

# **Ukukupita (Cohabiting): Socio-Cultural Constraints in Urban Zulu Society**

Journal of Asian and African Studies  
2014, Vol. 49(3) 282–297  
© The Author(s) 2013  
Reprints and permissions:  
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0021909613485705  
jas.sagepub.com  


**Dorrit Posel and Stephanie Rudwick**

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

## **Abstract**

In South Africa non-marital cohabitation rates among Africans remain low, and particularly in the context of very low marriage rates. Through qualitative interviews with urban isiZulu-speakers we explore attitudes towards *ukukupita* (cohabiting) in contemporary Zulu society. These in-depth interviews capture the meanings associated with non-marital cohabitation and they provide insights into why cohabitation is widely viewed as unacceptable in Zulu society unless the man has initiated *ilobolo* (bridewealth) negotiations and concrete marriage plans are in place. Cohabitation without *ilobolo* payment is widely interpreted as akin to behaving disrespectfully towards Zulu culture and tradition, the immediate family and the Zulu community more broadly.

## **Keywords**

Cohabitation, *ilobolo*, marriage, South Africa, Zulu

## **Introduction**

In many countries, increasing levels of non-marital cohabitation have been noted as one of the most significant changes in nuclear household structures (cf. Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004; Oropesa, 1996; Seltzer, 2004). The literature generally distinguishes between two forms of cohabitation: first, cohabitation with marriage intentions and as a precursor to the institution; and second, cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. Historically, in South Africa non-marriage among Africans seems to have been rare (Preston-Whyte, 1981). However, falling marriage rates have been observed since at least the 1950s (Gluckman, 1950), a trend that has continued through recent decades (De Haas, 1984; Hunter, 2010; Posel, Rudwick and Casale, 2011; Preston-Whyte, 1978). As marriage rates have fallen, cohabitation rates have increased: in 1995 only 5% of African women aged 20 to 45 years reported cohabiting with a partner; by 2008 this had increased to 14% (Posel et al., 2011). Nonetheless, relative to the share of African women who are unmarried (76% of those 20 to 45 years in 2008), cohabitation rates remain low (Posel et al., 2011) and particularly

---

## **Corresponding author:**

Stephanie Rudwick, School of Built Environment and Development Studies (BEDS), University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus/Memorial Tower Building, Durban 4041, South Africa.  
Email: Rudwicks@ukzn.ac.za

among women who are mothers. In 2008 almost half of all African mothers were neither married nor cohabiting with a partner, and only 30% of African children were growing up with their fathers in the same household (Posel and Rudwick, 2012).

It is curious that, in the context of very low and falling marriage rates, cohabitation rates – particularly among mothers – have not increased more. One explanation is that cohabitation is not viewed as an acceptable form of union. In contemporary Zulu society, the verb most commonly used to describe cohabiting is *ukukipita* (literally translated as ‘to keep it’), which carries negative connotations similar to the dated German usage of *Wilde Ehe* (literally, ‘wild marriage’).<sup>1</sup> In Zulu society the isiZulu term *ukuhlalisana* (to stay together), which is considered less derogatory and more neutral in its connotations, seems to be far less in usage than the pejorative term *ukukipita*.

While there is some reference in the literature to cohabitation being stigmatized in Zulu society, there is no study that elicits the roots of, or reasons for, this stigma.<sup>2</sup> In this paper we seek to fill this research lacuna by interrogating attitudes towards cohabitation. Using data collected from qualitative interviews with urban Zulu women and men, our study illustrates how the complex mix of Zulu culture and religion shapes attitudes towards cohabitation and how community values are at the root of the continued stigmatization of such unions, in particular as an alternative to marriage.

We pay particular attention to the widespread payment of *ilobolo* (bridewealth),<sup>3</sup> which is required before or during the marriage even if the union is based on a church or civil procedure (De Haas, 1987; Hunter, 2010; Ngubane, 1981; Posel and Rudwick, in press). The nature of *ilobolo* negotiations and practices has changed over time, but the custom per se continues to be practised by the vast majority of Zulu people. The current ‘standard’ *ilobolo* amount of 11 cattle<sup>4</sup> in KwaZulu-Natal that ironically was set as a maximum payment by the 1869 colonial administration (either in livestock, a negotiated value in cash, or a combination of both) poses a financial challenge to many Zulu men today. It is also not unlikely that this financial challenge jeopardizes the institution of marriage to a greater extent among Zulu people than among other ethno-linguistic groups in South Africa (Hosegood, McGrath and Moultrie, 2009: 284; Posel et al., 2011). The payment of *ilobolo* may not only increase the economic requirements of men who want to marry, but in this paper we argue that it also renders cohabitation a socially unacceptable form of partnership unless *ilobolo* negotiations are underway.

Although seemingly under threat, marriage is widely desired among African people (Posel et al., 2011) and, for most married Zulu women, it has been termed an ‘event of major importance in their lives’ (Harrison and Montgomery, 2001: 316).<sup>5</sup> A study of cohabitation in Zulu society needs to recognize that marriage persists as a necessary step towards achieving social status as a Zulu ‘man’ or ‘woman’.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, the links between marriage and reproduction have been dislodged. Despite low marriage rates, most African women want to have children and, at least in some sections of Zulu society, the goal of motherhood outweighs that of marriage (Preston-Whyte and Zondi, 1989: 55).<sup>7</sup> With very low marriage and cohabitation rates among mothers, and rising rates of non-marital childbirth, the phenomenon of the absent father has become a concern among South African researchers (Denis and Ntsimane, 2006; Hunter, 2006; Morrell, Posel and Devey, 2003; Posel and Devey, 2006). This research identifies that the common absence of fathers in many Zulu households is not always because men are denying paternity or behaving irresponsibly, but that their absence may have financial reasons (Hunter, 2006). In this paper, we demonstrate that a man is socio-culturally not permitted to cohabit and co-parent with the mother of his child unless he has initiated the *ilobolo* (bridewealth) negotiations and concrete marriage plans are in place. Although a Zulu man is able to claim rights to his children<sup>8</sup> through the significantly lower *inhlawulo* (‘damages’) payment, and this practice may have helped to accommodate

high rates of non-marital childbirth within Zulu culture, the payment of *inhlawulo* does not grant the father the right to cohabit with the mother of the child.

In the next section we briefly discuss the relatively sparse literature on cohabitation in South Africa more generally, before focusing on the few studies of Zulu society. In the fieldwork section we outline the methodological approach and then present the findings gained through lengthy, in-depth interviews with a sample of urban isiZulu-speakers in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. We conclude by drawing attention to the central role of *ilobolo* in the marriage process. We find that the widespread practice of, and respect for, the custom of *ilobolo* underpins negative attitudes towards cohabitation unless *ilobolo* has been initiated and payments have been made. Among non-Christian Zulu people, the payment of *ilobolo* is typically sufficient to 'mark' marriage and end cohabitation. Among Christian Zulu people, marriage may also require a religious ceremony, but the custom of *ilobolo* is still widely observed, and cohabitation is rejected on both religious and cultural grounds.

### Cohabitation in South Africa and Zulu Society

References to non-marital cohabitation in urban African society in South Africa can be found in several anthropological and historical monographs throughout the 20th century, but the description of the frequency and reception of these unions, and their place in urban African society, varies widely. It seems that non-marital cohabitation rarely existed in pre-capitalist Southern African cultures and, before the 20th century, the young couple resided in either of their parents' homes prior to marriage rather than having an independent household (Comaroff and Roberts, 1977). Radcliffe-Brown (1950: 64) notes the tradition among Zulu people that 'when a man dies and his wife has not passed the age of child-bearing it is the duty of the man's brother to cohabit with the widow in order to raise children, which will be counted, not as his, but as children of the deceased'. However, non-marital cohabitation outside of those culturally sanctioned domestic set-ups caused conflict in the community and with the tribal authorities (Radcliffe-Brown, 1950). It is also likely, as will be seen later, that the isiZulu term '*ukukupita*' was not used by Zulu people in the context of what Radcliffe-Brown described as 'cohabitating'.

General household surveys that record the nature and composition of households historically have been rare in South Africa. Consequently, it is 'almost impossible to patch together anything but an impressionistic sense of changing household structures' over an extended time period (Delius and Glaser, 2004: 112). While one can find evidence that non-marital cohabitation has been a feature of African urban life since at least the 1930s (Shropshire, 1946), the more noticeable change in South African household composition during the 20th century is the increasing number of 'illegitimate' children and single mothers and, as a result, the growing incidence of female-headed households in South Africa (Posel and Rogan, 2012).<sup>9</sup>

A number of qualitative studies have described an increase in cohabiting unions which coincided with growing African urbanization during the 20th century. Longmore (1959), for example, identified non-marital cohabitation in her study of African society in Johannesburg as a 'distinctive feature' of urban African household structure. Several of the male respondents in her study stated 'that it was easy' to 'persuade a woman to accept suggestions to live with them without *lobolo*' (Longmore, 1959: 66). Accordingly, "'*ukukupita*' (cohabiting) is accepted as the best of life because it is maintained that married couples no longer live happily together' (Longmore, 1959: 68). However, Longmore's claims have been contested. Vilakazi (1963: 949) strongly refuted her statements arguing that her claim about the frequency of such unions (*ukukupita*-union) 'is absurd'. Rather, Vilakazi (1963) stressed the illegitimate character of an *ukukupita*-union in the context of Zulu moral values and Zulu tradition.

While Longmore's account of urban African cohabitation may have been misrepresentative and exaggerated in numerical claims, it nonetheless provided initial insights into why non-marital unions were increasing: some men preferred cohabitation to marriage because it required less commitment from them (socio-emotionally as well as financially) and was more easily dissolvable in case of a dispute. And apparently even some women found it advantageous at that time, as the following comment from a young female respondent in Longmore's study indicates: 'it is better to live without marriage because as soon as a man ill-treats you, you are free to go' (Longmore, 1959: 69).

Mayer (1961) referred to a growing number of non-marital cohabitation unions among urban Xhosa people in the context of increasing urbanization and 'immorality' in towns as opposed to the traditional conservatism in rural areas.<sup>10</sup> Wilson and Mafeje (1963) described cohabitation as increasing in a township outside of Cape Town during the 1960s, but they also noted the sense of shame associated with this type of union formation. Steyn and Rip (1968: 512) suggested that in some communities in Johannesburg, up to 50% of all couples were cohabiting during the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> However, during the same publishing year, Pouw (1968: 135) argued in reference to urban Xhosa people in East London that 'although relatively lasting relationships are common among young townpeople, these do not commonly lead to the establishment of common domestic arrangements outside of marriage'. Only when relations with parents were strained may a woman have gone to stay with her lover (Pouw, 1968).

Bank's research in the Eastern Cape suggests that, during the 1980s and 1990s, cohabitation unions became increasingly common among politicized township youth and could be understood as 'emblematic of their new-found freedom and independence' (Bank, 2001: 131). Nonetheless, Bank argues also that these unions were very unstable because of tension between the expectations of women, who associated cohabitation with a rejection of their traditional roles, and men, who often 'expected their lovers to behave like "customary wives"' (Bank, 2001: 145). However, by the late 1980s, Motshologane (1987: 201) suggested that an attitudinal change towards cohabitation was evident in African society, and that 'though not explicitly approved', cohabitation was becoming a 'common feature of the urban Black society' because of the 'weakening and repudiation of traditional controls'.

Although historical and ethnographic studies therefore generally point to increased cohabitation in urban areas, particularly during the latter part of the 20th century, they have not painted a consistent picture of the acceptability of these unions in African communities. Of these studies, only a few relate directly to the KwaZulu-Natal province and Zulu people in particular. De Haas's (1984) seminal study on changing marriage patterns in the Durban region focused on Zulu people, but it did not give much attention to cohabitation patterns and attitudes towards *ukukupita*. The study does describe, however, the complexity of living arrangements between Zulu men and women due to apartheid and it makes brief reference to a few couples staying together without being married (De Haas, 1984: 204).

Available micro-data collected in nationally representative household surveys provide evidence that cohabitation is not uncommon in KwaZulu-Natal. In 2010, for example, approximately 13% of all African women (aged 20 years and older) in the whole province, and 14% in urban areas specifically, reported to be in a cohabiting relationship. Nonetheless, only 30% of all African women in KwaZulu-Natal were ever-married, and among never-married women, less than a quarter were cohabiting with a partner.<sup>12</sup>

Higher cohabitation rates in urban areas suggest that socio-cultural sanctions on cohabitation are stronger in rural areas of the KwaZulu-Natal province. A recent report by Budlender et al. (2011), examining a rural area (Msinga) in KwaZulu-Natal, concludes that cohabitation is "'almost" not existent' (p. 51) in the area, because of the 'stigma attached to unmarried women who move out

of their parents' home' (p. 36).<sup>13</sup> Within urban areas, national cohabitation rates among Africans are higher among informal settlement (or shack) dwellers than among formal settlement dwellers (Hunter and Posel, 2012). Hunter (2010: 94) refers to urban informal settlements as being 'known for allowing cohabiting unions', and Xaba et al. (2005: 58) even claim that in the urban Cato Crest area in the *eThekwin*/Durban region, comprising mostly shack dwellings, 'the majority of people' are *kipita*-ing. In urban KwaZulu-Natal specifically, cohabitation rates in 2010 were considerably higher among informal than formal dwellers (23% compared to 10%), but still the majority of African women living in informal settlements were neither married nor cohabiting with a partner.<sup>14</sup>

A few studies also highlight the negative consequences of cohabitation for women, describing this domestic set-up as one in which women are particularly vulnerable (Goldblatt, 2001; Xaba et al., 2005).<sup>15</sup> This vulnerability has physical, emotional and financial dimensions, and may explain why in some studies men are found to be more willing than women to agree to cohabitation (Goldblatt, 2001: 41).

The literature on cohabitation in contemporary South Africa and in Zulu society specifically remains sparse. In some contexts, cohabitation seems to be relatively common, but there is also reference to *ukukipita* being against *amasiko* (culture) and recognition of a persistent socio-cultural stigma attached to cohabitation among Africans and Zulu people (Budlender et al., 2011: 36; Goldblatt, 2001: 31; Hunter, 2010: 99; Xaba et al., 2005). However, the roots of this strong disapproval have not been examined and studies have not investigated why and how the stigma is maintained, particularly in the context of very low marriage rates. The objective of our study is to explore attitudes to cohabitation in contemporary urban Zulu society and to probe what informs and maintains these attitudes.

## Fieldwork

Due to the greater frequency of cohabitation unions in urban areas of South Africa, we restricted our data collection to isiZulu-speakers in the Durban municipality among whom a change of attitude and increasingly open views towards cohabitation are more likely. The primary data used for the analysis in this study are 40 lengthy, qualitative, in-depth interviews with urban Zulu men and women conducted during a four-month period (November 2011–February 2012) in the *eThekwin*i region (Durban municipality). We employed a combination of opportunity and snowball sampling,<sup>16</sup> and grouped the participants (P) into four categories: 10 unmarried women (P1–10), 10 married women (P11–20), 10 unmarried men (P21–30) and 10 married men (P31–40). The participants were between 19 and 59 years old, and although most of the sample lived in formal settlements, the participants had diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds. All participants identified themselves as heterosexual, and the large majority had children, many of whom were born out of wedlock.

Before the above-mentioned period where we conducted the 40 interviews with the primary interest in cohabitation (hereafter phase 2), we had already spent three months in the previous year doing fieldwork (hereafter phase 1) in the same region (*eThekwin*i/Durban municipality) in the course of a project focusing on marriage and *ilobolo* in Zulu society. This first phase included the same number of participants who had equally diverse backgrounds.<sup>17</sup> Because several of the interviews conducted during this earlier period yielded valuable information on attitudes towards non-marital cohabitation, we also consider these earlier data in our analysis and discussion. Furthermore, we include ethnographic data based on information we gathered through several unrecorded casual interactions with isiZulu-speakers during the two fieldwork periods mentioned above.

We specifically asked participants about their attitudes towards cohabitation under various conditions: (i) without marriage intentions; (ii) with marriage intentions but no *ilobolo* negotiations in place; and (iii) with marriage intentions that already included *ilobolo* negotiations and payment. In addition to cohabitation, several other issues were discussed in the interviews including questions on marriage and *ilobolo* more broadly, childbirth and *inhlawulo*. Although the interviews were semi-structured we consciously allowed them to develop into more narrative formats where the interviewee could speak about issues that had importance to him/her even if they were not directly linked to the research questions. Some participants were interviewed twice in order to clarify and verify issues that arose during the first meeting. The original data were in isiZulu, but a few participants made use of isiZulu-English code-switching.<sup>18</sup>

### **Ukukipita in urban Zulu society**

With little prompting from the interviewers, the striking theme present in almost all the interviews was an unambiguous construction of *ukukipita* as ‘wrong’ and ‘unacceptable’ for Zulu people and as something that ‘cannot’, ‘should not’ and ‘must not’ happen. Specifically upon being asked whether ‘it is all right for a couple to live together *without intending to get married*’, only two of the 40 participants<sup>19</sup> in phase 2 felt ‘uncertain’ or ‘unsure’, and not a single person commended it. The remaining 38 participants either disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the above statement. If tangible marriage plans were in place, attitudes became slightly more open and accepting, although more than half of the participants still considered it problematic. It was only when *ilobolo* negotiations were underway that cohabitation was widely regarded as legitimate: 32 of the participants found cohabitation with marriage intentions, which included the initiation of bridewealth payments, as acceptable in the context of Zulu moral values and tradition. The few participants who did not consider cohabitation under these circumstances acceptable objected on religious and moral grounds.

While it is important to note that the negative attitudes towards cohabitation were not always consistent with actual behavioral patterns (a few of the participants had in fact cohabited before, or were doing so during the time of interview), most previous or current cohabitees claimed that their cohabitation came with the expectation of marriage. In particular, women insisted that they always thought their boyfriends would initiate the *ilobolo* process. Because *ilobolo* implies marriage intentions, these attitudes are representative of a Zulu value system inherently connected to a cultural and/or religious rejection of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. Most of our participants respect this value system and aspire to obey to it, but not all succeed (and hence cohabit[ed] without subsequent marriage). In the next section we describe in more detail the paramount role of *ilobolo* in informing these attitudes and we present resulting subjective realities.

### **Cohabitation Legitimized through *ilobolo***

As has been mentioned, the isiZulu verb *ukukipita* is not simply translated as ‘cohabiting’; rather, and as confirmed in our fieldwork, the term *ukukipita* carries negative connotations. The integral nature of *ilobolo* in Zulu marriage affects how Zulu people understand and use the term. While in the English language a couple cohabits if the partners are not married, in Zulu society *ukukipita* ends once some *ilobolo* payments are underway, even if no wedding ceremony has taken place. There was a firm sense among a significant number of the interviewees that the term *ukukipita* was no longer appropriate once the male partner had initiated the *umcelo* ritual (asking the father<sup>20</sup> of the bride for permission to marry his daughter and establishing some kind of negotiation process leading to at least part of the payment of *ilobolo*).

For example, an unmarried female domestic worker (P6) had lived with her fiancé for over 16 years without getting married. However, he had initiated *umcelo* and paid some *ilobolo* before they had moved in together, and she therefore said:

...I never cohabited (*ukukupita*) and I hate it. [...] That [paying some *ilobolo* and subsequently moving in together] was done a long time ago – so they [relatives and ancestors] know him at her home, he has paid. So it's not like cohabiting and they [the couple] know where they are going with their future. It's not like you'll see this boyfriend today and another one later.

The same participant spoke shamefully about her own daughter who was, at the time of the interview, in an *ukukupita* relationship. She explained that she was disappointed with her daughter because her boyfriend should at least initiate *umcelo* and be willing to pay some *ilobolo* (she suggested R10,000) as the legitimization for her daughter to live with the man.

Several of our interviewees considered the payment of *ilobolo* as marking the status of 'being married'. One married male interviewee (P34), for instance, explained that: 'when you have paid *ilobolo*, you are like a married man'. A married female (P14) even went as far as to say: 'when you get married without *ilobolo* being paid, it's the same as cohabiting'. A few others voiced similar opinions which suggests that, for some Zulu people, *ilobolo* legitimizes cohabitation to a greater extent than, for instance, a civil/court marriage without the payment of *ilobolo*. However, the specificities about the legitimization of a joined household between a man and a woman greatly varied from one interviewee to the next; some viewed the *umcelo* ritual to suffice while others expected the entire *ilobolo* payment to have been made. Many felt that at least a substantial amount of *ilobolo* should be paid before cohabitation was acceptable. A 26-year-old woman (P1) who started living with her partner after he initiated *umcelo* maintains that retrospectively she regrets her decision: 'That is how men use us: they just come to our family for *umcelo* and you think that he is serious. So then you go and live with him and that is against culture. It is better if he has paid half of it [*ilobolo*] at least' (P1). In her particular situation, her own parents and her in-laws interpreted the *ilobolo* payment differently. While her parents felt she should not have moved in with her fiancé so quickly, her in-laws found it unacceptable for her, the prospective bride, still to maintain her own flat after her family had received some payment following the *umcelo* ritual. This example bears testimony to the idiosyncratic attitudes and behaviours towards procedural details of *ilobolo*, marriage and cohabitation in contemporary KwaZulu-Natal. Yet the overwhelming majority of our participants were of one voice when it came to Zulu people who 'just' cohabit without tangible marriage plans that include *ilobolo*: they were shamed and some interviewees even considered it a 'disgrace' to their family and ancestors. Some also felt that it was upsetting: 'it is sad to look at those people (who cohabit) only to find that the woman is 50 years and still waiting to be *lobola'd*' (P15).

A few young participants found ways to justify for themselves why they cohabited or had done so in the past. One 35-year-old woman (P3) who had been cohabiting since 2002 emphasized that she has always wanted to get married, but: 'sometimes people cohabit for good reasons, like maybe because of your background where you are not happy with your family. So rather than staying in the streets, then it's better to live with your boyfriend'. This participant's unhappiness with her family was best captured by her breaking contact with her father and his relatives. She did concede that, if her mother was still alive, she would 'not be staying with a man'. In her case, therefore, the separation from her father's family and her mother's death provided a justification for cohabiting with her boyfriend. An unmarried 26-year-old male (P24) who expressed unease about having cohabited for three years felt ambiguous about the issue: 'you must know each other before you

decide to get married because you don't want to get surprises' but 'it is also about culture'. He continued by explaining that the decent thing to do for a Zulu man was to at least initiate the *umcelo* procedure before moving in with a woman.

In our interviews we also found no evidence that cohabitation was justified by a couple having had a child together. There was virtual consensus among our participants that a child, and the wish to co-parent, did not legitimize a shared household without the payment of *ilobolo*. Consequently, a young father who may be committed to his child and his/her mother is socio-culturally not permitted to live with his family unless he also initiates the process of *ilobolo*.

Cohabitation between the mother and father of a child was not viewed as acceptable even if *inhlawulo* had been paid by the father of the child to the mother's family. Participant 21 put it like this: '*Inhlawulo* allows you to be able to live with your child, but not the mother ... It is there for the child, but not for the mother'. Although a few participants considered cohabitation between parents as considerably less objectionable than just living together childless 'as boyfriend and girlfriend',<sup>21</sup> the vast majority did not regard it as an acceptable option, either for themselves or for others. One young female, for instance, insisted: 'A child and *inhlawulo*, that's not *ilobolo*. He [her boyfriend] was paying for the baby, not me. I would never cohabit with that person, whether he paid *inhlawulo* or not' (P1).

The *inhlawulo* payment and its associated rituals have financial and spiritual implications. While *inhlawulo* symbolizes a 'payment' for having dishonored the family of the young mother, it is also believed to cleanse the illegitimate child of the bad health and misfortune culturally associated with pre-marital (or non-marital) childbirth (see also Preston-Whyte and Zondi, 1989). *Inhlawulo*, however, does not permit couples to cohabit, and there is no equivalent ritual to accommodate non-marital cohabitation among couples with children. One young female (P5) described a child born out of wedlock as a 'mistake' that could be 'apologized' for by the *inhlawulo* payment, but she considered it entirely unacceptable to regard the child as a reason for the couple to cohabit. Similarly, a young man (P23) said: '*Inhlawulo* ... is there to only cleanse the family and apologize ... for not doing things properly. You cannot do wrong, and then continue with it [by cohabiting]'.<sup>22</sup>

## Maintaining Traditional and Cultural Constraints of *Ukukupita*

Among the 80 participants, including those from phase 1 of the fieldwork who were not directly questioned about cohabitation, some referred immediately and many quite explicitly to Zulu culture and tradition in their construction of cohabitation without marriage intentions as unacceptable in Zulu society. One woman (P11) exclaimed: 'with us Zulus, it [cohabitation] is completely unacceptable, you know some things are just taboo'. A married man (P32) similarly stated: 'In our tradition as Zulus you are not allowed to live with a girl before marriage'. Cultural constraints on cohabitation are maintained in two ways: first by referring to family, community values and a general sense of collective lifestyle; and second through spirituality and the belief in ancestors. The dual underpinning of the cultural stigma is best captured in the following comment: 'we [Zulu people] believe that it is unnatural for a girl to just go and live with a man. You need the permission of the adults, and the ancestors' (P<sub>1</sub>19).

African thinking and acting is considered to be informed and influenced by communal life (Mkhize, 2006: 187), and the family and community pressures that inhibit Zulu couples from cohabiting must not be underestimated. Some of the young Zulu men and women whom we interviewed did not personally regard cohabiting per se as particularly objectionable, but almost all felt that *ukukupita* was highly disrespectful towards their families and communities. An unmarried 35-year-old man claimed never to have cohabited 'because the problem is that each and everything



you do, where both parents from the man and woman were not consulted, that kind of thing from an African point of view will not end up well' (P26). Several participants, and ironically even some of those who had admitted to a previous cohabitation relationship, used very judgemental (e.g. wrong, unacceptable, etc.) or instructional (e.g. should not, must not, etc.) terminology in relation to cohabitation as an alternative to marriage or without the demonstration of marriage intentions.

Our interviews also suggest that Zulu people may be less reluctant to cohabit when their parents and other close family members are either not at the same place or are already deceased. One explanation, therefore, for higher cohabitation rates among urban dwellers, and among urban shack dwellers in particular is that couples are living further away from their kin. Among our participants, the few shack dwellers were no more accepting of cohabitation without *ilobolo* than the other participants, although they acknowledged that they knew many people, including neighbours, who were cohabiting. There were also three participants who indicated that professional urban Zulu couples increasingly accept cohabitation as a stage in courtship but only one participant (P18)<sup>23</sup> went so far as to suggest that a value change is taking place among young Zulu people. And even this particular individual ended the interview with the words: 'it's not good to stay together before marriage because most of the time you end up not getting married'.

The second most prominent reason for the persistence of cohabitation as socially unacceptable is spiritually grounded. Responses from participants reflect a Zulu belief system which recognizes and respects the power of the ancestors.<sup>24</sup> One young male professional insisted that cohabitation 'is against what I was taught to believe [...]. We can always visit each other, but not cohabit' (P30). An unmarried woman said: 'if you go and *-kipita*, you are asking for trouble' (P18). Although 'trouble' is a broad term, the interviewee alludes here to the trouble caused by having upset the ancestors. Some participants only implicitly referred to *amadlozi* (ancestors), but it is evident that this belief system continues to add significantly to the stigma attached to cohabitation:

It's for your own dignity [to get *lobola*'d and married]: getting married brings together the ancestors. So if I live with you without being married, it will be a problem. And if we have kids – because in our culture you are not allowed to get married if your parents were not – they have to start with us, [...] otherwise you create problems for yourself. (P31)

The interviewee refers to the spiritual Zulu belief that an individual may be physically and psychologically affected by the 'wrong'-doings of his/her parents, in this case that they had not been married 'properly'. During phase 1 of the research, two unmarried male participants (P<sub>1</sub>26 and P<sub>1</sub>40) narrated quite extensively about what they viewed as a common procedure in contemporary Zulu society, to conduct marriage-related rituals and ceremonies for one's deceased parents, thereby cleansing oneself of bad luck or illness caused by the parents' *ukukipita* or their otherwise inadequate marriage history. The combination of ancestral belief and cultural obligation requiring individuals to show respect towards family and community contributes in large measure to the persistence of cohabitation as unacceptable. Not all the participants in this study, however, rejected cohabitation only on cultural grounds. Several different religious convictions among our interviewees also contributed to the unacceptability of cohabitation, which we describe briefly in the next section.

## Religious (Christian) Constraints

The tradition of *ilobolo* is significant in the dynamics of marriage and cohabitation in Zulu society, even among most Christian people. As described earlier, in our sample of urban isiZulu-speakers, *ukukipita* was quite unanimously described as culturally improper and cohabiting couples were

referred to with strong disapproval. Christian reasoning behind the rejection of cohabitation featured far less prominently<sup>25</sup> than Zulu cultural and spiritual motives, but the role of religion does warrant a short elaboration. In South Africa, a large percentage of Zulu people<sup>26</sup> identify themselves as Christians and, for some, their religious faith contributes significantly to the unacceptable image of cohabitation. The statement ‘*my religion does not allow me to cohabit*’ was made by a 57-year-old married man (P39) who belongs to the ‘Church of Christ’, one of the many African Christian congregations. Another young married man, who initially said during the interview that he did not want his Christian views to intrude in the discussion, nonetheless stressed later: ‘before the *pastor blesses* the wedding and you put the rings on – I think it is *wrong* to live together’ (P37). Another married man (P39) strongly disapproved of cohabitation ‘because of Christianity – because God says that if you want to live with that person, you should get married first. I am against cohabiting’.

Several of the participants in our study indicated that they had a ‘bad conscience’ for not doing things ‘the right way’ in terms of their religious beliefs, leading to feelings of guilt. One young female (P11) who moved in with her fiancé without having had a formal wedding ceremony (although *ilobolo* had been paid), appeared very distressed about the fact that, at church and at home, people could find out that she was cohabiting without having had a church marriage ceremony.

These responses therefore suggest a distinction in how some Christian Zulu people identify the start of marriage. Although most would still regard *ilobolo* as an integral part of the marriage process, marriage also typically requires a religious ceremony. The frequently heard isiZulu saying, ‘*bazothini abantu?*’ (what will people say?) captures people’s concern with how they are regarded by the community, which may refer not only to family, neighbours, and traditional and cultural leaders, but also to a church community.

## Loss of Female Value

The interviewees, including those from phase 1 of the project, provide compelling evidence that the meanings attributed to *ukukupita* may also be gendered. A discussion of the value of a woman in Zulu society featured prominently in interviews on *ilobolo* and marriage and re-emerged during phase 2, when we focused on cohabitation. Many female participants maintained that the payment of bridewealth awards them for their personal value (see also Rudwick and Posel, 2012). Conversely, cohabitation is widely perceived as depriving a woman of her value and dignity. Several of the interviewees, both male and female, claimed simply that ‘the value of a woman goes down [with cohabiting]’ (P17). In one case, this referred literally to how cohabitation would affect the payment of *ilobolo*. As the female student (P9) elaborated: ‘after cohabiting, your value goes down because you have been living with this man and there will be no virginity cow’.<sup>27</sup> Most respondents felt that cohabitation devalued the standing of women as ‘marriageable’ in general, and their status in the cohabiting relationship more specifically. A 33-year-old professional female (P15) who claimed not to have had sex before her marriage stated: ‘when you cohabit, your man loses respect for you; you don’t hold any value to him. If he wants to get married, he will leave you for a new person’. She illustrated her point by referring to her male neighbour who had been cohabiting for five years with a woman and who apparently told her that financial issues do not impact on his decision not to marry the woman but the fact that ‘the girl [sic.] is not good enough for him’ (P15).

Most interviewees regarded cohabitation primarily as detrimental to the position of women. Both male and female participants expressed the view that women are more vulnerable in

cohabitation than in marriage due to the lack of both financial and emotional security. One female respondent remarked: 'if you stay with a man, he can use you the way he wants because he knows that he didn't pay [*ilobolo*]' (P<sub>1</sub>18). It is a common (mis)-perception that once *ilobolo* has been paid and the couple is married, a woman finds herself in a more secure position, financially, socio-culturally and emotionally. While there is evidence in South Africa that much abuse also occurs in African marriages (Fox et al., 2007; Jewkes, 2002; Wood and Jewkes, 1997), our interviews suggest that the loss of female value and contempt are feared to a greater extent in reference to cohabiting relationships than marriage.

Although the vast majority of the male participants in our study stated that cohabitation without marriage intentions was unacceptable, some women claimed that Zulu men and women differ in their approaches to cohabitation because 'men don't care, but in the mind of a woman, there is that need to get married in the end' (P14). However, there were a few men who expressly viewed cohabitation as having a negative impact on their identities. One unmarried man (P22) stressed the paramount value of marriage in this context: 'You can never be a man without being married. You will see that properly if we are having rituals. There is meat for men and for boys ... that [cohabitation] does not make you a man, you will always be a boy'. These findings suggest that gendered Zulu cultural norms govern to some extent attitudes towards cohabiting unions and deserve to be explored in more detail elsewhere.

## Conclusion

Socio-cultural objections to cohabitation are constructed and maintained in multiple ways among our sample of urban Zulu men and women, but there is virtual consensus among the overwhelming majority of participants that *ilobolo* is of paramount significance in the setting up of a joint household between a man and a woman. Once *ilobolo* negotiations are underway, the derogatory isiZulu term *ukukupita* is not commonly employed in reference to a Zulu couple who lives together, even if no date for the wedding has been established. Although among Christian Zulu people, it is also the wedding ceremony and the blessing of the church that marks marriage, only few have dispensed with *ilobolo*. Cohabitation without *ilobolo* payment is widely considered unacceptable in Zulu society and is frequently interpreted as akin to behaving disrespectfully towards Zulu culture and tradition, the immediate family and the community as a whole. Without the payment of *ilobolo*, Zulu couples who only have a religious or civil wedding may also be viewed as still *kipita*-ing.

This research indicates that negative attitudes towards cohabitation in Zulu society are deeply socio-culturally bound, and strengthened through tight family and communal values. While communal values appear to remain strong even in urban areas of KwaZulu-Natal, increasing individualization in the lifestyles of young urban Zulu people may trigger change in the years to come. Our findings suggest that there is some evidence that the views and behavioral patterns towards cohabitation among young adults slightly differ from those of their parents, but it is out of respect to the older generation and the Zulu community more generally that the strong disapproval of cohabitation persists. Consequently, despite very low marriage rates in contemporary Zulu society, there seems to be little indication of a general value change or of increasingly open attitudes towards cohabiting unions as an alternative to marriage. Even cohabitation as a precursor to marriage seems only marginally more acceptable unless *ilobolo* payments have been initiated.

## Acknowledgements

We thank an anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments and suggestions and Magcino Shange and Rose Makhosi for their research assistance.

## Funding

The research on which this paper is based was funded by grant income attached to a South African Research Chair, funded by the Department of Science and Technology and administered by the National Research Foundation, South Africa.

## Notes

1. This term has fallen completely out of usage in Germany due to the frequency of such unions today and the radical change of general attitudes towards cohabitation. In an article about the recently designated German 'Bundespräsident' Joachim Gauck, who cohabits with his partner, the Sociologist and Gender Studies scholar Nina Degele was quoted as saying that the term 'Wilde Ehe' can only be used in inverted commas in present-day Germany because of its deeply antiquated nature (for more detail, see <http://www.zeit.de/news/2012-02/24/bundespraesident-diskussion-um-gaucks-ehe-nicht-mehr-zeitgemaess-24161820>).
2. In light of the apparent stigma attached to cohabitation in South Africa, unions of this kind may also be under-counted because people may be embarrassed to admit to cohabiting (Goldblatt, 2001: 14). In the context of Botswana it has recently been pointed out that measurements on cohabitation are problematic and inaccurate (Mokomane, 2005, 2006). It is possible that some of these inaccuracies also arise in the collection of quantitative data on marital status in South African household surveys (Budlender, Chobokoane, and Simelane, 2004).
3. We use the term 'bridewealth' rather than 'bride-price' to avoid the implication that *ilobolo* is a question of wife purchase, and to recognize that the practice served to transfer wealth between families and generations (Evans-Pritchard, 1931: 36).
4. While the cattle generally are passed on to the father of the bride or her male kin, the eleventh cow, termed the *ingquthu* beast, is reserved for the mother and is meant to represent the daughter's virginity.
5. Although it was recently argued that unmarried African women have 'greater control over their sexuality and childbearing decisions' (Ndinda et al., 2007: 848), quantitative attitudinal data show that the large majority of never-married African women want to marry, and that this percentage is even higher among Zulu women specifically (Posel and Rudwick, in press).
6. Various studies in the historical and anthropological literature about Zulu society highlight the paramount value of marriage to Zulu womanhood (Harrison and O'Sullivan, 2010; LeClerc-Madlala, 2001; Marcus, 2008; Ngubane, 1977, 1981; Preston-Whyte, 1978, 1987; Vilakazi, 1962).
7. There is a large literature which explores increasing pre-marital sexual relations and childbirth during the 20th century in urban South Africa (Gage-Brandon and Meekers, 1993; Longmore, 1959; Mayer, 1961; Moeno, 1977; Motshologane, 1987; Pouw, 1968; Preston-Whyte, 1978; Preston-Whyte and Zondi, 1989; Russell, 2003; Shapera, 1933; Steyn, 1987; Steyn and Rip, 1968).
8. These rights primarily include the child acquiring the father's surname, although in a few cases our interviews suggest that the child may also move to the father's household to be raised mainly by the paternal grandmother.
9. By 2006 approximately 38% of all households in South Africa were female-headed (Posel and Rogan, 2012).
10. Multiple reasons are mentioned for why people cohabited (Mayer, 1961: 258). The apartheid pass laws restricted the movement of Africans in town, especially at night, and it was safer to stay at a lover's place than return to one's own home in the middle of the night. Financial reasons also played a role as, through cohabitation, partners could share living costs. Mayer suggests that, for women, security may also have been relevant as women felt less vulnerable living with a man than living on their own. For men, cohabitation may have been convenient because women generally took responsibility for domestic work in the household. Men are also noted to have felt more in control of their partners' activities if they were co-residing (Mayer, 1961).
11. Steyn and Rip (1968) argue that in particular the apartheid pass system and high *ilobolo* demands contributed to the increasing formation of cohabiting unions.
12. Own calculations from the 2010 General Household Survey.
13. Participants in this study reported that 'cohabitation (*ukukupita*) was discouraged through charging men who had not paid lobola for the woman with whom they were living R160 per year' (Budlender et al., 2011:62).

14. According to data collected in the 2010 General Household Survey, only 21% of African women living in informal settlements in urban KwaZulu-Natal were married (own calculations).
15. While much female abuse occurs in marriages, a cohabitation union is argued to provide even less rights and securities for women (Goldblatt, 2001).
16. The participants of this study were selected with the only common criteria of being isiZulu mother-tongue speakers and having spent most of their lives in the *eThekweni* environment.
17. In order to distinguish the two different interview data samples, the participants from phase 1 have a subscript 1. Unmarried women: P<sub>1</sub>1–10, married women P<sub>1</sub>11–20, unmarried men P<sub>1</sub>21–30 and married men P<sub>1</sub>31–40.
18. The interviews were conducted by the second author who has good knowledge of isiZulu and by an experienced isiZulu mother-tongue speaking fieldworker. This interview design allowed the interviewees to have both an insider and an outsider present and this provided for interesting dynamics of bridging and bonding but also distancing during some of the interviews.
19. Only the 40 participants of phase 2 were asked this question directly.
20. Given the frequent absence of fathers from households, a sibling of the bride's parents or an older sibling of the prospective bride may also be approached in the *umcelo* ritual.
21. One participant (P7), for instance, conceded that she had seen cases where parents initially only cohabited but then married at a later stage.
22. A few participants also suggested that some parents who receive *inhlawulo* after a daughter has had a child interpret this as a first step towards a marriage proposal for their daughter. Participant 8, for instance, said: 'sometimes after [a man] pays *inhlawulo*, they [the mother's parents] start calling him *umkhwenyana* [son-in-law]'. She argued that these expectations by parents may deter a young father from making the *inhlawulo* payment. Conversely, a few single mothers among our participants also conceded that, although the father of their child had not (yet) paid *inhlawulo*, he did contribute financially to raising the child.
23. This 35-year-old female participant had already been *lobola'd* and married twice and raised three children who all had different fathers.
24. Zulu spirituality and the belief in *amadlozi* do not necessarily exclude Christianity in South Africa. Several South African churches follow belief systems that are fundamentally built on syncretism between Christianity and Zulu spiritual elements. Several of the interviewees belonged to the *Shembe* and *Zionist* churches that are examples of this African Christianity.
25. Only six participants flagged Christian or other religions (e.g. Jehovah Witness) as reasons for why cohabitation was unacceptable.
26. According to data collected in a 2005 nationally representative attitudinal survey of adults in South Africa (the South African Social Attitudes Survey), approximately 80% of Zulu adults classify themselves as belonging to a religion (20% Zionist church, 12% to the Nazareth church, about 56% to other Christian religions, and 12% to Islam and 'other') (own calculations from the 2005 South African Social Attitudes Survey).
27. While it had been mentioned a number of times in the full sample of 80 interviews that, in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, the virginity cow is still paid when the woman has no child (and not when she actually still is a virgin), P9 was the only interviewee who also mentioned that cohabitation would result in the virginity cow being forfeited in the calculation of *ilobolo*.

## References

- Bank L (2001) Living together, moving apart. Home-made agendas, identity politics and urban-rural linkages in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19(1): 129–147.
- Budlender D, Chobokoana N and Simelane S (2004) Marriage patterns in South Africa: Methodological and substantive issues. *South African Journal of Demography* 9(1): 1–26.
- Budlender D, Mgwaba S, Motsepe S et al. (2011) *Women, Land and Customary Law*. Johannesburg: CASE.
- Comaroff John L and Roberts Simon (1977) Marriage and extra-marital sexuality: The Dialectics of legal change among the Kgatla. *Journal of African Law* 21(1): 97–123.

- De Haas M (1984) *Changing Patterns of Black Marriage and Divorce in Durban*. Unpublished Masters Thesis. University of Natal, Durban.
- De Haas M (1987) Is there anything more to say about lobolo? *African Studies* 46(1): 33–35.
- Delius P and Glaser C (2004) The myths of polygamy: A history of extra-marital and multi-partnership sex in South Africa. *South African Historical Journal* 50(1): 84–114.
- Denis P and Ntsimane R (2006) Absent fathers: Why do men not feature in stories of families affected by HIV/AIDS in KwaZulu-Natal? In: Morrell R and Richter L (eds) *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 237–249.
- Evans-Pritchard EE (1931) An alternative term for ‘bride-price’. *Man* 31: 36–39.
- Fox AM, Jackson SS, Hansen NB et al. (2007) In their own voices: A qualitative study of women’s risk for intimate partner violence and HIV in South Africa. *Violence Against Women* 13(6): 583–602.
- Gage-Brandon AJ and Meekers D (1993) Sex, contraception and childbearing before marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Family Planning Perspectives* 19(1): 14–33.
- Gluckman M (1950) Kinship and marriage among the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia and the Zulu of Natal. In: Radcliffe-Brown AR and Forde D (eds) *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 166–206.
- Goldblatt B (2001) *Cohabitation and Gender in the South African Context*. A Research Report prepared by the Gender Research Project of the Center of Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Harrison A and Montgomery E (2001) Life histories, reproductive histories: Rural South African women’s narratives of fertility, reproductive health and illness. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27(2): 311–328.
- Harrison A and O’Sullivan LF (2010) In the absence of marriage: Long term concurrent partnerships, pregnancy and HIV risk dynamics among South African young adults. *AIDS Behaviour* 14: 991–1000.
- Heuveline P and Timberlake JM (2004) The role of cohabitation in family formation: The United States in comparative perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(5): 1214–1230.
- Hosegood V, McGrath N and Moultrie T (2009) Dispensing with marriage: Marital and partnership trends in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa 2000–2006. *Demographic Research* 20(13): 279–312.
- Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)(2005) *South African Social Attitudes Survey*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Hunter M (2006) Fathers without amandla: Zulu-speaking men and fatherhood. In: Morrell R and Richter L (eds) *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 99–117.
- Hunter M (2010) *Love in the Time of AIDS*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Hunter M and Posel D (2012) Here to work: The socio-economic characteristics of informal dwellers in post-apartheid South Africa. *Environment and Urbanization* 24(1): 285–304.
- Jewkes R (2002) Intimate partner violence: Causes and prevention. *The Lancet* 359: 1423–1429.
- LeClerc-Madlala S (2001) Demonising women in the era of AIDS: On the relationship between cultural constructions of both HIV/AIDS and femininity. *Society in Transition* 32(1): 38–46.
- Longmore L (1959) *The Dispossessed: A Study of the Sex-Life of Bantu Women in Urban Areas in and around Johannesburg*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Marcus T (2008) Virginity testing. In: Carton B, Laband J and Sithole J (eds) *Zulu Identities. Being Zulu, Past and Present*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 536–544.
- Mayer P (1961) *Townsmen and Tribesmen*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Mkhize N (2006) African traditions and the social, economic and moral dimensions of fatherhood. In: R. Morrell and L. Richter (eds.) *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, pp. 82–200.
- Moeno NS (1977) Illegitimacy in an African urban township in South Africa: An ethnographic note. *African Studies* 36: 43–47.
- Mokomane Z (2005) Formation of cohabiting unions in Botswana: A qualitative study. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23(2): 193–214.
- Mokomane Z (2006) The collection of marital status data in Botswana: A review of the ‘living together’ category. *Journal of Population Research* 23(1): 83–90.
- Morrell R, Posel D and Devey R (2003) Counting fathers in South Africa: Issues of definition, methodology and policy. *Social Dynamics* 29(2): 73–94.

- Motshologane SR (1987) Attitudes and practices pertaining to premarital and extramarital sex and cohabitation in Black society. In: Steyn AF, Strijdom HG, Viljoen S and et al. (eds) *Marriage and Family Life in South Africa: Research Priorities*. Pretoria: HSRC Press, 190–204.
- Ndinda C, Uzedike UO, Chimbwete C et al. (2007) Gender relations in the context of HIV/AIDS in rural South Africa. *AIDS Care* 19(7): 844–849.
- Ngubane H (1977) *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine*. London: Academic Press.
- Ngubane H (1981) Marriage, affinity and the ancestral realm. In: Krige JE and Comaroff JL (eds) *Essays on African marriage in Southern Africa*. Cape Town/Johannesburg: Juta & Company, 84–95.
- Oropesa RS (1996) Normative beliefs about marriage and cohabitation: A comparison of non-Latino whites, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58(1): 49–62.
- Posel D and Devey R (2006) The demography of fathers in South Africa. In: Richter L and Morrell R (eds) *Baba? Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 38–52.
- Posel D and Rogan M (2012) Gendered trends in poverty in the post-apartheid period, 1995–2006. *Development Southern Africa* 29(1): 97–113.
- Posel D, Rudwick S and Casale D (2011) Is marriage a dying institution in South Africa? Exploring changes in marriage in the context of ilobolo payments. *Agenda* 87: 108–117.
- Posel D and Rudwick S (2012) *Attitudes to Marriage, Cohabitation and Non-marital Childbirth in South Africa*. Submitted manuscript.
- Posel D and Rudwick S (in press) Marriage and *ilobolo* (Bridewealth) in contemporary Zulu society. *African Studies Review*.
- Pouw BA (1968) *The Second Generation. A Study of the Family among Urbanized Bantu in East London*. Cape Town/Oxford/London/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Preston-Whyte E (1978) Families without marriage: A Zulu case study. In: Argyle J and Preston-Whyte E (eds) *Social System and Tradition in Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 55–85.
- Preston-Whyte E (1981) Women migrants and workers. In: Krige EJ and Comaroff JL (eds) *Essays on African Marriage in South Africa*. Johannesburg/cape Town: Juta & Company, 158–172.
- Preston-Whyte E and Zondi M (1989) To control their own reproduction: The agenda of black teenage mothers in Durban. *Agenda* 4: 47–68.
- Radcliffe-Brown AR (1950) Introduction. In: Radcliffe-Brown AR and Forde D (eds) *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1–87.
- Rudwick S and Posel D (2012) Zulu *Ilobolo* (Bridewealth): (De)-constructing ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ identities. In: Fiala V (ed.) *Multiple Identities in Post-Colonial Africa*. Moneta: University of Hradec Kralove, 110–121.
- Russell M (2003) Are urban black families nuclear? A comparative study of black and white South African family norms. *Social Dynamics* 29(2): 153–176.
- Seltzer JA (2004) Cohabitation in the United States and Britain: Demography, kinship and the future. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(4): 921–928.
- Shapera I (1933) Premarital pregnancy and native opinion: A note on social change. *Africa* 6(1): 59–89.
- Shropshire DWT (1946) *Primitive Marriage and European Law. A South African Investigation*. London/Johannesburg/Salisbury: Society for promoting Christian Knowledge.
- Statistics South Africa (2010) *General Household Survey*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Steyn AF (1987) Situating premarital and extra-marital sex theoretically and empirically in the South Africa society. In: Steyn AF, Strijdom HG, Viljoen S et al. (eds) *Marriage and Family Life in South Africa: Research Priorities*. Pretoria: HSRC Press, pp. 145–189.
- Steyn AF and Rip CM (1968) The changing urban Bantu family. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 30(3): 499–517.
- South African Ministry of Home Affairs (2006) *The Civil Union Bill*, Republic of South Africa. Pretoria.
- Vilakazi A (1962) *Zulu Transformations*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Vilakazi A (1963) Book review of *The Dispossessed: A Study of the Sex-life of Bantu Women in Urban Areas in and Around Johannesburg*. *American Anthropologist* 65: 948–950.

- Wilson M and Mafeje A (1963) *Langa. A Study of Social Groups in an African Township*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Wood K and Jewkes RK (1997) Violence, rape, and sexual coercion: Everyday love in a South African township. *Gender and Development* 5(2): 41–46.
- Xaba M Associates (2005) *Role of Women: Urban-Rural Linkages and Household Livelihoods*. Report submitted to the provincial Planning and Development Commission.

### Author biographies

**Dorrit (Dori) Posel** holds a South African Research Chair (SARChI) in the School of the Built Environment and Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her areas of specialization include migration, labour markets, social indicators, and more recently family formation and marriage. Her research has been published in a range of journals, including *Nature*, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *Social Indicators Research*, the *Journal of African Economies*, *Applied Economics* and the *Journal of Socio-Economics*. Dori received her PhD in Economics from the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) in 1999. She has been the recipient of numerous research awards and fellowships, including the Vice-Chancellor's Research Award in 2005, and the South African Research Chair in 2007.

**Stephanie Rudwick** has been employed as a senior researcher in the project 'Marriage Markets and *Ilobolo* in South Africa' in the School of the Built Environment and Development Studies and also is an Honorary Lecturer in the Linguistics Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She has published on a wide range of ethno-linguistic and anthropological topics, including language, race, gender and identity, urban variation, language planning and policy. More recently, her research interest has shifted specifically to Zulu respect customs, practices of *ilobolo* (bridewealth) and attitudes towards these customs in contemporary South Africa. Stephanie received her PhD in Linguistics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and subsequently was the recipient of a National Research Foundation (NRF) post-doc scholarship in 2008.