

Young peoples' experiences and understandings of 'home' and 'family' living in safety homes, Khayelitsha, Cape Town: Exploring the strengths and limits of the 'social family'

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Abstract

This dissertation draws on qualitative research conducted in 2012 with foster mothers and young people living and having lived in three household-style 'safety homes' in the township of Khayelitsha, Cape Town. Unlike large formalised residential care facilities, with high staff turnover and high ratios of children to caregivers, these settings are intimate long-term spaces of care that provide stable parenting. This finding of stable parenting and of proper care of young people in the safety homes forms the crux of this thesis and challenges the dominant view that care other than within the biological family is inferior and 'out of home' and 'out of family' care. The research highlighted that the social (non-biological) family has both strengths and limitations.

One of the most important strengths that the young people in foster care experienced was that their foster mothers largely met their ideals of a 'real' mother through providing continuous care, love and discipline. It was apparent that the youth in this study dexterously acquired a home and family in these spaces and developed a sense of belonging that helped them cope with past family fragmentation. At the same time however, limitations to their experiences of the social family emerged when biological parents were idealised for their unconditional emotional and material support. This idealisation was apparent in the youths' experiences of conditional professional care, stigma and longing for parents and siblings.

Drawing on key sociological and anthropological studies (Henderson 1999; Ramphele 2002 and Bray et al 2010) on family and home-making in the face of family discontinuity in past and contemporary South Africa it became evident that my participants' efforts to secure stable nurturing relationships with caregivers resemble that of other young people in these studies who have experienced familial fragmentation.

These findings challenge the idealised and naturalised social convention of biological parenthood fundamental to the state's familial reunification drives. To uproot young people from these stable relationships with their foster mothers could be detrimental.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CSG: Child Support Grant

CYCC: Child and Youth Care Centre

DSD: Department of Social Development

FCG: Foster Care Grant

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

NPO: Non-profit Organisation

RDP: Reconstitution and Development Project

TB: Tuberculosis

UNICEF: The United Nations Children Fund

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Chapter 1

Introduction:

1. 1. Situating the study

Academic writing about residential out-of-home childcare adopts a universally unfavourable attitude towards this type of non-family care. This discourse underlies national and international policy and practices. There are two reasons for this negative conception. Firstly, it is considered not ideal for children in residential care to live apart from their families [or kin]. Secondly, there has been widespread criticism of residential care and claims have been made that it is psychologically harmful to children. Psycho-social research, most of which has taken place in the northern hemisphere, holds rigidly negative views on the harmful effects of residential care (Hamilton-Giachritsis & Brown 2012; McDonald et al 1996; Toth 1998; Murtaugh 2010; George 2003; Richter and Norman 2010). This research has widely publicised the risks of 'development delay, attachment difficulties, neural growth dysfunction and mental health disorders due to children's separation from their mothers and a lack of healthy, or possibly unhealthy, interpersonal relationships between children and caregivers (Hamilton-Giachritsis & Brown 2012: 911). These studies have located 'family' and 'home' outside of the parameters of residential care along with birth parents.

Internationally and nationally, discourses and policy focused on family reunification¹ form part of 'permanency planning'. In South Africa these are encoded as a regulation in the Children's Act that requires social workers to reintegrate children into a 'natural home' environment with their parents to provide stability and permanency in their lives. Primacy is given to birth parenthood, and in particular the stable two parent nuclear family, with consistent patterns of co-residence and relationships that are assumed to last a lifetime'.² Care located beyond the parameters of the biological family and home is considered as subsidiary. However international research and policies on childcare have included the extended family in their definition of family. This means that extended family members are acknowledged as foster care guardians given their traditional role in childcare in Sub-Saharan Africa where alternative

¹ Family reunification is a regulation in the National Norms and Standards for Child and Youth Care Centres in South Africa in section 194 of the South African Children's Act.

² See Chapter 12 Children's Amendment Act 41, 2007 Subsections 180 to 189 on Foster Care.

caregivers other than a child's parents are sought (UNICEF 2006). Non-kin care however remains on the peripheries of childcare in the Children's Act (Richter & Norman 2010: 220). This privileging of family care has resulted in the consensus that residential care outside of a child's biological family should be a temporary last resort to childcare once family options have been exhausted³ (Murtaugh 2010: 20). Studies highlighting the deleterious effects of long term placement in institutional care on children's psychological and mental development (Frank et al 1996; Richter & Norman 2010) underpin the goals for short term residential care. Therefore, according to the Act, children should be placed in residential care for a limited period, during which a state appointed Department of Social Development (DSD) social worker should plan to reunify a child with their parent(s) or extended kin once they are deemed able to care for the child physically, emotionally, socially and materially. Putting this into practice is not so easy in South Africa. Bureaucratic obstacles and delays often result in residential care becoming long term as opposed to the intended short term places of care⁴. Meintjes et al (2007: i) observed this in their longitudinal study, 'Home Truths,' of residential care settings in Gauteng and the Western Cape in South Africa where children often remain in these spaces for extended periods of time (Meintjes et al 2007: 65). This resulted in children's cases being forgotten, captured in descriptions of them as 'lost within the system' (2007: 71) by social workers in both Meintjes et al's and my study.

I began to question where family existed for youth living in residential care after observing their long-term stays whilst working for a local NGO. Between 2009 and 2012, I worked as an afterschool education facilitator in three children's homes situated in the township of Khayelitsha, Cape Town. These homes included a large conventional orphanage that accommodated up to 150 children and two small unregistered children's homes each run by a married couple who opened up their households to a much smaller number of children, accommodating less than twenty children. I grew interested in the latter type of setting that

³ Early prevention strategies by government and civil society organisations, focused on enriching families and communities' capacities to care are favoured above residential care, but in some cases family options become exhausted (Richter & Norman 2010: 220).

⁴ Foster care placements are limited to a period of two years after which renewal is an option. Within this two year period social workers working for the DSD and Child Welfare are expected to research the prospect of reunifying a child with their kin. However certain obstacles have prevented this from happening. These include the shortage of social workers, their excessive workload, and their incompetence means that conducting thorough investigations into the whereabouts of kin is a major challenge. Additionally, although difficult given that immediate and extended kin are scattered across South Africa, where relatives are found, social workers struggle to identify those capable of caring for children as many face severe poverty⁴. Indeed, unable to cope with childcare, kin rely on residential care as a scapegoat measure to care for children (Meintjes 2007: 9). Additionally, through having to concentrate on immediate crises coupled with a large amount of FCG applications, many cases have been forgotten or withheld (Meintjes et al 2007: 68). In addition to these Meintjes et al's findings, this information was recorded from in-depth interviews with three internal social workers of large residential care facilities who executed research into the child residents' backgrounds to aid the reunification process of children with kin in order to inform external state social workers of kin's whereabouts.

was largely absent from research despite an emergent body of research (Desmond et al 2002; Meintjes et al 2007; Murtaugh 2010; George et al 2003) capturing the existence of a diversity of residential care settings in sub-Saharan Africa. Desmond et al (2002)⁵ for instance highlight a 'typology of (residential) care' (2002: 447), by dividing it into six models of care including informal, non-statutory foster care; community-based support; home-based care; unregistered residential care; statutory adoption and fostering; and statutory residential care. I subsequently visited seven unregistered children's homes in Khayelitsha. These were the antithesis of dormitory style institutional care enclosed behind high walls where children are divided into particular age and gender groups with a shared kitchen, ablution and socialising facilities, therapy rooms and shift rotating paid care-workers presided over by a managerial office (Meintjes et al 2007: 29).

Rather, these children's homes were located in ordinary looking households within their neighbourhoods in Khayelitsha, which accommodated a combination of biological and non-biological foster and emergency care children and were run by primary consistent caregivers⁶ with informal voluntary assistance of caring and loving women⁷ from the neighbourhood. The children and adolescents helped out with housework and caring for younger children⁸ as they would have in their parental homes. While evidence derived from large formal statutory

⁵ In evaluating the cost effectiveness of each of these models of care Richter and Norman advocate that the money poured into running orphanages with their high running costs could be utilized in more cost effective formal, community-based arrangements or to strengthen the care of vulnerable children in their birth family's household (Richter & Norman 2010: 221).

⁶ The term 'caregiver' is used in this dissertation to refer to a person or persons who have assumed the primary responsibility and parentage of a child in their care.

⁷ It was difficult to converse with the care-workers given our language barriers. unable to remunerate and provide accommodation to their care-workers struggle to pay them little extra available money with which to pay live in or live out caregivers. The care-workers are only occasionally remunerated or given food or electricity vouchers to take back to their own homes. At Imitha the volunteer care-worker was committed to helping Hilda and the children on a daily basis. Their neighbour, an elderly unemployed woman also occasionally helped her. At Ukhanyo, Sophia was assisted by a young woman from her church, but during the research she left Ukhanyo after finding paid work. A few other volunteers from her church assisted her in their free time. She had no consistent teacher facilitating the day care. Consequently she had begun to attend a part time Educare course on Saturday mornings at the local False Bay College in order to become a certified day-care teacher. Since Agnes's household has been a lot smaller than Ukhanyo and Imitha, she has relied purely on the help of her children to run the household, apart from the help of two volunteer teachers for the day-care from her church. At Ukhanyo the teenagers prepared breakfast for the household, while Sophia, her biological daughter and the care-workers prepared lunch and their evening meals. Hilda would rise early in the mornings to prepare breakfast and the children's school lunches after which she or her husband would drive them to their respective schools, Akhona, Thandile and Phumla, my three main young female participants there and Onele who I also engaged with regularly were expected to prepare the household's supper. Hilda and her care-worker would then wash and dress the babies and prepare their lunch.

⁸ They played a key role in offloading the burdens of care on the mothers who were often exhausted. The mothers had in fact devised a routine where the adolescents were assigned certain responsibilities. Observational and conversational data revealed my young participants' appreciation for being entrusted with childcare responsibilities and the sense of family this gave them as it meant that they were not just an adjunct to the household, but were relied upon and respected as an important member of it. Their fulfilment of domestic duties done side by side with others in the safety homes subsequently fostered a personal and collective sense of belonging there. In contrast to literature on the detrimental impacts of excessive domestic responsibilities on children's mental development and children's aversion to participating in household chores (Bray 2003), my participants at Imitha were particularly delighted for being entrusted with domestic responsibilities and valued them as educational. They felt that Hilda prepared them for adult and motherhood by teaching them how to care for young children.

institutions details the harmful effects of a high child to caregiver ratio and inconsistent shift rotating caregivers with no consistent parent, love, attention and affection necessary for their emotional and cognitive development (UNICEF 2004: 9), the fact that these homes are run by a consistent caregiver highlights that these criticisms should not necessarily be assumed to mark all residential facilities. The mothers who ran these homes regularly referred to them as 'family type' settings. This is akin to Desmond et al's (2002:451) and Meintjes et al's (2007: iii) descriptions of this type of setting as a 'more "normal" family-type experience for children'. Meintjes et al (2007: 28) concluded that these settings establish 'home' and 'family' more effectively than other types of residential care due to the founder acting as a constant caregiver who provides long-term care to their residents and develops strong lasting relationships with the children. Without interrogating the actual meaning for the residents of 'family' and 'home' in these homes, I questioned the extent to which their residents, who have lived in them for at least three years, found a sense of 'family' and the meaning they attached to family in the context of this type of setting. My study focused on the experiences and understanding of home and family for nine youth aged between 14 and 23, divided into three groups from three children's homes, Imitha Safety Home⁹, Ukhanyo Safety Home and Safety Home. All three are representative of these types of children's homes. The first two are situated in the same neighbourhood in two married couples' households, while the Nest is situated in a nearby neighbourhood in a single mother's household.

The experiences and understandings of family for residents of these spaces, are important for research to begin to explore in order to consider the effects of long-term residential care on children. Understanding the effects of residential care on children is crucial to decision making in sub-Saharan Africa, considering the unprecedented effects of AIDS-related parental morbidity and mortality and burgeoning poverty on childcare and the capacity of birth parents and the 'traditional extended family' safety net to care for children. This is a struggle the residential care facilities that play a vital role in childcare are not exempt from. Indeed, the alarming figures in the UNAIDS's (2010) report indicate that in 2009 more than two thirds (22.5 million) of the world's HIV infected individuals lived in sub-Saharan Africa and it was estimated that 14.8 million (2010: 186) children under the age of 17 were orphaned by AIDS. One of the worst effected countries is South Africa with approximately 5.6 million (2010: 180) people

⁹ Throughout this dissertation, the safety homes and my participants are given false names in order to maintain confidentiality and not compromise their position.

living with HIV in 2009 and approximately 1.9 million (2010: 186) children having lost one or both parents to AIDS-related illnesses by 2009. It is not surprising then that a pervasive anxiety over the last decade within a wave of largely quantitative social studies from sub-Saharan Africa (Foster & Williamson 2000; Richter, Foster and Sherr 2006; Tarantola & Gruskin 1998; Oleke, Blystad & Rekdal 2005) has arisen in response to the level of childcare that children will receive and where they will end up. While acknowledging that the extended family had been adaptive hitherto, in pursuit of what Abebe and Aase (2007) define as the 'social rupture thesis', these studies concede that the AIDS pandemic has posed a challenge beyond the adaptability of the extended family. They foresee the imminent collapse of the extended family unable to bear the weight of the 'orphan crisis' as is visible in child, grandmother and single mother headed households' struggles to cope financially with childcare. On the other hand proponents of what Abebe and Aase (2007) define as the 'resilience thesis' predict households' ongoing adaptability and resilience to these adversities. Indeed, children continue to reside with kin as is widely recorded in resilience studies on informal non-statutory foster care among extended families¹⁰ (Kuo 2007; Mathambo and Gibbs 2009; Chirwa 2002; Madhavan 2004). While birth parents and the extended family continue to provide the bulk of childcare, the material, emotional and social care differs widely, depending on the effects of the epidemic on households. Abebe and Aase's (2007: 2060) argument for a less 'polarized' approach to analysing childcare to that of the resilience and rupture theses, is given weight by the emergence of different types of residential care which reveal this strain on birth and extended families. The need for children to live in alternative care with non-kin, as studies pursuing the rupture thesis fear (George et al 2003: 346; Madhavan 2004: 1448), is already clear with emergent forms of residential care in the region recorded in a small amount of research. The fact that these spaces become long-term residences for children, makes it particularly important to explore the level of care that they are receiving in these informal spaces.

1.2. Defining the research question

This study aims to discover where and how home and family are defined by nine fostered youth living in three children's homes in Khayelitsha apart from their biological parents and kin. This was with the intention of exploring the strengths and limits of the social family found in

¹⁰ These are children that have not gone through the legal procedures surrounding fostering. The lack of social welfare organisations involved in these types of fostering arrangements has led to concern relating to the abuse of their rights by caregivers and their possible neglect.

these spaces. In so doing questions explored the extent to which the youth find a sense of stability and permanency in these spaces and their intimate relationships and connections with the foster mothers. Stability is seen as optimal for a child's well-being in state discourse, policy and practice and that implicitly defines 'family'. In so doing I offer an examination of the motivations, goals and roles in the care-giving of the foster mothers who run the homes and the ways in which these shape the care they provide their foster children I explore their reflections on their pasts living between their birth parents and different kin and their arrival and transitional experiences in the foster homes.

1.3. Outline of research findings

Findings indicate that the social family in the children's homes have both strengths and limits. On the one hand the strengths of the social family in these spaces lie in the development of stable 'family-like' relationships. These relationships are seen in the long-term care given to the youth, their foster mothers' provision of stable parenting and their lasting connections to one another. The youths' comparisons of their foster mothers to a biological mother for providing them with nourishment, love and discipline also indicate these stable relationships. In general the findings challenge the idealised Western concept of biological parenthood fundamental to the state's reunification drive and views of residential care as a temporary last resort to care. However particular to some of the youth, moments of ambiguity arose in terms of insecurities around the professional attitude of a foster parent when DSD social workers were called in matters of discipline, through feeling stigmatized by their peers for being poor as well as being parentless, and longing for birth parents' perceived unconditional emotional and financial attention that their foster mothers at times struggled to fulfil. However these appeared to be idealisations of birth parents' supposed ongoing emotional and financial support of children; the youth recognised that birth parents in their neighbourhoods are often negligent because of alcohol abuse and single motherhood.

1.4. Research aims

This thesis demonstrates the need for social research, policy and practice in South Africa to reconsider predominantly negative preconceptions of residential care as necessarily 'out-of-home' and 'out of family care' (Richter and Norman 2010: 217) in the face of the reality. The nuanced nature of residential care and residents' complex perceptions of their place in

children's homes in South Africa are important to consider when the courts are required to make decisions that could have a lasting impact on a child's future. Implying that group care facilities deprive children of 'love, attention and affection' that are ideally found within the biological 'family' and 'home', overshadows the possibility of children's own versions of 'family' forming within these spaces. My overall aim for writing this thesis is to elicit the qualitative experiences of youth growing up in residential care, that challenge these views of the supposed non-existence of home and family in residential care (Richter and Norman 2010: 219), with family and home restricted to the biological family. In addition, my study shows that familial relations can develop in a shared living space that residents may draw on to define a sense of 'home' and 'family'. It thus seeks to partially fill the gap in research on youths' experiences of home and family while living in residential care. While the deleterious effects of residential care are acknowledged in relation to evidence derived from large formal statutory institutions, the range of settings, and the possibility for residents to find a stable of family in these settings should not be overlooked. This is especially so in a context where families struggle to provide stable childcare in the face of HIV/AIDS and adverse economic living conditions of South Africa, as recorded in anthropological and sociological studies on family- and home-making among South African households. Through highlighting the ways in which the social family is developed in foster care, my study further aims to contribute to cross-cultural anthropological and sociological studies' findings on the diversity of familial arrangements, and mothering and kinship practices globally and in South Africa more specifically

1.5. Field sites

The three children's homes are in an uncomfortable position on the margins of the law between an officially registered and unregistered children's home, as they are without legal classification in the South African Children's Act. Each houses more than the legal limit of six foster care children per household¹¹ yet possess a Non Profit Organisation (NPO)¹² number as a 'place of safety'¹³ and are recognised by the DSD to provide short-term emergency care. The state-appointed DSD social workers and the local Children's court knew of their existence due to their having an NPO status, and as they had placed the children by a court order there.

¹¹ In terms of the current South African law, foster mothers are limited to a 'maximum of six children placed in their temporary care' (Meintjes et al 2007: 25).

¹² Registration as an NPO enhances the credibility of the registered NPO and holds them accountable to a public office such as the DSD to maintain expected standards of governance and public accountability and in turn providing information on NPOs for public access.

¹³ Registration as an NPO depended on their submission of a founding document or constitution to the Department of Welfare.

Meintjes et al found similar unregistered children's homes existing on the legal peripheries of residential care, and attributed this to the government's moratorium on the registration of residential care in 2007. This resulted from a 2007 review of the Children's Act to include strict legal provisions to formalise residential care¹⁴ into children's homes. This was prompted by the high expense of running residential care and its ill effects on children's intellectual and emotional development. Where a children's home was previously classified as any space where a surrogate parent accommodated six or more children, they now had to adhere to the strict national norms and standards¹⁵ of a 'Child and Youth Care centre' (CYCC), something the homes cannot do (Children's Act 38 of 2005 S.s. 194 pg 180).¹⁶ They lack a regimented residential care programme that includes formal therapeutic programmes and permanency plans, together with adequate sleeping conditions given the houses' cramped living space. These were criteria the mothers were unaware of. Instead, the mothers rely on informal therapeutic measures, namely their steadfast faith in God as well as their own communication with the children as a means of healing rather than a qualified internal social worker found at larger registered CYCC's.

Overcrowding and the fact that they had little state support besides grants that often took long periods of time to receive¹⁷ was an increasing concern for the mothers. They blamed this on the unlawful practice of the DSD social workers, but understood the urgency and growing demands on social workers to find shelter for the high numbers of children in need of care. Additionally, administrative glitches, incompetency and staff changeover in both the DSD and the welfare offices contribute to these delays. These problems were also highlighted in interviews with a social worker from the DSD and an NGO that runs cluster foster care programmes in Khayelitsha.

While I have provided an overall picture of the children's homes' informal natures, the following descriptions based on observations and conversations with the foster mothers will reveal their particular informal physical and financial structures in comparison to larger

¹⁴ The term residential care is used in this dissertation to refer to orphanages, children's homes, safety homes and foster care.

¹⁵ See Chapter 13 Children's Amendment Act 47, 2007, Subsections 190 to 212 on CYCCs and their specific 'national norms and standards' that are specified in annexure B, Part V of the Children's Act (2005: 617-623).

¹⁶ Prior to the review of the Children's Act expectations of children's homes were less formalised, with any home where more than six children were cared for by surrogate parents, classified as a children's home.

¹⁷ Attaining the FCG or CSG was delayed sometimes for years, as children's formal placements by the children's court, required for processing grants, were delayed.

institutional care settings. This is with the intention of setting the scene in which the youth's experiences and understandings of family and home have developed.

Ukhanyo Safety Home

Ukhanyo Safety Home, begun in 2001 and run by Sophia and her husband Lwando, is located in a roughly finished government-funded RDP house within a formal suburb of Khayelitsha tucked away in one of the area's many small crescents far from large well known thoroughfares. It is barely distinguishable as a residential care facility, since its simple red brick style house with a shack addition at the back of the house is one among many others in the area. Further, its faded illegible signage barely sets it apart from the other residences surrounding it. It opens out onto an empty patch of sand adjoining the street upon which an outside toilet and a tap for washing their dishes and clothing are erected. It is not enclosed by a typically institutional heavy duty fence or burglar bars. For these reasons, it appears to be just another house in the neighbourhood.

Similarly, the physical interior of the house bears few markers of a formally organised institutionalised space. The front door opens into a modest open-plan kitchen and a dining room furnished with a couch, a chair and a baby's cot. Situated opposite the dining room is a living room that during the week changes into a day-care centre for about twelve young babies and children living in the neighbourhood. It is a very modest, simply furnished space. A passage running between these rooms intersects three small cluttered bedrooms. One of them sleeps seven children who share two single beds. Sophia, Lwando and a small baby sleep in a slightly larger yet cluttered bedroom. Their older biological daughter, her baby and their niece sleep in another small bedroom. Behind the house is a shack where three boys share a double bed, initially intended to be the day-care play area. However in winter since it is too cold in the shack for the little children in the day-care and noisy for the boys to sleep in the front of the house, they choose to sleep in the shack at the back where they share a double bed.

In addition to Sophia and Lwando's own daughter and her child, the couple support nine children aged between nine months and seventeen years, six of whom are foster children receiving foster care grants (FCGs) and three of whom are the youngest and have been placed

there on an emergency care basis receiving child support grant (CSGs)¹⁸. The social workers working on the latter's cases are legally given ninety days to search for a more permanent home with kin or a foster parent with more space in their household. However, having lived there for over a year, these children's cases appear to have been forgotten. The foster children have similarly lived at Ukhanyo for several years, with more than half arriving as infants and others as young children.

The households survive on an insecure set of formal governmental grants and informal financial resources. At Ukhanyo, in order to support the household, Sophia and Lwando rely on state grants including six FCGs and three CSGs. The household also depends on Lwando's monthly stipend of R2 000 from his previous job at a furniture manufacturer in Cape Town. In 2011 he fell seriously ill and his salary terminated, but in the meantime the company that he had worked for pays him a stipend until he has fully recovered and is able to return to work. Additionally they rely on a small rather unreliable donation from the mothers of the children in the crèche¹⁹ and towards the end of every month Sophia just manages to make ends meet by purchasing food on credit through an agreement with a local shop. This most likely resembles many poor households in the area, creatively depending on local informal credit schemes.

Imitha Safety Home

Imitha safety home, run by Hilda and her husband Samuel since 1991, is a modest home located in the same neighbourhood as Ukhanyo. Like some other houses in the neighbourhood it is built of a set of shacks next to one another. Other houses in the area are municipal-built brick houses. One large shack is divided into a tiny makeshift kitchen and a large bedroom where the whole household sleeps, scattered with single and bunk beds each shared by two children, a younger and an older child. Hilda, her husband and two babies sleep together on one double bed in the same bedroom. Around the sides of the room, school uniforms hang on nails hammered into the walls instead of cupboards, and a small couch and a television set are placed in the corner of the room. A small bathroom is erected in a shack detached from the main bedroom and another small shack to the left of the entrance is a

¹⁸ In 2012 the FCG amounted to R770 and the CSG amounted to R280 (See SASSA www.sassa.gov.co.za/Portals/1/Documents/05283ff8-ef75-4869-94b6-c026334269ef.pdf)

¹⁹ For those mothers able to afford a small contribution, this usually amounts to as little as R50 per month, an unstable remuneration further exacerbated by children's inconsistent attendance there as their mothers seek a formally registered educational care centre with a qualified teacher.

simple lounge area with two couches, a television set and a sound system. Hilda's eldest son of 40, who is often in charge of maintenance around the house, and his wife live in a small shack behind the house. A wire mesh fence with a makeshift wooden gate surrounds the home and their small yard scattered with old toys and a few broken chairs over which rows of washing hang stretched across the yard. Faded signage on a sign post standing above the premises and the fence around the property vaguely distinguishes it as a safety home. They share their house with four children who receive FCGs and another thirteen children, one of whom receives a CSG. Each of these children has been placed there by social workers from the DSD after being abandoned by their mothers at birth in the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town. The children have consequently lived there for periods of a few days to a few weeks for the entirety of their lives²⁰. Like Ukhanyo, they struggle financially. Apart from the grants and Hilda's pension, the household depends on Samuel's salary of R5000 per month as a driver for a music franchise. Organised through a local NGO, they also receive weekly donations of baked goods from a Cape Town bakery. Hilda was delighted by these donations as they contributed to the children's school lunches.

The Nest Safety Home

The Nest safety home is a small concrete house donated by the Cape Town municipality located in a suburb near Imitha and Ukhanyo. Agnes, a single mother whose husband died about ten years ago, has four children in their late twenties and early thirties and is both a foster mother and a pastor preaching in Khayelitsha and King William's Town in the Eastern Cape. Coming from a broken family, she saw it as her duty as a pastor to help people and consequently extended her household to children without parental care. She found most of her foster children independently of social workers, whilst preaching in King William's Town. She would subsequently gain permission from social workers to care for them.

The house is like others in the street. A faded white wall encloses it and a small silver gate at the entrance leads directly into their modestly equipped kitchen. To the left is a double bedroom where Agnes, her youngest daughter of 26 and her child sleep. Straight ahead is another bedroom shared by two of her foster children, one being Cebisa (23) who I became close to during the research. She shares her room with another young girl of 17. At the back of

²⁰ Indeed their oldest foster child, Onele (21), who no longer receives a grant still resides there with her baby.

the house is a small lounge from where voices from the television and Agnes's visitors could be heard through the house. This was a comfortable area where Agnes, her foster children and I always had long conversations. This area is cordoned off by a wooden barrier behind which another bed has been fitted for Agnes's son (28). A one bedroom shack, for Agnes's oldest daughter of 30 and her son, lies behind the house. Her three other foster children including twin sisters (23), one being Vuyelwa who I interviewed on two occasions, and Yoliswa (21) whom I struck up a friendship with, had recently moved out. They nevertheless spend many days visiting Agnes and the family. When they were living there they shared the bedrooms with Agnes, her daughter and her other two foster children. Behind the house is a small space that is used for both Agnes's church and a small informal crèche similar to that found at Ukhanyo. During the daytime, volunteer care-workers from Agnes's church, teach and look after about 15 young children from their neighbourhood.

Most of the children whom Agnes cared for on her own accord, did not receive a court order for their placement there nor a grant. She received one FCG for Cebisa until she turned 21 as the social workers placed her in Agnes's care.²¹ Apart from that, she supported the household on her state disability grant²² received for her impaired ability to walk after suffering from a poor circulatory problem. The household is further supported on the tithes collected from her congregation but these are inconsistent since many of the churchgoers are unemployed. The mothers at the crèche sometimes pay a small fee of about R50 per month, but this goes towards feeding the children and remunerating the volunteer teachers when possible. Agnes's two daughters receive two CSG, while the eldest earns a pittance as a packer at a local grocer. He is currently a motivational speaker to young unemployed people in their church facing financial hardships. Agnes barely sees her other son as he is in prison for theft.

Altogether, the Nest was much smaller than Ukhanyo and Imitha in terms of the number of residents that still live there. As there is little space for Agnes to accommodate more children on a permanent basis, with eight people living there including herself, her three children, two grandchildren and two foster children still living there, she is prepared to care for children on an emergency basis for a few days at a time before they are placed in a more permanent

²¹ Agnes avoided applying for FCGs through the social workers or directly herself at the SASSA offices given the multiple and lengthy procedures and bureaucracy involved in the process. Applying for grants through the social workers' is treacherous as they have multiple cases to deal with.

²² The disability grant amounted to R1200 in 2012.

home, as I witnessed on one occasion during the research. Overall, apart from the day-care and church area at the back of the house, the Nest was an intimate household style setup, barely distinguishable from ordinary households in the neighbourhood that accommodate a similar number of people including children, grandchildren and perhaps distant or non-relatives.

Chapter 2:

Literature review

2.1. Introduction

In my research study I have drawn on a variety of literature to help contextualise, compare and grasp my research findings. This literature will be discussed in this chapter. Given the lack of qualitative research that speaks directly to the experiences of 'home' and 'family' for youth living in residential care, I have drawn on empirical and theoretical research undertaken in the West , Africa and South Africa that explore 'home-making' and the 'family'. I begin by introducing one of the many signifiers, and a predominant one, of the notion of 'home' in Western research, namely intimate familial relationships. This understanding is centred on the notion that the nuclear and birth family supposedly remains a fixed part of one's life.

However, there is some literature which I will discuss that looks at the broader, extended nature of family in Africa, and which presents a more fluid picture of home and family. Drawing in more detail on historical and contemporary empirical research on home-making in South Africa, this fluid picture of diverse familial and childcare arrangements becomes even clearer.

These studies inform my viewpoint that family is not necessarily restricted to biological relationships. This understanding is also influenced by the ways in which different 'cultures' understand relatedness and 'family'. In line with these studies' findings that children and adolescents who experience unstable parenting, seek and value stable parental figures, not necessarily blood relatives, and a sense of belonging to a family, I take the stance that while it is important for young people to have a sense belonging this does not have to depend on biological relatedness. This literature has provided a kick-off point to think about what family and relatedness mean to the youth in my study whose experiences I understand to speak to a deep sense of relatedness to their foster mothers. In the following section I will

address some meanings²³ of the words 'home' and 'family' and try to find meanings that represent the way they are seen by the participants in my study.

2.2. 'Home' and 'family' in Western Societies

In Western societies and empirical and theoretical research (Gilman 1980; Mallett 2004; Bowlby et al 1997; Jones 1995, 2000; White 2002) 'home' has long signified family relationships largely centred on a nuclear middle class and heterosexual family of father, mother and child/children. In particular, the notion of 'home (has) typically symbolize(d) the birth family dwelling and the birth family or family of origin' that rears, nurtures and gives stable care to children over time (Gilman 1980 cited in Mallett 2004: 73). Through this idea, 'home' is seen as a unique physical and emotional entity to which a deep sense of attachment is felt throughout one's life. However, this seems to be a somewhat romantic and static depiction of a deeply meaningful home that remains physically and emotionally inscribed in one's life, despite the changes one undergoes. Research has shown how 'home' is not necessarily a fixed 'localisable space' (Douglas 1991: 294), but may indeed change over time as new intimate relationships develop in different spaces. European and North American research on 'homelessness' of people without a fixed abode (Bowlby et al cited in Mallett 2004: 74; Wardhaugh 1999, 2000; Wagner 1993; Passaro 1996; Jackson 2012) and 'home' among Western immigrant communities are highlighting how a sense of 'home' is not predetermined but may remain fixed or change and redevelop during one's life.

2.3. The 'extended family'

Within the African context in particular, evidence indicates that people live far from fixed lives. Indeed the large body of quantitative and qualitative social scientific research exploring the nature and meaning of home, family and childcare demonstrate a diversity of household arrangements. Children are fostered in informal child arrangements, either voluntary or crisis-led, as part of the extended family kinship system found in Africa (George 2003: 346; Madhavan 2004; Abebe & Aase 2007; Murtaugh 2010; Mathambo & Gibbs 2009; Brown 2009; Chirwa 2002). 'Voluntary' foster arrangements, found mostly in West Africa

²³ While this is a somewhat challenging endeavour given that "home" is linguistically nonexistent in some societies, I believe that the English notion of the intimate and familial nature of "home" is an experience common across many societies.

and in South Africa (Bledsoe 1994, 1990a, b; Goody, 1982), pertain to cultural arrangements among extended families based on kinship obligations, education and domestic labour, discipline and reciprocity obligations. 'Crisis-led' fostering of children, involving children orphaned as a result of AIDS, takes the form of unreciprocated fostering mostly performed by grandmothers in response to parental death and economic adversities facing households (Madhavan 2004: 1444). Moving family members between households within this extended family network is a strategic means of ensuring the survival of children (and adults) amidst poverty and HIV/AIDS-related parental morbidities and mortalities (Ansell & Van Blerk 2004; Chirwa 2002). Some researchers perceive these arrangements as a vitally important, informal 'traditional social welfare system' (Brown 2009: 4) in countries without a formal social welfare system in place. However, evidence is demonstrating that these somewhat romantic depictions of the extended family as an 'altruistic, fully functioning entity' (Madhavan 2004: 1443; Seekings 2008; Seekings & Harper 2010; Abebe & Aase 2007)²⁴ ought to be reconsidered given the burdens of care on women and children. Findings across Africa are indeed showing foster parents' varied capacities to meet economic, emotional and social needs of children²⁵. A telling implication of the struggle for households to cope with childcare amidst the unprecedented escalation of AIDS and poverty is the emergence of a range of residential care settings. Missing from this literature are the experiences of 'home' and 'family' for children and youth who have lived between their parents', different kin's households and residential care. In fact little research exists on formal foster care arrangements outside of the extended family or the clan structure like those in which this study is based.

²⁴ Seekings and Harper (2010) have recently found that in post-apartheid South Africa 'families are less extended than in the past' with claims made by young black adults on kin restricted to 'only a narrow range of close kin' particularly maternal kin. In this way they 'suggest that there has been some shrinkage in the extent of kinship ties among young black people, and a dramatic shrinkage on the paternal side'.

²⁵ Findings on the varying levels of childcare provided by extended family members in West Africa point to this continuum of care. Working among West African extended families sociologists and anthropologists have been documenting a variety of child fostering arrangements for over two decades noting both its benefits for a child's progress in life especially found in voluntary led foster care (Bledsoe 2011) and its negative implications on a children's well-being in crisis-led situations (Bledsoe et al 1988). In Bledsoe's 1988 study that explored the relationship between informal child fosterage and child morbidity and mortality in Sierra Leone, it was found that in households experiencing severe food shortages, foster children were exposed to higher risks of undernourishment and death than biological children. In voluntary organised fostering arrangements between birth and foster mothers, based on obligatory relations to uphold kinship ties, there was less likelihood of these resulting in neglect. While it was clear that childcare may suffer in crisis-led foster arrangements among extended family members, in research undertaken in rural Mali by Castle (1996) it was found that in crisis-led arrangements foster children received equal nourishment to biological children living in the same household and sometimes living conditions were better in foster care than those with birth parents. This calls for an 'individualised' focus on foster care where each household's particular circumstances affect the care of children differentially (Murtaugh 2010).

2.4. Home-making in South Africa

A better grasp of the experiences of South African youth living in residential care may be gleaned from the experiences of home-making among children and youth living in impoverished Xhosa-speaking urban neighbourhoods. These experiences are drawn from sociological and anthropological research (Spiegel & Mehlwana 1997; Henderson 1999; Jones 1993; Bray et al 2010) on immediate and extended families' struggles to provide childcare and to establish a consistent 'home'. While the first three studies took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they provide a historical, theoretical and comparative framework to understanding my participants' experiences of 'home' and 'family'. In so doing the similarities to those of other South African children's efforts to secure a sense of 'home' through securing bonds with parent 'figures' become clear.

As a result of South Africa's colonial and political economy of gendered and forced labour migration, coupled with oppressive Apartheid-era legislation,²⁶ children and adults living in South Africa have been spatially diffused between parents', grandparents' and extended relatives' households in rural areas, the so-called homelands, including the Transkei, and urban areas. Reynolds' (1989: 22) comment, 'The Xhosa child is born of a man and a woman whose movements are constrained by official prohibitions', captures the egregious effects of South Africa's political economic situation on Xhosa families. These prohibitions created turmoil in Xhosa families, with children's lives disrupted, uprooted and 'shredded by an evil system' (*ibid*: 199). The term, 'domestic fluidity', used in Reynolds' studies, particularly encompassed the shifting and inconsistent nature of domestic and extended family care during and after the Apartheid period. While the oppressive political legislation and the regime ended nearly two decades ago, its effects on family coherence are still visible today. This has been dramatically worsened by HIV/AIDS and growing economic instability in the country. Children's mobility between different kin's households and their mothers' and fathers' absence or departure from their lives continues to mark the social fabric of South Africa.

²⁶ During apartheid, migrant workers were defined as residents of homelands rather than urban areas themselves. The artificial dichotomy between black and white over land and the lack of freedom to settle and sell one's labour characterised the South African condition, leading to huge distortions of wealth resource access (Reynolds 1989: 13). The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act and the Influx control Act controlled citizens' rights to work and live in other areas other than the 'independent' states of, among others, the Transkei and the Ciskei. During this time black South Africans could come to urban centres on one-year contracts without wives, children and any other dependents. Labourers were housed in single bachelor quarters, but people only 'technically' lived singly, with single quarters illegally housing women and children (Ramphela 1993).

Two contrasting responses have arisen to the effects on children's well-being of parental absence or departure and the parents' struggle to maintain stable nurture and childcare. On the one hand, through a culturalist lens, children are seen as resilient to parental instability. This is based on the idea that the sharing and reciprocating of childcare responsibilities among multiple caregivers or a primary caregiver, while an adaptive measure adopted to deal with poverty, is based on the historically culturally normative African practice of maintaining kinship ties (Spiegel & Mehlwana 1997). Spiegel & Mehlwana (1997) argue that within this context, children have adapted to living between different households, experiencing an 'almost seamless continuity...between the various households within which they are housed' (*Ibid*: 30). While Spiegel and Mehlwana's argument highlights the 'extended family's' adaptability to poverty through drawing on others in childcare, their essentialist depiction of a culturally coherent 'extended family', overlooks young peoples' own means of adapting to and their struggles to cope with domestic fluidity.

In a more interdisciplinary response to childcare than Spiegel et al, Jones (1993), Ramphele (1993) and Henderson (1999), have highlighted both the positive and negative effects of domestic fluidity on children, when looked at from their perspectives. In so doing they found that although fluidity severely compromised children's emotional well-being, children also found the strength to cope with it. Jones' research on children's experiences of migrant life living in a hostel in Lwandle, just outside of Cape Town during the final years of Apartheid, Jones (1993) presented children's descriptions of their sadness at the inconsistency in their lives. This was observed in relation to the rupturing effects on children of developing attachments to kin and then having to leave them, probably to never return. Despite these difficulties Jones' participants displayed much emotional strength. They achieved this through actively engaging in creating a feeling of family through an acute awareness of and compassion for their parents' concerns, through caring for sick parents, through emphasising their love for them and through their dreams of a better life for them (*ibid*: 134–137). Despite familial instability in this context Jones found that 'it is the lack of consistent parenting rather than separation *per se* which is most likely to be damaging to children in the long term' (*ibid*: 83). In this way he emphasises the importance of a consistent parent figure, not necessarily a child's parents, for children's healthy emotional development.

Similarly, working with adolescents in the Cape Town township of New Crossroads, Ramphele found that adolescents experienced 'a disturbing pattern of discontinuity with their mothers' (Ramphele 2002: 62). Single mothers were obliged to relocate to the city in search of employment, often having to leave their children in both rural and urban areas for long periods of time with others. 'Given the dictates of poverty, single parents often faced an awful choice: to ensure the physical survival of their children at the expense of emotional development' (*Ibid*: 66). Thus many young people had to live with others while their mothers eked out a living elsewhere. Consequently Ramphele found that '(t)he meaning of family in this context was fluid', with 'complex family relationships' forming (*ibid*: 66). This affected her participants in a range of ways. On the one hand they formed close relationships with their caregivers. On the other hand their sense of self worth weakened as they resented their mothers for abandoning them. This was felt in response to the unequal emotional and material support to that of their foster mothers' 'real' family members (*ibid*: 63).

Based on her work with children and adolescents also living in the township of New Crossroads, and working with Ramphele, Henderson (1999) presented similar findings to Ramphele. On the one hand she found that parental absence and mobility caused 'flux and discontinuity in the lives of children' and families (*ibid*: 25), that through rupturing intimate relationships and causing fragile bonds with family members, became embodied as a 'mental affliction' (*ibid*: 27). On the other hand she observed children's ability to heal by finding stability within fragmented relations through maintaining family links between their rural and urban homes. This was facilitated by parental and child mobility that promoted their sense of cultural identity and offered them nurture (*ibid*: 64-65).

Moving to more recent research in post-apartheid South Africa, Bray et al (2010) observed similar efforts by children and adolescents to secure stable parent figures. Their participants lived in 'ordinary households' across three apartheid divided areas in Cape Town. In response to the limited scope in social scientific research that had mostly focused on 'atypical' groups of vulnerable children and youth in the 1990s and early 2000s²⁷ (Bray et al

²⁷ South African based academic research (Seekings, 1995, 1996) with politically active youth during the political dispensation of Apartheid in the 1990s pathologised youth. After boycotting and failing severely under-resourced township schools caused by the Apartheid Bantu Education Act of 1953, concerns for these youths' futures grew into references to them as the 'lost generation'. Following this research, in the early 2000s the plight of a younger group of children, 'AIDS orphans', rendered through 'apocalyptic stereotypes' such as 'children of the storm', was the subject of growing anxiety in research and the national and international press (Meintjes & Bray 2005; Meintjes &

2010: 22), Bray et al sought to refocus youth studies on 'ordinary' urban children's everyday experiences of family life, their relationships with kin, neighbours and friends, and their everyday anxieties about dangers within their neighbourhoods. A range of family patterns existed, with single mother-headed households predominant in the poorest areas of Masiphumele and Ocean View and nuclear families predominant in the wealthier suburb of Fishoek. Poverty-driven 'maternal and paternal absence'²⁸ was also experienced in the poorest areas. Frequently grandmothers, step-parents and non-kin played the 'role of parent' (Bray et al 2010a: 62). Building on Jones', Ramphela's and Henderson's arguments, Bray et al offered further insight into the superior importance of maternal qualities as opposed to a biological link with a parent. Consequently, they concluded that the 'quality of the parental relationship rather than the presence of parents *per se* ... is important to a child's immediate (and probably long-term) well-being.' Therefore '(p)recisely who fulfils this role – a biological parent or a parent figure – and the level of material resources available to sustain the domestic group are given lesser attention by the young than the quality of relationship experienced therein' (*ibid*: 94). These qualities included stable emotional and material care, intimate interpersonal communication, unconditional love and long-term nurture, mostly attached to mothers.

The precise details of how these qualities are attached to and the extent to which they are fulfilled by parent figures will be discussed in the empirical chapters of my dissertation, in which I also reflect briefly on the differences in perception between Bray et al's and my participants.. However, it is not my objective to compare my findings with those of others, as such a focus would subtract from my participants' individual stories from which the strength of my thesis is developed. What this comparison does achieve is to highlight the significance of similar ideas of parental qualities held by young people living in South Africa both now and in the past.

Overall, of much significance for my work are four common threads that bind these studies together. Firstly, multiple configurations of 'family' and 'home' beyond the nuclear family have existed in the South African context as many mothers call on other kin within a wider

Giese 2006; Bray 2004). In particular, growing up without parental care were concerns that permeated these exaggerated discourses based on inaccurate figures, culminating in and developing from what Bray (2004) referred to as a 'moral panic'.

²⁸ Surveys, such as the Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS) were fundamental in highlighting the extent of parental absence in the Western Cape. At the time of their research '(l)ess than one half of all adolescents and only just over one half of children in Cape Town live(d) with both of their biological parents' (2010: 99).

composite extended family, particularly maternal kin to assist with caring for their children. Secondly, the role of a parent figure is not limited to birth parents when it is necessary to adapt to difficult circumstances. Thirdly, young people try to secure stable sources of nurture and support in a parent figure. Lastly, young people are resilient and flexible and are able to find the strength to cope with their circumstances. These threads are all important for my thesis as they introduce the possibility of 'home' and 'family' existing outside of the biological 'family' in residential care. The cited authors' observations of both positive and negative effects of domestic fluidity cited here further inspire a focus in social research on young peoples' particular vulnerabilities and strengths in coping with familial separation and their remaking of a sense of "family" and "home". In so doing, I hope to contribute to the sparse social scientific work on the actions, desires and agency of young people to cope with their particular circumstances. Altogether these threads are all important for my thesis as they introduce the possibility of a sense of belonging to a "home" and "family" beyond the parameters of the biological "family" in residential care.

2.5. Belonging to a 'family'

Overall, in this thesis, taking into consideration my and the above studies' empirical findings, I concur with Bray et al's view that 'belonging to a family, whatever form the family takes' is important for young people (*ibid*: 61). Although my participants did not speak directly to the notion of belonging to a family, they did so indirectly, in placing importance on their feelings of belonging within the residences. The notion of belonging to a family, as found in developmental psychology (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi, Cummins 2008; Kune 2011), sees membership of a group, such as a family, as a fundamental human psychological need. Motivating this need to belong is the need for intimate and stable relationships with a person or people; such an intimate relationship is often understood as an attachment between people deeper than acquaintance (Baumeister & Leary 1995). I have tried to strike a balance between a psychological and cultural lens on 'family', resulting in my viewing it as an institution not necessarily limited to biological relatedness, yet necessary for the youths' sense of belonging.

While the aim of this thesis is not to provide an in-depth theoretical discussion of belonging, a brief definition of it is necessary in order to frame the reflections on the degree to which it

was found by my participants. The concept of 'belonging' is a multi-dimensional and challenging concept. In this dissertation I have chosen to use it as an analytical tool through which to reflection the personal 'processes of belonging' in which the youth, with all their life histories, perform, navigate, enact, and perceive belonging (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 10). In line with the sociologist and anthropologist, Pfaff-Czarnecka's argument in relation to her work in Western immigrant contexts, I recognise that belonging is navigated by people as part of an 'on-going' (*ibid*: 1), far from finite process. Although the youth find a sense of belonging through different ways of relating to their foster mothers, at times the mothers cannot match their expectations of them. Consequently belonging is understood as a process.

2.6. Rethinking the meaning of 'relatedness'

Sociological and anthropological studies' reconstitution of the notions of 'family' and 'home' in South Africa echo a movement in research that seeks to reframe 'kinship' in more culturally inclusive ways. Carsten's (2000) book, *Cultures of Relatedness* has contributed significantly to this movement. Multiple ethnographic cases are brought together in her book to provide new insights and new ways of thinking about and analysing 'kinship'. The authors present autochthonous perspectives of relating beyond procreative relatedness. As the notion of 'kinship' has Western connotations of biological reproduction and genealogical relatedness, Carsten uses the term 'relatedness' instead of kinship in an effort to move away from the natural/social analytical distinction that the study of kinship and family rest upon on. The term 'relatedness' opens up a space in research for the acknowledgement of 'new meanings and new experiences of being related' (*ibid*: 34).

In this way, Carsten's volume, together with Jones', Henderson's, Ramphele's and Bray et al's studies, further inspires and promotes a rethinking of what it means to be related in South Africa. Through demonstrating that people may adopt a mothering role to children whom they are not necessarily related to, the above authors' findings consequently illustrate that the practice of parenting overrides child bearing. Although a challenging task, given that 'mothering' has been 'absorbed into what is deemed natural' (Henderson 2003: 10), these works encourage both research and the state to suspend assumptions that because mothering is a predetermined biological practice, other childcare such as foster

care is necessarily surrogate and inferior care. This said, I am not suggesting that in South Africa court orders are always in favour of the child's biological family. Indeed The South African Children's Act (2005: 157) states that 'court orders (are) aimed at securing stability in a child's life'. While the Act may have the child's best interests at heart, it is not necessarily the case that preservation and continuity of family relationships meets that need. As my study will show, youth in alternative care may find stable, secure and affectionate relationships with others in these spaces. This lead me to the conclusion that foster care , as George et al (2003: 348) argue, ought not to be considered in research and by states as necessarily occupying a 'grey quasi familial zone' with biological and adoptive parenthood considered to be superior. Instead foster care may become long-term homes to children, and consequently 'adoption' in all but legal terms.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 3: Methodology and ethical concerns

3.1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters I outlined my research question and aims and my theoretical underpinnings and sources. In this chapter I will discuss the methods and challenges of data collection and data analysis for this study. This chapter begins with an outline of the research approach, connecting the qualitative data collection process to the research question, followed by a discussion of the use of a variety of qualitative methods and the challenges that arose in the field. Given the intimate encounters within the field, ethical concerns are considered throughout this reflection. The chapter ends with an outline of the method that was used to analyse the data.

3.2. Research approach

The research study was conducted over a period of four²⁹ months between July and October 2012. Given the nature of the research question *to explore* foster children's experiences and understandings of family and home, I pursued a qualitative exploratory approach to data collection and analysis. While the strength of quantitative research is in its statistical power to measure and indicate magnitude and incidence, qualitative research enables exploration into deep and complex phenomena and may uncover new understandings and meanings (Curry et al 2009). I pursued this approach by collecting extensive data from a small number of participants (Patton 2002; Curry et al 2009) using a range of exploratory methods including oral, visual, written and observational methods. In so doing I was able to explore and gain insight into the different ways in which my participants 'make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world' (Merriam 2009: 13).

3.3. Data collection

Acknowledging that adults are invariably a part of young peoples' lives as they live together in the same social worlds and therefore have unique insights into young peoples' experiences, my inquiry included adults. I spent a significant part of the first month visiting

²⁹ While I initially intended to do the research over six to eight weeks, the average masters fieldwork period, it was necessary to extend the research as this preliminary stage was continuously interrupted by the service delivery protests in July and August among Khayelitsha residents living in informal settlements. On a few occasions, on encountering these protests that blocked the main thoroughfares into Khayelitsha, my only option was to postpone our meetings for a later date.

residential care settings, explaining my project's aims and conducting semi-structured interviews with those who ran the homes. These included one foster home that accommodated less than six children, two registered institutional care settings, a cluster foster care programme run by a Cape Town-based NGO, a registered shelter for street children, and five unregistered children's homes. In-depth interviews were additionally held with four social workers, three working internally at each of the institutional facilities and one working for the DSD. My aim during these interviews was to acquire several perspectives and extensive information on the range of alternative, non-kin, residential childcare facilities in Khayelitsha. Much of the data attained from these interviews are not used in this dissertation given that my goal was to speak to young people living in small safety homes. I chose three of the five unregistered homes for this study as I had previously worked in the other two and felt there could be a conflict of interest. During the two and a half months that followed, I worked closely with the foster mothers of these three homes and conducted multiple informal, semi-structured interviews. These led to an in-depth insight into the overall functioning and structure of the homes, the mothers' care-giving experiences and motivations, their daily challenges and their approach to parenting.

I then gained permission from the foster mother and three foster children aged between 14 and 23, from each home to include them in my study. The only male participant lived at Ukhanyo. The range in age and the inclusion of three older participants who had recently left the Nest allowed the research 'to capture continuity of experience' (Ansell & Van Blerk 2005: 146). During the next two months, I worked with the youth about three times a week, in the afternoons or early evenings after school. Although my time was limited, my use of a combination of research methods, including group interviews and activities such as a photographic project³⁰ and written activities³¹, and individual interviews³², led to considerable insight into their collective and individual experiences. This insight was also attained through my ongoing inquisitiveness during conversations and participation in and observation of their everyday responsibilities. Aware that our interviews about 'family'

³⁰ I have deliberately excluded the youths' photographs from this dissertation. This exclusion was ethically important in order to ensure my participants' anonymity and to protect their identities given that many of the images captured them in their surroundings.

³¹ Please see Appendices A, B and C for examples of the written activities, that were subsequently discussed in interviews. These are drawn on in the empirical chapters 4 and 5.

³² Also, knowing that other group members may impact on one another's responses, it was important to engage with them on a one-to-one basis.

could trigger distressing emotions and thoughts as my participants were no longer living with their kin, I avoided authoritarian, forceful and prying questions in our sessions together. Instead I encouraged my participants to initiate ideas throughout our dialogue for which participatory methods were particularly useful. The use of different methods enabled my participants to set the boundaries to what they shared, and to talk about the things that mattered to them and that constituted their everyday lives. This meant that the flow, the pace and the length of our meetings was largely directed by them.

In line with this approach, and given that it was impossible to predict how my participants would respond, the data collection methods were exploratory, flexible and adaptable to their responses. Despite this exploratory approach, given the time constraints and scope of the research, it was important to set certain parameters for data collection by striking a balance between allowing participants to influence the direction of our exchanges and returning to main themes from my thematic outline in relation to my research question. Asking open-ended questions throughout our meetings based on this thematic outline particularly enabled this balance and allowed them to respond in their own words.

The research began with three semi-structured conversational group interviews, one with each group of participants. These were introductory sessions and informative about their daily lives. In these sessions, although I had constructed a predetermined thematic outline, I mostly relied on spontaneous questions that arose in line with the flow of our conversations. Some poignant stories emerged in these interviews, particularly with my older, more confident group of girls at the Nest. Nevertheless, given that we were still establishing a trusting space, the personal depth of these interviews was limited. The two younger groups at Ukhanyo and Imitha were a lot more reserved and shy, and so these initial interviews were useful in becoming acquainted and building rapport with one another.

I have drawn some useful methodological ideas from child-centred activity-based qualitative research. Given that young people are 'competent and confident' in 'differing mediums of communication (drawings, stories, written work, and so on)' as they acquire these skills at schools (Morrow 2008: 3), I felt that it was fitting to use such methods. Drawing on the visual offered a less intimidating and daunting approach than the more conventional group

interviews (Wills 2012). The group interviews were followed by a series of semi-structured, extended interviews in response to particular activities. The activities, while open to individual interpretation of the topics under question, were systematic in that I asked my participants the same questions and therefore allowed for consistency, comparison and patterns to be noted between their responses. These activities and the interviews based on them were intended to elicit deeper personal insights into their lives than could be achieved in the group interviews. While I had a predetermined set of questions based on the activities, they were also conversational. I also used these sessions as a space in which to fill in any gaps in the data collected from previous meetings.

The particular activities included a photographic project and three written tasks. I began by giving each of my participants a disposable camera and asked them to photograph what 'home' meant to them. They were given the cameras over a weekend when they were away from school because I was concerned that having the cameras during the week could limit the pictures to photographs of their lives at school. I held interviews based on their photographs as a 'tool to expand on questions (in relation to the images) and simultaneously ... to provide a unique way (for the participants) to communicate dimensions of their lives' (Clark-Ibenez 2004). These interviews particularly allowed me to access their private worlds through their descriptions of the personal meanings they attached to a particular image that they chose to capture (Punch 2002).

In doing so, I learnt much about their everyday lives and activities in their households and in their neighbourhoods at different times of the day when I was not around. Their images of people elicited insights into their relationships. Their viewpoints on issues of parenting and the hardships facing families in their neighbourhoods also surfaced. Altogether, attaining comprehensive oral descriptions and interpretations of the photographic imagery was a lot more successful than the group interviews. Given that they had the security of the photograph to turn to and speak to the use of photography also functioned to overcome linguistic challenges at times posed by my limited knowledge of Xhosa and their infrequently spoken English.

Given that verbal communication was difficult for some, the written tasks gave them the opportunity to express themselves in a different manner and in their own words without the

pressure of trying to interpret my many words in the interview questions. In so doing, the written tasks were 'useful for generating data and understanding grounded in young peoples' own social realities' (Wills 2012). Aware of my participants' possible difficulties in English literacy, they were given the opportunity to write in Xhosa. Only one participant, Thandile, living at Imitha, opted to do so. Her writing was then translated by an assistant. In order to distinguish the tasks from school work that is compulsory and judged as either correct or incorrect, completion of the activities was optional and they were aware that what they wrote would not be assessed as right or wrong. It was intended as an enjoyable, creative, and personal activity with informative results.

The topics were based on 'memory work' that required my participants to write about a memory with a topic or 'trigger word' as guidance (Lupton 1994; Belasco 2008). I asked them to write about a memory growing up as a child. Some wrote about their pasts living with their biological families, while others wrote about their transitions and adjustments from a life lived with their parents to one in the children's homes. This offered a 'jumping point' (Wills 2012) to discuss and uncover personal details about the participants' experiences in their life, both in the present and past, in interviews based on these exercises. My older participants were also asked to write a letter to themselves at the age of fifteen in order to gain more continuity in my knowledge about their lives between their childhood and their current stage of early adulthood. Another topic was 'what would you keep the same and change as a mother of a home like the one you live in?' Their responses to this question illuminated their representation of current and ideal mothering in their lives, as will become clear in the following chapters. Altogether their writing and the interviews along with these activities enriched the presentation of viewpoints around the ideas of home and family that are indeed 'not ready-made, ... but require the elicitation of thoughts and opinions' (Helavirta 2011: 440). Knowing that 'the context of our everyday lives is so familiar that we essentially relate to it in an unconscious way' (Merleau-pony 1962), the use of activities offered my participants an opportunity to think and reflect carefully on the meaning of home and family.

3.4. Informed consent and confidentiality

A crucial part of these discussions was continuously gaining my participants' informed consent to work with them, to digitally record and transcribe our conversations, to write field notes during and after our meetings and to eventually write and present a paper on their verbal and written narratives. They were continuously reassured of confidentiality through assuring their anonymity by using pseudonyms throughout the research and dissertation writing process. I also emphasised that the location of the children's homes would be excluded to ensure they remained anonymous. Before we began our group sessions I also discussed the importance of them maintaining confidentiality among one another, knowing that private matters could emerge and be revealed outside of our meetings if we were not careful. However, within the groups they reassured me of their trust in one another, having lived together and disclosed much over the years. Indeed in our space together at each of the homes, often outside in the sunshine, largely undisturbed, none of us wished to compromise our private conversations. When interrupted by a passer-by, our conversation would stop abruptly and friendly chatter would ensue, after which it would resume. It was our time and space spent together. It was also important to maintain confidentiality with both the foster mothers and younger participants.³³

3.5. Challenges to data collection

Apart from the linguistic challenges, alleviated somewhat by the use of a variety of methods, a major challenge to data collection was my participants' inconsistent presence and their lack of arrival at some of our arranged meetings. Thandile and Akhona, living at Imitha, did not arrive on two occasions to discuss their written activities as they were visiting friends or staying late at school. One of my older participants, Vuyelwa, who had lived at the Nest had to drop out after our interview based on the photographs as she moved to an area about half an hour away from Khayelitsha. No one, including Agnes could reach her. Knowing that participants, especially young people and children may struggle to express their reluctance to continue participating in the research due to 'the power relations that can exist between the researcher and the researched', I read Thandile's, Akhona's and Vuyelwa's absence sensitively as an 'expression of (a) desire to opt out of

³³ On a few occasions towards the end of the research when Sophia tried to confide in me about two of my participants' behaviour, in their presence and when they were not around, I explained that it was important to maintain everyone's trust and therefore that I did not wish to speak poorly of them. Instead I recommended that they receive group therapy at the local FAMSA.

(the) study' (Wiles 2004: 7). While nothing appeared particularly distressing in our meetings together, these instances were a reminder of the need to continuously negotiate consent with the other participants.³⁴ Therefore I did not persist after the second time that they did not arrive, resulting in their responses not being as explicit or detailed as those of my other participants.

3.6. Reflexivity and my role as a researcher

Initially I felt profoundly uncomfortable of my position as a researcher aiming to ultimately write about my participants' lives. In South Africa tertiary education that gives researchers permission to explore and write about others' lives is largely underwritten by a historically 'marked racial (and class) privilege' (White 2002: 408). In line with numerous social researchers' arguments for greater reflectivity on the imbalances of power between researchers and participants, I questioned the extent to which my position as a researcher from a privileged white middle class background could lead to an uncomfortable power relation between my participants and I. Aware that power imbalances may result from differences in ethnicity, age and class (Harden et al 2000) my concern was not limited to the fact that some of my participants were children and I an adult. In fact I considered this imbalance a possibility within each of my engagements. Nevertheless, when working with my younger participants I was aware that cultural traditions in Xhosa speaking households could potentially create a boundary between us and lead to inauthentic responses to questions in terms of what they thought I wanted to hear as an adult. I overcame this challenge through maintaining humility and emphasising my role as a scholar and a learner, hoping to learn from them. This approach developed into a trusting space where much was shared over time. Nonetheless, I do not claim to know everything about my participants and their particular contexts (Staeheli & Lawson 1995).³⁵

A further concern as a researcher was that I did not want to come into the spaces, develop close, trusting relationships and conduct extractive research without any return. While I

³⁴ This was crucial, considering the University of Cape Town's code of ethics for research with human subjects that expects researchers to acknowledge participants' right to withdraw from the research at any time.

³⁵ Given that we worked together in a process of knowledge production as I have noted above and given the brevity and scope of the research and the impossibility of knowing people fully, gaps in my knowledge about their lives undoubtedly remain.

could not offer a definite long-term benefit to the households³⁶, I assisted them with small gifts throughout the research.³⁷ These were ways of showing my appreciation for my participants' willingness to participate in the research with very little permanent return.

While the youth seemed to enjoy the activities and the conversations that we shared, probably because nobody had shown attention and interest in their lives before, the mothers had certain expectations of me and this was an important challenge to negotiate. When I informed Agnes, the foster mother at the Nest that I was helping her foster children with their CVs, she expressed her hopes for a mutual exchange between her foster children and I:

Yes please help them man because I want you to gain something from them and them to gain something from you, ah please man, please man people, work together people.

Hilda and Sophia also frequently asked me to contribute towards Imitha's electricity bill and nappies for the babies she cared for. Having not received any external support at Ukhanyo, Sophia considered me her 'helper', a label that explicitly reflects her expectations of me. Although I did indeed provide Hilda, Sophia and Agnes with electricity vouchers, small gifts of food and nappies that were greatly appreciated and probably culturally appropriate for visitors to do, I did not provide direct financial assistance when asked. It was necessary to maintain boundaries to a potential unhealthy dependence on me that my limited budget could not afford. It was necessary to continuously explain the purpose and the short-lived nature of the research and my own means so as to not raise their expectations and hopes of my financial support during and after the fieldwork.

3.6. Data analysis

³⁶ Participatory action-oriented social researchers aim to do offer a long-term benefit to marginalized and disadvantaged groups through linking research with effective social action (Young & Barret 2001; Abbott et al 1998; chambers 1997; Kesby 2000; Whyte 1991; Morrow 2009; Schensul & Marlene 2004; Freire 1972).

³⁷ I provided a few computer lessons to my younger participants. I also often assisted the mothers through feeding, reading to, or playing with the youngest children. On other occasions I collected gently used second hand children's and adults' clothing for them and their neighbours who were frequently visiting. I brought snacks to my meetings with both the younger participants and the mothers. I helped my older participants to complete their CVs for job applications and sometimes with transport money to our meetings. I also thanked them by taking them out of their everyday contexts on excursions to the Cape Town Waterfront that they chose.

The information from the group and individual recorded interviews, activities and field notes were transcribed into written text and made systematically comparable for analysis through 'thematic analysis' (Flick 2009). Throughout the note taking and transcription process I carefully noted the meanings behind what my participants were saying in relation to the research question and subsidiary questions. These meanings were then labelled into categories that were grouped together under broader categories or central themes running through the participants' discourses. I then identified relationships, commonalities, inconsistencies, contradictions and nuances of meaning among them, and generated conclusions. The findings were then interlinked with and compared to literature on family and home-making among households in sub-Saharan Africa and the northern hemisphere in such a way as to contextualise, validate and illuminate contradictions in my findings.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999: 149)

Data analysis should be understood as the process whereby data obtained from the field in raw form is interpreted from a position of empathetic understanding to make sense and to draw meaningful conclusions.

Despite the fact that data have been manipulated in the process of data analysis in order to draw conclusions, I have nevertheless sought to capture the fullness of my participants' individual discourses in line with these conclusions.

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented an overview of the qualitative, exploratory approach for my study and have introduced the value of this approach, employing as it did verbal, visual and written methods to explore young peoples' experiences and understandings of home and family. The data obtained through the use of these methodologies will be brought to life in the following chapters that seek to show the fullness of my participants' experiences while simultaneously analysing them.

Chapter 4: The strengths of the social family

4.1. Introduction

This chapter begins by exploring the foster mothers' goals and the ways in which these contribute to the stability that youth find in the safety homes. It follows by tracing the youths' trajectories from their parents' households into the safety homes and compares the absence of their biological parents in their lives to those of children and adolescents living in ordinary households in South Africa as seen in the studies of Bray et al (2010) and Henderson (1999). This is with the intention of highlighting similarities among many young people in South Africa facing familial separation, with mothers and fathers absent for a large portion of their lives. The final section looks at discipline and in particular the youths' understanding of discipline as one of the vital roles performed by 'real' parents, but mostly mothers. Their responses and criticism of 'neglectful' parents in the neighbourhoods of the three safety homes clearly show that they equate the discipline they have received with a stable home life. Through highlighting the participants' sense of family and home despite living in residential care apart from their biological parent(s), this chapter challenges negative stereotypes of vulnerable and displaced youth dispossessed of family, home and stable parents. In so doing, it similarly unsettles alarming Dickensian type images of the foster child as undernourished and ill treated by their foster parents (Madhavan 2004: 1445). The youth have lived at Ukhanyo, Imitha and the Nest for extended periods of time in which they have developed meaningful nurturing familial relationships.

The youth's experiences and discourse – together with African-centred literature on diverse family arrangements beyond the Western two-parent nuclear family model – challenges the conceived superiority of biological parenthood and specifically motherhood. While scholarship aspires towards redefining family, it often overlooks the possibility of family formations found outside the extended family or the clan structure in residential care settings (*ibid*: 1449). I hope this chapter will partially fill this gap and encourage social workers and policy-makers to acknowledge that children in foster care may feel a sense of belonging, especially in a context like South Africa where birth parents are often absent from their children's lives.

4.2. The founders' motivations to foster children

The founders' (foster mothers') personal callings³⁸ to help children who had suffered as they had, were instrumental in establishing the safety homes in this study and resulted in their emotional investment in the projects, an element that contributed to their intimate nature. The mothers who run the safety homes are all in their early sixties, with grown-up children of their own. Like many South Africans who live in the Western Cape urban townships, they have lived between Cape Town and the former apartheid-era Xhosa 'homelands' of the Transkei and the Ciskei, now the Eastern Cape Province. Living in abject poverty with few employment opportunities as local economies failed to develop in the Eastern Cape, the mothers relocated to Cape Town in the early 1980s as young adults in search of informal domestic work. Having personally suffered through losing and being separated from family members during this time, they spoke of being drawn to helping children who were experiencing similar losses in the 1990s and early 2000s. Consequently they opened up their households to children who both they and social workers working for the DSD found without parental support in Khayelitsha.

In line with the findings of research on the underlying economic and socially motivated decisions of extended family members to foster children, I also observed a conscious set of intentions beyond simple altruism on the part of the foster mothers in the safety homes. Thus, it is important to clarify the foster mothers' motives in this study in order to set up the discussion for the level of stability that my participants found living in these spaces. The extent of and motivations for non-kin taking on the responsibility of childcare in their neighbourhoods is an unexamined and undocumented issue in social research in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly where kinship care and fosterage patterns among extended families in sub-Saharan Africa are predominant (Madhavan 2004: 1445; Foster & Williamson, 2000:277; Serra 2000).

In line with studies on fostering among kin, it is noted that 'fostering is embedded in a complex system of reciprocal obligations among relatives and is accompanied by an exchange of goods and services' (Serra 2000: 2). This includes some customary fostering relating to apprenticeship in exchange for material and practical support like foodstuffs from the rural areas to uphold kinship ties (Goody 1982). Upon deeper inspection, the foster mothers had expectations that there will be a reciprocal arrangement between the DSD

³⁸ The mothers' personal callings that inspired the establishment of the safety homes were expressed in in-depth and follow up interviews.

social workers and themselves based on remuneration per child. This was apparent in their complaints about the DSD social workers where the mothers expected an implicit exchange or type of reciprocal arrangement as is seen in their accusations that the DSD social workers bring children to them with delayed financial and material support.

Both Hilda and Sophia, who were more involved with the social workers from the DSD than was Agnes, were resentful of them, feeling as if they were part of an unfair exchange, expected to share their few grants between everyone in the household. They felt they were helping to ease the social workers' burden to find shelter for children in need of emergency care, and expected monetary support. This type of reciprocal arrangement is seen in informal kinship fosterage where a foster parent may care for a child with an 'economically motivated rationale' (Goody 1982: 33 cited in Madhavan 2004: 1444; Serra 2000: 20) in exchange for monetary support by the child's kin.

While this is a very different scenario as it is based on strengthening kinship and social ties, and pertains to organised 'voluntary' fostering (Madhavan 2004: 1444),³⁹ the foster mothers' concerns reflected the interrelationship between their material needs and their purely altruistic motivations to care. This was expressed through contrasting their motivations and attempting to set themselves apart from other foster mothers' self-seeking behaviour in their neighbourhood, captured in their recurrent metaphor used to describe some mothers as 'eating the money of foster children' – profiting from the financial incentive of social grants and failing to use the grants for nutritional support of the children. In contrast they considered themselves as dependable and trustworthy carers who 'are not greedy for money, but greedy for life'. In so doing they highlighted their willingness to care for children without financial gain while simultaneously believing that their generosity dedicated to the life of children without intent for personal gain showed them worthy of more financial assistance.

Sophia's following comment is exemplary:

You know I think they like me because you know I'm supposed to get six

³⁹ Madhavan distinguishes the notion of voluntary led fostering from crisis-led fostering among extended families in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the latter pertaining to referring to Goody's work among the Gonja of Ghana where reciprocity obligations are less important to uphold in a context of a crisis, that Madhavan links to fostering of AIDS orphaned children particularly by grandmothers (Madhavan 2004: 1444–1445).

foster children, but they put more kids with me because the judge said I want this baby to go to Mama Bhota, to Sophia because I know her for a long time. He know about this work. The judge said I want her to look after the kids because I know her hand. He can trust me because he was telling the social worker he wants this lady to do this work because I think most mothers are eating the money of the children without feeding the children. They buy bricks for their houses and clothes for themselves.

Hilda, also puzzled by the long wait for grants, proudly set her dependability apart from other foster mothers' financial motives, highlighting her willingness to care for children without financial gain, while simultaneously believing her trustworthiness entitled her to funding. She also repeated a recent conversation that she had had with the social workers:

You know they told me 'other mothers are not like you, other mothers love the money. That's why I bring the children to you because you haven't got complaints.' Another mother can't take the child without nothing.

Feeling abused by the social workers for this unfair exchange expected of them, the mothers had begun to assert their boundaries to the number of children that they could care for and consequently hoped to concentrate their care on those currently residing with them although this was difficult to enforce, as Hilda suggested: 'you open your heart, you open your house', explaining this to mean:

I take the child who hasn't got a mother to give them love. The social worker knows I can't talk if she brings the child who is very dirty and sick, she know I'm worried, I take the child and I care for them. The social workers don't care where I'm getting the money, they abuse me. Social development make me sick. That's why I don't want to take another children. I want to close my mind to them and look after the children that are here now.

However, while Hilda's monetary needs are explicit here, so too are her altruistic intentions to care for the children at Imitha.

Despite their complaints, food and bare essentials were never lacking. The children were not undernourished, with food being prepared throughout the day, but there was a hope that funding would allow them to purchase more clothing for the children, to improve and extend their households, and to purchase more beds so that they would not have to share beds with at least one other person. While their financial problems did not affect the mothers' commitment to the youth, they found themselves in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, they hoped that the social workers would respond to their calls for more support if they alleviated the pressures of finding shelter for children and on the other, they hoped to limit their care and commitment to those already living in the safety homes. This was not a question of or concern for maintaining intimacy, as they dreamt that funding would enable the extension of their households to include more children, without questioning the potentially negative psychological impacts of institutionalising care on children.

4.3. Mothers' parenting goals: long-term stable care and commitment

There was much data illustrating Hilda's, Sophia's and Agnes's long-term commitment to the children. This extended beyond the age of 21, the official cut-off for acquiring a FCG grant⁴⁰, and reflects the results in Meintjes et al's (2007) study of mothers of informal unregistered children's homes. Akin to the mothers in their study they 'considered their role as that of parents, whose task was to raise a family, with life-long commitments to those children who come into their care' (2007: 34). For instance, at the Nest, Agnes has remained a stable caregiver to her foster children with a lasting commitment to them by deepening her role as more than a foster mother for a given period of time as her following comment exemplifies: 'I'm not fostering them, they are just my children, I'm just a mother for them now because they are old. I'm just their mother'. Consequently, Agnes has allowed her foster children to live with her indefinitely and when they have chosen to move out to live independently, she has tried to maintain contact with them. Additionally, rather than filling her house with new foster children, Agnes has preserved the limited space left behind in case of their return,

⁴⁰ FCGs are usually granted until a child reaches 18 years old. It is terminated when a child leaves school. However if the child remains at school after the age of 18 the grant and official foster care placement may extend until the age of 21 (See <http://www.westerncape.gov.za/service/grant-fostering-child-foster-child-grant>).

providing them with a stable home to return to. This was however not the intention of two of my participants, Yoliswa and Vuyelwa, as they enjoyed living in their own space.

At Imitha Hilda's long-term commitment often emerged in response to her anxieties about the children's future and social workers' alleged authority to relocate them to kin's households. This became evident when she spoke of her dream of writing a will that would recognise them as rightful members of her family in case of her death:

'...If I find the money for a lawyer and get the document I want to write a will to make it that nobody can take my children, if I die my children must stay here. I want to write Hilda Awuwa, that is my surname, and my children's surname. First one, nobody must come to fetch my children if I'm dead. If I'm dead, my children must stay with my husband. If my husband is dead, my children must stay with my son and the wife of my son. They must stay here! Nobody must take them because they grow up here from the start. Nobody can get my children. You think my child can go and stay with another mother and another children when they old? So I want to make a letter and make a copy and put it in my file if maybe I'm dead.

Additionally, the fact that they had a long history with her and Samuel, having lived with them since they were born and bearing their surname, showed that she regarded them as members of her 'family' and 'home':

If she's married she's married, if she goes to school she goes to school, if she's a social worker she's a social worker, if she's a policeman she's a policeman, they can stay here because this is their home. It's their family, it's my surname.

While little research has been done specifically on the meaning of motherhood among non-kin foster mothers in relation to their children in South Africa, both Hilda's and Agnes's aspiration to provide long-term care to their foster children clearly show their long term commitment to the children. This can be likened to the legal expectations of birth or adoptive mothers as opposed to the intended short-term basis of foster care.

Sophia at Ukhanyo, assumed a somewhat ambivalent, conditional and professional approach towards parenting the children. She asserted her long-term commitment to her children who had no parents, including one of my participants, aged 17, her oldest foster son, Vuyani, seeing them as permanent members of her family because they had no known biological parents. Discussing Vuyani, she commented:

Vuyani cannot leave because he has no biological parents. I'm the parent. He's going to be a man with me. If he is going to marry he is going to marry here because I'm the mother.

In the Xhosa tradition an important part of marriage is the protracted negotiations between the families of the groom and bride particularly over the payment of the bride price or lobola. This means that Sophia and Lwando would be responsible for the bride price, payable these days in the form of cash in urban areas rather than the traditional gift of cattle in rural areas. Sophia and Lwando would become his wife's parents' in-law in the family relationship.

When discussing the other children in her care who had known parents, Sophia emphasised her professional approach. This was evident in her imagining of her reaction to a child's departure:

It's not hard because it's my job. I like to take someone from the dust and clean clean clean and after that she must go back if their family want. You are a foster mother and you must work for that hard time. You know if I have a bond with a child, they must go because the law says that. Like these kids (pointing to a photograph of her first group of foster children) I have a bond with these kids because I was crying when they leave to go back to their mother, but I was crying aside because in the foster workshops (organised by the DSD and child welfare) they tell us that we must know that if we are bonding and if the family⁴¹ come for them we must leave them and they must go.

⁴¹ Many of the children that Sophia cares for have parents that are aPhumlang alcohol and drugs. She has occasionally been in telephone contact with them as is legally expected of foster parents given the state's intention to reunify children with their kin once they are proven able to care for their children in the future. Parents however, rarely visited their children to maintain parent child bonding, as is expected by the state to allow for the smooth integration of children into their families.

Sophia was well aware that her role as foster mother may be temporary, as most of her foster and emergency care children had living parents although they were too poor, ill or addicted to alcohol to care for them. Thus, her attitude was ambivalent: on the one hand she did establish a bond with these children, but on the other hand she knew that she might have to give them up one day and send them back to their kin.

Yet in the case of Agnes and Hilda, having mostly children with no kin, but sometimes obliged to care for children with a known parent, they demonstrated a long-term commitment to all their children. The children in their care were not once identified as 'orphans', indeed telling of the mothers' goals as parents to them. This echoes Meintjes and Giese's (2006: 422–423) work in South Africa, that attributed the limited usage of the term 'orphan' at a local level to the fact that the term is often taken to refer not necessarily to parentless children, but to those isolated and destitute, left without any adult care. Although the foster mothers may not be their foster children's extended kin as is Meintjes and Giese's focus, they illuminate the rarity of children becoming isolated from care in the African context where multiple family members and sometimes neighbours are responsible for raising a child.

While the foster mothers have to accept the possible temporality of their care, their stated goals to provide long-term parenting to the children in their care appear to contradict the conventional view in literature on residential care of a foster parent being a substitute carer intended to care for a child for a temporary period of time (Richter & Norman 2010; George et al 2003). I questioned the extent to which the foster mothers' words were fulfilled in practice. I thus explored the extent to which the youth established long-term connections to the foster mothers, so creating a sense of home and family. The section that follows looks at their lives before their arrival in the safety homes, their extended stays and the stability through maintaining long-term connections that they have found in the safety homes after living between different kin's households. Others, who have lived there since they were infants, have known no other homes.

4.4. Unstable family histories

Children's journeys between different households and their separation from their mothers and fathers for a large portion of their lives, rooted in the migrant labour system and apartheid's splitting of families, have remained an ongoing process within the post-apartheid social landscape of South Africa. While the policies prohibiting wives, husbands and children from living with one another have since been rescinded, the separation of immediate and extended family members remain embedded in the social fabric of South Africa. Together with this history, the current economic and health crises (Henderson 1999: 54–55; Bray et al 2010; Ramphele 2002) have intensified mothers' and fathers' absence from their children's lives at different periods in their lives. Their separation from their parents and kin parallel those of many children and adolescents in Sub Saharan Africa, as will become clear in this section. While Bray et al's, Henderson's and Ramphele's participants' journeys did not culminate in them living in a safety home with a foster parent, as kin were able to care for them, my participants' histories of separation from their parents and kin are not that different from the stories of separation in their studies. Following are brief biographical accounts of my participants' separation from their kin.

Ukhanyo Safety Home

Vuyani (17), my one male participant, had a very unsettled background. He grew up with his unemployed, single mother for the first five years of his life after which she left him unexpectedly with a friend of hers in Khayelitsha. He has not heard from her since. Soon after his mother left, Vuyani ran away to look for her, only to be found by a social worker and placed in emergency care for a few weeks in a safety home in Nyanga. This was followed by his placement in a large children's home in Cape Town where he stayed briefly while a more stable foster placement was sought. When a foster space was available the DSD returned him to the safety home in Khayelitsha. Vuyani felt uncomfortable there, however, and a social worker took him to Ukhanyo where he has been fostered now for ten years. This has been the most stable period of his life. After his mother left him with no documentation of his birth, and with no record of her or other kin's whereabouts, he has taken Sophia and Lwando's surname on his birth certificate. He was unsure of his exact year of birth but the social workers estimated it to be in 1995 without any evidence from his background. Although he feels uncomfortably older than his classmates at school as a result of being unsure of his age and having had his schooling disrupted when he was a young

child, he is determined to complete his education, after which he hopes to become an electrician as he loves fixing things around the house.

Nomhle and Avu (15), twin sisters and their two younger sisters, have been fostered by Sophia and Lwando at Ukhanyo for six years since 2007. They were just seven years old when they arrived. Prior to their life at Ukhanyo, they lived in a nearby neighbourhood with their single, unemployed and alcoholic mother who had neglected to care for them. They were barely fed and hardly attended school as their mother wanted them to stay at home during the daytime whilst she frequented the local shebeens⁴², returning home in the evenings.

Imitha Safety Home

At Imitha my three young female participants **Phumla (14)**, **Akhona (15)** and **Thandile (16)** were abandoned by their mothers at birth in the Cape Town Red Cross Children's Hospital maternity ward. They have lived with Hilda and Samuel at Imitha ever since their birth. Having never had any known kin and having no birth certificates⁴³ Hilda's surname⁴⁴ has become theirs. Thus they have largely had a stable background, living for a long period of time with Imitha's consistent caregivers.

The Nest Safety Home

Cebisa (23) has lived at the Nest for most of her life, although intermittently when she was a young child. After her mother died whilst giving birth to her in 1989 in East London, South Africa, she moved with Agnes, who was preaching in the area, to Cape Town after Agnes was approached by a social worker. Her older sister was already living and working in Gugulethu, Cape Town, sending money home to her parents. After a few years Cebisa returned to live with her father and younger half brother in East London. However, he was becoming an alcoholic and struggled to care for her, so she stayed with her aunt for a while before returning to Agnes's house in 1996. Agnes legally fostered her and since 1996 she

⁴² In South African townships, the term 'shebeen' locally refers to an unlicensed drinking establishment.

⁴³ Birth certificates are nationally mandatory and necessary in terms of gaining access to fundamental rights and social services including government child support grants, healthcare and schooling.

⁴⁴ Taking the surname of a foster parent...particulars of the legal guardians are required. In Act no 18 of 2010 Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act, substitution of section 12 of principal act 51 1992, 'Notice of birth of abandoned or orphaned child' The notice of birth of abandoned or orphaned child can only be given after a thorough investigation by the social worker into the child's background 'Provided that in the event of any parent of the child being traced after the registration of the birth and the particulars in any document or record in respect of the child not being reflected correctly, the Director-General may on application, in the prescribed manner, amplify and correct the said particulars'.

has lived at the Nest. Cebisa has taken about fourteen years to complete her schooling. Agnes has recently paid for her to attend a tertiary course in information technology, a subject she had always dreamt of studying.

Yoliswa (21), lived at the Nest for three years, a shorter period than Cebisa. She was born in 1991 in Mtata in the Eastern Cape where she lived with her parents until they died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2004. After their parents' deaths she and her siblings moved to live with her mother's siblings. Yoliswa and her youngest brother went to stay with their aunt in Maxwele, who had two children of her own.⁴⁵ Their brother and sister lived with an uncle in Qumbu. On Yoliswa's father's side, her only living family are his brother and his children. Everybody else on this side of the family has passed away as a result of AIDS-related diseases.

Yoliswa had a difficult time living with her aunt, as she favoured her biological children and neglected her niece. This was noticed by Agnes when she was preaching at her church in Maxwele. Agnes saw that Yoliswa was suffering emotionally and physically from hunger and cold and moved her to Cape Town in 2007. This was the last time that Yoliswa saw her siblings, although she has remained in contact with them. She was not allocated a social worker and did not receive a FCG because her move was an informal agreement between Agnes, her aunt and herself. Yoliswa fell pregnant with a son at the age of 17 in her second-last year of school and has been a single mother ever since. She was forced to leave school at the end of 2009 but Agnes paid for her to finish her final year of secondary school at night school in Cape Town in 2011. She was able to get a CSG to support her son from 2010 onwards. She and her son lived with Agnes until early 2012 when Agnes bought them a shack in Khayelitsha. Apart from her son's CSG, they survive on her small and inconsistent salary from a clothing business selling clothing purchased at factories in Cape Town to people living in her neighbourhood and attending Agnes's church. She began this business in 2012. When her son starts school she hopes to become an entrepreneur and a photographer, having thoroughly enjoyed taking photographs during the research. Additionally, Agnes assists her with any extra food costs and through providing her son with

a place at the day care. Now in her early twenties, Yoliswa has since met a caring and loving man.

Vuyelwa (21) lived with Agnes for six years after having moved from the Eastern Cape where she was born in 1991 to Cape Town in 2004 soon after the death of her HIV-positive mother. She moved with her twin sister and two brothers to live with her aunt and uncle in Cape Town. In 2005 Vuyelwa and her twin sister were fostered by Agnes after her school teachers had noticed that she had become increasingly unhappy living with her aunt and uncle. Just before she moved to Cape Town and after losing her mother she fell pregnant at the age of thirteen after being raped by an elderly man, for which her aunt and uncle blamed her. They expected her to be a mother at such a young age. However another foster mother has been caring for Vuyelwa's child ever since she was born. Since her child is a reminder of a very painful time in her past Vuyelwa does not visit her.

In 2011, soon after discovering that her father was alive Vuyelwa chose to live with him and his family in Kraaifontein. However, as he was also HIV-positive and severely ill with TB and struggling to support several children, Vuyelwa moved into a shack with her twin sister in Khayelitsha. This sister is now HIV-positive and pregnant with an elderly man's child. After failing grade 9 twice and being unable to cope at school she has been working as a carer for a Khayelitsha-based NGO earning a small stipend of R1200 a month, a job that Agnes organised for her. She dreams of leaving her job and becoming a social worker, hoping to help child victims of rape like herself, but for this to become possible she would have to complete her schooling. She felt ready to do so, but did not have the financial means.

Links to child migration in sub-Saharan Africa

These brief biographical outlines of my participants' lives illustrate their separation from their mothers and fathers for different periods of time and for different reasons. Vuyani's, Yoliswa's and Vuyelwa's shuttling between different households reflects the migrations of many children in sub-Saharan Africa (Ansell & Van Blerk 2004; Van Blerk & Ansell 2006) between their birth parents and their extended kin in what Madhavan (2004) calls 'crisis-led' as opposed to 'voluntary-led' fostering arrangements. These crises include increasing HIV/AIDS-related parental mortalities and increasing poverty. While compromises are frequently made to cope with these adversities, with 'children's migrations (used) as a

household/family strategy' as Ansell and Van Blerk (2004) found in research in Lesotho and Malawi, sometimes these households cannot cope with illness, morbidities, food shortages, limited earning capacities and the emotional support of children. These difficulties are indirectly revealed in children's placements in residential care.⁴⁶ In South Africa particularly, my participants' unstable pasts reflect those of many South African children who have continued to grow up in an 'environment marked by family instability' that has its roots in the political history of colonialism, apartheid and the migrant labour system (Madhavan 2004: 1446; Murray 1981; Thomas & Mabusela 1991; Ramphele 1993; Henderson 1999; Jones 1989).

Henderson (1999) captured the fragility of bonds as they broke between mothers, fathers and their children living between different households in New Crossroads and the Transkei. These bonds were broken and reforged as apartheid policies, chronic poverty and work opportunities dictated (1999: 65). Henderson observed that while this familial rupturing affected children's emotional well-being, they 'demonstrated the agency, dexterity and responsibility... in fluid circumstances' (*ibid*: ii) to cope and heal from these experiences of discontinuity, by finding ways of maintaining nurturing relationships (*ibid*: 25–26). It is this dexterity, agency and adaptability on the part of my participants that I turn to in the following section. While their life histories are deeply poignant, it will become clear how they have found ways of coping with their experiences of family fragmentation and uprooting through seeking to maintain nurturing relationships with their foster mothers, and in so doing essentially re-establishing a sense of family and home for themselves in these spaces.

4.5. 'She is just like my real real mother': Becoming 'relatives'

The following discussion of the ways in which my participants' mindfully use familial terms in their discourses will reflect the strength of their nurturing relationships with their foster mothers in the safety homes. Added to African-centred literature on diverse familial and childcare arrangements particularly in sub-Saharan and West Africa, their language further dismantles the notion of 'family' and parenthood as biologically defined. At Imitha, familial

⁴⁶ The long history of peoples' spatial dispersion between rural and urban areas in South Africa as a result of colonialism, apartheid and the migrant labour system, has resulted in extended kin being widely scattered and difficult to locate, as the social workers I interviewed had found.

terms such as 'my mother', 'my father', 'my parents', and 'my family', were used liberally, unhesitatingly and unconsciously by Phumla, Akhona and Thandile. This was not surprising as Hilda and Samuel had been their only parents and family since their birth. However, my participants who have lived with their biological parent(s) in the past also unsettle the conceived superiority of biological parenthood through their ongoing references to biological and non-biological mothers. These references are especially seen in their reflections on their transitions into the safety homes from a life lived with their parent(s) who were unable to care for them. During our discussions, the youth suggested that while their biological parents could not meet their expectations of what a parent should be, namely to provide emotional, physical and educational support, their foster mothers could to a large extent. In this way their relationships with the foster mothers appear to have largely compensated for the loss of their parents and their inability to fit their image of what a biological mother should be.

I would like to begin this section by providing an example of the ways in which familial terms were used without hesitation or question by Phumla, Akhona and Thandile in both our group and individual conversations. This reveals the security and stability that they found living there. While reflecting on her past the security that Phumla found in knowing that she had a home and family to return to when, as a young child she was hospitalised for tuberculosis for three years in Cape Town far from Imitha, is clear. This was a very difficult time for her as she underwent a pneumectomy (the removal of a lung), and she relied heavily on the security of her relationships with Hilda and Samuel and her 'sisters' who regularly visited her in hospital. During this time Phumla remained in Hilda's and Samuel's care and was not replaced by another foster child. At the age of eight she returned 'home' to Imitha and changed schools from a model C school in Cape Town to one in Khayelitsha in grade 2. When reflecting on her return home, her stable sense of home and being a member of a family that she could return to is clear:

It was good to be home with my mother and father and my sisters and brothers, just to be with my whole family at home again. My favourite place to be now is my home because at home I eat when I'm hungry and sleep when I want to sleep and my mum has a very warm open heart and is always loving and supportive to us so I feel free. I love my mother.

In a series of written exercises about their childhoods undertaken by my participants who had lived with their kin when they were young children, and the subsequent conversations elicited by these, an insightful set of responses on the way they found a sense of family and home in the safety homes emerged in relation to their transitions from their previous households into the safety homes. Avu's response is one example:

The day I came here I was not feeling sad, I feel welcome because I knew this will be home to me. I know where I come from. The day I come to Ukhanyo I was crying and I was very very hungry, but my mother gave me food to eat and then gave me water to wash my body, then Sophia tell me not to cry, that everything will be okay. She tell me this home it will be my home. I said okay. As the years go on, my life changed, everything changed. I feel welcome at Sophia' house. Sophia treat me like she is my biological mother. Now I'm in grade 7 and next year I go to high school because of Sophia.

Avu chose to reflect upon the major change in her life when she moved from the home of her alcoholic mother in Makhaza, Khayelitsha to Ukhanyo, where she found security and stability. Avu's mother barely fed her and her siblings when they were young children as she uncaringly left them at home while she spent many days unemployed and drinking in the local 'shebeens'. During this time their mother neglected to send them to a crèche or to their first year of school. Avu consciously chooses to erase her hardships in the past and see Ukhanyo as the place she 'comes from', her origin, as she has settled in there, enabled by Sophia's welcome of her and the sustenance that she provided which her biological mother was unable to do.

Vuyani similarly depicts the significant change from living an unsettled life to a settled one at Ukhanyo where he found stability, hope and a future to look forward to after searching for his mother and living between different children's homes in his earlier years. When I asked Vuyani to write about his childhood he also wrote about his transition from his past and finding settlement at Ukhanyo:

The day that I came it was terrible because it was a new place for me and I was not happy because there was no one that I know but I told myself maybe this is the

place that I belong and I will see my dream and Ukhanyo did help me in education and I can see myself now. I am a big boy, 17 years old now and I want to thank you Ukhanyo safety home for helping me to grow up as a big boy because I can see my thing and the world and my dream and the mother that take care of me always give me food and water, education and support my life. She loves me like a true mother. She is a true mother for me.

In response to this exercise when I asked Vuyani ‘was there anything that made him feel like he belongs there?’ he responded:

To me it’s love, it’s what makes me feel to belong. For me OK let me say, something that make me feel I belong here is my mom, she love me and my dad too. They give me love. It’s my foster mother that give me love. She give me that love, maybe the love of my true mother. Yes maybe the love of my true mother, so she give me that love that I would’ve got from my true mother. I am her son and that makes me happy.’

Sophia is a ‘true mother’ for Vuyani because of the love that she has given him that he defines by her ongoing physical and educational support. The above examples reveal the way in which Sophia has become a mother to the children by meeting their ideals of what a ‘true mother’ should provide. This is particularly shown through their interchanging use of the terms ‘my mother’, ‘my true mother’, ‘my foster mother’, ‘Sophia’, and ‘biological mother’. Furthermore while they are conscious of the biological difference between their mother and foster mother through correcting themselves by saying that Sophia is ‘like’ their real, true or biological mother, they simultaneously appear to be erasing the difference between her and their biological mothers in their minds.

Marshak (2010: 122) found a similar set of responses among ‘orphans and children made vulnerable by HIV’ in Kwazulu Natal, South Africa, when speaking about their ‘non-biological guardians’, particularly their grandmothers. Marshak’s (*ibid*: 126-127) adaption of Guenther’s (2006) work to make sense of her young participants’ discourse and to argue that motherhood is not strictly dependent on biology has inspired my similar use of Guenther’s work as an analytical tool with which to gain a deeper understanding of my

participants' discourse and the notion of motherhood in foster care. In Guenther's feminist interpretation of Levinas's (1981) phrase 'like a maternal body' in his work on ethics and the 'maternal body', she questions the interrelationship between the biological maternal body and sociological and ethical responsibility. Within a patriarchal context, women have been marked by a 'predestined' ethical responsibility of maternal self-sacrifice to one's child (2006: 6). The use of the word 'like' in this phrase however disconnects the biological body of the birth mother from the ethical responsibility of mothering and so 'destabilize(s) any strict correlation between women and mothers, or between motherhood and responsibility' (*ibid*: 7). Thus, a person may become 'like a maternal body' for a child through 'embody(ing) a culture of motherhood' by assuming responsibility without necessarily giving birth to a child (*ibid*: 7). My participants' switching between different mothering terms to describe the mothers can be understood as a reflection of the way in which the foster mothers have embodied this culture of motherhood in their committed care over time. While this may be seen as an extreme argument given that many birth mothers perform a very important maternal role in societies globally, other women may also perform this same role just as well.

This argument particularly resonates with Cebisa's views on Agnes's unconditional love for her as an embodied love in my view. Although Agnes is not her biological mother she has come to embody the traits of her ideal mother. Cebisa's words specifically dismantle ideas around the superiority of biological motherhood:

Agnes has that love that doesn't end. It's in her, it's inside her because sometimes some people with conditional love can love someone on the surface, but you know they can say something about you and you cannot love them for that, but she has unconditional love, that real love that mothers for even their own children don't have. It is that full love. I don't know how to say it... you can feel and see love in her. Even if you are not her own child she shows that love, that she always worries and cares about me. You know as I grow by not knowing my mother, I just see that as a purpose of God I grow up by unconditional love, a love that I think I was going to get from my biological mother. As I grow up I experience that

a home without love, that is not a home. She has her own children that she must look after, but she has unconditional love that she brings to each of us.

It is clear that Cebisa defines Agnes's love for her as a timeless, consistent and unbroken form of love that she attributes to mothering. She has a picture in her mind of what a mother should be and Agnes fits that picture. Most importantly she highlights the sincerity of Agnes's love for her, as a love derived internally, an embodied, unbounded love. Through defining Agnes's love as an embodied type of love that she attaches to biological mothering, Cebisa explicitly emphasises the 'naturalness' of their relationship and in this way calls into question the narrow confines of natural connectedness to one's birth mother found in 'Western' notions of kinship and motherhood (Carsten 2000).

In view of Carsten's (2000) notion of 'relatedness' as socially 'performative rather than biologically given' in her book *Cultures of Relatedness: New approaches to the study of kinship* that brings together diverse cross-cultural forms of social relatedness in both genealogical and non-genealogical ways (*ibid*: 18)⁴⁷, my participants' relationships to their foster mothers suggest that they have become 'relatives' in all but biological or legal terms.

4.6. 'If she comes I don't want to go': Reflecting on parents' return

The youths' suggestions that the foster mothers have fulfilled their ideals of what a mother should provide, is further apparent in imagining that they would choose to live with their foster mothers who had met their needs, if offered the opportunity to live with their parents.

While Vuyani was curious about his mother's whereabouts, when he spoke about her he imagined that he would choose to live with Sophia even if his biological mother or father returned:

...if she comes I don't want to go there because this mother (Sophia) makes me grow into a big boy. But sometimes it's good to see your true mother if she's still alive. If my true mother comes here I can understand

⁴⁷ Ruddick's (1989) and Strathern's (1992) studies on lesbian practices of co-mothering and new reproductive technologies (Carsten 2000: 12) have been foundational to this argument on the socially performative nature of relatedness.

because my true mother was suffering too and she was looking for jobs. If my true mother comes and says she wants me, I don't want to go because I grow up here, but maybe she can explain it right and I can understand why she left me because she was suffering. But if my father can come to fetch me now I can hate him because when my true mother was suffering he wasn't there. He just made my mother pregnant and then left, but she was trying. I don't know my father. I don't know him or his face. I don't have an image of him. But I know my mother. If my father comes here because of the research of Kumbulekhaya⁴⁸ I can hate him. I will never understand. Why did he leave my mother if he knew she was suffering? But my mother, I can think about often, what is she doing, maybe she's still suffering today or maybe not. I don't know.

Although he thought about his mother's whereabouts and felt love and pity for her, Vuyani felt certain about remaining at Ukhanyo. He imagined living there as his life had improved after suffering as a young boy and as he had grown up attached to this more secure life. While it is not certain how he would react to his mother's actual return it is clear from his reflections that he has grown attached to Sophia because of the stable care that she has provided him.

Similarly Cebisa, living at the Nest, expressed in her written exercise on her childhood her preference for living with Agnes as she had given her a life of hope and stability:

... the important things to my life, my mother gave me, love, school and God. In our house I'm always happy, there is nothing I want that I don't have, she gave me a heart that have thanks for everything. I have no wishings to stay with my father. Yes he's my father and I love him, but I don't think I was going to be this special important person in (his) life. Pastor Agnes is my family and this is my home now.

⁴⁸ 'Kumbulekhaya' is a local television programme that broadcasts messages from letters sent to the post office by kin in search of children, the only way he imagines he and his mother or father would find one another.

Even those who had experienced living with a biological parent/s understand how their relationships with their foster mothers have compensated for the loss of their parents. In addition, their inability to fit their image of what a biological mother or father should be, namely to provide them with love, sustenance, education, and long-term commitment, an image indeed met by their foster mothers, is recognised.

4.7. 'I will not forget where I come from'

The major change that foster care provided was particularly captured in my participants' views of these spaces as where they come from, their origins although they have not always lived in these spaces with these mothers. To see a space as where they come from although it is not where they were born suggests their conscious assertion of the major change from their difficult pasts and the significance of these spaces to meet their needs. .

Vuyelwa's comment is exemplary:

it's a good thing when you are growing up to stand on your own, but you must not forget where you come from because I am standing on my own now because of Agnes, I don't forget where I come from.

Indeed Vuyelwa had moved out of the Nest to live with her father when she was 19 after finding out that he was alive, but it did not take long before she returned to Agnes where she knew she had a stable situation. Her father's home was not ideal given that he suffered from TB and had many children to care for that he could not support.

Likewise Cebisa stated:

If I move out, I will always think of where I come from, ya I will not forget Agnes. I will not forget where I come from.

Cebisa has lived with Agnes since she was a young child as I have shown above and it is clear from her statements that she regards her home with Agnes as where she comes from. For these two participants, at the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood in which they are establishing a sense of independence, it is important to remember where they come from, and tellingly they speak not of their birth parents but of Agnes as mother and

'home'.⁴⁹

4.8. Stable long-term relationships with foster mothers

Nosphiwo's and Cebisa's assertions that they will 'not forget' Agnes further suggests a means of holding onto and maintaining stable long-term relationships with her. This stable base in their lives could enable them emotionally notwithstanding their insecure futures that Agnes could not always provide for financially. Indeed, they continuously spoke about their financial and educational concerns, dreaming of returning to school and pursuing tertiary education. The fact that they could dream of this was due to the confidence and encouragement that Agnes was giving them. She encouraged them to return to school, apply for bursaries and sent Cebisa to college.

In fact, these older participants at the Nest have maintained long-term relationships with Agnes beyond the official foster care age limit of 21. Through these relationships they create their own sense of continuity. Agnes continued to provide them with a family to return to through regular contact. While their stories are not exemplary of other foster children in South Africa, they open up a space for the recognition of the possible continuity of these relationships in the future. At the Nest, Yoliswa's long-term relationship to Agnes was apparent in her ongoing contact with her. Although she had moved out of Agnes's household six months before the research began, her regular communication with Agnes compensated for her loneliness and gave her a sense of security:

I come here a lot, I go back home very late like at half past six in the evening. It's like I'm still staying here because if I need something she's the first one to call. If I'm sick she's always the first one to call, if I need food she's the first one to call. She always

⁴⁹ 'Home', as viewed by my participants, did not appear to be a distant fixed origin that they long to return to upon growing up and leaving foster care. Viewing the safety homes as where they come from reveals that they have become a 'home' to my participants and that there was no other home. This is contrary to the notion of 'home' in the literature on diaspora as a formative dwelling place and a place of origin that people have been dislocated from and feel the need to return to one day (Mercer et al. 2008; Brubaker 2005; Ember et al 2004). Brubaker has argued that (2005: 3) the term 'diaspora' has extended from a focus on the Jewish Diaspora to an 'ever-broadening set of cases: essentially to any and every nameable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space'.

helps me out when I need something and you know when I'm at my house, I miss chatting with pastor Agnes because she's a kind person and when I grow up here I feel very free. She's a kind person and I feel very free because I can cook anything, I can ask her anything even of the boyfriends I can ask her and she gives me advice, 'my child this is wrong, this is right'. So she always gives me the advice and how to live life and how to overcome things. I miss her when I'm alone and not with her so I come visit her here. Maybe like now I'm here, then much later when I'm going back I just think of the thing we were sharing and then I think hey my mother told me that and then I just love it because I'm going to get advice and I take it seriously, yes this is right. I have to do this because it'll help me.

Still feeling part of Agnes's household, Yoliswa indicated her long-term relationship to Agnes. Agnes's practical and emotional indispensability to Yoliswa and their communication with one another, despite her being grown up and having moved away, has helped her to feel less alone.

It is apparent that my participants aspire towards maintaining 'stable contact with secure attachment figures' (Richter & Norman: 2004: 221) in their lives, as is deemed necessary in psychosocial research for children's cognitive and behavioural development. While these 'secure attachment figures' are generally considered to be birth parents or family members, the responses of my participants clearly show that this is not necessarily always the case.

4.9. 'There is no home without a mother': negligent mothering, valuing mothers as figures of discipline

The youth further found a sense of stability in the safety homes through the discipline received from their foster mothers. This is a role that they expect a mother to fulfil, especially in a context where negligent mothering is rife as a result of alcohol abuse. Mothers' negligence was defined by their inability to provide discipline to children. This was something the youth valued and did not lack living with their foster mothers. The youth saw their foster mothers as unique among the negligent parents within their neighbourhood. Without having to face the perils of alcohol abuse and abject poverty they set themselves

apart from these fragile households, seeing themselves as privileged to have discipline when compared with many children living with biological parents. In this chapter the focus is predominantly on my participants' criticisms of mothers generally, reflecting the onus placed on them by society to fulfil particular socially gendered roles as nurturers. This highlights the significant value attached to mothering.

While the discussion that follows concerns mainly the young peoples' criticism of mothers in their neighbourhood, fathers were not ignored entirely. My participants were critical about the fathers in their neighbourhood. For instance, Nomhle exclaimed:

All these fathers they are not right because they are drinking and are not supporting their families!! All!!

Similarly Avu claimed,

We know those people on our streets and their fathers are not good and they are not treating their children well because they don't care what they say, they are talking the things that are making your ears not alright, you know tuga tuga, being rude and calling their children bad names.

Aware that household abuse and violence may be a silent issue in households given the widespread cultural interdict against speaking publically about private matters in one's home (Bray et al 2010: 70),⁵⁰ I did not exclude abuse as a possible issue in the foster homes. I am however aware that from my discussions with social workers, abuse and the physical punishment of children are monitored and prohibited within formal foster care. Although I did not explore their relationship with their foster fathers because this was not my objective, my participants' occasional comments and views on their foster fathers, and my observations, revealed that there was no abuse on their part. Sophia' husband, Lwando, remained a softly spoken and seemingly humble man in his mid sixties. Usually at home, he was happy to let the youngest children climb all over him or his role was to stop them from venturing outside onto the streets. On the few occasions that my participants spoke of their foster 'fathers', their comments were of a sanguine nature.

⁵⁰ Indeed aPhumlave fathers and household conflicts were expressed by a number of children in Henderson (1999) and Bray et al's (2010) studies, although the children were largely silent in the beginning of their research about these issues for fear of being sent away to custodial care and given the strong cultural interdict against speaking openly about private issues.

Akin to Avu and Nomhle, at Imitha commented on fathers' neglect of their families and consequently thought highly of Samuel for his supportive, protective and material role in her foster home. The following conversation, in response to whether she considered a father's presence in the household as important, explains her viewpoint.

: Some are important and some are not because others in our neighbourhood leave the mothers and children and do not support them.

Anya: Do you know of any fathers who do support the mothers and children? : It's my father he is so special because he cares about the family, he works hard for us, he gives us support like money for lunch and he buys things for us, like what we need, and he buys food and he takes us to school because the gangsters can come any time, and he guides us outside with everything and when a skolly (the local term for a gangster) comes, he protects us. He does everything for us, I mean everything.

Samuel, indeed worked hard for the family as a courier, regularly heading out to work in the early mornings and often on the weekends. 's comment resonates with the views of Bray et al's (2010) participants', where fathers were represented and valued as material providers rather than providing emotional and social support, although 'material provision (was) valuable to ... children as a symbol of emotional attachment and care' (2010: 42). However, adolescents in Bray et al's research were 'especially critical of mothers who are seen to choose to neglect their children' (2010: 42). In their research, physically and emotionally absent fathers were not scrutinized in the same way as absent mothers. The transience and mobility of fathers in search of work to support their families have become a standard social norm, while women are expected to be the 'sources of nurture' within the household (2010: 87). Likewise, my participants placed the onus on mothers to provide support through scrutinising them (more so than fathers) for their inadequate parenting abilities as will be seen in the following paragraphs.

Single motherhood, alcohol abuse and parental negligence of children

Confident in becoming a social worker after finishing school in order to foster change for children neglected by their parents in her neighbourhood, Avu highlighted the perils of

drugs, alcohol, single parenting and the lack of discipline that besets households in South Africa. She addressed these issues in response to one of her photographs in our project that captured a group of young children who regularly play in their local park while their parents supposedly frequent shebeens:

I want to be a social worker because I don't want to see any child suffering like me you see, so I want to help people with those issues. So I especially want to be a social worker that helps children that are helpless, starting from zero until they're teenagers. Because there is a lot of things; drugs, alcohol, pregnancy, rape... so I would like to take them to the workshops⁵¹ to teach them about what you must do to protect yourself when you are girls because girls can get raped, how to respect yourself because these children don't have parents to teach them this. Their mothers are always drinking alcohol at the shebeens. You know, there are a lot of shebeens around here... So to start, I can go into the community to see who they're staying with, and listen to the grandmothers, the old ones because they do a lot for these children. Sometimes they stay alone with this child that has no mother because the mothers don't care! They like to be free, to party, to drink. So I'm going to help them to buy them food, then I'll wash them and the children, then I'm going to take them to the clinic...

Avu indeed came from a difficult background where her mother had neglected her and thus it is not surprising that her desire to help others in similar situations to her is close to her heart.

Yoliswa at the Nest described some of the issues facing mothers, but criticised their negligence in terms of a lack of love for their children:

Maybe some of them they got stress. Sometimes other ones are pregnant and she goes to the shebeen and drinks. She doesn't think about the baby and that she's pregnant. Then she gives birth and she still drinks and doesn't care about that little child ... and doesn't give enough love to her only child. And the other ones just go with the child to the shebeen and neglect the child ... you see. Maybe she can go to the counselling at the church or the rehabs. Everyone knows that... But then there

⁵¹ The foster children regularly attended educational workshops on social issues facing teenagers, which were organised by their churches and the DSD.

are some mothers that have that real love, unconditional love, a love that they will always give to their children.

Yoliswa, who fell pregnant towards the end of school, has her own child that she cares for properly. Both Avu and Yoliswa are pointing to the disturbing issue of households headed by single mothers in sub-Saharan Africa and more specifically South Africa. Single parent households, mostly headed by mothers, are common in sub-Saharan Africa (Clark & Hamplova 2013; Buvinic & Gupta 1997)⁵². In South Africa, according to Henderson's (1999) findings more than a decade ago these households are due to broken or non-existent bonds between men, women and children rooted in South Africa's political economy of migrant labour that has characterised the colonial, apartheid era and post-apartheid contexts (1999: 64). The 2012 *White Paper on Families in South Africa* census data in 2007 provides an image of the sheer scale of the problem over the last decade. The White Paper reported that only 34.3 percent of children were living with both biological parents, a decrease from 37.8 percent reported in 2002 (2007: 18). A further alarming finding in a research paper titled *First Steps to Healing the South African Family* by Holborn & Eddy (2011:3) on single parenting in urban areas is that the majority of these single parents are African females between the ages of 25 and 34. This certainly illustrates the sheer scale of single parenting, not to mention the socio-economic strains on South African households, including 'poverty and inequality, unemployment, housing, HIV and AIDS, absent fathers, crime, substance abuse, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and moral degeneration' (White Paper 2012: 22). In South Africa, households headed by single mothers are a product of declining marriage, as child support grants that have been expanded to increasing numbers of poor households in the 2000s have given women greater independence. Thus women no longer have to depend financially on husbands who are increasingly seen as unmarriageable given the high rates of unemployment among men (Bray et al 2010: 49-51).

Mothers valued as figures of discipline

The youth were somewhat protected from these issues as they receive discipline from their foster mothers. The sense of privilege they felt in the light of this gave them the confidence

⁵² These studies have largely focused on the negative implications of single mother headed households on children's well-being in relation to the children's higher risk of malnourishment, illness and mortality, and their diminished educational progress in single mother headed households compared to double parent households.

to criticise negative parenting. The foster mothers were appreciated for being figures of discipline, communicating 'right and wrong', acceptable and unacceptable behaviour to the youth. Many households supposedly lack discipline given the absence of parents to alcohol abuse, to which the youth contrast themselves as they appreciate the security in having a figure of discipline and protection in their lives. Contrary to studies on the constraining nature of 'home' on youth's autonomy as discipline is imposed upon them by their parent(s) authority (White 2002: 217), the youth in this study do not express an inhibiting experience of 'home (as) a zone of restricted autonomy and bounded action' (2002: 222), but a sense of appreciation for their discipline in a wider context of supposed negligent parenting. A mother's value and 'home' was defined by her capacity to discipline children in a context where this is lacking in many households.

The participants defined a good mother by the way she imparted ideas of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. As Cebisa commented:

...Agnes always told me what the right and wrong things are in life to do. She is a straight talker with no compromising and don't like to see someone do wrong things, sometimes if I did a wrong thing she told me and it shows me how she cares. It's painful when I am shouted at, but that (has) made me a good listener, and to care about my life and be strong and to not do the same and that's what children need in a home, to become strong to protect themselves from the things outside... I think that shows a good mother.

Similarly Akhona suggested this value and her appreciation of Hilda as she fulfilled it, when she wrote about growing up at Imitha:

To grow up in Imitha is very nice because my mother teach me a lot of things that if I did not live here I will not know about the outside. My mother is like a friend to me because she is honest and supportive to me because she always sit down and give me advice and tell me what's wrong and right in life because if you don't have those things you will never go anywhere and you will never have a bright future. To listen maybe you will have a bright future and be what you want to be in your life. So I don't go to the street and stay with the other children that are involved in those things, they're staying alone and their parents are at the shebeens. It's not right to

be no mother between children. A home which does not have a mother is not warm enough for children. Children are meant to be given warm(th).

Hilda provided this warmth for Akhona through her commitment and dependability as a parent, directing the course of her life through educating her on what is right and wrong behaviour.

Similarly appreciative of Hilda for this discipline which many children lack in their lives, Phumla exclaimed in a significant phrase that highlighted the way in which discipline has in fact given her a sense of 'home':

There's no home without a mother. If there's only children they will make parties and drink alcohol because there's no person to tell you no don't do this, it's wrong, so everything you do is right. Like if you kill somebody it's right to you because there's no one who can tell you what is wrong and what is right.

Altogether it is clear from these examples of multiple comments of a similar nature that the youth in my study found a sense of 'home' through the foster mother's role of providing discipline and ethics in a context where they perceive this to be largely absent.

When asked their opinion on the idea of children moving out of a foster home in order to live with kin or another foster family, their adamant opposition to this raised a significant point on the value of becoming accustomed to discipline over time. Dismissing the possibility of coping with conflicting rules when living inconsistently between households, Phumla said:

No I don't agree with it because maybe here you learn something that you didn't know, you learn that you mustn't do this and this and this and then when you go out there to another place they will tell you another thing, another story that you must do this and this and this and don't do this and this and this and they won't tell you the same thing that we did.

Anya: Like what sort of thing, could you give me an example?

Phumla: Maybe don't fight and then when you go there they don't tell you don't fight, ya things like that.

Phumla's comments about discipline offer an important conclusion to this section for social work discourse and practice to consider. Together with reiterating a mother's role as a teacher, without which the likelihood of behavioural problems developing is high, an inherited system of values acquired by children within their household, that over time become ingrained into one's character is alluded to here. Bourdieu's pioneering notion of 'habitus' as a 'system of durable, transposable dispositions' acquired by a young child in their home as a result of a dialogue with their family's conscious and unconscious practices resonates here (1990: 53). In time, if, as Bourdieu claimed, habits become one's 'embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history' (1990: 56), one questions the effects of uprooting to a new home as a child or an adolescent from the comfort and security developed from the closeness one has with the habitual. With one's habitus or behavioural script deepening as it evolves through ongoing interactions with people and the environment over time, uprooting to an unfamiliar place could certainly displace this internalised history (1992: 134). Thus, when the relocation of children from places of safety to kins' households is considered by social workers, they ought to consider the length of children's residence and the possible consequences of uprooting them. As my study has shown, these long-term residents have become used to stable discipline and value systems within their foster homes and value them highly, in a context where discipline is lacking in many households. In the face of the social issues biological families in South Africa are prey to, including single parenting, alcohol abuse, poverty and a lack of stability and discipline, safety homes ought to be considered a viable long-term option of care for children who may have grown up amidst these problems and experienced positive changes in their lives since living in a safety home.

4. 10. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to address a number of issues that show the strengths of the social family (the foster family), through exploring the foster mothers' aspirations and expectations, the youths' experiences and understanding of what constitutes a 'family', a 'real mother' and a 'home', and the overall security and stability provided by the safety homes. In a final reflection of the findings presented in this chapter, my participants appear

to have been engaged in performing, navigating and enacting personal 'processes of belonging' amidst their unstable life histories (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 10). Both the mothers and the youth's efforts to secure a sense of family and home reflect their efforts to fulfil the fundamental human need to belong to a group like a family in a home environment where love, nurture and support are shared. The results further call for a reconsideration of singularly negative universalist discourse on residential care and the need to pay careful attention to residents' experiences. Furthermore, as long as nurturing is equated with biological motherhood in social work discourse and practice, and the biological parent is seen as providing the best childcare, the relationship between the biological nuclear parent and quality of childcare will remain unchallenged.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 5:

Limits of the Social Family

5.1. Introduction

The process of belonging is fraught with difficulties and tensions. As Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011: 11) says, '(b)elonging is hard work,(it) means maintaining relations and displaying loyalty and commitment'. In the previous chapter I briefly discussed the sense of belonging of the foster children in my study as being shaped by 'relating' to their foster families, through love and care and through establishing long-term relationships in the safety homes. Yet at times my participants' sense of belonging was constrained when they attached a special value to biological parenthood, despite likening their foster mothers to biological mothers. Consequently they idealised birth mothers and endowed them with certain qualities that they believed foster mothers lacked at times. This is evident in their descriptions of the care given to children by foster mothers. There was an element of criticism for instance in the Ukhanyo residents' descriptions of Sophia's discipline and in particular, how she involved social workers in matters of discipline in what I refer to as a conditional approach to her care. A few of my participants longed for biological parents and siblings and felt the stigma of being poor and parentless. At Imitha however, Thandile, Akhona, and Phumla, although reserved a lot of the time in their responses to the questions I asked them, when they did speak they only spoke glowingly of their upbringing at Imitha.

5.2. 'Conditional care'

Bray et al (2010: 55) found a large discrepancy between children's invariable depictions of 'parents as reliable, unconditional providers of care' and the actual performance of birth mothers who failed (particularly in poor neighbourhoods) to fulfil these glowing depictions. Likewise, I too question how accurate are such depictions. They found that both biological parents and parental figures, often absent from their children's lives, are idealised by children as a form of 'wishful thinking' (2010: 56). Similarly I suggest that the foster mothers could not always fulfil my participants' descriptions of them. This discrepancy was particularly apparent at Ukhanyo in their attempts to understand the conditions that Sophia placed on living there in terms of their behaviour, and her imposed limitations

to long-term commitment. Vuyani's comment is revealing of his perception of Sophia's care for them as conditional that he contrasts unfavourably with a biological mother's unconditional care:

'We can live here only if we do not fall pregnant and/or get HIV. If this happened Sophia will care for the baby but we must live with our boyfriend or girlfriend. You know this is the difference between your real real real real mother. She wouldn't tell you to go if you fell pregnant, it would be fine, but because she is not our real real real mother and the baby wouldn't be her baby because they're not blood, she can tell us to go. But that's good because it makes us not fall pregnant and follow her rules.

Vuyani's emphatic differentiation between a 'real' and 'foster' mother here explicitly makes the connection between blood and sociological responsibility of motherhood. It is a perception that values the birth mother for her perceived unique, unconditional responsibility to her children.⁵³

A further condition to their stay at Ukhanyo was to accept that Sophia involved the social workers in matters of discipline. This resulted in their fear of Sophia's and the social workers' authority⁵⁴ and responsibility and to their seeing the social worker as a serious threat to their security. Such antagonism and discomfort are apparent in the following conversation:

Vuyani: There's one question that I always ask myself, why does my mother tell the social worker when we're rude, but not when we haven't got food, I don't understand this, this question is always sitting here in me.

All together: It's always inside us.

⁵³ It is difficult to determine whether or not the threat of having to move out of Ukhanyo was simply to impose discipline, since none of her foster children had actually fallen pregnant. However, Sophia's own daughter, Vela (18) had fallen pregnant in her final year of school. Vela and her daughter in fact still live at home. Sophia's attitude was somewhat different from that of Agnes who had accepted Yoliswa's pregnancy while still at school and allowed her and her son to continue living at The Nest. Similarly Hilda and Samuel's eldest foster child, Onele (21), still lives with them after she had a child at the age of eighteen and was obliged to leave school.

⁵⁴ The authoritative position of social workers to remove children from foster care working for the State organisation Child Welfare in Cape Town was suggested by Henderson (2003) in her paper titled *Questions on Fostering: An Anthropologist's perspective*. As Henderson found, social workers were responsible for salvaging foster care breakdowns through providing therapy to both foster children and foster parents (2003: 23–24) or through finding children a new placement if the breakdown in their relationship with their foster mother is irresolvable. These breakdowns were largely attributed to the trauma that children seemingly suffer as a result of their 'severance from the biological family (that) is inherently damaging' (2003: 27) and their struggle to adjust to a life with new 'proto-parents' (2003: 18-19). The extent to which social workers' current discourses and practices reflect similar findings to Henderson's work a decade ago, is yet to be questioned in research on foster care.

Vuyani: You see teenagers do naughty things, they experiment and they can be rude, but I don't know why she tells the social worker that, knowing that the social workers have power.

Anya: What do you mean by 'they have power'?

Vuyani: if they see that a child is rude to the mother they can send you to court and the judge can cancel your grant and send you back to your old home or another foster mother and pay for another child in your place at the house.

Nomhle: There's so many questions we want to ask the social worker that we don't, because they have the power to do anything and they won't listen to us, they just listen to our mother (referring to Sophia) (pause). You know we're scared, we're scared that they will take us back to our mother's home so we don't want to say anything to them.

Avu: But I didn't want to go there because my life has changed for the good here and they didn't take us because I told them that I didn't want to go back so they gave me a warning.

Indeed during that time, they had already received three warnings to be sent back to their mother's or another foster mother's home in Khayelitsha by the magistrate at the children's court as they had not abided by Sophia's rules⁵⁵.

This conversation with Vuyani, Avu and Nomhle highlights the social workers' and the foster mothers' perceived power to shuffle foster children between different foster homes in the case of foster care breakdowns. My participants' fragile position was felt clearly when Sophia expressed that she was at liberty to involve the social workers any time she wished:

Anytime, if they make me sore again I can go to the magistrate and the magistrate is going to take them away and then the magistrate is going to replace them with other kids.

Although this appeared a rather callous attitude on the part of Sophia, it later emerged that her readiness to consult social workers was aimed at indemnifying herself against possible accusations of irresponsibility and negligence should Avu and Nomhle get into difficulty or be injured. This would

⁵⁵They supposedly arrived late in the evenings from socialising 'outside on the streets', did little housework and Avu had been rude to Sophia when she wanted unaffordable fashionable clothing. Their neglect of the housework was difficult to imagine as they often appeared to be helping around the house or looking after the young children who attended the day-care or those that lived there. My participants' recurrently used phrase, 'outside on the streets' was symbolic for a deviant space of dangers and influences pertaining to alcohol and drug use, underage pregnancy, gang involvement, specifically feared by the foster mothers for influencing and trapping experimental teenagers into a life of aberrant behaviour.

ultimately threaten her position as a foster mother and those of the children she cares for. The South African Children's Act (2005: 380–381) stipulates that foster parents are expected to be responsible, among other duties, for protecting their foster children. Overall, while Sophia was dedicated to caring for the children in her custody, she maintained a somewhat more conditional and professionalised approach to her care through her involvement of the social workers and the magistrate in matters of discipline. This was contrary to Agnes, who barely involved them sometimes even in the placement of children at the Nest, and Hilda, who hoped to cut herself off from the social workers given their perceived mistreatment of her at Imitha. In contrast to Sophia, Agnes and Hilda's long term commitments thus appeared without ambivalence.

This potential conditional and professional approach to care is an important limit in foster care and can be contrasted with the biological family, where the latter functions independently of the State. Adolescence is often a vulnerable period where young people disobey their parents and experiment with sex, drugs, alcohol and gangs, but in the context of foster care this experimental and disobedient stage carries an additional repercussion: foster children may be removed and sent away to a new home. However my participants' fear of communicating with the social workers reflects their fear of being taken into custodial care elsewhere and removed from their familiar environments, where they had developed a sense of belonging. It is clear however that they became insecure about their futures and their continuity in this home when Sophia involved the social workers and they were faced with the threat of being relocated to a different household.

As the adolescents in foster care have shown that a sense of family may be fostered in these spaces, social work ought to focus on strengthening new familial forms like those potentially constructed in safety homes especially when children have lived there for extended periods of time and have not expressed hopes to be reunified with their biological families. This points to a paradox where on the one hand social workers' involvement in safety homes is necessary to monitor the quality of care, and on the other their involvement may exacerbate insecurity and a lack of belonging in young people who have desperately tried to carve out a sense of stability, continuity and belonging in these spaces.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Social workers could further strengthen bonds within these spaces through attentiveness to both the youths' and mothers' voices and choices. Additionally, where problems arise between foster mothers and foster children these could be resolved through attentive counselling of both the young people and mothers in order to get to the core of their tensions and the former's behaviour before simply presenting them with a legal warning. Since the fieldwork period, Avu and Nomhle's behaviour has in fact improved; an improvement that Sophia has attributed to her ongoing and open communication with them about the dangers outside.

5.3. Longing for parents and siblings

At the Nest, the ambivalent feelings that Nomhle and Avu manifested in their antagonism over Sophia's use of the social worker as a weapon of discipline and yet their longing for security of tenure was not apparent in the other safety homes. At the Nest Yoliswa expressed her grievance over her parents' recent AIDS-related deaths and her separation from her siblings in 2007 that her foster family at the Nest could not completely compensate for. She desperately hoped to reconnect with her siblings who reside far from her in the Eastern Cape. Rather than hoping to return to the Eastern Cape, she hoped that at some stage her siblings could move to Cape Town to join her in the life that she had become used to. While Agnes has maintained her commitment to her, post foster care, Yoliswa contrasts the life with Agnes and her children at the Nest with the one lived with her biological family. Perhaps her longing for her life with her biological parents, that the other participants did not reflect, reveals the fact that her parents' care for her ended when they died while the others' life with their biological parent ended because they were removed through their parents' neglect of them.

Reminiscing in a written exercise⁵⁷ describing her childhood, her longing for her parents is articulated and her sadness conveyed:

Life!! I was so happy to live with my parents. I MISS THEM (Yoliswa's emphasis). They both gave me love. Good memories about them. GOOD MEMORIES ABOUT THEM. My father! I still hear him although he's not alive anymore. That man he was the man that honour his word. He was the man that keep his promises to his wife or his children. I never suffered when dad was alive. DAD I LOVE YOU AND I ALWAYS WILL. My mother! Oh the amazing woman. MOM! MOM! MOM! I lost so much. You were like a friend, a sister, a brother, as well as a mother. We shared so many things together. I miss the stories you used to share with me, YOUR STORIES. I miss your smile, your laughter, but why did you give up like that? I'm lost without you. So much has happened to me. Terrible things. Memories.

Indeed, since her parents' death Yoliswa has faced several difficulties while living with her aunt in the Eastern Cape, and after moving to the unfamiliar environment of the Nest in Cape Town.⁵⁸ However,

she has been fortunate to have found a sense of security at the Nest and a loving and supportive partner during the last two years. Nevertheless she has remained deeply troubled by the loss of her parents.⁵⁹ Foster children who have known their biological parents and who have had a loving home with them must hanker after that situation to be repeated, but realistically it cannot be. Yet the foster homes offer a familial relationship to replace the one they have lost.

In retrospect Yoliswa paints an idealised picture of her parents, as providers of unlimited attention and love for her. She compares their unrestrained communication with what she sees as limited from Agnes as she struggles to adequately share her emotional attention out between everyone in the household. This is exemplified in Yoliswa's response to her description of something important to her in her life:

The important thing in my life is, I thank God first because he gave me a foster parent, she is caring and a loving woman and (pause) I, (pause), there's many things in my heart I want to say. As a child I grow up here, and actually what I want to say is that growing up without parents is very painful because sometimes you want something and you can't afford and you ask why me and then you think if only my parents were here. It's hurting, it's hurting a lot, but I thank God that I have a foster parent.

Anya: And does Agnes know that you're hurting?

Yoliswa: Ya I tell her sometimes that I feel this.

Anya: And does she try to help you?

Yoliswa: Ya she try to help me, but she can't help me every time with this because she has her own children. She can't help me with everything and it's hurting sometimes when I come home and I don't have my parents when I come home, it's hurting. It's hurting, and she can't, because she's got other children she can't give you all her attention to try and understand, but I understand that she can't give us attention all of us all the time, but she try her best to give us attention...

⁵⁸ Soon after her move to Khayelitsha she was raped in the neighbourhood. Around the same time she fell pregnant after a casual sexual encounter with a man she has subsequently avoided contact with. As a result of her pregnancy she was forced to leave school and could only return two years later.

⁵⁹ Jolting that which she had avoided thinking about, her recollections felt useless to her. Consequently our conversations developed more around her more current experiences.

In spite of the security Agnes provides, Yoliswa clearly differentiates between her and her birth parents, imagining that if they were still alive her parents would be consistently emotionally attentive and financially supportive of her in ways that Agnes cannot be. Thus, Agnes has only partially filled the void of loneliness and pain left by the loss of her parents.

These excerpts from our discussions and their writing show their idealisations of birth parent(s) as consistently emotionally and materially supportive. They further indicate that they are sensitive to the stigma attached to children who do not live with their biological parents which is exacerbated by them having to go without material things.

5.4. Experiences of Stigma

Yoliswa, Vuyelwa, Nomhle and Avu's feelings of stigma amongst their peers for being poor and parentless, perceived as inseparable circumstances, illuminates my participants' idealisations of their birth parents above foster mothers as consistent financial providers.

In the following conversation, when describing her friendships and the friends she had chosen, Yoliswa revealed her feelings of stigma for being parentless and poor amongst her peers:

Yoliswa: The friends I have chosen are not from here because I've got friends from Bellville South, they are coloureds, but I like them because they are not racist and they treat me the same as them. They don't treat me like 'ah Yoliswa she don't have nothing, she stays in a shack uh' or something like that. They treat me the same like the way they are.

Anya: Have you had friends in the past who have been racist?

Yoliswa: Ya, because of their status or their home status. They are rich so they treat me 'oh she don't have parents or she don't have food or new clothes so she can't walk with us to go to parties or go to the mall.

Anya: Why do you think they treat you like this if you don't have parents?

Yoliswa: I don't know why, but in my mind because they have parents and I don't have parents I can't afford what they afford so they treat me bad. When we don't have parents you look like a stranger

Anya: Why is that?

Yoliswa: Because sometimes they think you grab something. If for example we are together here and you are rich and I am a poor person and you just misplace your things, 'oh Yoliswa was here' so she think I took her thing. Meanwhile I don't take it, she just misplace it here and that is very hurtful because you know you not a thief, you can't take something without permission and that's just hurting, being accused of stealing something when you're not stealing ... but these are not your real friends, they're heartless friends. If you have heartless friends, they're going to treat you like you're a thief, a stranger that stay outside, like a beggar that stay on the road, but if you've got real, best friends, they treat you better.

Anya: So is it that you think people can be judgmental if you don't have parents?

Vuyelwa: They can be judgemental sometimes because if you don't have parents sometimes, you know mos as I said last time if you go sometimes outside, the youth, they wear expensive things that you can't afford and I think that you can lose out when you getting that influence. Sometimes you can lose some things in your life and focus on that influence. Like maybe you get somebody like Agnes and then she tells you that you must go to school and then you see outside of your thoughts and because of the influence you get outside you just don't focus on school and you think what can I do to get me these things you know?

Yoliswa: Ya people are judgemental if you don't have parents, most people not all of them, but most people are judgemental when you go outside when you don't have parents mm ya.

Vuyelwa: What I see, children that have parents they are better than me when I see, like a status, the way they dress, you know. They've got more money. Even with those who are school children I see uh uh I don't qualify with these people.

Anya: How do they act?

Vuyelwa: Like with attitude. You just feel it in your spirit that there's some tension that you don't like.

Anya: And who are those people?

Vuyelwa: Sometimes they can be people you know outside. Sometimes you are going somewhere and you meet new people and on the way you see that there's a tension somehow even if you don't share anything they see that you are struggling and it's obvious, they normally think there's a problem.

Both Yoliswa and Vuyelwa suggest a sense of estrangement from their peers as a result of their perceived stigma for having no parents and being poor, issues that are synonymous in their minds. They both learnt to cope with it and avoid feeling at a disadvantage by choosing their friends carefully.⁶⁰

Similarly Nomhle and Avu expressed their feelings of stigma for being fostered and poor when I asked them what they believe makes someone feel they belong to a place, hoping to elicit their experiences of belonging at Ukhanyo.

Nomhle: To make a person feel they belong here, show him love, respect and when we talk to him be honest and smile and welcome him and show we are not judging him, like 'why you are here?'

Avu: Those kids say things like that.

Anya: Which kids?

Avu: Some of the other children.

Nomhle: When we go on a camp with social development we are sitting together like this (as we were doing) and sharing our stories. Some of the children, when they are told we are fostered they don't welcome and respect us.

Avu: If their mother is working they think they are rich, they think they are rich. They don't want to sit next to you because you are wearing dirty shoes like this, so they don't want to sit next to you. They think 'I'm richer than you', and I don't like things like that and I get so worried and I don't like to judge each other. I don't know his issues and he don't know my issues so I must not judge him and when we are at camps we have different kinds of children that come from different kinds of mothers. So we are sharing our stories and some of us are raped from their fathers. Their fathers rape them. So I feel sorry and I try and have an open heart and listen to their issues. It's painful, but I feel their pain of being raped before they came here. Yes if you have love and an open heart you are done.

Akin to Vuyelwa and Yoliswa, Nomhle and Avu refer to the pain of being marginalised when their peers treat them as inferior. Here they refer to the school camps organised by the DSD and how they feel when discussing their own and others' suffering.

⁶⁰ Indeed, their friendships were very important to them, as they frequently socialised with and spoke about them. At The Nest, Cebisa remained silent on the issue of stigma and thus I was not sure whether she experienced similar feelings to Yoliswa and Vuyelwa. She preferred to stay at home or attend church, where she spent the majority of her time.

Through idealising parents for their ability to support children materially as Yoliswa suggested earlier, imagining that she would receive more material support if her parents were still alive, the youth see themselves as less fortunate than other young people living in ordinary households with their parents. However their concerns for their lack of material support mirror those of many young people who struggle to face the pressures to possess fashionable clothing and follow trends. The adolescents in Bray et al's (2010) study who could not afford to follow trends also experienced feelings of inferiority that the researchers define as 'class stigma' (2010: 152) within their neighbourhoods and peer groups. In particular, at school, wearing inadequate uniforms was found to 'undermine both their status within the peer group and the family reputation' (Bray et al 2010: 210). In fact in South Africa feelings of inferiority has put pressure on young people particularly young women to 'pursue images and ideals largely created by the media and globalisation' through engaging in transactional sex for material gain (Leclerc-Madlala 2003: 1; Hunter 2002). While this was beyond the scope of my research my participants' experiences, while unique to them, resonate with those of other young people that suffer from the same material deprivation living in similar circumstances of poverty. My participants' experiences of being stigmatised for being poor were however intensified by being parentless and fostered. They felt that this was something which their peers distinguished them by.⁶¹

⁶¹ My participants' experiences of stigma were different to those frequently found among residents of institutional care that are socially excluded from their neighbourhoods (Chirwa 2002) through living in large gated residential care facilities isolated from their surrounding environments. Imitha, The Nest and Ukhanyo were far from exclusively private institutions isolated from their neighbourhoods. Rather, they physically opened out into their neighbourhoods, and the youths' church and school friends as well as neighbours were regularly welcomed or visited by my participants. Evidence has indeed shown that living in 'distinguishable fancy accommodation in a poor neighbourhood (does) not embed children there and instead serves to increase children's sense of difference' within their neighbourhoods (Meintjes et al 2007: 35). It has been observed that participation in ordinary neighbourhood life is important for building one's 'individual identity' that gives one the ability to function as an individual within society, in contrast to an unhealthy 'group identity' that can develop among children living in formalised residential care facilities (Meintjes et al 2007: 31). Besides the insecure caregiver-child relationships and the high expense of institutional care, this criticism is a major reason for the move away from institutional care in countries worldwide towards establishing small household-style care for children where residential care is a necessary intervention (George et al 2003; Murtaugh 2010; Chirwa 2002). Additionally, where residential care such as foster families and institutionalisation may cause children's social exclusion from their neighbourhoods, these authors advocate for community-based organisations to 'complement' these spaces 'in order to facilitate the reintegration of orphans into the local community' through strengthening relationships between beneficiaries, and to consequently offset social exclusion of children living in residential care (Murtaugh 2010: 42-43). Thus, while stigma may be experienced, efforts may be made to curb and change this and this should by no means be considered a permanent outcome of residential care.

My findings mirror those of Bray et al in their study, who also found that value is attached to birth parents to provide materially and emotionally for their children. It is apparent that birth parents, cast as emotionally and economically dependable, were elevated above foster parents when challenges relating to the households' economic situations arose. In Bray et al's (2010) work, while living apart from and with their birth parent(s), their young participants living in all three neighbourhoods attributed to them a unique 'symbolic importance' (2010: 86) above other mother figures namely grandmothers and aunts. This was the case even when they preferred to live with the latter who provided them with a secure home and with whom they shared a close bond, having lived together for a substantial period of time. In this way these mother figures did not completely substitute for biological mothers (2010: 84). In their research, the value placed on their birth mothers was reflected in their expressions of 'a combination of hurt, regret and blame towards mothers' who had failed to fulfil a 'mothering role' of providing unconditional emotional and economic commitment to them (2010: 86). The literature and my findings seem to point to a widespread idea that biological parents possess certain qualities; ideas that appear to have become sacralised and naturalised 'knowledge' for youth across different household contexts whether they be ordinary households or safety homes.

5.5. Stigma and the importance of paternal lineage in Xhosa 'culture'?

The stigma that foster children may feel for being parentless requires further future inquiry and reflection on what lies beneath it before any conclusions can be drawn as to whether this stigma may result from or is exacerbated by the absence of a paternal lineage. During and since the research I have questioned whether the youths' feelings of stigma were made more acute by having few, if any, ties to their paternal lineage and their ancestors. Previous studies (Henderson 1999; Ramphela 2002) have found that young people in Xhosa households construct a sense of security through maintaining relationships with their paternal ancestors. Xhosa children are traditionally born into complex webs of clan relationships and ancestors. There are reasons I did not delve into this subject with my participants, among them an ethical concern to avoid causing discomfort and pain, associated with their pasts that such an inquiry would have evoked. The youth had experienced abandonment and inadequate parenting, either through neglect or the death of their parents. Consequently looking back at this painful time in their lives was distressing for them. Indeed on questioning them, some found it hard to talk about their pasts and Yoliswa became tearful

on a few occasions. They expressed that they would rather focus on the present and look forward to the future than think about the past. Another reason was my concern that, had I pushed the subject, it could have led to total alienation between myself and the youth. The information about their pasts that I did gather came through fragmented stories and without me pointedly posing questions on their backgrounds. Given that it could have triggered emotions that they were trying to overcome, the sadness of the upheaval and estrangement from their kin in their early lives was not the focus of this research. Instead I chose to focus on their efforts to secure and maintain nurturing relationships as adolescents and young adults being thoroughly caught up in surviving on a day to day basis.

My findings regarding the importance of social parenting and the social family in childcare do not negate or underestimate the importance of biological ancestry for children in Xhosa society. Further research in a longer study on the possible significance of belonging to a paternal lineage for Xhosa-speaking foster children and the ways in which foster families may navigate relationships to ancestors could add to a deeper understanding of the strengths and limits of the social family. It would also be worth investigating whether new cultural and religious practices that do not worship ancestors reflect a coping mechanism used by young people to establish a new sense of belonging in an environment where belonging to a lineage is thwarted. Furthermore, the extent to which foster parents organise other cultural rites, that are conventionally exercised by paternal kin (for example circumcision) in these spaces in the same ways as biological kin is a question that requires further exploration. Vuyani will be initiated this year and will one day marry into Lwando's lineage; as Sophia said they are his 'family' now. However it is unclear what will happen upon marriage to foster children who have known kin, yet who have established a sense of 'family' in the foster homes. A further concern would be to question the extent to which belonging to a paternal lineage is a motivator and is taken into consideration by South African social workers and the State who aim to get children back to their biological families.

5.6. Conclusion

Chapter 4 dealt with the ways in which the youth in my study found stability and nurturing in their foster homes and their recognition that their foster mothers provided them with levels of care and love that their biological parents were, for various reasons, not able to match. In this chapter the

study has introduced a conflicting viewpoint in that biological parents are also idealised and young people have often unrealistic expectations of them being able to provide consistent emotional and financial support. In a context where single mother parenting is prevalent and alcohol abuse is rife, these expectations become difficult for mothers to meet although mothers may try hard to fulfil their children's expectations. It would appear, as Bray et al (2010) have also concluded, that the qualities that children attach to mothers are not biologically determined and consequently that the quality of the relationships between children and caregivers (the foster mothers in my study) are more important than biological relatedness. The values that Bray et al's young participants placed on birth parents reflected the importance of the quality and nature of relationships based on their ability to provide economic and emotional care and not on the importance of biological relatedness. As Bray et al argued, '(i)f we follow young peoples' priorities, family coherence would be judged on the basis of relationship quality and shared values rather than its biological integrity' (2010: 96).⁶²

In the face of the ambiguities in my participants' discourses— on the one hand love and appreciation for the foster mothers care for them, and on the other a feeling that birth mothers would somehow be able to provide more – a brief research study cannot reach any solid conclusions. The findings do, however, emphasise that social workers need to be attentive to and recognise the possible existence of sound familial relationships in residential care. This is especially important in a context where birth parents may be negligent or absent from their children's lives and where the extended family is struggling to cope with childcare. It is vital that social workers are aware that foster children may well have built strong family bonds and have a sense of stability and continuity in their safety homes, and that they work to strengthen and build on these. In the following and final chapter of this dissertation a final summary and reflection of the significance of the findings will be provided from where recommendations for further research and policy and practice will be presented.

⁶² In Bray et al's (2010: 96) study, the values that emerged included 'trust, open communication, reciprocity and mutual respect' that were drawn on to nurture relationships.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

I began this study with a concern for the plight of young people living in small informal safety homes tucked away within their neighbourhoods in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, and their experiences and understandings of home and family. After discovering a number of these homes in Khayelitsha and noticing that these spaces are under-researched and under-resourced residential care settings, I felt a need to investigate their role in childcare. My focus fell on three of these homes. Two were run by a married couple and one by a single mother. They opened up their households to children in need of care brought to them by social workers working for the DSD. While their primary role is foster care they have also accommodated children brought to them in emergencies, meaning that they have ranged in size. Contrary to my initial understanding of these spaces as interim, temporary and short-term places of care for children who would soon be reunified with parents or extended kin by social workers, I found that young people may live in these spaces for long periods of time, during which they carefully carve out a sense of home and family. The fieldwork took place in these spaces for a two-month period between August and October 2012, during which time I investigated how these homes functioned and the residents' experiences of home and family. The main participants were the three mothers, one from each home, and 9 youth aged between 14 and 23 years old, 7 residents and two of whom had recently moved out to establish independent lives for themselves. I drew on traditional methods of verbal communication such as in-depth interviews with my adult participants. With my younger participants I used a range of verbal, written and visual methods in order to engage closely with them and elicit meaningful responses. The following discussion will outline the findings and reflect on the significance of the findings in terms of the wider unstable context of childcare, family and home-making in South Africa.

6.1. Findings and reflections

The research highlighted both vulnerabilities and strengths in the youth I worked with. Despite unstable pasts, loss of parents and movements between multiple kin, they display strength in their efforts to build stable lives. They develop nurturing relationships with their foster mothers which build a sense of family and home in their lives in the safety homes.

This was evident from their comparisons of their foster mothers to 'real', 'true' and 'biological' mothers. Their foster mothers largely fulfil their ideals of what a biological mother should provide in terms of care, love, discipline and commitment. They further seek to ensure stability through identifying the safety homes as where they come from and therefore their 'homes'. My older participants additionally find stability in the safety homes through maintaining close long-term relationships with their foster mothers. These findings suggest the positive change in their lives found in the safety homes. I discovered that the mothers tried to make their foster children part of the family and home. This was indeed largely experienced by my young participants, whether they had kin or not. The mothers (and fathers) became parent figures to my participants, providing them with 'relatives' in all but legal and biological terms.

At times however, certain limits to the social family were experienced, especially by my participants who had known kin. Issues which appeared to limit their experiences of the social family included the conditional care of a foster mother, my participants' feelings of stigma among peers and grief over parental loss. At times the foster mothers could not meet the youths' ideals of what a birth mother should provide. There was ambivalence, however: on the one hand birth mothers were imagined to fulfil all needs and on the other my participants were aware that this was an unrealistic expectation. They recognised and criticised negligent mothers in their neighbourhoods and felt privileged to have stable homes in foster care. This pointed to their awareness that birth mothers often struggle to fulfil certain responsibilities to their children.

My understanding of family, mothering and parenthood as not restricted to the biological and/or nuclear family and the importance of the social family with non-kin existing in safety homes is supported by sociological and anthropological studies on family and home-making in South Africa. I draw on these studies' findings to show that the notion of family is fluid; children in South Africa have long been part of families that did not comply with the Western notion of the nuclear family and that have included extended family members and members who are not biologically related (Henderson 1999; Ramphela 2002; Bray et al 2010). Within the ongoing context in which families continue to undergo changes and reconstitute themselves my findings, coupled with the findings of these studies, highlight

the need to re-evaluate the idea of biological parenthood and family as superior. This understanding opens up a space for the possibility of 'family' to exist in residential care.

My study and others have highlighted the need for and importance of parental and familial stability for children. Therefore, the fact that my participants find a sense of home and family in these spaces shows the significance of the social family in the South African context where family is important but often fragile.

While my study is small in scope, the supportive and loving familial relationships, and the foster mothers' stable, long-term parenting in the safety homes begin to unsettle popular and academic conceptions of 'residential care' as 'out of home' and 'out of family' care (Richter & Norman 2010) that implies children's physical and social dislocation from familial networks of care and parental support.

It is clear from my study's findings that foster care plays a vital childcare role in society. In the face of the social issues that impact on biological families, including HIV/AIDS illnesses and mortalities, single, unstable and absent parenting, alcohol abuse, poverty, and a lack of stability and discipline, foster care ought to be considered a viable long-term option of childcare.

6.2. Recommendations

From these findings I have developed a set of recommendations for policy and practice and for further research to be conducted in the field of residential childcare in South Africa. Further inquiry into the state of residential childcare and the strengths and limitations of the social family as experienced by residents in these spaces is necessary, given the lack of research in this field. Extended and in-depth discussions around residential care in the country could add to my findings and strengthen the need to pursue the following recommendations.

Young peoples' participation in legal decision-making

Young peoples' insights into their lives suggest the potential value in recognising and enhancing their participation in both the everyday space of the home and the formal sphere of the law. The extent to which young people's participation is encouraged in legal decision-

making about their lives in South Africa, as far as I am aware, is under researched. A decade ago Burman et al (2003), in their multidisciplinary book, *The Fate of the Child: legal decisions on children in the new South Africa*, advocated that the implementation of children's rights in juvenile courts requires ongoing harmonisation with the ever-changing realities of South Africa. This is important as legal decisions may have a lasting impact on young peoples' lives (2003: 1). Burman et al's nuanced approach to the implementation of children's rights is useful, considering that young people are increasingly having to cope with the adversities of HIV/AIDS, familial separation and sometimes disintegration and increasing poverty. If the opportunity for reunification arises once a parent or both parents demonstrate the ability to resume care, it is important to carefully consider young peoples' sense of family and home and stability found in residential care. However, given that belonging is a process, it is necessary to pay attention to where children find themselves in this process. While they should always have the choice to return to kin if the opportunity arises, the same applies to remaining in foster care. If fostered youth seek to secure stable relationships amidst the context of familial discontinuity in South Africa as my research and the literature on family and home-making in South Africa have shown, then the stability found in residential care ought to be accounted for in legal decisions that may impact upon residents' lives.

Ways forward for safety homes

Despite the positive changes in the lives of my participants since living in foster care, more research is necessary given that fostered youth may experience certain problems. These may include the conditions of care by a foster parent and feelings of stigma among fostered youth as research shows. Further research is needed into foster youth's experiences in household-style safety homes that could both highlight problems facing them and the ways in which these may be effectively offset.

Furthermore, given that safety homes appear to exceed the legal limit of six foster children per household, it is important to contain growth in order to avoid institutionalisation and to maintain their intimate natures. Perhaps if the workload was more manageable for social workers and the mothers were stricter about the number of children they receive this issue would be less pressing. However, the growing number of children in need of care make this a difficult endeavour. As long as social workers are overloaded with cases of children in

need of care and foster mothers struggle to assert their limits, further research into the reasons for the increase in the size of foster care is necessary in order to present an in-depth current report on the reasons for this breach in the law. This may make possible resolutions clearer.

Given the real possibility of stable long-term relationships forming in these spaces, I believe that the foundations are there for foster care to become adoption. The positive changes in the lives of my participants from a life lived with their parents or kin to the foster homes and the stable long-term relationships with their foster mothers that they try to secure, point to the need for permanent and stable placements. Although foster care provides an important temporary interim option of care for children who wish to return to their parents or kin once they are able to resume responsibility for them, if implemented effectively foster care could result in adoption for those who wish to remain in these spaces.

The goal of foster care is to provide a temporary 'safe haven' for a child while that of adoption is to provide permanent care. In the case of the former, birth parents are expected to remake their lives in order to reunite the original family. In South Africa if an extended family member is able to provide care, this is also an option. A child's biological or adoptive family is characterised by long-term 'deep and steady attachment(s) to a parent or parent figure that is considered necessary for (children's) healthy psychosocial development' (Bowlby, 1953; Parker, 1966 cited in George et al 2003: 347). In this light the social family in foster care occupies a subsidiary position to biological (and adoptive) families.

However, in cases such as my participants', neither option is possible and consequently children may remain in foster care for several years and deep and steady attachments between children and foster parents may form in this time. In this way, the boundary between foster care and adoption may blur. Indeed in an overview of formal and informal⁶³ foster care in a range of countries George et al point out that '(t)he differences between adoptive and foster families can blur, as when long-term fostering becomes adoption in all but legal name' because of the healthy sense of 'permanency' and 'attachment' that it may

⁶³George et al (2003: 248) define informal foster care as foster care found among extended families in developing countries that precludes formal mechanisms and is therefore largely undocumented. Formal foster care on the other hand has a 'shorter history. It denotes formal mandates, supervision and/or support for those caring for children to whom they have no direct obligation (and) the formal relationship can be with the state or an NGO'.

provide (*ibid*: 347). Finding that my participants constructed a sense of permanency and stability in foster care over extended periods of time, and given the range of existing forms of social family and social parenting, foster care is a valuable option for permanent childcare, especially in contexts where biological parents and kin are not able to provide care.

Considering the uncertainty around foster children's futures once they have reached the official end of their formal placement in safety homes, adoption could provide more security to children at this time. Perhaps adoption would add to the stability that may already exist in these foster homes. Although my older participants had found a sense of continuity and stability in their relationship with Murial through maintaining links with her beyond the official foster care age, and this insecurity did not arise as an issue for them, the extent to which other young people cope at this point in their lives is yet to be explored in further research.

Given the lengthy and convoluted process involved in adopting a child in South Africa and the lack of financial support of adoptive parents, financial and bureaucratic issues would require much consideration. As of yet adoption remains under-researched and under-resourced in South Africa. Any financial investment in adoption should not, however, impact negatively on the financial assistance given to foster parents. Another important area for the State to consider is financial investment in foster children's tertiary education after school. As I have shown, the need for further education among foster children is clearly there, but the means are not. In this way the financial incentive to care that may override altruistic motives of foster parents to foster children, could be offset and could assist dedicated foster parents. To this end, investment in adoption could contribute to the existing foundations of stability that foster children and mothers seek to ensure.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Vuyani's written activity on a memory from his childhood.

My childhood: I start my story when I was a small boy in age of 8 years old I came to Sonwabile place in 2003 the day that I came it was terrible because it was a new place for me and was not happy because it was not one that I now but I told myself maybe it is the place that I belong and I will see my dream and Sonwabile did help me in education and Social work did support me in education and I can see myself now I am a big boy and still I am 17 years old and want to Sonwabile safely home thank you for help me to grow up as a big boy because I can see my things and the world and my dream and the mother that take care for me give me food and water, education and support my life she is a true mother for me.

Appendix B:

Phumla's written activity on what she would keep the same and change as a mother of a home like Imitha.

I would always keep my home with love & Care ~~and~~ whatever the circumstances. During hardships I would ^{do} all I can to make sure that my children won't feel the pain I would feel. I wish to find some-one who would take care of my home, my parents ~~and~~ my children. I want to ~~lead~~ ^{be} by example be a good example for my ~~kids~~ children. I want to give them love and care, and everything they want. When they would have problems ^{I'd} ~~and~~ listen to them and advise them. So I can be a good parent among other parents. I want my children to be happy all the time.

Appendix C

Yoliswa's written activity on a memory from her childhood.



