I Z W I

THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF AFRICAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN CAPE TOWN IN THE 1980s

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A B S T R A C T

The focus of this thesis on African women's experiences as domestic workers results from the fact that the majority of women within the African population in Cape Town are employed in this sector of economy. Further, the African working class is in a peculiar position as a result of the strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy. This policy ensured the almost total exclusion of the African population from decent housing and education as well as employment. In fact, the policy has hamstrung almost every aspect of the African population's life. The Coloured Labour Preferential Policy was coupled with the strict enforcement of influx control, governed by the Urban Areas Act No. 25 of 1945 as amended. Worst hit by this law were the African women.

An attempt was made to understand the experiences of African women both in and outside their work situation. The examination of their gendered experiences of 'race' and class divisions has led to the identification of a number of issues, among them poverty, exploitation as rightless workers and payment of low wages, fragmentation of family life and subordination in marriage relations, childcare problems, housing problems and isolation as mothers and workers. Further, their dreams, which include a wish for securing property, a secure family life and educating their children, as well as self-employment, are all indications of their deprivation and exploitation as women.

In this thesis gender has been prioritised, as it emerged as the prime feature of African women's experiences of social divisions. Being a woman in a society divided by 'race' and class, has created hierarchies which carry unequal relationships between employer and employee and the payment of low wages. The privatised nature of this unequal relationship is the key to the oppression and exploitation of domestic workers. Moreover, the impact of the double day on African women domestic workers has resulted in particular experiences of exploitation and oppression.

Because of the limited material currently available on domestic workers, this study is seen as a contribution to the study of women as well as a contribution to a gender-sensitive, working class history of Cape Town. The selected literature that has been reviewed has left the gendered experiences of African women unexposed within their households. The focus has been on the work situation only. Failure to recognise or identify these gendered experiences within both class and 'race' divisions results in obscuring the daily struggles that African women face regarding housing, family life and childcare facilities. The review of the two commissions of enquiry, namely the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions has shown that the State is still unresponsive to the needs of women as workers and in particular, as domestic workers. Riekert has tied the availability of housing to employment, thus excluding a large number of women in the Cape Town urban area.

Moreover, women are the first to be laid off and the domestic sector, being the sector most vulnerable to economic slumps, means that domestic workers are frequently confronted with unemployment. While Wiehahn has recommended the greater mobility between urban areas for Section 10 holders, again it is women who are affected, as most of the domestic workers are employed on contract work, thus excluding them from this benefit. Further, some domestic workers are working without a permit and are thus excluded from these minimal reforms. The commission also recommended the employment of women in jobs that were formerly male-gendered, such as working on night-shifts as petrol attendants, and overtime work. These were made in apparently total ignorance of the women's experiences as both mothers and workers. Work of this type would interfere with their family lives and increasing their childcare problems. Thus the State's gender-blindness has increased women's oppression and exploitation.

As already mentioned, the gendered experience of African women domestic workers is the focus of this study. My research was undertaken in order to gain first-hand experience as well as a thorough knowledge of the context of the research. The life history technique was adopted in order to explore the gendered experiences of both the childhood and adulthood of domestic workers. The aim was to obtain a subjective interpretation of the daily experiences of the domestic workers. The research process became fully humanised as the subjects of study, the domestic workers, were

active participants in relating their lived experiences. Thus the process was detailed in order to give an opportunity for the exposition of feelings of both the respondent and the researcher, as this is important in feminist research. The title of the study, "Izwi", indicates the aim of the study: to expose the daily life experiences of domestic workers, thereby giving them the opportunity to have their voices heard.

The gendered experiences of both 'race' and class divisions form the basis for the organisation of domestic workers in their union. Low wages, childcare and housing are the major problems affecting domestic workers in the 1980s. Thus for the union to be responsive to the needs of the domestic workers, it has to address first their basic, daily needs. The life histories have highlighted these. The study attempts to contribute to the unionisation of the domestic worker by drawing the attention of the union to these needs.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
CHAPTER 1:	**INTRODUCTION**	1
1.1	MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY	2
1.2	PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING RESEARCH	5
1.3	AIMS OF THE THESIS	8
1.4	CHAPTER OUTLINE	10
1.5	A NOTE ON TERMS USED	12
CHAPTER 2:	**CONTEXTUALISATION**	14
2.1	INTRODUCTION	14
2.2	CHARACTERISTICS OF DOMESTIC WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA	14
2.3	AFRICAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN CAPE TOWN	22
2.4	SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE ON DOMESTIC WORKERS	28
2.5	COMPARISONS WITH DOMESTIC WORKERS IN FIRST WORLD COUNTRIES	43
2.6	CONCLUSIONS	50
CHAPTER 3:	**METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**	53
3.1	INTRODUCTION	53
3.2	STAGES OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS	56
3.3	SUPPLEMENTARY SURVEY	56
3.4	IN DEPTH TECHNIQUE	61
3.5	LIFE HISTORIES	68
3.6	CONFIDENTIALITY	75
3.7	CONCLUSION	76

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF LIFE STORIES 78

4.1 INTRODUCTION 78

4.2 STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION 80

4.3 MIRIAM - RESIDENTIAL WORKER 84

4.4 KEY THEMES 102

4.5 THELMA - DAILY COMMUTER 109

4.6 KEY THEMES 129

4.7 MARTHA - PART-TIME WORKER 139

4.8 KEY THEMES 154

4.9 DISCUSSION OF THE SUPPLEMENTARY SURVEY 162

4.10 CONCLUSION 166

CHAPTER 5: ISSUES FROM THE LIFE STORIES 168

PART ONE

5.1 INTRODUCTION 168

5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOMESTIC SECTOR 169

PART TWO

5.3 ANALYSIS OF THE KEY ISSUES FROM THE THEMES EMERGING IN THE THREE LIFE STORIES 192

5.4 EXPLOITATION AS DOMESTIC WORKERS: 197

POVERTY, EXPLOITATION AS RIGHTLESS WORKERS LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES, LOW WAGES, DEPENDENT AND EXPLOITATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH EMPLOYER, UNHEALTHY EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS AND HEALTH CONDITIONS OF DOMESTIC WORKERS AND THEIR CHILDREN; LACK OF EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

5.5 FRAGMENTED FAMILY LIFE: 205

SUBORDINATION IN MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS AND SINGLE PARENTING, CHILD CARE PROBLEMS AND EXTENDED KINSHIP PRESSURES, LEGAL STATUS AND HOUSING AND LIFE OF HARASSEMENT

5.6 HOUSING: 214

LEGAL RIGHTS AND HOUSING ALLOCATION, LACK OF PROPERTY RIGHTS; VARIATIONS IN HANDLING THE ACCOMMODATION CRISIS

5.7 ISOLATION: 226

RELIGION AS A FORM OF SOCIAL CONTACT AND SUPPORT SYSTEM; RELIGION AS A SYSTEM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

5.8 DREAMS: 233

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP, FAMILY LIFE AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN, SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

5.9 CONCLUSION 240

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION 242

6.1 INTRODUCTION 242

6.2 PRIORITIZING GENDER 242

6.3 THE NATIONAL UNION OF DOMESTIC WORKERS 250

6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH 255

APPENDICES 257

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
SELECTION OF LIFE STORY RESPONDENTS
DATA ANALYSIS OF LIFE HISTORY
NOTE ON DOMESTIC WORKERS IN AFRICAN HOUSEHOLDS

BIBLIOGRAPHY 269

DOMESTIC WORK IS A GRADUAL KILLER.

Thelma: Daily commuting domestic worker, 1986

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The occupation of domestic work has come to be equated with Black women in South Africa. It is argued in this thesis that the position of African women domestic workers must be understood in gender terms. Their gender oppression is situated at the convergence of both class and 'race' divisions. These three dimensions of social stratification have created hierarchies of privileges which have put African women in positions of subordination and oppression in South Africa. As Gaitskell et al. (1984: 88) state: "in South Africa the people who end up in the job are African women who are the weakest and most socially subordinate strata".

In Cape Town the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy, coupled with influx control, has put the African population and more specifically African women workers, in a particularly perilous position when compared to other regions in South Africa. Through the enforcement of these laws, Africans were denied access to certain job categories, their movement was restricted, and they have been denied access to housing.

This is a study of African domestic workers' experiences of home and working life in Cape Town in the 1980s. In this introductory chapter, I will explain the motivation for the study, discuss problems encountered in the research, and set out the aims of this.

1.1 THE MOTIVATION FOR THIS STUDY

The inspiration for writing about the experiences of domestic workers came from a number of sources. Firstly, my mother was the key motivator for this study. Her experiences as an African woman, domestic worker and sole bread winner in the family inspired me to write about domestic workers. Secondly, I have had personal experience as a domestic during the school vacations. Thirdly, I was born in Cape Town and, as a member of the working class, I have experienced certain political and legal constraints. Fourthly, my professional career as a social worker from 1980 to the present, has exposed me to the plight of the poor, who are mostly women and children.

In the 1980s, domestic workers, like all the other workers, have begun to organize themselves into unions although they are not yet in a strong bargaining position. This has also motivated my study. While they have formed a National Union representing their needs, they still have to fight individually for fair working conditions because of the isolated nature of domestic work. Thus there is a need to clarify the demands of the women domestic workers, to study the gendered experience of working women which results in their subordination and exploitation, and to bring this to the attention of the union.

Further support for this study has come from the daily contact I had in trains and buses with domestic workers when I was working in the Southern Suburbs in the period 1983 to 1986. This experience has helped me to gain access into the lives of domestic workers. I was easily accepted as I had no racial nor language barriers to overcome. To a certain degree I was no

stranger to the exploitative situation of African women domestic workers.

Access can be a major problem in social science research especially if the researcher is not familiar with the context of the study and research respondents. This influenced my choice to base this study on African domestic workers' experiences in Cape Town in the 1980's.

I was born in the heart of Cape Town in the late 1950s before the strict enforcement of the Group Areas Act. I have lived in all three African townships after my family was forced out of the centre of Cape Town. At present I am working in all three townships. My work as a social worker has put me in touch with the daily problems of the African population in the Western Cape. I have worked with the victims of the system, mainly women, who have faced eviction from houses, deportation from the area and been denied access to welfare benefits because of the influx control system. Thus I was conversant with rituals and customs as well as value systems that characterise the daily experiences of the women.

Being classified in racial terms as an African has meant that I have been accorded working class status without any political representation in government. The result is that I have been forced to stay in townships designed for Africans in Cape Town.

I stay in the same council houses as the respondents of this study. I thus shared many aspects of the class position of the domestic workers in this study, denied property rights, access to decent employment and subjected to influx control system. This has often sensitized me to the experiences of the African working class in Cape Town.

I come from a Xhosa speaking family and I have used Xhosa as a medium of interviewing the respondents without any problems. Most of the respondents of the study were Xhosa speaking. I therefore had a language advantage and could understand the respondents whether they used abstract language in the form of idioms or simple, everyday Xhosa.

I am a woman and I was interviewing women about their life experiences, and this made my task easier. I was familiar with the experiences of being a woman. For example, I was talking to women in more or less the same language about house work which is societally and culturally defined as women's domain.

I have also personally experienced some of the disruptions of African culture associated with so-called industrialisation. For example, I stay with my parent in a council house which is culturally inappropriate for a woman of my age according to the African custom. Before the destruction of African culture, young women were given rooms of their own. But because of class background and social environment, I am staying with my people. I have internalized such new cultural practices, which my respondents also have often been forced to adopt.

Age did not affect my acceptance by interviewees. From the interviews with older African women I was met with such enthusiasm that one elderly respondent indicated that the study was a step forward in the liberation of black working class women. "To us older and younger women who have been involved in women's struggle against patriarchy, racism, class as well as all other forms of exploitation, your progress is ours" (Miss M, 1986). With these kinds of feelings expressed I felt encouraged to carry on with

this work but explained again to the respondents that my research cannot do much except to highlight their plight as domestic workers and encouraged them to join the union and take up issues affecting them through their unions, as well as to bargain with their employers for improved working conditions.

1.2 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE RESEARCH

The social circumstances and personal commitments which motivated this study inevitably raised certain problems during the course of the research.

The research was undertaken at the time of great turmoil and social upheaval in South Africa. The State has combined repression with reform and the oppressed communities are under great stress. I am both the researcher and a participant in this context. Even though I have access advantages, being a participant has not been without problems.

Firstly, for years I worked with oppressed people in unsettled communities who faced uprootment and dispossession. Researching a subject of which I am part and parcel may have caused problems of being over-sensitive.

My experiences, to a certain extent, may have coloured my interpretation of the research findings. My experiences as a participant have also prompted questions about the role of such research: whose side, as researchers, are we on; with whom do we align; and, for whose benefit is the research done?

These questions, the integrity of the researcher, as well as the purpose of research, raise the question of producing a research study that is either for community consumption and contributes to community awareness, or one that appeases the status quo. My research attempts to provide a voice for the African domestic workers in Cape Town.

Secondly, it was a painful experience interviewing African women who have been imprisoned because of the influx control system. This aroused feelings of anger, frustration and resentment in me.

Thirdly, the State of Emergency was declared twice during 1985 and 1986. In 1985, soldiers besieged the townships, turning them into concentration camps. Respondents were suspicious of the questions being asked about themselves. They wanted assurance that the information would be kept confidential and that I was not affiliated to certain political organisations. This arose in part because of the spate of detentions that were and are still taking place in the townships and because of the State's silencing of women's organisations in the Western Cape. Thus again the role of a researcher in South Africa in a state of immense social upheaval raises both political and personal problems - problems of deciding on whose side the researcher is.

Fourthly, the language I have used to write this thesis is not my mother tongue. Although I started to learn English from the lowest grades, I cannot claim to be fluent in it. I have written in what could be called Colonial language, which at the very least conveys the message of the research to the community. If I had conducted and written the thesis entirely in Xhosa, which is my mother tongue, better results could have

been produced. The primary research was conducted in Xhosa, but the interview material was recorded in English, as I am used to this style of recording. This could have slightly changed the meaning of what was expressed by the domestic workers. Thinking and conceptualizing in two different languages poses problems of interpretation and presentation of data. It also limits the attempt to provide a loud voice for the domestic workers.

Fifthly, I am a woman, interviewing and writing about women's experiences of exploitation and oppression. Like the women respondents, I experience gender, class and racial subordination. Notions of 'good' versus 'unclear' research are not by accident explained or justified in male terms. 'Male' interpretation lacks sensitivity to both subjectively experienced research, and gender experiences. Oakley (1980: 40) argues:

> The sociology of feelings does not exist. Sociology mirrors society in not looking at social interaction from the viewpoint of women. While everyone has feelings 'our Sociology' defines being cognitive, intellectual or rational dimensions of experience as superior to being emotional or sentimental. Through the prism of our technological and rationalistic culture, we are led to perceive and feel emotions as some irrelevancy or impediment to getting things done.

Lastly, I would like to raise the point of being a black researcher in South Africa. I was the breadwinner in my family when I started this research project. This is still the case today. The result has been that I had to study part-time, only after working hours. Some sacrifices had to be made in order to cope with the pressure of time and work. Many Saturdays and Sundays were spent in libraries, also I had pressures to negotiate time off work and often I was subject to pressures of domestic responsibilities in my household.

1.3 AIMS OF THE THESIS

The thesis aims at documenting the work experiences of African women domestic workers resident in Cape Town in the 1980s. The women who form the focus of this study are mostly employed in kitchens of white homes. The presentation and analysis of three life stories forms the core of this study.

The study is an attempt to add to the people's history of Cape Town. Because of the scarcity of literature on domestic work, especially on Cape Town and on African women, it is an addition to the literature available. The title of the thesis "IZWI", indicates an attempt to provide a VOICE for the domestic workers to expose their plight as women, workers and as Africans.

Domestic work has offered African women an opportunity for wage employment but an opportunity which reflects their situation and their experiences at the intersections of 'race', class and gender. The focus in this study on the working conditions and experiences of African women encompasses not only waged work done in the public sector but also the unpaid labour performed in their own households. In order to domestically the separation between the public and private spheres of women's work, we need to emphasise the link and impact of these spheres on their lives. Leghorn and Parker (1982: 4) state that:

> In order to include women's experience in our analysis, we have to look at the institutions that have economic implications on women's lives: the family, the educational system, the dominant ideology as it concerns women and their options and the forms of violence against women that sustain that ideology, the male-defined economy and the political organization of the culture.

Such institutions have great impact on women's lives as wage earners in the public spheres and in their families. Women domestic workers' experiences and the limited options open to them need to be made visible. An attempt is thus being made in this thesis to link the experiences of women in both public and private spheres of their lives.

African women domestic workers have been seen as dependants even when they are the major breadwinners in their families. They are paid low wages which have to be stretched to cover their household needs. The thesis focuses on the connections between experiences of exploitation in both the private and public spheres of their lives. The focus, conceived of in this way, allows a 'voice' for the many domestic workers whose experiences have been denied existence. Dixon (1980:43-44) is of the opinion that:

> Precisely because the separation of domestic from the economic life is peculiar to capitalism, use of women's situation in contemporary society may be playing right into the hands of bourgeois ideology. Bourgeois ideology itself promoted and continues to promote the identification of women with home, domesticity, effective relation 'non-productive' activity and defines these as structurally distinct from the 'public' world of real economic life.

Such a false division further creates confusion when it comes to planning strategies for change.

1.4 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following chapter discusses characteristics of domestic work, the social context of domestic work in Cape Town in the 1980s, and reviews selected South African and international literature on domestic workers.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the gathering of data - a combination of methods including the life history technique, participant observation , use of documentary sources, and a small survey. In this chapter, the process of research, which is important in a feminist approach, is described. The research became a two-way process: a sharing experience for the domestic workers and a learning experience for the researcher.

In Chapter 4 the life stories are presented. Three life stories were selected as the core of this study. They are organised according to key categories in the domestic workers, lives. The stories are those of Miriam, a full-time resident worker; Thelma, a daily commuter; and Martha, a part-time worker.

Chapter 5 first discusses the social background to the life stories and then analyses the key issues identified in Chapter 4. These include issues of poverty, denial of rights, lack of bargaining power, relationships with employers, poor working conditions, denied access to housing, fragmentation and disintegration of their family lives, and their experience of subordination in marriage relations. Variations are identified in ways of coping with childcare problems and in solving housing problems.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, provides a summary of what the thesis has tried to do - provide an explanation of life experiences of African domestic workers in Cape Town in the 1980s. These experiences are exposed and analysed in an attempt to provide a 'voice' for domestic workers.

Gender is prioritised in order to highlight the unique experiences of African women as members of the working class. As women, they have been denied access to educational institutions, experience childcare problems and suffer the payment of low wages, thus keeping them in subordinate positions. They have been denied access to housing and, in the 1980s, have led the struggle for housing to secure family life and fulfil the dream of economic independance.

1.5 A NOTE ON TERMS USED

As a black researcher in South Africa and researching in a context that one is part and parcel of a number of problems were raised for me. It became unavoidable to use the government's racist classifications of the various population groupings. It is especially more painful when one is both philosophically and ideologically opposed to these racist classifications.

Being classified African in racist terms has meant that I am on the receiving end of the experiences of being classified African. 'Race' in South Africa has been used in order to disempower the majority of the indigenous population. Further, 'race' has legitimized the institutionalized inequalities which have resulted in the exploitation of black people in South Africa. Cultural and religious differences have been magnified in order to emphasize the 'differences' between the various groupings. The result has been the unequal power relations which gave birth to the experiences of ruling and being ruled.

Writing about these experiences from the side of the oppressed has thus necessitated the adoption of these racial classifications. This has been done in order to highlight the unique experiences of women who have formed the basis of this study. Thus the inverted commas are used wherever the racist terms appear.

The term African has been used in order to refer to all the indigenous groupings in South Africa. 'Coloured' has been used to refer to those who are neither 'White' nor 'African'. Coloureds are alleged to be of mixed

origin between European settlers and the indigenous population of this country and the slaves who were imported to South Africa. For purposes of ease I have not used inverted commas when referring to groupings.

The most respectful terms are preferred when referring to those who have formed the basis of this study, i.e. domestic women are the following: helper, house assistant and house specialist.

'Homeland ' refers to the Bantustans found in South Africa. They are based on ethnic backgrounds for all the African people. The reference to them as 'homelands' is in agreement with the Government's policy of regarding the African people in urban areas of South Africa as temporary sojourners.

'Rikhoto' - the first person to win the court ruling to be in an urban area after working as a migrant labourer in the Republic, i.e. Section 10 1(d).

Lastly the term "Izwi", which means "Voice", and which is the title of the thesis. This term is used in order to indicate the disempowering and deprivation of women of opportunities to voice their feelings as felt and interpreted by them.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALISATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the characteristics of domestic work, both in general and more specifically as a form of employment in the South African context. The social and legal conditions affecting the position of domestic workers in Cape Town in the 1980s are briefly discussed, but elaborated on in Chapter 5, and selected literature on domestic workers in South Africa is reviewed. Some comparisons are made with literature on the domestic workers in other countries in previous eras. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical and social contextualisation for my research study.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF DOMESTIC WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

Domestic work is labour performed within the household for generation replacement and reproduction of a family/household. Typically it is performed under conditions where both familial and kin relations determine who performs this labour. Various justifications are used in defining domestic work as women's work across cultural, racial and class boundaries. The most entrenched of these are justifications based on physiological differences between men and women.

Oakley (1974:1), writing about unpaid domestic work in industrial

societies, suggests four socially difining characteristics:

> Its exclusive allocation to women, rather than to adults of both sexes; its association with economic dependance, i.e. with the dependent role of the women in modern marriage; its status as non-work - or its opposition to 'real', i.e. economically productive work; and it is primary to women, that is, its priority over other roles.

Paid domestic work is labour performed by a worker in order to earn a living. The difference between the paid and unpaid domestic work lies in the wage relationship, but basically it is the same work performed under the same conditions, although there are class variations in circumstances under which it is performed. For example, some women can afford the use of labour-saving domestic technology because of their priviledged class (and in South Africa, racial) position.

In South African history, domestic work as waged labour, as one of the ways of earning a living, was initially performed largely by men. This they had done in order to pay taxes and for paying lobola. Van Onselen (1982: 6-7), states that "the Zulu men had preferred domestic labour to mine work as it was better paying". Another possible reason is that there were no black women in the Johannesburg area prepared to do domestic work. Most African women were involved in the agricultural sector in rural areas. Others who were in Johannesburg had resisted incorporation into domestic work by self-employment, such as selling African beer.

'Mrs S' whose story is recorded in Bozzoli (1982: 24), provides an example

"I also used to sew dresses and sell them. I would spend money I earned out of selling dresses or groceries. I used to sell apples with a group of women from Bethanie ..."

In the absence of women to perform domestic work an alternative supply of labour had to be sought elsewhere. African men were available. As part of the colonized labour force they were forced into domestic work. Thus there was the intersection of the racial policy and the colonial attitude which forced the African men into domestic work.

Many English artisans had come to South Africa as single men without any women to serve and care for them. In the mines where they worked they were paid wages which afforded them the opportunity of employing a servant at a lower rate. The African men who were employed were accommodated as single men, either in the kitchen or in any structure outside the house.

There are also men in contemporary South Africa who perform unpaid domestic work. Sometimes they are forced to do so, as in the case of migrant workers in Cape Town during the 1980s, housed in hostels where women are not allowed. They do washing, ironing, cooking and cleaning for themselves. However, Ramphele (1986) has shown that in a number of cases these men have girlfriends or other female relations staying with them who do their unpaid domestic tasks. Other men in this position are those in mine compounds where no female visitors are allowed: they are left without an option and have to do a demanding, boring and oppressive unpaid shift. This they view as an insult to their male ego as domestic work is culturally defined as a woman's work. Ramphele (1986) notes that these men generally do domestic work only where there are no women available.

There are very few men involved in paid domestic work today in white households, especially in Cape Town. As the men moved out of the domestic sector and gained greater access to industrial employment, it became dominated by women, especially African women.

To contextualise domestic work in contemporary South African society, it is necessary to take account of proletarianisation processes as well as gneder divisions. As Boddington says of her own analysis of domestic work in South Africa, "A class analysis of domestic services implied an examination of domestic service within the process of proletarianisation and an analysis of the relationship between dominant and dominated classes. Included in this, and examination of the sexist division of labour was neccesary in order to understand why domestic work was always, and became even more so, a female dominated job." (1983: 8-9).

The isolated nature of the domestic sector leads to various forms of control by the employer. Domestic workers are mostly hidden at the back of the employer's yard without any family contacts. Family life is fragmented and divided and at times the relatives and friends are not allowed into the employer's premises. Due to the unequal power relations between domestic worker and the employer, and without any bargaining rights, employers pay domestic workers pathetic wages which have to be spread to cover all the domestic family needs. As a "manager" doing the supervisory duties, the employer decides that the domestic worker can have a break from work when it suits her. Verbal harassment and threats of dismissal in the absence of alternative employment subject the domestic worker to daily experience of strict employer control. Gaitskell et al

(1984: 87-88) elaborate on how the gender content of domestic work manifests itself in "a colonial context or in a racially divided society where subordinate groups perform the task".

What then are the conditions of domestic work as paid employment? Like women's work all over the world it is characterized by payment of low wages, it is regarded as repetitive and unskilled, and it is associated with low levels of union organization. Domestic work differs from the other sectors of the economy that employ women in the following ways: Domestic work is highly privatized; women who perform it do so in isolated surroundings* usually with the employer as a manager in supervision. The employer can dictate the terms and exert an unusual level of control over the domestic worker.

The individual employer sets the terms of employment in the absence of basic worker rights and state protection. The working day is stretched by the employer without regard for the unpaid labour done by the domestic worker in her family. The wages, off days, sick leave, annual benefits, use of telephone, duties, provision of food as well as accommodation, are decided by the employer to the disadvantage of the domestic worker's family/household. With limited employment options open to her, the domestic worker accepts these terms of employment, as she has to face unemployment and possible starvation if she does not agree with these unfair terms of employment.

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* This isolated nature of domestic work has recently resulted in them being the victims of burglary as some are left by themselves in big mansions while the employers are away. To protect themselves against these invasions they have to lock every door in the house and no formal protection is afforded them.

The work done involves a range of tasks but mostly cleaning of the house. Obery et al (1983) provide a fuller account of the kind of work entailed. Other useful local sources are FOSATU's Women Workers (1984) and SACHED Trust's Working Women (1985). The work is done either manually or with the use of labour saving devices (which still need the operation of the domestic worker, although they make the task either light or tough depending on the type used). Shindler (1980) discusses the use of these devices. Some employers, in fact, do not allow their domestic workers the use of these labour saving devices. They are only for the employer's use when the domestic worker is on leave from work.

Domestic work does not require certification; it is cross-cultural and in all classes defined as woman's work. Ideologically it is defined as unskilled like most of women's work thus giving it a low status and justifying the payment of low wages. The reality of the situation is that domestic work includes specialized work like, for instance, cooking, child care and general caring of the family members. Domestic workers could be justifiably called "home specialists".

However, domestic work is identified with the 'private' sphere of reproduction. Labour power, which is the ability to work, is reproduced within the private sphere of reproduction, outside the capitalist relations of reproduction. As Vogel (1983: 152) says, "For the reproduction of labour power to take place, both the domestic and social components of necessary labour are required. That is, wages may enable a worker to purchase commodities but additional labour - domestic labour - must generally be performed before they are consumed." As a result of its subordinate position within the economy, domestic work is therefore given

low status, and the skills involved are often not recognised.

It is true, however, that domestic work includes labour which is boring and repetitive, without any challenge to the worker, and in itself is degrading. Pollert (1981: 80) in fact sees these characteristics of domestic work as typical of other kinds of work which women end up doing. "What constitutes a woman's work has the same characteristics as those of domestic work, namely routine, repetitive, fiddly, low-graded work". But as Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1980) has shown, women's work is of great value to the reproduction of both the dominant and dominated classes.

Within the African custom men rarely help with the housework. The work that is done is degraded, and so are those who perform it. Mrs Q, a participant in my study, informed me "Men expect to be served - they seldom help with housework. They always hide their faces behind a newspaper". She was indicating an awareness of the source of her oppression and exploitation - a double oppression and exploitation as a woman and a wage earner.

African cultural practices exclude men from doing domestic work in the household. Payment of lobola is taken as justifying this exclusion. This is one expression of structural male dominance or partriarchy, which can be defined (following Hartman, 1971:11) as a set of social relations which establish or create interests to dominate women. The material base, upon which patriarchy rests, lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labour power.

Finally, as a job, domestic work has very little upward mobility or recompense. One remains a domestic worker for up to 35 years and the longer one remains in domestic work the poorer the employment conditions become. Cock (1980: 27) cites the story of Elsie who started to do domestic work at the age of 12 and earns R25 per month. Also, Obery, I. et al. (1985: 31) cite the story of Elda Mthuduli, a mother of two, who earns R65 per month. All these women have devoted their lives to working for their employers but the more they worked for them the more the conditions of their employment deteriorate. Thus one mama from my respondents Ms X (1985) who is approximately 65 years old said in Xhosa:

> Isevisi ayibhatali mntwana wam. Abelungu bewatya amandla akho bathi xa umdala naxa bedikiwe nguwe bakuthi tya.*

The story of Betha Mabena in S.Gordon (1985:152) highlights the payment the domestic workers get for a long service when the employer terminates the service. This story confirms my respondent's allegations of being left in the cold during one's older days.

> "Mrs Jardine said to her: Rose said I must give you this. It was the last of my will today. After working for her for 19 years. Promised me a will. The last of my will was R100 from her sister. That's all."

"Long service with one employer, my child, does not pay. Whites (meaning employers) suck all your energy and when you are old and they tire of you, simply discard you like an old rag."

2.3 AFRICAN DOMESTIC WORKERS' SITUATION IN CAPE TOWN

The influx control system has divided the black working class in Cape Town along racial lines, as well as creating divisions within the strata of the working class, the 'legals'[1] and the 'illegals'[2]. As Goldin (1987:52) states, "it was in this region that the local authorities together with local employers and politicians began to campaign for the development of a policy of Coloured Labour Preference." This policy until recently denied Africans access to jobs which were reserved in preference for coloured workers. (Recent changes are discussed below.) Further, the migrant labour system which is male exclusive and the building of hostels instead of family housing, have ensured more control over the growth of the urban African population in Cape Town. Worst hit by the non-provision of housing were women. Thus it is not by coincidence that African women had taken the leadership in the struggle for housing in Cape Town in the 1980s - the Crossroads and squatter struggles.

The period of the 1980s in Cape Town has highlighted the State's policy of controlling and limiting the number of settled African people in the region.

In this area, these repressive state actions were accompanied by limited reforms which were aimed at mystifying the state's repressive actions of

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(1) Legals: In terms of the Urban Areas Act, No. 25 of 1945, these were Africans who had been born, or had worked continuously in urban areas and who were classified into Section 10 (a) (b) or (c). Section 10 1(c) were the dependents of (a) and (b) who may be the son, unmarried daughter or the wife.

(2) Illegals: Were those who did not qualify under Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act No. 25 of 1945 as amended to be in urban areas. They were neither born nor in employment in urban areas. Included under the illegals were the Section 10 1(d) holders , who were the contract workers. Their service was renewed annually.

disorganising the African family life. Cape Town with its unique position regarding the treatment of African population, has a long history of informal squatter settlement. From the time that the Nationalist Party came to power, its main agenda regarding the African population has been to exercise proper and effective control over all aspects of their life.

Women and children have been the most severely affected. In order to control the growth of the African population various methods were used. These were non-provision of housing, street arrests, demolition of squatter camps, and deportation to 'resettlement' camps near the 'homelands'. The present housing struggle regarding the provision of family housing for the African population has its roots in post 1948 period. Thus Hill (1983:42) states:

> The Coloured Labour Preference Policy has also ensured structural differences and divisions between Coloured and African households and communities. Certain less-skilled categories of employment are reserved for Africans in the Western Cape.

The historical impact of this policy still filters throught the Coloured and African Communities. It has for a long time thwarted the successful organisation of the working class in Cape Town. The strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy coupled with the influx control, forced African women to devise some means of survival and defiance of the state's policies. Thus it is no accident that African women have in the 1980s taken leadership in the struggle for housing in Cape Town in general, the Cross Roads and KTC squatter camps in particular.

Municipal by-laws regarding the access of domestic workers to housing have also been discriminatory. Women could only get housing if they had produced proof of marriage. Thus women were being force to engage in

oppressive relationships with men. In the work situation, women in domestic work in certain suburgs of Cape Town - like Sea Point - were subjected to the 'key laws'. Such a law authorises the raiding of servants' quarters at any time of day by the Police or Municipal Police. The raids took place mostly at night, interfering with any form of family life that might be taking place in the servants' quarters.

Exclusion from the Wage Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act, puts domestic workers in a precarious situation. Also, exclusion from the Wiehahn and Riekert recommendations (which are discussed fully in Chapter 5) subjected women in the domestic sector to employer and state oppression. Before the 1980s women suffered most from the housing by-laws of municipalities in Cape Town as they were often excluded from access to other housing. Widowed, divorced and single women were the worst hit. The professional and educated women were at least in a better position compared to their sisters in the domestic sector. The relaxation of these by-laws in the 1980s came when the former single men's hostels at Langa were being converted into family housing with unaffordable rents. The de-electrification as well as the lack of ceiling and flooring in the houses led to community resistance to the occupation of these four-roomed houses. It was only at this time that single women and all the women who had had problems in securing accommodation were allocated houses without the prior production of a marriage certificate. Again, in 1985 when there was resistance to the forced removal of the African population to Khayelitsha as well as the occupation of the two-roomed core houses, housing became available there to all women irrespective of their economic position. (This has changed now as only those who can afford to buy the houses are allocated them. Further, those who earn less than R200 per

month have been refused access to housing.) Only when there has been organised community resistance to housing, has the state relaxed the descriminatory conditions, and allocated houses to women without having to meet certain conditions.

Since the early 1980s, increased state repression and repeated declarations of the State of Emergency since 1985 have been efforts on the part of the state to try to thwart working class attempts at organisation. Women's organisations such as the United Women's Congress and the Federation of South African Women, have been amongst the targets of the state. Leaders have been detained indefinitely, offices raided, women imprisoned and families of office bearers harassed. All these were attempts aimed at restricting women's organisations in Cape Town.

Some changes in legislation since the study was started in 1983 have taken place regarding the governing of the Africans in Urban Areas. Notable amongst the changes that have taken place in 1986, has been the scrapping of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy, however, its historical impact still filters through to the lives of the African people. The following changes took place:

1. The abolition of the Influx Control Systems by an Act of Parliament in July 1986. The influx control system was a sore in the lives of hundreds of African people. This act affected women and children most and family life was disorganised. The abolution of influx control meant that Africans for the first time were free to live and work in urban areas. The Africans can bring their families with them to urban areas but the problem is the gross housing shortage

especially in Cape Town for the African population. Women who have been denied access to housing, especially those who earn low salaries in the domestic sector, will still be subjected to the housing shortage. The Group Areas Act is still strictly enforced thus denying the occupation of empty houses in 'white' areas by Africans.

2. The extension of the 99 year leasehold to the Cape Peninsula African townships. Because of the strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy the 99 year leasehold was only extended to Africans in Cape Town in 1986. This improvement did not affect the majority of domestic workers who cannot afford to buy the houses as the prices of houses in African townships are exorbitant. They are still faced with the housing problem (The Group Areas Act).

3. The abolition of the reference book system and the introduction of the common identity document for all the people in South Africa. This means that no street arrests for passes and nightly raids will take place. But the reality is that raids are still taking place in African townships under the emergency regulations. The so-called 'clean-up' operations with the army virtually sealing off the townships. The unemployed and the so-called unproductive are arrested. Women form part of this group as they are worst hit by the present high rate of unemployment and so are their children. Again the new I.D. system is not different from the old reference book in that Africans still have to be fingerprinted, have to produce proof of residence in the Cape Town area as well as the proof of birth in the area. The new identity document is still another form of control over the lives of African people.

4 The restoration of South African citizenship to the citizens of Independent States. Virtually all the Africans in Cape Town have been denied their birth right because of the so-called Independence of Ciskei and Transkei. Africans can apply for dual citizenship of South Africa as well as a particular 'homeland'. It means however, that they have to finish a period of five years of continuous residence in South Africa before qualifying, whereas the 'citizens' of the TBVC states are regarded as aliens and can only be granted permanent residence status if they are to offer their services in the field where there is a gross shortage. Given the long history of the national deprivation of access to educational institutions, few Africans will meet this requirement. Thus the majority of Africans and mostly women and children will be excluded and will continue to face arrests and deportations to barren 'homelands'. Budlender (1986:39) sums up the position of the 'new Aliens' with regard to the issue of permission to work in South Africa:

> A work permit will be obtained from the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Manpower. We will be back to the system of migrant labour, hostels, endorsements in your identity documents which will show that you are entitled to be here. In these respects at least your position will be worse than it was in practice before! The penalties of contravention of the Aliens Act are more severe than those under the Urban Areas Act; you will be potentially liable to summary deportation even if you have a work permit and because the work permit is temporary, you will not acquire permanent residence right through a sustained period of employment. The Rikhoto principle will not be applicable.

The majority of Africans in the Western Cape, forced to become citizens of Ciskei and Transkei, will depend on the permit system provided under the Aliens Act. Women who are mostly involved in domestic work will be worst hit by this system as already there are enough domestic workers in the Cape Town area.

2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE ON DOMESTIC WORKERS

Selected South African literature on domestic workers has been reviewed, both for information and to identify the perspectives from which a variety of South African writers have viewed domestic work. The writers are organised in chronological order, reflecting different perspectives on domestic work. The perspectives are: The Liberal Views of the 1970s; the Radical Liberal Views of the 1980s; and the Marxist Feminist View.

One of the aims of this review has been to identify gaps in the literature on domestic work as well as to look at areas needing more attention and to try to address the gaps identified by this research.

Whisson and Weil, in their book Domestic Servants (1971) provide what could be called an early liberal view of domestic work. They address the position of the domestic in terms of class and 'race', but it seems that they equate class with 'race' and exclude the identification of gender as another form of social division. Had they addressed changes in the gender composition of domestic work as wage labour they would have been able to explain why today waged domestic work is done by black women; why coloured men have escaped doing domestic work; and why only Coloured and African

women are doing domestic work in the 1980s.

Whisson and Weil advocate "racial equality" in order to alleviate the plight of the domestic workers, but are not clear about what they mean by the treatment of races on an equal basis, and they fall back on a combination of morality and economic prosperity. "Improvements in the circumstances of domestic workers appears to be tied to the conscience of the employers and more important, to the state of the economy" (1971:64). Thus they end with racial equality which does not explain how this is going to be achieved nor how it is going to benefit domestic workers.

Gordon's (1971) "Handbook for Housewives" advises employers about domestic workers on practical daily matters affecting the maid/madam relationship. The aim of the book is to address questions relating to the improvement of the maid/madam relationship. The audience is comprised of mainly the employers of domestic workers and as Callinicos (1980: 88) states, the "book is openly didactic". Gordon offers suggestions on working hours, salary, leave, and all the general conditions of employment. This book can also be described as having a liberal perspective.

The suggestions that she makes do not alter the unequal relationship that the domestic worker has with the employers. Power relations between maid and madam are unequal and thus call for further investigation of the socio-legal nature of this relationship. The differentiated social, class and gender backgrounds affect this relationship. Further, the absence of legal protection for the domestic worker makes their position more vulnerable.

The prescriptive advice that Gordon gives is not a solution to the plight of the domestic worker as it does not contribute to raising the awareness of the domestic workers nor to their organization. The solution that she proposes for the improvement of the conditions of the domestic worker is again that of appealing to the conscience of the employers. In her latest book however, Gordon (1985) has tried to be more sensitive to the plight of the domestic workers by exposing more about their private lives as well as their employment life. In this later volume she has shown more sensitivity to gender relations and unequal power relations than in her 1970s writing.

Maid and Madams and Being Disciples, an Anglican publication addressed to the Christian employers of domestic workers, was produced by The Board of Social Responsibility in 1980. This work includes some attention to the legal aspects of domestic work. The Board states that the plight of the domestic worker is the result of the absence of a contract system between employer and employee.

The contract system, however, tends to be binding only on the part of the employee, as mentioned earlier, because of the absence of legal protection for the employee. Davis (1982: 88) has noted a similar imbalance in an American context:

> In America after the abolition of slavery,' employers coerced their employees into the signing of the contract which led to the master wanting to duplicate the antebellum conditions.

Unequal contracts have trapped thousands of African people in South Africa. The prime or classic example of the contract system which has been exclusive to African people has been the migrant labour system. This

system, which has been enforced through Section 10 1(d) of the 1945 Urban Area Act No 25 as amended, has disorganized the African family life. Families have been separated and married men turned into bachelors. Worst hit by the system have been women who could only come to the urban areas if they were dependent on men relatives. Women, as well as their children, have been deported and imprisoned. Some women have been trapped in the homelands and others have escaped into the domestic sector. The result has been employment in subhuman conditions. They are deprived of the basic worker rights, like the annual holiday and suffer poor wages and poor accommodation in poor surroundings. There is no legal protection from such unfair employment practices. The contract system is a sore to thousands of African people who are denied any political representation and basic human rights.

In order to improve this situation the Board of Social Responsibility again appeals to the conscience of the employer, just as the other two previously mentioned liberal publications. But without attacking racism and sexism which converge to create structural privileges for certain groups of the population there can be no change in the condition of domestic workers as well as those of women in general.

The Board goes further to say that the plight of the domestic workers is a result of lack of love and caring for each other as Christians. "We all need to grow in being more thoughtful and being caring about those around us and be disciples" (Board of Social Responsibility, 1980:4). The Board fails to recognise that different racial class and gender backgrounds mitigate against the formation of sisterhood feelings between domestic worker and her employer. Here again the Board perpetuates exploitation in

that "Love" is an ideology that keeps women in subordinate positions by obscuring the reality of their exploitation. The white ruling class has the power to define the terms of being a "disciple" in a racist and sexist society like South Africa. Firestone (1971:128-9) alleges that "love is not altruistic and the height of selfishness becomes corrupted by an unequal balance of power". Christian love is then no exception as it does not challenge the structures that perpetuate male hegemony and exploitation and oppression of women. How can love prevail when domestic workers have been defined as the "others" and objects of exploitation? The definition of the domestic workers as "other" results in their coercion into unskilled, underpaid domestic sector where they become objects of oppression.

Marks (1981) takes what could be called a more radical liberal viewpoint. She analyses the plight of coloured live-in domestic servants in Sea Point as a result of the lack of education and a cycle of poverty. Marks states that race (Coloured) and sex (woman) forces Coloured women into domestic work. "The state suffered by domestic servants and the cycle which results in the offspring of domestic servants being channelled into this category of work is a process caused by low wages, poverty and low educational level" (1981:14).

To address the question of why Coloured women in particular have been forced into domestic work, while Coloured men have escaped it, Marks should have addressed the differential proletarianization which has been affected by gender and racial divisions of labour. These gender and racial divisions have converged with class divisions to create privileges which have resulted in women being forced into the lowest paying jobs like

alternative employment the women endure these inhumane working conditions. "Few have become domestic servants as a first choice: they are servants because the alternative is unemployment" (1985: xvii). However Gordon does not explain why these domestic workers do not have a choice. It is because they are Africans, members of the working class deprived of any political representation and because of their gendered experiences as women. This lack of choice is worsened by the strict enforcement of the influx control system whose cornerstone has been the Urban Areas Act of 1945. Women could only come to urban areas if they accompanied a male relative. (A note on the change of legislation has been made earlier in this chapter.)

In this book, Gordon has shown some sensitivity to gender as she provided some analysis of the relationship between domestic servants and members of her household, employer household, the employer/employee relationship and between domestic servants themselves. She has also exposed the problems of housing that affect family life of domestic servants and addressed the childcare problems faced by domestic workers on a daily basis.

Two of the domestic workers in her book were men who had entered the domestic sector before the Second World War. She touches briefly on female-male employer relationship and how male servants have resisted or felt, when they had to take orders from a "madam". But of interest is the fact that they, unlike their sisters in the same sector have moved away from this sector: they have found alternative employment.

Having presented the stories of the South African servants, Gordon goes further to suggest a solution to their plight. She states (1985:xxvi),

domestic work. Women's work has been defined as unskilled and of low value, justifying the payment of low wages. As noted previously, in the introductory chapter, women have been paid wages below the cost of the reproduction of their labour power in the public sphere.

Marks however goes further than previously mentioned writers, in suggesting that the plight of the domestic workers can only be alleviated through structural changes. Unfortunately, she does not tell us or suggest how these structural changes should come about or what structures should be changed. Thus her study could be regarded as being rectificatory; it does not practically challenge the specific structural basis of the class, 'race' and gender intersections which converge to result in women's oppressive and exploitative daily situations.

For her 1985 publication, A Talent for Tomorrow : Life Stories of South African Domestic Servants, Gordon collected 23 stories of African domestic servants.

> The book is about employers from the eyes of the servants. This book complements the other one which is mainly didatic and for employer consumption. This book is for employer/employee consumption. To the employers it is meant to sensitise them to feelings of being a domestic worker and how this sector of employment affects family life (Gordon, 1985:xvii) .

Through these stories, Gordon portrays the plight of domestic workers as caused by excessive poverty which forces African people to do domestic work. Because of a need to earn a living the women escape from the rural areas to the city and take any kind of job they can get. Usually the employers exploit these women who come to the urban areas without a right to be in the area through the payment of lower wages. In the absence of

amelioration of the conditions could come through the mobilisation of domestic workers, "but at the same time the nature of their employment would make monitoring by the Union extremely difficult". Thus she lays great emphasis on the power of the unions to change the positions of domestic workers. Union demands should address the daily existence of domestic workers such as lack of childcare facilities, housing, as well as the payment of a living wage and the right to family life and try to stop the breaking up of families.

Cock's (1980) book, Maids and Madams, takes a Marxist Feminist view of domestic work. She views the exploitation of domestic workers as a result of their "situation at the convergence of three lines along which social inequality is generated - class, race and sex" (1980:5). She claims that these inequalities are reproduced within the white kitchen, which is hidden, like most sites of women's oppression and exploitation, but does not explain the mechanisms used to hide women's labour in both public and private places. The hidden character of women's labour within the household is a result of the her work being seen as of no value by both capital and the dominant male view. The role played by the working class family/household is not mentioned in reproducing the domestic worker. Had she analysed this, Cock would have been able to expose the super exploitation of the proletarian household members. She looks at only one level of exploitation: that of the domestic worker in wage labour, forgetting the exploitation of women within their households.

Cock thus fails to analyse fully these three "lines" which she claims account for the exploitation and oppression of domestic workers. She offers instead a description of the process of women's oppression and

exploitation as domestic workers.

Dealing with the issues of wages, families and dependents, Cock recognises the underpayment of the domestic worker, and she writes:

> Money sent home to relatives or children represents great self-denial - a denial of self that is subsumed under the workers' definition of family obligation (1980:51)

Cock could have gone further to explain that the self-denial of domestic workers resulting from the payment of low wages affects the domestic workers family/household in various ways. Low wages mean that more members of the family/household have to enter the capitalist labour market, often at an early age. Family life starts disintegrating.

The wage paid to the domestic worker is meant only to satisfy the needs of the individual worker. The worker's family is denied existence in capitalist societies and as a result, the issue of family wages arises. Such wages have to cover the individual worker's needs as well as those of the family/household members. The demand for family wages can only be obtained through worker organisations who will in turn link the demands for higher wages to the broader working class demands. The payment of low wages to working class members has ensured a continued supply of illiterate and dominated workers.

In her book, the section on the historical development of the domestic sector in the Eastern Cape which she calls South Africa's Deep South, has helped to develop some ideas on the position of African women in Cape Town - for instance, the unique position of African women in relation to the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy. Cock (1980) and Boddington (1983)

offer a similar analysis of the historical development of the domestic sector as well as its changing nature in the Cape and Cape Town. Both have helped to form the historical basis of this thesis.

Where she discusses the the role of the missionaries in providing education for the African girls in the Eastern Cape, Cock has emphasised the modernizing and domesticating effects of their education but not the divisive effect which it has had on African families. More should be said about the effect of fragmentation of Africans. Family life was disrupted as the converts were accommodated in missionary premises. Amongst Xhosa people, the division was pronounced between Christians and the so-called reds or heathens. Thus the destruction of the cultural and value systems of African people was part of the conquering done by the missionaries and the missionaries succeeded in entrenching division among the strata of the African working class. (Even today the so-called red people are seen as being timid and stupid.)

Boddington (1983: 7) views domestic service "as a prime example of class oppression". Her historical analysis of domestic service between 1841 and 1948 can also be classified within a Marxist Feminist perspective, but she stresses the class dimension. For her domestic service is oppressive to both men and women, thus not a unique experience to women only.

> It is a class oppression and it is because of the class structure and specific way that capitalism has developed in South Africa that domestic workers were particularly oppressed and that domestic service became a female dominated source of employment. (Boddington, 1983: 8).

Thus it appears that Boddington is prioritizing class over 'race' and gender, but both class and 'race' divisions in their unequal power

relationships further disadvantage women. To prioritize class means a failure to recognize that domestic service is oppressive and exploitative to women in a unique manner. They perform domestic work as paid labour in isolated surroundings as well as unpaid domestic work in their own homes. Not only is the domestic worker being robbed but also the entire proletarian household, creating a cycle which helps to reproduce the domestic worker. Their situation deprives them of a chance to attend union meetings, thus hindering their attempts to gain bargaining power. It also deprives them of a decent family life by excluding the presence of their families in places of employment. Thus, Boddington could be criticised for denying the existence of the unique experiences of the majority of the African working class women who are domestic workers, and for neglecting the important role the proletarian household plays in reproducing workers, outside the capitalist relations of production.

By examining gender and giving it the important analytic weight it deserves, she would have been able to understand that, as the composition of domestic workers changed its character and became female dominated, so did the conditions of employment of women deteriorate. This is not to ignore the inhumane conditions that men domestic workers were subjected to, and the forms of harrasment they suffered. The point being raised however, is that they were not subjected to the double day experiences as they did not perform household chores within their own household (cf. Van Onselen, 1982). It is for such reasons that gender in this study has been important in the analysis of the life experiences of African domestic workers in Cape Town. For example, there are unique problems experienced in relation to child care and accommodation, and there is the added burden of the aspects of African culture and practices which define women as

legal minors, keeping them in subordinate positions.

Boddington has provided a well documented role of the legislation as a means of controlling the working class. She has showed the way in which legislation has developed in the Cape to form the Coloured Labour Preference Policy. Though no longer law, the historical effects of this policy, and the interests which it served, persist today. She correctly observes (1983:34):

> Legislation reflects the needs of the ruling class, it does not evolve by itself without opposition, nor legislation in itself can be used as a means of periodising history.

Again, within a broadly Marxist Feminist perspective, Gaitskell et al. (1984: 107) see the oppressive situation of domestic workers as "a product of the complex operation of class, 'race' and gender division over time". These writers see the three social divisions, namely 'race', sex and class, as interrelated and overlapping without one being more important than the others. These divisions place African women in a unique position, both within and outside the work situation. Much of this unique position results from the experiences of the double shift.

Gaitskell et al note the participation of African domestic workers in militant community-based organisations, but have not sufficiently explored the role the women play in these organisations, nor the issues that affect women's participation. The gender relations within the domestic worker's own family or household have and important effect on their participation in community and labour organisations. The problems involved in women's participation in certain social groups is a theme which has been investigated in this thesis.

The study by Gaitskell et al helped me to formulate analytical categories for the life stories in my research, and in selecting key issues. I also found their study a useful source for developing a conceptual, historical and contemporary view of domestic work.

Some limitations in their study include the following. The domestic worker is seen in a schizophrenic manner in that experiences of oppression and exploitation in employment and residential situation are split. Failure to recognise the false separation between public and private spheres of womens lives can be an acommodation of capitalist ideology. For example, there "is a trend toward replacing live-in servants with daily chars who commute from adjacent townships" (1984:105). But because they separate the employment and residential spheres, they have failed to note that this trend will affect the already-existing housing shortage in the township. Former live-in workers have to face problems of securing accommodation in the township. The domestic workers will be faced with squatting as an alternative to their housing problem. Issues like this were brought to my attention when I was analysing the life stories in my own study (see Chapter 5).

Finally, in this selective review of South African literature, mention should be made of Van Onselen's (1982) study, The Witches of Surburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand: 1890-1914.

In this work, Van Onselen suggests reasons for the academic apathy regarding the study of domestic servants. "Domestic servants serve, they do not produce. Not being commodity producers, their labour is difficult to evaluate in capitalist terms ..." (1982:1). But where is the labour

power produced? The production of labour power is an economic activity which is seldom recognised by the dominantly male view prevalent in our society, and "tends not to be seen as an economic activity" (Higgs 1983:60). The dominant male view has the ability to define what is economic and what is not. Male bias, in constructing economic and statistical tables, ignores the economic role of reproductive power in both the private and public spheres, as well as the continuity of workers' experiences therein.

Like Cock, Van Onselen traces the way that the various race groupings have entered the domestic sector, in this case for the Witwatersrand in the early twentieth century. The last group to enter the domestic sector were African women. Domestic labour appeared to have been a transitional stage for women in their career development but, in a racist, class and gender divided society, the majority of African women had remained in domestic labour for almost the whole of their lives. This remains the case in South Africa for African women in the 1980s. The chance of opting out of the domestic sector has been minimal - for African women apprenticeship is for life.

Van Onselen shows how conditions in the domestic sector deteriorated as African women moved in. "When black or coloured women were employed, wages would be reduced and minus the room" (1982:4). Extra-economic means were used in order to force them to remain within the domestic sector. Strict enforcement of the influx control system and strict control over the allocation of housing to women, were some of the measures which were taken.

Van Onselen includes accounts of resistance by domestic workers to employer control, for example a detailed description of how male domestic workers tried to redress employer wrongs by organising gangs and attacking them. The story of Nongoloza reflects determination on the part of the Amalaitas to restore justice when they were placed in a disadvantaged position because of their racial backgrounds. But the courts were contaminated by racial prejudices and the voices of the domestic workers were not heard.

From the racially divided workplace in South Africa, the focus is now on the position of domestic workers in the 19th century: Germany, Victorian England and the early 20th century America. The character of the employer and employee relationship is to be analysed. This is actually a historical comparison of the development of domestic service in the First-World countries, which shows both similarities to and differences from the South African context.

2.5 COMPARISONS WITH DOMESTIC WORK IN FIRST WORLD COUNTRIES

It is interesting to pick out themes from literature on domestic work in other countries, and to draw links with the South African situation.

Schlegel (1983) provides a study of domestic work in nineteenth century Hamburg, emphasising how class divisions played a crucial role in employer/employee relationships. The intimate aspect between employer and employee resulted in tension due to the difference in their class backgrounds. To demonstrate this she looks at servants' memoirs to present the relationship from the side of the employee. She chose a case, that of Doris, to demonstrate this. A voice from below stairs has been heard in European literature. Most historians had looked at the servants' position from the empoyers' eyes. Servants were seldom given a chance to expose the nature of the relationship with their employers. Like Schlegel's, my study - IZWI - also attempts to give domestic workers a voice through the use of life stories.

She documents how social distance was maintained by the employing class in several ways. Language was one such example of keeping the social distance. There are parallels in South Africa. Van Onselen (1982) for instance noted the use of Fanakalo by employers in 19th century Johannesburg to maintain social distance when communicating with their employees.

Schlegel records employers' attempts to control the private and sexual lives of domestic workers. She states "such protective inclinations were not simply a distorted expression of paternalism" (1983:66).

She also discusses the retaliation of servants to employer control over their lives. Some servants defied their employers, others sought the protection of the law, and some decided to leave. The last course of action is also been identified by Katzman (1978:183) as the last option left to domestic servants: "to the servants, however, one power always remained - to quit." This is the path mostly chosen by domestic workers in South Africa.

Schlegel found that domestic work in Germany at this time was normally seen as a transitional stage in the development of women's career path: that women engaged in domestic work because of lack of alternative employment. Schlegel argues: "This situation was by no means a result of the women's choice. The so-called feminisation of household service was a product of complex social and economic development which affected women no less than men." (1983:63)

Steady growth of industrialisation in Germany and open opportunities for women subsequently enabled most women to leave the domestic sector and engage in alternative employment in the tertiary sector, but the type of jobs they entered were those mostly associated with women, such as nursing, secretarial jobs, retail clerks, etc. This indicated the sex typing of jobs. Schlegel states that " ... most domestic servants were only too eager to leave service for good as soon as they were offered a genuine choice" (1983:76). Such choice has not been available to the majority of African women especially in Cape Town due to the history of the strictly enforced of Coloured Labour Preference policy.

Turning to an American Source, Katzman (1978) has focused on the study of

Black servants in America during the period of the Civil War and World War I. The majority of servants were from the Black working class, although Katzman identifies other sources of domestic labour, namely the immigrant ethnic minorities. These minority groups included Irish and Norwegian women but the decrease in migration rates meant that this source of supply of labour was exhausted, and more native women tried to avoid household work. The result was that this sector of the economy was dominated by Blacks.

Katzman (1978) shows that there were regional tendencies in the employment of servants. Blacks dominated the south, while native white immigrants and ethnic minorities were predominant in the north. As industrialisation increased more white women moved out of the domestic sector. 'Race', as in South Africa, had determined one's opportunities of moving up the social ladder.

Cultural background also affected women's preference of domestic work. Italian women had preferred to work within the family setting (as do the majority of Moslem women in South Africa). Few women in both these cultures are engaged in domestic work outside their own families. Women of Jewish background also avoided domestic work, while the Irish women had dominated the domestic sector among the immigrants. Irish girls were socialised into domestic work before eventually settling down into their own domesticity.

Racial bias of employers affected their selection of domestic workers. "Previous experience with one or more servants from a group, anti-Catholicism, and Anglophilia, Negrophobia or any other personal prejudices

influenced likes and dislikes." (Katzman 1978:70). In the South, employer/ employee relationships were generally characterised by racial prejudice towards Black women. "Race divided mistress and servant, suppressing nearly every interest they might have shared as women" (1978:201). Even shared cultural traditions could not transcend racial barriers in the South. Black women were servants and there to administer to the needs of their White employers. The position of the Black servant in the South in the 19th century could be easily equated to that of African women domestic workers in Cape Town.

Katzman (1978) goes further to show the difference between North and South regarding the distinction between servant and mistress. In the North, class and ethnic background differentiated employers from employees, while in the South race and gender hierachies were predominant. 'Race' was the priority in differentiating maid from madam. Shared experiences of womanhood and sisterhood were hardly recognised. Thus Katzman talks about the loneliness of servants in their employer's households.

Katzman concludes his analysis by stating that reform cannot change the situation of domestic work. The unequal employer/employee relationship cannot be reformed. The shortage of domestic workers coupled with the change from live-in work to live-out work contributed to the change in the situation of domestic workers in early 19th century America, at a time of rapid industrialisation. As in South Africa, the majority of domestic workers remained black women. Their situation changed partly because they became scarce, moving into other sectors. Others moved from live-in to live-out workers in an attempt to lessen the employer control over their lives. This trend was indicated in my own study. More African women have

moved from resident work to part-time or daily commuting work. In so doing, they are trying to resist employer control over their lives even though the situation in South Africa has not changed much.

Horn (1975), examining the position of servants in Victorian England, notes that not only were employers distinguished by class from each other, but also servants. The number of servants that one could employ was a mark of one's social class. The type of work that a servant peformed in a household determined the type of privileges each servant was to enjoy, in larger households where a number of servants were kept.

Gender divisions were apparent too, as certain women were given privileges over the women workers in the households. For example, the housekeeper dominated the women's side. If absent, the honour was taken by the cook or the lady's maid. On the men's side the butler, the chef or valet had dominated the scene. Friction between male and female servants was not uncommon. Van Onselen (1982) mentions a racial parallel in Johannesburg during the 19th century where white servants had bullied the Black kitchen boys. They were like managers and tended to shift their reponsibilities to the shoulder of the kitchen boy. So did the elder men over the young kitchen boys.

In Horn's account, the maid-of-all-work was at the bottom of the social ladder. This person was a phenomenon found in small households. "She was expected to carry out in her own person all the work which in larger establishments was accomplished by a whole range of domestics" (1975:51). This class of servant is typical of the situation of the present day domestic workers in South Africa. Servants are expected to do a variety of

work which could be accomplished by a number of persons thus increasing their working day while the pay packet remains static.

Social distance was maintained as servants were not expected to talk back to their employers. Servants were viewed as needing firmness and kindness from their employers. Horn (1975:112) states:

> It was all part of the same social attitude that servants were warned under no circumstances to offer any opinion to their master and mistress, nor even to say goodnight, or good morning: except in reply to that salutation.

Changing a servant's name was not uncommon, and Horn notes attempts to change and to control their belief system, leisure-time and dress. This was done in order to distance the employer from the servants. Van Onselen (1982) suggests parallels when he mentions the objectification of servants as they were given names of objects like Saucepan or Sixpence, etc, expressing an increased domination of servants by employers.

In discussing the resistance of servants to ill-treatment by employers, Horn observes that senior servants were reluctant to change jobs but the junior and younger servants less so. Even so, this option was rarely used by most young or junior servants as they were either ignorant or too timid (1975:118). The situation of these young servants appears similar to the present situation of domestic workers in South Africa. Few servants change their jobs often, but some have changed from live-in to live-out and part-time work in order to alleviate their situation.

In Britain, the Apprentices and Servants Act of 1851 was supposed to improve the conditions of work of servants under the age of 18. However, this law was never effectively enforced as the private nature of domestic work gave employers a powerful position over their employees.

Such protective legislation is non-existent in South Africa. The government has felt that the maid and madam relationship is a private issue. Both the Riekert and Wiehahn commissions have excluded the domestic workers in their recommendations, thus leaving their situation unchanged. Public awareness campaigns, as well as the opening of new job opportunities for women and awareness of their legal rights, changed the situation of domestic workers in England. African womens' political rights in South Africa are still tampered with and they are culturally defined as minors.

The situation of servants has changed in 20th century England. Resident servants have become the privilege of a few employers in England. Horn (1975:183) states

> In Victorian England the employment of a resident domestic servant was a legitimate ambition of every middle-class family. During the inter-war years that aim became increasingly difficult to achieve; now in Britain of the 1970's, the resident servant has become the ultimate social symbol, the prerogative of the wealthy few.

In South Africa, the present day situation more closely resembles that of the Victorian era in Britain.

2.6 CONCLUSIONS

Much of the above literature on domestic worker's employment conditions and experiences has drawn a dividing line between their racial, class and gender experiences in the work situation and places of residence. These three social divisions namely 'race', class and gender, when they converge and intersect, subject women as workers, mothers and community members to unique experiences which place them in subordinate positions. A major problem has been the inability of most researchers to link the experiences in the workplace with the household experiences of the domestic workers.

In particular, attention needs to be given to how these combined experiences affect domestic workers' participation in community-based organisations like the church and labour unions. There is thus a need to see the domestic worker in a holistic manner, that is as an individual daily facing interrelated struggles within her own family as well as within the community where she lives and in the work situation. Seeing the domestic worker in this way will throw some light on the experiences of the oppressive double day[1]: paid in a work situation and unpaid in her own household.[2]

A focus on the gender relations of domestic workers highlights the oppression of women within their own families and how both men and women are socialised to exclude men from doing housework. The unequal power

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1. This is a concept used by J. McCrindle and S Rowbotham in their book "Dutiful Daughters: Women talk about their lives", 1977.
2. Household is used interchangeably with family as it includes all the people under one roof. Family denotes a unit which is very rarely found in domestic workers' lives as they live fragmented life styles.

relations that exist between men and women result in some cases in men controlling the family's pay packet, women's sexuality and the number of children the woman has. Having mentioned all these, gender experiences do not mean that the other social divisions are of lesser importance in analysing women's experiences. This is because the three social divisions intersect and converge, creating hierarchies of privileges for men and a limited number of women.

An issue which has received insufficient attention in all the literature reviewed is that of resistance. This issue needs to be investigated further.

Cock (1980) for example, has reported passive resistance in terms of cup breaking and petty theft within the private sphere, and the passive defence which she calls 'wearing a deferential mask', but she has not addressed such issues as women coming to towns to seek employment, escaping poverty and the control of the extended family, as other possible forms of resistance.

In addressing resistance on the part of the domestic worker, I have attempted in my research to look at the nature of and forms of resistance, in both public and private sphere. This issue in my study has been addressed first within the family/household of the domestic worker: for instance, their insistence on the sharing of work with their male partners, their refusal to be tied to marriage and their option for independent living as single parents. Within the work situation, the demand for better wages and talking back to their employers has been

addressed. More broadly, some domestic workers are taking employment without a permit in order to be in the area and bring their family (children and often grandmothers) with them, in defiance of the influx control system. Some have joined community based organizations and are demanding housing for their families. In this last instance resistance has taken on an organized form. Housing is an issue that cuts across class, 'race' and age. It affects women from all walks of life. Women have led the struggle for housing, as illustrated by the case of Martha in my study(discussed in Chapter 4).

Legislation and progress in industrialisation were ways which freed the majority of women in England, Germany and America from the chains of domestic employment. Access to the legal system as well as the improvement in women's contractual standards opened many doors for women. However, in an emergent capitalist and racial society like South Africa, where the whole nation has been denied access to the means of production and had their labour power devalued, these changes do not take place. Domestic work has not only provided African women with entry to paid labour, but has also almost trapped them in it.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

I see the research I have undertaken as a challenge to me in the sense that few African women have written about the experiences of African domestic workers. In addition, research published to date has been undertaken by people who have not had first-hand experience of either being a domestic worker, or as members of the community from which domestic workers are drawn. In this thesis I am attempting to present both first-hand experience of being a domestic worker (although I am not at the moment employed as a domestic worker) and the experiences of those domestic workers who have been willing to share them with me. Furthermore, by undertaking this study I am attempting to provide a voice for those who are hardly accorded a hearing in South African studies. Domestic workers, being a strata of the working class and the majority being women, have been silenced for a long time.

I have chosen to undertake participatory research because it gives the researcher an opportunity of gaining both first-hand experience and a thorough knowledge of the context of the research.

Among the advantages of participatory research is that the research becomes a two-way process; the domestic workers shared information about their life experiences and from these experiences I learnt to understand their perceptions and interpretations of their world. I became aware

during the course of this research, and as a result of it, of the necessity for a union representing their needs and the need to negotiate for fair employment conditions. This point is mentioned because the majority of the domestic workers interviewed for this study were not affiliated to any domestic workers' organisation. Thus, this research attempts to link domestic workers to organisations representing their needs. Knowledge gathered from the respondents will be made available to the individual respondents, in order that they may improve their situation.

While talking to the domestic workers about their life experiences, it dawned on me that a structured interview schedule would not be appropriate, since it would restrict the interview and turn it into a question-and-answer session. Further, it was not providing a voice for the domestic worker. Having realised this pitfall I then decided to construct key themes as a guide for in-depth, unstructured interviews. This approach made the sessions like ordinary conversations. Plummer (1985: 94) views the structured interview as:

> A crutch: it pushes the researcher into a well defined role (sitting there with a questionnaire in one's lap and permitting the relative security of having both what to ask and what to be heard in reply.)

In addition, this setting creates a division between the privileged and the underprivileged: the privileged being the researcher who has a set of prearranged questions to which the respondent has to respond; the underprivileged being the oppressed domestic workers feeling compelled to answer the questions. Usually the questions limit the responses to yes-or-no answers. No allowance is made for the expression of how it feels

to be asked questions by a stranger who expects all the questions to be answered in a predefined manner. This results in the respondent being pushed into a powerless position with limited options at her disposal. Furthermore, it creates hierarchies of power and subordination. Women have long been deprived of power in both the public and private spheres of their lives. Further, the researcher seldom has the time to go back to the respondent to ascertain the impact of the questions asked. Respondents become objects of research, rather than active participants in the research situation. Thus the style of research techniques for this research has sensitised the researcher to this kind of problem.

Undertaking research of this nature calls for a brief exposition of the researcher's role in South Africa in the present historical epoch. The research was undertaken during a time of intense local and national social unrest, and in a period when the state responded in an increasingly repressive manner to community demands. Hearn (1987:116) states that:

> Indeed historically the state can be seen as merely the temporary status quo of the dominant distribution of the forces of organised violence.

The present situation therefore calls for the joining of hands with progressive community-based organisations, and making academic skills available to the masses, such as advice on legal problems or undertaking research on behalf of the community on needs identified by the community members themselves. The most crucial role that the researcher can play during this time of increased state repression is to make available information on repression, in order to contribute to creating a climate of awareness on the part of the community members. Knowledge has been withheld from the majority of working class people for a long time in South Africa.

3.2 STAGES OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This research has undergone several changes during the time of data collection. This was partly because of the type of problem under investigation, namely the working conditions of African domestic workers in Cape Town in the 1980s. This, being an exploratory study, has meant that certain changes in the style and techniques of the research had to be made. Initially a survey interview schedule was utilised for the collection of data. The kind of data that was sought, namely the experiences of being domestic workers, was not being obtained, and a decision was taken to make use of the life history as the major technique of gathering data for this study. Thus the life history technique has formed the basis of this study, and that is why the study focuses on the experiences of domestic workers which are not quantifiable or able to be gained from the interview schedule. A need was later felt to do a survey. Thirty women were interviewed in order to obtain descriptive data about their work experiences. This survey was undertaken in order to increase the validity and representativeness of the experiences.

3.3 THE SUPPLEMENTARY SURVEY

The survey interview schedule was designed in order to supplement the three life stories which form the core of this study. Forty-two questions were prepared in an open-ended interview schedule. I aimed at obtaining descriptive data about the lives of the domestic workers. The questions were divided into four sections. Section 1 dealt with identity particulars and a brief history. Section 2 dealt with family life and the period spent in Cape Town. Section 3 dealt with employment history, and Section 4 dealt

with group membership, church, community, worker organisations and political organisations. (Refer Appendix 1.)

In order to 'pilot' the schedule, a haphazard sample* of eight domestic workers was selected from domestic workers living in the vicinity of the researcher. This was done in order to test the suitability of the questions. The sample of eight women represent the three categories of domestic workers, namely resident workers, full-time and part-time workers. These domestic workers were interviewed at their places of residence, and they were well known to the researcher.

From the 'pilot' study I discovered the advantages of the self-administered interview schedule in that probing could be done. This enabled the researcher to elicit more information from the respondents. It helped me to clarify ambiguities as well as uncertainties in the order of the questions. For instance, it became clear to me that I had to have some sequence in the grouping and ordering of questions. Identifying information was asked first, followed by questions on residential qualification, key historical moments such as early life and adolescence, present employment, family life and finally group membership and dreams. The ordering of questions in this manner helped in developing ideas and feelings about the experiences of the domestic workers and the topic. Thus the open-ended interview schedule served as both eye opener and sensitiser to the experiences of domestic workers.

The major limitation of the interview schedule was that no substantial

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* The haphazard sample was selected on the basis of the availability of the domestic workers. Open University Block 3 on 4 (1979) gives more information on sampling methods.

in-depth data could be obtained from it. However, the interview schedule was used to supplement the data gathered from the life stories. As the survey interview schedule creates a situation of an expert and one who is the powerless, I decided to conduct the interviews more like a chat, in order to humanise the process. I decided to create a space for both the interviewer and the interviewee by opening up parts of my private life such as the kind of work that I do every day. The interviewees would ask for personal advice on their private lives and after the advice had been given I would start with the interview. I was trying to be sensitive to their needs as women first, making the situation beneficial to both of us.

The findings of the interview schedule will be discussed further in Chapter 4, when the life stories are presented.

3.3.1 Problems Experienced During the Piloting of the Interview Schedule

Originally I had tried to interview ten women from each category of domestic work, viz resident workers, chars or part-time workers, and full-time daily commuters. This was not fulfilled due to the changing patterns of employment. The following were discovered:

i) That more domestic workers were involved in part-time work due to a number of factors:
   (a) More money is earned from doing piece work for various employers.
   (b) Changes in most white employers' economic positions had resulted in few being able to afford full-time workers and therefore resorting to chars.

(c) Resident workers are becoming scarce due to the relaxation of influx control.

ii) That there were problems in accessing the respondents

Respondents were selected on the basis of their availability. In six cases the researcher was given an address where she would meet the prospective respondent in the township, only to find that:

(a) the person was unknown at the address;

(b) the person was not expected in the township during that week-end; or

(c) that the person had long stopped visiting the given address.

Some had expressed fear of losing their jobs, although the purpose of the research was explained. In such cases the researcher phoned the prospective respondents and asked them not to worry as they would not be bothered again.

The State of Emergency has resulted in a strong presence of police in the townships. This coupled with election fever, played a contributory role in intimidating the prospective interviewees.

3.3.2 Discussion of the Interview Survey

As already stated, 30 domestic workers were haphazardly selected on the basis of their availability for this study. The three categories of domestic work represented were resident worker, part-time worker and the daily commuter.

Despite the small size of the sample (0), there is no reason to suppose that it is unrepresentative of the daily work experiences of the average domestic worker. While the results pertain strictly to the sample, generalisations can readily be made to the wider community of African domestic workers on the basis of evidence from other sources used in this thesis.

This interview schedule was administered in order to increase the representation and validity of the life stories which form the core of this study. For instance, issues of childcare problems and oppressive, unequal relationships with employers were echoed by the majority of the women in the sample. Housing was also noted as one issue that affects women, especially domestic workers.

The present situation in South Africa is that the majority of those involved are members of the African working class. In Cape Town this has been the result of the strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preference policy, coupled with influx control measures. This meant that Africans could move into certain employment sectors only if there was not a coloured person available. Priority in education, housing and in most spheres of life was given to persons classified 'coloured'. The living conditions of African people thus deteriorated. Women could be employed only in domestic work, and the value of their labour power was cheapened. The unemployed were subjected to forceful removal to the 'homelands', and it thus became important to be employed rather than face starvation, hunger and poverty in the 'homelands'.

3.4 IN-DEPTH TECHNIQUES

Various techniques have been used in collecting data for the in-depth investigation of the life experiences of the African domestic workers. Participant observation was undertaken, documentary information was consulted, the survey was conducted and lastly the life history technique was utilised.

3.4.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation involved various stages such as entering the field and establishing a relationship with the respondents. In my case participant observation has taken the following forms:

i) exposition of both my mother's experience and mine in domestic employment;

ii) travelling with domestic workers to work;

iii) attendance of meetings of domestic workers in various suburbs.

By the time I started pre-school my mother was long involved in domestic work. When I reached high school I was helping her during the school holidays. This was between 1978 and 1980.

I was involved in domestic work myself, though for a short period only. My involvement was via my mother who was a domestic worker. I learnt first hand that domestic work in and outside one's household oppresses women and reflects the low status that is allocated to women in our society. This low status is based on the inequalities that exist in South Africa as a result of one's gender, 'race' and class. The performance of domestic work

raises the question why women have to do it, and why a particular class and 'race' of women. Women who are involved in domestic work for their living have to perform double shifts, one paid and the other unpaid in their own households.

By travelling together with domestic workers in buses and trains, I became aware of the the invisibility of domestic work. It is rarely studied because it is performed in isolated surroundings by women who have to endure low wages. Contact with domestic workers also revealed the anxieties and pressures caused by unequal, oppressive and unhealthy relationships between maid and madam.

From this contact I learnt that domestic workers' consciousness of exploitation has increased. They have begun to voice their grievances and others are taking legal action against their employers. This being similar to the Amalaita in Johannesburg which was an organised form of resistance in the eighteenth century (Van Onselen, 1982). They have developed strategies of defeating the system; for example, the exchange of passes and the warning of each other when there are raids going on. They also seek legal advice and are prepared to fight in order to change their situation. They are making a new history in which they are active participants.

3.4.2 Meetings

These can be divided into meetings with organisers of domestic workers and general meetings of domestic workers. From the outset of this research I adopted a participatory approach and these meetings were crucial in

assisting me to:

- define the issues facing domestic workers
- check the relevance of the study to the domestic workers.
- identify burning issues like employment conditions, poor wages and forms of organisation

3.4.3 Meetings with Organisers of Domestic Workers

I discussed my research topic with both the organisers of the South African Domestic Workers' Association (SADWA) and the Domestic Workers Association (DWA) in 1984. This was during the early stages of my research. The aim was first to check whether the research I was conducting would be of any relevance to the organisation of domestic workers. Secondly, to request some guidelines on the topic from the people who were involved with domestic workers on an intimate and daily basis. From the discussions with the organisers of domestic workers I was helped to formulate ideas for the survey interview schedule which was discussed earlier. Further, I gained some insights into how they deal with issues of unfair dismissal, wage disputes and verbal harassment. Another advantage was that I was supplied with the publications of these unions and a few files were made available to me in order to grasp some of the problems dealt with on behalf of the domestic worker. I was later invited to attend some of their branch meetings. A relationship was partly established during the early stages of this research in 1983 and 1984 with the organisers of SADWA and DWA* which facilitated consultation during these two years.

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* SADWA and DWA have merged to form South African Domestic Workers' Union on November 30, 1986.

The SADWA organisers in turn consulted me when they had problems related to the welfare of the domestic workers, since I am a professional social worker.

3.4.4 General Meetings

I attended meetings of domestic workers in various suburbs where domestic workers and caretakers come to voice their complaints. This was during 1984, 1985 and 1986. The most striking feature of the meetings was the high level of consciousness of the domestic workers and the caretakers. They were demanding decent and humane treatment from their employers. Advice was given to those who had voiced complaints on appropriate action to take. At one of the meetings, lawyers were invited to advise and educate them about their legal position and what action to take when faced with threats of dismissal or negotiating for a salary increase. They were not prepared to be the passive victims of their employers and are challenging their employers and beginning to organise themselves. This attempt to organise domestic workers culminated in the launching of the National Union of South African Domestic Workers in November 1986. This was a great step towards beginning to bargain for better wages as well as improved working conditions.

The second last meeting I attended was a combined meeting with both employers and employees present. The employer's attendance was very poor, while the workers had packed the house to capacity. From this poor attendance I deduced that many of the absent employers felt that the employer-employee relationship was a private matter. Most of them do not

want to part with their privileges that they get at the expense of their "sisters" whom they employ at slave wages. Lastly, those who attended were the more liberal employers who were trying to improve their employee's position. The aim of the meeting was to build some kind of communication channel between employer and employee. Unfortunately only the "converts" attended. Each side or group, ie. domestic workers and employers, was given an opportunity to discuss their fears and anxieties and try to find a common ground for working together. Again I was able to learn that some employers are willing to improve, or even change, the employment situation of their workers. Even domestic workers are aware that some employers are sensitive to their plight but that these employers are also victims of male dominance and oppression within their own families.

With this kind of participant observation I was able to understand the obstacles and constraints faced by the domestic workers in their life situations. At the same time my role as a participant observer was limited as I had worked as a domestic worker only briefly during the school holidays. Furthermore, my experience was as a full-time daily commuter, not as a part-time or residential worker. These limitations were partly overcome by the collection of data from documents and secondary sources.

3.4.5 Documents: Primary and Secondary Sources

Documents, ie primary and secondary sources, were used in the initial stages of this research as well as during the analysis of the data collected via the life histories. I consulted documents in the form of pamphlets and speeches made in Parliament about domestic workers, files from the South African Domestic Workers Association and the Domestic

Workers Association, as well as poems written in various publications that were related to the plight of the domestic worker. Ideas were also developed from consulting existing literature, as well as making comparisons of the life experiences of domestic workers in other parts of South Africa. Documents have been found to have one great advantage, namely that of not being dependent on any particular individual's willingness to answer questions or make appointments for interviews.

3.4.6 Primary Sources

Domestic Workers Association and South African Domestic Workers Association Publications

As previously mentioned, I had access to some DWA and SADWA publications and records as a result of the relationship that I established with the leadership of these organisations. I was given the opportunity of reading some of their files in order to gain some insight into the complexity of the problems experienced by the domestic workers, including family problems, pension problems, pass problems and unfair dismissals. I was also able to understand the organisational problems that DWA and SADWA have had in recruiting their membership, as some of the domestic workers had consulted them only when they had problems with their employers, or were accused of theft, or suffered verbal and physical harassment. These sources helped me to formulate the key categories for the life histories. For instance, a category on work experiences which reflects the unequal relationship between employer and employee was formulated to help in collecting data for this study. The categories are discussed later in the chapter.

Newspaper Reports

Newspaper cuttings depicting some aspects of the lives of the domestic workers were collected. These helped the researcher to become familiar with the latest developments, for instance, the legal protection of domestic workers, deputations sent to the Minister of Manpower, payment of a living wage and fair and just working conditions, which were demanded by both DWA and SADWA.

Editorial comments on the plight of domestic workers such as verbal and physical harassment, as well as the court victories won by domestic workers involving disputes with their employers, have been of great help. "The great value of these reports lies in their being contemporary and revealing open chaotic clashes and possible dominant body of opinion" (Madge, 93-94, 1975). These reports have helped in the formulation and development of research ideas by making contemporary issues facing domestic workers clearer. This helped to justify the categories formulated for the life histories.

3.4.7 Problems of Documents

When I used the primary and secondary sources, I was aware of the following shortcomings. Documents have the disadvantage of exposing the writer's viewpoint, while newspaper reports tend to sensationalise issues in their reporting so as to increase their commercial success. Editorial opinions tend to perpetuate a particular political view. Thus they serve a particular section of the community. They are bound to espouse an elitist

interpretation of events. L. Kidder (1981: 289) sums up the disadvantages of documents "over-reporting, exposure of accounts, procedural inconsistencies, sampling biases, recording and clerical errors, ganging definition of categories". Newspapers may tend to sensationalise issues in order to increase their selling power. Their source of funding, as well as the restrictions placed upon the press, affect the kind of news they may publish. These shortcomings were taken into account when these publications were used for this study.

Having noted these shortcomings, the researcher decided to hold discussions with union representatives and workers in order to get the authentic views of those interviewed. Keeping regular contact with the domestic workers interviewed for the study was another method used. Being an active-passive listener on the trains and buses also helped to balance the views of newspapers with those of the domestic workers. The attendance of the launching of the National Union of South African Domestic Workers helped. Linking up and discussing the research topic with members of community-based organisations like UWCO and other interested parties helped to overcome the newspaper biases.

3.5 LIFE HISTORIES

Life history research involves the collection of data about a particular individual from birth, covering all the milestone developments and events to the present-day activities. Oliver (1976:17) warns against the dangers of relying on the respondent only by saying that:

> It seems to me that those who prepare and use records have not yet given sufficient weight to the tricks that memory can play, to efforts and rationalization and self-justification that all of us make even if only subconsciously or to the terrible telescoping of time which an interview often encourages and which runs counter to the very essence.

The collection of data from the domestic workers has involved the formulation and development of key categories. These have helped to shape the collection of the life history material, thus helping in the interview to inform the flow of ideas from the domestic workers. This was supplemented by the use of secondary data and the survey conducted. Key categories of life history cover the childhood, youth and family history; employment history; family life and children; social group membership and dreams. The key categories of domestic work, namely full-time resident, full-time daily commuter and part-time worker, helped in the selection of core life stories. These categories are discussed later in this chapter and key themes and issues are discussed later in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.5.1 Life Histories as a Major Technique

Life history as an in-depth technique has been used in order to grasp the domestic worker's subjective interpretation of her life situation. Plummer (1985: 79) states that:

> People's lives are concrete details we have to study; but these lives will inevitably be trapped within the contradictions of constraints and choices, diversity and similarity. The life history's humanistic commitment leads to a humanistic praxis. (my emphasis)

Through domestic workers recounting life histories I was able to elicit data about aspects of the domestic worker's life, like the experiences of

being a mother, childcare and accommodation problems. By gaining intimate knowledge of the domestic worker's lives, I was able to understand the constraints and contradictions in their lives and how they interpret these constraints.

To humanise the research process meant as far as possible involving the respondents in the research. This took place especially in the data analysis stages of the research when I had gone back to the domestic workers to get some clarification on certain ambiguous issues, or when there was a need for clarification of my own interpretation and understanding of their situation. Being a woman and talking to women about their life experiences gave me the opportunity to obtain an intimate knowledge of their lives. I was able to learn how the women shape their history by being actively involved in changing their oppressive situation.

I am giving the 'invisible' majority a chance to be heard in this thesis. The insights gained from my role as participant observer led me to challenge the injustices that the domestic workers experience. I experienced role conflict as I had to be a problem-solver and a researcher. I found half of the interview time spent on being a welfare officer, giving advice and making referrals to Development Board offices, the Black Sash and the Legal Resources Centre. Thus humanising the research process is not without problems.

3.5.2 Disadvantages of Life History

Life histories have one major flaw and that is that a human mind is fallible. People's memories are not always correct and therefore cannot be

relied on fully. Secondly, subjects tend to exaggerate or are unable to relate all the events that have taken place. Thirdly, each individual experiences and interprets life situations differently, so the impact of life events on individuals is different. Mindful of all these shortfalls, the life histories were supplemented with the initial data of the interview schedule, participant observation and use of documents. Another factor is that we as researchers are unable to capture or record a whole series of events that have taken place, that is, we are only able to record a few incidents that have affected and influenced individuals.

Through the use of the life history method, the life lived and experienced by the individual domestic worker is seen as a whole, while acknowledging their potential for changed personal worth which is found to be lacking in some domestic workers because of the low status of the work that they are doing. Seldon (1983:39) states that:

> Oral evidence can be particularly effective in supplying information about relationships, because how relationships function in practice is often very difficult from how they are officially supposed to work.

Therefore, aspects of women's lives which have an impact on them cannot simply be tapped through the use of a pre-structured questionnaire or interview schedule. Such aspects are easily tapped only when women are given an opportunity to relate their experiences as felt and understood by them, and would include questions on gender relations within their household. The value of the life history is best summarised in this way:

> The central value of the life documents and the job they can best do lies in the tapping of the ordinary, ambiguous personal meaning (Plummer, 1985: 83).

The interviews were not tape recorded although later the survey interviews were later recorded.

3.5.3 Selection of the Core Life Histories

The selection and recruitment of life history respondents has already been partly discussed on the previous page and in Appendix 2. I will now focus on the selection of the core life histories.

Four sessions, lasting approximately two hours with eleven domestic workers for in-depth investigation of their life histories, were held. Of the 11, three have been selected to form the core of the study. The three selected consist of one resident worker, one full-time commuter and a part-time worker. With the three, six additional sessions lasting for three hours spread over a period of three months were held. This happened because it takes a long time to get a full, detailed life story from a respondent. In addition, the data gathered had to be read back to the respondent in order to make corrections and amendments.

Martha, Thelma and Miriam are the three domestic workers who form the core of the study. They have been selected because they are just ordinary women who had a good story to tell about their lives as domestic workers. They do not represent any particular category of the working class. They are neither educated nor articulate, nor leading figures with charismatic personalities like Ellen Khuzwayo, Winnie Mandela or Albertina Sisulu. They are women who are prepared to share their life experiences, their perceptions of their daily lives as well as their future and dreams. These are women who are helping to expose injustices in the history of the

1980s. They have suffered, won and lost victories and are learning from their mistakes. They are typical of the average domestic worker who has neither any recognised union nor legal protection from the state like other workers in the economy. The data gathered from them was informed by use of key categories of life experiences which reflect the important aspects of the lives of domestic workers as women and working class members.

3.5.4 Key Themes and Issues

Having worked through the life histories, trying to analyse and make sense of them, key themes emerged which were dominant in each story. From these key themes it was possible to identify particular issues relevant to each story and also issues common to all three stories. These are discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

3.5.5 Presentation of Life Histories

In Chapter 4 the core life histories have been presented according to the categories of experience and the dominant themes that have emerged in each story. In Chapter 5 key issues from these themes are analysed.

Direct quotes from the respondents were used in order to make their stories live. This was done in order to present a story of a living and dynamic person reflecting the lived experiences and capturing the person's definition of her daily situation. Further details concerning the presentation of data are discussed in Chapter 5.

Some editing also took place in order to get rid of unnecessary data. K. Plummer (1985:109) sees editing "as almost sine qua non of any personal document of research". Some form of selection has to be made in order to make sense of the data collected, as well as keeping the sequence of events, for example, in tracing the employment of the particular domestic worker from the first to the present day.

The three life histories have been contextualised within the daily experiences of many African domestic workers within South Africa. The impact of both racist and class oppressive legislation is examined in the lives of domestic workers. This is related to their future and dreams, as most have indicated a wish to stay as a family and remain unmarried parents, and obtain property rights and ultimate self-employment, which have been denied them because of the politico-legal system in South Africa.

3.5.6 Problems Experienced in the Presentation of Data

I did not use the tape recorder in gathering the data during the interview sessions. This meant that some selection of what data was recorded had to take place. Shorthand had to be used in recording as it was impossible to capture everything that was being said. It was difficult to keep all the documentation as I share a room with three people at home, and that meant that more time had to be spent in the field, re-reading the material to the respondents and trying to fill gaps. However, this exercise was beneficial at the same time as I was able to ask for clarification of statements, thus clarifying ambiguities.

The last problem was that I am a woman, an African and a member of the working class and writing about working women. The issue was how to present the data in an unemotional manner. Objectivity is a myth and this was soon resolved by the encouragement received from people who were, and are, also writing about domestic workers, as well as from the respondents themselves.

Van den Berghe (1969: 195) states that "any account of apartheid must include not only 'objective' realities but also the subjective feelings of the participants in the system".

The women interviewed for this research were assured of the importance of their life stories and their benefit to other domestic workers. It was further pointed out to the women concerned that not only the researcher would be the benefactor but also that parts of the research could be made available to their union for educational purposes. This was done with the purpose of raising the consciousness of their exploitation as women and making them aware of the existence of a union representing their needs.

3.6 CONFIDENTIALITY

The respondents were guaranteed anonymity in that false names were to be used, thus assuring them and increasing their responsiveness. Further, they were assured that their positions would not be jeopardised in any way, as a change of address and certain life events that could easily be traced to them would be excluded in the final writing up of the life stories. The data gathered from them would be shared between myself and my supervisor, as well as a few members of the sociology department. I also

assured the respondents that the raw data from them was being kept in a file which is always locked and stored in a safe place.

Having gained the most sensitive information about the lives of the domestic workers, I was left with the task of ensuring that no harm or embarrassment befell the women I interviewed. One problem is the use and the interpretation of some of the data collected. Intimate personal details about sex were left out as racially prejudiced statements have been uttered about the promiscuity of domestic workers, as well as working class women in general.

As Finch (1984: 83) has emphasised, "women are especially vulnerable and the data shared in an intimate relationship of trust could be used and interpreted to harm women". That is why I have put the appeal stated earlier. This means that extreme care has to be taken in revealing certain experiences of women. Furthermore it involves the protection of the collective interest, thus siding and identifying with those who are subordinated.

3.7 CONCLUSION

A final point which has methodological implications, is that a claim to be apolitical in this research would be impossible, as any study of women's experience is a political issue. It touches on the basis of inequalities existing in our society. It is impossible to be aloof from the situation being studied. I am part of the context of study and share both class and racial experiences of oppression with the respondents. The relationships engaged in with the respondents and my own experiences as a domestic

worker justify my identification with them as well as my commitment to the liberation of women. "A feminist sociologist of course will be on the side of the women studied" (Finch, 1984: 85).

It is not only feminist research that is value laden but all social science. The material interest of a particular researcher indicates the basis of the stance taken during the process of research. The interests the research is to serve is an important issue that the researcher has to bear in mind. Thus I. Evans (1987: 3) emphasises that: "Academic research should be used in the interest of the community, and not to improve or further obscure the existing patterns of domination and exploitation". It is therefore justified to take a particular stance and identify with the oppressed communities.

> A feminist methodology of social science requires that this rationale of social science be described and discussed not only in feminist research in general. It requires further that the mythology of hygienic research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be placed by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias, it is a condition under which people come to know each other and admit others. (Oakley, 1980: 59)

Women in this study have therefore been made active historical subjects rather than being objectified and seen as the "other". Their experiences lived and interpreted by them are the subject matter of this study. This has been a step towards "the creation of the sociology of women for women."

EMPLOYERS THINK WE ARE MACHINES, THAT WE ARE MADE OF STEEL AND IRON AND NOT FLESH AND BLOOD, AS THEY SELDOM UNDERSTAND WHEN WE ARE ILL.

Mrs B. (3/06/86)

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF LIFE STORIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the life stories of three domestic workers, Miriam the full-time resident worker, Thelma the full-time daily commuter and Martha the part-time/char worker. Their stories form the core of this study. The three women have been selected because each of their stories highlights the experiences of being an African woman domestic worker in Cape Town. (Refer to Appendix 2 for further details on problems experienced in data presentation.)

Like the rest of the African women in South Africa, and as domestic workers in particular, the respondents in this study have faced juro-legal systems which have branded them, and forced them to carry passes. They have been subjected to daily harassments in and outside of the work situation. As women members of the working class, they have been discriminated against on the basis of their 'race', denied access into other sectors of the economy, as well as access to educational opportunities. Left with limited options they resorted to doing domestic work which subjects them to ultra-exploitation and oppression. At work they are faced with struggles against payment of low wages, lack of sick and pension benefits as well as relations of oppression with employers. They have no union rights. Power relations are unequal and they have to take orders from various members of their employer's family who assert their authority over them. Often they are accommodated in 'back yards',

thus ensuring total control over their movements.

Outside the work situation, as members of the working class without any political rights, they are faced with the struggle for accommodation, high rents, enforced sales tax, high rates of inflation, lack of childcare facilities and harassment by police and board officials for permission to live in Cape Town.*

These women have attempted in various ways to circumvent the State's embargo on their movements, in particular to shuffle them back to the rural areas. Survival skills have been devised which aim at challenging the State's policy of influx control. Such skills have included their continued presence in Cape Town. African women have in the process suffered losses and have won victories and have learnt from their mistakes. Loss of life has been incurred and the victories have meant that influx control has been partly scrapped. Their family/household members can, to a limited extent, stay together now.

The women in this study, as well as other African women, have increased their level of organisation. They have joined political groups and in this study Martha, the part-time worker, is a member of a Civic Association and the United Women's Congress. The majority of others are affiliated to church organisations. The church organisations, such as the Mother's Union, Federations and Fellowships, have provided the domestic workers in this study, and many others, with an avenue for voicing their frustrations as well as a support system.

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*Inspectors were officials employed by the then Department of Bantu Affairs to help the police in enforcing influx control policy in Cape Town.

From the political organisations they have learnt to voice their grievances in a united and organised manner, like that demonstrated during the squatter destructions. The women refused to have their families scattered. They demanded the right to live as a family and be provided with decent accommodation. This they partly won, as the squatter camps of KTC and Cross Roads are still existing.

Each story has something to tell about how the influx control system has retarded the progress of the African population in Cape Town in the 1980s. Africans have been denied property rights in Cape Town. The 99 year lease option was not applicable until 1985. Secondly, the women could not own any property or even be allocated a house without a marriage certificate. Thirdly, the growth of the African population was controlled by the non-provision of family housing and the building of more single hostels. Pass arrests at night and street arrests are other methods used by the State to control the movement of the African population.

4.2 STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

In each case there is a structure to the presentation of the stories. The first step is a brief biographical summary of the domestic worker. This is done in order to give a global view of the person behind the story.

The second step is a brief discussion of the reasons given for the selection of the story. This step is undertaken so as to highlight the uniqueness of the experiences lived by the particular domestic worker.

The third step is the presentation of the stories, first Miriam's, and then Thelma's and Martha's. As stated in Chapter 3, each story is presented according to key categories denoting historical moments in the life of a particular domestic worker from childhood experiences until present-day activities. The types of social groups to which domestic workers are affiliated are mentioned, as well as the benefits they get from these groups. Their future dreams are presented in order to highlight their needs and wants as women. Each story is divided into the following categories:

i Early Childhood, Youth and Family History
ii Employment History
iii Family Life and Children
iv Social Group Membership experiences
v Dreams

These categories are discussed in Appendix 2.

A conscious attempt has been made to retain the substance of each story. Direct quotations from the words of the respondents have been used. These quotations are intended to preserve the richness and originality of each story, to dramatise the story and to capture the real life experiences as related by the respondent.

Each story is concluded by an analysis of the themes that have emerged from it.

The fourth step is a brief analysis of the key themes which have emerged

from each story. The key themes give an indication of patterns in the lives of the domestic workers as well as their own families. I have highlighted the variations of the impact that the influx control system has had on each domestic worker: how a combination of patriarchy, African culture and racial capitalism have shaped the lives of domestic workers and affected their future and dreams. On the basis of these key themes, common issues for all the three domestic workers are analysed in Chapter 5.

Pseudonyms have been used in order to protect the identity of the respondents. This was done in order to increase their willingness to share their experiences without jeopardising their jobs or hurting their families. The first name, for instance Thelma, is used in the place of employment and is usually of European origin. If one does not have a name, usually the employers give her a 'Christian' name. It carries some form of painful experience for the domestic worker. They are seldom addressed in a respectful manner, even by their employer's children. The second name, for instance, Nomathemba, at least carries some form of respect and in many instances a prefix such as 'sisi' or 'mama' is used by those junior to the domestic worker. The third name, No-Amen or No First, Nowezile symbolises some form of change in the domestic worker's lifestyle, of dress and surname when she marries. Usually the name is given by the elder sister-in-law or the parental aunt of the husband of the domestic worker. It carries some form of oppression by the in-laws and the husband, who all wish to impose some form of authority over the woman. Often the husband/in-law bond is so strong that they all band together in making unreasonable, and African-custom legitimised, demands on the newly-wedded woman. Newly-wed women have not only to change their place of residence and

undergo some form of initiation by the in-laws, but they have also to change their surname. The last two names are mostly used in their own families: the pseudonyms given are a reality in their lives.

These names allow the world of married domestic workers to be viewed from three dimensions, namely: the paid labour in 'white' kitchens, unpaid labour in their own kitchens and the demands made by their in-laws and husbands.

4.3 MIRIAM NOMSA - RESIDENTIAL WORKER

4.3.1. Brief Biographical Summary

Miriam was born on a farm in the Molteno district. She is the elder in a family of two, one boy and a girl. Both her parents were farm labourers. Her mother was a domestic worker in the farm kitchen while her father was a farm hand.

Her family was evicted from the farm after a long period of service to the farmer. Miriam's family was evicted because of her mother's refusal to terminate her schooling in order to be a nanny to their employer's children. Her family struggled for a long time trying to find both shelter and employment. Eventually they secured a council house in Jamestown near Queenstown. Miriam's family started disintegrating when her father found employment in the Johannesburg mines. Her mother went into domestic work. Her father sent very little money to them and sometimes nothing at all. He later died in a mine accident. As the elder child in her family, she was forced to leave school in Standard Five at the age of sixteen. She was pregnant then.

Her first employment was as a domestic worker in Queenstown. She worked as a nanny for four years until a friend advised her to seek alternative employment in Cape Town. On arrival in Cape Town, she was unemployed for three months in 1976. She had stayed with a 'home-girl'* at Old Cross Roads. She then found part-time employment as a domestic worker. In 1979 she gave birth to her second son. She sent him to her mother at nine months and has not seen him since then. She has had three convictions for

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* Home girl means a friend who comes from the same area as the respondent.

pass offences and her present boyfriend has helped her to pay the fines.

In 1980 she found her present job with its inhumane and unhealthy working conditions, denied annual leave and proper accommodation. With the opening of Site C in Khayelitsha she was given the fifteen month permit which allows her to be in Cape Town on condition that she secures employment. She has built herself a shanty which she hopes to share with her mother and two sons.

4.3.2 Reasons for the Selection of the Case

Miriam's case has been selected for the following reasons: firstly, the story reflects the plight of the African people as a whole in South Africa. Miriam was born into a family of 'bywoners' who were later evicted from the farm because of a clash between her mother and her female employer.

Secondly, her family lived the life of 'bywoners'; her whole family contracted to a particular farmer until they secured a council house in Jamestown. Thirdly, in Cape Town she is 'contracted' (i.e. in her pass book there is an endorsement stating that she is employed by Mrs X from a specific date). Her employer treats her like a slave and subjects her to the same conditions as those on the farm in Molteno. Her conditions of employment are appalling. Fourthly, she is involved in a squatter struggle which resulted in her being allocated a shanty at Khayelitsha. Housing is an important issue for African women in Cape Town since they have a long history of denial of access to housing and property ownership. Thus, since the 1970s they have led the struggle for housing.

4.3.3 The Life Story

i EARLY CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND FAMILY HISTORY

"I was born thirty-two years ago on a farm in the Molteno district. Both my parents were farm labourers. Mother had worked in the kitchen of the farm house doing all the domestic chores. She was doing the washing, ironing, child caring of the farmer's children as well." Illiteracy is common among farm workers. Farmers themselves are not obliged by any law to provide school facilities for their employees. Both her parents were illiterate and like their parents were 'bywoners' on the farms. Denial of knowledge to farm labourers serves as a strategy to keep the working class under the control of their bosses.

"We were two at home, one son and one daughter. Farmers are in control of their employees' families." The farmer contracts with the head of the family on an individual basis but expects the labours of other family members to be used as well. Thus employees' children become part of the workforce. "While I and my brother were still toddlers mother had taken us to the farmhouse and we played near the house while she worked." Apprenticeship of farm labourers' children begins early. "At the age of seven years I was already being sent around the house, collecting eggs from the chicken run and helping with washing the dishes." While she was a kitchen hand, her brother was herding the cows. Between her brother and herself there is a three-year age difference. She informed me that she was very close to her brother as they had spent most of their time together.

"I and my brother started schooling at the same time. We had to walk long distances to get to school as there were very few schools in the farming districts." When more labour power is needed on the farm, the farmer makes use of his employee's children. "Our schooling was every now and then disrupted when there was plenty of work to be done on the farm." This was mostly during the harvest time. The authority of the father is undermined and his family has to live by the rules set by the farmer. Thus children from an early age are socialised into different class and racial privileges. "Mother, who was very keen to have us educated, was disturbed by the disruption. As a result we were were often behind in our studies and having started schooling at a very late age (10 years and her brother 7 years) made matters worse."

"I adored my father who had worked as a slave for the farmer. Father had demanded complete obedience from his children. He was a very strict man and would sjambok us if we did not finish our daily task at home. Mother was a darling on the other hand and has cared for us very well; she used to protect us from the farmer, his wife and my father," Further: "I used to hate the way she had given herself to work for the unthankful farmer's wife. The farmer's wife used to give us very little food and overworked us."

Farm labourers as members of the working class without any workers' rights have to live by the rule of the farmer. "Life on the farm was a mixture of misery and happiness. We had happy times as a family especially when my father bought us shoes from his meagre earnings or when he told us stories about his childhood experiences." Miriam had never heard or seen her parents quarrel. They had their way of doing things. "My mother never

spoke to my father in a harsh and high voice. She was very soft spoken even when she was angry." Miriam was aware of the cultural influences of the gender prescription of rules, as she stated: "In fact the African culture does not allow women to shout at their men and even argue with them. My father had the final word in our family."

Miriam's mother had challenged the authority of the farmer over her children's schooling and such actions were followed by later dismissal. "Life changed dramatically on the farm as mother was getting sick and tired of her children having to be taken out of school every now and then. In one year we had to miss the end of the year examinations because of the harvest. Mother was very annoyed and complained in the strongest words to her husband and the farmer." When her mother complained to her husband, he had reminded her that they were employees and that the boss's word was final. However, they were fortunately promoted to the next standard.

Gender divisions of labour were part and parcel of Miriam's family life. In their house (which was made of mud and consisted of two rooms) the division of labour was very clear. "Mother and I had to do the cooking, washing and fetch the water from the farmhouse, while father and my brother never helped with housework." During their spare time, her father would either visit his friends at nearby farms or just go hunting. I and mother seldom had time to rest, we were always on our feet." Thus the experiences of the double day subjects women to exploitation, as their labour power is compensated below its value. Their labour input is worth much more than the farmer's compensation. This labour force has never been quantified, leading to the exclusion of this labour force in the unemployment and economically active regional and national statistics.

Their eviction from the farm came when her mother refused to allow Miriam to leave school permanently in order to work in the farmhouse. Her father, for a change, stood by his wife by refusing to bow to the farmer's wife's demand. "The farmer's wife was demanding that I should terminate my schooling in order to be a child minder. When my parents refused to give in to the farmer's demand, they were immediately evicted from the farm." And this was the beginning of the struggle to seek work and shelter. Eventually their father secured a council house in Jamestown near Queenstown.

Life in Jamestown

"On our arrival in Jamestown, I was doing Standard Five at the age of sixteen. My brother was doing Standard Three at the age of thirteen years. Life was hard and my family was struggling. Mother tried with great difficulty to find employment as a domestic worker." The migrant labour system has broken up many families within the African working class. "Father found employment in the Johannesburg mines. The family started to disintegrate. We seldom heard from father in Johannesburg." Married men live like single men on the mines and, under these conditions, tend to establish other relationships to the detriment of the family unit. Miriam's father seldom sent money to his family. "Mother was struggling to make ends meet and still had to pay the monthly rent for our house." Houses in African townships are hired out to the occupant on a monthly basis. Failure to pay rent would have resulted in their eviction. "The death of our father came as a rude shock to all of us. My mother was heartbroken and it took her some time to accept the death of her partner." Miriam's father died in an underground mine accident. African workers are

allocated numbers in their employment; their personhood ceases until they die. As is common with mine workers who die in underground accidents, Miriam's father's body was never recovered. He was presumed dead. "We never got much from his death." Poverty then forced Miriam to go and work in order to supplement the family income. "I had to leave school and help mother to maintain the family."

Miriam continued: "When I left school at the age of sixteen, I was already expecting a baby. There was this boy who was working at the mines whom I had an affair with." Denial of paternity is common practice on the part of men, and women are forced to shoulder the burden alone. "When I told him that I was pregnant he promised to pay the 'damages'.* But he disappeared and I had to find stable employment in order to maintain myself, the baby, my mother and my younger brother." Illegitimacy is normally frowned upon by African culture. Mothers are supposed to give proper guidance to their daughters: generally, African mothers frown upon giving sexual counselling to their daughters. "The pregnancy was another blow to my mother as motherhood outside the wedlock was a disgrace in our small community of Jamestown. Usually the mother is blamed for failing to be exemplary to her daughter. I was also disappointed with myself but had to accept the reality of the situation. Further, my brother lost interest in schooling and he found employment in the mines in Johannesburg. He never wrote home till today."

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* Damages: when a girl is impregnated under African custom the culprit has to pay a certain number of cows, also compensation for the lost virginity. This helps in the upbringing of the child. It is a form of maintenance.

ii EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Early Employment in Jamestown

Many domestic workers find their jobs through contacts with friends. Advertisement is by word of mouth. "I found my first job through my mother's friend who was sympathetic to my mother's plight. I commuted daily. The advantage was that I could see my son and my mother daily. While I was at work my mother took care of my son." Women have to carry the burden of supplementing family income. "My mother was then selling candles, sweets and matches to maintain the family. I worked as a nanny looking after a one-year old baby and doing a few chores around the house. I earned R10 per month working for a family of four." Strict supervision by employers of domestic workers is hated by most domestic workers. Her employer did not order her around although she had to work hard. Her employer was very lazy and had delegated all the work to her. "I left the job when my employer's baby was four years old, was given some old clothing as a token of good service. Madam had tried to persuade me to keep the job but I declined the offer as I needed more money."

Higher wages forced Miriam to change her domestic job. "I found alternative employment at a local coffee shop where I used to fetch my former employer's morning paper. I had suffered for a period of three years before finding the job at the coffee shop. The salary was much better than what I had earned as a nanny. I was earning R15 per month working long and strenuous hours." Domestic work is strenuous whether done in a private house or in public places like hotels and restaurants. "I worked seven days per week, starting at seven in the morning until very late at night. The wages were low and life was hard but better than what I

was getting as a domestic worker." As she could not meet all her baby's needs as well as her mother's, she took a friend's advice and sought 'greener pastures'* in Cape Town. Her son was almost three years old when she left him with her elderly mother. "I felt bad about having to leave my son and mother." Her mother, however, had encouraged her to take the chance as there was no future for her in Jamestown.

Employment in Cape Town

'Homegirls' and 'homeboys' are the socialisers of the new arrivals in urban areas. They provide some kind of security until one has established himself/herself. Miriam arrived in Cape Town in 1976 and stayed with a 'homegirl' at Old Cross Roads. She stayed with her 'homegirl' for a period of three months. This 'homegirl' had a shanty at Old Cross Roads.

"I was unemployed for the first three months and fully dependent on my friend. While at home I had helped with the house chores, cleaning, washing and cooking. I had also stood for another home girl at her place of employment while she had gone home to attend to family matters." She did ironing twice a week at Sea Point, earning R15 per week. Asked what she did with the money, the reply was that she felt she had to contribute towards her staying in her 'homegirl's' house.

When her friend arrived back she was unemployed again and had to rely on relieving friends every now and then. "I did not have the permit to be in

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* Greener pastures: In Cape Town some women returning to the rural areas had grown fat due to unhealthy eating habits and had used skin lightening cream because of the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy. These signs to their sisters in rural areas were an indication of successful urban life.

contract. There are always long queues and a lot of time is wasted waiting in these queues.

Working Conditions

Wages

Domestic workers are denied any bargaining rights relating to terms of employment: these are decided by the employer. Power relations are unequal because of the diverse cultural, racial, economic, political and social backgrounds. Usually the employer comes from an advantaged background compared to that of the domestic worker, who is desperate for work and willing to accept any price for her labour.

Miriam earns R100 per month. She is unhappy with her present salary. "My monthly budget is as follows: I send R20 per month to mother who is caring for my two sons. Mother is a pensioner. I put R10 every month into a banking account as I have to have some money when I go home, or when something happens to me like ill-health, injury or when a death occurs. The rent is R12 for the shanty that I occupy at Site C in Khayelitsha. The rest is spent on busfare, clothing for my family and in buying food as I get none from my employer." Asked whether she had asked for a rise in her salary, she replied: "My employer had informed me that she has no money and is also desperately in need of more money herself." She was disappointed as she is not being paid a decent wage and has not had a raise for the past five years.

Cape Town and this had made my chances of securing employment very slim. 'Madams' wanted to see the pass before they can employ a person. If you do not have any pass and even references from previous employers they are reluctant to employ you." Eventually Miriam found her present employment through an introduction made by one of her casual employers.

Present Employment: Resident Worker

Miriam is presently employed as a full-time resident worker. She has been with her present employer since 1980, a year after the birth of her second child. Childcare problems hit women the hardest. Separation of children from the earliest age from their parents is common among working class women domestic workers. "I had to send my second son, who is now seven years old, to my mother in Jamestown as I had nobody to look after him in Cape Town. My son was approximately nine months when I sent him to Jamestown with a 'homegirl' and a note to my mother: I could not keep my baby with me as 'madams' do not employ you when you have a baby. They say that you are going to waste time looking after your child while their work is not done."

The Development Boards are government agents which control the movement of African women. Miriam had to be registered at the Development Board's labour bureau when she was first employed by her present employer. She said: "From that day I was free from police harassment as I had already three previous convictions, all for pass arrests. Registration with the Development Board meant that I had to work for my 'madam' for twelve months and then renew the contract." At the beginning of each year, Miriam and her employer had to go to the the Labour Bureau offices to renew her

Benefits

The type of fringe benefits that domestic employees get depends mostly on employers' lifestyles. Miriam gets six afternoons off from duty per week. "I knock off at 2.30 p.m. to be back on duty at 7.00 a.m. the following day." Miriam does not get any annual leave nor sick benefits. She has not had any holiday leave since she started working five years ago for her present employer. She said: "I miss my children as well as my elderly mother." When she is sick she has to pay out of her pocket for medical expenses.

Tasks : Working Day

The employer can stretch or reduce the worker's working day depending on her needs. Miriam starts work at 7.00 a.m. "I start by preparing lunch boxes for my employers as well as their three boys who are at school. I then prepare breakfast as well as their school uniforms." Domestic workers are at the disposal of their employers and their family members. "I have to rush around like mad as they all demand this and that from me, shoes, shirts and even their ties. After they have left I have to pick up things left scattered behind by them. The house is left looking like a pigsty." Miriam cleans the house and does the washing and ironing manually. She washes and irons on alternate days as she cannot cope with the work to be done each day. Every second week she cleans the windows of this five-roomed house which are huge, as well as the interior glass doors with brass handles. She finishes her work at 2.30 p.m. and is usually worn out by then. She does not have a decent rest as by that time her employer's children are back from school.

Relationship-with Employer

Relationships between employer and employee in a domestic setting are characterised by both 'race', gender and class privileges. Miriam says she has a very poor relationship with her 'madam': "She is very protective towards her silly children, encourages them to be rude to me. When I complain she takes no notice of me. Her children treat me as though I am one of their toys. She hardly shares a joke with me as it is always the giving of orders and complaints about incomplete jobs."

She says she has a good relationship with her 'master' as he always responds when she complains about his children's rude behaviour towards her. Miriam further sees her female employer as a slave driver. "When she is at home during her off-days from work she works you like a slave and she is very lazy. One thing I hate most about her is the leaving of her panties scattered around in her bedroom and expect me to wash them." Miriam has resisted some of her employer's demands: she refused to wash her employers panties. "I told her to wash her underwear as I wash mine. That was a big battle and she now washes them herself."

Moreover, provision of healthy and decent food for employees has been a strategy used by employers to control their employees. Employees have to adapt and adjust to what the employer is prepared to give them. Miriam referred to her female employer as stingy and inhumane. "She is not used to sharing as she gives me dry bread as a meal for the day. No decent and healthy food is provided for me."

The different worlds that both employer and employee come from prohibits the development of any 'sisterhood' feelings between the two. Employers seldom have a clue about their domestic worker's lifestyle. "My employer is very unhelpful even when I have a problem either financially or just need advice. She has been promising to give me a three-week holiday with full pay at the end of the year. This depends on her family's holiday plans." What also annoys Miriam most about her employer's family is the fact that her employer's boys call her by her first name although she is almost their mother's age. Thus the manner in which employers and their families communicate with their domestic worker reinforces their different class and racial backgrounds as well as the gender hierarchy inherent in them.

Living Conditions at Work

Control over the domestic worker's living space enforces the employer's privileged position over her employee. Miriam has no decent accommodation at work. "I sleep in a garage which has broken windows with absolutely no privacy. The garage also serves as a playroom for her children." Resident work normally ensures a domestic worker a room and some form of privacy. But for Miriam this was not the case. Her dreams of securing a room at last were shattered as her employer did not adhere to basic minimum standards of providing proper accommodation for her employee. "I am treated like a slave and even worse than a dog as the dog has a kennel to sleep in. In my case there is absolutely no privacy. There is no wardrobe nor a private bath and toilet. Water has to be fetched from the kitchen in the main house. I only have a decent wash when the family members have all gone either to work or school."

iii FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDREN

Family life for domestic servants and their families/household members is distorted. Domestic workers as mothers are unable to fulfil their role as nurturers and socialisation models for their children.

Miriam is an unmarried mother of two sons aged fourteen and seven. The children have different fathers who both deserted her. Asked why she had the second child she told me that the contraceptives had failed her. Further,"I feared risking my life by having an abortion and for me an abortion is equal to taking an innocent life. I had met the man who impregnated me in 1980 while I was staying at my homegirl's house in Old Cross Roads."

"My two sons are presently being cared for by their elderly grandmother who is a pensioner living in Jamestown. I miss them a lot and have contact with them via the post. I have not seen them for the past five years. My youngest son was nine months when I last saw him." In single-parent families, the remaining spouse has to play the dual models for her children. Thus Miriam says: "I am beginning to worry as my mother is getting old and the boys are growing up fast and need somebody stronger to discipline them. I have to bring them to Cape Town now that I have a shanty and I can see them every week-end." Domestic workers seldom have time to devote to their children's schooling, thus at times problems develop. Asked about her sons' schooling she said "the youngest son has not started schooling yet but the eldest is doing Standard 2. To be honest, I am not really well informed about their school progress and I am worried sick about their future."

Relationship with Boyfriend

The type of relationship that domestic workers have with their male friends is dictated to them by their employers. Regular contact depends on the free time that the worker has available to her.

Miriam is unmarried but does have a boyfriend whom she describes as being very helpful. "He has paid fines three times for my pass arrests. He has also had me registered in his house as a lodger which helped towards the allocation of a shanty at Khayelitsha." She refers to him in this way, "He is a true friend and has actually helped me to build the three-roomed shanty which I occupy at Khayelitsha. We also see each other every week-end." Boyfriends play an important role in supplementing the domestic worker's salary. Miriam's boyfriend also helps her by buying the groceries for her but he does not help with the house work. Asked about the possibility of marriage, she replied: "I am not yet ready."

Living conditions in the township

The controls which have been put on the provision of housing for Africans in the Western Cape have implications for women such as Miriam and have discouraged many from remaining in the area permanently.

Miriam occupies a shanty at Site C in Khayelitsha. "Before the allocation of the shanty I was a lodger in my present boyfriend's home at Old Cross Roads. I was registered in his family card as we had thought that would make things much easier for me when it comes to the allocation of houses. I did not want to stay permanently with him in this house as he is sharing the house with his mother, brothers and aunts. I wanted something which

would be registered in my name." Miriam said that life was not easy as a lodger. First, problems developed with his family. "They expected me to serve them which I refused to do as I was not married to their son."

Taxation of the limited salary that Miriam earned took place at Cross Roads. "Outside the house I was taxed heavily by the committee which was ruling Old Cross Roads. Almost every week I had to pay R10 towards the legal battles being fought which were to legalise our stay in Old Cross Roads. I had to pay the money as I wanted to secure a house for myself. I found myself joining one of the women's groups in Old Cross Roads in order to be able to gain some sewing skills. I attended the community meetings that were called almost every week in order to be conversant with the daily developments in Old Cross Roads. The meetings were mostly dominated by men. Women seldom spoke."

When she was asked how she got the site at Khayelitsha, she replied: "When the government announced that people who are interested in moving to Site C would be helped to remove their furniture, and be given tents until they were able to build themselves a house, I jumped for the opportunity as I was in need of accommodation of my own. Further, we were given an 18 months permit to be in Cape Town and to find accommodation. I was lucky because I was already employed and that secured my position."

Miriam's boyfriend helped her to build a three-roomed 'shanty' which is partially furnished with goods bought from whites who stay near her place of employment. She pays a monthly rent of R12 for the shanty. There is no private toilet nor tap. "I get water from the communal tap which is about a kilometre from my shanty." She locks her shanty during the week as there

is nobody at home. She relies on her neighbours to keep an eye on her house. She spends weekends with her boyfriend in her shanty.

iv SOCIAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The isolated life that domestic workers are faced with daily is compounded by their powerless position. Therefore religion plays a dominant role in alleviating their situation. Miriam is affiliated to the Dutch Reformed Church which she claims to have joined while they were still staying on the farm in Molteno. She seldom goes as she has to attend to her housework during the weekends. She emphasised that her not going to church does not necessarily mean that she does not believe in God. She regards herself as a Christian.

v DREAMS

Dreams are a product of our subconscious mind. Dreams are mainly a reflection of our deprivation and personal wants. Miriam's dreams are to educate her two sons so that they do not struggle like she did. "With better education they can secure themselves decent and better paying jobs and not have to go to the mines as my father and my younger brother." She went further to say : "I also wish to have my whole family, meaning mother and sons, staying together and sharing the little money that I get."

4.4 KEY THEMES

4.4.1 Working Class Background

Miriam comes from a working class background. Both her parents were farm labourers and, like domestic workers, they had no workers' rights. They had only their labour power to sell in order to earn a living. They could not vote and were denied property rights. The result was that they were accommodated on employer premises. This was because of their racial classification and class background. Both her parents were illiterate as they were deprived of free access to educational institutions. They had no skill qualification and were forced to become farm labourers. It is only recently that attempts have been made to form a union to represent farm labourers and domestic workers. Without such a union, farm workers were subjected to the control of the farm owner. The whole family was employed and as a result Miriam and her younger brother missed school at times in order to help on the farm. They were grossly underpaid and accommodated in poor structures. The authority of her parents was almost totally removed as they were all subjected to the will of the farm owner. As members of the African working class, they had no access to legal recourse. When they were evicted from the farm her parents could not challenge their eviction in any court of law.

Miriam, like her parents, has an elementary education of Standard Five and is similarly denied all the rights as a worker, mother and member of the working class. Like her mother eventually, she was forced into doing domestic work whether in Jamestown or in Cape Town.

4.4.2 Family Disorganisation

Unfair dismissals are the order of the day for the African working class and after their eviction from the farm, Miriam's parents had to find alternative employment. However, because of the racism entrenched in employment practices in South Africa, that is, the promotion of the migrant labour system among the Africans, their father was recruited to the Johannesburg mines. This racist, sexist employment practice encourages the employment of able-bodied men and migrant labour results in the disorganisation of the family structure. The movement of her father to the mines resulted in the change in her family structure. Her mother became the head of the household. This structure became permanent when her father was killed in a mine accident. The fragmentation of her family occurred further when her younger brother moved to the mines in Johannesburg and she to Cape Town. Thus fragmentation of family life is a common feature in South Africa within the African working class, and this increases state and capital's control over the working class.

Miriam's mother was forced to seek employment in the domestic work sector. The capitalist employer contracts with the individual and the low wages paid to Miriam's father made no allowance for his family. Further, the rising cost of living forced both parents as well as the children to go out and work. They also experienced childcare problems as they had to leave their children alone due to the absence of the provision of child-care facilities for the African working classes. The state and capital further exploits the working class by the non-provision of family housing for migrant workers. Only hostels are built, thus ensuring more control over the lives of the workers and their families.

Miriam experienced the same trauma of being separated from her two sons, constantly hit by feelings of guilt that she is neglecting her own children. As a domestic worker, and a single parent, she could not bring her own family to stay with her. When she was first employed as a domestic worker her child was left with her mother. Her own family is presently fragmented as her two sons are left behind with her elderly mother in Jamestown.

4.4.3 Dependent Relationship with Employer

Miriam has been exposed since her childhood to a dependent and exploitative relationship with employers. Her father's authority was challenged every now and then by his employer; they were evicted from their farm home and were unable to challenge this action. While resident on the farm with her parents she had to perform domestic chores as an employer's dependent. On arrival in Jamestown she was employed in the domestic sector, and was grossly underpaid and had no worker's rights. Even when she changed employment and moved to a coffee shop, as a rightless worker she was subjected to long strenuous hours. On arrival in Cape Town, without a permit authorising her to stay and find work, she accepted the terms of employment set by her employer which again were to her disadvantage. Because of racial policies, as an African woman she was left with limited options at her disposal and had to accept the unfair and oppressive working conditions, as African women are only employable in the domestic sector. Her employer of five years for whom she works on a contract basis, pays her a sum of R100 per month and, because she is an illegal employee and part of the working class African stratum in Cape Town, she has not

had any pay increase for the past five years. This arrangement is a result of the absence of any law which sets basic wages for domestic workers. The only arrangement that exists between madam and servant is the common law agreement. Since no legal protection exists for domestic workers, they are thus subjected to extreme exploitation and oppression by their employers. Miriam has had to endure all the unfair employment practices as she is 'held hostage' by the government's requirement of 10 years continuous service. Her employer felt no obligation to provide Miriam with decent accommodation. She failed to observe the minimum standards of proper ventilation, privacy and habitability of a room. She treats her like a slave and verbally abuses her. She treats Miriam like a child rather than an adult. She takes no notice of the rude behaviour exhibited by her children towards Miriam. Miriam's employer's children call her by her name although she claims that she is almost their parent's age. Thus the first experience that a white child has with a woman of colour sets the pattern for the child's behaviour and attitude towards other black people. The child is socialised to see all black people as servants and inferior to white people, while the blacks are socialised to believe that they have to serve the whites and thus accept their employment as domestic workers.

4.4.4 Life of Harassment in Cape Town: In and Outside Work

The African working class has been fragmented by the Urban Areas Act No. 25 of 1945, according to birth in the area, continuous residence and employment and being a dependant of a Section 10 holder. Goldin (1987:87) states that "by 1986 over 5000 women had been endorsed out of the area.

On arrival in Cape Town Miriam faced the problem of not having a permit or a pass to be in Cape Town. The government had tightened the enforcement of passes in order to discourage African women from leaving the rural areas for the cities. Being an African and a woman meant that Miriam could be stopped every now and then and a pass demanded. This was a method used to control the presence of African women in urban areas: failure to produce one might result in imprisonment, deportation or the imposition of heavy fines. As she could not secure any paid employment (the employment of 'illegals' also carried heavy fines), the result was casual employment and long periods without work. Thrice she was arrested for not possessing a pass.

Eventually she secured contract employment as a full-time domestic resident worker. The non-provision of accommodation is another form of control of her movements. Her employer ensures that no members of her family stay with her on her premises. Without any alternative employment available to Miriam, she has to endure this daily harassment. Lastly, the breach of contract by desertion would mean that she had to go back to Jamestown. Thus the state and the employer are co-operating to ensure continued control and subordination of African women.

4.4.5 Isolation

Miriam, like the rest of the domestic workers, is accommodated in a poor structure at her place of employment. She occupies a garage which is bare, without any pictures or items to identify with. She is separated from her family as her employer would not allow her to stay with her children on the premises. Most of the day she is left by herself in her employer's

house without anybody to talk to. Her accommodation in such surroundings is part of the control that employers exercise over their employees. It is a form of harassment. The State collaborates with the employer by harassing all those who are found in employer's premises without a permit. Further, where she works there are no recreational facilities available for domestic workers. She spends most of her free afternoons either window shopping or going to the beach. She cannot have a decent rest in her 'room' as it also serves as a play room during the day. Her employer's family is very hostile to her and she is continually disrespected by the children. Thus she lives a life of isolation until she goes to the township on weekends.

However, even in the township she is presently not affiliated with any community group. She does house work which leaves her with little time for enjoying community affairs. The Dutch Reformed Church, to which she is affiliated, does not offer her relief from her isolation as she claims not to be a frequent church-goer. Therefore, unlike other domestic workers who are church-goers, Miriam has no outlet for her isolation. At least she escapes from the control and oppression of the church structures which ascribe certain privileges to men.

4.4.6 Single Parenting

Most working class women do not opt for single parenting; this is a choice forced on them by the racial policies of this country, namely the migrant labour system. Miriam, who faces a life of isolation as a domestic worker, has voiced a wish to be united with a family. She has secured herself a shanty at Site C after a long struggle as an unmarried African woman and

hopes to bring her family to Cape Town to stay with her there. She is presently having a relationship with a man but does not wish to marry him. The constraints placed on African women by the institution of marriage have forced many to live outside it, so Miriam has chosen to raise her children outside of wedlock after being deserted twice. When she was a lodger at her boyfriend's place, she objected strongly to the control over her by her boyfriend's family.

As single parent, woman and member of the African working class, she faces a number of struggles such as raising a family on a meagre salary and having to do her own housework, subjecting her to the double day.

Thus, her dream of a secure family life outside of wedlock is a result of a raised consciousness of how the existing marriage situation oppresses and exploits women. Also, the disadvantage of being declared a legal minor, a dependent by African custom and the legal system in South Africa, and denied the right to engage in contracts, affect her. As a woman she has to face problems of discrimination in the allocation of housing. She believes that house work has to be shared irrespective of one's sex and she hopes to train her boys in that direction. By securing herself a shanty, she has tried to demand her right to a united and secure family life.

4.5 THELMA NOMATHEMBA NO-MENDO - DAILY COMMUTER

4.5.1 Brief Biographical Summary

Thelma was born in Cape Town in 1947. This was before the introduction of the Group Areas Act when all racial groups could occupy a room in the centre of Cape Town. Her family was staying in Harrington Street as lodgers. In her family were five children, four girls and a boy. Thelma's mother was a domestic worker and her father a messenger at a bank. At the age of eighteen while she was doing Standard Eight her parents were divorced. The first year she left school she fell pregnant. Because of the divorce in her family as well as her pregnancy, she had to find employment with Standard Eight and with no other formal educational training. She experienced problems in finding employment. The strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preferencial Policy complicated her employment problem. Eventually she found herself employment in the domestic sector. The reputed father of her child had denied paternity. Later they patched up their differences and got married in 1966.

Thelma has worked as a full-time resident worker and as her children grew older, as a full-time daily commuter. She has had a break from domestic work and worked at a Jewish Old Age Home. However, the conditions of employment were not suitable for her although the salary was good. She then went back to domestic work as a full-time daily commuter.

4.5.2 Reasons for Selection of the Case

Thelma's case was selected for the following reasons. First, it highlights the problems faced by African women who get married to migrant workers from outside Cape Town. Secondly, the story highlights Thelma's bravery in going ahead with a marriage to an 'outsider' who caused her to lose her residential rights to be in Cape Town. Further, she found herself as a legal minor and an appendage to her husband in order to regain her residential rights in Cape Town. Thirdly, the case highlights how patriarchal relations and capitalism have worked together to oppress and keep African women in subordinate positions.

4.5.3 The Life Story

i EARLY CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND FAMILY HISTORY

Life before the introduction of separate living areas for the various racial groups was easy. Racial harmony was in existence.

"I was was born thirty-nine years ago in Harrington Street, Cape Town. The family consisted of five children. Being the eldest in my family I had to help with the upbringing of my younger siblings. My parents were from the average working class background." Thelma's father was a messenger at a bank while her mother was a full-time daily commuting domestic worker. "As a domestic worker mother left home at 7.00 a.m., having bathed us the previous night. Our clothing was hung up on a chair the night before. In the morning we would just dress ourselves without any problems. Porridge was cooked early in the morning and mother would dish it up before leaving

for work. Father had helped us to dress and tidy the house. He would then take the youngest daughter to our relations a few streets from where we were staying." Elder children play a positive role in helping their parents by doing some of the house chores. "On the way back from school I would fetch my younger sisters, buy bread and give it to them. Having finished that I would do the other household chores like washing the lamp glasses as we used paraffin lamps. Windows had to be closed as failure to do these tasks was met with severe punishment."

The introduction of the Group Areas Act in 1963, especially in Cape Town, forced the African people to move to impoverished conditions, against their will. Such areas were far from their places of employment and houses were small. Overcrowding is common in African townships.

"After our removal from the centre of Cape Town to Langa, my family lived in a two-roomed council house. The two rooms served as a bedroom, kitchen and a diningroom. My parents shared one room while my siblings and I shared another." Because of the accommodation problems, sleeping arrangements had to be made in such a manner that privacy among the children was impossible. "We had a studio sofa which opened into two beds. One sister and I slept on one side, while my other sisters and brother shared the other." Sharing of clothing was common in Thelma's family. "We had a close relationship as sisters although we had quarrels when it came to the sharing of clothes." Her younger brother was, and is still, the apple of his parent's eyes. As the only son in the family he was given more attention than them. He was excluded from all the household chores, except for gardening (which he seldom did).

"My parents were very close to each other. They were both committed church-goers." When she was eighteen however, her parents were divorced. She had this sad memory about the divorce: "What went wrong between my parents is still unknown to us even to this day. After the divorce we were divided between the two of them. Myself and one younger sister and brother were placed with my mother. My two younger sisters were placed with my father. My parents are still on talking terms with each other." Thelma's mother was fortunate not to be evicted from the house after the divorce as the township housing by-laws were strictly enforced against single, divorced or widowed women. After the divorce Thelma's father had to move house and they were all sad. Thelma added that "as parents are secretive about their quarrels we as their children could not intervene or try to reconcile them." Thelma's father re-married but has no children from the second marriage; her mother opted to remain single: "Mother has remained single as she feared that her children would be ill-treated by a step-father. Further, she said that she did not wish to change her surname for the second time."

Thelma spends a lot of time with her sisters. The divorce made some drastic changes in Thelma's life. "Life became very hard for me and my mother. I had to leave school in Standard Eight and try to find employment. My mother's salary did not cover all our needs. A second problem cropped up when I fell pregnant after leaving school." The shock and disappointment that her mother showed was unbearable to her; pre-marital sex was strongly condemned by her mother. Falling pregnant out of wedlock was a shame to her family. "My mother faced possible excommunication from the church as she was regarded as having failed in her duty as a mother. But she was lucky as my pregnancy was kept a secret

until I delivered the baby." Asked about her mother's attitude towards her, she said: "At first she was angry and had given me a thorough beating and I had to beg for mercy. I had no maternity dresses and I was wearing her old overalls and daily my tummy was getting bigger. Her elder sister, that is my maternal aunt, tried to calm my mother and eventually she accepted the reality of the situation. Towards the end of term of my pregnancy we were really close and she showed great concern about my health. She bought all the basic things for the baby." The reputed father of Thelma's child was evasive about paternity: he neither denied paternity nor accepted it. With these kinds of strains and stresses, she was fortunate as she did not have any illnesses related to pregnancy.

Meanwhile the relationship between Thelma and her boyfriend was strained. Being a single parent forced Thelma to find employment immediately after the birth of her baby in order to be able to support it. Her mother was helpful with the bathing and feeding of the baby. Thelma's first job was that of a domestic worker.

ii EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Early Employment

As an African it was not easy for Thelma to find suitable employment in Cape Town. 'Race', class and gender hierarchies determine the access of women into the labour sector. Further, the Coloured Preferential Policy had discouraged employment of African women in the manufacturing sector, leaving domestic work as their only avenue open for waged employment.

Thelma was introduced to wage labour via the doors of the domestic sector. During the school holidays she had helped her mother at her place of employment. She was at least familiar with the kind of work. "I chose domestic work because the madam I had worked for was very kind. She had allowed me to bring my baby on my back to work. This I found a privilege as this was not permissible at the factories. As an African it was not easy to find a job at the factories." Thelma could not find a job at the factory as Africans were not employed due to the Coloured Labour Preference Policy.

Thelma's first job was in Wynberg. Her day started at six in the morning: "I had to wash the nappies and leave them on the washing line to dry, then feed and clothe the baby. I left home at 7.30 in order to be in Wynberg by 9.00 a.m. I did house work, that is cleaning the four-roomed house and doing the ironing once a week." Fortunately, her employer lived by herself and so there was not much to be done.

She worked approximately four hours per day and earned R40 per month. "I had to spread the R40 to cover all my child's needs and help mother to educate my younger sisters. I had worked for this kind employer for a period of nine years but left her when she refused to give me an increase." The wealth of an employer seldom assures better pay for domestic workers, as was the case with Thelma. This was supported by other domestic workers in the sample; they all complained that the rich employer did not want to part with her money. Thelma regarded her employer as having been polite and rich but said: "My employer was stingy. She was always complaining about the rising cost of living but did not see the need for giving me an increase." Thelma left this employer when her son

was doing Sub B. There was no longer the need to bring him to work.

In Cape Town African women always end up doing domestic service, whether in hospitals, private households, or restaurants. The conditions of employment are the same. From domestic work in a private house, Thelma went to work at a Jewish Old Age Home, first as a cleaner then as an assistant nurse. Thelma experienced pressure at work from both the management and the patients. "As an assistant nurse I was bathing and feeding the aged, who were impossible. One had to beg them like children. They were demanding and rude at times. On the other hand the nursing sisters and matrons were very strict." The distance to be travelled by African employees from their homes to their workplace, demanded early rising. "I had to leave home every morning at 5.00 a.m. in order to be there at 7.00 a.m., which was the starting time. I used to get home at six in the evening. Many a time I fell asleep in the train and bus to and from work as I was tired every day." Her salary was R60 per month. "I left the job when I was accused of stealing some valuable items from an inmate's cupboard, which were of no value to me." As Thelma's children grew older, she decided to work on a part-time basis. Part-time work gives many domestic workers an opportunity to spend more time with their children. From there Thelma did part-time domestic work for three years. "My early employment was interrupted by my marriage and the birth of my children. Further, I had spent some time with my in-laws immediately after marriage." She was actually observing a probation period which is customary to all newly-wed African brides.

Present Employment: Full-time daily commuter

From part-time work to full-time daily commuter, Thelma is presently employed as a full-time daily commuter. She has been with her present employer for the past five years.

Working Conditions

Wages

Loyalty to the employer, which is often to the disadvantage of the employee, stops servants from demanding fair employment practice. Thelma earns R110 per month. "The money is very little but my employer is also poor. Her house is poorly furnished and she drives an old model Escort. Her clothes are made of Crimplene material and her style of dressing is just average."

Control of wife's earnings by her husband.

Part of this R110 is given to her husband who controls the family's budget. Her reason for giving part of her money to her husband is that: "When we married we promised to share everything", but Thelma does not know what her husband earns. She sends part of the money to her mother who looks after her two youngest children. The train and bus fares also come out of her salary and so do the church dues. Failure to pay the church dues results in excommunication from the church.

Benefits

What do domestic workers get in return for their loyal service to their employers? Most studies revealed that there is very little that domestic workers get in terms of benefits: the law is blind to their needs. As a result, Thelma works five days per week without any rest. She has no sick benefits. "When I am sick I have to produce a medical certificate in order to get full payment for the days I was absent from work. I also have to pay for my medical expenses and usually attend the local Day Hospital where it is cheaper and I spend R1.00 per visit as I earn less than R250 per month." Thelma's husband does not belong to any medical aid scheme at work. Thelma receives three weeks' leave with full pay every December.

Food is often described by workers as a bone of contention between them and their employers. Some are not provided with food and others get a very poor quality of food. Thelma informed me that she gets the same meals as her employer. "She is free with her food, I can eat anything from her refrigerator and at times she gives me part of her food to cook for myself. She gives me her old clothing or the small ones free of charge." Thelma either gives the clothing to her daughter who wears the same size shoe as her employer or to her sisters. If they do not want them she sends the clothing to her husband's family in the Transkei, where her two elder children are staying.

Tasks: Working Day

"Domestic work is a gradual killer", Thelma said of her work. "I start work at 8.30 a.m. until 2.00 p.m. and have no rest hour in between." Asked what kind of work she does daily she replied: "I have to clean a five-roomed house but fortunately four have a carpet. I just vacuum-clean

them. I start with the bedrooms as both my employer and her son are lazy. Clothing is always scattered all over the house. I do washing and iron by hand. Windows are done twice a month." No supervision by her employer is seen by Thelma as fair treatment. "She does not follow after me as I do the work, but she does love cooking and, as a result, I often find piles of dishes waiting for me after the weekends. Every dish, spoon, cup and saucer is found in the sink dirty. When I move into the kitchen I feel like dying." Asked whether she had discussed the dish issue with her employer she said: "She is a lazy bones, she hardly empties the ashtrays she uses. They are always full of dead cigarette ends. She is also very fond of her sleep." Thelma expresses her feelings towards domestic work very clearly: "Domestic work is a gradual killer, you only realise its effects when you are in your fifties and suffering from either high blood or arthritis or sugar diabetes. That is why I would like to stop now that I still have some energy in me."

Relationship with Employer

Race, class and cultural differences affect the employer-employee relationships in the domestic sector. Small favours and gifts on the part of the employer reinforce the servant's loyalty but entail no loss on the part of the employer. Despite the above comments, Thelma alleges that she has a good relationship with her employer. "When I have a problem concerning my children, husband or related to finance, she is ever willing to help. If money is involved she does not deduct it from my salary, I pay it back when I can afford to do so. She is like a friend to me but if only she can stop being lazy and dependent on me." Thelma's employer shares a lot of other things with her such as the use of contraceptives and how to approach adolescents about sex. She also shares with Thelma where she can

get daily food bargains. Her employer does not work and is always at home. Servants tend to know all the details about the employer's family functioning.

Thelma also intervenes in her employer's familial problems. She said, "When she and her son are having a quarrel I always intervene and try to calm them down. Her son has great respect for me. He is very polite and if I failed to do what he asked me to do, he does not sulk." Thelma feels that she is like one of the family members. Her employer treats Thelma's husband and children well. Sometimes her children spend part of their school holidays at her place of employment. Her employer welcomes them.

Living Conditions

The migrant labour system and the non-provision of familial housing has lead to Thelma seeking some kind of privacy in the back yard. Although Thelma works as a full-time sleep out worker, she has a room at her place of employment. "I had discussed the daily raids at the single men's quarters, where my husband rents a bed, with my employer. She was sympathetic and offered me the use of her old garage which was converted into a two-roomed house." Thelma said: "I was very glad as I could invite my husband to my room when the raids were worst. We had at least some form of privacy and peace of mind from the people walking in and out of the hostels."

Domestic workers' rooms are rarely made comfortable for the occupants. The living space of domestic workers is always inadequate - some of them have been accommodated in kitchens or in attic rooms.

Thelma describes her two rooms as having electricity, a poor ceiling and the floors without any carpeting. "I use one room as a bedroom, while the other serves as a kitchen. My employer has supplied me with a bed, wardrobe, and a dressing table." Domestic workers' lack of recreational facilities result in many spending their limited spare time either reading or doing other household chores. "I bought myself a knitting machine which I use for knitting jerseys when I have a chance. I love the two rooms as it is the only place I can call my own and this gives me some form of privacy."

iii FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDREN

The Urban Areas Act, No. 25 of 1945, has fragmented the African working class into 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. As a result, the strict enforcement of the influx control measures meant that African women who get married to 'outsiders' lost their right to live in an urban area. This was the case with Thelma when she married.

Thelma got married in 1966 to Joseph who was a migrant worker from the Transkei. Joseph had made her pregnant when she left school in 1964. Two years later Thelma married him. "When I got married to Joseph he was employed on a contract basis and staying at his firm's hostel. I could not join him there as there was always a watchman at the gate. If we had some business to discuss we had to sit outside the hostel's premises. I could only share a bed with him on weekends when the watchman was lenient. But there was absolutely no privacy as my husband was sleeping eight in a room in double bunks."

Not only do women lose their right to be in an urban area but they also fail to acquire accommodation. Women's status in a 'racially' and class segregated South Africa is determined by their relation to male relatives, either a husband, brother, or son.

"My husband was a contract worker and did not qualify for housing. When I got married to him as 'a borner', that is, with a Section 10(1)(a) to be in Cape Town, I lost all the rights when I was declared a dependent of him. I was always faced with the legal possibility of being arrested, my reference book was signed every time I was employed and discharged. We suffered for a period of ten years until my husband qualified to be in Cape Town. My reference book was also put in order as my mother had helped us in fighting the battle with the Development Board Officials."

Relationship with Husband

Violence within the family serves to reinforce the domination of women. This also enforces the views of men as seeing women as part of their property. The situation is worse within the African custom of the payment of 'lobola'.

Thelma said that she has a smooth relationship with her husband now. "While my husband was staying at his employer's hostels he was abusing alcohol and was violent towards me. One time he had assaulted me to the extent that I had to be hospitalised for a month with broken ribs." In such cases the extended families interfere and act as some form of court to restrain the violent acts of the husband towards his wife. "Our fights used to be a secret from my family but the last one had to be known." A big row had erupted when her mother heard about her hospitalisation. She

had confronted her husband and he was fined by her family elders. That was the last time that he seriously assaulted her. Now that her husband has stopped drinking they have very few quarrels.

Joint decision-making is nonexistent in some families as some African men feel that this would amount to yielding to a woman's power. Thelma's is no exception. Power relations between husband and wife are unequal due to the position occupied by men within their families; they are seen as the head, their wives are supposed to be minors.

"Decision-making is the sole responsibility of my husband. I am merely informed in passing, there is no proper discussion about family matters. For example, when my elder son was to go to the initiation school, I was told only when the date was already set." Thelma's husband seldom helps even with their own washing. She views him as a 'Goduka' ('a traditionalist'). Parents, as transmitters of the culture, impart cultural know-how to their children. Thus Thelma worries when her husband reinforces role definitions within the family along gender lines. "My husband teaches these traditional ideas to my children and this worries me a lot." Boys are excluded from housework. However, Thelma informed me that she has taught their boys to help out with the house chores like drying the dishes, making their beds and washing.

Budgeting

"Wives are wasteful and husbands have to control the family purse if they wish to have bigger savings", said Thelma's husband when she tried to find out how much he earned. "My husband controls the family purse. I do not know how much he is earning per month although I give part of my salary to

him. He thinks if I can know how much he is earning I would want to buy everything I can lay my hands on." Thelma's inability to control or even challenge her husband's control of the family budget means that she is at the will of her husband. "I have to ask for money from him when I have to buy clothing for the children and other basic necessities. My husband is very stingy." He sends R60 per month to his mother in the Transkei who cares for their three children while she gives R40 to her mother for the two staying with her. "I have to add either food or money when I have some in order to help my mother. I get sick and tired of having to ask for money from him."

To alleviate her economic dependence on her husband Thelma had to buy herself a knitting machine. "I bought myself a knitting machine which I use for knitting jerseys and other woollen items. I use the extra money for patching up what my children are in need of both in the Transkei and Cape Town."

Children

Children are a source of joy to parents. But African working class parents are denied this experience and it is common to find children separated from their parents.

Thelma is a mother of five children who are divided between her mother and mother-in-law who is in the Transkei. Asked why the children had to be divided she replied: "My husband had insisted that they all be sent to the Transkei as we did not have accommodation of our own. I compromised on the three elder children, two girls and a boy, as they could at least take care of themselves."

Lack of trust between in-laws and brides is evident. "They could write to me when there were problems. I felt the younger children were safer with my mother than with my mother-in-law. I could see them every now and then when I needed to."

Women irrespective of their class or race have their sexuality controlled by men. Thelma says that no decision was taken when to have children, they all just come. "I was scared to use contraceptives then as my husband is a very strict person. He always has the final word."

African working class women have to leave their children in the care of a childminder as they have to work either as sole breadwinners or to supplement the family income. Usually Thelma went back to work three months after the birth of her children. Her maternal aunt was willing to look after the children until they were of school-going age and could be sent to the Transkei. Thelma said that her husband is very fond of their children but he is very strict with them. They know that his word is final. Thelma is like a channel as her children request things from their father via her.

Mothers are responsible for the sex education of their children. Sex education for girls is left in their hands although they seldom have the chance to impart such knowledge. Further, continued absence from home due to domestic work prevents most mothers form being confidants for their children. Thus Thelma says "I have taken my eldest daughter to the Family Planning Clinic as I did not wish to be a grandmother. I was just playing it safe but it was not easy breaking the news to my daughter." Her

daughter is presently doing her first year in a Teacher's Training College. Thelma spends most of her week-end with her younger children and mother.

Life at the Hostels

The Riekert Commission (1979) excluded all the migrant workers from its recommendations. No family housing has to be built for them as they are regarded as temporary in urban areas.

Distorted family patterns at hostels are constant features of the lives of hostel dwellers. Migrant workers are denied access to housing in urban areas except in employer barracks or hostels. Their families have to remain in the homelands. Thus Thelma and her husband could not rent a house at any of the three African townships in Cape Town because of her husband's contract status. This meant that her husband had to stay at the single men's quarters. Strong rural links have prevented Thelma's husband from seeking housing in the urban areas and "my husband is unwilling to register for housing even when he has completed the required 10 years or more of contract service with one employer." Thelma had this kind of experience staying at the hostels: "Life at the hostels is like staying in the open air. Raids are conducted by either the police or the Development officials in the early hours of the morning." The illegals, that is men and women, are bundled in vans and appear before the Commissioner. At times they can escape paying fines by bribing the police and the board officials. Violence against women was on the increase. Some women were put under a cold shower semi-naked and driven to the police station wet. The conjugal rights of migrant workers were continually disrespected by the police and Board Officials.

"Sometimes the police sexually assault the women." Thelma went on to say that the police had no respect for sleeping couples as they would remove blankets from them and light them with torches. "After the police raid there is no peace of mind due to the noise made by men who are working in essential industry, namely the dairy and bakery industries when they prepare to leave for work. There is hardly any chance to have a decent sleep."

Privacy is virtually nonexistent at the hostels. Thelma shares a room with her husband and three other men who either have relatives or girlfriends with them. Some form of privacy is maintained by having a curtain, starting from the roof, around each bed. "We could at least enjoy sex although not to full satisfaction. Further, that we are giving birth to children. At the moment I have five children, two boys and three girls. We have been leading this abnormal life for almost fifteen years now."

Thelma is subjected to triple oppression and exploitation as she has a triple responsibility as a domestic worker, mother and wife. This is because she is leading a triple fragmented lifestyle in the public and private spheres.

On coming back from work she first stops at her mother's place where her two youngest children are staying. "I help with the preparation of the evening meal as well as washing the children's clothing. This I have to do as my mother is a diabetic patient. From this 'shift', I have to rush to the hostel where I am sharing a bed with my husband. I have to cook the evening meal and keep a close watch over the food as there is a communal

kitchen and pots tend to disappear. When I get to bed in the evening I am dead tired but have to be ready for the next day."

iv SOCIAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Belonging to a church group is important for the majority of African women, especially those who are isolated in domestic employment.

Thelma is affiliated to the Presbyterian church, which is one of the independent churches. Before marriage she was a member of the Methodist church. Once she was married she had to join her husband's church. She belongs to a religious group because "I have to belong to the church as I was brought up from a religious background. At home, church attendance was very strict and so I have internalised these values. I strongly believe that the church saves a person from a lot of evil." Probed further about her family's attendance she stated that her husband is an occasional visitor to the church but her children do attend church services. Thelma is actively involved in the church. She is a member of the Mother's Union. She attends the Thursday gatherings. "Being a member of the Mother's Union has meant a number of things to me. First, I have learnt to lead a disciplined life. Secondly, I think I am capable of consoling people who are in pain, I can pray and preach the word of God. Thirdly, that I have joined the church because I wish to have a decent funeral and be buried by a priest and have the members of the Mother's Union forming the guard of honour at my funeral." Thelma sees herself as setting an example for her daughters and wishes that one of them would wear her Mother's Union jacket after her death. This view was expressed by some of the women interviewed

for the survey. Belonging to a religious group was perceived by the women as crucial, especially when one approaches old age.

Besides the religious groups Thelma belongs to no other social or community-based organisation. Further, Thelma is not a member of the Domestic Worker"s Union, although she is aware of its existence.

v DREAMS

Education is the key to the improvement of the African working class's oppression and exploitation, thus the majority of African working class parents rejected the passing of the Bantu Education Act in 1954. Again in 1976, they came out strongly in support of their children to reject this Act. Parents have become concerned about the quality of education being offered to their children.

Thelma's dream is to educate her children so that they will not have to become domestic workers like herself. In addition, she expressed: "I would like to stop doing domestic work and concentrate on making full use of the knitting machine. I would like to open a small shop from which I can sell my products." Thelma thinks that the shop will have to be in the Transkei as her husband wishes to settle permanently there when he retires from work.

4.6 KEY THEMES

4.6.1 Working Class Background

Thelma, like the majority of other domestic workers in Cape Town, comes from an urban working class background. Such a working class in Cape Town existed on a permanent basis until the appointment of the Riekert (1979) and Wiehahn (1981) Commissions of Enquiry. Both her parents had legal rights to be in Cape Town. Her father was a bank employee which at least carried some form of status among the African community. Because of the strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy in Cape Town, Africans could only be employed if there was no suitable other person of colour available. Worst hit by this policy in Cape Town were women such as her mother, who was forced into domestic work as a daily commuter. Others were forced to work as resident workers which meant that they were separated from their children. This was in keeping with the government's policy of discouraging any form of family settlement in Cape Town. African women were not employed in other sectors of the economy. This was partly due to the strategy of the State to reduce the number and growth of the African working class in Cape Town. Women and children were deported to areas outside of Cape Town. Further, the policy was meant to divide the working class along racial lines, thus reducing its threat to the state. Thelma's parents had limited access to educational institutions but had the advantage of having been at least exposed to some form of education.

Having been denied property rights, they had no accommodation of their own and were victims of the Group Areas Act which aimed to fragment the

working class along 'racial' lines. They were forcibly removed from the centre of Cape Town where Thelma had been born, to Langa. They could not challenge their eviction as they had no political representation as Africans and members of the working class.

Thelma underwent the same treatment as her parents as she could not find employment when she left school with a Standard Eight education. The only option left for her to earn a living was the domestic sector. She followed in her mother's footsteps and is still a domestic worker without any rights as a worker, an African and as a mother.

4.6.2 Fragmentation of Family Life

African families are not only fragmented as a result of the government's policies, but also through divorce, desertion and death. Thelma's family was split in two when her parents were divorced. She was then 18 years old. The fragmentation of her family resulted in the children being divided between her mother and father. The family structure changed as her mother became the head of the household. This fragmentation affected her family's economic position. Only one pay packet was coming in, that of her mother from domestic work. The pay packet had to be stretched in order to cover their basic needs of rent, food, as well as the education of the children. Low wages in the domestic sector force African women to send their offspring into the labour market at an early age. Thelma was forced to abandon her schooling in Standard Eight in order to supplement her mother's meagre salary. Thelma's unplanned pregnancy added to their already overstretched financial resources. As the eldest daughter in the family she had to play the role of the parent/child and help her mother

with the domestic chores. So Thelma's original family was splintered by divorce, unlike that of Miriam, whose family was splintered by the migrant labour system.

Her immediate family, i.e. that resulting from marriage, is splintered thrice. She married a migrant labourer, which, because of the racial policy, namely the Urban Areas Act no 25 of 1945, resulted in her loss of legal rights to be in Cape Town. Declared a legal dependent of a migrant labourer meant that her presence was not desired in Cape Town due to the government's influx control system. As a dependent and a woman, she could not secure a house in any of the townships. Her husband had to reside in single men's quarters while their children were split between her in-laws in the Transkei and her mother in Cape Town. The racial policy of influx control deprived her of a family life. She had to find surrogate parents for her children and they are deprived of their parental care. Thus her family life has been fragmented from childhood to the present day as an adult. This process has continued to affect her own children who see her once a year. Thelma has tried to resist this splitting of her family as she first resided in the hostels and then at her place of employment with her husband. This splitting of family lives of Africans has, in the 1980s, been the burning issue that community organisations have organised around. The demand for the provision of decent housing by the worker near the place of employment is linked to the demand for family life.

4.6.3 Women as Legal Minors

Marriage, for newly-weds, is customarily the happiest event in their lives. But for Thelma, who is African and a working class mother involved

in domestic work, this is not the case. As an illegal African in Cape Town she lost her residential rights immediately after her marriage to Joseph who was a migrant labourer. She was immediately declared a legal minor and thus had no right to be in an urban area. Daily she was subjected to raids and harassment by the Board Inspectors and the police. It is not only the legal system in South Africa that oppresses and exploits African women, but also certain cultural practices. Within marriage women are immediately subjected to the control of their in-laws and their husbands. Various methods are used to control them. First, they have to move residence and stay with their husband's families. There they become slaves responsible for the domestic chores, they have to serve husbands as well as their in-laws. Thelma had to observe this initiation period in the Transkei. This period may last a life-time, especially if the husband is the only son or first or last born. He cannot leave his parents and his wife has to serve his parents.

Declared legal minors, women are without any decision-making powers in and outside their households. They have to produce children within a certain time and if they fail to do so they may be divorced or a second wife can be taken, with or without their consent. At the moment Thelma is the mother of five children. The payment of lobola further ensures the control of the husband over their wives as they feel that they have paid for them. At times lobola becomes the source of the breakdown of marriage as a husband may abuse his wife while claiming to have been overcharged. Thelma had no power to decide how many children she wanted. The majority of women in the survey did not exercise any control over their sexuality either, nor did those interviewed by Elizabeth Roberts (1984). Thelma said: "They all just come and I was scared to use birth control measures." Her husband

also has the final say in the family. He decided that all their children should be sent to the Transkei to his parents. Thelma compromised on the two younger ones who are with her. Her husband could be what Roberts (1984) called "an all powerful father, dominating, subjugating, even terrifying his wife and children."

Thelma's husband even controls the purse in that she has to give part of her salary to him though she does not know how much he earns. She has to ask for money every time she has to buy things for their children. He controls virtually all their finances, thus keeping her in a dependent position. He also degrades her by saying that she spends money too freely, although she spends wisely. This is a way of ensuring that he has total control over her and that she does not question his authority. Thelma had to be strong in order to cope with her husband's behaviour. It is no wonder that she has sought refuge in the church and is a committed church-goer. She has placed her hopes on the external powers which she hopes will prepare her for the 'future life.'

Violence has been another method used by Thelma's husband to keep her in a subordinate position. He used to assault her when he was abusing alcohol. She now knows that she has to obey orders although she is no longer physically abused, but verbal harassment is still common. Roberts (1984: 120) describes women of Thelma's make-up as unfortunate and usually compliant, dutiful, silent and uncomplaining. Thelma describes her marriage as smooth now that her husband no longer assaults her. She has shown courage and determination in maintaining some form of independence from her husband. She has bought herself a knitting machine which she uses to supplement her wages.

Thelma's presence in the urban area was undesirable to the juro-legal system existing in South Africa.* As a dependent of a migrant African man she had to devise some means of surviving. She changed from Section 10 1(a) to Section 10 1(d), meaning that she had to be in continuous employment for a period of ten years with the same employer, in order to qualify to be in an urban area, thus qualifying for residence. The results in the change of residential qualifications due to her marriage were the following: She and her husband could not qualify for accommodation in any of the three African townships until her husband had finished a period of ten years continuous employment with one employer. The Riekert (1979) Commission had, in the 1980s, recommended flushing out the 'illegals' back to the homelands. Paragraph 7.55 of the Riekert (1979) Commission recommended that : "Control over migration of population to urban areas is essential in order to obviate social problems. Effective control over employment should be the criterion for the regulations. Migration of workers and their families should be discouraged for the promotion of orderly community development in urban and rural areas." This was accepted by the government.

Because of her working problem as a result of her qualifications, her family had to be split between her mother in Cape Town and her mother-in-law in the Transkei. The split in family went hand in glove with the split in her meagre salary that had to be stretched to cover the needs of her children in Cape Town and in the Transkei, as well as her needs in Cape Town. She experienced problems with her husband, who, after completing ten years of continuous employment, thus qualifying for

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* A Note on the changes in law since 1985 has been attached in Chapter 2.

housing, refused to apply for housing in either of the three townships, as he claimed that "township life is rough".

There are other legal problems in the sense that from the Riekert (1979) ruling, the government has indicated that the dependents of those who qualify to be in the urban areas because of completing a continuous period of employment, have to prove that they have accommodation available. The problem arose out of the fact that there is already a shortage of housing in the existing townships.

The number of people on the waiting list exceeds those who are already accommodated. Secondly, the houses that are being built by independent building companies are beyond the reach of the majority of domestic workers. Faced with these kinds of problems, Thelma had to share a room in the single men's quarters where her husband stayed with three other men without any form of privacy. Further, she had to perform a triple shift of work, namely at her place of employment, at her mother's place and at the hostel where her husband was staying. At the hostel she had to keep watch over the food that she cooked as there was a communal kitchen. The result is triple exploitation as her husband does not help her in her three shifts.

4.6.4 Dependent Exploitative Relationship with Employers

Thelma has been engaged in domestic work since the age of eighteen. The different racial, class and gender backgrounds of the employers and the domestic workers militate against the formation of an equal relationship. This is because of the privileges inherent in the three social divisions.

She has had dependent and exploitative relationships with all her employers. The first employer underpaid her for a period of nine years but she had to stick with this employer as she was allowed to bring her son to work. The kind of favours employers do for their domestic workers mean that they expect a lot in return. They tend to magnify the value of the favour to the recipient. Thelma tolerated these employment conditions until she found alternative employment.

She has been with her present employer for a period of five years. She says that she has a reasonable relationship with her employer - what a reasonable relationship means is not clear. Her employer has offered her backyard accommodation. The motive behind the offering of the room is for Thelma to act as security for her as she is widowed. Thelma also acts as a mediator in family quarrels between her employer and her son.

Schlegel (1983) also mentions the involvement of servants in their employer's family quarrels. At times they act as confidants for their female employers, but the disparities in living conditions due to the privileged racial and class backgrounds prevent the formation of sisterhood between the two women, causing tensions in the employer/employee relationship.

Her monthly salary is also very low, even though the relationship is said to be smooth. It does not lead to the improvement of working conditions. The daily harassment at the hostel where her husband is staying distorts her perception of reality. She places too much emphasis on the backyard room as it gives her peace of mind. However, its condition depreciates its value. She is unable to realise that her employer benefits more from

offering her the room. Further, the fierce enforcement of the influx control system distorts her interpretation of her daily working situation.

By giving Thelma the backyard, old garage the employer is reinforcing her loyalty. No amount of sacrifice has been invested on the part of her employer. Because of their accommodation problem and her husband's negative attitude towards securing accommodation in Cape Town, Thelma places great values on the offer made by her employer. No loss or expenditure has been involved in giving Thelma the old garage which has been of no use to the employer's family. Thus the value of the accommodation has been magnified to the recipient although it is of less value to the giver. This results from the lack of bargaining rights of workers on the part of domestic workers. It enforces loyalty and dependency on the part of the domestic worker and also ensures total control of their lives by their employers. With limited options open to her as an African, woman, and a member of the working class in the Western Cape, Thelma has to endure these employment conditions. The few options open to them are not exploited due to the racial ideology of the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy in Cape Town. Very few factories employ African women, therefore in the survey of 30 women, a large percentage chose domestic work as they had no skills or qualifications and because it was the only job available to them under the strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy in Cape Town.

Thus the combination of State and employer in controlling the employment rights and the lives of African women becomes clear as one examines the kind of relationship that domestic workers have with their employers.

4.6.5 Religious Affiliation as a means of a Support System and an Outlet for Frustration

Thelma is a staunch member of the Mother's Union of the Presbyterian Church, one of the independent churches. Religion plays a dominant role in her life. She said: "I was brought up within a Christian family and I had internalised these values". Further, she had learnt to console people who are in pain. Thus religion for African women serves as an outlet for frustration as they tend to pour out all their family and work problems. Religion is another area where women are denied leadership positions, although they play a dominant role in the running of the daily affairs of the church. But to Thelma, life without going to church is incomplete.

4.6.6 Self-Employment

Thelma, who started domestic work at the age of eighteen, wishes to stop this kind of work. Domestic work exposes the majority of African women engaged in it to various health hazards: poor diet, long, strenuous hours, psychological torture and verbal abuse. Thelma views domestic work as a killer in that the bonus one gets from it is chronic ill-health. She said that she wishes to avoid what most elderly ex-domestic workers suffer from, that is high blood pressure, sugar diabetes and arthritis, which are all related to overwork and stressful situations. The domestic worker usually faces daily harassment from the employer and has no outlet from this stressful daily situation. In order to avoid being a candidate for ill-health, Thelma wishes to open a shop and sell knitted items, probably in the Transkei as her husband intends settling there eventually.

4.7 PART-TIME WORKER - MARTHA MAFUNGWASHE NO-AMEN

4.7.1 Brief Biographical History

Martha was born in Queenstown in 1927. She was the eldest daughter in a family of eight. The family consisted of five boys and three girls. She comes from a very poor family. Her mother was a domestic worker while her father was an 'induna' at the Johannesburg mines. Both her parents were illiterate and are now deceased. She started her domestic work career at the age of twenty-one. She has an elementary education of Standard Two. Her first employment was in her home town and then she moved to Elgin in the Western Cape. She found the Elgin job via a friend who had already established herself as a domestic worker in the area. From Elgin Martha moved to Rondebosch and worked as a nanny. When her employers emigrated to Australia they transferred her to their friend in Constantia. There she worked as a full-time resident worker, but is now employed as a part-time domestic worker.

In 1956 she met and married John who was an employee of Pepsi-Cola Beverages Company. She had an unstable marriage and gave birth to two sons. She separated from her husband. After his death she had a relationship with a migrant worker and gave birth to a daughter in 1973. Martha is presently employed as a part-time worker in order to devote more time to her daughter. She lives in a shanty at KTC which was invaded by the so-called 'conservative wit doekies.'

4.7.2 Reasons for the Selection of the Case

The case was selected firstly because it depicts how an illiterate African woman coming from a deprived socio-economic background finds herself doing domestic work for her living. She has been passed down from one employer to the next and in the process, neglected her own family. Secondly, the case depicts the combination of the patriarchal and racial capitalist relations which result in the exploitation and oppression of African women. This is highlighted by her problem as a single parent in securing accommodation for her family. Thirdly, it shows how Martha has eventually been politicised by her accommodation problem. She joined the squatter struggle and eventually secured herself a shelter. Fourthly, she embraces the false hope that long service with one employer may result in her inclusion in the employer's will.

4.7.3 THE LIFE STORY

i. EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY HISTORY

"I was born in Queenstown in 1927 and was one of a family of eight. I am the eldest daughter in a family of five sons and three daughters. My parents were very poor." Deserted women with dependents form the bulk of the poor who subsist below the breadline. "Mother was a domestic worker and was struggling to raise us. Father, whom we rarely saw, was an 'induna' on the Johannesburg mines and was seldom able to contribute financially to the family. Every time Father visited the family in December, there was a baby born the following year." Faced with the daily struggle for survival of their families, African women cannot afford to be

weak. "Mother was quiet but strong. She seldom complained and tried her best to bring us up." Both her parents were illiterate. As poverty was rife in Martha's family ... "we were lodgers and could never afford to buy a house of our own." Her family shared a three-roomed house which was poorly furnished. "There were two bedrooms, one for my parents, the other for the children, and a kitchen." African children are socialised early in life to be responsible for their lives as they do not have the privilege of being waited upon. "Housework was shared among the elder children, like fetching water from the communal tap, going to buy milk for the 'stywe pap' which was our family's staple food. Dish washing and bathing of the younger siblings was my duty as my mother often came home from work dead tired."

Sons normally take after their fathers and this was the case in Martha's family: her brothers failed to contribute to the family income after leaving school. "They never sent much money home and they soon forgot about us. Mother relied on me to be her consolation. Tragedy struck my family when Father was killed in a mine accident." Death brings families together as they all need the other's emotional support. Even though contact with his family had been minimal, the death of Martha's father hurt her mother very much as she had loved and adored her husband. The death of Martha's father forced all the children to engage in paid employment.

ii EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Early Employment in Queenstown

"My first job was that of being a nanny, that is, caring for my employer's

two children aged two and three. I loved every minute of it as it was an extension of what I used to do at home. I bathed the two boys, fed and took them for a walk in the nearby park. For all this I was earning a few shillings and working six days a week from seven in the morning to seven in the evening. There was no rest hour as the walk in the park was thought to be rest for me." Her employer was very demanding and took advantage of her. Employer control over the domestic servant is shown by the type and amount of food they provide. "I was ill-fed and ill-treated. I gave all the money to my mother as she did all the family's budgeting and bought us clothing." When a friend found her employment in Elgin (Western Cape) she left Queenstown although her mother was not very keen about her leaving for the Cape, Martha managed to convince her.

Working Life in Elgin

Domestic workers do not need any educational qualifications to do their work. With an elementary education of Standard Two she was not fussy about the kind of job she got. In Elgin she worked as a nanny, which was exactly what she had been doing in Queenstown. She had to take care of three children aged two, three and five. She had to feed, bath and clothe them. The level of affluence of a particular family is normally judged by the number of servants they employ. "My employers were very rich and had two helpers, a cook and myself."

The cook was a coloured lady from Bredasdorp who had already been with the family in question for three years and had some form of special status. The employer's family depended on her skills: valued servants are not easily disposable. Older servants are the key socialisers of recent arrivals in any particular family, making the new arrival's life comfort-

able or uncomfortable, depending on their disposition. " I had a good understanding with the cook who was older than me, as well as her employers. The cook was like a sister to me and had taken good care of me. My madam was sweet and humane." She paid three pounds a month which then, ie. 1947, was a lot of money. Of this, Martha sent one pound to her mother in order to help her, one pound was put into a savings account at the post office so that she would have some money when she went home for holidays, and the last pound was spent on herself. Martha said that she was working as a full-time resident nanny, accommodated on the employer's premises. She knew nobody in the area except the friend who brought her to Elgin and the cook. She had done a lot of travelling with her employers when they took their three children on holiday. "But at times I was prevented by law from going into certain places with them and had to be left behind. Domestic workers tend to be labelled as surrogate mothers. "The three children were very attached to me and I enjoyed looking after them as I was allowed to reprimand them for silly behaviour." Her employers left for Australia and they transferred her to their friends in Rondebosch.

Life in Rondebosch

Domestic workers are easily transferred from one employer to another. They do not take a long time to adjust to the particular family's life style. In Rondebosch she was employed as a cook and slept at her employer's residence. "I had learnt my cooking skills from the cook that had befriended me in Elgin." The different worlds which domestic workers and their employers inhabit have caused some resentment in workers. Her Rondebosch employer was a 'social giant' and entertained twice fortnightly. " I helped to prepare a variety of foods." Asked how she felt about these parties Martha said: "What I hated most was the cleaning that

followed with a pile of dishes that had to be washed before I went to sleep. I would finish the dishes at 2.00 a.m. I was getting tips from the visitors, which was some consolation. My employers were unfair to me as I was not paid for the overtime I worked. I was getting the food left-overs, which were not that important to me." This couple also left South Africa for Britain and they transferred her to friends in Constantia. They paid her a large sum when they left and thanked her for her service. She said that she was heartsore when they left as they had paid her well, R25.00 per month.

Life in Constantia

Domestic servants are often entrusted with the upbringing of their employer's children, although there are racist and sexist stereotypical views of the servants by the employers. Martha started her employment in Constantia in 1966 and was employed by a dairy farming couple. "I was a child minder of three children, two girls and a boy. I was given full control of their care, starting from planning their diet to buying them clothing. My madam would ask me what the kids were in need of and would give me all the clothes they had outgrown. I would then give the old clothing to my cousin who looked after my two boys, then aged seven and four. She would not charge me anything at the end of the month." Asked about her attitude towards her work she replied: "I used to love looking after the three children, they were disciplined and polite and that made my work very easy." Limited contact between male employers and their servants is indicated by what Martha says: "Both madam and master were pleased with the way I was looking after their children although I seldom saw the master who was a very busy man. The children were more at home in my company as they were used to staying with me. The only thing I hated

about this job was when I had to baby-sit on week-ends. I could do nothing about it as my employers were good to me."

Martha worked for a period of ten years until the couple decided to sell their property and move to New Jersey in America. "They were not happy with the apartheid situation in South Africa." On their departure, her employers gave Martha furniture, kitchen-ware and a sum of R300 as a sign of gratitude for her service. From 1977 she decided to work part-time as her children were growing up and her cousin could no longer care for them properly.

Present Employment

Martha has been with her present employer since 1977. She is employed as a char and works part-time.

Working Conditions

Domestic work is characterised as an occupation by low wages and job immobility.

Wages

Martha said, "I work three hours per day three days a week. I earn R80 per month. It is a very small amount, but when I think about the grocery allowance that I get every month and the payments she makes towards my daughter's education, I do not complain. But I think I do need an increase as the bus fare has gone up as well as the train tickets, and I use both for getting to work."

Benefits

"There are no sick benefits nor contribution toward an old age pension and annual leave and bonus. I eat the same food as my employer." Her employer also gives her second-hand clothing that she no longer needs, as well as some household goods. She said: "I might be included in her will and perhaps end up rich when she dies." This was found to be an assumption as her employer has never committed herself.

Tasks: Working Day

Martha's day starts at nine in the morning and ends at one in the afternoon. She leaves home at seven in the morning in order to be in Sea Point by nine. "First thing I do is to make myself breakfast then I open all the windows and start cleaning the five-roomed flat. I make my employer's bed, hang up her clothing and put the dirty clothing in the washing machine. Then I vacuum her bedroom and the spare room, then it is the lounge and lastly the kitchen, bathroom and toilet." Cooking is done by her employer when she is not in Johannesburg (she spends six months there). Some days it is the ironing and brief cleaning, and the silver has also to be cleaned.

Domestic service is occupied mainly by women with little power in their hands and who cannot find alternative employment. Concerning her attitude toward her work Martha stated: "It is not tough work as I leave everything when it is one o' clock and the time for going home, then I finish the task the following day." What she hates most is washing of windows, as "I have to climb stepladders at my age which is very risky." She often complained to her employer about the window cleaning, she said. "She told me that she cannot hire another person specifically for window washing and

suggested that I try to be cautious." Martha has to stick with her employer because of her age. She is already 59 years old and it would not be easy for her to secure another job at this age. She added: "It is better to stick with an old devil than a new one whom you have to learn its tricks and way of life."

Relationship with Employer

Relationships between employers and employees in the domestic sector are described in various ways by both parties. The employer's point of view is usually that the domestic worker is treated as 'part of the family'. Various responses were also received from the 30 women interviewed for the survey.

Martha says: "I have a stable relationship with my employer." Domestic workers usually measure their relationships with their employers by the kind of help given by them. Martha's employer has helped her many times. "She has tried to help me to secure a house in one of the three townships, writing a motivating letter on my behalf. Further, she is paying for the education of my younger daughter. She is humane and sensitive to my problems." Unlike others, Martha's employer seems to take an interest in the world of her employee. "She likes to know about the family as well as life in the township." Asked whether her employer shares in doing the household tasks she replied, "At least she washes the dishes that she has used and does part of her washing. I seldom find the house in an extreme state of mess." Martha and her employer do have differences and she said, "Madams are like kids and once you spoil them it is difficult to undo the harm. She knows most of my dislikes and I also know hers." Martha describes her employer as a perfectionist.

Employers use various means to control their domestic worker's movements. Martha's madam is widowed and her two grown-up sons are resident in Johannesburg. "When she is in Johannesburg she phones daily trying to find out whether everything is in order and whether I need any help. We talk for a long time on the telephone."

iii FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDREN

The presence and growth of children determine the type of job the women in the family engage in. (Roberts, 1984). Martha got married in 1956 by civil rites to John who was then an employee of Pepsi-Cola. She said: "My marriage was rocky from the start and the home atmosphere was tense. We never had a decent house of our own. We were first lodgers in Cape Town in Harrington Street for three years. Then we stayed in a two-roomed house with other people in the same yard. Our house was reasonably well furnished and because of the smallness of the rooms, everything was neatly packed." From Cape Town, Martha and her husband went to stay in Athlone. Martha and her family are amongst the majority of the working class people who were victims of the Group Areas Act. In Athlone they were lodgers again and this time had one room to themselves. Two sons were born, one in 1959 and the second in 1960.

In 1960 her husband was arrested for theft and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Martha was evicted from Athlone by her landlord because of her husband's imprisonment. She said: "Life became hard as the landlord forced me to leave his premises. He said that he could not keep a prisoner's wife." This meant that Martha had to find alternative accommodation. As an African woman faced with the backward juro-legal

structures, securing accommodation was not easy. Martha had to battle for 20 years before she could have a roof over her head.

Relationship with Husband

Power relations between husband and wife are seldom equal due to the gender hierarchies which ascribe certain privileges to men. Men are always seen as heads of their household and the main breadwinners in their families, even when their wives are economically active.

Martha's husband was arrested when their marriage was under strain. Her husband is said to have been a womaniser. "He had ill-maintained his family and life was hell with him. It was a great relief when he was arrested as I got a chance to sort myself out and be independent from him. While he was in prison I took care of my children and there were less problems. Unfortunately he was released on parole three years later from prison. The difference between my husband and myself increased although I tried to mend our marriage." Martha's husband made no attempt to get accommodation of their own after his release from prison. The involvement of the extended family may either help or save marital problems between two people, but in many cases the opposite happens and, as a result, most married women place very little hope in the extended family for a support system. "The problem was aggravated by the involvement of his extended family, who instead of helping us to solve their problem, took sides with him. In fact they gave him accommodation and he had cohabited with girlfriends in their houses. I reached a stage when I could not take it any more and permanently separated until his death." Asked how the children felt when they separated she said, "They could not understand our problems as we never quarrelled in front of them. But I

think at times they suspected as we used to have family meetings trying to solve the problem or at times we talked in harsh language. They were sad when I told them about the death of their father. I collected his corpse and paid for all his funeral expenses and I was then in peace with my soul."

Children

The presence of both parents in a marriage is an ideal for which most couples strive, but various social factors often make that situation an impossibility.

When Martha's husband was arrested she was already a mother of two sons. Without her husband to help she had to bring up her sons by herself. She decided to send them to Queenstown to her mother as there was no one to care for them while she was at work. "Luck was against me as my mother died a year later in 1961 and I had to bring my children back to Cape Town. I experienced problems in finding a child-minder for my children. Eventually my cousin agreed to take care of my children." She saw her children only during the 'offs', i.e. when off duty, as she was working as a resident worker. On her days off she has to cook, wash and spend a few hours with her sons. Her sons regard her cousin as their mother. "I paid her a small amount and gave her anything that I got from work, but could not complain although I realised at times that my sons were thin."

Relationship with Boyfriend

"I could not mourn the death of my husband for a long time as I had my life to lead. Further, when he died we were already separated and when I met Peter, who was a migrant labourer, life became meaningful again."

Martha described Peter as having been loving and understanding and different from her husband. "He shared his salary with me and helped me to bring up my sons. They knew him as an uncle as we never showed them that there was something intimate between us." Peter impregnated her and she had a daughter. Martha regards her daughter as the apple of her eye. She is clever and does well at school. Martha's employer pays for her daughter's education. Asked whether her daughter knew Peter as her father, she replied that she did. "I had stayed with my daughter at my employer's premises until she was three years. She was very attached to him."

Asked about the whereabouts of Peter she said, "He left Cape Town 11 years ago as he was a contract worker. I further discovered that he had a family in the Ciskei where he originally came from. He never wrote to me since he left Cape Town." Martha voiced her feelings about these experiences: "Nothing hurts nowadays as I have gone through bad times. Now I am living without a man and I am enjoying every minute of it."

Living Conditions - Housing in the Township

Securing a house in the township for a single parent woman is a struggle. Martha is presently occupying a three-roomed shanty at KTC. She has been on the housing list awaiting housing for almost twenty years. She said: "I have been in and out of the superintendent's office, begging for housing. My employer tried to intervene on my behalf by writing letters requesting that I be allocated a house, but to no avail." Single women are not regarded as a priority in the allocation of houses, thus they need proof of an association with a male guardian to gain such an allocation. At one time the Guguletu housing superintendent said to Martha: "You should go to the zones where single men are staying and find yourself a husband, then I

will allocate you a house, or your elder son should get married and you become his dependent and stay with him." Martha said that after this kind of insinuation, "I decided to allocate myself a shanty at KTC. I needed a house of my own as I was sick and tired of being a lodger and my children were growing up." The shanty was built in 1982. "At the beginning we were harassed by both the police and the development board officials. Our shanties as KTC residents were demolished several times in the middle of winter or when it was raining very heavily. As women we had to organise ourselves as we were facing the common enemy."

Martha talked about her housing struggles: "They destroyed our shanties during the day and we built them up at night. Most of us were beaten up and arrested by the police but we resisted and we got support from community-based organisations and the civic association. As women we had to take turns to watch over our belongings. We hardly had any decent sleep and we went to work exhausted." Martha summed up the result of the battle in this way: "It lasted as long as we could resist and it paid off in the end. The site is fully serviced with communal taps and toilets and refuse is collected daily. Further, the houses have been numbered."

At the moment Martha is sharing her house with her three children. She said, "My shanty is furnished fairly well and is a heaven to me. At last I could lead a normal family life with my three children."

iv SOCIAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Martha's politicisation took place because of her continued harassment by government agents. "I am a member of the Civic Association, an association

that fights for the township residents. She joined because members of the Civic helped them when they were faced with threats of forced removal from KTC. The Cape Civic Association fights against all the problems that face residents of the township, such as high rents, unfair evictions from the houses as well as bribery for housing. She also joined a women's organisation, the United Women's Organisation (UWO)* because it unites women with or without education, married or widowed or even divorced: there is no segregation. Further, as a black woman she learnt a lot of things like how to organise other women and how to fight for women's issues like pre-schools and creches. She has also learnt how to run meetings and share daily experiences.

Martha is affiliated to the Methodist church, but her tickets are not paid up. She was brought up in a Christian home and religion plays a dominant role in her life. She said: "I get a chance to share in prayer my problems and get moral support from other women."

v DREAMS

Martha said, "I wish to secure myself proper accommodation where I could leave my children when I die. I would not like my children to suffer like I did when I had no place to stay." Concerning domestic work, she said she does not wish to have any of her children doing this kind of work "as it wrecks one's life and you end up with illnesses like high blood sugar, diabetes and arthritis."

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* Now the United Women's Congress (UWCO)

4.8 KEY THEMES

4.8.1 Working Class Background

Martha, like the majority of domestic workers in South Africa, comes from a working class background. They had no access to the means of production and had only their labour to sell.

As workers, Martha's parents had no bargaining power and no union rights. They had accommodation problems and were lodgers. Property rights were non-existent for them. They were deprived of education opportunities and access to knowledge; both her parents were illiterate. They occupied the lowest paying jobs - her mother a domestic worker and their father a mine worker. The result was that they subsisted in near poverty conditions. Because of their accommodation problem, they had no form of privacy as the house they were renting was overcrowded. Children were exposed to various harmful experiences, like parent quarrelling. Because of the financial problems, all the elder children had to drop out of school in the elementary classes. Martha left school in Standard 2. The result was the production of future illiterate working class members.

With an elementary education of Standard 2, like her parents, Martha was forced into domestic work for employment, as there was no other job available for her as an African woman. She entered a labour market which was already fragmented by 'race', class and gender divisions. Her brother went to the mines. She entered domestic work as she had no option for alternative employment, either in Queenstown or in Cape Town. She was trapped into it.

4.8.2 Fragmentation of Family Life

Martha's family was fragmented by the migrant labour system when her father was recruited on the Johannesburg mines as an African mine labourer. As previously mentioned her father was illiterate and without skills: this was the only employment available to him. As a migrant labourer her father could not move with his family to Johannesburg. This is because of the racial and gender character of the migrant labour policy in South Africa, as only able-bodied men are employed. The sick, the elderly and women are not recruited. Further, the migrant labourer is paid a single pay packet - irrespective of his marital status. Married men are forced to lead a life of bachelorhood by the very nature of the system, and eventually forget about the families left behind. Capital refuses to bear the cost of the reproduction of the migrant's family as the aim is to maximise profit by exploiting the worker. This happens through the non-provision of public facilities in the form of housing for the employee's family, poor wages and lack of union rights.

Because of this system Martha, her mother and siblings were left behind in Queenstown. As a result, her mother became the head of the household and, with the low salary from domestic employment, she had to battle to keep her family alive and they were poverty- stricken. Both Martha and her mother had to enter the domestic labour market as this was the only option open to them as African women.

Her family became single parented when death struck her father. Martha

was forced into waged employment in order to supplement the family income. More members of her household were forced to drop out of school at sub-standard level due to the family's poor socio-economic situation.

Even within her own family, after her marriage, disorganisation occurred. Martha's husband was first imprisoned, then death struck him. She became the head of the household like her mother. Her family had to be splintered while she was employed as a domestic worker as she had accommodation and childcare problems. Thus the cycle of fragmented family repeated itself in her life. It can be seen that family fragmentation is a common feature among African families, causing much insecurity and instability to both the parent and the growing children.

4.8.3 Passing Down a Commodity

The passing on of a domestic worker from one employer to another is common in the domestic sector. Some are even inherited with the purchase of a house.

Martha has been a domestic worker since the age of 21. From Queenstown she went to Elgin in the Western Cape. When her employer left South Africa they transferred her to their friends in Constantia and later to others in Rondebosch. She is being passed down and she has no option but to stick with her employers or face starvation. As a domestic worker, employment is not guaranteed. Extreme exploitation occurs in Rondebosch as she is not paid for overtime. As a resident worker she is on duty around the clock at her employer's wish. She is denied the right to live with her family on the employer's premises. Thus she is subjected to isolation as she is

accommodated in the back yard. In the eyes of employers, domestic servants have no personal life, they are there only to service the needs of their (the employer's) family.

Martha later transfers herself from a full-time resident worker to a part-time worker as she grows older and her children need her more. Part-time workers are subjected to extreme exploitation, having to complete a full week's work within a short time. Her present employer is said to be treating her well but underpays her. Her age is not taken into consideration when it comes to the type of work she has to do. Thus domestic work offers women no comfort as they grow old. Life becomes worse.

4.8.4 Limited Access to Opportunities

Martha has had limited options at her disposal since birth. Poverty struck her family and she had to leave school at an early age. She then had to engage in full-time employment in order to help her mother to bring up her siblings. As the eldest daughter in her family she had to leave school and play the surrogate parent to her siblings. In working class families, the good and well-being of the family takes priority over the needs and wants of the individual. Poor wages in Queenstown forced her to go to Elgin as a domestic worker. From Elgin she was transferred to Constantia and later to Rondebosch. She had no option but to accept this transfer. No alternative type of employment was open to her as an African, woman and a member of the working class. When she married she had a struggle to secure accommodation but it became worse when she was widowed. In Cape Town she lived as a lodger in various places as the Coloured Labour Preferential

Policy was strictly enforced; it stipulated that priority should be given to Coloured and White in the provision of housing, education and employment.

Further, her marriage did not work out as her husband was said to be irresponsible. She claims to have tried to save her marriage but without any success. Eventually she separated from her husband and then became the head of her family, which then consisted of two children. As she had to earn a living she faced the problem of childcare as the State has failed to provide childcare facilities for the working class. She was forced to make use of members of her extended family and sent her children to Queenstown to her mother. Luck was against her when her mother died. She then had to bring her children back to Cape Town. She left them in the care of her cousin and only saw them during the weekends when she was off duty. She could not stay with them at her place of employment as this was not permissible by law. The lack of contact with her children meant that she could not develop any form of bonding with them and they regarded her cousin as their mother for she was providing them with emotional and spiritual support. As her children grew older she decided to work part-time and find herself accommodation. Having struggled for twenty years to secure accommodation she decided to allocate herself a shanty at KTC. This was in defiance of the local authority as she had been discriminated against in the allocation of housing. Being an African, a woman, a mother and a worker had forced Martha to make a living for her family with limited options at her disposal. She had been discriminated against in all spheres of life - housing, education, employment and in the provision of childcare facilities.

4.8.5 Options for Single Parenting

Martha's marriage to her first husband was short lived. His imprisonment for theft was the first phase of her single parenting. For a period of five years she was forced to be the main breadwinner in her family. Upon his release from prison her husband neglected his family financially. He abandoned them and went to live with a girlfriend. Martha then tried on several occasions to save the marriage, without any success. Death separated them forever. She was then used to the idea of being the main breadwinner in her family. After the death of her husband Martha never remarried. She had a relationship with a man who was a migrant labourer. When this man deserted her and their daughter to return to the Ciskei, she decided not to remarry. She argued that it is better to be a single parent and not be subjected to any male demands. Had she married she would have had to change her surname, move residence and be subjected to the control of her new in-laws. Further, she might have had problems with her sons as step-father and step-son problems could have developed and her loyalty could have become divided. Most African sons refuse to allow their mother to remarry after the death or divorce of their parents. The problem magnifies itself especially when they are adolescents or they have to be taken to the initiation school when they usually demand the presence of their father or the eldest of their father's clan. Thus sons also subject their mother to male subordination. By being a single parent Martha escaped all these problems, and was also able to play an active role in community groups like Civic Associations and UWCO.

4.8.6 Housing Struggle

The government in South Africa has used many methods to try and curb the movement, residence and growth of the African population in urban areas. In urban areas housing restrictions and street arrests have been the key methods of controlling and oppressing the African population. Worst hit by these methods are women who have been discriminated against on the basis of their gender and class background. Women suffered most because of the official ideology of seeing the African working class as temporary in Cape Town. The majority of those forced out of the area were women.

Martha had been on the waiting list for the past 20 years, before 1982. In the survey done to supplement the stories, 30% of the women were lodgers and 10% had no accommodation of their own. Housing shortages hit women hardest and it was not unusual to find women waiting for housing for 10 years. From the time Martha was married she was a lodger with a family of two children. As an African in Cape Town it meant that she had to struggle to secure accommodation because of the Government's Coloured Labour Preferential policy. Being widowed complicated the matter for her as the sexist housing by-laws discriminated against women, whether widowed or single. The housing superintendent uttered a sexist and racist comment to her that "she has to get a man first before the allocation of a house." Thus, the allocation of a house in all three African townships is tied to a stable marriage relationship. Without a husband she struggled for 20 years until she decided in 1982 to allocate herself a shanty, where she came into contact with police harassment. The housing struggle became a political struggle and they (the KTC women) were determined to secure their family life. The State reacted by the destruction of their

structures but this did not deter them. Martha joined the United Women's Congress (UWCO) and the Civic Association which had given them support and educated them. Her employment as a domestic worker on a part-time basis, with a meagre salary, added to her problems.

4.8.7 Politicisation and Consciousness as a Woman, a Worker and an African

Frustration and the beginning of a feminist conscience drove Martha to determine to continue with her housing struggle. The years of struggling to earn a living in Cape Town had left her with emotional scars. The limited options at Martha's disposal raised her consciousness as a woman, African and a worker. She has had problems with childcare as she had to be separated from her children due to the non-provision of these facilities by the state. Further, she has had to cope with the problem of isolation as a domestic worker and she decided to become a member of community-based organisations, although she does not play a dominant role.

Cole (1987: 15) confirms this by saying: "As women began to share with each other some of the pain of these individual experiences, they began to develop a sense of solidarity as women."

The peak of her politicisation came when she was degraded by a housing superintendent who told her that a house could only be allocated to her if she married. This had angered Martha as she realised that she was being discriminated against because she was a woman, widowed and an African. She defied the State and erected herself a shanty at KTC camp. Cole (1987: 15) states that: "The migrant labour system had, over the decades,

intensified gender conflict; resulting in the bitterness and frustration which women expressed." During her stay there, women led the struggle for resistance against the demolition of their shanties. Women's solidarity increased as they were all facing a common threat to their survival. The consciousness of being a mother was raised as they had organised and tried successfully to prevent the disorganisation of their family lives. Martha joined a branch of UWCO at KTC. UWCO reinforced the solidarity of women as mothers. The first thing Martha claims to have learnt is to struggle for the protection of family life, demand provision of childcare, housing, sanitary systems and issues that affect women in general. She also joined the Civic Association which she claims is fighting for the rights of the township residents. She joined these organisations because they played a dominant role in helping them as women and residents of KTC to fight against the demolition of their shanties. The result of the struggle was that a few concessions were won as the women were allowed to erect their shanties and stay with their families.

4.9 DISCUSSION - SUPPLEMENTARY SURVEY

Before moving to the discussion in Chapter 5, I would like to discuss the findings of the supplementary survey. This step is taken first in order to provide a context for the discussion of issues that have emerged in this chapter. Secondly, the aim is to increase the validity and representation of the life stories. Survey interviews are normally referred to as supplementary, as has been the case here for the three life stories selected to form the core of this study.

Among the 30 women interviewed the illiteracy rate was found to be high. Various reasons were given for the early drop-out from school. Pregancy, loss of interest, death of parents, financial problems, and unhappiness at school resulting from poor teacher-pupil relationships, were given for the high illiteracy rate. This problem has been caused by the unequal class and 'race' funding of the educational system in South Africa. African women, as members of the working class, have been denied access to educational institutions, resulting in a high rate of illiteracy amongst them.

Faced with problems of illiteracy, these women were further denied access to employment opportunities. Lacking any training or skills, they were left only with the option of doing domestic work to survive. Domestic work offered them the only access to paid employment. At their places of employment they are faced with unequal, oppressive relationships with their employers: the variegated backgrounds of class, 'race' and gender from which they come prevent any formation of bonds and affinity between them. This is reflected in the low wages paid to domestic workers. Such wages have to be stretched to cover the personal needs of the domestic worker as well as those of her household members. This has been found to be the case with Thelma, Miriam and Martha in this study. Even the so-called childless and single women have dependents who rely on their salaries. The majority are not assured of any annual increases as they are without any legal rights nor bargaining rights.

Given the low salaries that domestic workers are paid, they have very little leisure time for themselves or their families. No recreation facilities are provided for them and the majority, like Martha and Thelma,

spend most of their time in church-related activities. Others knit, sew or attend literacy classes or spend their time doing their house chores. Miriam, as the study shows, has no recreational outlet and spends her spare time doing her housework on the weekends or when she is off duty.

Housing has been found to be another issue which has affected these women the most. Fifty per cent of the women in this survey were found to be without any form of housing of their own. They were either lodgers, or had no house at all and were staying on their employer's premises, or they were living with their parents or extended families. The remaining fifty per cent were either renting a council house or living as squatters. The three women forming the core of this study are like the women who were interviewed for the survey. The domestic workers and women in general lead fragmented lifestyles which are a direct result of the housing crisis: husbands, children and significant family members are separated from them, causing the domestic workers to lead isolated lives. Thelma's family, as shown in the survey, has been fragmented three times.

As a direct result of the housing crisis in the Western Cape, the women have taken the lead in the struggle against discriminatory housing policies. Five of the women in the survey are active members of community and political organisations.

Again it appears that African women in the survey are aware of their oppression as women and members of the working class. They are questioning their conditions of employment and challenging the structures that perpetuate their oppression by protesting the presence of police and army in the townships. They are participating in bus boycotts and taxi

boycotts, although on a small scale. The red meat boycott, rent boycott and the Fattis and Monis boycott are further examples of their active participation. The three women in the study have also participated in these boycotts.

Women have collectively sought action against the state's action of disorganising their family lives - women who were without permits to be in Cape Town.

These findings have helped in placing the three life stories into the context of the daily lives of African women involved in domestic work. The struggle for survival faced by the three women are also faced by others interviewed for the survey. The findings have also helped in balancing the subjective interpretation of the three women's stories with the objectivity of the survey responses. The researcher was also able to supplement and cross-check the validity of the stories told by the respondents of this study.

The majority are aware of the existence of a union representing domestic workers, although few are members. They are aware of the need for the existence of the Union. This is reflected by the following responses:

> "Union of Domestic Workers is supposed to protect workers from unfair employment practices like unfair dismissal."

> "The Union helps workers when their employers refuse to pay them holiday bonuses and when they refuse to increase their salaries."

There also seems to be a trend towards the employment of more workers in part-time work as few employers are able to afford the payment of full-time wages, either for resident or daily commuters. Availability of housing in Khayelitsha and the development of squatter camps in this region has attracted more women to part-time or daily commuter jobs.

The following chapter is aimed at analysing the issues arising from these stories.

4.10 CONCLUSIONS

The experiences of the African women, illustrated in these life stories, reflect the daily struggles faced by African women in South Africa today. As Africans, women, mothers and members of the working class, they have experienced exploitation and oppression in various ways.

These experiences have been reflected in the analysis of the themes which have emerged and are discussed after each story. From these themes the following key issues have been identified:

Working class background: The issues are:

- subordination in marriage relations and single parenting; childcare problems and extended kinship pressures; life of harassment in regard to legal status and housing.

Exploitation as domestic workers: The issues are

- low wages; dependent and exploitative relationships with employers; unhealthy working conditions and lack of employment benefits.

Housing: The issues are

- legal rights and housing; lack of property rights.

Isolation: The issues are

- Religion as a system of social contact and support; religion as a control system.

Dreams: The issues are

- security of property and property ownership; education of children; ultimate self-employment and economic independence; ultimate self-employment.

Having selected these key issues, I shall attempt to develop explanations for the lived experiences of domestic workers and to theorise them in the context of the 1980s in Cape Town. This will be done in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

ISSUES FROM THE LIFE STORIES

SECTION I

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section attempts briefly to trace the historical development of the domestic labour market in the Western Cape. Secondly it attempts to analyse the issues which have emerged from the themes that have been stated in the previous chapter.

In trying to trace the development of this labour market in the Western Cape, special emphasis will be placed on the 1980s, which have been referred to as the Reform Era. This is done in order to try to explain how the government policy has been changed and modernised in response to working class demands. Further, an attempt will be made to demonstrate how this policy has affected the supply and control of domestic labour in the area.

The intensified government onslaught against the African people, especially those in the squatter camps, was met with organised resistance. Open defiance of government policy took place, as the illegals and the squatters were no longer prepared to be harassed and endorsed out of the Western Cape. In the face of organised resistance, the government made certain concessions to the African people. Amongst these concessions was the relaxation of the influx control system, as it had proved to be a failure in halting Black urbanisation in South Africa.

5.2 Development of the Domestic Labour Market in the Western Cape

The domestic and agricultural sectors have been the dominant sectors of employment for the black labour force in South Africa 'since' before the discovery of minerals. The domestic sector in particular has been important as a point of entry for the various racial groups in South Africa. Cock (1980:6) views domestic service from an historical point of view as being a kaleidoscopic institution which has had both sexes, irrespective of 'race', moving in and out of it. However, the black woman, being the last to be incorporated into this sector, still dominates it today.

The development of the domestic sector took different routes in South Africa. In Natal and the Transvaal, the domestic sector was initially dominated by African males. Women resisted incorporation into this sector as most were involved in subsistence agriculture and in brewing liquor. This is supported by the number of beer battles in Natal in the eighteenth century. Gaitskell et al (1984:99) state that "where black women were not present in sufficient numbers, sexism (the assumption here of the naturalness of domesticity to women) yielded to racism and black men performed domestic service". Van Onselen (1982) provides more history of the involvement of the African male in the domestic sector in the Transvaal during the era of the discovery of minerals.

At the same time, in the Cape and Orange Free State, the domestic sector was dominated by the female from the start. The tradition of associating racial minorities (blacks and all the underprivileged groups) with domestic labour dominated the Cape scene in the eighteenth century. The Western Cape, in particular, has a history of the use of slave labour,

imported Africans and Asians, in the domestic sector. The early colonials viewed the use of slave labour as economical. Gaitskell et al (1984:98) state:

> the early colonists had opted for slave labour instead of immigrant white labour because it was cheaper and more controllable and some officials considered that it was more fitting for slaves than free whites to do menial work.

This was a clear indication of the racism of the time, as captured San and African women were coerced into domestic work. In the Free State, African women were coerced by the imposition of the pass laws into doing domestic work, but this action was met with fierce resistance by the women.

Legislation was thus used as a means of stimulating the supply of much needed African Labour. Gaitskell et all (1984:99) are of the opinion that "African women could thus be seen by whites as most appropriate household help in a context where domestic labour had become firmly associated with servile status."

White men and women have gradually moved out of the domestic sector. In 1936, 5,02% were employed in this sector, decreasing to 0,38% in 1970. Similarly, the Asians employed in this sector have decreased from 27,6% to 5,1%. Coloureds and Africans still dominated this sector in 1970 (Gaitskell et al 1984:102).

The development of the commercial and manufacturing sectors afforded white men and women an escape from the drudgery of the domestic sector, while Coloureds, Asians and Africans shared an underprivileged class and racial background. Their movement out of the domestic sector has been slow.

Boddington (1983:98) accounts for the decrease of Malays/Asians in the domestic sector in this way:

> Small proportions of Malay women, followed by mixed women, were employed in industry, which again attests to the long term urban nature and incorporation into wage labour of Malays and their higher status relative to other Black groups.

Coloured women, on the other hand, entered waged employment earlier than the African woman. They moved into the jobs that were left by white women in commerce and industry.

Boddington (1983:84) states that "because of the small number of jobs for Coloured women elsewhere, domestic service was still important as a source of employment, though still not quite as important as for African women".

More African women were employed in the agricultural sector, as their entry into urban areas was restricted. The 1923 Native Urban Areas Act placed stricter control on the movement of African women. African men, on the other hand, were in a rather privileged position as they occupied labour positions in industry from 1946, although they were in a minority compared to white men. By 1946, over 60% of African women were employed in the domestic sector, but unlike other racial groups, they, as members of the working class, have remained in this sector until today (Gaitskell, 1984)..

Lacey (1981:271) states "keeping African women out of town, and making town life as unattractive as possible for them, were therefore part of attempts to leave jobs open for white women in shops, factories and homes".

Whereas Hill (1983:84) quoting Bozzoli, states that African "women were proletarianised in that they were separated from their means of production but did not become part of the industrial proletariat on the whole, in the sense of entering factory-based waged labour".

The employment position for the various racial groups in the domestic sector in 1960 was as follows:

TABLE I

SEX	RACE				
	White	Coloured	Asian	Black	Total
Male	5291 (2.38)	7274 (3.27)	6340 (2.85)	14 897 (6.69)	33 804 (15.17)
Female	9011 (4.05)	84858(38.10)	1896 (0.85)	93 184(41.83)	188 949 (84.83)
	14302 (6.42)	93132(41.36)	8236 (3.70)	10 808(48.52)	222 751 (100.0)

SOURCE: 1960 Population census, by race and occupation, Rep G68 A7

The following table shows the position of the various racial groups in the domestic sector in the 1980s.

TABLE II

OCCUPATION BY RACE AND PERCENTAGE

OCCUPATION DOMESTIC	RACE				
Sex	White	Coloured	Asian	Black	Total
Male	380 (0.07)	2060 (0.36)	40 (0.01)	48 880(8.55)	51 360 (8.99)
Female	2840 (0.50)	65220(11.41)	1320 (0.23)	450800(78.87)	520 180 (91.01)
	3220 (0.57)	67280(11.77)	1360 (0.24)	499680(87.42)	571 540 (100.0)

SOURCE: 1980 Census. Report 02-08-03.

From the above table it can be shown that because of their late incorporation, Black women dominate the domestic sector. As members of

the working class, they dominate this sector and have been denied access to other sectors of the economy.

TABLE III

DOMESTIC SERVANTS ACCORDING TO POPULATION GROUP AND SEX IN THE CAPE PENINSULA IN 1985

URBAN AREA	RACE				
Cape Peninsula	White	Coloured	Asian	Black	Total
Male	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	2.8%	4.9%
Female	0.0%	52.7%	0.3%	42.1%	95.1%
Total	0.0%	54.8%	0.3%	44.9%	100.0%

SOURCE: 1985 Census: Report 11-01-20 G68A4, houses and domestic servants; and flats in 1985.

The Cape Peninsula is dominated by the Coloured population and their big numbers in the domestic sector indicate their dominance in the area. On the other hand, the African population have been denied access to the commercial and industrial sectors, hence their dominance in relative terms in the domestic sector. No members of the white population were found in the domestic sector.

Thus class and racially based attitudes were common, as white women formed the minority of domestic workers. Poor employment conditions, access to better employment, as well as marriage were factors which decreased the involvement of White, Coloured and Asian women in the domestic sector, while the destruction of the rural economy by theft and the imposition of racist legislation forced African women into the domestic sector.

Gaitskell et al (1984:99) state that "... a combination of African pre-capitalist gender hierarchies, as well as frontier racism, tended to leave them at the bottom of the scale of wages".

The extension of the reference book to African women in 1952 meant that their movements were restricted. Further, Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act No. 25 of 1945 as amended, authorised the imprisonment and deportation of the unemployed. Women were worst affected and domestic work was the alternative to deportation and imprisonment.

African women could get employment only in the domestic sector as they were not employable in other sectors of the economy. Cock (1980) and Boddington (1983) state that domestic work was a point of entry for African women into waged employment. Their entry was pushed by violent means against them as women, workers and members of the working class. Boddington (1983: 136) states that:

> The specificity of domestic worker's oppression is therefore explained through the violence, resistance and force with which their labour was secured, their incorporation into wage labour as unskilled domestic workers and the subordination and control to which they were subjected as domestic workers.

As the government was not prepared to allow large numbers of African women into the Western Cape, pass raids became the order of the day. African women could remain in the area only if they were involved in paid domestic work. This was the case with both 'legal' and 'illegal' women in the Western Cape. Control of their movements and residence was very strict; African women could not just leave their places of residence in the rural areas to seek employment in Cape Town, Section 10 of the Urban Areas Consolidation Act made it difficult for African women to remain in urban

areas for longer than 72 hours without a permit so they sought employment there as this was the only way in which they could remain. Employment was one of the major ways of protecting women from deportation to rural areas as an 'idle undesirable' person in the urban areas. Many women were once victims of this situation and were deported to areas outside the Western Cape.

Seeking employment via the labour bureaux, which were instruments of controlling the residence and movement of African women, was unpopular and, as a result, more and more women have been recruited by word of mouth for domestic service. "For this reason, it is important for job seekers to have someone in town who could recommend them to prospective employers" (Berhardien et al, 1984: 9). Wages paid to these working-class women were very low, and without any bargaining rights as workers, they could not challenge payment of these low wages.

The following table indicates the average wage paid to domestic servants in the Cape in the period 1975 - 1985.

TABLE IV

AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGE, CASH AND IN KIND, OF FULL-TIME FEMALE DOMESTIC SERVANTS BY URBAN AREA BETWEEN 1975 - 1985.

URBAN AREA	RACE	SEX	YEAR	WAGE
Cape Peninsula	Black	Female	1975	R 71.67
	Coloured	Female	1975	R 82.16
	Black	Female	1985	R190.72
	Coloured	Female	1985	R175.00
P.E. Uitenhage	Black	Female	1975	R 54.48
	Coloured	Female	1975	R 54.76
	Black	Female	1985	R168.42
	Coloured	Female	1985	R178.62
East London *	Black	Female	1975	R 54.06
	Black	Female	1985	R156.86
Kimberley *	Black	Female	1975	R 54.29
	Black	Female	1985	R181.60

SOURCE: Census 1985: G68 A4 Table 1.10 of Report No. 11-01-20

* Figures for Coloureds in East London and Kimberley were not available.

Worst hit by these poor wages were the African women who came to the urban areas as 'illegals'. As their presence was 'undesirable' they were prepared to take any job that came their way at whatever wage the employer was prepared to offer. They were faced daily with the worst employment conditions as employers tended to exploit their position. In order to make their presence in the urban areas safe, they had to be registered with the labour bureaux. Their contracts had to be renewed annually in order for them to remain in employment; and, in order to comply with the demands of Section 10 of the Urban Areas Consolidation Act, they had to

remain with one employer for a period of 10 years in order to qualify to be in Cape Town permanently. This contract agreement subjected the women concerned to the will of their employers. Loss of employment usually resulted in deportation to the homelands and possible starvation. Employers and the government had joined hands in controlling the lives of these women. Daily raids were carried out by Administration Board inspectors to check the legal status of these women.

The families of these women were not allowed to be with them in their place of employment; their employers discouraged any form of family life in the backyards. Strict control was exercised over their movement as well as over that of their visitors. Police and inspectors kept a constant check on all the people in the domestic workers' rooms. Nightly raids were also conducted by the police, in order to check husbands, boyfriends and children. Heavy fines were imposed on all those found to be unregistered in a household. Thus the sexuality of the domestic worker was controlled. Family life for African domestic workers went against the Coloured Labour Preference Policy and it was therefore imperative that the government and the employers collaborated in discouraging Africans from settling in Cape Town.

Outside the place of employment, workers as women were denied the right to own property. Housing allocation in the townships was attached to a permanent relationship with a man.* Once again the State was destroying the family life of domestic workers, and it is no surprise that it was the women who led the squatters' struggle in the Western Cape.

This has changed now as the municipal by-laws have been relaxed and women can now be allocated a house without a marriage certificate. (See Note on Changes in Chapter 2.)

The government responded by destroying their shanties; women were beaten, charged, shot and imprisoned, but this did not deter the women from organising and resisting the government's efforts to discourage permanent settlement of African families in the Western Cape. The government eventually consented to the demands of the the women in KTC and Old Crossroads by providing site-and-service schemes in these areas, but not before sifting out the recent arrivals from those who had resided in Cape Town continuously. Again this was a strategy on the part of the government to fragment the working class.

In the survey, 10% of workers who had 'no house' of their own were resident workers staying on their employers' premises. Another 10% stayed with their parents, not from choice, but from lack of access to housing. Hence, as already mentioned, tight control exercised by the government over the supply of housing for Africans has affected women the most.

5.2.1 The 1980s - Reform, Control and Repression

The post-1976 period has been termed the 'New Deal' era by the government. This is because of the limited reforms introduced by the government during this period. The government was responding both to the economic crisis and the political demands made by the black working class.

Political demands and trade union recognition in South Africa date back to what S. Friedman (1981:14) calls the 'fifty years in the wilderness' (from 1919 to 1973). Worker militancy had increased and the trade unions took on a political character in the absence of any political representation of the black working class. External pressure in the form of sanctions added

to the pressure on the South African government to introduce reforms. Thus the period of the 1980s saw the appointment of two Commissions of Enquiry, namely the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions. The two commissions were not only responses to the demands of the workers in the industrial sector, but also those hidden in the private sphere - the domestic workers.

5.2.3 The Riekert Commission - "Attack on Family Life"

Van der Horst (1981: 34) states that the aim of the Riekert Commission was to enquire into all legislation affecting the economic use of manpower, except that administered by the Department of Labour which was being investigated by the Wiehahn Commission. The Commission was established in terms of Government Notice 1673 of 26 August 1977 (Riekert 1979). In its recommendation the Commission, in trying to arrange for the maximum utilisation of 'manpower', tied the availability of employment to housing in the urban areas. How responsive were the Commission's recommendations to the demands of the working class? Paragraph 4.281 of the Riekert Commission recommended that:

> No employment should take place without the authorization of the labour bureau having competence. Offers of employment have to be made between the established workers of all population groups before the recent arrivals in the area can be considered. In the case of the former, a standing authorization should be subject to any requirements and authorization by the government concerned for the worker to leave its area, also be subject to:
> (i) a firm offer of employment
> (ii) the availability of approved housing and in the case of contract workers imported temporarily, the non-availability of suitable local work seekers.
> (iii) Section 10 (1) to be the main criterion for determining the long presence of a black person in an urban area (Riekert, 1979).

What the Commission had actually recommended were limited concessions to Section 10 holders in terms of the Black Urban Areas Act No. 25 of 1945

between urban areas. Excluded from these limited concessions were the Section 10 1(d) holders who were mostly governed by the influx control system. These Section 10 1(d) holders were mostly migrant workers who were unlikely ever to become permanent residents of the urban areas. These workers had to be housed in hostels and no family housing was to be built as they were temporary in urban areas. This was the old practice in the Western Cape, as was a freeze on African housing in 1966.

Most of those affected by this exclusion from the recommendations of Riekert were the dependents of the migrants, women and children. All these attempts were aimed at restricting women's presence and organisations in Cape Town. It is no accident therefore that women, especially in the Western Cape, have led the struggle for housing. Africans in this area have long been in a precarious position as compared to other parts of the country because of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy. The government had frozen the building of housing in favour of single men's hostels. This was coupled with the strict rounding up of the 'illegals' who were deported back to the 'homelands'. The so-called 'illegals' were mostly women, children and those who were unemployed.

In 1984 Koornhof, the then Minister of Co-operation and Development, reiterated the government's plans of non-provision of housing for those in Cape Town 'illegally'. He stated that:

> The established black communities were the first to suffer from the uncontrolled influx of people without accommodation. Whites also suffered as a result of such chaotic conditions and eventually the effects of influx were felt by the whole community (Cape Times 1.09.83).

Paragraph 7.55 of the Riekert Commission recommended that: "Control over migration of population to urban areas is essential in order to obviate social problems. Effective control over employment should be the criterion for regulations. The migration of workers and their families should be discouraged for the promotion of orderly community development in urban and rural areas. This was accepted by the government." (Riekert, 1979).

It became clear then that the government was increasing its application of reform and repression. The reforms had both political and ideological implications. The aim was to split the African working class into 'legals' and 'illegals' thus ensuring worker control and exploitation. Working class militancy was to be neutralised as only those who had housing and employment were to be in Cape Town. The urban African community, i.e. the 'illegals', were under siege as they were deported to areas outside Cape Town. As mentioned earlier, the effects of these repressive actions by the government were felt mainly by women and children. This is because housing is crucial to stable family life. Thus an Old Crossroads woman states that it was the women who were experiencing deportation and disorganisation of their family life (Cole 1987:15).

With increased repression some women resorted to domestic work on a full-time basis in order to secure a room. The price which was paid by the women engaged in domestic work was very high, as they had to be separated from their families. Children were left with relatives or by themselves in or outside Cape Town. Men were accommodated in single men's hostels. Only the 'legals' were able to get employment in Cape Town. But there were employers who were enticed by the idea of employing an

'illegal' worker, thus being able to pay lower wages and subjecting them to inhumane working conditions. On the other hand they were faced with prosecution for the employment of 'illegal' labour. Paragraph 4.153 proposed that:

Increased penalties should be made applicable to employers of illegal workers. Such penalties should be made more effective in the following ways:

(i) Fines for such offence should be increased every time it is committed
(ii Terms of imprisonment that may be imposed as an alternative or otherwise should be in proportion to the proposed increase in the fines.
(iii) Fines should equal the period of 'illegal' employment that the employer had engaged in.
(iv) Payment of admission of guilt fines should be encouraged.
(v) Employers should be made responsible for the cost of repatriation of illegal blacks in their employment (Riekert, 1979).

The Government accepted most of these recommendations, but stated in its white paper that the seekers of illegal employment should also be made to feel the pinch. Illegal employees were also to be fined or imprisoned for being found in employment. Thus the illegal strata of the African working class were to continue to feel the pinch of the Labour Preference Policy in the Western Cape. The Riekert Commission was entrenching their illegal position.

"Riekert recommended that the onus for preventing the unlawful employment of workers who entered the area illegally, should rest on employers" (Van der Horst 1981: 53). Employers of 'illegals' faced possible imprisonment and a fine of R500. This then limited the chances of employment for the 'illegal' women, especially in Cape Town where pass arrests and raids were the order of the day. Those who stayed in domestic work were without any worker rights and state protection. Termination of a contract of

employment could be accompanied by deportation to a homeland and possible starvation as there are very few job opportunities for women there. Pregnancy was another possibility for the termination of employment, in the absence of maternity benefits for domestic workers. Marks (1981: 18) states that:

> Pregnancy, which for the Sea Point White employer population is usually a happy event, is instead for the Sea Point domestic a time where one's economic survival is tenuous and threatened and where the legal provision which relates to time off for pregnant women in commerce and industry are not found, neither it seems, is human compassion which, despite the absence of legal requirement, would see fit to allot a period of paid leave and confinement.

Thus it became clear that the state and employer had joined hands in subjecting domestic workers to exploitative and oppressive conditions. The curfew was also recommended in order to rid the white areas of black people. Only those who were offering their labour power and had permits, were to be allowed into the white areas. Paragraph 4.215 of the Commission was aimed at increasing the maximum utilisation of local labour (Riekert, 1979). Strict control was to be exercised over the importation of contract workers to the Western Cape. Local employers where thus to be encouraged to use the African labour available locally. The labour bureau system was to be improved so as to be able to control, monitor and channel African labour in urban areas and between the various sectors of the economy. The recommendation was accepted in principle by the government.

The independence of the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei countries worsened the conditions of the African working class. Citizenship of these homelands was forced onto all the Africans in Cape Town thus depriving them of their South African Citizenship. Children born after the so-called independence of these homelands were to become citizens of these

homelands, irrespective of whether both their parents were born in an urban area. Earlier the place of birth was the key criterion in determining citizenship under the Urban Areas Act of 1945 as amended. Thus it became a clear intention of the State to attack the African working class family, as its permanent nature in the urban areas in the long term would mean the demand for political representation.

Faced with this intensified government repression, the African women domestic workers resorted to squatting, which became a reality for them in order to secure their family life. But squatting was made illegal. Thus again the government was sewing up the loose holes in its legislation. As previously mentioned, it is thus no accident that women have come to the forefront in organising against the demolition of their squatter camps. The presence of large numbers of both 'legals' and 'illegals' was a threat to the State as in the long run they would demand political representation which the government had displaced to the so-called Independent States. In defending the government's policy, Koornhof said in the Cape Times (18.12.83):

> We are convinced the government does not wish to give recognition to the separation of husband and wife and family or the migrant.

Despite this statement, deportation of 'illegals' and the setting up of roadblocks continued daily. Further, the Group Areas Act had restricted the mobility of women. Permits were demanded for women to stay in their employer's premises at night. Determined to secure a family life and to remain in the Western Cape, women were forced to continue to challenge the authority of the State in every possible way. Squatting was the only option open to them in view of the housing crisis in the Western Cape for

Africans. The Cape Times (1.09.85) quoted Koornhof in Parliament as saying:

> The Government made no apology for its influx control measures and would not under any circumstances tolerate squatting in the urban areas. The government would act strictly and decisively against squatting mainly for socio-economic reasons.

The State's idea of creating divisions within the ranks of the working class became clear then with the concessions made to urban or legal workers in the payment of better salaries. As working class solidarity increased due to the peculiar position of Africans in the Western Cape, these attempts were resisted. It became apparent that deportation and resettlement in camps in or outside Cape Town could be a reality for both the 'legals' and 'illegals'. It also became clear that the flooding of the so-called illegals to the Western Cape could not be halted by pass raids only. Thus Cole (1986: 98) states:

> Both Koornhof's attempts to translate the Riekert proposals into legislation since 1980 had clearly failed. With an increasing economic recession and growing political challenge in urban areas the government fell back on pass raids. The raids intensified in 1982 but in the Cape Peninsula there were signs that pass raids on their own could not stem the presence of an illegal African population.

The government was then forced to recognise the presence of the squatters in the Western Cape and offered some concessions which were aimed at controlling the growth of this stratum of the working class.

The Riekert proposals made no drastic changes to the lives of the majority of the working class in the Western Cape. This Commission was followed by the Wiehahn Commission.

5.2.4 The Wiehahn Commission and Women's Position

The Wiehahn commission had as its terms of reference "the adjustment of the existing system of labour legislation to 'provide' more effectively for the needs of our changing times; the elimination of bottle-necks and other problems in regard to labour; and the creation and expansion of sound labour relations for the future" (Van der Horst, 1981: 34).

This has meant the recognition of African unions and their being brought under the ambit of the State. Gaitskell et al (1983:102-3) state that "the Labour Relations Act provided for the registration of unions with blacks or non-racial membership and their participation in statutory labour procedures". It also extended the State's control to unregistered unions and replaced liaison and works committees with plant-level works councils.

The Commission recommended the improvement of the working conditions and rights of workers in various sectors of the economy by extending trade union rights. Excluded from all these reforms were the two main sectors where large proportions of the African labour force are concentrated, namely in the domestic and agricultural sectors. Paragraph 4.684 of the Wiehahn report stated that:

> Terms of and conditions of service in domestic households, wherever possible, be bargainable (Wiehahn, 1981).

4.685 recommended that the domestic and agricultural workers should be under the control of the Wage Board's, but the government's views were not

in favour of this, as paragraph 4.29 states that:

> The government is in agreement with the Commission's view that a large variety of factors militate against the introduction of a formalised or structured system for farm and domestic workers and has noted the Commission's statement that few countries have established industrial systems for farm and domestic workers (Wiehahn, 1981).

The government would therefore prefer to consult with the parties concerned before taking a decision in regard to the issue of the organisation of domestic workers (Wiehahn, White Paper: 1981:32). The result was that large numbers of women in employment which is exploitative and oppressive and subjects them to control and domination, are not covered by any legislation to protect their interests. They are left at the mercy of their employers who are given leeway by the Government. Cock (1980: 76) alleges that:

> 800 000 black women are employed as domestic workers given the coercive legislation that offers them no alternative employment.

The fact that domestic workers are not covered by the new Act indicates the private nature of the relationship between maid and madam. This unequal relation of madam and maid means that employers are not forced to set minimum wage standards for their employees. The result is an increase in the control of the domestic worker by depressing wages in the absence of alternative employment in either the informal sector or other sectors of the economy. The 'contract' of employment between maid and madam is based on common law agreement between the two. Usually the agreement is made in isolation because of the private nature of the domestic sector. Thus Cock (1985: 10) alleges that "domestic workers are located in a legal vacuum. They are vulnerable to instant dismissal by employers who often fail to observe the common law provisions". Moreover the domestic workers

are without any sick benefits, pension benefits, maternity benefits or even annual leave.

The position of domestic workers is also characterised by a series of patriarchal relations that they are subjected to both in and outside their families. At home it is their husbands, if they married; or their brothers or relations if they are unmarried, divorced or widowed; the male boss at work who gives orders via the wife; the police and inspectors who raid them; and the magistrates and judges in the legal field who are mostly men. This series of male figures often results in domestic workers not pursuing any legal actions against male dominance, as they view all the institutions as favouring men.

Callinicos (1980: 88) sums up the legal position of African domestic workers in this way:

> Legal discrimination imposed by white colonial interpretations of African customary law on women combined with our efficient system of labour control, its pass laws and contract systems, its migrant labour and apartheid regulation - plus the fact that domestic work is not "productive" work in the economic sense and therefore not as useful to the the capitalist system, had reduced the domestic worker to a further category of oppression and ultra-exploitability in our already ultra-exploitative society.

The Wiehahn Commission made recommendations to Parliament to have the conditions of employment of domestic workers and farm labourers investigated. The failure of the Commission to improve the conditions of either the farm or the domestic workers indicates the centrality of domestic service and the agricultural sector in controlling and dominating African women.

The Minister of Manpower announced in February 1982 that the National Manpower Commission would investigate methods of laying down minimum conditions of employment for workers in these sectors. However, he added that there are in South Africa a variety of factors which militate against the institution of formalised or structured conditions. "Factors which are peculiar to this sector and which must be taken into consideration are the intimate relationship between employer and domestic servants" (Cape Times: 22.02.1982).

The "promise" made by the Wiehahn Commission resulted in domestic workers organising themselves in order to safeguard their interests. Two organisations representing domestic worker's interests were formed in order to represent domestic workers in the absence of State protection for these women.

Apart from domestic workers, women in the service sectors of industry have also failed to benefit from the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations. Women were and still are subjected to low wages, although the Act had recommended the scrapping of sex discrimination. Employers, however, had the final say. Women were also previously prohibited from working night shifts. The Commission's ruling in this regard has meant that more and more women have to work night shifts in cleansing departments in the major cities. These women are subjected to verbal, physical and sexual harassment by their male bosses and night watchmen. Furthermore, their families are adversely affected as their husbands, lovers and children are left to care for themselves. This also threatens their marriages and may result in in the dissolution of their families. Regarding maternity benefits, the Commission recommended in paragraph 514.19 (Wiehahn, 1981) that maternity

benefits for women should be improved and that women should be assured security of employment after the confinement period. Light work should be given to women instead of dismissal because of pregnancy and the red tape involved in applying for maternity benefits should be removed. The government's response was not positive to this recommendation as it felt that no undue hardships were experienced by women as a result of pregnancy.

Further, the government did not support the increased provision of child-care facilities in black areas where the need was greatest, because of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy in the Western Cape. The government felt that the provision of these facilities should take place within the frame-work of the government policy of separate development in the Western Cape.

Cock et al (1983: 295) views the inclusion of women in this manner:

> The recent inclusion of women without regard of their domestic responsibilities will make issues such as transport at night, lack of advance warning about overtime, and compulsory overtime doubly onerous. This might well wipe out any benefit accruing in terms of additional wages.

Thus the State has persisted in disorganising the African working class despite its reforms. Furthermore, the Commission encourages the control of women and their subordination by trying falsely to equate them to men. Rather than recommend the provision of fair and humane conditions of employment based on aspects of the lives of women, like household responsibilities, the Commission has made cosmetic changes which are of no benefit to women. In fact, the Commission worsens the conditions of employment of women, thus ensuring their effective control and domination.

What then is the situation like for the women who are in the 'homelands' and who comprise more than 50% of the work force? The women concerned have had their productivity under-valued or even unnoticed. They are employed mostly in border and 'homeland' industries. The payment is very low, and they have no workers' rights. Life has become hard and intolerable for most women. The meagre salaries sent by either migrant husband, brother, daughter or at times sons, are proving to be inadequate, as the homelands exist within the structures of the South African economy. Crisis in the South African economy worsens the effect on the women in the homelands.

The majority of the women are victims of forced removal from white farms. They were not "allowed to either live or work in urban areas. The result was that many of the women became casual seasonal labourers on white farms" (Yawitch 1984: 138).

Desire for independent living outside the marriage institution also forces them to maintain their own families. This is the situation that domestic workers had to face if they were endorsed out of Cape Town or any other urban area. This is perhaps the reason for some domestic workers' preparedness to tolerate poor working conditions. To them "domestic work is a strategy for survival", as Cock (1980: 307) has pointed out.

SECTION 2

5.3 ANALYSIS OF KEY ISSUES FROM THE THEMES EMERGING IN THE THREE LIFE STORIES

5.3.1 Working Class Background

Under this theme, patterns from early childhood, which depict the gendered experiences of women's exploitation and oppression emerged. Three issues have been identified: poverty, exploitation as rightless workers and limited opportunities.

5.3.2 Poverty

Poverty is caused by the exploitation of rightless workers and the payment of low wages. Patterns from early childhood depicted that the women interviewed for this study come from a working class background. Their parents were struck by poverty as they were exploited as rightless workers and by the payment of low wages.

They, like their parents, were discriminated against because of their racial classification and class background, forcing them to occupy the lowest paying jobs in the job hierarchy. Their parents had no bargaining rights as they were denied the right to organise themselves into unions. As a result they were not in a position to bargain for living wages and improved working conditions. Detentions and deportations as well as the non-provision of decent housing became strategies to weaken the working class. Denied the right to vote meant that they were without any political representation to articulate their needs. They were also denied the right to own property.

The women, because of their gender, had unequal power relations with men within their own class. This unequal power relation subjected them to male domination as they were regarded as perpetual minors. Legally they were defined as minors and culturally they were subjected to the will of their men and certain privileged women. As women they were without any educational qualifications and were forced into domestic work which subjected them to ultra-exploitation. Thus from early childhood the women concerned have been socialised into doing domestic work. The result has been that poverty, which had earlier affected their parents, is rife among domestic workers. But the gender character of this poverty must also be emphasized if we are to understand the specific experiences of domestic workers as women and members of the African working class. It is mostly women who occupy the lowest paying jobs. They are denied access to educational opportunities, denied access to housing and are without any political power. Those who are employed are often the sole breadwinners and their salaries are important for the daily survival of their families/ household members. Further, the majority of the unemployed are women. Thus poverty affects women, their dependents and household members the worst.

5.3.3 Exploitation as Rightless Workers

The majority of domestic workers in South Africa are African women. Because of their racial classification as well as their class they have no rights as workers. They are denied the right to vote and they have no political representation. African workers for a long time have been denied union rights. This is still the case with domestic workers. The

result has been that they have been unable to organise themselves into unions and bargain for better employment conditions, such as better wages and benefits such as maternity leave, holiday pay, annual bonus and upward mobility. They are exploited as workers through the payment of low wages. The low wages they are paid exclude the domestic work that they perform in their own family households. Domestic workers are doubly exploited as workers and as women. The result is that their families subsist in near poverty conditions. The wages paid to them are based on an individualised system which denies the existence of their family. The domestic workers have to carry the burden of reproducing the next generation of workers. The employers shy away from paying them a family wage which will help to keep their children at school and afford them the opportunity of improved living conditions. The domestic worker's family therefore seek a variety of ways in which to supplement the family income. In the survey of 30 women, some had taken in lodgers and others had taken their children out of school before they reached high school level.

Africans were only allowed into the urban areas to sell their labour. Permits had to be sought for the right to be in an urban area. Worst hit by the permit system were the domestic workers. Without rights to be in an urban area they could not find employment. If one was lucky to get a job, it meant enduring the most appalling employment conditions with poor wages. Further, the worker was tied to one employer for a period of twelve months. In order to qualify to be in an urban area, the domestic worker had to finish a period of ten years of continuous employment. Failure to do so would result in the cancellation of the permit and deportation to a homeland. Deportation meant loss of income and possible starvation.

Outside the work situation were the pass laws. Failure to produce a pass or a permit resulted in imprisonment which also meant loss of income for the particular domestic worker and her family. Also, the employers of the 'illegal' domestic workers faced possible prosecution.

Thus the interplay of 'race', class and gender deprives African women as members of the working class of basic human rights as workers, mothers and women. It also indicates the collaboration of employers and the state in controlling their lives.

5.3.4 Limited Opportunities

Coming from a working class background, these women have been deprived of educational opportunities as well as access to decent employment. Without any opportunities to better themselves, they were left with limited opportunities at their disposal. A certain type of education which limits their employment opportunities is a feature of racial capitalism in South Africa. Cock (1980) refers to it as 'education for domesticity'. It was meant to prepare African women for domestic service. Neither free books nor compulsory education was available to Africans in South Africa. Education thus became the privilege of few. The majority, being women, were left without any form of education nor employment opportunities. Deprived of all the basic human rights the African women in this study found themselves having to do domestic work. From the sample in this study, the highest educational level reached by domestic workers was standard nine - only three had gone that far - the rest had either never been to school or had dropped out before standard nine.

Domestic work does not need any form of certification as it is an extension of what the women have been socialised into doing. Domestic work in another woman's kitchen reflects the racial and sexual definition of women's roles. In South Africa it is the women of the disadvantaged class, the women of colour who do domestic work. They are paid poor wages and have to work long and strenuous hours. The chances of opting out of this situation are minimal. In Cape Town, they have been forced into the domestic sector when the women of other 'races' had been incorporated into other sectors of the economy.

Faced with this situation the women concerned had to devise some survival skills in order to cope with their situation. They 'shared' reference books and alerted each other when there was a police raid. Martha and Miriam had to resort to squatting in order to resist the racist and sexist discrimination in the allocation of houses. The majority of domestic workers in the sample have opted to be single parents and to remain outside of the marriage institution, as it is patriarchially dominated and oppressive to them.

5.4 EXPLOITATION AS DOMESTIC WORKERS

The particular forms and experiences of exploitation are low wages, dependent exploitative relationships with employers, unhealthy employment and health conditions, and lack of employment benefits. All these key issues are important in exposing the employment conditions of domestic workers.

5.4.1 Low Wages

Low wages paid to all women irrespective of their occupation is related to the ideology of regarding women's work as 'inferior', which justifies the undervaluation of their work. Housework, done in isolation, is the worst example of this ideology. The women who perform this reproductive labour are accorded the lowest status in society and are highly exploited because of its isolated nature. It involves the expansion of labour power for 24 hours. The wages of the women in the sample ranged from R60 to R450 per month, and, with dependents ranging from 4 to 11, they have to stretch their meagre wages.

Domestic workers were not (until recently) in a position to negotiate for better wages. As stated earlier, they had no bargaining rights. The Riekert Commission in 1979 had made a recommendation for the inclusion of domestic and agricultural workers to the Wage Board, but this was rejected by the Goverment. From all the women interviewed it became evident that they were being underpaid because they are women and form part of the working class. Also, their wages are regarded as being pocket money, which indicates that domestic workers are paid below the subsistence level.

Yawitch (1984: 29) confirms that the payment of women below the value of their labour power reinforces their financial dependence on men and perpetuates the ideology of a woman's salary being pin-money, used to top up the family income. Two of the women who form the core of this study are breadwinners in their families and their wages range between R80 and R100 per month. Miriam, who is a resident worker, has to split her wage twice. She has minor children left with her mother in Jamestown, rents a shanty at Khayelitsha and has to pay for her own food and clothing. The meagre wage paid to domestic workers has to be stretched to its maximum. Thelma, who is a full-time sleep-out, does some knitting in order to supplement her salary. The point being emphasised here is that domestic worker's wages have to be split between two or three families because of the fragmented nature of their families. The law does not allow them to bring their families into their place of work and at times, place of residence. Thus, their families are not only deprived of their physical presence but also of financial benefits.

5.4.2 Dependent and Exploitative Relationships with Employers

The relationship that exists between the domestic worker and her employer is unequal, and is characterised by class, 'race' and gender differences betwen employer and employee. The vast differences in the experiences of both women further affect the power relationship. The terms of this relationship are subject to the employer's interpretation and wishes. Employers use various methods to exploit this relationship. With limited options for employment and survival, the domestic worker has to endure this unhealthy, unequal relationship. In South Africa, white employers are in most cases more advantaged than their employees who are people of colour. The employer has both political and economic power over the

domestic worker, thus putting the worker in a dependent and vulnerable position. This exploitation takes place as follows: most domestic workers, irrespective of the category of work, i.e. part-time, resident work or as full-time commuters, are subjected to long hours, poor wages, no benefits; the long hours that are worked by most domestic workers are a result of the isolated nature of the type of work done by these women. With the absence of any state protection in the form of legislation, the domestic workers are subjected to ultra-exploitation. One respondent commented that "madams are very strict about the starting time but they forget when you have to go home to attend to your family."* The length of the working day is stretched by the employer in order to have control over the lives of the domestic workers. Some of the workers are never sure about the exact hours of their working day. Employers use a number of subtle ways to stretch the working day but the pay packet remains the same at the end of the month, week or day.

As discussed in the literature review, language often plays a role in the relationship between maid and madam. Employers address their employees in broken language, enforcing the class differences. Schlegel (1983: 65) states that employers in 19th century Hamburg "felt it appropriate to change their mode of speech" when talking to their workers. Van Onselen (1982) also mentions the use of 'fanakolo' by employers when talking to their kitchen boys. On the other hand, employers expect to be "addressed at the highest level possible" (Schlegel, 1983:65) and some employers have gone to the extent of changing their servant's names. Van Onselen (1982) states that workers were given object names in order to increase the social distance between employer and employee. Horn (1975: 113) emphasises that "sometimes too, even the kindest of employers thought nothing of

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* Mrs Y. - interviewed: 4/05/86

changing their servant's names arbitrarily, if it happened to clash with those in the 'family'..."

The employment life of a domestic worker is characterised by daily harassment. The harassments are either verbal or a threat of dismissal. Some employers have been discovered to be exploiting the high rate of unemployment because of the current economic crisis. They are seen to be making unfair and unreasonable demands on their employees. The white kitchen is the common ground for the conflict between employer and employee. This is because of the unequal relationship that exists between employer and employee. Domestic workers have no bargaining rights, thus they are at the mercy of their employers. Some domestic workers are denied food at work and have to provide for themselves. Others are provided with over-frozen food like bread, meat and fish or with the previous night's leftovers. Domestic workers are very bitter about this kind of treatment, especially when they compare the food provided for the animals in a particular household, to what is provided for them.

5.4.3 Unhealthy Employment Conditions of Domestic Workers and their Children

Lack of union rights, which deprives domestic workers of various worker benefits, puts them in an awkward position. This is depicted in their employment conditions. Domestic workers are the most overworked and underpaid workers in the world. They are the trapped workers who face daily struggles for survival in and outside the work situation. The only agreement on their employment conditions that exists is between them and their employers. Usually employers take advantage of their situation in a number of ways.

The long hours worked by the domestic workers are to the detriment of their own health as well as their families. Having left their families early in the morning and returning home late, they spend less and less time with their children. Coming back home they have to prepare their families for the next day. As a result, the food prepared is of the so-called 'gou-gaar'type which takes less time to prepare. Bread becomes the staple food for the children as well as sugar water when they come back from school. Unhealthy eating habits develop which then become the order of the day. Less and less time is spent in listening to their children's problems.

In order for these women to cope they have to delegate the elder children to undertake certain tasks at home after school. Girls are encouraged to undertake housework and, if possible, depending on their ages, help in the preparation of the food and caring for the younger children. This type of arrangement helps the domestic worker to cope with the double shift they have to work. Thelma has to work a triple shift. She has to prepare meals for her husband at the hostel, prepare clothing and food for her children who are staying with her mother and also engage in paid domestic employment. Her husband, who is fully aware of the triple shift that she has to work, does not share any of these duties. Thelma regards him as a 'traditionalist' who believes in the strict division of labour along gender lines.

When employers are sick they expect domestic workers to watch them around the clock. One interviewee from the sample said, "Employers think we are machines, that we are made of steel and iron and not flesh and blood as

they seldom understand when we are ill". Miss B*, one of the respondents in the study, has been sacked twice by her employer of ten years after complaining that she needed a break as she suffered from a continuous backache problem. Her employer, instead of being sympathetic to her, paid her all her monies and ordered her to leave the premises within an hour. She re-employed her three weeks later after begging her to come back, but the relationship between her and her employer was strained. Her employer had tried to cut her weekend leave, which she totally refused to accept.

The employers' attitude to workers' ill-health stems from their refusal to negotiate with their employees. The kind of diet planned for the employee never takes into consideration the strenuous manual labour she does, and domestic workers often do what Cock (1983) calls "the denial of self" by sacrificing all the nutritious food for their families.

Domestic workers also have to bear the brunt of family conflicts in their employer's households. They are normally the scapegoats of quarrels between the husband and wife. They are expected not to talk back, as this is taken to be a sign of arrogance on their part and could result in instant dismissal. There is, therefore, a high rate of psychosomatic diseases such as high blood pressure and heart disease in working class women. Moreover, employer's children participate in the oppression of the workers. Miriam said: " I am treated like a toy by her children and she works and treats me like a slave". Because she needs the job at this moment she has to tolerate this kind of treatment and human indignity. She has suffered this kind of treatment for the past five years. Miriam suffers most because of her legal position in Cape Town. She is presently

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* Miss B - Interviewed on: 03/06/86

contracted to her employer for a period of 12 months. In order for her to qualify for permanent residence in Cape Town under the Urban Areas Act of 1945, as amended, she has to complete a continuous period of employment of ten to fifteen years. She also has to make sure that she is not involved in any criminal offence, but unfortunately for her, she has had three convictions for pass arrests. She has been fined between R80 and R100. Because of these pass offences her chances for permanent residence in Cape Town are very slender. Her children, before joining her in Cape Town, have to get permission from the Local Development Board and her employer. Failure to get the required permits may result in the cancellation of her services and she may be deported back to her place of origin (see later in the analysis of housing changes that have taken place in Miriam's life regarding the employment and housing situation). It appears that both her employer and the State join in ensuring that she remains with her employer at all costs.

In some cases the employer threatens to withhold the worker's salary unless she complies with the demands made by the employer (Argus 8.8.86). The domestic worker has no legal protection against this type of harassment. Racist and sexist biases have penetrated the legal system in South Africa in the sense that rarely are domestic workers listened to by the police. Also made clear from this, is the fact that her presence in the urban areas is tolerated so long as she has a commodity to sell, i.e. her labour. Continued employment with her employer, who treats her like a slave, may prove impossible, thus meaning that the domestic worker has to forfeit the status of being a qualifier to be in an urban area.

An article in The Argus (8.8.86) confirmed this ill treatment of domestic workers. In many cases women endured appalling conditions, physical violence and slave wages in order to keep their jobs. The Star (8.4.85) reported that an employer was fined R50 or three days for allowing the maid to sleep in the garage, while the City Press (3.8.86) reported the story of a domestic worker winning a court battle for wages. These cases are an indication that domestic workers are no longer going to tolerate ill treatment.

5.4.4 Lack of Employment Benefits

Domestic workers, unlike other employees, enjoy no benefits in the form of sick leave, annual leave, pension benefits and annual bonuses. This lack of benefits forms part of their daily harassment. When the domestic workers do not turn up for work they either have their wages deducted or are verbally abused. Most of the employers of domestic workers seem to be unsympathetic to their employees.

If they give permission for the domestic worker to go for medical treatment, they want to know the time that the domestic worker will return. Before leaving for the medical appointment, the housework has to be done or a substitute has to be found to do the work when the domestic worker is not around. At times employers demand appointment cards or even telephone the particular clinic and check on the credibility of the domestic worker's request to be allowed to see the doctor. Some domestic workers have reported a pay deduction if no medical certificate is produced for being away from work. Employers at times telephone domestic workers who are in bed sick, demanding to know when they will be back. The employer expects domestic workers to be ever on duty, irrespective of

the strenuous, unsatisfactory working conditions. Chikanda (1986: 3) says: "a domestic worker is simultaneously treated as a child and a superhuman being who is expected to achieve the impossible".

5.5 FRAGMENTED FAMILY LIFE

Interlinked here are the issues that have emerged from this theme: subordination in marriage relations and single parenting; childcare problems and extended kinship pressure; legal status; housing; and harassment.

5.5.1 Subordination in Marriage Relationships and Single Parenting

The three women in the core of this study all come from fragmented families because of either divorce or the racist policies of South Africa. The system which operates to split the African families is that of the migrant labour system. It is unique to South Africa because of its racial character. African men are recruited to serve the needs of the mines, farms or other essential industries.

Their families are not desired and are a burden to capital as it would be to capital's disadvantage to pay African men a so-called family wage. As a result, husbands are separated from their families and are accommodated in hostels. They become married bachelors, locked in hostels. E. Chikanda (1986: 2) alleges that: "As an active victim of apartheid, her mobility and her relationship to her husband is defined by laws affecting them both. The grand design of apartheid was aimed at keeping black women in remote rural areas while their husbands were to become 'single' persons who were only tolerated in the urban areas because of their labour

potential. Only a few black women would be allowed in the urban areas to serve the white mistresses. The rest would remain as single parents".

The Bantu Labour Act of 1964 No. 67 tightened the loopholes which were exploited by women who entered the urban areas. Mariotti (1980:160) alleges that the Act placed the entry of African women into the urban areas on the same basis as that of African men. Women could therefore enter an urban area only if their labour was needed or for medical reasons. She could enter otherwise only if she could obtain a permit from the local bureau, as the Development Boards were then called, which stated the purpose of her visit as well as the duration. Her visits were strictly monitored and could not exceed a period of three months at the most. This ensured that women not in waged employment were in urban areas for a short period. If the permit was granted for medical reasons, it had to be stated where they would be staying. This meant that greater control and the monitoring of their movements in urban areas could be exercised. A permit would read as follows: "Permitted to be in the prescribed area of the Cape Peninsula while receiving treatment at such and such a hospital". The visit could be extended to a period of six months and even a year, but a medical certificate from the hospital superintendent had to be produced. This loophole was soon discovered and the Government exerted more pressure for this certificate to be issued only in exceptional cases, that is, where the desired treatment was unavailable in the particular person's place of origin, or when the particular person could not be referred to a hospital near his or her 'homeland'. Thus the medical visits were excluded as a form of giving wife and children an opportunity to be with their husband and father other than in December when he visited for a few weeks.

Penalties were introduced in terms of Section 14 of the Urban Areas Act which gave the magistrate powers to impose fines of up to R100 or three months' imprisonment when a black person was in an urban area for longer than 72 hours without a permit. "Any person who remains in a prescribed area for longer than 72 hours and cannot prove that he or she is entitled so to remain, commits a criminal offence and is liable to a fine. Further the court may order the deportation of the offender and his family" (Bosman, 1982: 638). Many African women and children were deported from Cape Town and dumped at so-called resettlement camps like Dimbaza and Mdantsane in the Ciskei. Many of these women defied the law because they wanted to prevent the fragmentation and disorganisation of their families. The result in the 1980s has been the flourishing of camps like Crossroads and KTC.

The Government is totally opposed to the building of family dwellings, as it would mean that it acknowledges the permanent nature of Africans in the townships. A few changes have taken place in the Western Cape with the relaxation of the Influx Control measures. Few women have had access to housing without prior association with men. By building hostels the government is able to control the employment, movement and residence of African men. The migrant labour system thus splits family life, which at times becomes a permanent phenomenon. The father is thus seen by his family as a stranger and at times, an unwelcome visitor who disturbs the established patterns of communication. The limited time that he spends with his family does not give him an opportunity to readjust to his family life. The migration of men to the cities has some consequences to their families. The structure of the family changes from one headed by a man to

one headed by woman. Women then, as breadwinners in their families, tend to establish their own patterns of living which at times are looked down on by men. Women become the major decision makers in their families on issues affecting themselves, like limiting the number of children they wish to have as well as in planning the future of their children. These decisions are usually taken in defiance of the male extended family member or the in-laws who were traditionally supposed to keep an eye on the home of the migrant worker and who had to be consulted before major decisions could be taken. This situation has been done away with by many African women as they are no longer prepared to be regarded as minors by the Apartheid system as well as the backward traditional mores and norms. These women have to cope with their situations as their husbands tend to neglect their families or the money sent to them is not enough to cover all the family needs. Because of the few options open to her, the African woman is then forced to enter wage employment. But what kind of employment are they entering? Being the last group to enter waged employment, they are forced to enter domestic work when other racial groups have long left this sector of the economy for better paying jobs in other sectors which offer better prospects for them.

Being the 'latecomers' to the urban labour wage sector they are faced with the prospect of remaining trapped in it. As their wages are low, it places a burden on their elder children to engage in domestic work. Elder daughters bear the brunt as they have to leave school at an early age and engage in domestic work in order to supplement their parent's wages. This has been the case with both Martha, Miriam and Thelma and millions of other domestic workers in South Africa. For instance, Rachel in S. Gordon (1985: 114) helped with housework from the time that she could walk, and

was helping to look after children younger than herself. She observed the women at their tasks and began at an early age to work about the homestead. She could cook mielie pap at the age of six. At the age of seven she was already in employment as a domestic worker and that was the beginning of her life career in domestic work.

5.5.2 Child Care Problems and Extended Kinship Pressures

Patterns in handling childcare problems were identified from the experiences of the domestic workers. Extended kinship structures and the total absence of children emerged strongly. Joining their husbands or coming to the townships by themselves, the women concerned have experienced a number of problems within and outside their families. The State has, for a long time, controlled every aspect of the lives of African people. The result has been that a number of struggles have been waged by the working class to force the State to recognise its basic needs. Because the State does not provide childcare facilities for the African working class, these women find themselves in a dilemma. They have to clothe and feed their children. But who is to look after them while they are at work? The result is that they are either left by themselves, with neighbours, elder children who have to miss school or their granny, in and outside Cape Town. Meanwhile these women have to take care of the employer's children and supervise and play with them while theirs are left to play by themselves in the street without any proper adult supervision. Most domestic workers express concern and anxiety about this state of affairs. They told me: "I worry the whole day when I am at work about what my children might be doing". They also experience problems when it comes to proper discipline of the children. One resident domestic worker said that, "because our children are left by themselves for a long time, they

tend to engage in petty offences which eventually land them in trouble. As a mother I feel very bad about it and blame myself for having failed to give proper guidance to my children".*

Being black mothers these women have to face struggles daily in their lives in and out of the work situation. Kinship structures are made use of in order to cope with the conditions that they live under. The use of kinship structure involves the use of aunts, grandmothers or other extended family members to care for the children while the domestic workers are at work. Usually payment is made on a mutual basis, like the giving of old clothing obtained at work by the domestic worker,or of the payment of school fees for one of the relative's children. Martha had her children brought up by her cousin. As a result, her children were more attached to her cousin than to her. She was like a stranger who satisfied their material needs while her cousin satisfed their emotional needs.

If the children are left with older siblings, their staple food during the day is bread with sweetened cold water or "left-overs" from last night's meal. In most cases bread seems to be popular with children. Bread, which is the staple food of most African families, has risen in price from 7.5 cents a loaf in 1968 to 58 cents a loaf in 1986. With large families, three or four loaves have to be bought daily which means that the meagre salary has to be stretched to its limits. Miriam, the full-time resident worker, sent her child with a friend to her mother in Jamestown with a brief note. Her son is presently seven years old and she last saw him when he was a few months old. "The kinship system has been made use of in order to solve the problem and involves adult relatives, older siblings and

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* Margaret - interview: 18.05.86

child minders." (Cock, J., Emdon, E. and Klugman, B., 1985: 47). Government and state have not provided for workers in other sectors either, with the exception of cases like provincial hospitals.

Chikanda (1985:3) gives the following description of the position of African women as mothers in relation to their own children: "Being Black automatically rids them of their maternal instinct in as far as their own children are concerned but miraculously equips them with the basic maternal ability to be a care giver to their employer's children".

Pauline Mokoena, a respondent in Gordon (Domestic Servants, 1985:110), had this to say about her relationship with her employers children: "I take the child to the clinic, a few days old. The missus was struggling. The nurse was so pleased she says 'This baby is fit and fresh'. I look after him very well. I like him, that child. He likes me too. When he wants food, even if his mother is here, he calls for me. He has respect. When I go home I leave another girl here. When I come back he says 'Jussus Pauline! I don't like that girl, man why you go so long time'". On the other hand, the attachment that grows between the domestic worker and her employer's children becomes the source of conflict between her and her female employer. Female employers become jealous of their domestic worker and start harassing them in front of their children. Or they encourage the children not to have respect for the domestic worker by not reprimanding them when they are rude towards the domestic worker. They socialise their children from infancy to see a domestic worker as a labour unit, not as an individual worthy of any respect. Their children take on this attitude and generalise it to all other black people. Thus domestic workers have to face extended family pressures and/or send their children

outside of Cape Town as there are no facilities provided for them. Some domestic workers have been known to settle the scores with their employer's children. Horn (1975) states that some children remembered their nannies as being very cruel to them during the Victorian era in England.

5.5.3 Legal Status and Housing and a Life of Harassment in Cape Town

Th influx control system in South Africa has crippled the lives of most African people. Van Vuuren (1979: 5) states that "Influx control, which can prevent the wife from joining the husband in an urban area, can force her to leave an urban area on divorce, illness or widowhood".

First the Urban Areas Act No. 25 of 1945 as amended has created a privileged group with Section 10 a/b rights to be in the urban areas. Section 10(1)c were the dependents of 1 a and b, while Section 10(1)a were the migrant contracted workers. The Act has divided the working class into those born in urban areas and those belonging in non-urban areas. The strict enforcement of the pass system has meant that hundreds of women and children were incriminated. . The pass system was also tied to employment and residence in the urban area.

This policy has been of benefit to the State as the unemployed (mostly women and fewer men) were deported out of urban areas. It has reduced the threat of working class militancy and thwarted attempts by employees to obtain higher wages. Further, Africans were only allowed into the area as temporary sojourners to offer their labour and go back to the homelands when it is no longer needed. The result of this policy has been the promotion of the migrant labour policy which discriminates against women.

The surplus African population, in the form of women and children, have been deported out of Cape Town to the 'homelands'. The building of family housing was substituted by the building of hostels which were guarded by security men 24 hours a day.

The State aimed to prevent a settled African working class which would demand political representation. Further, it would mean that the State would be responsible for the reproduction of the working class through the provision of facilities for public consumption in the forms of schools, creches, welfare benefits and housing. This burden was displaced by the State to the 'homelands' as the surplus population was deported there. The State has also paid African men single pay packets instead of so-called family wages. The result has been the survival of the working class in near poverty conditions. To try to ensure that women and children remained in the homelands, the influx control system was strictly implemented.

The government had created the so-called self-governing states where it was said that Africans could exercise their 'right' to vote. In urban areas Africans were there to offer their labour, then go back to the homelands. Thus the non-provision of housing became another way of harassing domestic workers.

5.6 HOUSING

Under this theme variations appeared in the ways women have faced the housing problem. Legal status and property rights are key issues. The gendered experience of women's lack of access to housing and legal rights has forced them to take the lead in demanding housing.

5.6.1 Legal Rights and Housing

The government's housing policy has created insecurity, not only for the contract workers but also for the so-called permanent residents of the urban areas. The Government's policy created conditions which made it impossible for any African to own property outside the homelands before the introduction of the 99-year lease scheme.* The influx control policy, based on the Urban Areas Act of 1945, especially Section 10, determined where an African could stay and work, whether families might be together, and kind of job that might be allocated to a Black person. "Influx control ordinarily slows down and regulates the rate of urbanisation, gradually allowing people to move to cities as work and accommodation becomes available" (Bosman, 1982:629).

My aim then is to highlight how the Act has hamstrung the lives of the three women and others not included in the study. The Act tried to tie the presence of women in urban areas to a dependent relationship with a 'qualified' man. Women who were without any male relation faced deportation to the homelands. They tried to defeat the influx control system by moving to the cities without any male relations, and by finding

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See note on changes in Chapter 1.

accommodation and employment. However, the kind of employment they found subjected them to low wages and constant threats of imprisonment and high fines. Faced with all these daily problems, women continued moving to urban areas, as the will to survive is more powerful than all the threats to be faced.

For most resident domestic workers, accommodation was the enticing factor. Some form of privacy and identification with the place in which one lives is a basic human need. Marais (1981: 3) identified housing as fulfilling a number of interrelated individual family or community needs, viz. shelter, privacy, financial security and social status. With Miriam, who is a resident worker, this has not been the case. She is accommodated in a garage which has broken windows and where there is absolutely no privacy. She informed me: "I am treated like a slave and even worse than a dog, as the dog has a kennel to sleep in. In my case there is absolutely no privacy. There is no wardrobe nor private bath or toilet. Water has to be fetched from the kitchen in the main house. I only have a decent wash when the family members have all gone either to work or school." (11.4.85). Miriam suffers this kind of treatment because she is contracted and has to serve her employer at all costs as her presence in the urban areas is tied to her job. Her employer is also breaching part of the conditions of her employment by not providing proper accommodation. Because the employer sets the terms of employment and Miriam is without any legal protection, she has to endure this sub-human condition of employment. She is not the only one to sleep in a garage. Thelma, the daily commuter, also sleeps in a garage converted into a two-roomed house. She also had accommodation problems as she is married to a migrant worker who is not prepared to apply for housing in any of the three black townships in the Peninsula.

5.6.2 Lack of Property Rights

In South Africa up until the 1976 social upheaval, Africans were not entitled to any propety rights. This policy forms part of the exclusion policy of the Apartheid system in South Africa, and was the strategy used by the government to exclude millions of Africans from the urban areas. Up until the introduction of the 99 year leasehold system in the 1980s, family housing was only built in the homelands. In urban areas, only hostels or single men's quarters were built. Worst hit by this policy were women and children. The provision of family housing was frozen in 1966 in almost all the major urban centres in South Africa. The non-provision of housing for Africans and the splitting of their families justified the payment of low salaries to African men. They were not paid the so-called family salaries as the government wished their families away. Mariotti (1980: 167) quotes the Athlone Advice Office in Cape Town as saying "the Government is using housing policy as a means of reducing the number of Africans in the Western Cape". Security was non-existent for both legals and illegals as the legals also had to prove that they had suitable accommodation. Employers in Cape Town were encouraged to provide hostels for their employees which were guarded by security officials around the clock, thus ensuring that men or husbands did not stay with their families.

Faced with these legal and ideological constraints, how have the women being studied, challenged and defied the state? Some women, with and without Section 10 rights, moved into the domestic sector for both employment and accommodation. Others devised the following means reflected in these stories.

5.6.3 Variations in Handling the Accommodation Crisis

Case Number 1: THELMA

I start with Thelma who is married to an ex-migrant worker and is employed as a full-time sleep-out or daily commuter. Her family is split thrice. Her elder children are staying with her mother in Cape Town. She shares a bed with her husband at the single men's quarters. Her husband is not prepared to apply for housing in any of the three townships. She copes with this kind of situation by travelling daily to work. On the way back she stops at her mother's place and prepares food and clothing for her children, then goes off to the hostel to prepare food and clothing for her husband. Back at the hostel her husband shares the room with two other men who either have girlfriends or wives, all staying together and sharing one room.

Some form of privacy is maintained by hanging a curtain from the roof downwards around the bed. With this kind of privacy the couple at least are able to make love, although the conditions are not conducive to any satisfying and rewarding performance. Thelma said: "Children are being born in the process which has minimal privacy". Staying in these overcrowded surroundings it becomes impossible to lead a normal married life. The married couple seldom get a chance to share their intimate problems or even have time to devote to each other. Ramphele (1986: 9) says "societal pressure in the form of peer group men discourages men in the hostel from spending too much time with their female partners. Preference is given to male company for drinking, gambling and other social activities". This type of life has some benefits for men like

Thelma's husband in that he would find life boring if they were to share a house of their own and stay with their children. It would further mean that Thelma would exercise some form of control over his movement. Staying at the hostel means that it is easier to just say one is going to spend some time with other men. She cannot complain as they are seldom by themselves. Further control is used to maintain women in a subordinate position, as Ramphele (1986: 9) notes further that "men and women do not eat together, they are physically separated. The room where men eat is equivalent to the traditional kraal in a rural setting which is the cattle kraal where men eat and socialize. This practice forces women to eat outside the hostel buildings or in the over-crowded rooms, sometimes in the presence of sick people with infectious diseases like TB which is very common here as can be expected".

It is not only overcrowding that is the problem at the hostels but also the nightly raids by the police and the development board officials. Women are raided and imprisoned and men have to pay the fines. With these kinds of experiences, Thelma related her problem to her employer. The result was the allocation of the old converted garage to herself. At least she now has some form of privacy for herself and her husband. But he prefers the hostel life. He spends less time at Thelma's place of employment. Thelma has to go to the hostel most of the time. Thelma fits into the category which Ramphele (1986) called the wives of hostel dwellers who come at the initiation of their husbands, some for short periods, but a significant number of wives stay permanently.

From the sample of the 30 women surveyed, some women had opted to be lodgers in order to be with their loved ones.

Case Number 2: MARTHA

Martha, who had been on the housing waiting list for 20 years before she moved to the squatter camp of KTC, is the second case to be discussed. To start with the term "squatter" is an ideological one as it denies the existence and permanent nature of the families who have been victims of the apartheid policy, especially the Group Areas Act.

Squatting developed because of the gross shortage of family housing in Cape Town. Instead of alleviating the housing problem, the government has responded in two major ways, namely the demolition of squatter camps and repatriation. This official policy has affected both Coloureds and Africans in the Western Cape. The Sunday Times (19.10.75) reported the following story:

> Demolition squads left women and children homeless. When Miss Cathy Cornelisen returned home this month she found her children crying huddled in front of their gate in Athlone and her few pieces of furniture strewn about and stacked on top of each other. All that was left of their home was the rubble left by the demolition squad of Cape Town City Council.

Women and children, as is always the case, are the victims of this policy. This is because of the State and government's refusal to be responsible for the reproduction of the working class which would involve the provision of better health facilities, creches, day care centres and schools. The so-called illegal Africans were deported from the urban areas to the homelands. The repatriation was done at government expense with the people coming back to Cape Town the following day. This government exercise placed a burden on tax payers who were forced to pay for the enforcement of the influx control system. D.Luyt (1982: 39) alleges that:

"This policy or government action can be seen as part of a broader campaign to harden influx control through increased fines for pass offences".

Martha has become politicised because of her accommodation problem. She has been humiliated by the housing superintendent who suggested that she get married before a house could be allocated to her. The squatter resistance climate which prevailed in the Western Cape as well as public lectures on anti-forced removals contributed to her politicisation. The government's policy on housing discriminates against women. The worst hit are the divorced, widowed and single. Allocation of housing at the township has been attached to the availability of a marriage certificate.

The gross shortage of housing in the African townships has led to family members fighting one another over the tenancy of the house. This is common as two to four generations may be staying under the same roof. The fight reaches its peak after the death of the parents. The fight to secure tenancy usually ends up at the superintendent's office, and he is normally bribed by the wealthier family members to handle the case in their favour. The result is the total breakdown of affinity among family members. Lodgers also turn against their landlords or landladies in an attempt to secure tenancy of the house, especially when the occupant of the house is elderly or without employment and they are the ones who pay the monthly rentals. The sense of neighbourliness becomes destroyed when neighbours turn against each other in an attempt to alleviate the overcrowding in their own houses. These battles are beneficial to the State as it means that energies are spent in fighting one another instead of working class members organising and challenging the State for its non-provision of

housing. Although there is some awareness among the working class members of the State's strategy of pitting them against each other, the fighting is still common. Some form of community-based organisation is taking place, like the rent boycott, aimed at forcing the State to provide decent accommodation for the working class.

This has been one of the causal factors which has forced women to come to the forefront in the struggle for housing. Martha, having not had any decent accommodation from birth until adulthood, decided to allocate herself a shanty at KTC. She said "I needed a house of my own as I was sick and tired of being a lodger and my children were growing up". She did not want her children to be like her for the rest of their lives. Having built a shanty at KTC the price to be paid was high in terms of daily harassment. Women in KTC were arrested, beaten up by police, the area surrounded with a barbed wire fence and their building material confiscated. This kind of police brutality did not deter the women from continuing to struggle for family units and accommodation. Martha became involved in the United Women's Congress (UWCO) and the Civic Association. She was not the only one to be politicised by the struggle for accommodation. Women at Old Crossroads organised themselves around the issue of accommodation. They have fought successfully to have their men and children stay with them. This resistance paid in the sense that their presence in Cape Town was legalised and they were allowed to build themselves shanties. The same happened in KTC and the area was fully serviced and residents were given numbers and expected to pay rent. At the moment Martha is sharing the shanty with her three children. She told me "My shanty is fairly well furnished and is a heaven to me. At least I could lead a normal family life". She claims to have learned a lot of

things from UWCO which has a branch at KTC which concerns itself with things like organising women on issues that affect women in general like pre-school facilities, better sewerage systems and daily removal of rubbish from the area.

Martha's plight is similar to the other domestic workers in the sample. Two of the married women in the sample had resided in the single men's quarters immediately after they were married as housing was not available. Thus it becomes clear that the family lives of the African domestic workers were constantly threatened by the government's racist and sexist policy, namely the Migrant Labour Policy. It is no wonder that African women have been the hardest hit by the housing crisis and have developed mechanisms of resisting the destruction of their family lives.

Case Number 3: MIRIAM

Miriam, who is an ex-contract domestic worker, had another way of finding accommodation for herself. Having unhealthy and poor working conditions stimulated her to secure accommodation in the township. At work she sleeps in a garage that has broken windows, and which also acts as a storeroom. During the day she cannot rest after work as the garage serves as a playroom. Being contracted to an employer meant she first had to work for a continuous period of 10 to 15 years before she could qualify for permanent residence in Cape Town. Problems would occur even if she had finished the required period of employment in that decent suitable accommodation had to be available before she could qualify. With the current backlog on housing, her chances of securing accommodation were slim. Miriam, having studied her situation, took the following steps. She registered as a lodger at her boyfriend's place at Old Crossroads. She

paid all the community dues, thus securing her position as a lodger. She further attended meetings in order, as she put it "to be conversant with the daily developments at Old Crossroads". Her attendance at these meetings, coupled with her registration as a lodger, paid in the end. She said that: "When the government announced that people who were interested in moving to Site C at Khayelitsha would be helped to remove their furniture, be given tents until they were able to build themselves houses, I jumped at the opportunity as I needed accommodation of my own. Further, we were given an 18 month permit to be in Cape Town and find ourselves employment. I was lucky because I was already employed and that secured my position." For more details on the relaxation of the influx control system in Cape Town see Cole (1986) and Cobbert (1986).

Miriam's housing problem should be looked at against the State's realisation that the African working class in Cape Town is a factor to be contended with. The so-called skill shortage and relaxation of influx control laws after the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions, were government attempts to modernise Apartheid. The government had come to realise that the squatter camps in the Cape Peninisula were responding in an organised fashion to the State's threat of attempting to destroy them. Miriam's position was therefore improved by the allocation of a shanty at Site C Khayelitsha. Before, life had not been easy for her as she had had three previous arrests for pass offences, but even now, with accommodation sites provided, she had to buy the material to build a shanty. Further, Site C is far from her place of employment and this adds another strain to her limited financial resources.

The government's policy has long been to reduce the cost of building houses for Africans by using unqualified labourers and low cost material. The Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (CAHAC), a community-based organisation, referred to the type of housing built by the government for the working class in this way: "Houses that are built for us will have no ceiling, no electricity, no paint on the inside walls and no flooring" (Grassroots, September 1982). While the Administration Board in African townships has a by-law which states that any improvements made to the bare walls, fitting of ceiling and flooring and installation of electricity in the houses to make them more habitable, is done at the owner's risk. The Board will not be responsible for any back payment. The result was that for a long time, until 1976, few people had taken proper care of their houses. The Bishop Lavis Action Committee (BLAC) reported the following finding regarding the housing of the working class:

"1. People living without electricity spend up to R80 a month on wood, paraffin and gas. This is four times what most people spend on elecricity.

2. Houses without ceilings are very hot in summer and very cold in winter. Water often drips from the roof making the house damp. The dampness causes chest complaints.

3. Living without bathrooms or doors on bedrooms means that people have little privacy. These conditions are bad for the health of our people. Many suffer from Tuberculosis and other diseases."
(Grassroots, September 1982.)

The spread of contagious disease as a result of overcrowding was also confirmed by Dr Coogan, the Medical Officer of Health, as a result of housing shortages (Argus 21.6.83).

Mariotti (1980:165) states that "the aims of the Native Building Workers Act was to reduce the cost of building African housing by permitting Africans to perform at lower wage rates construction work (in African townships) customarily reserved for whites. The site-and-service scheme

eliminated (for the government) the cost of construction altogether by giving African families permission to build their own houses". The government has thus put the burden of housing squarely on the shoulders of the African people. With the high rate of unemployment, very few people will be able to provide decent and suitable accommodation for themselves, most of whom are women with dependents to maintain. The tins, wood, and all the waste material are still common building materials. Also, one is not surprised when one looks at the type and quality of houses built for Africans at the townships outside Cape Town i.e. Khayelitsha. The houses are without electricity, very small, the walls are bare and they have no ceiling. Sand and dust is thrown up and it is difficult to keep it out of the food.

It should be borne in mind that the building of Khayelitsha by the government was aimed as sifting all the 'illegals' and settling the 'legals' there. This was part of the government's reform and repression strategy. Hence Cole (1987: 92) states that: "In 1983, when the state announced building Khayelitsha as a solution ot the growing crisis in the Cape Peninsula, it had two major objectives. Firstly to settle all the blacks with rights to live in the Western Cape - including all those resident in Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu - in Khayelitsha; and secondly, to repatriate all 'illegals' - estimated to be over 100 000 blacks - to the homelands".

Another point worth noting is that the new township is dominated by single women. The govèrnment in the past had denied the single, widowed and divorced access to houses. Thus when the community resisted moving into Khayelitsha, suddenly women were allowed housing without restrictions. The

reason for this is that the government has used them in order to break the resistance of the African community to the occupation of these so-called sub-economic houses. No restrictions were put on women at all. Accommodation became freely available without any attachment to a man. All the women interviewed have expressed a wish to secure proper and decent accommodation for their families. Miriam said: "I wish to have the whole family stay together and share the little money that I get". Martha's view is: "I wish to secure myself proper accommodation where I could leave my children when I die. I would not like my children to suffer like I did when I had no place to stay". (A note on changes in legislation is attached in Chapter 2.)

At the same time, men too have voiced this wish. "Zisani spoke for all men when he explained what he desired most in life" (quoted in P. Reynolds, 1984:30): "I would like to have a house of my own in the city where I would live with my family knowing that it is mine. If the government makes me return to the Transkei to renew my contract or relocate my home, I can return to the city without fear because I would know that I would be returning to my own house and family".

5.7 ISOLATION

Domestic work subjects servants to extreme isolation, even in the presence of their employers. The two different worlds that the employer and employee come from militate against the formation of any sisterhood or familial feeling. This is despite the fact that most employers normally refer to their employee's as 'one of the family', while some domestic workers refer to their employers as being 'nice' or 'friendly'. From the

survey sample, the following responses were received. Three women in the study communicated with their employers via letters, while only 20% expressed having a friendly and relaxed atmosphere with their employers. The friendly and relaxed atmosphere becomes questionable, especially as the madam-maid relationship is characterised by the presence of racial, class and gender hierarchies that ascribe certain privileges to the employer. Faced with this situation, how do domestic workers cope with the isolation. Ten per cent of the women in the survey claim to spend their spare time either visiting friends, paying accounts, sleeping, reading, going to church or doing their own laundry. How the time is spent depends on their recreational facilities, but there are no recreational facilities for domestic workers of the working class. On the other hand, employers of domestic workers know where to go and how to spend their spare time. Recreational structures that exist for domestic workers are mostly for improving their skills or developing them in either sewing, knitting or literacy classes. Besides that, domestic workers have to spend isolated lives on their employers' premises.

Variations coupled with contradictions appeared under this theme regarding the approach of domestic workers to countering isolation. The key issues are religion as a form of social contact and support system and religion as a control system. These two themes reflect the contradictory nature of the impact of religion in the lives of domestic workers. This is the case irrespective of whether one is affiliated with the so-called mainstream or independent churches.

5.7.1 Religion as a Form of Social Contact and Support System

Religion has persistently appeared as playing a dominant role in the lives of the majority of African women. This appears to be because religion offers women, especially those involved in domestic work, a chance to overcome their isolation.

It offers them an outlet for their frustrations and problems, for example a drinking husband, son or daughter, or an unhealthy working relationship. Women come together and pray and state in prayer the problems they are experiencing. Women also hold vigil meetings in times of bereavement. Services are then held for days until the burial day in the home of the bereaved family. Donations towards the burial costs are made by the church and Mothers' Union members.

In some cases, sick members are visited at home and prayer meetings held, in order to take care of the emotional needs of the members. In other churches, Christmas parties are organised for the aged, the destitute and the orphaned. This practice makes the often forgotten members of the church feel wanted and important. The women involved in the offering of these services also have their morale boosted and feel that they are important. Thus religion is an important aspect in the lives of domestic workers which is welfare related. Friendships develop among the members of these church groups. New jobs available with better employment facilities are made known as well as the exchange of telephone numbers, thus breaking the monotony of domestic work. Religion thus serves as a support system within the African community. This support system is very important in the lives of the African women, especially the elderly domestic workers.

5.7.2 Religion as a Control System

As discussed, religion plays a very important role in the lives of African domestic workers by providing them with a support system and relieving their isolation. However, religion has another aspect which is related to the control and subordination of African women. Most domestic workers are left by themselves the whole day. Their only consolation at times is the domestic animals they have to attend to. Many domestic workers see their employers once a month, when they have to collect their monthly payments. In many cases communication between employer and employee is via small notes in the form of instructions left for the domestic worker. Sometimes contact is made telephonically when the employer is trying to check the times of arrival and departure of the domestic worker. The contact is very superficial and impersonal. The domestic worker is just seen as an object whose needs are not taken into consideration. They lack their family support and that of friends as most employers are not keen to welcome their employee's visitors.

The accommodation of domestic workers in the backyard increases isolation. The various employees cope with this isolation in different ways. Thelma, one of the respondents for this study, had this to say about the role played by religion in her life "I was brought up from a Christian background. I believe that the church saves you from a lot of evils. I have learnt to lead a disciplined life and I am able to console people in pain, can pray and preach the word of God" (6.04.86). From this statement by Thelma it becomes clear that religion gives women a chance to be together. It offers them a chance to talk about their family problems as well as their daily hardships.

It has been noted that most domestic workers do get a chance to attend religious gatherings. Most domestic workers are off duty on Thursday afternoons and others on Saturdays and Sundays and most of these meetings take place on these days. Employers are prepared to make arrangements for their domestic workers to attend these church gatherings. Most of the domestic workers met and others interviewed are members of the Mothers' Union, Women's Federations and other fellowship organisations within the church. One interviewee even remarked that "Madams do not moan when I request time to go to church gatherings and family planning clinics. But when you put family affairs or problems they do not consider them as important" (Ethel, 20.06.86).

Isolation of the domestic workers takes place even in the household of their employers. Servants seldom share in the luxurious life enjoyed by their employers, but share only in the preparation of the extravagances and in cleaning up after their employers. Thus, even in the presence of their employer's families, servants are isolated due to the class and racial privileges enjoyed by their employers.

Sixty per cent of the church members are women, but what positions do women hold in the church? Who controls the main decision-making structures within the church? These questions are raised to show how religion, as it is practised today in most churches, subordinates and controls women.

First, within the household women are regarded as minors and this spills over to the church. The majority of men who are married to domestic workers encourage them to go to church. They even allow them to go to

evening services, leaving tasks incomplete at home, something that would seldom be tolerated in other situations. These men have no fear that their women might be cheating them. They view religion as another mechanism to control and subordinate them.

The majority of jobs allocated to women in church could be defined socially as female jobs like Sunday school teaching, fund raising, general maintenance work and catering during feasts. Women are running the day-to-day affairs of the church but they seldom change the situation to their advantage. They are excluded from the committees that make major decisions and are reduced to followers rather than leaders, although they have exhibited good leadership qualities. They are perceived as junior partners within the theological profession without any position of authority. There is no question about the male authority as well as the male dominated church structures which create hierarchies of privileges for men. The story of Motlalepua Chabakulu exposes the position of women within the church when she says:

> I am still unordained by the Anglican Church in South Africa because the Johannesburg (white) Anglican Bishop is opposed to the ordination of women. The sexism he upholds within the church is just as evil as the racism of the South Africa he condemns (1982: 20).

The church structures, which are male-dominated, discriminate against women by allocating them jobs which make it difficult for them to organise in order to fight for better positions. Further, the jobs that women perform, important and basic as they are, are seldom given improved status. Women are indispensible to the running of the church affairs, and without them the church structures would not function properly. The church benefits from the subordinate position of women.

Another important factor is that women are not a homogeneous group within the church. The uneducated and illiterate women - mostly domestic workers - are seldom given recognition for the work they perform. When it comes to elections for committee members and allocation of duties, education and wealth become the criteria, thus leaving the majority out of office and having to perform the spade work. The educated and wealthy who dominate the women's committees, collude with men in dominating and keeping the majority of the church-going women in subordinate positions. They usually define their roles in terms set by men and rarely speak for issues that affect women with the church. Thus the church committee creates hierarchies of exploitation and subordination. Those women who are unable to pay all their church dues are discriminated against, although they frequently attend church. Whatever their economic situation they have to pay the money demanded from them as they fear excommunication. This is emphasised by Thelma when she said "I joined the church and the Mothers' Union as I wish to have a decent funeral, be buried by a priest and my coffin be followed by union members" (6.04.86).

There are a few options left to the majority of the women who are church goers. Some women have decided to leave the church as they are very unhappy with the present situation. They influence their children, who are the next generation of church members, to do the same. Others have decided to remain in the church and try to unite the women and encourage those who have left the church to come back. These are the feminist theologians who are trying to make the church structures responsive to the needs of the poor, the majority being women and domestic workers. They are advocating for changes in the preaching of the scriptures which are male dominated. Feminist theologians are aiming at exposing male bias in church. They show

that God has love, is forgiving and identifies with the poor. The feminist theologians regard the church structures as "having no ears to hear what women have to say nor the mouth for women to express their expectations, thus keeping them in subordinate positions" (Sr Margaret 19.02.87).

Religion is not the only system that hinders the effective organisation of women. In the locations there are the savings groups which are also dominated by men. Out of the 30 women interviewed for the survey, 12 also indicated membership of these groups as ways of spending their leisure time. Their identities as women and individuals are recognised, but few women, if any, are in executive positions. If they are, they are in the minority and hardly have an impact. Again, women are in the majority and are dominated and subjected to male domination. The women have no final say as to whose turn it is for the savings. Women were hit hard in the seventies when these organisations were not registered and money was squandered. The widowed, old, divorced and single suffered great losses. Even today the structures have not changed much; they still keep women out of important decision-making portfolios.

5.8 DREAMS

Dreams are a reflection of suppressed needs and desires and are an indication of our deprivation as human beings. Thus the three themes that are discussed below are an indication of the degree and extent to which the African domestic workers as women and members of the working class have been affected.

Under the theme of dreams three key issues have emerged in regard to the future wishes of the domestic workers. The key issues are those of security in terms of property ownership, family life and self-employment and economic independence.

5.8.1 Property Ownership

As mentioned earlier, up until the introduction of the 99-year leasehold schemes in the 1980s, African women could not own land or property whether in or outside the homelands. Married women are regarded by customary rights to be minors. They could not own land or property on their own, and could not enter into any land transactions without a male guardian. Simons (1976: 262) states that: "Land held by a woman in her own capacity cannot therefore devolve on her daughter. If she acquired the title in her capacity of a wife or a widow at her husband's homestead, the land passes to her son or the other heir of her house". This is irrespective of whether her daughter had played a dominant role in keeping the land in good condition, or if the son is irresponsible. In many cases when the son marries conflict develops between the widow and her daughter-in-law. The result is that the widow has to vacate the place, making her son the beneficiary. The majority of women who reside in both KTC and Old Cross Roads were victims of this racist and sexist municipal action and were endorsed out of Cape Town. Left without an alternative form of accommodation, some have resorted to marriages of convenience in order to occupy a house. Others have resorted to squatting and have actively participated in squatter struggles. The generalised onslaught on 'illegals', especially women in the Western Cape, precipitated a climate of solidarity on the part of women. In the survey, thirty per cent of the women were lodgers hoping to be allocated a house in the long run. It is

these gendered experiences of exclusion from occupation of a house which have forced women's organisations to organise around the issue of housing.

In rural areas, widows who decide to leave their deceased husband's homestead in order to earn a living in an urban area, forfeit the right to cultivate the land. A widow is expected to make a living for her children out of the produce that she gets from the land, irrespective of the droughts and the over-cultivation of the lands in most homelands. Thus most women find their way to urban areas in order to earn money to support their families. In urban areas they were previously faced with the most hated influx control system. Most found employment in domestic work and got temporary security in the form of a room.

However, this is changing as more women are either resorting to squatting or to lodgings in order to preserve their family lives. This was revealed during the time the researcher was doing the survey, as very few resident workers were found for the study. Thus the desire to own property or to have a roof over one's head is increasing among domestic workers.

All the women interviewed for this study showed an interest in owning property. The housing shortage is great in urban areas and the development of shanty townships was, however, a clear deficiency in the influx control system. Before the development of squatter townships women had to have a permit and residential rights before they could reside in urban areas. Certain conditions had to be met before a person could occupy a house, namely:

> The applicant has to be the head of the family, a fit and proper person, lawfully permitted to enter, be in and reside with his family in the urban areas, lawfully employed in the area and financially able and willing to erect a dwelling or pay for the right of occupation (Simons, 1976: 267).

Few women were able to fulfill these requirements, thus most were left without any proper accommodation. They resorted to squatting since it was cheaper and no requirements were set for them. Worst hit by the requirements of the municipalities are the aged, single and widowed. Cock (1980: 245) states that:

> A woman living in an urban township may lose her house and be evicted out if she is widowed or divorced. Officials have been known to arrive at a house where the father has died in order to issue an eviction notice even before the body has been buried. A great deal depends on the discretion of the local authority, often simply on officials such as the Township Manager or Location Superintendent; extreme insecurity of tenure is the result. Moreover, rented accommodation for single women is both expensive and insecure.

My own observations and experience in working in all the three townships concur fully with Cock's. Before the allocation of a house to any woman, a marriage certificate has to be produced. In Cape Town no provision is made for single women except the few staff quarters for lady teachers, which are certainly not sufficient. A few changes have taken place, but the majority of women in domestic work are still left out in the cold.

5.8.2 Family Life and Education of Children

Katzman (1978: 102) states that: "Home is a place where loved ones live, a place of freedom, with the companionship of equals on equal terms. Home is not the kitchen".

Domestic workers as workers are deprived of the opportunity of being with their families. This is because of the policy of both the government and capital of disorganising their family lives. Employers of domestic workers refuse to allow domestic workers to stay with their families at places of employment. This is enforcee in a number of ways, and among these are the

following: domestic workers are accommodated in backyards in small rooms which are badly built. The employer gets a chance to exercise proper control of the movement of the domestic worker. Employers deny domestic workers visits either from relatives, children or friends, thus resulting in their isolation. Further, domestic workers are denied paid annual leave and are therefore not in a position to build lasting parent-child relationships with their children. Thus domestic work estranges parents from their children since they are paid low wages which cause most of their families to subsist in conditions of near-poverty and force the children into the labour market at an early age in order to supplement the family income.

The State plays a role in depriving domestic workers of a chance to be with their children. The nightly raids conducted by the police and the inspectors were all attempts to harass and control the of the domestic worker. Children, boyfriends, relatives and husbands found in the domestic worker's room were rounded up and arrested. Further, heavy fines of up to R500 were imposed on those who employed domestic workers without legal rights to be in Cape Town. These measures were confirmed by the recommendations of the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions.

The State has also failed to make provision for childcare facilities for the African working class. African women have to bear the burden of the non-provision of these facilities by having to make use of extended kinship structures, or the older daughters have to take charge of the younger children. Payment in cash or kind has to be made, thus further stretching the meagre salary of the domestic worker. Thus not only do the domestic workers suffer from the payment of low wages, but so do their families/household members.

Within the cultural context, domestic workers suffer from the domination by men. African men try to subject African women to their will by the use of violence as well as controlling their fertility. They try to make women part of their property through the payment of lobola. Further, they refuse to help with any household work and expect women to serve them. Thus it is no wonder that the women in this study are opting for single parenhood in order to escape subordination within the marriage relationship. They want to maintain some form of family structure but refuse to be oppressed and exploited within the marriage institution. They wish to engage in relationships with men on their own terms, that is demanding the sharing of the housework as well as compelling the boyfriends to contribute financially to the maintenance of the household. By so doing, they avoid being regarded as legal minors and under the direct control of the male guardian. Further they wish to maintain some form of household stability without being ordered around.

Stability of family life also entails the education of their children. Women are sacrificing their lives in order to give their children the education of which they were deprived. African women are active in challenging the present education system which is oppressive as it aims at creating a strata of privileged Africans, thus fragmenting the working class. Thus all these wishes are the result of women's gendered experiences of oppression.

5.8.3 Self-employment and Economic Independence

Deprived of the right to seek employment where they wish and faced with limited options for employment, many African women have been forced into

domestic work. Without any demands for a certificate, domestic work has offered African women an opportunity to obtain employment and wages. Thus they are able to keep their families going. But the women concerned are faced with hazardous employment conditions. They are without any state protection, thus being exposed to extreme exploitation and oppression. They, as workers, are also deprived of family life, thus being subjected to extreme isolation. Domestic work is demanding and the payment after a long service is the cost to one's health. This is indicated by one respondent in the study who said that she would prefer to stop working while she still has energy in herself (Martha, 1986). The majority of domestic workers interviewed for this study indicated a wish to stop working as domestic workers; they wish to be independent and earn their living outside the domestic sector; they indicate a wish to be recognised and treated like human beings; to be able to exercise control over their lives. By being self-employed they would be able to shape their employment in a manner that suits them and still be a caretaker for their families.

Secondly, self-employment frees them from the control of both their employers and husbands. Thus it lessens the burden of exploitation and oppression for the women concerned and leads to economic independence. Economic dependence has been one of the major causes of women's exploitation and oppression. With economic power women are able to participate in major decisions concerning their families. It frees them from male dominance within their families as well as within the extended kinship structures. They do not have to be tied to oppressive and exploitative male relations and are able to restructure social relations within their families. They can also lead their lives as independent single parents.

5.9 CONCLUSION

The key issues have led to an exposition of the exploitation and oppression of women as Africans, members of the working class and mothers. The issues have highlighted the unique gendered experiences of women of exploitation both in the public and private sphere, ie. in the work situation and within their families. Further it has helped to remove the tendency of seeing the exploitation of women in the work situation as unrelated to their exploitation within their family/households.

In churches their needs as the poor are ignored. Church structures have turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to their needs. The important role they play as the majority of the membership, is ignored. Women are disempowered within the church. They are now, however, beginning to challenge male dominance and are starting to demand a change in the church structures so that the church will become responsive to the needs of the poor and the underprivileged. They are beginning to demand a say in the running of the church affairs and in making major decisions.

As domestic workers in the 1980s they have started to mobilise themselves on both a regional and a national basis. This culminated in the formation of the National Union in October 1986 which put forward various demands for better and improved working conditions. These demands have been struggled for as the domestic workers are without any legal protection. They have to survive in the Apartheid era and develop their qualities of resilience, perseverance and strength. Davis (1982: 231), a black feminist, has said: "Black women could hardly strive for weakness, they had to become strong for their families needed their strength to survive".

By identifying the issues that have emerged from the themes I am contributing the formulation of further demands which could be of help to the Domestic Workers' Union. As stated earlier in Chapter 3, most of the women interviewed for this study were not affiliated to the Domestic Workers' Organisation and this research is seen as a contribution to the mobilisation of the domestic workers.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this concluding chapter, I will explain why I am prioritising gender in exploring the working conditions of African domestic workers and secondly, why the thesis is entitled 'IZWI'. I end with comments about future research.

6.2 PRIORITISING GENDER

In this thesis I have focussed on African women domestic workers because they are in a unique position, given the particular intersections of gender, 'race', and class. Gender divisions, which include cultural practices, affect women's participation in both the public and private spheres. One is a woman first, then a member of a kin system and then, given racist practices and policies, classified into a so-called 'race'. While class divisions fundamentally affect and are shaped by both gender and 'race' experiences, all these social divisions have 'determined' African women's incorporation into the domestic sector.

In Cape Town, the strict enforcement of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy and the influx control system in Cape Town has resulted in particular patterns of exploitation and oppression.

The individual experiences of the women selected to form the basis of the study reflect aspects of their oppression as women, mothers and workers in a capitalist society. Each individual life experience illustrates how gender divisions and the Coloured Labour Preferential Policy, coupled with influx control, have left African women with limited job opportunities, thus forcing them into domestic work. The life histories taken as a whole have also shown that the women concerned come from depressed working class backgrounds shaped by the racial policies of this country.

African women could move to the urban areas only if they had a qualified male relative (that is until recent changes in legislation). Those who were without a male relative were faced with possible starvation in the homelands. Those who qualified to be in Cape Town were forced into domestic work because of limited options open to African women in the area. Those without male relatives had to find their way to Cape Town 'illegally', and being 'illegally' in the area, were forced to be in the worst paying and exploitative jobs.

Domestic workers face a daily struggle in and outside the work situation. Class relations permeate the working environment of the domestic workers as they are engaged in relationships that are unequal with their employers and, in the white kitchen, their employers try to control their lives. While employers take advantage of their 'illegal' status and subject them to the worst conditions of employment with daily harassments, it is the private nature of the relation between domestic workers and their employers that is a fundamental aspect in the unequal power relations of waged domestic work. This unequal relationship results in the employer using various ways to control every aspect of the domestic worker's life.

The payment of low wages, the verbal and at times physical and sexual harassments are all forms of control exercised by employers of domestic workers. Daily domestic workers have had their working hours stretched without extra pay. They have been asked to babysit at short notice, thus disregarding their own family plans. The worst hit are the resident domestic workers who are accommodated at employers' residences. They are deprived of friends and relatives' visits. Accommodated in back yards, they are deprived of meaningful social contacts. They live a life of isolation and loneliness and are subjected to dependent, exploitative relationships with their employers. Non-provision of food for the domestic worker is another form of control, as is the provision of a uniform, which differentiates the employer from the employee. The employer's control over the lives of domestic workers ensures that they do not have time to attend union meetings, thus discouraging any form of domestic worker organisation. The absence of sick benefits, annual leave and bonuses subjects the domestic worker to further control and exploitation by the employer. Domestic work itself is demeaning and lowers the self-esteem of the individual. With police harassment and employer harassment in the work situation, the State and employers join hands in exploiting and controlling domestic workers.

The State's non-provision of family housing ironically hit domestic workers the worst in Cape Town. This makes full-time resident work an attractive opportunity in that workers can 'own' a room with which they can identify whatever its condition. But this does not alleviate the problem of childcare. As children are seldom allowed on employer's premises, the domestic workers have to worry daily about the safety and

welfare of their children, and because of the shortage of accommodation in the townships, the domestic worker's children have to either be sent outside Cape Town with some relatives, or the family has to be split between the extended family. They see their children once a year if they are lucky to get annual leave. They experience anxiety and guilt regarding the safety of their children. They usually see educating their children as the only way of changing their daily situation for, by educating their children, they hope that their children will care for them in their old age, especially in the absence of pension schemes in domestic work.

Often there is a heavy burden placed solely on the domestic worker's shoulders; her meagre salary has to be spread as her family is split. Domestic workers are paid wages on the basis of a single worker's subsistence although most of them are heads of households. For those who are not heads of households, their wages are desperately needed as their unemployment leaves a hole in the family's or household's budget. As a result, many children of the members of the working class are forced to leave school at an early age in order to join the labour market and supplement the household's income. The situation is not improved as the racist labour market subjects the workers to payment of low wages.

Some of the married domestic workers have their wages taken from them. Their husbands have the final say in the family budget. Thus, within their families, some have relationships which subject them to their husband's control. Those who are divorced or have chosen to lead single lives, have indicated that marriage is oppressive and exploitative as they have to do the housework by themselves without their husband's help. Some have opted

to be without any male relationships or are trying to reconstitute their family lives in such a way that control over money and the division of labour is not based on their subordination by men. They are teaching their children to share domestic labour. Those who have boyfriends are demanding the sharing of work, thus resisting gender stereotyping of jobs. They are also forcing their boyfriends or male friends to contribute financially to the daily maintenance of the household members.

Faced with these daily hardships, how have the women concerned reacted? First, they have defied the State's influx control policy in a number of ways. Those who are without any legal right to be in Cape Town have moved to Cape Town and found employment. The raids by the Board Inspectors were counteracted by the sharing of reference books, the warning of each other when there were raids, and other methods.

Women have also defied the State's aim of limiting the urban black population. They have joined their families and re-established them, whether in hostels or in shanty townships like Old Cross Roads. They have erected shelters on vacant land. Women have been at the forefront of battles for accommodation and in resisting the State's policy of the disorganisation of their families. They have been arrested, imprisoned and deported when their shelters were demolished. They have identified themselves with the popular working class struggles, as has been described in the case of Martha, who became politicised by her accommodation problems.

In 1979 the Riekert Commission was appointed in an attempt to reform the influx control system. The Commission had tied influx control to the

availability of accommodation and employment, and in this way, divided the working class, in the sense that Section 10 holders were given more freedom of movement between urban areas while the 'illegals' were to be shifted back to the homelands. The majority of those classified as 'illegal' were women who were not prepared to be separated from their husbands and families, or to be deprived of an opportunity to earn a living as independent heads of households. Women resisted this ideological division of the working class and the creation of a privileged urban black middle class, and as a result, more women demanded residential rights. The majority got them at Old Cross Roads, but with their legal status alleged to be 'pending'. With this type of legal status, they can earn a living but are still subjected to exploitation by employers who take advantage of their legal status. At least they have won the battle to have their families stay with them.

After the Riekert Commission it was the Wiehahn Commission which looked into labour problems. This Commission was established as the result of the pressure created by the industrial unrest in the country. Reforms were made in all sectors of the economy except for farm and domestic workers. Again the main aim of the Commission was the control of all unions in the labour sector. The farm and domestic sectors, which are dominated by women, were excluded partly because the State and capital are benefiting from the exploitation of women through the payment of low wages and the denial of union rights, bonuses, sick benefits and annual leave.

Faced with this increased repression, the domestic workers organised and sent deputations to the Minister of Manpower, who has regarded the relationship between maid and madam a private affair. Effectively the

plight of the domestic workers is left to the conscience of the employers. This official attitude has encouraged domestic workers to organise and challenge their employers, even in courts of law. The number of workers in the resident section of domestic work has decreased as they have become more aware of their vulnerability to be exploited when on 'duty around the clock'. The battle for domestic worker's rights as workers has culminated in the launching of the National Union of South African Domestic Workers. This will be discussed in due course.

Gender divisions have been prioritised in this research in order to highlight the unique experiences of women of both oppression and exploitation in the context of class, 'race' and cultural kin systems. First, the adoption of gender exposes the role played by kinship structures in defining the social relations between men and women, women and women, children, men and men within the family structures and households. These kin-structures define women as minors, thus depriving them of the right to decision-making within their families. Examination of the unequal relationships, based in part on gender division of labour between men and women, helps us to understand why men use violence to control women and why they refuse to share the housework.

Because kinship structures operate within classes, their role in oppressing and exploiting women is usually mystified, thus obscuring the most basic structures that oppress and exploit women. Kinship structures and gender divisions spill over into the work place which is already divided by 'race' and class, and 'determine' women's place in the lowest rungs of the job hierarchy. This adds to the devaluation of women's work as well as to the payment to women of very low wages.

Secondly, prioritising gender helps to expose the experiences of African women who are involved in domestic work. We are able to trace the historical development of the process of coercion of African women into domestic work and the juro-political legislation that has led to the definition of women's work as 'unproductive' and men's as 'productive'. The different experiences of oppression and exploitation within the working class can be identified and the specific nature of waged domestic work can be analysed.

In South Africa the intersections of 'race', class and gender have created hierarchies of privileges which have been responsible for the entrapment of the majority of African women into domestic work. These hierarchies have resulted in experiences of working in isolated surroundings, doing drudgery work, and the physical and sexual abuse of women. Exploration of these experiences makes an important contribution to the understanding of the exploitation of women. It helps us to understand the false division created between the home and work-place, which makes invisible the double day of women workers. Lastly, the exploration of these gendered experiences of coercion, entrapment and performance, of so-called unskilled and unproductive labour, helps us to understand why African women in particular are still dominating domestic service in the 1980s. We are providing the basis for the writing of a history which sees the domestic worker's daily struggle as part and parcel of the working class struggle. In the process, the organisational issues that concern domestic workers can be examined more clearly.

6.3 THE NATIONAL UNION OF SOUTH AFRICAN DOMESTIC WORKERS

The Union was launched in 1986 as a result of the exclusion of domestic workers from the Wiehahn Commission's recommendations on labour reforms. Secondly, the absence of State legislation to protect domestic workers, and their increased daily harassment, has forced domestic workers to form a national union and to articulate their demands in a single and united voice. The Union was launched in 1986, due to the increased consciousness of the workers' exploitation and oppression. Working class organisation and unity had increased due to the government's divisive tactics of reform and repression.

Among the demands forwarded by the Union at its launch were the following:

1 A living wage of R200 per month paid to all domestic workers.
2 A normal eight-hour working day for five days.
3 Overtime should be paid at R2,50 per hour.
4 Abolition of child labour.
5 Demand for maternity benefits for all women. Domestic workers should be paid eight weeks prior to giving birth and six weeks after giving birth.
6 Time off to attend ante-natal clinics without any pay deduction.
7 Annual leave of twenty-one working days.
8 One month's notice for either side.
9 Presentation of pay slips stating hours worked and overtime.
10 Day off on all public holidays or overtime payment.
11 Provision of decent accommodation.

(South African Domestic Workers Newsletter, Vol 1/1/1987).

What benefit is the formation of this National Union to domestic workers?

Firstly, the Union will attempt to help break the isolation of domestic workers from each other. This will give them a chance to share and support each other whilst working in isolated surroundings. Secondly, the Union will attempt to counteract and resist both physical and sexual harassment

of domestic workers by teaching them to demand their rights. Finally, the Union will establish an organisational basis through which the domestic workers can voice their demands in a united way and create an awareness of their experiences as working-class women.

Having briefly outlined the overall benefits of the Union to the domestic workers, what are the more specific implications of the Union demands? The Union has demanded the same legal protection of the domestic workers which is applicable to workers in other sectors of the economy. Women will have access to legal institutions which they have long been denied, and will thereby be able to challenge all the inhumane labour practices that they have endured for a long time. Legal protection will go with the stipulation of minimum wages to be paid to domestic workers, the provision of benefits in the form of annual bonuses, sick leave, maternity benefits and unemployment benefits. In general, the legal protection will be a step towards ending the exploitation of domestic workers. The economic aspects of family life will improve to a limited degree as the poor wages paid to domestic workers have led to the impoverishment of their families.

The value of waged domestic work will be increased with the winning of minimum wage demands. The unequal power relationship which has existed between employer and employee, and which results in employers controlling every aspect of the life of the domestic worker, would be challenged. The privatised nature of domestic work which mystifies the double exploitation of domestic workers would be challenged. This will force the payment of a wage which covers the work done by the domestic worker to reproduce herself and her family on a daily basis. The Union in this way will help to clearly define working class demands such as the provision of childcare

facilities and access to decent housing and health facilities, of which the State has long deprived the working class.

The Union's demand for the normalisation of working hours can mean that the domestic workers will have control over their working hours. Their working hours will no longer be stretched without recognition for their own household responsibilities, as is the case at present, and, if they work overtime, they will be paid for the extra hours worked. The parent-child relationship would be improved as they would have some time to devote to their children. Most of the domestic workers interviewed for this study have expressed guilt feelings resulting from the neglect of their own children. Domestic workers would be in a better position to participate in their Union's activities as well as in community organisations. The demand for maternity benefits would mean that control over women's sexuality is lessened. Further, pregnancy will not result in loss of income, forced abortion or unemployment. Domestic workers would then have the same security of employment which is being demanded by the workers in other sectors of the economy. The demand for maternity benefits should go hand-in-hand with the provision of childcare facilities, which has long been the women's major handicap. The non-provision of this facility has affected women's participation in trade unions, women's organisations and other community-based organisations. The provision of this important facility will increase women's participation in the labour sector, and the abovementioned organisations. Their active participation in these organisations will help in identifying and linking issues that affect them as women, with broader working class demands. For instance, the demand for the abolition of child labour will be linked to the domestic worker's future aims mentioned in Chapter 5, those of securing

family life and educating their children. Thus, in order to realise this dream, they are already participating in demanding free and compulsory education for their children. In this way, the Union demands will not only help to mobilise domestic workers as women, but also as members of the working class.

Through these means, the real enemy of the domestic worker and the working class can be identified. Energy will no longer be spent by members of the domestic worker's household fighting each other, thereby creating instability within the household which benefits the State and the employer and men within households. Social relations will begin to be redefined, with household members seeing each other as partners. Family and household violence and tyranny would be diminished. Men will be challenged to alter their role of perpetuating the exploitation and oppression of women.

This brief discussion of the implications of the Union's demands provides some ideas as to how the working conditions of domestic workers might be altered. Further, it has helped to fill in the gap left by previous writers on domestic work, which was mentioned in Chapter 2.

The literature reviewed has left a gap by splitting the domestic workers' experiences of oppression and exploitation in the workplace and within their households. This dividing line has been narrowed in this research, as it has been shown that women's gendered experiences of exploitation and oppression within their households spills over into the workplace. This has been done by the exposition of the fact that the low wages paid to domestic workers have to be stretched to cover the 'unpaid' labour they do

within their household to reproduce their families. Further, the three categories of domestic work have been studied in order to expose the fact that they are exploited irrespective of the category of work that they do. The private nature of the relationship that domestic workers have with their employers is caused by their situation at the intersection of the three social divisions, namely 'race', class and gender, which create hierarchies of privilege that disadvantage them as women. The false division, created between the public and private, distorts the identification of issues which affect women as women and as members of the working class. This has been demonstrated by the brief analysis of the Union demands as well as the links to the broader working class struggle; for example, the issue of low wages which affects women as well as their families. The non-provision of housing, as well as the denial of access by women to housing, is an issue that women's organisations have taken up. It has been linked to the working class struggle as the women have taken the lead in struggles for housing.

The gaps in legislation, which have left domestic workers at the mercy of their employers, can be analysed and linked to Union demands. For example, the demand for the payment of a living wage will help women to try to uplift their families from the near-poverty conditions in which they subsist. The provision of protective legislation will mean that women will have access to legal institutions and be in a position to challenge the privatised, unequal relationship they presently have with their employers. This privatised, unequal relationship has subjected them to exploitation, as they have not had the right to negotiate for fair employment conditions.

This study has tried to provide a voice for the domestic workers. Limitations of my attempt are that I am presently not employed as a domestic worker, nor am I a member of the Domestic Workers' Union.

The study could be accused of a narrow focus by nature of its concentration on the experiences of African domestic workers. This has been done deliberately as there is very limited literature on the experiences of African domestic workers from the vantage point of African women in Cape Town.

6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

Having tried to link the Union demands to working class demands, I will now try to identify areas that need further investigation.

Further research is needed on the nature of domestic workers' experiences of poverty. There is a need to investigate the gendered nature of poverty in relation to the payment of low wages, non-provision of housing for women as working class members, and the lack of child care facilities.

The nature of domestic workers' participation in trade unions, community organisations and political organisations needs to be studied. An investigation of the terms of women's participation, given their household responsibilities, would be of benefit in order to strengthen the unions as well as the working class struggle. Further, there is a need to identify obstacles that affect their participation in these organisations.

The nature of the relationship between domestic workers and their employers needs to be studied further in order to emphasise a need for labour legislation which will protect their interests as women and workers.

The move away from resident work to part-time and daily commuting work needs to be investigated.

Lastly, as mentioned in the thesis, the majority of domestic workers are affiliated with church organisations and saving clubs, which are forms of self-help projects. An investigation is needed to show how gender can be adopted in order to help mobilise women and strengthen the role of these organisations, thus bringing them within the working class struggle.

Thus, these five areas identified here would help in making the labour unions and community organisations more responsive to women's issues.

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: THE DOMESTIC WORKER

The questions are divided into four sections:

SECTION 1

Identifying particulars:

1 Name:

2 Age: (1) 16 - 21 (2) 22 - 26 (3) 27 - 31 (4) 32 - 36
(5) 37 - 41 (6) 42 - 46 (7) 47 - 51 (8) 52 - 56
(9) 57 - 61 (10) 62 - 66 (11) 67 - 71 (12) 72 - 76

3 Marital status:

(1) married (2) single (3) divorced (4) separated (5) staying together

4 Number of children in your original family?

5 Where are you in the order of birth?

6 What was your parents' educational background?

7 What kind of work your parents were doing?

SECTION II

Residential particulars:

8 Under what section do you qualify to be in Cape Town?

1 Section 10 1(a) a borner
2 Section 1(c) dependents of 10 1(a) & (b)
3 Section 10 (1d) contract work
4 Other

9 How long have you been in Cape Town?

10 On you arrival where did you stay?

11 Why did you move?

12 Were you the owner of the house?

13 If so, how much did you pay for rent?

14 Where are you staying at the moment?

15 How much rent are you paying for your accommodation?

16 Are you "owning" a house at this moment? Give reasons if not.

SECTION III

Employment

17 When did you start working as a domestic worker?

18 How old were you then?

19 Why did you pick on doing domestic work?

20 What is the longest period of your employment as a domestic worker?

21 What category of domestic work are you presently doing, ie. full-time resident, full-time daily commuter, and part-time or char work?

22 How long have you been with your present employer?

23 Working day - how many hours do you work?

24 What is involved in your daily routine?

25 Do you get any day offs? If so, when?

26 Are you paid for extra work that you are asked to do at short notice?

27 When are you paid, ie. monthly, fortnightly, weekly or daily?

28 Describe briefly your employment conditions. Do you get any of the following: food, annual leave, sick leave, annual increase?

29 What nationality are your employers?

30 Do you share any of your problems with your employer?

31 How big is your employer's family?

32 How is your employer's attitude towards your family?

33 What disturbs you most about your employer's attitude towards you?

34 What is your attitude towards your work, ie. domestic work?

PART IV

Social Group Membership

35 What church do you belong to?

36 Are you a member of any of the social clubs within the church? If so, why did you join and what is your position?

37 Do you get a chance to attend meetings of these church groups?

38 Do you belong to any street organizations? Give reasons.

39 Do you belong to any clan organization? Give reasons.

40 Are you aware of the existence of any women's organization in your area?

41 Name any other grouping or organization that you are affiliated to.

42 Are you aware of the existence of an organization that represents the needs of domestic workers?

APPENDIX 2

1. Selection of Life History Respondents

The criteria used in the selection of life history respondents were the following:

(i) access, and

(ii) nature of involvement in domestic work, i.e. resident worker, full-time daily commuter and part-time worker.

Thus in addition to the aspects of access to the field discussed earlier in this Chapter, the place of work and residence and nature of involvement in domestic work were important in selection of respondents.

(i) Access

The areas chosen, Old Cross, KTC, single men's quarters, for the life history respondents were firstly chosen on the basis of their accessibility in terms of place and time. The eleven chosen for the study were chosen because they could be contacted anytime I needed to interview them. Secondly, and importantly, the women chosen did not mind being contacted at work or at home. When at their places of employment they did not have to stop their work in order to carry on with the interview. The interviews took the form of conversations and they could carry on with their work like ironing or dish washing, thus avoiding lengthening their working day. If I failed to contact them at work I could contact them at either Old Cross Roads, KTC or the single men's quarters where they had some form of accommodation.

The domestic workers easy accessibility in terms of time and place meant that regular and constant contact was maintained with them, thus facilitating the establishment of a strong relationship between us.

(ii) Nature of Involvement in Domestic Work

The second criteria of selection of domestic workers for the study was the subject's present involvement in domestic work, either full-time resident, full-time sleep out and the part-time work.

These categories have been adopted because they are real in the lives of the domestic workers. They depict the degree and specific nature of the oppression of each domestic worker. Also, the women concerned had typical work experiences in Cape Town, being a char or full-time residential worker or daily commuter. For example, the part-time workers are the worst exploited, from the point of view of both the respondents and the Union, as they at times have to do a week's work within one or two days. The payment is usually equal to the days they have worked although they have done a week's work. On the other hand the resident workers face the problem of being on duty around the clock as they are every now and then called to do small favours like baby sitting and at times without prior notice. The full-time sleep out workers face the daily "double shift", that is work performed in their employers homes and when they get home having stood all the journey home in packed and unreliable trains and buses have to start from scratch with their "own work" and prepare their families for the following day. The double shift varies according to the presence of one's family in Cape Town.

The three categories therefore, depict the kind of differential exploitation the domestic workers are exposed to. The combining of motherhood and employment is a reality for most domestic workers. It is not only domestic workers who suffer by combining these two roles but all the mothers involved in employment.

> Women who attempt to combine paid employment with childcare are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by their employers.
>
> Part-time employees typically receive lower hourly rates as well as reduced chances of security, training or promotion than full-time employees when the work they do is virtually identical." (Bilton et al. 1983: 337)

The three categories of domestic work can easily be equated to shift workers in others sectors of the economy, as women involved there have to adjust their family lives according to the type of shifts they work.

The three groups gave reasons for engaging in a particular type of work, based mostly on preferential reasons regarding payment and effects on their family lives. The basic issue is that they are all subjected to the will and ill-treatment of their employers and devised some survival techniques in order to cope with their daily situation.

Plummer (1985: 89) emphasizes that "a good informant should be thoroughly acculturalized, currently involved and nonanalytic". The domestic workers interviewed had rawly presented their experiences as felt by them. They have expressed feelings of anger, frustration and the few victories they have won.

APPENDIX 3

DATA ANALYSIS OF LIFE HISTORY

1. Life History

The data being analysed here is the lived experiences of the domestic workers as told and interpreted by them. These lived experiences cannot be organised into statistical categories which usually mystify the interpretation of women's experiences. Alexander's view is pertinent to my study. She affirms the need to "itemize the details of the labour process itself, the composition of the working day and the methods of payment which divide a workplace already divided by sex, language and cultural difference." (Alexander, S, 1976:7). Because my aim is to theorize and expose lived experiences and to help provide a voice for the domestic workers, my analysis is geared towards the exposition of the daily injustices experienced by domestic workers in and outside the work situation.

In order to achieve these aims in the analysis of data, I have evaluated the research strategies mentioned in the Open University Block 6 (1979) series on research methods. The first strategy "is the use of an existing theoretical model of analogy, the research taking the form of an attempt to develop and specify it by applying it to the data from a particular setting." (Open University Block 6 1979:24)

Secondly, the "fictionalised, semi-pictorialized and autobiographical literature can also provide the analyst with a very useful .... ideas." (Open University Block 6 1979:26)

Thirdly, unstructured interviews are used to generate theoretical categories. Participant "accounts of their life and world are elicited and the analysis is focused on themes which emerge from these accounts, for example, routine troubles, crises, factional differences, etc. Such themes provide a set of issues around which to start to structure analysis and perhaps collect further data." (Open University Block 6 1979:26)

All the above mentioned strategies were not adopted but they have been useful in sharpening the thoughts of the researcher. I have thus adopted the strategy which has involved from the beginning the use of key categories of life experiences in collecting data. I then focussed on developing an explanation of the themes which have emerged from the personal accounts of lived experiences and the world. The approach can be viewed in this way

> (The) ultimate aim of the ethnographic research is not simply to produce a narrative record of events in particular situations but rather to develop explanations of these events and others like them. Intentions and motives must be located in relation to the actor's actions and statements on other occasions to perspectives also employed by other actors and to situations, routines and novel, which the actor faces. Beyond the narrative level, then the search is for more abstract categories which explain the actions, intentions and motivations that occur on particular occasion (Open University Block 6 1979:25).

The process of data analysis is perceived as "the truely creative part of work - it entails brooding and reflecting upon mounds of data for long periods of time until it 'makes sense' and 'feels right' and key ideas and themes emerge from it" (Plummer, K. 1985:99). This involves going backwards and forwards, working with the raw data and returning to the field seeking clarification from the respondents. Every now and then the

field notes were read and comparison of aspects of the life stories were made with those already published like the stories in S Gordon's book "A Talent for Tomorrow", (1985) and J. Cock's "Maids and Madams", (1980). This step was taken in order to increase the validity of the data collected. This process of data analysis thus starts with the collection of data and goes on until the final report is presented. It is a live and challenging process which takes a long time to achieve. The final step in the data analysis of the life history is "to capture that person's subjective reality, his definition of the situation which the legitimate part of sociological investigation." (Plummer 1985:105)

2. Organising the Data: Key Categories of Life History

The first step is the breaking up of data into small and manageable categories. This process of data analysis "operates simultaneously on many levels of observation". (Open University Block 6: 1979:16). In the data collection stages I started by grouping the questions into key categories of experiences of being a domestic worker. This was followed by the selection of the eleven domestic workers who represented the three categories of domestic work, namely the resident, the full-time daily commuter and the part-time worker. Then out of the eleven I selected the three stories that formed the core of this study. Each story was then analysed from data which was organised around categories of life experiences. Key themes were identified from these categories and key issues which had emerged from these themes were analysed. (Full discussion of these key themes and key issues is provided in Chapter 3 and 4.)

These key categories of the life histories reflect the experiences of African women as members of the working class, workers and mothers. They help to reflect the daily struggle faced by the domestic workers in and outside the work situation as well as the limited opportunities open to African women.

i Early childhood, youth and family life

This category helps to expose the experiences of being born into a working class background and be subjected to both racial, class and gender oppression and exploitation. It helps to elicit information about the type of families that domestic workers come from and how the particular domestic worker was socialized. Further the category has helped in eliciting as well as in analysing gender divisions of labour within the domestic worker's family as well as in her own immediate family. It helps to also illustrate the power relations within her own family as well as why some African women opt for single parenting.

ii Family Life and children

This category also helps in exposing the type of family structures found within the African working class in Cape Town. Fragmented family lives appear to be a common feature in the domestic worker's families. The relationship between the domestic worker and her children; the daily struggles that the domestic worker faces, for example accommodation problems which result in the fragmentation of her family as well as the non-provision of childcare facilities.

APPENDIX IV

Note on Domestic Workers in African Households

The focus of the thesis is an African woman employed in domestic work in private white kitchens. This focus on the white kitchen is not aimed at excluding the fact that there are African women employed in African kitchens and in all the black townships in Cape Town. The women concerned are employed as either general workers, that is they do the house work, cook and look after children, or a sick member of the family. Their conditions of employment are poorer than those of their sisters in white kitchens. The wages are poor, there are in most cases no off-days except for afternoons off. Usually it is women who come from outside Cape Town who are "imported" through relatives. They are the so-called "illegals" who have to stay with the particular family. The situation within the African working class has been necessitated by the State's attempt at fragmenting the African working class. Concessions were made to the "legal" population in the form of greater movement within the urban areas, the extension of 99 year lease and promotion of Africans into higher positions. Further, by the fact that the rate of inflation had increased, necessitated that both husband and wife go out in order to earn a living for their family. With the State's non-provision of basic facilities in the form of pre-schools, day care centres and old age homes, the employment of a home assistant became a reality for most African women who could afford it. Thus both notions of sisterhood and class-consciousness were violated. This became the sign of the fragmentation of the African working class and the development of an African middle class without an economic base.

This area would then require further investigation by future researchers.

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