her domestic unit. For example, Murray's (1981: 122) studies of remittent-dependent rural households in Lesotho, highlights the role of bridewealth or *bohali* payments in sustaining the households of senior wives or widows. Murray (1981: 119) describes such payments as "a vital element in household strategies of economic viability".

However, I argue that the success of this strategy depends on a balance of interests existing between the two parties to the alliance, that is, the mother and daughter. Firstly, the daughter must receive some tangible benefit from the absence of her pre-marital children. The temptation here is to conclude that the benefit a woman receives relates to decreased daily expenses usually incurred in looking after young children. This is undeniably a benefit but it does not apply in situations where the woman has to send money home to *her* mother on a regular basis. Rather, one might argue that having no children in her domestic unit frees a mother from the demanding task of childcare and allows her to structure a domestic routine that places her (new) husband before her premarital children. In redistributing their children, women such as Nkanza were able to act as 'free agents' not only to enter into consensual or marital unions but also to enter the job market.

Secondly, the presence of dependants in their grandmother's domestic unit should not place too great a burden on this older woman's source of income. However, it is not simply an expectation that her grandchildren will not present too great a burden but also some long-term expectation of bridewealth payments coming into her domestic unit if she is unmarried or widowed. In this sense, grandchildren should add value to her domestic unit, even if payments are somewhat delayed. For example, when Pearl Makgoba and her boyfriend decided to set up a home in Old Dunbar, Pearl included her pre-marital children because her indigent mother did not have the means to keep Pearl's children. Without a regular source of income Pearl could not guarantee that she would remit money home. Her mother did have

another daughter's children living in her home but this daughter was *employed*. Although Nkanza Ngwenya was not formally employed when she left her mother's home, she only had one daughter who was *her* mother's only grandchild and, furthermore, Nkanza's husband was in permanent employment. It is not surprising, then, that Preston-Whyte (1978:58-59) describes 'female-linked' families in KwaZulu-Natal as comprising co-operative ties between women and their *employed* or work-seeking daughters. These alliances ensured older women who took in their daughter's children some form of income and in turn their adult daughters were to enter the workforce. I emphasize here that such mother-daughter alliances do not only benefit daughters. An important factor operating here, that is, an incentive for grandmothers to hold onto their grandchildren is the real possibility that as they grow older, they will become less employable. This pattern is seen in the following example of a female-linked family.

**Case 5: Staying single as an alternative to marriage.**

Betty Sithole was born in the small rural town of Harding in 1934. She completed standard one, thereafter remaining at home where her mother taught her to sew. This skill was later to become her only means of generating an income. Betty's father, a migrant labourer, was away from home for six months of each year as he worked on the Witwatersrand mines. When Betty gave birth to her first child at twenty-two-years of age, she did not leave her parental home, choosing to remain unmarried. In this way, Betty's family, like Pearl's, was extended in the matriline.

Betty bore six pre-marital children in total, leaving these children with her (later widowed) mother whilst she migrated north to Durban, taking up a job as a seamstress in the township of Umlazi. Betty could not remember the year that she left for Durban but did recall that her children were young at the time. She claims to have remitted money home on a regular basis, even though she had worked away from Harding for many years. Betty remained in contact with her mother and children, returning home at each month end. When violence erupted in Harding in 1992, all her adult children - except for one daughter - fled to Umgababa where their maternal uncle owned a spaza cum sewing room. Betty, now fifty-eight-years old, decided to keep in contact with her children, joining them in Umgababa where she made clothes for her brother to sell.

When three of her children moved to Durban to build their own homes in Old Dunbar, Betty also migrated to the informal settlement where she looked after her (non-resident) grandchildren. Betty's decision to remain unmarried (unlike her own mother) is perhaps an indication that entering into a marital union would hinder her mobility, her freedom to work where and when she chose. Her ability to remain in contact with her mother, to travel home each month, might have been constrained somewhat had she entered into a marital union. Niehaus' (1994: 135) comments on the constraints and expectations (on both husband and wife) that follow from a marital union are relevant here, illustrating that remaining single is simply a better, or more flexible option for some women. Each option - remaining single or entering into a marital union - is a strategy with different benefits, yet the risks are

similar. The risk that attaches to remaining unmarried is one in which an unmarried mother might find herself unemployed and solely responsible for the welfare of her children. However, a married woman may find herself in the same position if forced to leave her marital home or if her husband absconds.

Thus far, save for Betty Sithole's case, the focus has been upon women attaching themselves to male earners, women moving from their rural homes, either leaving their children behind or taking their children with them. Only one case study points to the incorporation of a male migrant into the home of an urban female-headed family. The latter comprised a widow, her adult children and grandchildren, similar in many respects to Pearl Makgoba's natal family. Sandile Cele's mother-in-law acted as a gatekeeper in the sense that she held access to a needed resource, that of urban accommodation.

The inclusion of Sandile into this post-marital family might be interpreted as an effective means of securing *ilobolo* payments, some of which this widow did manage to elicit. However, the downfall of this strategy lies in the fact that male-earners, although potential sources of domestic income, are employed erratically. This reinforces the argument that social maneuvers are open to failure. Sandile's case study is unique in that he entered into matrilocal residence. However, a common pattern emerges, namely, the tendency for extended families to deplete a domestic unit's income and the pressures this places on couples to enter into neolocal residence.

### **Case 6: Male migrants - wage earners or domestic dependents?**

Sandile Cele was born on his father's farm in Ndwedwe in 1936 but he did not receive any benefit as the principle of primogeniture applied. However, his older brother inherited the house only because their father had sold off the land before his death. Sandile's only hope was to migrate to Durban to seek work as there was no one to support him. He explained his inability to return to Ndwedwe: "I am not entitled. It is my brother's home and I can't go and live there." He entered into a marital relationship with the mother of his first born daughter, however, this woman deserted Sandile leaving him responsible for the care of himself and his child. His second wife, Nabane, born in 1962, was much younger than himself. Nabane, her two brothers and three sisters had remained in their widowed mother's home following their father's death from tuberculosis and it was this domestic unit that Sandile joined. Sandile paid *ilobola* over the years although some friction arose (after the couple's departure from this widow's home) as to whether these payments were completed. No doubt Sandile's earnings, whether for bridewealth or general domestic expenses, contributed significantly to this widow's income. However, the gradual expansion of the domestic unit through the birth of Nabane and Sandile's children depleted both living space and the domestic budget. The extended family battled to pay their water and electricity bills. It was inevitable then that the couple would have to move away from KwaMashu to seek their own (more cost-efficient) space. This splitting away of individuals from matrilineally extended domestic units, that is, the process of domestic fission or dispersal is also

seen in Pearl Makgoba's and Nkanza Ngwenya's case studies. One might suggest that domestic dispersal is a better strategy than co-residence, and that, in the context of poverty, ties to networks of kin are far more productive.

A theme that re-emerges in Sandile's case study is the extent to which senior women become involved in marital negotiation, a phenomenon which relates to three factors: pre-marital procreation, early widowhood and a lack of agnatic ties. Firstly, pre-marital procreation means that unmarried mothers - single mothers - become parties to bridewealth transactions. This is seen most clearly in Nkanza Ngwenya's case study. However, the predominant family pattern that emerges from the biographical material is that of widow-led families incorporating unmarried daughters and daughter's children. These widows become parties to marital negotiations. Of course, widowhood, in itself, does not automatically imply that women should become involved in marital negotiations. The tentative conclusion is that widowed families are relatively isolated, and that other factors such as social dislocation (as seen in Cynthia Molefe's case study) have already loosened ties between larger extended families. Yet, this very process of social isolation places increasing pressures on what I have termed, using Pauw's (1979) descriptor, families extended through the matriline. Such families, by necessity, cannot afford to become caught up in cycles of non-marriage. Rather, new family patterns emerge in which unmarried women, divorcees and widows step into positions traditionally monopolised by men. Murray (1981: 147) describes a similar pattern of marital transactions in Lesotho as:

"[The] result of bargaining conducted by senior women over the earning capacity of men, than as the result of bargaining conducted by senior men over the productive and reproductive capacities of women."

One example of this process is that of the marital transaction that took place between Nomusa Phungula's mother and mother-in-law. Nomusa's mother was widowed when her daughter was seven years old. She remarried but subsequently separated from her second husband. This left her relatively isolated, finding herself solely responsible for her children. She sent Nomusa to boarding school where her daughter fell pregnant with her boyfriend, Eugene's, child. Nomusa's mother was not able to support her daughter and grandson for any length of time, which meant that the father of her child, Eugene, turned to his employed mother for support. This divorcee was working as a live-in domestic servant in Durban and she acted as a gatekeeper, finding piecework for her son in the city.

I argue that gatekeepers such as Anna were strategically placed to assist their kin because of their employment as domestic workers. Domestic work, especially where this includes live-in employment, places such women in a better position to access suburban resources and to fully utilise networks of information relating to piecework jobs. Men such as Thabo Dlamini and Vuyani Bhengu, like their female counterpart Pearl Makgoba, used their mothers and sisters positions of employment as domestic workers to begin gardening work in the city. Although both men eventually moved on to better paying jobs, the fact remains that kin provided them with a foothold in the city. So too, when Valentina Shezi migrated to Durban from

the coastal town of Mtunzini, she first came to live with her mother, a live-in domestic. Valentina then found domestic work in the same area as her mother. Yet, once each of the four respondents mentioned here had found work, they *eventually* moved on to set up their own homes. The exception is of course Eugene, who at the time of fieldwork remained dependent on his mother. The erratic nature of Eugene's employment meant that he and Nomusa relied heavily on his mother's wages. In turn, Eugene's mother became responsible for paying Nomusa's mother *ilobolo*.

The periodic dependence of men on their wives, mothers or mothers-in-law thus impedes any strategy seeking to access a man's earnings. A secondary point here is that the very instability of male earnings contributes to marital or consensual dissolution. This is noticeable in the way in which Sandile Cele described his second wife: "She is much better than my first wife. She doesn't complain when I don't bring money home." There is no doubt that a domestic unit requires regular cash inputs, the lack of which inevitably fragments the unit and disperses its members. This is part and parcel of the process of survival amongst extremely impoverished communities. Domestic units must slough off adult dependents if they are to survive and in turn these ejected individuals either manage alone or become incorporated into other domestic units that can accommodate them. Children must be redistributed if unmarried women are to stand a chance of finding work and /or setting up marital domestic units.

I suggest that, the mobilisation of survival networks underpins the process of domestic readjustment in a context of extreme poverty, which in turn fits into an existing argument that portrays domestic units as "labile, shedding and adding members in response to ever-changing exigencies..." (Smith and Wallerstein 1992 quoted in Russell 1998). The indiscriminate mobilisation of kinship ties, checked to some extent by the tendency towards matrification, accounts for the fluidity of domestic units and their varied composition. The deliberate effort here is to emphasize social maneuvers, the choices and decisions that impoverished folk must make, an analysis of those whom they attempt to obligate, rather than an analysis of households or domestic units per se. This also portrays co-residence, not simply as an end in itself, but as a means to an end or part of a long-term strategy of urban survival. Essentially, networks of kinship ties that cross-cut spatial or geographical boundaries, as illustrated by the biographies, function as crude measures of insurance for those individuals for whom access to bed-space, at the very least, provides a foothold in the city.

## **Chapter Five: 'My own place': Attempts at domestic consolidation in Old Dunbar**

This chapter examines the way in which respondents mobilised their kinship networks in setting up domestic units in Old Dunbar. By domestic units, I refer both to the physical shelter, that is, shack or 'imijondolo', and its co-residential personnel or family unit. The opening up of Old Dunbar for informal settlement provided men and women with a welcome alternative to overcrowded hostels, township houses, backrooms and other shack settlements. However, the illegality of the settlement in its formative phase, added to the practical difficulty of re-establishing and sustaining domestic units required that individuals, couples and families mobilise support from kinsfolk.

A certain amount of 'deal-making' thus ensued between spouses, siblings, matrilineal cousins, mothers and their adult children with the activation of otherwise dormant relationships culminating in domestic units of varied compositions. Inevitably, these new or reconstituted domestic units were neither bounded in terms of income-expenditure flows nor static in terms of their co-residential personnel. Rather, domestic units were embedded within wider support networks that cut across their physical boundaries. An analysis of these support networks reveals especially high levels of reliance, that is, dependency, amongst mothers and their adult children given pre-marital procreation, widowhood, marital dissolution and male domestic marginality.

## **Sponsors and Gatekeepers**

Each shack amongst the sample of twenty domestic units had what Verdon (1979) terms a residential sponsor, an individual through whom others gained rights of access to the dwelling unit. This individual provided the material assistance necessary for the shack's construction, paying for the site and / or procuring the building materials. Whilst sponsors such as Thabo Dlamini, Eunice Myeni and Valentina Shezi had each resided in their homes on a permanent basis allowing other family members to co-reside for longer or shorter periods, other sponsors lived and worked outside of Old Dunbar informal settlement. These non-resident individuals retained rights of access to their homes, installing kinsfolk as a means, perhaps, of safe-guarding shacks for their own future residence. However, the type of sponsorship that predominated amongst the sample of domestic units in question was one in which resident individuals, that is, shack owners - provided their kinsfolk with sleeping space. Residential dependents did not necessarily rely on their sponsors for food or other needed items unless they were unemployed and had no other source of income. Likewise, sponsors did not automatically stand as domestic heads or authority figures - not because some sponsors were non-resident - but for the very fact that some dependents simply used sleeping space in Old Dunbar as a easy and convenient way from which to travel to work or school and back. Access to sleeping space was exchanged for services related to domestic chores, childcare or informal sector activities. Even companionship proved invaluable for those sponsors who had moved to Old Dunbar alone.

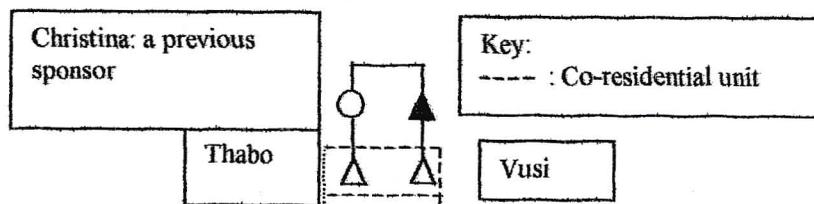
I labour the point that a crucial distinction must be drawn between sponsorship and headship because the levels of domestic fluidity in Old Dunbar and the importance of (often invisible) extra-residential ties raise the question as to the usefulness of labels such as male or female headship. Terms such as gatekeepers or residential sponsors illustrate the instrumental and temporary nature of domesticity, whilst one questions whether named heads are *effective* heads, especially where many male heads were actually unemployed husband-fathers with few procreative responsibilities and so not central to the functioning of a domestic unit.

### **Siblings and matrilineal cousins**

Manona's (1991: 202) study of the migration of ex-farm workers to informal settlements outside of Grahamstown illustrated that these individuals drew upon sibling or collateral ties in finding a place to stay in town. Further, Manona (1991: 201) argued that an overlap existed between the parent-child and sibling relationship in that adult children fulfilled obligations to their parents vis-à-vis their siblings. Certainly, siblingship encompasses a moral dimension but the extent to which siblingship forms a basis for co-residence needs to be seen in a context of migrant labour and commuter labour. For example, Niehaus' (1994: 118-9) study of the impact of commuter labour on QwaQwa households suggested that the existence of strong ties between adult siblings related to the unusual level of sibling responsibility, where brother and sisters were left alone for long periods to raise one another.

Consequently, the reliance of siblings upon one another may extend into adulthood with individuals mobilising ties to individuals with whom they have a common domestic history. There is an element then of convenience and security in drawing on an individual whom one knows or has an existing relationship. For two 'brothers', Thabo and Vusi Dlamini, who were matrilineal cousins raised by Thabo's mother, setting up a domestic unit in Old Dunbar enabled each man to establish a foothold in the city. Each brother acted as a co-sponsor pooling his resources so as to utilise fully the opportunity that this shack settlement offered.

### Case 1: Co-sponsorship in Old Dunbar



Thabo and Vusi Dlamini, 27 and 26 years old respectively, were born in Hammarsdale, KwaZulu-Natal. The men were matrilineal cousins but Thabo's mother and maternal grandmother had raised Vusi together with Thabo and his siblings. Christina referred to Vusi as *her* child, and she and her children were his only living relatives. Hence, Thabo and Vusi regarded each other as brothers. Neither Thabo nor Vusi completed primary school, having left school to take up employment during their teenage years. Whilst Vusi had remained in Hammarsdale at his mother's home, Thabo's work took him away from

his family between 1984 and 1994. However, Thabo did not lose contact with his mother during this time, and had stayed with her from time to time in her servant's quarters.

In August of 1994, Thabo and Vusi heard through a friend, of work at a factory in Jacobs south of Durban. The work involved cleaning old containers that had contained industrial chemicals. This was not pleasant and Thabo believed that it was the cause of his chronic bronchitis. However, both men needed work. Vusi was unemployed and Thabo had lost his job at a fast food outlet in Durban North, and could no longer afford to pay rent to the owner of the house in whose garage he had been living. Vusi did not wish to live in Hammarisdale any longer because of violence in that area and it would be easier to commute to work if they could live closer to Durban's city centre. Thabo had also obtained weekend work at a supermarket in the city centre.

The men heard that people were building homes in Old Dunbar, and they took the decision to move to the area. Both men were single at this point, and Thabo had no children, whilst Vusi's children lived with their mother elsewhere in the city. Thus the two men moved to the shack settlement, and built for themselves a two-roomed corrugated-iron shelter, each room having a separate entrance. They bought two paraffin stoves and a radio, the use of which they shared. Together the men spent relatively little on fuel as they spent most of their time at work, and so their respective expendable income was relatively high. During their first year in Old Dunbar Thabo earned between R700- and R1000- per month.

However, this situation was not to last. In August of 1995 Thabo was placed on short time, working a three-day week only whilst Vusi was retrenched from work. The demand

for labourers at the factory had dropped, which meant that the brothers had to manage on one part-time wage. Towards the end of 1995 Thabo's seventeen-year-old girlfriend Thandi, whom he had met whilst working in town, fell pregnant with their daughter. Thabo agreed to take Thandi and their baby to live with him in his room in Old Dunbar. Thandi remained at her natal home until the month before the birth of her child. Her mother agreed that she could take one year off school but had to return to complete standard eight in 1997. At the same time, Thabo's mother needed a place to stay in Durban, in order to look for work. She had been recuperating at her home in Hammarsdale following an illness but she needed to find work again to support herself and her three adult children who were living in Hammarsdale. She came to Old Dunbar and moved into Vusi's room, whilst he went to live with his girlfriend who had servant's quarters at her place of work in Durban North.

The immediate point that emerges from this case study is the fact that setting up home in Old Dunbar provided each of these two men, for a short while at least, with their *own* space. For both men, this was their first attempt at establishing their own home. Their domestic arrangement was essentially a convenient one in that the men made few demands of one another and in turn no other kin - girlfriends, their mother or other siblings - made demands on them. That the composition of the residential unit changed after one year, with Vusi leaving to live with his girlfriend does not necessarily point to a weakness in the sibling relationship itself. It does, however, illustrate the temporary transformation of a moral tie - essentially a non-effective relationship - into an instrumental relationship.

Stack (1974: 119) emphasizes that co-operation amongst siblings is as much an adaptation to poverty as are female-headed family units, and should not be overlooked. However, the question arises whether the two family types are interrelated. Pre-marital procreation and marital dissolution narrow the span of kin an individual is able to draw upon for help, so creating the tendency for individuals to look for help within their natal family, which would obviously include their mother and siblings. If so, this would suggest that phenomena such as female-headed or to use a better term 'female-linked' families (Preston-Whyte 1978: 7) incorporate or foster sibling-reliance. For example, Pauw's (1979: 150) study of town-dwellers in East London, South Africa, revealed that children resided for longer in 'multi-generation female-headed households' than in male-headed households. Possibly, these children were more dependent on their mother because they had limited or no contact with paternal kinsfolk. No doubt, the longer individuals co-reside the more likely they are to have stronger ties to one another. The overall argument I am making here is that individuals who need a place to stay on moving to town must make use of those relatives at hand who have something to offer them. Thus, it is also possible that an individual may be solely dependent on a paternal kinsman or kinswoman.

Nokulunga Nzuzza's case study illustrates this point. Her kinship network was narrowed by the death of both her mother and father. She and her brother, Patrick, were raised by their paternal aunt, Thembi, as she was their only living relative. Nokulunga and her brother were already living with their paternal aunt before being orphaned, and the extended family had moved as a unit to Umbumbulu to seek work. Here Thembi met and married her husband to whom she bore nine children. Nokulunga later came to rely upon her paternal aunt Thembi when she sought a place to live closer to Durban's C.B.D. Both

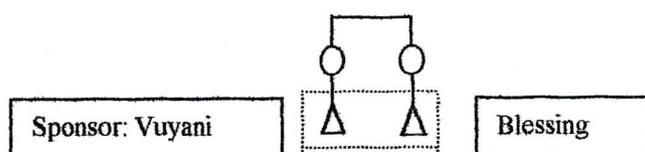
Thembi and Nokulunga migrated to Durban to seek work, although the younger woman had migrated from Umbumbulu more recently. Initially Nokulunga lived with friends in the township of Umlazi but later moved into her aunt's shack on a temporary basis in 1996 because she desperately needed to find work, so using Thembi's home to prepare for several job interviews.

Nokulunga's relationship to her paternal aunt points primarily to the operation of a sibling tie, that is, Thembi's relationship to Nokulunga's father, rather than that of agnatic principles. Similarly, Manona (1991: 205-6) interprets supportive ties between siblings as follows:

"This illustrates the shift from the earlier agnatic emphasis. It also represents a paradigmatic shift from descent (which is jural) to filiation (which is moral) in the morality and obligations of kinship"

The phenomenon of sibling-reliance also extended to cousin relationships, especially matrilineal cousins, given the tendency for individuals to mobilise ties to and *through* women. Vuyani Bhengu and his matrilineal cousin, Blessing, were raised separately by two sisters but later co-resided in Old Dunbar. Unlike Thabo and Vusi Dlamini, Vuyani and Blessing stood as sponsor and residential dependent respectively.

## Case 2: Male sponsorship and domestic co-operation



Vuyani and Blessing were matrilineal cousins, the sons of two sisters living in their separate marital residences. When he obtained full-time work in 1993 as a petrol pump attendant on the Bluff, in Durban, thirty-six-year old Vuyani decided he could afford to move out of his sister's overcrowded township house. He had lived more or less permanently with his married sister for twelve years. Vuyani earned R700- per month, at that point, but he needed to be closer to work to cut down on transport costs. He heard that people were moving to Old Dunbar, but did not wish to live alone. His twenty-two-year-old cousin, Blessing, a post-matric student at a Durban technical college agreed to come and live with him, and in return Vuyani agreed to provide Blessing with food and his a place to sleep. Blessing had been living with his parents in Kwa Mashu and would cut down on transport costs if he could live closer to the city. Although both men had children, the latter were living with their respective mothers. The men built two separate shacks, a pit latrine, and a washing line, which they fenced off using wooden posts and wire. The cousins shared one room, in which they slept and kept their personal belongings. The second shack served as a kitchen and a place for Vuyani's mother and daughter to sleep in when they visited. Blessing and Vuyani found this arrangement suitable as Vuyani worked nightshift on alternative weeks. Blessing had the room to himself during these times, and Vuyani could sleep during the day whilst Blessing was at technical college.

This domestic arrangement obviously suited both men, highlighting Niehaus' (1988, 1994) argument that amongst low-income families, the flexibility of the sibling or cousin relationship stands in sharp contrast to the more narrowly defined conjugal relationship. Although an age-gap existed between the cousins, their relationship was one of equivalence and Vuyani did not stand as paternalistic father-figure over the younger man. However, Niehaus (1994: 128) research amongst residents living in a closer settlement in Qwaqwa highlighted the benefits that working *women* living with siblings, as opposed to spouses, experienced. Niehaus (1994: 119-120, 130) points out that unmarried working women living with their male siblings experienced fewer domestic pressures than their married counterparts. The question remains unanswered as to the benefits *men* derive from living with consanguines, rather than affines. One cannot put forward the suggestion that these two cousins, Vuyani and Blessing, avoided domestic duties, such as cooking, cleaning and fetching water. However, both men were free from the practical constraints of childcare and the associated expectations of husband-fathers to provide for their dependents. Vuyani had minimal contact with wife and children who lived some distance away in the northern KwaZulu-Natal town of Hlabisa, whilst Blessing's child lived with its mother elsewhere in Durban.

I suggest, then, that consanguineal relationships *per se* do not automatically form the basis for flexible domestic units. These two cousins set up a specific domestic arrangement that gave each man their own space away from the overcrowded homes of their female kin. Vuyani had lived in his sister's marital home for ten years. Blessing and Vuyani continued to live together during the course of 1995, but once Blessing had completed his year of study, he no longer needed to live with Vuyani, so leaving Old Dunbar early in 1996.

Notably, the co-residence of Vuyani with his cousin did not challenge male-female role expectations because Vuyani's female kin took over domestic chores, such as cooking, washing and ironing his clothes when they visited his home.

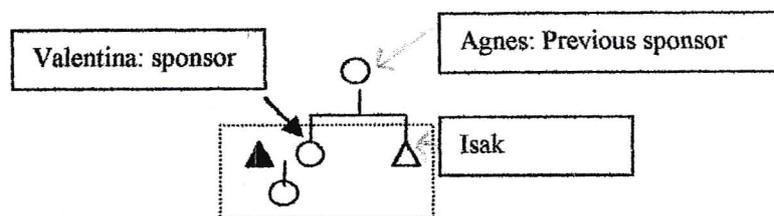
The relative ease with which unmarried male respondents established their own homes in Old Dunbar contrasts with the experience of unmarried female sponsors such as Valentina Shezi and Eunice Myeni. Although women such as these did move to Old Dunbar to establish or re-establish their own homes, they faced the added responsibility of caring for dependent children *and* earning a living. By necessity, the domestic units of female sponsors were embedded within support networks directed towards the care of children.

The redistribution of children in and out of Old Dunbar pointed, then, to a pattern of inter-linked domestic units or female domestic networks. I argue that whilst male kin were not necessarily absent from the homes of their female kin (or vice versa), they were largely marginal to these domestic networks because they had few procreative responsibilities. This possibly made it easier to slough off male kin or easier for men, themselves, to abscond.

Two single mothers, Agnes Shezi and her adult daughter Valentina, formed a supportive dyad grappling to support their respective children. Agnes had stood as a gatekeeper for her daughter Valentina when she migrated from Mtunzini to Durban, allowing Valentina to stay in her domestic servant's quarters. When Valentina and her boyfriend built a shack in Old Dunbar she became a sponsor herself, taking her younger brother into her home. In turn, Valentina relied on her brother to mind her baby daughter from time to time.

## Female sponsorship and domestic responsibility

### Case 3: Valentina Shezi's role as sponsor for her mother and brother



Valentina and her fourteen-year-old brother, Isak, moved to Old Dunbar to live in a one-roomed wattle-and-daub shack. Twenty-three-year old Valentina had arrived in Durban in 1993 from Esikhaweni, a former KwaZulu township several hundred kilometres north of Durban. Here she had attended a mission school. However, she did not migrate directly to Old Dunbar settlement, but re-established contact with her mother, Agnes, who had servant's quarters in Yellowwood Park. In 1994, her mother's employers informed Agnes that they intended to emigrate and that she would have to find another job and a place to stay when they did so. Her mother informed Valentina that she would not be able to carry on working for many more years because of her arthritis. According to Valentina, she organised the building of the shack in Old Dunbar, because, in her own words, "It is my responsibility". Added to this, Valentina and her boyfriend wished to have a place where he could visit her.

Over Christmastime 1994, Valentina, her boyfriend and her fourteen-year-old brother built a one-roomed wattle-and-daub shack in Old Dunbar. Valentina agreed to take her younger brother to live with her in Old Dunbar, whilst Agnes remained with her

employers until they had left the country. Valentina continued working in Yellowwood Park but because she had to take two taxis to get to and from work, spending most of her R200-00 salary on travelling expenses she gave up work within a month. She then relied on money from her mother and her boyfriend. However, her mother earned only R200-per month, which she had to use to buy food for herself, Valentina and Isak. Within the first year of arriving in Old Dunbar Valentina fell pregnant with her first child. During her pregnancy Valentina did not work but after her daughter's birth she was forced to go out to look for work as her boyfriend had committed suicide. Valentina described the occurrence:

“Well, he decided to go and die just before she was born. He committed suicide. I don't know why, but I think it was family matters. He came home from visiting his family and he killed himself. His mother just cried and cried. They came and asked me why but I do not know.”

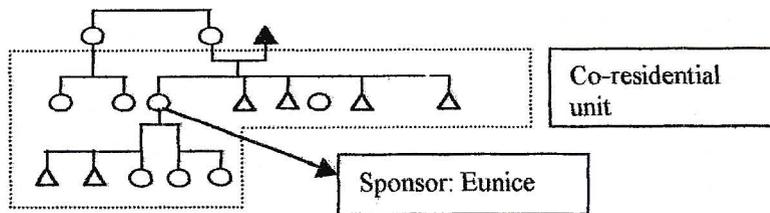
Valentina was not able to breastfeed her daughter once she was born, which meant that she had no choice but to look for work, as her mother's small salary would not stretch to pay for infant milk formula. Valentina had obtained a letter from a doctor at King Edward Hospital requesting that the local clinic near Cato Crest squatter settlement give her free powdered milk on a monthly basis. However, as Valentina indicated "I went there with a doctor's letter but they chased me away." As a means of generating some income, Valentina sold cakes and sweets baked by a woman in neighbouring 'Maxhane', a low-income housing project. Valentina then obtained daily kitchen work paying a salary of R800- for the two months prior to Agnes's arrival in Old Dunbar, leaving S'mangele in the care of her mentally disabled brother until her mother moved to Old Dunbar in November 1996. This type of co-operation between Valentina and Agnes, in which both women took

turns to stay at home and to go out to work, resembles what Preston-Whyte (1978: 7) described as a form of 'role switching'.

What also emerges from the Shezi case study is the fact that relatively narrow support networks of mothers and daughters foster a pattern of sibling-responsibility for younger children. This case study widens, then, the meaning of the term 'childminder' to include children who look after still younger children and also lends support to Jones' (1993: 2) argument that not all black children find themselves dispersed to grandparent families in the rural countryside. The death of her child's father added to the fact that her own father had married a woman in Mtunzini meant that Valentina had few options and so relied heavily upon those kin at hand. This illustrates that a domestic network is not necessarily comprised of a large circle of female-support, and may simply refer to a mother-daughter dyad. Eunice Myeni stood as a residential sponsor to her adult brothers and matrilineal cousins in Old Dunbar, however, she looked primarily to her own (non-resident) widowed mother to lessen her domestic burdens.

Case four of chapter four illustrated how Eunice Myeni took her brothers into her care when they were children. However they remained with Eunice into their adult years. Eunice, her brothers, her younger two children and a male clansman whom Eunice called her 'brother' comprised the initial domestic unit established in Old Dunbar. Two of her younger female cousins migrated from their rural home by using Eunice's shack as a means to building their own place in Old Dunbar, reminiscent of a pattern Manona (1991:207) observed of migrants to Grahamstown, in which older siblings migrated first and later their younger siblings joined them.

#### Case 4: Eunice Myeni's extended family



When her brother Lulama moved to Old Dunbar to build his own shack in November 1994, Eunice, her brother Velisa and her five children soon followed him. She had decided to end the relationship with her boyfriend, rather than lose contact with her brothers. When she left Ntuzuma her boyfriend refused to allow her to take her electric sewing machine with which she made clothes to sell, using the excuse that would not be able to use it in an unelectrified shack settlement. Although separated from one of her brothers whilst living with the father of her youngest children, the move to Old Dunbar reunited Eunice with all three of her brothers. Eunice could not afford to keep all her children with her and soon she sent her elder three - two sons and a daughter - to live with her pensioned mother in the Transkei. She had helped her mother by taking in Velisa and Lulama after their father died and now, in return, she needed childcare assistance from her mother. Eunice promised to remit home what money she could, as the children were to attend school. Her mother thus acted as a quasi-sponsor for the domestic unit.

A fourth 'brother', Ntokoza, who was actually a distant cousin sharing the same surname "*isibongo*" came from Eunice's natal home came to stay with her. In return he would help with her in her small-scale enterprises, and hopefully find full-time work in Durban.

Eunice received irregular remittances from the father of her younger two children but

distributed any money he sent her to her mother in the Transkei. Eunice's two twenty-three-year old twin cousins also hoped to find work in Durban. They built their shack adjacent to Eunice and Lulama's shack, the two residential units forming one commensal group. Eunice and Lulama found work in the kitchen of a restaurant in the city centre, and together supported six adults and two children. Throughout her first year in Old Dunbar both Eunice and Lulama had employment. However, once retrenched from her job, Eunice began street vending, working initially for another vendor but later obtaining her own table in town.

The persistence of co-operative relationship between brothers and sisters, especially where a sister assumes financial responsibility for her adult brother or brothers, illustrates the situational nature of domestic patriarchy (See Sharp, J 1994: 79-84). A man without the means to access urban resources, such as a place to stay or a fixed income, may have to obtain these *through a woman*, such as a sister. However, it is important to note that Eunice did not stand as the head of her domestic unit because her brothers could not rely on her to consistently sustain the domestic unit nor was she viewed as an authority figure. One might question, then, whether the concept of domestic headship is valid where survival depends on an individual's efforts and not on the collective endeavors of a domestic unit. Eunice *followed* her employed brother Lulama to Old Dunbar where she then began a process of domestic consolidation that involved distributing three of her children and finding work in town. She could not guarantee that she would be able to follow through with her endeavors, making her a relatively weak sponsor for her unemployed brothers. However, sponsorship is by definition temporary because sponsors such as Eunice are gatekeepers through whom kin try to establish a foothold in the city.

Nevertheless, Eunice's relatively flexible relationship to her siblings and her mother stands in contrast to her previous conjugal relationship. Common to South African (Niehaus, I. 1988, 1994, Preston-Whyte, E. 1978, Van der Vliet, V. 1984), Latin American (Lomnitz, L. 1977) and Caribbean (Gonzalez, N. 1969: 68) studies documenting the primacy of mother-child and sibling ties is their recognition of the instability of marital or conjugal relationships. Niehaus' (1994: 130) study of Qwaqwa households, South Africa, observed "the greater status accorded to a woman in household with people to whom she is consanguineally related." Gonzalez's (1969: 60, 69) consanguineal family model described Black Carib 'households' comprised of mothers and their adult children, and in the absence of husband-fathers from domestic units, *brothers* took on authoritarian roles over their younger sisters and sister's children. Similarly, Lomnitz's (1977:191) study of Mexican-American shack dwellers noted that women tended to form affective ties with their children and their brothers (Lomnitz 1977: p94-6) because conjugal relationships were exceptionally restrictive. Women sided with their brothers over their husbands in domestic disputes. Stack's (1974:124) analysis of kin networks amongst low-income black American families also revealed "the strong conflict between kin-based domestic units and lasting ties between husbands and wives".

It appears, then, that specific types of consanguineal families benefit both men and women in very different ways. For men, such as Thabo Dlamini and Vuyani Bhengu, living singly without children relieved them of the role expectations that come with being husband-fathers. For women, the benefit derives from support from other female kin or

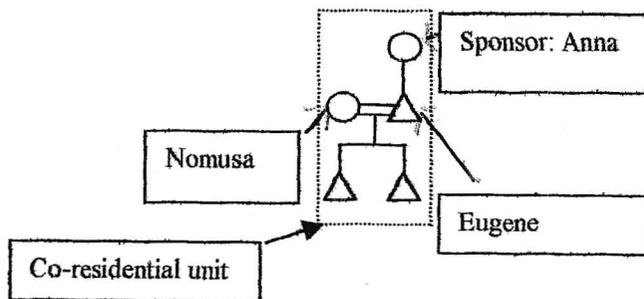
younger kinsmen in childcare, although consanguineal families do not relieve them completely of their procreative responsibilities - they cannot easily escape the role-expectations that come with motherhood. Despite the advantages of residing with consanguines, not all respondents moved to Old Dunbar with their mother, siblings or cousins. Preston-Whyte (1988: 68) points out that Gonzalez's (1969) consanguineal family model derived from a context in which limited ritual significance was attached to marriage, in contrast to its importance for African families. One must also bear in mind that South African studies pointing to the advantages of residing with consanguines derive from a context of labour or commuter migration combined with limited rights to urban residence. This legacy of urban policy created a situation in which married couples were forced to live apart or in overcrowded and unsanitary dwellings such as hostels (Ramphela, M and E. Boonzaier, 1988). The opening up of core city settlements, such as Old Dunbar, provided some couples with the opportunity to co-reside near their places of employment. Hence, I interpret both the co-residence of couples with or without children and that of consanguines in largely situational terms. Such an approach avoids the assumption that either type of domestic unit forms 'a hypothetical baseline' (Murray, C. 1981: 100) or a normative framework.

### **Setting up marital homes / living together in Old Dunbar**

Those conjugal units that couples set up in Old Dunbar were not completely self-sufficient and like their consanguineal counterparts, they relied to differing extents on some form of external sponsorship. Sponsorship ranged from assistance with the care of children to

complete financial dependence on a non-resident individual. Setting up an ostensibly independent domestic unit in Old Dunbar was a risk given the unpredictable nature of a couple's income. Although Eugene and Nomusa, a couple in the process of formalising their marriage, appeared financially independent, they had gained access to a domestic unit in Old Dunbar through Eugene's mother. The *de facto* resident husband-father was not, then, the effective head of this domestic unit, that is, the individual who sustained the domestic unit. Eugene's role as a husband-father was limited to piecework jobs and it is not surprising that whilst out of work he spent a good deal of his time in the company of friends (also unemployed) in Old Dunbar. Nomusa's residential history is mentioned very briefly on page 93 of chapter four.

**Case 5: The role of female wages in sustaining a conjugal unit**



Nomusa Phungula, Eugene Mbatha and their two young sons lived in a one-roomed wattle-and-daub shelter in Old Dunbar. The contents of their home consisted of two beds, a side-table with paraffin stove, and a radio. The couple had fenced off their home and front yard by growing a large hedge, and had planted three banana trees within the yard. Eugene's divorced mother, Anna, was a full-time live-in kitchen worker who visited her son and his family on Sundays. Neither Nomusa nor Eugene had full-time

employment and so relied, largely, on Anna's wages. Anna had in fact financed the building of the shack in Old Dunbar, so that her son and daughter-in-law had a place of their own in which to stay. However, the shack was also an investment for Anna as she had sold her home in KwaMashu. Eugene and Nomusa were not officially married, although I explained in chapter four that Anna had partially paid *ilobolo* to Nomusa's divorced mother living in the rural area of Uzwatini. As Eugene was still in the process of marrying Nomusa, he planned to return to his father's home in Greytown, for ritual purposes, in order to complete the marriage ceremony. However, he explained that he could not afford to do this:

"I need a ring for Nomusa, a new suit for myself, and I have to kill a cow and goat in Greytown."

Anna shopped each week for fuel and food, even paying her elder grandson's primary school fees of R60- per year. Meanwhile Eugene relied on piecemeal jobs, selling second-hand clothes, working as a petrol attendant, a security guard and construction worker. Although she was dependent upon Anna, Nomusa did not hold her in high regard, remarking that: "My mother is important, not Anna". However, Nomusa remained completely dependent upon Anna and felt that Anna resented having to support her son's family. Nomusa was relatively isolated as her kin lived some distance away because her mother and one of her brothers lived in Uzwatini, a married sister in Fondlezi, and an unmarried sister in Johannesburg.

Nomusa spent most of her time within the confines of her home or yard carrying out domestic chores, such as, washing nappies and children's clothes, whilst her youngest

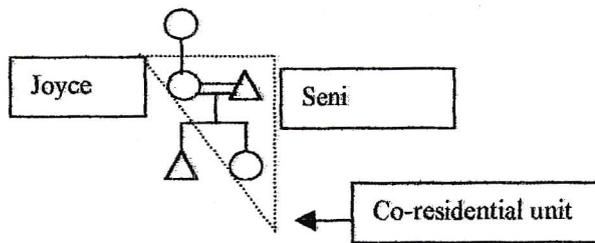
child was strapped to her back. Her daily chores involved getting her elder son ready for school, making his breakfast, before feeding her youngest child. Then she had to collect the first of two twenty-five-litre drums of water needed for cooking and washing. She then swept the floor of the shack, made the two beds, and washed the dishes before resting. At lunchtime, she prepared food for lunch and dinner on her paraffin stove, complaining that the smoke from her stove sometimes made it difficult for her to breathe. Occasionally, Nomusa cooked food for her two female friends, who chatted whilst eating together. Otherwise, she remained at home, unless she needed to take her baby to the Cato Crest health clinic.

The question that emerges from this case study is whether children fare better in domestic units where a woman 'holds the purse strings'. Moore (1994) argues that children are more likely to experience 'food security' in domestic units in which a woman (rather than a man) has greater control over resources. It is significant that Preston-Whyte (1969: 402) pointed out that men - sons, lovers, brothers - were marginal figures in female-linked families. Perhaps it suited these women to distance themselves from men whom they may have perceived as economic liabilities. Yet, Preston- Whyte (1988: 67) later cautioned that the seeming absence of men from female-linked families was perhaps "a construct of our research and of what we have up till now expected to find rather than reality".

The fact remains, however, that a co-resident husband-father, a man who is very present, may in fact have little to contribute to a domestic unit. The phenomenon of male unemployment thus fosters, indirectly at least, a pattern of female-centred domestic networks directed towards the care of children. The relative marginality of Eugene to his

conjugal unit stands in contrast to Seni Radebe's efforts to set up a home for himself and the mother of his children in Old Dunbar. The risk that this man undertook in setting up a home for his family did not detract from the value he placed on having his own space in this settlement. Unlike Eugene, Seni spent all of his time in his home because he and his wife had set up a small spaza shop in one of the rooms. In fact, one might describe Seni's refusal to take part in the rituals of smoking and drinking that bound men together in Old Dunbar as a central feature of entrepreneurial behaviour, directed at minimising personal consumption.

**Case 6: The difficulty of sustaining a conjugal unit**



In March of 1995, Seni Radebe and his common-law wife Joyce Modise moved out of his maternal uncle's home to build a place for themselves in Old Dunbar. Seni kept in contact with his mother's brother with whom he and Joyce had lived, by telephoning him from time to time. Seni described Joyce as follows: "She is not my wife. She is the mother of my children." Seni built his one-roomed home with crating that he obtained from a dump, paying a delivery vehicle to bring the materials to Old Dunbar. He bought tarpaulin to cover the roof. Essentially, Seni decided that he, Joyce and their young son Khipiwe would now live in their own place in Old Dunbar and that they would not return to their Transkeian home. Seni insisted, "I'll never leave here". Seni found full-time work as a labourer in the building industry earning R400- per month. For the first eleven months

that the family lived in Old Dunbar, Seni worked full-time. However, their fortunes changed in February of 1996 when Seni was retrenched from his job. Added to this, Joyce was expecting their second child. The couple employed two strategies to cope with this change.

Firstly, Joyce took her son Khipiwe back to her mother's home in Ntabankulu, Transkei. Joyce's redistribution of her son to her maternal kin parallels to some extent a pattern originally observed by Bott (1957) of working-class families in London, England. Bott (1957: 137-8) described these families mother-centred families, and suggested that supportive ties between mothers and daughters constituted pre-existing systems of support that a woman retained ties to despite entering a marital, or in this case study, consensual union. Secondly, Seni and Joyce also set up a small home-spaza shop with Seni's savings, cutting a small serving hatch into the front of their home, which they locked at night. He purchased stock for the shop, such as fresh vegetables, tinned foods, rice, chips and sweets. However, their main source of income derived from the sale of liquid paraffin. Each month Seni ordered seventy-five-litres of paraffin from a wholesaler in Phoenix at a cost of R1.15 per litre plus a R40-00 delivery charge. He then resold the paraffin at R1.50 per litre. The couple established a strict domestic routine each day. Joyce cleaned the shack, served customers (mainly children sent on errands) and organised the day's meals. Whilst cleaning was in progress, Seni sat outside the home with their infant daughter. Seni intended to buy a small electric refrigerator to stock his shop with cooldrinks and other perishables, but could not find a fridge cheap enough.

Joyce retained ties to her mother and siblings at home in Transkei. In August 1996, she took her new baby daughter home to show her mother, leaving Seni to look after the home and the shop for a month. Joyce took cooked food, "*umphako*", back home to her family in the Transkei, which Seni explained was imperative "if you have the power", that is, 'money'. Whilst Joyce was away Seni cooked and cleaned, staying close to home as he did not socialise with anyone in Old Dunbar. Seni knew of neighbours from Ntabankulu that were living in Old Dunbar, however, these individuals had little to do with one another, save for greeting one another and exchanging information. Each morning Seni cleaned the home, neatly tucking in the bedcovers and stacking the cooking pots in the corner of the shack, until Joyce returned home with her baby and the couple resumed their domestic routine.

However, early on the morning of 1 September 1996, thieves broke into the shack, stealing all their possessions and money, including stock for the shop. According to neighbours, the thieves hit Joyce who was holding her child. By dawn the next day the couple had packed their remaining possessions and fled Old Dunbar. A few days later, the house was boarded-up and the door chained and padlocked. The couple informed their neighbours that they had decided to return home to the Transkei. Hence, unforeseen circumstances forced this young couple to alter their plans despite Seni's earlier insistence that he would remain permanently in Old Dunbar.

This couple's ejection from Old Dunbar illustrates that a host of factors make domestic consolidation a difficult task for low-income families. It also lends some support to the argument that low-income domestic units cannot afford to isolate themselves from their

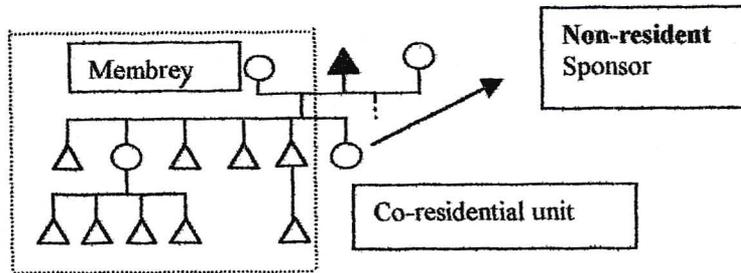
kinship networks and that extra-residential ties constitute a form of risk reduction against unforeseen events for these families. Overall, the case studies presented in this chapter lend some support to Moore's (1994: 3) observation that " domestic units, whatever their composition and form, are rooted in social networks which provide support and solidarity, as well as the exchange of goods and services." Given the role women play caring for dependent children combined with the domestic redundancy of husband-fathers given non-marriage and male unemployment, the question is raised as to whether *women* as mothers, daughters or sisters form the core or centre of these domestic networks. Stack's (1974: 114) study of low-income black families in America emphasizes the role that networks of women play in carrying out household tasks associated with childcare. Stack (1974: 114) notes:

"Since households form around women because of their role in childcare, ties between women (including paternal aunts, cousins) often constitute the core of a network"

Although I emphasize the notion that domestic units by necessity are embedded within supportive networks, two points must be emphasized. Firstly, it is up to individuals to mobilise support from their ego-centred kinship networks. Secondly, this external support is not necessarily ongoing, making domestic units such as Membrey Shezi's extremely vulnerable. The formation of this widow's domestic unit was partly the result of help Membrey obtained from her employed daughter. However, her daughter's sponsorship did not extend beyond a loan of R200 for the site on which Membrey's shack stood. Unlike Preston-Whyte's (1978: 58-9) description of men eventually leaving the homes of female-

linked families upon marriage, Membrey's four adult sons were heavily dependent on this widow's monthly pension.

**Case 7: The role of a pensioned mother as sponsor to her adult sons**



Membrey Shezi was the sixty-six-year-old mother of six adult children: four sons and two daughters. A quiet spoken woman, who wore ragged and torn clothes, Membrey had few possessions. She was born in Ndwedwe, the daughter of poor subsistence farmers.

Membrey did not attend school, although her mother taught her how to cook and clean the home, to fetch water and to plough the field. Membrey never worked, leaving home to live in Inanda when she married. All her children were born in Inanda where the family lived in a home without running water and electricity. She was the second wife in a polygynous marriage, married to a full-time worker at a wool-processing factory. Her husband died in 1991, but she received little from his death benefits, which were shared between Membrey and her husband's first wife. Membrey stayed on in Inanda after husband's death. However, in 1993 her younger daughter Dora and son Khipiswi who were living in Durban became ill. According to Membrey, "they could not walk" and so she abandoned her home in Inanda, coming to Durban accompanied by her mentally disabled son Makhosazane. Her eldest daughter, who lived and worked in Sydenam,

bought her a site in Old Dunbar for R200-. Once Membrey's shack had been built, her other three unemployed sons, a son's son, her younger daughter and five grandchildren moved into Membrey's home. Hence, this widow's monthly pension of R430-00 per month had to stretch to feed eleven mouths, as Membrey claimed that her employed daughter did not provide extra money for food and fuel.

Although Membrey described herself as the head of this domestic unit, this case illustrates that female-headed families do not necessarily fare any better than those based on a conjugal or marital union, especially where one woman is financially responsible for numerous dependents. Female-heads do not automatically control the wages of their adult children, even their adult daughters. For example, James (1985), Murray (1980, 1981), and Spiegel (1980) highlight the economic vulnerability experienced by small female-headed domestic units in rural areas, describing these units as highly disadvantaged in contrast with larger male-headed ones.

What my case studies illustrate is that female sponsorship does not amount to a system of matrifocality, that is, of recognised female headship. Smith's (1956:148, 1973:140-1) study of black families in Guiana highlighted the solidarity of the mother-child and sibling relationship, in terms of affect and economics, over the conjugal relationship. Within such families "the mother has some degree of control over the kin unit's economic resources and is critically involved in kin-related decision-making processes" (Tanner, N. 1974: 131). Smith (1956) indicated that *post-marital* mothers in matrifocal families assumed positions of authority over their dependent children and grandchildren. One notes, then, the high status attached to the role of "mother" within the post-marital unit. This role was

an exclusive one, in that children of co-resident adult daughters were assimilated to a filial relationship with their maternal grandmother whom they called “mama” (Smith, R. 1956: 145). Smith (1973:42) reiterates:

“In choosing the term “matrifocal” in preference to such descriptive terms as “matri-central,” “matriarchal,” “female-dominated,” “grandmother family,” as so on, I specifically intended to convey that it is women in their role as mothers who come to be the focus of relationships, rather than head of the household as such. It was central to my argument that the nuclear family is both ideally normal, and a real stage in the development of practically all domestic groups.”

Preston-Whyte (1988:60) points out that an African woman whether unmarried or in the post-marital phase does not necessarily assume to role of a socially *recognised* decision-maker. It is also extremely difficult to describe women such as Membrey, Valentina or Eunice as domestic heads when they have few choices at their disposal, and when their kinship networks are far from extensive. When one examines the support systems within which the domestic units of these respondents were embedded, one observes that these women, their mothers and / or their siblings were economically dependent on one another. In no real way could one describe these women as being the ‘focus of relationships’, as Smith (1973) puts it, or the unifying element within their families, because no one individual family member had the economic means to ensure that its members did not split up.

A pattern begins to emerge, then, in which one notes a close connection between mother-child and sibling or collateral ties. This ‘connection’ is one borne out of economic dependence and the fact that pre-marital procreation, and widowhood or marital

dissolution, effectively narrow the span of individuals on whom one can call for help. One observes, then, that these female-linked networks *potentially* comprise a senior woman, who is either married, widowed, divorced or single. This seniority of this woman relates to her age and not necessarily to her decision-making capacity. The phenomenon of sibling reliance means that the network also comprises this woman's siblings, that is, her brothers and sisters as well as their children. Secondly, this network might include a woman's adult daughters *and* sons and their respective spouses. Thirdly, her grandchildren, the children of sons or daughters, are the dependent kin members. This description is, of course, an abstraction that does not adequately capture the processes through which individuals mobilise different parts of their social networks. Chapter six discusses in more detail the desperate efforts of these informal settlers to make a living, expanding on the argument that kinship ties are a form of quasi-insurance under conditions of material insecurity.

**Chapter six:**  
**Work patterns, domestic arrangements and fluid social relationships**

This chapter examines the way in which highly erratic employment patterns impact upon domestic arrangements in Old Dunbar, and I argue that the effect is twofold. Firstly, the lack of stable employment splits up families and disperses domestic units because individuals must constantly search for work. Secondly, and by consequence, this means that survival is dependent upon the strategic manipulation of a broad segment of social relationships, not only of kinship, but also of, *inter alia*, neighbourhood, friendship, workplace association and religious or church affiliation. These social relationships are transitory and situational, determined primarily by their usefulness. Essentially, they are a reflection of the shifting social environment within which they exist, given that domestic units and neighbourhoods are in a constant state of flux as individuals struggle to survive by maximising limited social and economic opportunities.

The insecurity brought about by limited opportunities for work meant that respondents placed great value on permanent wage employment, although not all respondents managed to find or hold onto such work. This absence of a permanent source of income left respondents dependent on income derived largely from unskilled and underpaid piecework, that is, temporary work which did not constitute an adequate buffer against impoverishment. Similarly, Sharp and Spiegel's (1985: 137) study of impoverished relocation communities in Qwaqwa and Transkei highlight "the crucial importance of a reliable source of cash income

to domestic groups as the main shield against impoverishment". Like their landless rural counterparts, no such 'shield' existed for these urban shack dwellers. Only casual work or informal enterprise *combined* with other strategies to minimise domestic expenses, such as child redistribution, kept domestic units afloat. However, the income derived from casual work was largely erratic. Regular employment was not guaranteed, as employers tended to exploit those desperately in need of a cash income. Table 2 (see over) provides details of respondents' sources of income.

### **Casual workers: Unpredictable outcomes and exploitation**

Casual workers comprise what the International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.) defined in the early 1970s as the "working poor" (Moser, C. 1978: 1051). This definition extends to include self-employed individuals living in low-income communities who are also engaged in the process of hand-to-mouth survival. The I.L.O. classifies these workers as "vulnerable" (Rogerson, C 1991: 209) in terms of the sector which employs them, their labour and social status. However, what distinguishes wage labour from casual work is not so much a fixed set of criteria as "the degree to which labour is recruited on a *permanent* and *regular* basis for *fixed* rewards" (Hart, K. 1973: 68, italics mine). The effect that irregular or sporadic employment has on those men and women concerned, is one in which these individuals experience a marked lack of control over their working lives. Even those respondents such as Agnes Shezi, who managed to hold onto their jobs for

Household No.	Respondent's name <sup>2</sup> (Surname, first name)	Age	Gender	Source of income	Description	Level of education
1.	Shezi, Membrey	62	Female	Monthly pension	Pensioner	None
2.	Ngcobo, Elias	45	Male	Entrepreneurial activities	Local fruit and vegetable stall	Std 3
3.	Sithole, Betty	62	Female	Monthly pension	Pensioner	Std 2
4.	a. Thembi, Vincent b. Thembi, Milazi (4a's brother)	28 31	Male Male	Informal sector activities	Home spaza operators	Std 4 Std 10
5.	Ngidi, Zandile	37	Female	Informal sector activities	Street trader	Std 9
6.	Bhengu, Vuyani	34	Male	Full-time wage employment	Petrol pump attendant	Std 8
7.	Makgoba, Pearl	30	Female	Full-time wage employment	Domestic worker	Std 5
8.	Nsene, Mlungisi	32	Male	Unemployed	Unskilled labourer	Std 5
9.	Phungula, Nomusa	24	Female	Unemployed	Housewife	Std 9
10.	a. Dlamini, Thabo b. Dlamini, Christina (10a's mother) c. Gwela, Thandi (10a's girlfriend)	26 55 17	Male Female Female	Part-time wage employment Part-time wage employment Unemployed	Supermarket storeroom worker Domestic worker Teenage mother not at school	Std 1 None Std 7

<sup>1</sup> See table 3 for Eunice Myeni, Nompumelelo Xolani and Nkanza Ngwenya.

<sup>2</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

Household no.	Respondent's name (Surname, first name)	Age	Gender	Source of income	Description	Level of Education
11.	11a. Shezi, Valentina	22	Female	Part-time wage employment	Restaurant / kitchen worker	Std 10
	11b. Shezi, Agnes (11a's mother)	45	Female	Part-time wage employment	Domestic worker	Std 3
12.	12a. Cele, Sandile	56	Male	Informal sector activities	Spaza and taxi operator	Std 8
	12b. Cele, Nabane (12a's wife)	34	Female	Unemployed	Housewife	Unknown
13.	Nzuza, Nokulunga	32	Female	Unemployed	Shop assistant	Unknown
14.	Radebe, Seni	30	Male	Informal sector activities	Home spaza operator	Grade 1
15.	15a. Molefe, Cynthia	35	Female	Informal sector activities	Street trader	Unknown
	15b. Molefe, Thandeka (15a's daughter)	14	Female	Unemployed	Scholar not attending school	Std 2
16.	Radebe, Dennis	51	Male	Informal sector activities	Paraffin-stove repairman	Std 5

relatively long periods did not escape retrenchment, which introduces another element to casual work in that it exploits cheap and dispensable workers. (Agnes Shezi's residential arrangement is discussed in greater detail in case three of chapter five).

Agnes Shezi entered domestic service when she was fifteen years old, having completed only a standard three education. After twenty-one years of domestic service working for three employers, she had fared no better than another respondent, Thabo Dlamini, who had worked for eight different employers in a shorter span of time. In 1996, Agnes' third employer emigrated from South Africa, leaving her with a nominal amount of money and a chipboard cupboard as retrenchment pay. Once she had moved to Old Dunbar, the only work she could find was doing daily piecework for an office-cleaning agency at the rate of R40-per day, less the agency's R10- fee. This experience led her to stereotype her previous employers, perhaps as a means of making sense of her working life. She spoke of her first employer in reverential terms, saying "Afrikaans employers are much better than English-speaking ones." Her first employer, an Afrikaans-speaking woman, had helped to finance the building of a township house for Agnes and, when this woman relocated, had helped Agnes find work in Durban. The quasi-maternal nature of Agnes' relationship with this former employer is seen in the way Agnes described how she had 'cured' this woman's son:

" I saw that child you know. He is a doctor now. He said 'that's my nanny'. He got very sick when he was small, and the madam told me not to give him my

medicine, but I made medicine for him. You drink hot water and put a teaspoon of spirit [alcohol] and vinegar inside” The child recuperated and when ‘the madam’ came home, according to Agnes, she said, “Agnes, you are clever - you are [like a] doctor”. At this point in her narrative, Agnes burst into laughter, then added. “I also used to make *stiffpap*. You can make [it] if you have a stove. Just add some peanut butter and it is very nice.”

There is some suggestion, then, that casual workers - who are vulnerable in terms of the type of work they carry out - tend to personalise their relationships to employers. Perhaps this is intensified where the work is of a live-in type. Isolated from their own families for periods of time these individuals become heavily dependent on their employers, as seen in Thabo Dlamini's case. When Thabo obtained live-in work, as a gardener cum general labourer, he described this as a 'godsend' saying of his employer, 'He helped me when I was starving' and 'I even ate with their knives and forks." Furthermore, if a personal (quasi-kinship) strand can be worked into the relationship by the employee, it becomes a degree more difficult for the employer to summarily terminate employment.

On the other hand, the relative safety of the maternal (or paternalistic) relationship contrasts with abuse experienced by Agnes' daughter Valentina at the hands of a male employer. Valentina worked briefly for an Indian family shortly after her daughter's birth. She spent one month as a live-in domestic worker but from her experience decided that she could not trust Indian employers. She described her work experience as follows:

“I was separated from God and my family. I tell you I would rather eat grass roots than work for an Indian. He pulled me into the bedroom and showed me money. I would not do that. He wanted me to wash him and ran around naked showing his

privates. I did not tell his wife because I did not want to break up their marriage. I left that place and asked my friends to go back with me to get my things. To Indians you are like a dog, they treat you like shit. You must not eat their food unless it has been in the fridge for a week, and your plate must stay outside. You see... that is why I say I would rather eat grass roots.”

Thabo Dlamini had worked for eight different employers since beginning work at fifteen years of age, moving from one job to another. In August 1995, he obtained permanent work with benefits, but a year later the factory downscaled its workforce, retrenching Thabo's cousin, Vusi, and placing Thabo on short-time. (Vusi's brief period of co-residence with Thabo is discussed in case one of chapter five). Short-time involved a three-day working week, which did not include unemployment insurance or sick leave. After staying at home for a week with bronchitis, which Thabo believed was caused by the factory's industrial chemicals, he anticipated losing his job and on returning to work the following week he found that his position had been filled from the line of work-seekers who waited outside the factory gates each day. However, instead of looking for more work, he remained at home, drinking spirits. He described his feelings, lying behind the curtain that separated his room into a sleeping area:

“It's bad. It's really bad. You know it's better if I just lie here [He sighs]... No, I'm not working. Just at the weekends sometime, maybe I get R100-. It's not enough. I don't want to stay in Old Dunbar anymore. I can't bring my dog. I can't plant any flowers here. People walk past my house at night and bang on the wall [He bangs on the wall with his fist]. They are drunk, and look, I've got a child. People can die in front of my house...They ['tsotsis' or criminals] run past my house and fall. Then the police will ask for statements.” In a more positive tone he says, “Maybe it would be better if I had my own house, ja, it would be much better. How can I get my own house?” Meanwhile, Thandi and Simon (my assistant) who have been chatting to each other turn to face Thabo. Simon replied, inaccurately, “It costs about R60-000” to which Thabo retorts, “What?” and Simon says, “You have to have full-time employment.” Now Thabo is silent.

Thabo's despondency is also seen in Liebow's (1967) descriptions of unemployed black American or 'streetcorner' men, who recognised all too well their lack of control over their working lives, turning down offers of piecework that they knew would not lead to permanent employment. These men, like the unemployed male respondents in Old Dunbar, were neither shiftless nor unthinking but were caught up in a cycle of structural unemployment. The instability of casual work meant that Thabo battled to support his girlfriend and child, illustrating the difficulty faced by husband-fathers in fulfilling the duties expected of them by wider society. It is significant that unemployed male respondents complained more about their situation than their female counterparts. No woman ever approached me asking for work, although several male respondents such as Thabo, Sandile Cele, Dennis Radebe and Seni Radebe, did so.

An indigent man called Sunny - not a respondent - relied upon Mrs. M., a spaza owner's wife, for handouts of food, because he had no family members to help him nor had he managed to obtain a state pension, having no identity documents. He was allowed to sleep in a disused shack that served as an informal community meeting hall. Sunny had few possessions save for the clothes he wore, some blankets and two empty oil drums that served as chairs. He repeatedly begged for money to buy cigarettes and also asked me to find him work:

“Please, look at my place. I’ve got nothing Ma’am. I don’t like to live here. Can’t you find me a job with white people? I can make the garden nice, and have my

own place. I will make flowers around my home. I just want to live with white people. I can't get my pension because my I.D. was stolen."

Neighbouring friendships were also crucial for unemployed men such as Mlungisi Nsene who also had no kin to whom he could turn for help. Although Mlungisi's widowed mother lived nearby, she could not assist him, and his siblings had migrated to Johannesburg in search of work. This thirty-two year old man had only a standard five education and his survival depended on money obtained through piecework. However, at the time of the November 1996 survey, Mlungisi had earned only R50- over a two-month period. He would walk into the C.B.D. searching for work, but often to no avail. He possessed only a makeshift bed, an old wicker couch, and a paraffin stove on which he boiled water in an old tin. Mlungisi had formed a friendship with his neighbour Thabo Dlamini, from whom he occasionally received food. Mlungisi, Thabo's resident girlfriend and his two brothers who visited the settlement from time to time spent their leisure time together. The group entertained one another by '*jamming*', that is, composing tunes and lyrics using Mlungisi's guitar, which was much treasured by Thabo who wanted one himself.

One might also suggest that the pockets of smoking and drinking groups that emerged in Old Dunbar were an outlet for unemployed men, perhaps even providing one another with a form of moral support, which ties up with the notion of the domestic marginality of men. Given gender-specific roles relating to housework and child-care combined with unemployment, one might suggest that

recreation had an added importance in that it gave otherwise redundant individuals something to do. However, there was an alternative to unemployment - albeit a less preferred substitute for paid employment - which lay in the area of informal enterprise. This survival strategy enabled men and women to engage in a productive enterprise based in part or in whole within the home, which provided a limited income for respondents such as Dennis Radebe, Nompumelo Xolani, Sandile Cele, and Eunice Myeni - individuals who had no other source of income. I describe these informal enterprises as a form of self-employment, drawing a distinction between these and what Barth (1972) and Hart (1973) describe as entrepreneurial activities.

### **Self-employment as an alternative to unemployment**

Firstly, all but two (namely, Elias Ngcobo and Zandile Ngidi) of the self-employed respondents quickly consumed what profit accrued from the sale of their goods or services on basic household necessities, such as food and domestic fuel. They could not sustain their informal enterprises for long, taking up paid work if this became available. They were not, as Barth (1972: 7) describes Norwegian entrepreneurs, 'maximising their profit'. Instead, these individuals were "engaged simply in the static reproduction of his [or her] own subsistence rather than in accumulating profits" (Hart, K. 1975: 7). Secondly, they minimised personal risks by engaging in more than one enterprise. Thirdly, these individuals were desperate to gain access to another individual's cash incomes in order to start up and / or to

sustain their businesses. Informal enterprises depended, then, on co-operation or backing from kin partners, although individuals also manipulated ties to neighbours in Old Dunbar and to potential clients outside the settlement. One might suggest that, in this context, informal enterprises were but one of a number of interconnected survival strategies.

Dennis Radebe and a spaza owner, Mr M., became friends through their mutual participation in the system of marshals that policed the settlement in its formative phase. Dennis drew on his friendship with this relatively influential man - whom one might term an entrepreneur given the size of his home-based business - in his own efforts to start a paraffin-repair business in Old Dunbar. The formation of neighbourhood friendships does not negate the fact that there was nothing permanent about life in Old Dunbar. The settlement in itself did not guarantee sustained work - despite its relative proximity to Durban's city centre. Case two of chapter four provides details of Dennis' residential history and highlights his struggle to establish a permanent home. Hence, the sort of friendships forged between Thabo and Mlungisi and, Dennis and Mr M. were largely situational and the likelihood that an individual would hold onto such a friendship once she or he had moved from one settlement to another, obviously depends on its relative usefulness.

### **Case 1: Dennis Radebe - The Paraffin Stove Repairman**

Dennis Radebe, a fifty-two-year old man who lived on his own in Old Dunbar, was the local paraffin stove repairman. He advertised his business by means of a makeshift sign tied to a pole next to the main road, bearing the words "*Sikhandazitofu*" - meaning 'we repair stoves' - and the number of his shack. Dennis has started his informal business a year previously, taking advantage of the need for paraffin-stove repair, as most residents used *wick* or *primus* stoves to cook food and heat water. Dennis learned to repair paraffin stoves in 1969, whilst living in KwaMashu, but only began his own business after a series of short-lived casual jobs, each lasting less than a year, ranging from gardening to car repair. He had all the tools necessary for his trade, except for a 'blue lamp' - a rudimentary welding torch that ran on paraffin. His friend and local spaza owner, Mr. M. who had moved to Old Dunbar with Dennis in the same year - 1993 - lent him R80- to buy a second-hand 'blue lamp'.

The stoves that customers brought to Dennis usually had either broken "valves" or "nipples", which Dennis purchased from suppliers at a cost of 60c and 50c respectively, charging customers R5-00 to weld the new part onto the stove.

Dennis complained that his business was not making a profit, saying "things are staying the same". At the most he repaired five stoves in one week, although most weeks saw only two or three customers coming to Dennis' repair-shop. Some

residents knew how to repair their own stoves, whilst many stoves - once broken - were usually beyond repair and simply discarded for safety reasons. Although, his 'blue lamp' used only a third of a litre of paraffin per repair - at the time paraffin cost R1.70 per litre - it was not reliable and flames tended to burst out of the nozzle or fuel cap, burning his hands.

To supplement his income, he had repaired a few car radiators, built a shack for a resident and helped a friend build a roof onto his house in Ntuzuma. Of this man he said, "my friend gave me enough money for the stomach", that is, enough money to buy some food to eat. He also chose to remain single, although he did debate whether or not it was worth having a live-in girlfriend, as his previous girlfriend had deserted him some three years previously. He had lived on his own but was open to the possibility of living with a woman, saying "I am a bachelor so I must keep my place clean". What money he had left over after buying basic-necessities, he used to purchase a radio and a matching curtain and duvet set bought from a local seamstress. He had paid a deposit of R50- for the set and was paying the balance off at R15- per month.

The main point here is that individuals, such as Dennis, could not sustain their businesses, consuming profits for their own subsistence, which in effect meant that these endeavours could not provide a reliable source of income. These are temporary strategies that attempt to make the most of the opportunities available, whilst minimising costs, or at least making use of what materials are already

available. As Sharp and van der Waal (1988: 138) highlight, informal sector activities - in contrast to entrepreneurial activities - cannot form a viable alternative to wage work, nor do they solve structural unemployment. Rather, self-employment is a type of survival strategy as is, for example, the redistribution of children and constant mobility in search of work. In this sense, self-employed individuals were not concerned that others should draw upon their profits - this cannot occur where profit is lacking - but faced the problem of drawing upon another individual's cash income, especially income from waged-employment. Thus, survival depended on how successfully individuals could manipulate relationships to those wage-earners around them.

This occurred either through the direct loan of money for an enterprise from kin, or as in the previous case from a friend, or through the redirection or conversion of money meant for another domestic purpose - for example - a housekeeping allowance or a child support payment. Two brothers Vincent and Milazi Thembi bought a shack in Old Dunbar, which they converted into a small spaza shop. Their maternal uncle had informed them of the shack's availability whilst their sister, a nurse at a large Durban hospital had lent them R3500-, of which they spent R1300 to purchase the shack. The brothers and their sister - all of whom were Inanda residents - took a risk in setting up a small spaza in Old Dunbar, given that this particular niche was flooded with numerous home-based enterprises. The brothers' main income came from the sale of paraffin, although sales fluctuated and daily profits ranged anywhere between R20- and R150-.

TABLE 3: Informal Trading Sector

Household No.	Respondent's name <sup>1</sup> (Surname, first name)	Age	Gender	Marital Status <sup>2</sup>	Description	Are other adults in domestic unit in employment?
1.	Mdeni, Agnes	35	Female	Married	Local hairdresser	Yes. Husband is a security guard.
2.	Shabalala, Ruth	40	Female	Married	Dressmaker	No.
3.	Sithole, Patrick	40	Male	Unmarried	Cooldrink vendor	No.
4.	Xolani, Nompumelelo	33	Female	Married	Dressmaker and long-distance trader	No.
5.	Nkanza, Ngwenya	32	Female	Unmarried	Beadworker	Yes. Fiance is a train controller
6.	Myeni, Eunice	35	Female	Single	Food and household goods trader	Yes. Brother is a cook.
7.	Chaka, Phumela	45	Female	Single	Dressmaker	No.
8.	Shenge, Anna	32	Female	Married	Home spaza operator	Yes. Husband is a supermarket worker.
9.	Gaza, Pinky	22	Female	Unmarried	Second-hand clothes trader	Yes. Boyfriend is a factory worker.
10.	Mayisela, Thomas	63	Male	Married	Beer pot-stand and spoon maker	Yes. Wife is a domestic worker and his son is a male domestic.

<sup>1</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Single refers to individuals living without partners, whilst unmarried refers specifically to cohabiting adults.

It is interesting that, of the eight women (who formed part of a total sample of ten domestic units engaging in informal sector activities), three received some measure of support from an employed husband, one from an employed boyfriend and one from an employed brother. Table 3 (see over) provides a more detailed breakdown of these respondents' income generating activities. For example, Pinky Gaza used the R50-00 her factory worker boyfriend gave her each week to buy second-hand clothes, which she then resold at Durban Station to other traders. Local hairdresser, Agnes Mdeni, relied on her husband, a security guard, to support their four children, her sister, and her sister's daughter, as her custom was limited to Easter, July and Christmas.

One observes, then, the interdependence between male wages and female self-employment, which connects to a theme dealt with in chapter four, namely, accessing male earnings. However, the process of drawing upon male earnings was not uncomplicated. Women, such as bead-worker Nkanza Ngwenya and petty-trader Eunice Myeni, both expressed dissatisfaction at the amount of money that they received from their kinsmen. Nkanza managed to successfully combine her role as wife, Shembe devotee and beadworker by minimising her domestic responsibilities, and using her network of links to fellow church members to find customers.

## **Male wages, domesticity and female self-employment**

### **Case 2: Nkanza Ngwenya – The Beadworker**

Thirty-three year old bead-worker, Nkanza Ngwenya, asserted from the start of research "I am not a dressmaker. I am a fashion designer", making it clear that she eventually planned to create clothing patterns. However, despite the fact that she had completed part of a two-year clothing design course towards the cost of which her fifty-three year old husband, Paulus, had contributed, the type of self-employment in which she engaged herself involved neither sewing nor designing. A lack of electricity supply to her shack curtailed her productivity. She complained, "I am not using my talent. I am just keeping it in cardboard" making reference to the fact that her two electric sewing machines lay in cardboard boxes in her bedroom. Nkanza could not afford to run her sewing machine on a car battery, nor could she afford to purchase 1000 metres of electrical cord linking her shack to Mr M.'s spaza, nor did she possess a mechanical sewing machine. Some women, such as Cynthia Molefe, Nabane Mhlope and Thembakazi Hadebe overcame this by renting sewing rooms in the city centre. Here women bought material communally, which at times created tensions. Nkanza's neighbour, forty-year old Thembakazi Hadebe, who had rented a sewing machine in a communal room, gave this up after disputes over material.

Paulus, a full-time train controller, gave Nkanza R200- per month with which to purchase household necessities such as food and fuel. Nkanza's sister Lindiwe and Paulus' seventeen-year-old daughter Puseletso co-resided with the couple, as both were attending school in Durban, whilst Nkanza's thirteen-year-old daughter Bathabile resided with Nkanza's mother in Zimbokontweni. (Nkanza's relationship to her mother is discussed in chapter four). Paulus also diverted part of his earnings to his first (polygynous) wife and five children residing in Matatiele. Whilst still living with her mother in Zimbokontweni, before moving to Old Dunbar, Nkanza sold fruit and vegetables for five years, but did not generate significant profits. However, two year ago, at the clothing design course, Nkanza had learned to sew beads onto the bodices of wedding dresses, and so she transferred this skill to making items of beadwork. Nkanza did beadworking in her own home during her spare time, drawing on her network of Nazereth Baptist churchgoers who required various items for ceremonial purposes. Nkanza's income generating activity fitted, then, within the boundaries of her rather rigidly defined domestic role. Paulus, also a devout '*shembe*' follower, agreed that she could attend various services and events at different locations through the year. This meant that Nkanza could keep contact with potential customers. Nkanza sold items of beadwork to parishioners at the Inanda, Chesterville, Mayville and Gonondo church branches.

In January 1997, Nkanza received four orders for 'sets' that consisted of two items: a rectangular hatpiece attachment - "*umqwazi*" -and a pair of anklets - "*amadavat*". Separately Nkanza charged R120- and R80- for these particular items, designed

according to customers' specific requests. Adherents wear "*umqwazi*" and "*amadavat*" to wedding ceremonies and twenty-first birthday parties. Only women wear full sets, whilst men require the anklets only. Nkanza only began making requested items once customers had paid R100- deposit, with which she purchased beads and string from "*Putuman Bazaar*" in the city centre. One set takes three to four weeks to complete, as beadworking is a laborious process that involves stringing together thousands of tiny beads. Nkanza estimated that she gained between R60 to R80 profit for a full set, given travelling expenses to and from church. Some church members paid between R300 and R500 for more elaborate pieces of beadwork, such as "*inebe*", square pieces tied around the stomach, and "*mbamba*" thick coils tied around the stomach. However, Nkanza did not have the time or energy to devote to such items.

Nkanza's case clearly illustrates the complex interweaving of constraint and opportunity. In extending her role as wife and church member, Nkanza was readily able to access a niche for beadwork items and could allocate time to beadwork without neglecting her domestic duties. One of the rooms in her home functioned as a prayer-room, enabling Nkanza to pray twice daily. Further, she was unfettered by childcare duties having placed her daughter with her mother. The child-sister swap meant that both women - mother and daughter - had effectively swapped different sets of demands. Nkanza's sister did not present so much of a domestic task as her own daughter whom she admitted exhausted her patience, saying "she likes staying with her grandmother because I smack her too much". However,

Nkanza did not think that beadwork generated much of an income and relied more on her housekeeping allowance than money from beadwork. Nkanza did not hesitate to voice her complaints, about the limited housekeeping budget that Paulus gave her to visiting friends and neighbours. The latter ignored her complaints that she needed at least R1000- per month with which to buy clothes for herself as well as household necessities, saying such things as "Why don't you go and buy a dress from Pep Stores for R29-99?" and "You're a crybaby. You complain too much."

Nkanza claimed that she could make numerous veils worn by churchmembers to various ceremonies, saying 'I could make ten a day if I had my [sewing] machine'. The way in which Nkanza dealt with constraints on her 'talent' or productivity emerged during the course of a conversation, in which Nkanza was beadworking outside the home of her neighbour, Mama-Zondo. Suddenly, the current set on which she was working was no longer an item intended for sale. Nkanza commented:

"I am not doing this to make money. It is just to pass the time. I make these for myself and if other people want them I will make for them."

Yet the following week Nkanza admitted that she intended to take the sets that she had made to Swaziland, if Paulus funded her travelling expenses. The travelling expenses involved, however, would outstrip any profit made selling a handful of sets. In other words she intimated that her work was not for commercial reasons but for Shembe. The reason for her devotion lay partly in the fact that Nkanza was

desperate to have a second child, having miscarried several times. Her plans were to meet the prophet '*shembe*':

"If *Shembe* says I will have a child, then I will have one. He only has to say it and it will happen."

Whilst Nkanza's case is unique in that she used money accrued from the sale of beadwork items for her own personal consumption, sole supporters such as Eunice Myeni and Nompulelo Xolani deployed a number of strategies for survival, of which self-employment was but one. Their efforts to generate a living resemble what Preston-Whyte and Ngidi (1984), in their studies of female traders along the KwaZulu-Natal north coast, term desperation - rather than accumulation - strategies. For these women, what money that they did accrue was quickly consumed in the process of hand-to-mouth survival leaving little left over to reinvest in their small enterprises, given constraints such as flooded niches, limited skills, and seasonal trade. A further constraint or obstacle to female self-employment occurs where the activities of women are viewed negatively by their male partners - boyfriends or husbands – who frown upon their economic independence. For example, Bank's (1994) and Niehaus' (1994) studies of unemployment in Qwaqwa highlight the threat that female employment presents to their unemployed male counterparts.

In Zandile Ngidi's case, her economic independence clashed with her desire to marry given the domestic constraints that marriage would present. Zandile, the thirty-seven year old mother of one child, whose residential history is discussed

briefly on page 75 in chapter four, had managed to successfully establish a business selling cooked chicken pieces to early morning commuters at Umlazi train station. Zandile portrayed herself as an independent woman and let it be known that she had had a tumultuous domestic history, having fled an irate lover to seek refuge in Old Dunbar. She summed her experience in the statement, "I know God and I know the Devil". She had built herself a shack in Old Dunbar and was in the process of having another - bigger -shack built for herself and her son. Yet, her boyfriend - a lay preacher who operated from Old Dunbar - sought to control the decisions Zandile made in her personal life:

"My boyfriend will not let me wear trousers. He won't let me take the pill. You know [he says] a woman is like a fish...moving from man to man. I will not live with a man. I enjoy having a boyfriend [but] you have to iron, and cook and they can just hit you... Well, if he can pay [*ilobolo*] then he can pay. I will send my son to live with my mother. He will never accept another man."

Whilst Zandile estimated profits of R400- per month, respondents such as Nompulelo Xolani and Sandile Cele embarked on self-employment as a temporary measure until they had found wage-work again. However, to say that informal enterprises were a means of coping with a specific domestic crisis overlooks the fact that these domestic units - like many others in Old Dunbar - were already in crisis. If one examines the past history of many respondents, who came to Old Dunbar in the hopes of starting afresh, one notes a pattern of job instability compounded by the effects of political violence. Eunice Myeni, Elias Ncgobo, Dennis Radebe and Cynthia Molefe had all felt the very real effects of political violence, each having had their homes torched. Further, these individuals were

vulnerable because of their lack of skills and low level of education. Setting up an informal enterprise depended, then, on support from kin partners - not simply in the sense of cash loans - but through a wider network of domestic support.

In some cases, kin were drawn into informal enterprise, providing their labour in exchange for being given a place to stay. For example, entrepreneur Elias Ngcobo, who had set up several informal enterprises in Old Dunbar, received assistance from his wife, daughter and younger brother. In return, he allowed his brother and brother's girlfriend to live in one of the four shacks that he owned. Elias' wife and daughter took turns to serve customers at their fruit and vegetable stall, whilst he carried out other business matter, such as collecting groceries from Berea Station's market. Elias and his brother ran another line of business, re-spraying and panel-beating commuter taxis that operated in Cato Crest and Cato Manor. The two brothers shared a yard with two other men who carried out mechanical repairs on vehicles. However, support from kin was limited and obtaining this sometimes involved confrontation between individuals and between domestic units.

For example, Eunice Myeni, whose case is discussed in detail in case four of chapters four and five, was not able to sustain her informal trade because of a number of crises that swallowed cash needed to purchase stock for retail. She battled to extract child maintenance payments from Jacob, the father of her youngest two children. From June to October of 1996, she had sold household goods on the pavement in Durban's busy city centre, making use of a distant cousin,

a matrilineal cousin and a neighbour who took turns to man her table. However, she had to send part of her savings home to her mother and children, which temporarily halted her informal enterprise. Then in December of 1996, she received R150- from Jacob, most of which she used to set up another table in town that sold cooked food.

Crisis struck again in February the following year, when her daughters took ill and had to be admitted to hospital. At the same time, Eunice was not well herself. Her daughters' treatment swallowed up what money Eunice had, and so she stopped her petty trading activities. When both children recuperated, Eunice again faced the problem of extracting more money from their father. Jacob's new girlfriend and this woman's children had now taken up residence in his home in Ntuzuma and, from Eunice's perspective, were draining his income. At the same time, in March of 1997, her employed brother Velisa moved out of her home and into his own shack in Old Dunbar with his girlfriend and child. Now Eunice complained of Velisa: "he doesn't give me anything" and said of Jacob:

"He's got a four-roomed house, with water and electricity, and, a room divider, a television and cupboards. He would not let me take my sewing machine because there's no electricity here."

As a last resort, Eunice had no choice but to send the twins to live with their father and his girlfriend, as this was the only way he would take financial responsibility for his children. However, she feared that his girlfriend would not take care of her children. The week after taking her children to their father's house, she felt ill, and went to hospital to have her diabetes checked:

"I'm sick, but they can't find anything wrong. I've been to King Edward hospital yesterday. I've got no money left. I 'phoned Ntuzuma court to make him pay, but the social worker said he's unregistered [a casual worker]. They can't do anything... She [his girlfriend] does not want my children to live there [and] my sister told me my mother needs money for school clothes"

The only way Eunice could decrease her domestic expenses and at the same time to obligate her ex-boyfriend - was to pass on the upkeep of her children, which in effect illustrates how the lack of a reliable income inevitably splits up domestic units. Social relationships then have to be strategically *manipulated* for they are the only means of survival for unemployed men and women. This particular argument views self-employment - not as a separate strategy - but as being intricately bound up with the manipulation of social relationships. For example, Sharp and van der Waal (1988: 144, italics original) suggest that:

"informal production and service activities are embedded in a very complex network of *social* relationships, and comprise only a small fragment of the strategies which the poor deploy in order to attempt to survive. These social relationships include the reciprocities of kinship, of mutual aid associations, and of savings clubs."

The way in which Nompumelo Xolani coped with her retrenchment, reveals how she put her existing skills to use and utilised her natal home, as a base from which to trade during two months of unemployment. Sole breadwinners like Nompumelo and Sandile Cele used their respective retrenchment payouts to set up their small businesses, in an attempt to generate enough income for their families to survive. The way in which these shack dwellers used the limited resources at hand to the fullest brings to the fore Levi-Strauss' (1962, 1969) image of the bricoleur, which

can be applied to an individual combining disparate elements - whether material or social - in an effort to create a sustainable income. Once wage-work became available, Nompumelo and Sandile did not continue with their enterprises, preferring the relative safety of a fixed wage to a fluctuating income.

### **Case 3: Nompumelo Xolani - Long-distance Trader**

During 1996, thirty-three-year old Nompumelo Xolani supported her husband Enoch and their three children. Until the end of December 1996, she was employed in a garment factory as a material cutter, at which point she was retrenched. Enoch had not worked for some months, as a bullet-wound injury to his head left him recuperating at home. Nompumelo wasted no time and in January 1997, she reinvested her retrenchment pay, purchasing slippers from a wholesaler, which she intended to resell. Nompumelo had no experience in the retail trade, but she knew the Transkeian capital of Umtata, her birthplace where her kin still lived, deciding, then, to engage in long-distance trading. Nompumelo soon diversified her self-employment activities, and in February 1997, she used her dressmaking skills to make full-length aprons. Each week from Monday to Friday, Nompumelo spent her mornings making aprons, which she sold, on Durban's beachfront in the afternoons. Like some of her neighbours, she rented an electric sewing machine for R100 per month.

Nompumelo travelled to Umtata twice monthly, staying with her family over weekends. The journey there and back by taxi cost R100. Nompumelo estimated that she sold forty pairs of slippers per month, which she bought for R7-50 each from the wholesaler and then resold for R16-00. Nompumelo made between twenty-five and thirty aprons per week, which she sold for R20 each. Each apron cost R9-00 to make. When Nompumelo found wage employment in March of 1997, she gave up her informal sector activities. Nompumelo had managed to support her family for two months, by working within the constraints imposed on her, and maximising her skills and her knowledge of the demand for cheap goods in Durban and Umtata.

Her self-employment activities were entrepreneurial, in that her income generating activities were 'experimental' and 'speculative' (Barth, B. 1972: 8). However, she recognised that self-employment was not a substitute for full-time work, choosing to minimise the risk she and her family faced. Likewise, Sandile Cele invested his retrenchment pay in two small businesses in Old Dunbar, which he abandoned once he found wage work. Sandile and his wife Maria relied upon Maria's kin for help in this time of economic hardship, because the domestic unit faced several crises, notwithstanding Sandile's retrenchment. Maria was pregnant but also suffered from tuberculosis, which left her bedridden for long periods.

#### **Case 4: Sandile Cele - The Taxi-Driver**

In June of 1996, Sandile Cele and his wife Nabane were expecting their sixth child. However, Sandile faced the difficult task of finding some way of making a living. He had recently been retrenched from his position as a plumber's assistant, earning R300- per month. Fifty-six-year-old Sandile did not yet qualify for a pension, although he claimed to have applied for an early one. In order to help Nabane and Sandile, Nabane's sister took four year old Makhosi and two year old Ayanda into her home in KwaMashu. (Sandile's prior residence with his wife's kin is discussed in case six of chapter one.) In passing on the upkeep of two of their children, the couple had lessened domestic expenses.

After her son's birth, Nabane relapsed with tuberculosis but would not go to hospital because Sandile called her illness 'a Zulu thing'. Her father had died of the same illness and so she believed the disease to be 'in her family'. Nabane could not leave her home and did not have the energy to do domestic chores, leaving buckets of dirty clothing soaking for days on end. Sandile decided to set up two businesses based in Old Dunbar. He had already bought a broken-down station wagon, which he was currently repairing to obtain a 'certificate of roadworthiness'. A friend and neighbour in Old Dunbar, who had a fenced off yard guarded by dogs, agreed to safeguard the vehicle at night. With his vehicle, Sandile decided to ferry children living in Old Dunbar to and from local schools and to purchase groceries from a wholesaler to sell from home. Sandile modified his home, building a serving hatch

into the wall of his bedroom. This meant that Nabane could rest in between serving customers. Sandile also built and stocked chicken coups outside his home. He cut a hole into the wall separating the two rooms of his shack, so creating a tiny hallway into which he placed a refrigerator. He also bought four corrugated iron sheets at R100- each to repair part of his leaky roof. Sandile thus made the most of his shack, which suggests that homes in Old Dunbar are not simply places for unemployed kin to base themselves strategically, but can function as sites of production and / or retail. This illustrates how limited physical space is a resource used to its fullest, even though numerous home spazas filled Old Dunbar.

By the end of July 1996, Sandile's car was running, ready for the start of the new school term. He located eleven children whose parents respectively agreed to pay Sandile between R40- and R50- per month. Sandile stocked his spaza with paraffin, vegetables, sweets and chips. He bought a twenty-litre drum of paraffin per week. Despite Sandile's plans to run a refrigerator, he could not afford to. The refrigerator stood in his home for months without being used. Some months later Sandile's car broke down putting an end to his taxi business. When Sandile obtained plumbing work in March of 1997, which paid R100- per day, he decided to abandon his efforts at informal enterprise. What is most apparent here, is the extent to which individuals, who find themselves out of work and the sole supporters of their families, must improvise by making the most of their existing skills and knowledge.

The overriding theme that emerges here is that informal enterprise is but one of a number of strategies employed in the process of hand-to-mouth survival. Many of these strategies hinge on accessing another's source of income either directly through a loan, child maintenance or housekeeping allowance, or indirectly by sloughing off dependents into another's domestic unit. The impermanence of employment and residence affects social relationships, in that this splits up domestic units and weighs against the development of long-term relationships amongst neighbours. Yet, these self-same factors also mean that survival is dependent on the strategic manipulation of whatever relationships are at hand. Continually shifting alliances and sources of support are a reflection of the transient or impermanent nature of life for those living in Old Dunbar.

## **Chapter seven: Network as survival strategy**

In a context of domestic mobility and dispersal, I argue that economic survival depends largely on the degree to which individuals can successfully mobilise what Mitchell (1969: 13) refers to as 'personal' or 'ego-centred' networks, rather than reliance on a particular type of family or domestic unit. The recognition of social networks as significant units of analysis derives from studies of large, heterogeneous urban populations (See Kapferer, B 1969: 183). When this context is further complicated by the instability of populations such as Old Dunbar's, one comes to appreciate that survival involves the indiscriminate manipulation of sets of 'potential links' (Mitchell 1969: 26). Furthermore, the analysis of social manoeuvres, rather than of domestic units *per se* provides some insight into a particular methodological and sociological dilemma - namely, domestic fluidity. This shifts the focus from a transient localised unit to the relationships that underpin its fragile existence.

Male and female respondents were members of broad-based survival networks comprised of consanguineally and affinally related kin, but these extended to include non-kin neighbours, friends and co-workers. From time to time, respondents would activate relationships to their kin when they simply needed somewhere to stay - as highlighted in previous chapters - or required help in managing a domestic crisis related, for example, to illness, injury or marital dissolution. I stress the point that respondents did not mobilise all potential kinship

ties. Not all kinsfolk had the means to provide help, whilst for some respondents a kinsman or kinswoman had provided help on a one-off basis only. Instead, a limited number of kin - in several cases this was simply two individuals - developed a reciprocal relationship with each other, and in this rather limited sense, the social networks of respondents might be described as kin-based. These intense relationships did not hinge upon frequency of contact because physical distances, the cost of transport and lack of telephones made regular contact between relatives impossible. Rather, the intensity lay in the observation that in times of need these individuals looked to one another for support, so re-activating otherwise (temporarily) dormant relationships.

### **Structural versus operational needs**

The importance of kin in managing domestic crises in Old Dunbar does not imply that relationships based on physical proximity - for example, neighbourhood - did not have the capacity for reciprocity. Neighbours - unlike family members separated by great distances - were in daily contact with one another and they were often the first to learn of a domestic crisis, even if they could offer little or no help. Although the informal settlement was relatively young at the time of research, neighbours borrowed and lent small household items, attended community meetings and socialised to some extent. Patron-client relationships emerged where some local spaza operators allowed customers to purchase goods on credit and an element of 'multiplexity' (Gluckman 1955 cited in Mitchell 1969: 22) entered

relationships where, for example, neighbours attended the same church or became partners in rotating credit associations or *stokvels*. However, a number of factors, which contributed to the instability of residence in Old Dunbar and consequent high turnover of residents, also worked against the establishment of long-term relationships between neighbours. For example, in 1996, conflict erupted in Old Dunbar at the level of local leadership, resulting in the forced ejection of a number of men from the settlement. More specifically, criminal and vigilante activities had forced several respondents, their co-resident kin and / or their neighbours to flee Old Dunbar.

Elias Ngcobo, an entrepreneur, whose business activities are discussed in chapter six, was ejected from Old Dunbar after allegedly misrepresenting himself to outsiders as an employee of the C.M.D.A. with the authority to accept cash deposits for (non-existent) sites in Old Dunbar. The matter came to the residents' attention when two women came to demand a refund of their deposit from Elias. Given the already poor reputation of Old Dunbar in the eyes of the C.M.D.A., residents became infuriated, taking measures into their own hands by setting Elias' four shacks on fire. This act prevented not only Elias, but also his wife, daughter, brother and brother's girlfriend from remaining on in Old Dunbar.

The level of distrust amongst neighbours combined with the lack of secure tenure in Old Dunbar meant that kin living in different areas came together when a domestic crisis had occurred. The individual who faced the domestic crisis drew upon all the

help that was available, so mobilising an 'action-set', which is best described as a temporary field of support incorporating kin and non-kin. The important point to note here is that those brought into the 'action-set' had not necessarily been called upon for help before, and that the value or nature of the help given by each individual in the set varied somewhat, from the provision of domestic or child care services to that of room space. I argue that it was the help given by kin - especially *female* kin - and not neighbours, that was most central to coping with the particular domestic crisis at hand. In this sense, the survival networks were also female-centred, as seen in the efforts of women to sustain domestic units, to mind children in Old Dunbar and to accommodate their kin (or the children thereof) in their homes outside the settlement.

I should emphasize here that no logical reason exists why ties based on social proximity - that is, kinship - should be any more binding than those based on physical proximity. For example, in her study of Die Bos, a squatter settlement in Somerset West, Ross (1993: 60) noted that residents avoided looking to kin in times of need. Ross (1993: 60) explains this as follows:

"Given the high rates of un- and under-employment which characterised life in Die Bos, the resources with which to sustain intense, long-term relationships of the type associated with kin networks were scarce. Consequently, people often steered clear of activating kin-based networks. Instead they used other relationships of friendship and reciprocity."

Similarly, residents in Old Dunbar looked to neighbours for smaller favours, such as, the loan of an iron, toilet paper, a radio or even fridge space. Yet, residents of

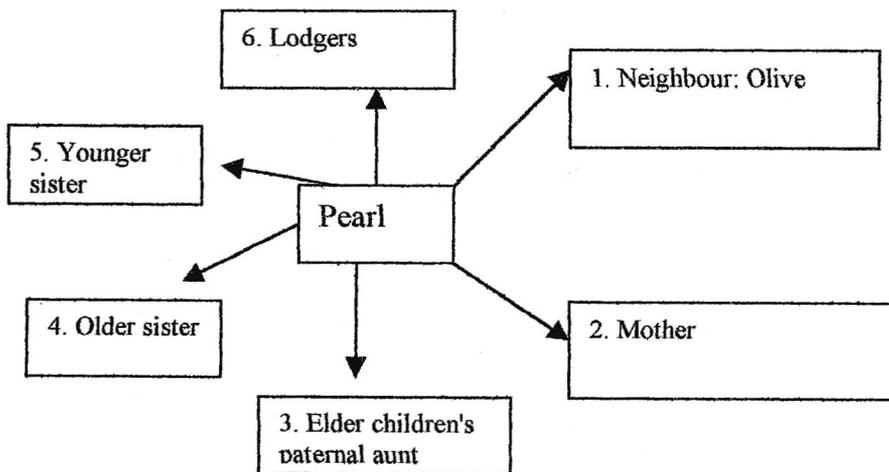
Old Dunbar had a vested interest in maintaining ties to non-resident kin with homes in other parts of Durban or KwaZulu/Natal because certain crises threatened to disrupt - and often did - already fragile domestic units. The observation that respondents looked to extra-residential ties more so than ties to neighbours in managing these crises is perhaps an oversight of research, although it possibly relates to the sheer size of Old Dunbar's population: a large, loose-knit community, estimated in 1994 to number some 11000 people (Jones et al 1996:11), contrasting with Ross' (1993: 16) three hundred informal settlers living in the less well-established settlement of Die Bos. The element of distance or anonymity that developed in Old Dunbar is partially indicative of the use of this settlement by many as a stepping stone to finding more secure residence and / or employment in Durban.

The difference between ties of kinship and neighbourhood lies in the different needs that these relationships service. One might argue that neighbours service operational needs. These are characterised by socially significant although small economic exchanges. This kind of sharing potentially smoothes the day to day co-existence between domestic unit. By contrast, kin are mobilised by a crises threatens the structure of the domestic unit. They absorb and cushion the strain that is placed upon it and, if need be, make structural adaptations. Respondents such as Pearl Makgoba, Vuyani Bhengu and Cynthia Molefe looked to those individuals on whom they had a tentative claim vis-à-vis the morality of kinship. These family members periodically broke stretches of isolation from one another, so

transforming what Bott (1957: 119-121) originally described as a 'non-effective' relationship into an 'effective' one.

Pearl Makgoba mobilised an 'effective network' (Boswell 1969) to deal with two crises that disrupted her domestic unit. Pearl's residential history has already been discussed in case one of chapter four and will not be repeated here save to reiterate that she and her boyfriend had moved to Old Dunbar in the hope of establishing their own place. However, a little over a year later she lost contact with her boyfriend when he fled Old Dunbar following the turmoil that attended the ousting of the then civic organisation. Left to support herself and four children, Pearl employed a number of strategies, one of which was to obtain help with the care of her children from several kinswomen.

**Case 1: The role of female kin in managing a child-related crisis.**



When Pearl's boyfriend Phillip, a casual worker, left Old Dunbar sixteen months after their arrival, Pearl was not in employment. This meant that Pearl was left with

her two elder children by a prior relationship, as well as her and Phillip's two children, one of whom was born after the couple moved to Old Dunbar. Pearl had few friends in Old Dunbar, although her neighbour Olive had helped Pearl give birth to her youngest child. Pearl's first move was not to seek help immediately from her mother or sisters but to ask a local welfare organisation for food.

However, that same month, an accident occurred in her cramped shack - her baby son pulled a pot of boiling water off her paraffin stove onto himself and his sister - which worsened her already dire situation. Peter's injuries were more serious than his sister's burns, which meant that he had to stay in hospital for six weeks. In the meantime, Pearl dispersed her elder two children, aged eight and ten, to her mother's home in Inanda, because she feared for their safety in Old Dunbar. She explained her decision: "It is safer there. In Inanda they can run and hide in the forest. Here - look - there is nowhere to hide." However, her mother was already burdened with dependents and could not keep the children for long.

Pearl then made an arrangement to send the elder two to live with their father's sister in Greytown, which did not please her given that the travelling distance would limit contact with her children. She worried that they would suffer without her, commenting that "children cannot stay nicely without their mother". Living alone in her four-roomed shack and without an income, Pearl decided to take in a female lodger and later a second, renting rooms out at R40- a month. With this money, Pearl could at least buy some food - mainly rice and vegetables - to eat, obtaining a large bag of rice and quantities of paraffin from a spaza operator, Seni

Radebe, which she paid for at the end of the month. Pearl's older sister, Agnes, visited Old Dunbar to help with domestic chores once both children were discharged from hospital, helping to bathe Peter's burns. Meanwhile, Pearl still needed to find work, but did not know who would look after her younger two children if she obtained a job.

When an opportunity arose in August of 1996, in the form of full-time live-in domestic work from Monday to Saturday, paying R350- per month, Pearl desperately wanted to accept the offer, even though this amounted to less than R15- per day. None of her kinswomen offered help immediately as her older sister worked full-time and her younger sister was still schooling. Pearl refused to accept help from a half-sister, saying "she is not the same as me." The local crèches were not an option because they did not keep children overnight and in her desperation Pearl considered placing her children in a children's home. However, once she learned that she could be declared an unfit parent by the court and later have to prove her ability to care for her children in order to regain custody, she decided against this course of action. When it appeared that she could not accept the job offer, her younger sister dropped out of school in order to look after the children in Old Dunbar.

The arrival of Pearl's younger sister in Old Dunbar raises a number of questions, not simply as to why female kin should harbour a sense of obligation regarding one another's children. One is also faced with the question as to whether the assistance

provided by her kinswomen is best described as the workings of, for example, a "female-centred" (Preston-Whyte 1969) or 'matrifilial' (Jones 1996) family. Certainly, the observation that co-operative endeavours amongst kinswomen are directed to the care of dependent children would suggest this. However valid such a comparison is, I argue that this should not detract from the fact that the giving and receiving of help is not an automatic process but one of negotiation, bargaining and compromise. For example, Pearl did not wish to send her elder two so far away to Greytown but, because her mother could not keep them, she had no choice. I suggest, then, that the concept of a network of potential links is better applied here because, firstly, networks allow for deviations from a typology - for example, not all kinsfolk can provide help, and secondly, it highlights individual preferences, that is, the ranking of kin. In examining the way respondents manipulated their support networks, ones attention is focused, then, upon the transaction that takes place between individuals as representatives of extremely vulnerable domestic units. For example, by sending her youngest daughter to assist Pearl, Pearl's mother effectively sloughed off a dependent daughter from her own over-burdened domestic unit. This reciprocal arrangement enabled both domestic units to maintain some sort of balance, albeit tenuous. Pearl's reliance on her mother and sisters, who effectively constituted one domestic unit sustained by the older sister's wages, illustrates the development of intense, multipurpose, or what Mayer (1961) described as 'close-knit', relationships developing amongst a subset of kin. This suggests that a system of generalised reciprocity existed amongst Pearl's kinswomen given the "equality of economic wants between partners" (Lomnitz, L

1977: 133), yet this system of numerous transactions included delays and compromises.

The question that still remains unanswered is why kinswomen should find it difficult to refuse the needs of working mothers, and it is possible that this system of quasi-mothering is partly a response to conditions that make it impossible or impractical for children to reside on a permanent basis with one or both parents.

The greater reliance on, or amongst women, whether they are single, separated or married reiterates a theme introduced in chapter four, that the burden of childrearing falls primarily upon the shoulders of women as mothering agents.

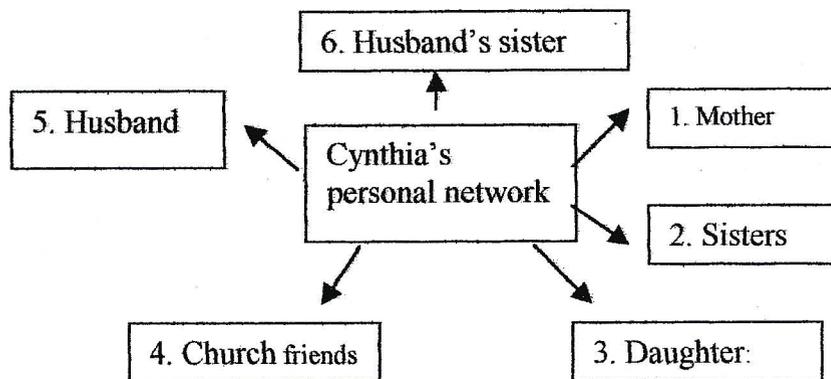
However, this system of child fostering is not one of long-term placement but one of numerous, temporary, shifts required to sustain domestic units. The possibility that a woman might need to redistribute her children means that it is beneficial if she herself holds rights in more than one domestic unit and is able to manipulate ties to her female kin, thereby apportioning her procreative responsibilities, either wholly or partially.

For example, seventeen-year-old Thandi, the girlfriend of Thabo Dlamini whose case is discussed in chapter five had, prior to her arrival in Old Dunbar, oscillated between her mother's and her maternal grandmother's respective homes. Thandi and her five younger brothers lived with the older woman in Ndwedwe during the week whilst their mother, a domestic, worked in the suburb of Durban North, returning to their parent's house in Inanda over weekends. Thandi gave birth to her

daughter whilst living in Old Dunbar and intended to return to school, spurred on by the insistence of her mother, grandmother and boyfriend's mother that she complete standard nine. She returned home to Ndwedwe in February 1997 but was unsuccessful in her attempts to register for the first term of the school year. However, Thandi did not remain on in Ndwedwe, choosing rather to return with her daughter to Old Dunbar, so retaining contact with the father of her child.

These transactions amongst women illustrate an argument made by Spiegel (1986: 32) that it is the *links* between or amongst low-income domestic units – as evidenced by the constant exchange of dependents - rather than domestic units per se that are integral to domestic survival. What Spiegel (1986: 32) terms 'inter-linked households' or domestic units, qualified perhaps as specifying *female-linked* domestic units, illustrate that transactions between individuals as members of domestic units represent efforts to sustain, salvage or reconstruct domestic life. These links amongst domestic units obviously do not exist in perpetuity but are activated by individuals when circumstances render it necessary. The fact of the instability of residence in Old Dunbar - perhaps better phrased as the need to remain mobile – illustrates that domestic units cannot afford to operate autonomously and that to assume the opposite would be ignoring the constantly shifting context in which individuals and families find themselves. Of course, this does not imply that studies of domestic fluidity should focus exclusively upon physical shifts without paying due attention to the social manoeuvres - or strategies - involved in relocating adults and children

## Case 2: Social manoeuvres and domestic reconstruction



Cynthia Molefe looked to her husband's sister for help – a woman whom she had not called on for assistance before when she decided to remove her children from Old Dunbar. Case three of chapter four describes how Cynthia and her female kin migrated to Durban, with Cynthia's husband acting as gatekeeper. However, a number of factors weighed against the long-term residence of Cynthia and her children in Old Dunbar, not least of which was the level of violence in the settlement, repeating an earlier pattern as Cynthia and her kinswomen had originally fled their rural home because of feuding.

As Zionists, the Molefe's were part of a close-knit set of relatives and fellow church members. Cynthia's husband was an *umshumayele* (preacher) who held sermons on weekdays after work and on weekends in an empty one-room shack near the family's home. These informal gatherings included neighbours such as Zandile Ngema and spaza owner Benny Mkhize. When the latter was murdered, allegedly in retribution for his involvement in the ousting of the leader of the

previous civic organisation, Cynthia decided to remove her children from Old Dunbar. Cynthia summed up her discontent in her words, "people here are mad", words previously uttered by her eldest daughter Thandi in explaining why she had no friends in the settlement. This wariness of strangers is characteristic of Zionists. However, Thandi was further isolated because Cynthia could not afford to send her to school, spending most of her time in the shack or in the yard looking after her infant sisters whilst both parents were out at work.

Cynthia arranged for her husband's sister to take her four children, intending to join them in due course. By moving back to Umkomaas and using her kinswoman as a well-placed gatekeeper, Cynthia was setting in motion a not entirely futile strategy, for several reasons. Firstly, she had fallen out of favour with the women with whom she shared a sewing room in Durban's city centre, no longer having a place from which to operate her sewing machine. Her own shack did not have a reliable and safe electricity supply, which meant that she would not be able to make the quantity of dresses that she normally sold in Durban and other south coast towns. Secondly, she was intent upon sending her elder two children back to school once they had returned to Umkomaas.

Cynthia's husband remained behind as he worked in Durban and could stay at his father's home in KwaMashu. By the end of August 1996, then, the shack was padlocked and empty. There is little argument that violence, or what one might

term a 'local level' factor (Ross 1996: 57-8), had informed Cynthia's decision to return to Umkomaas, yet one should not ignore the opportunist element in moving back to her rural birthplace and the mechanism that underpinned the family's relocation. Cynthia's sister-in-law thus acted as a gatekeeper for this returning migrant, as had Cynthia's husband when she and her kinswomen sought shelter in Durban.

Although the extent to which women as mothers form important sources of support for one another appears as the main point emerging from both Pearl and Cynthia's case studies, ones' attention should also be directed to the fact that help was derived from sources *outside* of Old Dunbar. The importance of ties that cut across the physical boundaries of this particular settlement is partly an indication that Old Dunbar cannot be described as a tightly knit or bounded community. Relationships between neighbours were not uniformly harmonious as seen in the case of Valentina Shezi, who was assaulted by a neighbour who suspected her and her brother of stealing appliances from his home whilst he was at work.

The presence of cross-cutting ties also lends support to Russell's (1998) argument that low-income residential units do not necessarily operate as self-sufficient, autonomous social units. Russell (1998) indicates that the notion of "discrete, persisting, resource sharing residential units on the basis of marriage and progeny" (p.173) is one that derives from "Euramerican preconceptions" (p.173) and is implicit within "census style research" (p.173). Such a conceptualisation of

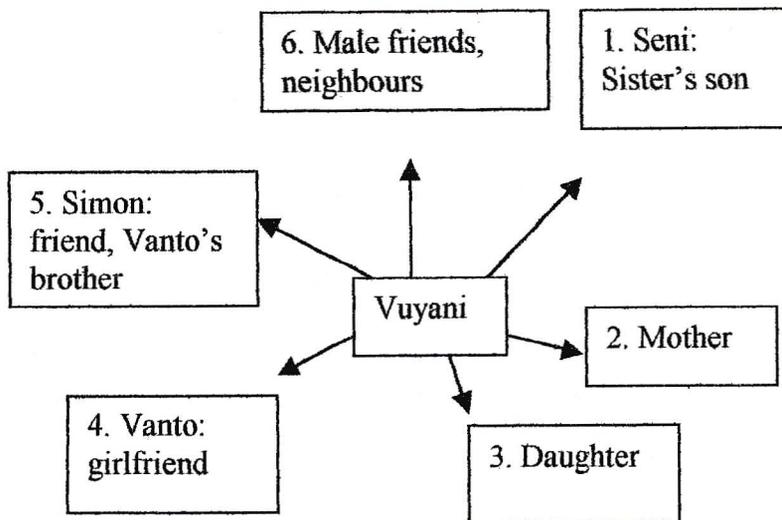
domesticity, of family life, is wholly inappropriate to a context in which numerous variables - both at a macro and micro level - such as unemployment, crime, political violence and marital dissolution, ensure that residence is a more fluid than fixed phenomenon. The observation of residential units as fluid entities is one that recognises the importance - not of investment within one residential unit - but rather, of the presence of a system of multiple (and shifting) residential allegiances.

The question that follows from this is that of what *form* support takes when domestic crises arise, given that neighbourhoods are fragile and families are non-localised units with members scattered by circumstances across different towns. I argue that help is derived partly from individual choice and partly from chance, in that individuals must choose from amongst those friends, neighbours and relatives who are willing and able to provide assistance. This means that those at hand, that is, physically proximate, may not be able to provide the help that is required and it is this point that Russell (1998: 175) is pursuing when she states that "interdependence is not regularly expressed in co-residence".

A thorough analysis of domestic fluidity requires, then, that one looks beyond what is essentially a shifting unit to examine the manipulation of social relationships and the transactions that surround the movement of adults and children in and out of domestic units. In other words, survival is dependent upon the mobilisation of help from a relatively broad-based network of individuals, help which transcends domestic or geographical boundaries. The constant movement of individuals in and

out of Vuyani Bhengu's domestic unit illustrates, not only his role as gatekeeper for two kinsmen seeking to establish themselves in Durban, but also his reliance to varying degrees on co-resident kin, neighbours and non-resident kinswomen when beset by a number of crises.

**Case 3: The importance of cross-cutting ties in keeping a domestic unit intact**



Case two of chapter five described how Vuyani's sister and her husband acted as gatekeepers when he migrated from northern KwaZulu/Natal to seek work in Durban. This favour he reciprocated when he allowed this sister's son to stay with him in Old Dunbar in the hopes that Seni would find piecework in the city. The arrangement obviously suited Seni's mother because she was effectively sloughing off a dependent son. As for Vuyani, his cousin, Blessing, had left Old Dunbar and consequently he needed someone to look after his shack on the weeks he worked nightshift at a petrol-station. (I discuss their co-residence in case two of chapter five). Seni explained his residence in Old Dunbar in terms of keeping his uncle company, saying that 'a man should not live alone'. However, it also suited Seni to

live in Old Dunbar because this made it easier for him to meet his girlfriend in town and it led – to some extent - toward his own quasi-independence. Within a year of moving to the settlement, Seni had obtained work in a bar in town and built his own shack a few metres away from his uncle's home, on a small plot next to his friends' spaza shop, making use of the shop's gas powered fridge in which to store his food.

Vuyani's girlfriend had lived in Old Dunbar in 1995 and now lived in a nearby low-income housing settlement with her mother and adult siblings, although she kept in contact with him. Her part-time role within Vuyani's home was largely confined to carrying out domestic chores, although this role gradually expanded as Vuyani's illness worsened over the course of 1996 and eventually confined him to his bed, unable to go out to work. Vuyani did not go to hospital immediately and although adhering to the Christian faith, an *isangoma* was called in to treat him. The family did not know the cause of his illness, until Vuyani eventually sought medical attention for the purposes of obtaining a sick note for work, which revealed that he was suffering from *tuberculosis*.

Vuyani remained bedridden for several weeks until admitted to a local government hospital. Whilst hospitalised, friends and neighbours from the informal settlement including his nephew and girlfriend, visited him. Vuyani was discharged, then recuperated at home, eventually returning to work. Vanto was not the only individual to who took up temporary residence in Vuyani's home during his illness.

Vuyani's mother and daughter travelled from northern KwaZulu/Natal and stayed for a month, carrying out domestic chores, whilst their kinsman recuperated.

One might suggest, then, that Vuyani's kin-based network, as it emerged during the course of his illness, was the only form of quasi-insurance afforded to him in an otherwise unpredictable context. Drawing from Cashdan's (1985:456-7) studies of food scarcity, one might further suggest that links amongst kin constitute a form of risk-reduction, operating in a context in which losses affect individuals and not entire groups. However, I stress two points here. Firstly, the sort of support network activated by Vuyani cannot be described as a permanent arrangement, because the set of individuals who came together would not necessarily remain the same if a crisis were to arise at another point in time. Secondly, those individuals with whom Vuyani had relationships based on physical or social proximity could only be described as sources of *potential* support. This means that any particular individual's personal network refers to a temporary and changing field of support, and not one which exists in perpetuity. Yet, given that Vuyani drew upon a relatively broad network of fairly random support, when faced with a serious illness, and received both moral support and practical assistance, it does appear that his female kin played a more important role in keeping his domestic unit intact.

The question that arises from this observation is that of *why* kinswomen (rather than men) should play a central role in ameliorating domestic crises. On the one hand, the role that women play within domestic units fits within accepted norms of

society, although this still does not guarantee that all or any of an individual's kinswomen would be willing and able to cook, clean, or act as quasi-mothers. In other words, one cannot conclude that women are more willing than are men to recognise their moral duties to kin, and numerous examples illustrate how male kin stood as residential and work sponsors to respondents. For example, Thabo Dlamini stood as residential sponsor to his mother and brothers when they sought work in Durban. When Seni Radebe's mine contract was not renewed in 1993, he moved to Reservoir Hills, Durban, to stay with his maternal uncle. Seni used this man's live-in accommodation as a base from which to find work as a plumbing assistant and, subsequently, Seni built his own home in Old Dunbar. Eunice Myeni obtained her first job in a factory in Butterworth, Transkei, through her maternal uncle. Betty Thusi found work with her mother's brother in Umgababa before moving to Old Dunbar.

However, I argue that the type of help given by women in the three cases discussed in this chapter, namely that of domestic and child care services, is significant precisely because it is not completely altruistic. The extension of female-role expectations presents a valid way for some women - who effectively have nothing else to offer - to establish claims to another domestic unit, or to the income flows that centre on it. For Vuyani's girlfriend, Vanto, her role within Vuyani's home, whilst fitting within accepted norms, could also be interpreted as a strategic move on her part. This enabled Vanto to attach herself to a male wage earner, even though she did not make her residence in Old Dunbar a permanent sleeping

arrangement, choosing rather to keep a foothold both in her boyfriend's and her elderly mother's households.

I argue that this decision was based not on the permanence of both homes, but was related rather to the insecurity of both. On the one hand, Vanto's mother held tentative rights to her home in Maxhane because, it being on lease-hold from one of a number of individuals and families who had illegally occupied dwellings in this area, she was being pressurized to release the house to the legal owners. On the other hand, Vuyani's illness could threaten his livelihood, and hence the stability, of his residence in Old Dunbar which served as a temporary home to several of his kin.

I suggest, then, that Vuyani's personal network was comprised of two smaller female-linked networks, one being that of his mother and daughter and the other, that of his girlfriend and her kin. Both female-linked networks had a vested interest in Vuyani's home in Old Dunbar, which served as a strategic urban base. Vuyani's personal network also included several male friends and neighbours and, when he became embroiled in a dispute with one of these neighbours, he again activated part of his personal network, seeking temporary refuge with Vanto and her mother until the conflict was assuaged. A link existed between his girlfriend and his male friends, in that Vuyani socialised with Vanto's brother Simon and both men formed part of a sociable drinking-group that occasionally spent their leisure time at Vanto's home in Maxhane.

Besides drinking, this group, several of whose members were unemployed, shared cigarettes and generally kept one another company. Generally-speaking, drinking took place over weekends in Old Dunbar where the men consumed beer, spirits, and other potent mixtures called "*hotstuff*", although Vuyani's nephew Seni insisted that "People here drink from Monday to Sunday". On one particular weekend in February 1997, when the group had been drinking, Vuyani and his neighbour, Nicholas, began to quarrel. Seni was present and he described how "Vuyani went mad" and assaulted Nicholas with a hammer and attempted to hit the other men. On sobering, Vuyani fled to his girlfriend's home from which he went to work the following Monday morning. Various rumours spread around Old Dunbar that Nicholas, admitted to hospital on Sunday, had either died or was now paralyzed for life. However, Nicholas recovered from his injuries and Vuyani, who returned home several days later, was chastised for his misbehaviour by the rest of the group, which had on other occasions disciplined its members from stepping out of line. On this occasion, Vuyani's network of male friends had managed to contain the conflict that erupted between two of its members, illustrating the multiple functions of relatively broad-based networks.

However, one is also drawn to the observation that in this largely transient community, dispute between neighbours is not uncommon. Only a few relationships, largely of kinship, withstand continual on-mobility, which explains the emergence of kin-based networks, that is, a core of more enduring social ties

surrounded by ephemeral connections made in various settlements. Even those ties to kin are largely conditioned by need, as seen in the numerous exchanges between kin-linked domestic units, which continually seek to redistribute dependents amongst their members. The process of survival, then, rests upon a series of transactions between friends, neighbours, and kinsfolk and it is these that underpin domestic fluidity.

## Chapter eight: Conclusion

A common thread that draws the previous four ethnographic chapters together is that each focuses on the strategies, or social manoeuvres, employed by the twenty-five respondents presented in this dissertation, in their efforts to make some sort of life for themselves in Durban. I have deliberately emphasised that survival is dependent on a series of transactions amongst individuals, their kinsfolk, neighbours and friends, and that these transactions cut across the physical boundaries of any one domestic unit. The transient nature of neighbourhoods, the lack of stable or permanent employment, combined with criminal and political violence, have forced respondents to draw on as wide, and indiscriminate, a base of support as possible. This meant that gaining access to needed resources, whether this be food, shelter or employment, involved a degree of negotiation and bargaining amongst extremely fragile domestic units.

The aim of this dissertation was certainly not to present a comparative discussion of the types of domestic units that respondents established in Old Dunbar because, firstly, the settlement contained a plethora of family types, ranging from domestic units containing large, extended families to those resembling small nuclear families. Secondly, the stream of individuals in and out of these domestic units meant that the composition of such units, and hence their typology, could change dramatically from one month to the next or from one year to the next. Nevertheless, the transient nature of domestic life in Old Dunbar presented both a methodological and sociological dilemma, both of which needed attention. One strategy adopted was to gather data relating to the residence and

work histories of respondents. Gathering such information helped to root these highly mobile individuals by providing a background to their arrival in Old Dunbar. It also illustrated the type of social relationships that respondents had mobilised in their quest to find work and shelter in Durban. Further, participant observation over a relatively long period revealed that the fluidity of domestic units could be better understood if one looked to the wider networks within which domestic units were contained. This would not have been possible had the research relied on one-off survey methods.

It became clear, then, that male and female respondents had made use of gatekeepers, that is, well-placed kinsfolk, who held access to even the most basic of urban resources, such as bed-space. This enabled rural born respondents to migrate from their respective birthplaces and for urban born respondents, it enabled them to move away from overcrowded township houses or violence-ridden informal settlements on Durban's periphery. The added complication faced by unmarried or post-marital mothers in moving about with dependent infants, school-age children, or young adult dependants raised questions as to how these women managed to find work and see to the welfare of their children. The difficulties these female respondents faced thus introduced a degree of complexity to this study. It became apparent that a family system, in which women bore most of the responsibility for rearing children, would obviously foster networks of supportive ties amongst women in similar situations. Only a few male respondents, such as Sandile Cele and Seni Radebe, had actually moved to Old Dunbar with their (common-law) wives and their children. Overall, an analysis of biographical material, as well as the domestic units set up in Old Dunbar illustrated that it was easier for men

to avoid or actively shirk their procreative responsibilities.

The facts of premarital procreation, widowhood, marital dissolution, and male domestic marginality meant that female respondents tended to forge strategic alliances with their close kin. The redistribution of dependent children to, for example, their maternal grandmothers freed daughters to take up work in Durban or in other urban centres.

These strategies were not infallible and not all female respondents were able to successfully place their children with kinsfolk. Further, grandchildren could simply act as a drain upon a grandmother's limited income, especially if her daughter (or son in some cases) failed to remit money. It became clear, then, that numerous temporary shifts of dependants were necessary, in order retain a fragile balance amongst extremely impoverished domestic units. I argue, then, that no one family type constituted an adequate buffer against poverty and that survival depended on how well individual men and women could manipulate the various strands of their personal or ego-centred networks.

For example, a number of strategies were available to unmarried women who could either remain single, so avoiding the added domestic responsibility of keeping a marital home, or could attach themselves to male wage earners. Remaining single appeared to be a viable long-term strategy for female respondents such as Betty Sithole. However, there was no guarantee that an unmarried woman would not find herself unemployed, possibly isolated from her kin if she had migrated from her rural birthplace, and responsible for the welfare of dependent children. Women, such as Nkanza Ngwenya

and Eunice Myeni, entered into consensual unions with the potential for formalisation after several years of living singly and giving birth to pre-marital children. These and other females retained ties to their mothers, perhaps, as a form of insurance should their consensual unions fail, as happened in several cases. I suggest, then, that female-linked networks cut across the boundaries of both 'marital' and 'post-marital' domestic units. These networks are best described as *female*-linked because the transactions that flowed along them primarily involved the redistribution of children from one mothering-agent to the next.

I should emphasise here that men were equally dependent on their kinsfolk in finding work and shelter in Durban, and suggest that men also drew upon female-linked networks when crises threatened the structure of their domestic units. Both male and female respondents mobilised support from their kin-based networks, making use of those individuals who were willing and able to provide the help they needed. However, these networks of support were not extensive, and in some cases, a respondent was heavily reliant on only one or two individuals, as seen in the case of mother-daughter dyads. One observes, then, the development of multipurpose relationships amongst a relatively small subset of kin. It appeared that for many male and female respondents, relationships to a core of close kin constituted the only source of stability in an otherwise transient socio-economic context. Of course, one could also view networks comprised of unmarried mothers and their adult children as extremely vulnerable, precisely because of their heavy reliance or dependence on one another. I have suggested that families without husband-fathers, that is, those comprised of mothers

and their children tended, in consequence, to create a system of sibling reliance, in which older siblings helped their mothers by taking in younger siblings, or where brothers and sisters acted as gatekeepers for one another.

Male and female respondents drew upon their kin-based networks in setting up domestic units in Old Dunbar. This involved a process of deal-making in which residential sponsors offered kinsfolk shelter in exchange for companionship, help with domestic chores, childcare or informal sector activities. For unmarried men and women, the decision to co-reside with cousins, siblings or adult children provided a degree of personal security in this large, unplanned settlement. In turn, these residential dependants used the informal settlement as a stepping-stone to finding work in the city or establishing their own homes. Given the temporary and instrumental nature of residence, it did not seem useful or meaningful to describe these domestic units as male or female headed, for several reasons. Firstly, sponsors were individuals through whom kinsfolk gained access to sleeping space. They did not necessarily stand as authority figures, even though some of these sponsors were older kinsfolk. At the very most, they were gatekeepers to urban resources. Secondly, named heads, such as resident husband-fathers, unmarried or post-marital mothers who did not necessarily control the incomes of their co-resident kin. These individuals were often reliant on some form of external economic support, as seen in cases where resident husband-fathers found themselves unemployed and with few procreative responsibilities. Hence, so-called heads of domestic units were not always central to their functioning.

The point that I emphasise here is that domestic units in Old Dunbar were not autonomous or self-sufficient units, and that their survival depended on how successfully the individual members of the unit could draw upon their respective personal networks. These networks of support were potential links, which remained dormant until the individual or individuals concerned activated them. Given the importance of a stable and regular cash income to domestic units, and the reliance of most respondents on erratic and / or poorly paid employment, keeping family members together proved difficult. The only way to place a check upon domestic dispersal was for men and women to adopt a plurality of survival strategies, which included the redistribution of dependent children, reliance on daily piecework, and informal sector work. The temporary nature of employment meant that those who did manage to find permanent wage work were desperate to hold onto their jobs, and the kinsfolk of such employed individuals had a vested interest in their continued employment. For example, female respondents who attached themselves to employed men were able to start up their own informal enterprises.

Of course, respondents also forged useful ties to neighbours and friends in Old Dunbar. These served to provide some measure of stability in an otherwise fluid social environment, and in some cases were economically productive. The relative strength of ties based on physical proximity verses those based on social proximity simply lay in the fact that each serviced different needs. Neighbours who were in daily contact with one another lent one another small household items or performed small domestic favours. In some cases, multiplex relationships developed amongst clusters of neighbours. These

served to smooth relationships amongst individuals who were strangers to one another when they arrived in the settlement from 1994 onwards, and went some way towards creating a (limited) sense of community. The importance of such friendships should not be overlooked because the size of Old Dunbar's population, combined with relatively high levels of criminal and political violence in the settlement, meant that it was very useful to befriend as many individuals as possible. The inhabitants of clusters of neighbouring shacks socialised with one another, or in some cases attended the same church. Although such relationships did not prevent disputes from arising, they at least provided a forum for their settlement.

Meanwhile, ties to kin were activated when a crisis threatened the structure of a domestic unit. In these instances, kin were called upon to prevent or contain the possible rupture of a domestic unit, or if this was not possible, then to redistribute family members in the best way possible. These relationships did not necessarily hinge on frequency of contact because family members were scattered across the city or province, and could not always respond immediately to a domestic crisis. This meant that the respondent concerned had to create an action set, which incorporated kin and non-kin. However, the help given by female kin, such as mothers, daughters, sisters and girlfriends proved invaluable to the continued functioning of many domestic units, which again illustrates the importance of female-linked networks. These kinswomen responded either by removing dependants from the domestic unit, or by travelling to Old Dunbar to stay temporarily until the crisis was assuaged, and I have argued that they had an interest in the domestic unit's survival. The help given by kinswomen in extending their roles as mothers, daughters or girlfriends

to other domestic units was a means through which they could potentially establish claims on the unit. This illustrates that holding rights in a number of domestic units provided a degree of security in a context in which long-term residence within any particular domestic unit could not be guaranteed.

The overall argument presented in this dissertation is that, for the twenty-five respondents, their survival depended on the strategic manipulation of those individuals in their personal networks who could provide the help they needed. This would suggest that networks, and not family or household types, constitute survival strategies because networks by definition are flexible and, obviously, their content varies from one individual to the next. The tendency for respondents to draw more heavily from those links to close kin, especially female kin, does not imply the persistence of mythical kinship bonds. Rather, it simply points to the fact that few respondents had contact with paternal kinsfolk, given that their mothers did not marry, or their parents' marital or consensual unions failed. This particular approach enables one to highlight the phenomenon of matrifilial (mother-child) and sibling reliance without necessarily labelling these as family types. The fact remains that Old Dunbar did not offer any real degree of residential stability for the twenty-five respondents, and that many had moved from one settlement to another in search of better opportunities or, at least, a safer place to live. This again illustrates the relevance of *networks of survival* to this particular sample of individuals. For those men or women who do manage to establish a firmer foothold in Old Dunbar, or the surrounding low-income housing areas, the question remains as to whether these wider networks of support will become redundant.

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