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Umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu:
**The support networks of black
families in Southern Africa**

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**Co-operative Research Programme on
Marriage and Family Life
Human Sciences Research Council
134 Pretorius Street
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The Co-operative Research Programme on Marriage and Family Life is centred within the Group: Social Dynamics of the Human Sciences Research Council. The emphasis in the programme is on the structure and dynamics of family life, the nature of family disorganization and disintegration, and the nature of the changes taking place with regard to family structure and family processes in society. In this report the emphasis is on the support networks available to black families according to a collection of theses on the subject.

The views expressed in the report are those of the author and should not necessarily be regarded as those of the Human Sciences Research Council.

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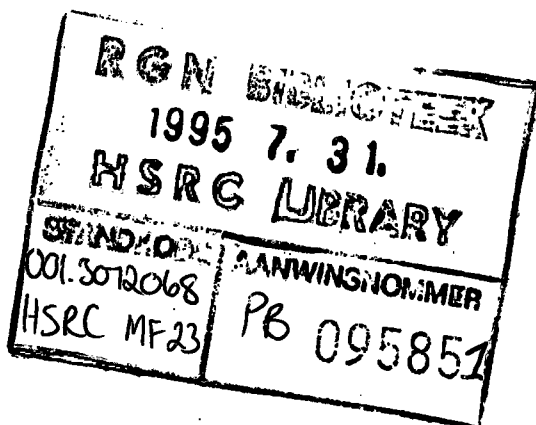
Hierdie verslag is 'n oorsig van tesse wat in die periode 1975-1993 by, hoofsaaklik, departemente van antropologie in Suider-Afrika ingelewer is. Met die fokus op die ondersteuningsnetwerke onder swart gesinne, is die verslag gestruktureer rondom die alomteenwoordige gedagte van *ubuntu* (medemenslikheid) wat dikwels deur respondente genoem is in antwoord op vrae oor steun en onderlinge hulp.

Die titel van die verslag beteken breedweg 'n Mens is 'n mens deur middel van ander mense', en beklemtoon die noodsaaklikheid van onderlinge hulp vir die mense wie se lewens in die tesse gedokumenteer is.

Onderlinge hulp en steun geskied deur en binne formele organisasies soos werkgroepe, spaargroepe en huis-persoonorganisasies, asook deur verwantskaps-, vriendskaps- en buurtkonstrukte, en die verslag spreek die vraagstuk aan hoe die verskillende ondersteuningsmeganismes geaktiveer en in stand gehou word. Interaksie binne die raamwerk van wat normaalweg onder die begrippe 'samelewing' en 'kultuur' verstaan word, definieer geborgenheid en aanvaarding binne 'n samelewing, en verseker 'n mate van hulpverlening aan verarmdes.

Sodanige hulp is egter nie neutraal of ewe beskikbaar vir almal nie. Die verslag ontgin differensiële toegang tot bronne wat gemanipuleer kan word om hulp te voorskyn te bring. Daar word aangedui dat hoewel medemenslikheid die ideaal is, die praktyk nie perfek is nie.

Die bespreking word in die laaste plek geplaas binne die konteks van die prosesse van teksskepping en die verhoudings tussen navorsers en diegene oor/met wie hulle navorsing doen.



Abstract

This report provides a review of theses submitted throughout Southern Africa between 1975 and 1993 to (mainly) anthropology departments. Focusing on the support networks of black families, the report is structured around pervasive notions of *ubuntu* (humanity) frequently given by informants in response to questions about support and mutual assistance.

The title of the report, which, roughly translated into English, means 'a person is a person by means of other people', emphasises the importance placed on mutual assistance by the people whose lives are documented in the theses.

Through a discussion of formal organisations created for assistance (such as work parties, savings groups and home-person organisations), and of ideational constructs of kinship, friendship and neighbourhood, the report addresses the question of how support mechanisms are activated and maintained. It is interaction within the parameters of commonly understood notions of 'society' and 'culture' which defines belonging and acceptance in society, and which also ensures some degree of assistance for the impoverished. That assistance is not however neutral. Nor is it equally available to all. The report explores differential access to resources that can be manipulated to generate assistance, pointing out that while humanity is constituted as an ideal, practice is not perfect. The discussions are contextualised in the processes of text production, and the relationships between researchers and researched persons.

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Chapter 1: *Introduction*

Background

The present juncture of the history of Southern Africa brings to the fore crucial questions on the ways in which people try to enhance their survival in contexts of extreme poverty. This is a question which has occupied much academic and specifically anthropological discussion over the years. Its importance is particularly apparent in the light of structurally differentiated access to resources which has formally characterised the lives of South Africans for the past four decades. A wealth of literature documents the problems of impoverishment (*Carnegie Conference series, 1984; Wilson & Ramphela, 1989*¹, for example) and highlights the plight of those who faced the strictures of *apartheid* governments. However, the question of how people create and activate networks of support to assist their survival remains virtually untapped in the vast resource represented by unpublished theses produced in and relating to conditions of survival in Southern Africa. Of particular importance in this regard is information that relates to the ways in which individuals and groups of people are able to establish and mobilise assistance based on shared social understandings.

This report reviews those Masters dissertations and Doctoral theses which examine black family life in Southern Africa from the period 1975 to the present. The theses are largely, but not solely, drawn from the discipline of social-cultural anthropology, and are mostly unpublished. An exploration of (informal) support networks which have been generated to assist impoverished domestic units provides the core of the report, illustrating the diversity of such networks, the contexts within which they are activated and the extent to which they are used as support mechanisms by South Africa's black population.

Methodological approach

The literature review on which this report is based was conducted between June 1993 and April 1994. A print-out of theses submitted for degrees in social-cultural anthropology was compiled by the University of Natal (Durban) library from the databanks of South African universities, and literature used in the review was selected from that list.

In places the databanks from which titles were drawn were not up to date. I therefore wrote to each university's anthropology department asking for a list of theses submitted between 1975 and the present. Only four replied to this request. Informal discussion elicited information on some theses not recorded on the library database, and where

possible this information was followed up. In addition, information obtained from a search conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council Library and Information Services was cross-referenced with the print-out, in order to verify that as many theses as possible were captured in the recording process.

Despite these measures, however, a number of theses were not accessible through the search resources utilised, and consequently their findings are not represented in this report.

Once the lists of theses were complete, and letters requesting assistance had been circulated, I omitted those theses which fell outside the allotted time period (1975 to the present), as well as those whose subject matter did not concern black residents of Southern Africa.

The criteria for inclusion, particularly in view of the complex macro-level social and political relationships which govern Southern Africa, were problematic. For the purposes of the review I identified as Southern Africa any area which fell south of the northern border of South Africa (thus including Lesotho, Swaziland, the TVBC states and the former homelands), and also South-West Africa prior to independence. The theses which are reviewed here were, for the most part, submitted for degree purposes at universities within South Africa and the former homelands/TBVC states. Some theses submitted elsewhere (e.g. Murray, 1976, submitted to the University of Cambridge) have been included where it was felt that their exclusion would seriously undermine or misrepresent the work done in relation to black families in Southern Africa.

In order to qualify for review, theses had to deal with black families, and to have been submitted during or after 1975. When the process of collation of these theses was completed it was apparent that still more stringent measures were required to narrow down the review process. Each title was therefore examined, and those which I felt were unlikely to contain information relating to support systems were excluded from the review. Examples include Mncedi's (1990) thesis from the University of Fort Hare, entitled *Xhosa chieftainship with special reference to the Ciskei*, and that of Schneider (1986) which was submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, entitled *Paint, pride and politics: Aesthetic and meaning in Transvaal Ndebele wall art*. In addition those theses which dealt solely with law as opposed to social relationships were also excluded. Many of these had been submitted to Afrikaans universities.

The remaining titles were requested through the interlibrary loans section of the universities of Durban and Cape Town. Several problems were experienced in conducting the literature review, not least of which was the difficulty of obtaining theses. Several theses are missing from their lending libraries, and consequently were not available for review. In addition, constraints on library resources and the fact that many theses were in use as teaching tools at their home universities meant that frequently documents took

extended periods, sometimes even months, to arrive in Cape Town for review. My illness in 1993 also hampered the review process.

In order to facilitate the writing of the review, a cut-off date of 1 April 1994 for receipt of theses was set with the approval of the HSRC. At this stage a number of theses which could have been included in the review had not arrived, or had not yet been requested. The thesis bibliography appended to this report indicates those theses reviewed, those requested which did not arrive, those requested which were recorded as missing or unavailable from lending libraries, and those which had not yet been requested by the cut-off date.

Difficulties were also experienced in that my command of Afrikaans is not extensive. An assistant* was hired to summarise and translate Afrikaans theses, and my discussion of these is based on her work. I, however, take full responsibility for any errors which may occur.

The discussion which follows then, does not pretend to be an exhaustive study of every thesis concerning black families in Southern Africa written within the prescribed period, although this was originally the intention. Difficulty in tracking down and obtaining data has precluded such a study. Instead this report is a critical review and discussion of those theses which were readily available, and based on the central question of the support networks of black families. In order to facilitate and contextualise the discussion which these theses elicit, I turn now to an investigation of the assumptions which underlie the topic.

Underlying assumptions

'Support networks of black families in Southern Africa' implies that: a) black families are in need of support, and that this need is a specific product of the Southern African material and historical locus; b) there are limited institutional means for such support; and c) that the reason such support is required is in order to maintain black *families*. On the face of it these seem to be reasonable assumptions. But, as we shall see, they relate to a set of normative notions of what families should be; a set of assumptions which, given the political and economic constraints which have operated specifically to constrain black people in South Africa (and which thus inform the basis for the first two assumptions), are not necessarily reflective of the world experienced by the subjects of this review.

Let us deal with each of the assumptions in turn in order to clarify them. It is not my intention to explore the first two assumptions in detail; the summary below will suffice.

* I should like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for the work done by Loretta van Staden in this respect.

However, I feel it is necessary to deal with the notion of family in considerably more detail as a preliminary to the discussions contained in the remainder of this review.

The first supposition is that factors impacting on black people resident in Southern Africa are significantly different from those experienced by black people elsewhere in Africa, and also from those encountered by other, non-black people in Southern Africa. One does not need to look further than the *apartheid* system (and its demise) to see that this is true. The gamut of *apartheid* laws and their legacies, which constrained the movements, education, employment opportunities and spaces black people could call home, and which set the parameters for the kinds of family life that could be experienced 'from the cradle to the grave', highlight the extent to which the conditions of survival were (and continue to be) constrained for this category of people.

The question of what constitutes a 'black' person in South Africa is also ambiguous and begs elucidation. Blackness has been defined in terms of skin colour (as opposed to 'white' or 'coloured'), in terms of categories of oppression (in which case black becomes synonymous with underprivileged), and in terms of opposition to whiteness — black as 'non-white'. The response received to my enquiry of the HSRC regarding this question in relation to the present research commission was that, in this instance, black was to be understood in terms of the now defunct Population Registration Act's definition of a black person and thus considered synonymous with the popular category African. Thus this report concentrates on African families and their support networks, and, while excluding other categories, at the same time acknowledges the systematic processes of disempowerment experienced by categories of people not represented in this work.

The second assumption stems directly from the differential access to resources permitted to South Africa's 'race groups'. The presupposition recognises the fact that access to resources was unequal during the *apartheid* era, and that this had a detrimental effect on the ability of black people to sustain themselves and their kin, despite, or rather, because of the policy of Separate Development. In short, then, the complexities and inequities of resource allocation are implicitly recognised in the assumption that black families require support.

It is the third contention which gives pause, and that has to do with the notion of black *families*. A normative assumption is in operation here; that is, that families constitute finite, autonomous units of (re)production and consumption, which are natural, distinctive and of long duration. The notion of family has a long history of contestation (see Jones, 1991; Ross, 1993 for critical discussion in the Southern African context), and nowhere is this more apparent than in Southern Africa, where more conventional categorising studies show a vast range of family types (see commentary by *Flandrin, 1976; Guyer & Peters, 1987*) and kinship structures. Those studies which do not adopt

the 'butterfly collecting' techniques so despised by *Leach (1963)* indicate an even more bewildering array of social processes centred on 'the family'.

The family then, is not a neutral or objective unit of study, but as an analytic term carries with it a set of assumptions about its constitution and behaviour, its form and function; assumptions which, after reviewing theses written in and of Southern Africa, do not seem justified. The absence of males from rural, particularly homeland, areas for extended periods of labour migration (see for example, *Murray, 1976; McAllister, 1979; 1986; Spiegel, 1979; 1990; Webster, 1976; Vorster, 1981; Quinlan, 1983; Van der Waal, 1985; Segar, 1986; James, 1987; Coplan, 1994*) has the effect, as *Murray (1981:102)* ironically comments, of ensuring that 'a condition of his family's survival' is '[a] man's absence as a migrant labourer'. Extreme dependence on migrant labour remittances is a common theme in many of the theses reviewed, and the importance of remittances is indicated by high rates of labour migration. Spiegel, for example, calculates that in 1982 Matatiele (Transkei) experienced a rate of 'external' migrancy (i.e. migrancy into common South Africa) of 15 %, while Segar estimates that before 1970 in a rural Transkeian village 40 % of the men were absent (1986:46). Migration continues apace, even in a 'new South Africa', and there is no reason to suppose that its demise is nigh. Thus the pattern of ensuring familial survival by altering the physical distribution and cohesion of those defined as being family members can be expected to continue.

However, male migration alone was (and is) not always sufficient to meet the exigencies of rural life. Frequently women also migrated; sometimes in search of their menfolk (see *Jones, 1991; Ramphele, 1991*), sometimes in search of better employment or lifestyle opportunities themselves, and sometimes in order to remind menfolk of their rural commitments 'and duty to remit cash' (*Simon, 1989:158*). While there is a growing body of literature which documents female migration elsewhere in Africa (see for example, *Ferguson, 1990-1*, for material on the *Zambian Copperbelt; Izzard, 1985*, who explores female migrancy in Botswana; and *Gugler, 1989* for a more general overview), there is little detailed documentation of female migration patterns in Southern Africa (although *Bozzoli's Women of Phokeng, 1993*, is an important exception). Nevertheless, the presence of women in what were defined as men's-only hostels (see *Jones, 1991; Oliver-Evans, 1991; Ramphele, 1991*) and the implementation by the South African state of women's pass laws, indicate that in fact rural and homeland areas were not only repositories of a male labour force (see *Wolpe, 1972*), but also of female workers, although no doubt the patterns of women's migration differed significantly from those of men.

Movement is not confined to adult men and women, but is also reflected in the life stories of children (see *Kotzé, 1986; Niehaus, 1987; Reynolds, 1989; Spiegel, 1990; Jones, 1991; Ross, 1993*), many of whom experience extreme disjunctures in both

dwelling spaces and in care-givers over relatively short periods of time (see Reynolds, 1991). It is significant that theses dealing with topics in urban areas tend not to address the questions of movements of black women and children — those discussions presented by Jones (1991) and Ramphela (1991) which explore women and children's lives in hostels in the Western Cape respectively are exceptions rather than the rule. Nevertheless, direct evidence in the case of men and inference and implication in the case of women and children point to severe disruptions in the family life of black residents of Southern Africa, particularly (but as we shall see, not solely) in rural areas.

In the light of this dispersion of immediate kin, what can be said about the notion of family as a unit of analysis in exploring social relationships? Social bonds that use (imaginary) blood ties as a basis, and the moral obligations that are construed in these bonds, are frequently activated, particularly in times of need. Bonds may be defined on the basis of distant kinship or clanship (see for example Jonas, 1981), and indeed need not necessarily all be kin-based. Wide-ranging literature documenting the existence and activities of 'home person' groups (*amakhaya*) bears testimony to this fact (see Mayer, 1961; McNamara, 1978, 1985; McAllister, 1979, 1986; Connaway, 1983; Thomas, 1988; Oliver-Evans, 1991). What is immediately apparent then is that a range of social sources inform peoples' notions of family, kinship and descent, and that these notions can be manipulated in such a way as to verify belonging and ensure assistance.

Neighbourhood and friendship ties are also links that are capable of being mobilised in contexts within which support is required. A complex set of socially constructed and mediated relationships determines whether kinship or neighbourhood (where these are not synonymous) are the central tropes of assistance recruitment. As we shall see, there appears to be a tendency for kinship/descent structures to be of greater importance in rural areas, while neighbourhood and friendship ties take a degree of precedence in urban areas. In part this is seen as the result of the demise of traditional institutions based on descent. Thus De Jongh (1979:83) comments that in urban areas

[n]ot only is the nuclear family² failing in many of its traditional functions of enculturation, security, assistance, discipline and authority, but the all-important kinship groups of lineage, clan, and often the extended family, are absent and hence unable to fulfill these functions.

The demise of family life and changing expectations is a central theme in several of the theses reviewed, particularly those which deal with marriage (see for example Manona, 1981; Van der Vliet, 1982; De Haas, 1984) and with child care (see Steyn, 1977; Rascher, 1991). However, as we have seen, perceptions of the demise in family life rest on a set of tenacious and often erroneous assumptions as to the nature of family experienced by black people in Southern Africa.

One of these assumptions is that the nuclear family is a viable and standard kinship arrangement, within which people have the same sets of expectations. Van der Vliet (1982) shows that in fact this is not the case; that frequently women choose to be single in order to avoid reliance on men or having to distribute their scarce resources among large numbers of people. Van der Vliet also shows how it is that women living in Grahamstown have expectations of marriage that are significantly different from those of men in the degree of 'openness' which they espouse. Her findings are replicated elsewhere. De Haas (1984) for example, exploring marriage among migrants and non-migrants in Durban during *apartheid's* influx control period, shows how changes in the political and patriarchal structures of rural life give rise to different expectations of marriage when transferred to urban areas — expectations that are firmly rooted in the indignities of influx control, inadequate wages, poor housing, and so on. Marriage and the strategies (not) employed within it therefore, are firmly located within the complexity of a fluid social structure. Manona (1981:2), too, shows how the political economy of Southern Africa impacts directly upon the individual and the household:

Given the periodic absence of the husband and father, as well as other male kinsmen, a new independence is given to the domestic unit of the woman and her children.

That independence itself is fraught with complexity, much of which appears to result from competition for scarce resources between women. Relationships between men and women (Van der Vliet, 1982), mothers and daughters-in-law (Manona, 1981; Ramphela, 1991), and young and old (Manona, 1981) become marked with tension and conflict as women compete for the remittances and other resources — such as bed-space in hostels — (sometimes) made available by male kin.

What is contained in the preceding discussion therefore, is a warning that models of family as presented in homogenised Western discourses are often not reflective of, nor appropriate to family and social life as it is experienced by those people who constitute the subject of the present discussion.

The discussion continues in Chapters 2 and 3, which explore the contexts in which support is sought, negotiated and activated. Following the structure suggested in the theses, Chapter 2 explores the (in)formal *structures* which are available and created in order to meet support requirements (such as work parties, burial associations and savings groups). Chapter 3 then explores the composition of these institutions in order to examine the sets of social and philosophical *relations* which are used and manipulated to create support networks. The chapter explores family and neighbourhood as the locus of moral interaction, and indicates that assistance is not neutral but is nuanced by historical processes.

Chapter 4 takes up this theme by examining the complicated issue of historical processes evident in text production. The chapter locates the processes of researching and writing theses in historical perspective, arguing that as texts, their production should be seen in the light of specific and changing processes of text production, of the location of anthropology as a discipline within the academies, and of the role of these in the broader society. In this light it is clear that future research relating to social institutions and peoples' understandings of support mechanisms needs to be undertaken with careful attention to the changing historical moments in which support is activated and used.

The report concludes by arguing that not only do kinship and neighbourhood present themselves as mechanisms through which black families are able to generate support, but that culture itself sets parameters within which people are able to imagine and activate support networks. Notwithstanding these comments, however, it is clear from the review that the presence of networks of assistance neither guarantees that such assistance is adequate, nor that such networks necessarily endure through time. Specific categories of people — the elderly, women (particularly widows) and children — do not have access to lasting and reliable support networks. Future research should examine the contexts within which associations of support are generated and implemented, with careful attention to inequities in access to such support.

Chapter 2: *Institutions of support*

Introduction

There are numerous ways in which support can be obtained and negotiated in the different contexts of need characteristic of much black family life in Southern Africa. Some of the processes are, to varying degrees, institutionalised, such as agricultural production practices encoded in work parties. Others involve the imaginative manipulation of social relationships and their transformation into resources which can then be called upon in particular contexts. In both instances it is clear that some people have greater recourse to these resources than others, thus bringing to the fore questions of social differentiation on the microlevel. These concerns are addressed as a subtheme in the present chapter and examined in detail in the next one (Chapter 3). The division between Chapters 2 and 3 — the former exploring formal practices and institutionalised relationships, and the latter the manipulation of social relationships — should not be taken as an indication that people have recourse to only one or other kind of assistance; the divisions are suggested by the models in theses reviewed, and are employed here for analytic purposes only. People are able to (and do) utilise a range of means of support in their daily activities and lives. The chapters should be read jointly to indicate the range of mechanisms through which social life is construed and lived.

A range of institutionalised strategies for support and survival were identified through a close reading of texts. I have categorised these briefly by type below, following the convention suggested by the majority of theses. The categories in question here are: agricultural production, burial and savings groups, healing organisations, and *amakhaya* (home person) groupings. The categorisation is not exhaustive; it represents solely those institutions described in the body of literature reviewed. The literature reviewed puts great emphasis on the need for agricultural assistance in rural areas, particularly as regards the existence of work parties, and thus a large part of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of such organisations. Note that although these support mechanisms are presented as institutions, it is in full recognition of their capacity for transformation that I present them as such. As cultural and social forms, institutions such as work parties are adapted to the contexts in which they occur; and given that the contexts themselves are fluid, so too are the meanings placed on the institutions. This is particularly clear from controversies which are represented in theses dealing with agricultural production, some of which appear to contradict evidence presented in others.

Agricultural production

The need for assistance in agricultural production is an important theme in many of the theses reviewed. Requirements for assistance are derived from two interlinked sources; the agricultural cycle itself, with its periods of flux and intense labour, and the exigencies of the domestic life cycle in the context of migrant labour, which means that frequently men are not available to perform important agricultural tasks. Co-operation in production takes a range of forms and is motivated differently. In some instances co-operation is a moral necessity, in others it is derived from systems of reciprocity and exchange. Co-operation is sometimes portrayed as an explicit attempt to 'outwit the state' (*Skalnik, 1989*), resisting incorporation into white domination through relationships of interdependency based on kin and community, and a 'strong sense of ... tradition' (McAllister, 1986:ii). At other times the different forms of co-operation are presented as a direct product of the peasant insertion into the particularities of Southern African capitalist production (see for example, Murray, 1976; Spiegel, 1979; Van der Waal, 1985).

I begin by quoting Segar (1986:73), a quotation which, with reference to Transkei, sets the scene for the contexts within which most agricultural production for and by black families in Southern Africa takes place:

There is a high degree of dependence on migrant earnings, and even for those who have access to land, agricultural activity cannot support the average household. The energies of most villagers are devoted to sheer survival, and although some people are better off than others, for the most part these are gradations of poverty rather than wealth.

Agricultural production has its own internal logic and timing (see *Chayanov, 1966*), and production itself is closely related to household developmental cycles. In Southern Africa, peasant household cycles generally include the absence of males, returning us once more to the paradoxes of family survival and group co-operation in rural areas (see Chapter 1). Interdependence becomes a condition of survival in many communities, particularly since, as McAllister (1979:254) points out,

[m]igrant labour is, of course, also a threat to the community. A man goes away to build his homestead, yet while away it must be neglected. His migrant earnings benefit the community, yet his labour power is lost to it for a long period.

The household cycle and cycles of production in rural areas are thus integrally connected to regional placement in the political economies of Southern Africa. Changes in the latter have generally rendered the former less efficient in production, and as a result house-

holds become more reliant on both the remittances of absentee migrants, and on co-operative labour efforts. With reference to Lesotho, Quinlan (1983:7) comments:

This peculiarity [of land tenure in Lesotho] is not due to some intrinsic feature(s) of Basotho but has been arrived at through the interaction of Europeans and Africans in specific historic circumstances. Thus, land tenure in Lesotho as we see it today is grounded in political and economic developments within and outside Lesotho.

Agricultural practices are thus articulated within the historical, dynamic and on-going processes of change. While there are distinct regional differences in insertion into regional political economies, Quinlan's comment holds true for the ambiguities of agricultural production by black peasant farmers in Southern Africa at large.

A close reading of these indicates that in addition to migrant remittances, co-operation among remaining residents in varying forms is frequently a condition of survival of rural homesteads, particularly for those disadvantaged by their stage in the domestic cycle (such as widows and the elderly). The forms that this co-operation takes are both manifold and complex. Relationships within and between households require attention here, in order to elaborate the scope and nature of reliance, and to document the ways in which co-operation is generated and assured.

Notable in this regard is the distinction which is frequently drawn between kinship and neighbourhood patterns of labour recruitment. Complex processes of rights generation encircle the recruitment of labour; processes which have material, cultural and symbolic significance, and which, hedged and broached in ideological discourses, frequently obscure the relationships of power and privilege which differentiate communal interaction. The recruitment of labour is articulated in a number of ways, including that on the basis of the kind of activity for which labour is required, or on the type and degree of social relationship maintained with those called upon. I deal with these briefly below and then turn to a discussion of work parties, which appear as prime examples of agricultural support in the theses which describe support mechanisms in rural areas.

The explicitness with which the distinction between neighbourhood and kinship is drawn varies (see Chapter 3). In part this is owing to the specificities of regions from which data are recorded. Thus in areas in which descent groups are close-knit and are located nearby, the distinction tends not to be as detailed as in those more heterogeneous areas where residence need not coincide with descent. Jonas (1981:227), for example, in a study of clanship in Zwelitsha, Ciskei, argues that the frequency with which assistance is sought from neighbours (as opposed to clan members) is

... verstaanbaar in die lig van die geringe aantal sibbegetote wat soms in 'n wyk voorkom. Wilson en andere het by Keiskammahoek gevind dat waar

mense mekaar met ploëry gehelp het, sodanige hulp in slegs drie persent van die gevalle aan sibbenote verleen is.

Differences also lie in the theoretical orientations of the authors. Distinctions in terms of kinds of labour and of social relationships determining who may perform such labour, are described by virtually all theses which explore rural production. Vorster (1981:109) argues that divisions of labour among the Bakwena are directly related to the uses to which land is put. Land for use as settlements is cleared and homesteads built in terms of gender divisions of labour among the residents of the homestead. Agricultural land, on the other hand, is tended using work parties of neighbours, who are paid for their labour with beer and food.

Kuckertz (1984:125ff) too, points to a strict division in the ways in which labour is recruited, arguing that four types of labour are available to residents of Caguba village; to wit, familial labour, work parties, that agreed upon by individual households, and wage labour or self-employment. Each of these carries different degrees of interaction and obligation. Familial labour, for example, is obligatory for those defined as members of the domestic unit in question. Work parties are conceived of as being different not only in form and function; they are constituted also as qualitatively different kinds of labour: 'These are not merely two organisational forms of labour, but ... two distinct conceptualisations of economic activities *qua* labour' (1984:227). In this respect, Kuckertz's argument parallels that of the *Comaroffs* (1987), who argue that seTswana speakers constitute the world of labour in radically different terms depending on whether the labour reproduces the homestead (in which case labour falls into the world of *seTswana*) or the outside world ('work' as opposed to labour; *bereka* is viewed as culturally and socially distinct from the culturally meaningful business of things *seTswana*).

Heron (1990) integrates praxis and social relationships in his study of production in Shixini, Transkei. He identifies three kinds of obligation which determine the sources from which labour is recruited. For those activities which are immediate, short-term relationships are established with strangers, who are hired to perform tasks. Those tasks which require repeated action, and are therefore more amenable to reciprocal exchange³, make use of neighbourhood groupings (for example, the formation of work parties) or activate kinship attributes (ploughing, for instance, requires that tools be used, and kinship becomes the medium through which obligation and rights are expressed in this regard). Thus social distance and activities are clearly defined and delineated in peasant activities, and these distances are used to map out the social fields from which labour (and thus support) may be drawn.

The ways in which constructs such as kinship and descent are manipulated and managed in order to generate support are the core concern of Chapter 3. Here I wish only to comment that kinship does not automatically ensure assistance, nor is it always

articulated as the most appropriate source of assistance, particularly where it carries with it long-term responsibilities and obligations (see Heron, 1990).

The themes of labour recruitment outlined above are important, particularly in so far as they highlight both the imaginative processes through which survival in rural subsistence economies is mapped and negotiated, and the failures of kinship and district as support resources. It has been posited that in earlier periods of subsistence agriculture each homestead was responsible for its own production and consumption, giving rise to neatly defined household units (see for example, Quinlan, 1983). Some theses argue that the homestead is still the primary unit of production and consumption (Steyn, 1977; Manona, 1981; Kuckertz, 1984; Van Niekerk, 1986). Kuckertz (1984:191) comments that 'Caguba's economic life originates from and is geared toward individual homesteads', while Manona (1981:114) makes the point that 'the extent to which relatives co-operate depends on whether they like each other or not'.

A number of other theses disagree with these hypotheses, however, and point to the exigencies of migrant labour and domestic life-cycles for legitimization of notions that production is not neatly confined to single, clearly identifiable units. Quinlan argues that in Lesotho by the late 1970s 'the household was no longer a viable unit of production', and that groups of 'agnatically-related households' became the primary unit of production (1983:180,184; see also Webster, 1976; Heron, 1990). Quinlan's contention is important, for it links with a number of other theses in making the point that over a particular historical period households could not subsist independently, and so were linked into socially imagined and enacted constructions of collaboration (see for example, Murray, 1976; Spiegel, 1979; James, 1987).

The interrelated activities described above should not necessarily be read to mean that the impoverished are automatically supported by systems of co-operation. A number of theses examine the implications of production for redistribution of wealth within rural homesteads, and generally the findings indicate that while assistance may be given, material differentiation in rural areas is not flattened by the diffusion of remittances and labour. Indeed, it has been suggested that differentiation is entrenched by the interaction between macrolevel political economy and domestic life-cycles (see Spiegel, 1979; 1990), and by access to and control over resources such as land and livestock (James, 1987). Thus, for example, while work parties may make labour available to a number of homesteads, this does not (as Kuckertz (1984) implies) necessarily bring about equality in the material well-being of the homesteads concerned (see also Webster, 1976). Indeed, the interaction between households as social and productive units may result in the disadvantaging of specific sectors of the population, such as widows (see Simon, 1989), who, as a result of their stage in the domestic life-cycle, may lack access to labour and remittances.⁴

I turn now to a discussion of work parties as a specific form of agricultural collaboration. Work parties receive mention in 18 of the theses reviewed.⁵ Work parties are described in a number of ways: in terms of relationships between the individuals and/or social categories involved; interactions based on notions of land-use; and ritual activities. Conflict within work parties is not often discussed in the theses, although some posit that such organisations do play a role in mediating both potential and actual communal conflict (see for example, McAllister, 1979; 1986). Similarly, little data relating to differentiation within work parties are addressed (although, as we shall see, James (1987) does explore the differential effectiveness of such organisations).

Work parties are a common sight in rural areas which practice subsistence farming:

In summer, the most frequent sight in the village was people carrying hoes and containers of beer (Kuckertz, 1984:186).

The groups are formed for a number of different tasks related to the intersection of agricultural and domestic cycles in peasant homesteads. Indeed, as McAllister points out:

Many people, including the families of absentee migrants, would not be able to cultivate at all without the assistance of others due to lack of some or all of the necessary inputs (1979:57).

The complex interplay between production processes and/as cultural forms is expressed in work parties as socially necessary activities. These differ in form and function throughout Southern Africa. Work parties may be called solely for agricultural purposes (such as weeding and harvesting), or for segments of the agricultural cycle (such as ploughing), or for more diverse activities (such as house-building and roofing). The diversity of the functions points to the wide range of needs for co-operation; for labour and for material goods (such as ploughs); and also to the specific ways in which various types of labour activity are understood and categorised. For the most part, it seems that parties are called for purposes of clearing land (see for example, Vorster, 1981; Spiegel, 1979; 1990; Van Niekerk, 1986) and harvesting produce (Spiegel, 1990; Heron, 1990). McAllister (1986) suggests that work parties were formed by specific categories of people in social relationships as a reciprocal response to having received beer. The processes involved in drinking beer together, argues McAllister, place these occasions at the centre of a cultural performance 'in which the social principles on which society is based and the realities in terms of which social life is lived are acted out and made explicit' (McAllister, 1986:47). In short, 'beer-drinks', integral to work parties, are constituted as being the cultural manifestation and manipulation of the individual and the homestead's incorporation into the community as a social (and therefore meaningful) entity.

It is not my intention to explore the different categories of work parties in greater detail. Instead I turn now to an exploration of the failure of work parties to provide equal 'blanket' assistance to all.

The notion of work parties appears to entail a normative expectation of membership, and thus implies that every person has an equal right to belong to, constitute, and call on work parties. Heron makes explicit the link between culture and economic co-operation in work parties as they are expressed through notions of *ubuntu* (humanity). Indeed, it is the prevalence of this notion in the literature reviewed which prompted the title of the present report. Heron states that

... in Shixini there is an ethic of mutual help or, in emic terms, *ubuntu*. [...] The value of *ubuntu*, although influenced by a specific need for co-operative work arrangements, underlies the idea of co-operation. People who do not help other people are seen to be lacking in *ubuntu* (1990:3).

While the question of whether cultural constructions of humanity underlie material production or *vice versa* has been contested (Kuckertz, 1984; Heron, 1990; Spiegel, 1990), it is not our concern here. Instead, I turn to a discussion of the complexities of rural production as they are made visible in the constitution of work parties. While (as Heron and others point out) there may be a normative impulsion to take part in such organisations, particularly in that they are generally reciprocally based, the formation and function of work parties are culturally and socially derived and sanctioned (see for example, Van Niekerk, 1986), and have been shown by some researchers to generate and maintain social distances and material differentiation. The gender-based division of labour within the agricultural cycle recorded in all theses dealing with rural production, masks in places the complexities of social relationships engendered around the calling of work parties. Age (Sobahle, 1982) and gender (Spiegel, 1979; James, 1987) play a role in these processes, along with social positioning/status, such that work parties are not neutral mutual assistance mechanisms, but complexly coded illustrations of and metaphors for social activity and location within the regional and macropolitical economy. Kuckertz (1984:199) argues that

[a]t the beginning of the agricultural annual season, a burst of co-operation takes place in the village and it lasts until the harvest has been taken home. It should be noted that this co-operation is generated by economic necessity, not any philosophy of co-operativeness and togetherness based on kinship or other forms of social arrangement.

He (Kuckertz, 1984:199) goes on to state that only one of the 106 households included in his study desired work parties. James (1987) argues that in the Lebowa village which constituted her study area, the people who performed labour in work parties were those

lacking adequate resources. In performing labour for others, she argues, the impoverished became more disadvantaged, risking the benefits of the rainy season by using their precious time to perform labour outside their own homesteads. Thus 'the work party system — even in the heartland communities — contained possibilities for reinforcing social differentiation' (James, 1987:74). Spiegel (1990) reinforces this notion, arguing that in Matatiele the people engaged in working on others' fields were mainly women, and 'frequently from households lacking either a field or a regularly dependable remittance income' (Spiegel, 1990:205). In short, then, there appears to be a widespread pattern of categories from within which labour can be sourced, and those categories tend to comprise people who are already at a disadvantage in the complicated articulation of domestic and agricultural cycles. Caution is thus required before organisations such as work parties can be seen as effective support mechanisms, particularly in view of harsh conditions of subsistence in homeland areas, and also in the light of the negative impact of policies such as that of 'betterment' enacted by the state (see Spiegel, 1990).

Productive relationships and the rituals expressed around them then, are complex, culturally produced and historically located metaphors of social relationships and interdependence; metaphors which ultimately describe recognition of and incorporation into an ordered set of social relationships. Labour and ritual are thus tools used in a living, imagining society; acts which utilise creative categories based on geographic and social space, and on social meanings of work, to define, determine and order survival in contexts in which survival itself is a resource. The existence of organisations such as work parties, and their legitimation through notions of history and tradition, should not be taken to mean that these organisations assist in the generation of *adequate* subsistence from the land. Indeed, Spiegel (1990:206) points out:

For members of landless households, the ability to insert themselves into local productive activities was crucial for their very livelihoods, particularly if their cash income was unreliable and/or irregular. This was not merely because they were able to obtain some agricultural product by making their labour available; it was also because, having established relationships of co-operation ... they could turn to those people ... for help in times of material shortages. The idiom of mutual concern and altruism which people said motivated their willingness to assist others was thus underpinned by material relations of co-operation which extended from the fields into a variety of other areas of small scale productive activities and localised exchange relationships.

The existence of such associations thus points to the need for assistance; it does not imply that the assistance which is forthcoming is either neutral or sufficient. As we have seen, it also does not imply that assistance is equally available to all. A similar argument can

be posited for savings and burial associations, documented mainly in urban areas, as the next discussion illustrates.

Savings groups/rotating credit associations

Several of the theses that explore urban social life mention the role of savings associations (*stokvels* or *imigalelo*) in the monetary affairs of residents. Ramphele (1991) points out that hostel dwellers in the Western Cape make use of a range of resources including 'individual friendships, loose groups ... formerly [sic] structured groups such as burial societies, *credit associations*, etc.' (Ramphele, 1991:280, emphasis added). Indeed, in hostels, savings groups are frequently operated by interacting networks of very close friends (*amakhaya* — see below). A number of researchers have commented verbally on the extent to which credit associations of varying degrees of formality comprise an important mechanism through which people are able to save money (see also *Lukhele, 1990*), and to generate networks of social support (including networks through which jobs can be sourced). That such groups are numerous has been recognised, and that their role is frequently more diverse than that of an ordinary savings institution is also known. However, this institution is not examined in the theses to any large extent save in some documents submitted for Honours degrees (and thus not included for review) and a Master's dissertation which was not available for review at the time of writing. As a result, for the purposes of this report, information relating to networks generated through savings groups remains untapped.

'A husband to widows and a father to orphans'⁶: The networks of health and healing

The search for healing and health in impoverished communities is one in which support networks are frequently activated. Four theses⁷ document strategies that are utilised in order to gain access to health resources (Lamla, 1975; Heap, 1985; Simon, 1989; Hirst, 1990). All of these point to the importance of social networks, particularly those centred on kinship. The theses explore health and healing from two perspectives. Heap and Simon examine the ways in which healing is sought — a patient-centred perspective. Lamla and Hirst examine the constitution and training of healers and diviners, thus approaching the question of healing from the perspective of the practitioner. I deal with each of these in turn.

Strategies for seeking assistance in times of illness are shown to be heavily reliant on kin, and to a lesser extent, on neighbours. Heap (1985:ii) argues that in villages in Lesotho the redistribution of resources across households means that '... there is no clear correlation between material differentiation and better access to health'. Her finding that

redistribution levels out rural differentiation, stands in contradiction to those of Spiegel (1979), and James (1987), indicating regional variation. In addition, it may be that the search for good health is understood in qualitatively different ways to other activities requiring the implementation of support outside the boundaries of households. Simon (1989:163) argues that: 'If untreated, disease can lead to death. As such it threatens the most basic economic resource: human labour.' Premising discussion on the primacy of health for production may indicate why health support networks appear to have greater grounding and moral immediacy than do networks activated for other purposes. It thus seems likely that kinship is the dominant trope through which health-related assistance is sought, a speculation borne out in that care of the elderly and handicapped is elicited through appeals to the morality of kinship (see Chapter 3). However, Heap's argument that health care resources are provided through the manipulation of a range of social relationships so that a 'materially based reciprocity appears to underscore many of the social relationships directed at maintaining health' (Heap, 1985:209), indicates that kinship is not the sole mechanism through which assistance is sought.

Simon's thesis explores the effects of differential access to health care in households in Transkei. Of particular interest here is the desegregation of households in terms of their access to health. Simon argues that male migrants eat better and have greater access to health care facilities while at work, than do their womenfolk in rural areas. As a result women are ill more frequently than men (Simon, 1989:140); a factor which impinges directly on the ability of the rural household to sustain itself through agricultural production, and thus gives credence to claims for assistance based on the need to sustain health in order to provide labour.

Both Simon and Heap point to the importance of kinship as an organising metaphor for the mobilisation of resources. Thus Simon (1989:136) argues that '... most illness is managed by the domestic kinship group', and places particular importance on women's natal kin as assisting with health-related issues, while Heap (1985:133) comments:

... ties of kinship and marriage provide a valuable support system, both within and across households ... [L]arge families are also seen as a useful survival (and therefore health) strategy, especially for the care and sustenance children can provide in old age.

While kinship remains an important mechanism through which people can maximise well-being, the resultant social relationships are fraught with tension arising from the articulation of domestic activities with the regional political economy. This is evidenced also in the complex interactions between the impoverished health-seekers, and their equally poor healers. Hirst argues that healing in Grahamstown 'is at times a precarious way of making a living' (1990:53), particularly in the context of widespread poverty in

the region (see also Wilsworth, 1979; Manona, 1981; Van der Vliet, 1982). As a result, healers are heavily reliant on

networks of social relationships and the complex reciprocities these engender between persons and groups over time ... [thus] creating a sense of social solidarity and cooperation in the face of pervasive poverty and political subordination (Hirst, 1990:19).

The contexts of impoverishment within which these processes occur cannot be extracted from the meanings which inhere in cultural beliefs and performances. Through the use of such ideas and symbols communities are sanctioned and constructed (*cf. Cohen, 1989*). Symbolic interaction is a crucial component in the construction of relationships from which support can legitimately be expected. The mere fact of proximity or blood relationship is not sufficient to imbue categories with social meaning. As Perry comments: 'The village emphatically does not give a sense of a tight-knit community life' (1977:7) — proximity is not a proxy for socially constructed meaning.

Hirst describes diviners as custodians of social values, in much the same way as *amakhaya* organisations are represented (see below), and as Brindley [1982] presents old Zulu women as being a repository of knowledge and advice. 'As guardians of tradition in town, the diviners play a critical role in mediating the synthesis of urban and rural values' (Hirst, 1990:17). Lamla (1976:186) too, argues that diviners in Transkei are custodians of tradition, and thence mediators of social order. These commentaries explicitly link cultural value with social support, indicating that culture and custom are themselves important sources of (non-material) support. As we see below, cultural performances also operate as support mechanisms. Indeed, notions of humanity which are frequently given as explanations for support are culturally devised and comprehended. Thus Lamla comments that divination begins as a unique individual experience, which gradually grows 'to embrace the community', so that it 'becomes also a sociological issue' (1976:183).

The interconnections of community, boundaries and support are thus perhaps at their most visible in ritual processes, particularly those surrounding illness and death. The following section explores burial associations and ritual practices in terms of their supportive function.

Burial associations

Burial associations have not received a great deal of attention in the theses reviewed. They are occasionally briefly mentioned in theses which deal with the social life of black people resident in urban areas, but death and its attendant rituals are explored in detail in only two of the theses reviewed, both of which deal with rituals of burial in rural areas

(Fischer, 1980; Zide, 1984) rather than the social relationships engendered around death and burial practices which inform the present report.

The rituals which surround death are a striking illustration of the ways in which culture operates to provide support at an ideational level. Speaking of Xhosa cosmology, Zide argues that 'death is that which stands between the world of human beings and the world of spirits, between the visible and the invisible' (1984:64). As such, rituals of burial are laden with symbolic meaning which resonates with the world of the living since ritual incorporates living and dead into a symbolic whole. Rituals surrounding death among the Nhlanguu are, according to Fischer (1980), a means through which opposition expressed in the social structure of descent groups can be overcome and social statuses reaffirmed. Both authors are thus arguing that the rituals that are performed at death serve to reconstitute the cosmological order, and to reaffirm peoples' places within that order both in relation to one another and to the moral universe. Funeral practices can thus be seen as support mechanisms designed to reaffirm social relationships. As ritual practices, they also have a limited economic role:

Die samewerking tussen verwante rondom 'n begrafnis stabiliseer nie alleen die verbonde wat tussen die verskillende linies bestaan nie, maar bevestig ook opnuut die moraliteit verbonde aan verwantskap; ook om mekaar op die terrein van ekonomiese produksie by te staan (Fischer, 1980:33).

Burial associations in urban areas frequently have a high home-person (*amakhaya*) type membership, since the reason for formation frequently lies in the need for bodies to be transported to homeland areas for burial in 'ancestral lands', and the need for support to be made available to people who have the same place of origin or who constitute themselves into social relationships in terms of clan membership. For this reason, burial groups are frequently mentioned in connection with support networks of migrant labourers (see for example Zide, 1984; Ramphele, 1991). Indeed, Zide (1984:118) comments that *amakhaya* in urban areas (see below) 'play the same role as burial societies do'.

It is *amakhaya* groupings, which are widespread throughout urban areas, that appear to play a pivotal role in providing support for rural people resident in urban areas. The constitution of such groups and the roles they play are examined in greater detail below.

Amakhaya

Amakhaya organisations have been a core concern in many theses which explore urban support resources. These groupings, constituting associations of people originating in the same (or neighbouring) rural areas, are closely identified in the literature with processes of what Mayer (1961) called 'encapsulation'. His theory of encapsulation has been tested

(see for example Thomas, 1988) and utilised in a number of studies and in a variety of ways (McNamara, 1978, 1985; McAllister, 1979; Van der Vliet, 1982; Ramphele, 1991), and the continuities and discontinuities experienced by (particularly) migrants, have been expressed in terms of the encapsulation model by a number of researchers and, as we have seen, underlie the theoretical assumptions of a range of others.

Encapsulation tends to underlie dualist models of social functioning, positing that culture is utilised as a process through which people originating in rural areas can shield themselves from the vagaries of urban life while retaining rural rights through the maintenance of rural links premised on cultural grounds. For migrants (whose social relationships are those to which the encapsulation model is most frequently applied), these links are frequently maintained through the sending of remittances and the purchasing of livestock, which, as *Ferguson (1990:159)* argues for Lesotho migrants:

... visibly support[s] his family, symbolise[s] his own presence, and establish[es] his place in the community as a secret Maseru bank account could never do.

Home-person groupings provide a resource which is frequently activated in urban situations, in order to obtain access: to shelter (Ross, 1993), or to bed-space in hostels (Jones, 1991; Oliver-Evans, 1991; Ramphele, 1991); to social support and a degree of security (*cf.* McNamara, 1978, 1985; Connaway, 1983; Ramphele, 1991); and to resources such as cash, food and jobs (Connaway, 1983; Oliver-Evans, 1991; Ross, 1993). In addition, in some contexts, particularly on the mines, *amakhaya* organisations provide formal judiciary functions and create order within hostel compounds (see McNamara, 1978; Connaway, 1983). Such organisations are also, as McNamara explains, a crucial component in coding, creating and perpetuating 'ethnic conflict' in hostel areas; conflict which is as prevalent in 1994 as it was in 1978 when his thesis was submitted. Thus while the reasons for conflict may have altered over the years, *amakhaya* groupings are still considered to be core tropes in hostel organisation. This organisation also incorporates emic categories of order in such a way that *amakhaya* are responsible for clarifying cultural and traditional practices to members while they are on the mines. The organisations thus serve to encapsulate members within specific constructions of cultural activity in their absence from rural homes.

Why *amakhaya* groups? As Ramphele comments: '[I]n a situation of scarce resources, appeal to all possible sources of support is crucial for survival' (1991:286). Constituting oneself as a member of a neighbourhood-based organisation which entails moral obligations and rights, enables one to utilise a wide range of other people as a kind of support net. It also allows for, and — as Connaway (1983:232) argues — enforces the maintenance of links with areas of origin:

'n *Amakhaya*-groep sorg ook daarvoor dat sy lede gereeld geld na hulle families in die tuisomgewings stuur en dat hulle dit nie in die stedelike omgewing verkwis nie.

While the formation of networks between people from the same areas of origin is a widespread phenomenon in urban areas throughout the world, it is interesting to note that the formation of *amakhaya* groupings in South Africa tends to be identified as a conservative reaction to urban life by black workers. The ways in which the creation of the homeland system in Southern Africa and the contract periods of workers have encouraged, facilitated and necessitated such groupings tend not to receive much attention in the literature which explores *amakhaya*, although it is well-documented in theses which explore the lives of those remaining in rural areas. *Amakhaya* are not simply indigenous responses to urban situations, as many theses imply. Thomas, for example, argues that among Durban's Zulu-speaking migrants *amakhaya* groupings are more diverse than those recorded by Mayer among Xhosa speakers in East London. According to Thomas, *ingoma* dancing practised by members of *amakhaya* groups is an activity which is encapsulating by its very existence, and which serves to reinforce strong 'country-rootedness' (1988:224).

However, there is very little analysis of the context within which such encapsulation occurs; a context the parameters of which are defined by the need to enforce links with rural areas in order to ensure their continued survival. The existence and perpetuation of *amakhaya* organisations needs to be seen as a complex interaction between state, capital and culture. In hostels, for example, the disaggregation of people by ethnic group into separate physical spaces has entrenched *amakhaya* organisations and social difference. McNamara (1978:x) comments that 'the home-based ethnic quasi-group appears to have adapted to the urban-industrial setting as a means for expression and maintenance of the working interests of migrants', but it should also be noted that the groupings maintain the working interests of the state and capital too. This is particularly true where violence (itself multi-causal) created the contexts within which the apparatus of the *apartheid* state could insert itself into the personal lives of hostel-dwellers.

If the above discussion implies that *amakhaya* groupings are formed only among those who retain strong ties with rural areas — that is, among migrants — it is because this is the context within which most *amakhaya* organisations are documented in the theses reviewed. There are a number of organisations of a similar nature which operate among those who have moved from urban areas, but these are not usually recognised as being *amakhaya* groups, although they serve essentially the same functions. *Amakhaya* are thus presented as being responses which are specific to black Southern Africans, and are usually depicted as being conservative in nature, linked as they are to rural (and by implication, 'backward') areas. In some theses the modernisation argument which

underlies such analyses is made explicit, as for example in those of Thompson (1980) and Connaway (1983). Thompson's dissertation is overtly structured around the question of the extent to which black migrant workers have modernised as a result of their contact with 'the urban industrial environment' (1980:2). Such a question makes it apparent that an implicit assumption is that black residents of rural areas must be non-modern, and therefore conservative and backward. Connaway (1983:ii) argues similarly that mine workers are 'able to adapt successfully to the mine environment *within the framework of their culture* and an associated psychological differentiation' (emphasis added).

Amakhaya organisations perform numerous functions, including the monitoring of members' social relationships, both at their places of work and also in rural areas (through the enforcement of remittance-sending). The groupings become salient tools of self-identification, and have been identified as providing support for members, and operating to divide worker populations. Indeed, the latter point is extremely important. As McNamara comments,

[t]he perceived danger of undertaking migrant work, coupled with the strong community support in the undertaking, imply that friendships between men from home become the most important personal resource and basis of support for migrants in the mine work setting (1985:267).

This support thus has the effect of generating networks for migrants, and also of mobilising support during conflict on these 'dominant cleavages in the structure of personal relationships' (McNamara, 1985:266).

Conclusion

Through a discussion of agricultural production, savings groups, burial societies, the processes of generating resources for health and healing, and *amakhaya* groups, this chapter has explored the ways in which social organisations are established in order to assist with numerous tasks in daily living. We have seen how, in some instances, the morality of kinship is articulated in order to activate obligations, while in other cases notions of friendship or neighbourhood become more salient. Thus social categories of person become important criteria in determining the resources from which one may draw assistance. From the discussion in this chapter, it is clear that these statuses themselves are historically located, such that the context of behaviour plays an important role in determining which status is socially and culturally relevant when assistance is sought.

Chapter 3 takes as its theme what elsewhere (Ross, 1993) I have called notions of morality and instrumentality which underlie and inform the choice of interaction, and which define the parameters within which choices can be actualised. In it I extrapolate the

themes of kinship and neighbourhood that underlie the descriptive collation of the present chapter, and explore their importance in generating and maintaining networks of support.

Chapter 3: *Kinship and neighbourhood as support resources*

A key theme emerging from the discussion in Chapter 2 points to the primacy of kinship and neighbourhood in any support strategy. In his study of taximen and traders in QwaQwa, Bank argues that 'the key to the successful transfer of goods between town and country was based crucially on the location of co-existing kin and the reliability of support networks in the countryside' (1987:91). Although Bank does not explore this notion in great detail, this single sentence points to a crucial element in the success or failure of any survival strategy, and that is the existence — and ease of manipulation — of relationships, which can be called on with a degree of legitimacy and authority, and with the expectation that obligations and rights will be duly exercised.

We have seen how formal institutions offer assistance to those in need (although the assistance may be differentially and preferentially available). I turn now to explore the networks of kinship and neighbourhood, of blood and friendship, which underlie many of the strategies described in the preceding chapter. Here I argue that social relationships themselves are constituted in ways which carry with them particular kinds of expectations relating to rights and obligations, giving new intensity to the notion of '*umntu ngumntu ngomnye abantu*'; the notions of humanity which are so frequently given as reasons for mutual assistance.

There is a tension that underlies relationships generated around the need for support; a tension which is played out in the literature in terms of models of instrumentality and morality (see Ross, 1993). The creation of networks of support requires a degree of commitment both among those providing and those soliciting assistance. That support can be negotiated in two ways; through ephemeral, single-case instances of assistance, in which short-term reciprocity is the medium of exchange, or more complex, longer-term relationships, where exchange is meshed with moral notions and expectations. A rather simple schematic division identifies the difference as lying in relationships of friendship/neighbourhood *versus* those of kinship. It should be noted that these are not mutually exclusive; that sometimes neighbours consist of people who claim a degree of blood relationship to one another (*cf.* Webster, 1976; Coertzee, 1978; Kuckertz, 1984; James, 1987), and that at times the obligations and rights which are generally perceived as inhering in kinship are also found in other social relationships, perhaps even to a larger extent, depending on the circumstances (see earlier discussion on *amakhaya* organisations). Nevertheless, the distinction between the two forms is suggested and sustained in the literature reviewed, and is retained in the present discussion. Albeit a simplistic model of what essentially involves extremely complex social decisions, differ-

entiating between the two kinds of relationship enables us to explore the contexts within which different kinds of network are activated.

One of the first striking aspects about the naming and manipulation of social categories such as kinship and neighbourhood is that these processes occur within specific contexts, which appear to be relatively exclusive. It seems that people make conscious choices concerning the kinds of relationship which they will operationalise, and these decisions are, to some extent, based on expectations of the longevity and intensity of the rights and obligations which are incurred as a result. That there is a difference in the contexts within which kinship as opposed to other social categories becomes a salient resource is apparent from all of the theses which explore the question. Dentlinger (1983:121), for example, commenting on the high rates of circulation of people identifying themselves as Topnaar in Namibia argues:

Hence, either to subsist or to 'get ahead', people along the [Kuisseb] river will establish or attempt to establish relationships of co-operation, usually, *but not exclusively, with kin. Relationships with kin are more readily established, as this is done in the name of kinship morality ...* (emphasis added).

As we shall see, this corresponds strongly with material presented by other authors.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of kinship, descent and agnation. I then turn to an exploration of two kinds of social praxis; dispersing dependants (Spiegel, 1990), and 'diffusing domesticity'. A sub-theme throughout the chapter examines what I have called relationships of 'morality' and 'instrumentality' (Ross, 1993), illuminating the contexts within which each kind of resource becomes socially salient.

Cells of support: Kinship, descent and affinal relationships

The processes through which individuals constitute themselves as groups based on shared notions of ancestry have informed much anthropological and social theory. As Fortes (1953:30) commented, in what was to become a crucial text in anthropological theory: '... there is nothing that could so precisely and incontrovertibly fix one's place in society as one's parentage'. Indeed, with the publication of the seminal *African Political Systems* (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940), descent had become *the* ordering trope through which social relationships in small-scale societies were described and analysed. Structural-functionalism was heavily reliant on this analytic tool. This reliance continues into the present, to the extent that the absence of kinship as an organising metaphor in social interactions of black people is deemed sufficiently unusual as to warrant discussion.

Notions of the centrality of kinship to the support networks of black people in Southern Africa are thus indicated from both the field and the theoretical orientations of the researchers.⁸ What is striking in the theses reviewed here, and indeed in anthropo-

logical literature at large, is the limited discussion which is placed on *why* it is that humans deem kinship to be a central organising metaphor. Fortes' comment quoted above seems to be the nearest approximation to an explanation. The use of kinship as a mechanism through which assistance is sought and offered implies recognition of an existing social relationship — or at least the rules through which such a relationship might be articulated. As Heron comments:

... [K]inship, because it creates a *genealogical blueprint* in the minds of people ... is important in the organisation of some ... activities (1990:42, emphasis added).

That this blueprint is not necessarily historically accurate has been well documented elsewhere (see for example *Eisenstadt, 1973; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983*). Nevertheless, the gist of Heron's commentary is reiterated in numerous theses, indicating that kinship is a key metaphor through which social relationships of support are organised and implemented. Quinlan (1983:ii), for example, comments that

... the significance of kinship is seen to lie in *the flexibility that its principles allow*, for members of the rural community, to accomplish the demographic, ecological and economic pressures of living in a peripheral part of Southern Africa (emphasis added).

Given the centrality of kinship and descent to anthropological theory, it is not surprising that virtually every thesis reviewed makes some commentary upon the social relationships which these engender, and the ways in which they can be and are manipulated. Kinship is held to be a crucial means of support: in the operation of businesses (see Van der Waal, 1985; Bank, 1987; Naidoo, 1993); in the care of dependants (see Niehaus, 1987; Geerds, 1990; Spiegel, 1990; Reynolds, 1991; Jones, 1991; Naidoo, 1993; Ross, 1993); in gaining access to shelter and food (McNamara, 1978; 1985; Dentlinger, 1983; Ramphele, 1991); in obtaining jobs (Niehaus, 1987; Oliver-Evans, 1991); and in mobilising labour (see Chapter 2). Indeed, it seems that kinship can be constituted as an organising metaphor in virtually any situation, subject to social ratification. However, it should be noted that these attributes of kinship are not specific to kinship alone, but are also visible in relationships engendered around neighbourhood and friendship ties.

A range of kinship relationships is constructed and drawn upon in specific instances in which assistance is required. I present some of these briefly below. The intention here is not to document in exhaustive detail the variety of kinship forms which are activated, but rather to indicate the range of consanguinity and affinity which can be manipulated to ensure assistance.

In Southern Africa's patriarchal societies, agnation (relationships constructed through the male line) is an important mechanism for social organisation (*cf.* Webster, 1976; Quinlan, 1983; Kuckertz, 1984), particularly where agricultural production is concerned. The interaction of kinship and the agricultural cycle in these instances is such that the structure of households is changed, diffusing domestic functions through and across a number of domestic units. However, the importance of kinship networks should not blind us to the range of relationships outside of kinship which can be activated. For example, while agnatic kin are considered important in some Caguba social relationships, in others, such as the organisation of work parties (*ilima*) relationships based on personal interactions are more important (Kuckertz, 1984:221). Coertze (1978:121-122) argues similarly that *ilima* are in decline because of the preference for wages which replaces a moral emphasis on reciprocity. This characteristic has parallels in other sets of social circumstances, as we shall see.

Gender relationships in terms of access to kinship resources are seldom overtly addressed in the theses, although the gendered division of labour is a theme which runs throughout virtually all of them, particularly those which explore relationships of production in rural areas. In this regard some theses point to the conflicts inherent in relationships between mothers and daughters-in-law in patriarchal organisations. Pauw, for example, discusses how, among the imiDushane, women move to the homesteads of their husbands' kin after marriage, where they fall under the authority of their husbands' mothers (1978:203, 225ff). In such situations conflict over the form and regularity of remittances is likely to occur (Murray, 1976; Sharp & Spiegel, 1985; Manona, 1981; Ferguson, 1990. See also Ramphela, 1991, who explores these relationships as they are manifested in hostels in the Western Cape).

In some instances women's own kin become important, despite, or perhaps because of patriarchal practices. This is particularly true in contexts involving the domestic life cycle — for example, during the birth of the first child and in matters concerning health (see Simon, 1989), and in the care of children (see Bank, 1987:151; Reynolds, 1991; Naidoo, 1993). With very few exceptions however, the literature does not tend to explore in gender-sensitive ways relationships which cross-cut geographical spaces (however, see Webster, 1976; Brindley, 1982; Van der Vliet, 1982), and thus little attention is paid to women's social relationships with other women outside their immediate social environments. Indeed, this appears to be a common trend in the theses, the most obvious exception to which are those works which explore the effects of migration on households (see Chapter 1). For the most part, theses examining kinship tend to concentrate on social relationships evident *within* the unit of study, be this a geographical region, a set of social relationships, or a 'culture'. The value of social networks, particularly for women, which extend across research boundaries thus are not addressed in any great detail.

Affinal relationships are also considered important in creating a network of relationships which can potentially be activated. Thus Fischer (1980:330) argues that relationships of affinity form the basis for economic organisation among Nhlangu peoples of the Eastern Transvaal, whereas affinal relatives were an important resource through which homeless people were able to legitimate their claims to shelter in an informal settlement in the Western Cape (Ross, 1993). Child-care practices tend to emphasise the placement of children with female kin of men, rather than of women, but there are instances where affinal relationships are activated for child-care (see discussion below).

As we have seen both in the brief discussion above and also in Chapter 2, kinship relations are invoked in a range of circumstances, almost all of which are predicated upon expectations of long-lasting interactions — that is, interactions which are expected to extend well into the future. So, kinship is important in that it allows for the articulation and manipulation of social relationships, which contain within them both rights and obligations. Why is it then, that in contexts where kin are available to be called on, these relationships are not always activated? I suggest that one answer to this conundrum may lie in the dynamics of reciprocity and obligation. Neighbourhood and friendship links tend to be activated with a shorter term of obligation. Which of these is constituted as a resource and thence activated depends on the contexts within which practices are located. Thus the implementation of work parties may rely on the moral obligations of long-term reciprocity (performatively expressed through drinking rituals — see McAllister, 1979; 1986), or else on the immediate exchange inherent in paid labour relationships (see Coertze, 1978; Kuckertz, 1984).

The complexities of decision-making in determining which social constructs to activate have not yet received a great deal of attention in the theses reviewed. However, as we see below, there is a growing literature which is beginning to address these questions. I explore this literature briefly below, showing how practices of dispersing dependants and also the functions of domestic units reflect processes of morality and instrumentality as expressed in a particular historical moment.

‘Dispersing dependants’: The diffusion of domestic responsibility

A small but growing body of literature explores the dispersion of dependants, particularly children, among kin and non-kin. Details of this practice are not widely documented, but there is evidence to suggest that patterns of dependant-dispersal are widespread among populations suffering impoverishment. The following discussion explores dispersion, mainly that of children, as it is this category of the sample population which receives most attention in theses dealing with diffused family relationships. The fact that the discussion concentrates on child dispersal does not mean that this category of persons is unique in experiencing movement and change — the weight of evidence presented in

documents relating to migrancy, dispels that concern immediately. Instead the emphasis on children is a reflection of the processes of documentation — themselves reflections of changing concerns of the academies (see Chapter 2).

Notions of diffused family relationships immediately raise a question: 'Why disperse dependants?' Spiegel (1990) argues that children and other dependants are dispersed between households of kin and non-kin in order to alleviate on the one hand the burden of providing for them in extremely poor households (see Wilsworth, 1979:160), and on the other, the burden of performing domestic tasks in the domestic units which receive children. Placing children in homes where they become available to perform domestic and/or agricultural tasks (*cf.* Gay, 1980; Spiegel, 1990) is essentially a process of exchanging labour for shelter, legitimated by appeal to notions of kinship (see Rascher, 1991) or *ubuntu* (see Ross, 1993 for a discussion of how these processes are activated by adults in informal settlements).

Spiegel also comments that in some instances dependants placed in poor households could be supported by the original household, which would 'in turn provide the "foster parent" with access to some resources' (1990:270). In addition, child-fostering practices are emically described as 'customary' (see Spiegel, 1990), and enduring. Diffused child-care practices thus are by no means a simple response to material hardship, but are explained and legitimated in terms of custom and culture — in terms of notions of humanity and the symbolism of involvement in human social relationships.

The effect of dispersion is that children experience substantially different movement patterns to their parents or caregivers, or even to their siblings (see Niehaus, 1987; Jones, 1991; Ross, 1993), and indeed experience drastic changes in caregivers over their lives (Reynolds 1991). Webster's comment (1976:242) that 'a child belongs to all who are his relatives' thus holds true in a wider sense than solely in terms of the rights and obligations which accrue to kinspeople. In short, children can and do become resources which can be and are manipulated in such a way as to maximise the inflow of support, or to limit the constraints which operate on individuals and households (see also Gay, 1980). Child-fostering appears to be a frequent practice among the impoverished, or those lacking secure access to land. This is evidenced in a number of studies, such as that of Steyn (1977), which argues that among the Himba of South West Africa (now Namibia), children were rotated between those people who had no young offspring to care for livestock (pp. 185-6). Dentlinger (1983), writing of shifting patterns of social relationships along the Kuiseb River, points to the high rates of child-fostering among Topnaar kin: in her sample, 31 % of the children had been raised by people other than their biological parents (Dentlinger, 1983:188), in a series of relationships in which bonds were flexible and easily broken. Similar findings are evident in hostels (Jones, 1991), while Niehaus (1987:184ff) found high rates of child dispersion in impoverished

households in Phuthaditjhaba. Research in an informal settlement (Ross, 1993) indicated that large numbers of children under the age of 18 years did not live with their biological parents in the settlement, but were dispersed — mainly to kin. In short, practices of child dispersal have been documented in numerous areas and across a large variety of social conditions.

A concern with the dispersal of dependants leads to a discussion of a second set of social relationships which are gradually becoming prominent in literature recording the processes through which networks of support are activated by black people in Southern Africa. These relate to movements of individuals and households between domestic units, and are documented in most detail in theses which explore the composition of households over time. It should be noted that while kinship is an important criterion in determining the shape of diffused relationships of the type described below, bonds of neighbourhood and friendship appear to be of equal, if not greater, importance over time.

Constituting domesticity: Movement and domestic units

Again, theses which explore these questions are limited in number, although at the 1993 conference of the Association for Anthropology in South Africa it was apparent that a wealth of data existed relating to domestic fluidity. Unfortunately little of it is available in thesis form, but some is planned for publication soon. For the purposes of this discussion, I therefore draw mainly on the works of Wilsworth (1979), Dentlinger (1983), Spiegel (1990), Jones (1991), Reynolds (1991) and Ross (1993) each of which explores one or more aspects of the effects of mobility and the use of kinship/friendship as a resource.

All of these theses have in common an emphasis on the fluidity of social relationships. Wilsworth, arguing that 'the extended family and close neighbourhood relationships can be a powerful coping device in the urban environment' (1979:404) points out that the stability of a set of social relationships along which goods and services can flow is an important component in the survival of a community. However, recent research indicates that in contexts where inhabitants are marginalised from power and resources, movement and *instability* can increase access to resources. Thus Ramphela (1988; 1991) points to the high rates of mobility of women in hostels, showing how women are able to maximise their access to bed-space and to male earnings through maintaining a set of loosely-structured relationships. Ross (1993) shows similar patterns among residents of an illegal informal settlement, indicating that 'rapidly changing ... compounded knots of individuals' created networks which 'often appeared to have no boundaries save those imposed with situational immediacy' (p. 184). The findings of Spiegel (1990), Jones (1991) and Reynolds (1991) summarised above, also indicate the fluidity with which domestic relationships are constituted and reconstituted; in this case, around the place-

ment of children in places other than their natal homes (see also Rascher, 1991). Dentlinger, too, points to the ways in which notions of domesticity, especially as created through 'temporary conjugal partners and kin' (1983:146), are manipulated by women to maintain themselves and their children. Domesticity here relates to a set of activities which are 'activated and severed in a spontaneous and sporadic way' (Dentlinger, 1983:169).

The dispersion of functions⁹ usually associated with discrete households lends credence to critiques of reified notions of household and family. In the cases cited above, movement and the diffusion of domesticity operate at two levels; firstly to maximise access to resources through the creation of a wide range of social links, and secondly through spreading the load of domesticity over a number of domestic units. While not specifically constituting 'networks' in the conventional sense of the word, these responses indicate the wide range of activities and structures which are manipulated in the attempt to survive contexts of impoverishment.

As the above discussion will have begun to illustrate, not all social networks comprise kin. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that the obligations which are incurred in the activation of kinship networks are sometimes too arduous to be regularly implemented (see Ross, 1993). Our earlier discussion of *amakhaya* should indicate the pervasiveness of non-kinship organisations in generating support. I turn now to a brief exploration of the role of neighbourhood and friendship in providing support.

Wilsworth (1979:162) comments that on a day-to-day basis among black residents in Grahamstown:

neighbours are probably the most significant internal economic resource ...
Reciprocity and sharing is the basic principle underlying neighbourhood relationships ... [creating a] therapeutically supportive environment.

In both rural and urban areas it seems that neighbourhood constitutes an important resource, although it tends to receive more attention as a theoretical model in urban studies, possibly as a result of pervasive models of urbanisation and encapsulation, as I have already discussed. Unlike kinship, networks of neighbourhood and friendship appear to carry with them less stringent moral requirements and shorter-term obligations than accrue to the manipulation of close-kin relationships. Thus even where kinship is an important organising trope, individual networks of support solicited on the basis of personal friendship and neighbourhood are important. Webster explains this, commenting that 'any individual needs the support of others in collective action in all spheres of social life' (1976:300). Kinship and neighbourhood should not be seen as discrete social entities, then, but as resources which can be manipulated or allowed to lie dormant, depending upon the contexts and historical moment.

For this reason it is not possible to simply delimit the contexts within which kinship or neighbourhood are appropriated and meanings given to them: the value of both institutions is their flexibility and malleability, such that either or both can be activated in a range of ways that are socially legitimate and recognised. This is, of course, not to say that the activation of such networks is always a simple or a conflict-free process. As we have seen in Chapter 2, resources — even, or perhaps especially, those structured around social *ideas* as opposed to material goods — are not equally distributed. Thus there is differentiation in terms of who it is that can read meanings into ideas, of who it is that does the naming and activating of social networks, and of who is able to contract into the obligations that participating in social networks entails.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that resources need not consist of material goods or formal organisations. Relationships of blood and friendship can also be constituted as resources, and it is the understandings construed in and around these that form the basis of much mutual assistance and support. Indeed, the chapter and that which precedes it, points to the centrality of human imagination within social and cultural contexts in creating the mechanisms through which support can be elicited. The chapter has also pointed to the inequalities contained within and enacted in processes of imagining and activating networks. Social resources such as kinship, neighbourhood, and organised assistance are seen to be non-neutral. Thus the processes of instituting and recreating social networks can be viewed as cultural and social performances, activities which tell not only about how individuals survive, but also about how the contexts within which they are located are made meaningful and (re)constituted as reality.

Chapter 4: *Seeing and saying: The contexts of fieldwork and of ethnographic production*

By turning names into things we create false models of reality. By endowing nations, societies or cultures with the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls (Wolf, 1982:6).

The preceding chapters have explored institutional forms and the social constructs which underlie them as means by which people are able to generate support. The data on which the discussion is based are drawn from theses submitted from 1975 onwards to Southern African universities. No analysis of the data would be complete, however, without a critical review of the processes of production of these texts themselves. This chapter therefore examines the contexts and constraints of research and writing in order to contextualise the data presented in the theses.

Anthropological theses, necessarily used in this report as authoritative texts, cannot be viewed as separate from the processes within which fieldwork, the cornerstone of the anthropological enterprise, is undertaken, and ethnography written. Theses are not texts isolated from the contexts in which they are produced, contexts which are constrained by both the academic and the political within a specific historical moment. As documents located in history, they themselves are salient representations of particular theoretical paradigms. This becomes apparent when theoretical approaches to the study of culture are viewed; a distinction most marked between social anthropological and *volkekunde*¹⁰ texts. As we shall see, the theses produced within the former paradigm tend to emphasise the reliance of people upon one another in a more diverse manner than do the latter, and as a result contain more explicit information relating to support networks and strategies of black people in Southern Africa.

'Othering' through documentation

Of particular interest in this regard is an exploration of the subject matter of the theses. The process of writing anthropology is, in many ways, one of identifying and writing about 'The Other' as distinct from 'The Self', and thence of 'othering' through the process of documentation. In this regard it is important to note that the vast majority of the writing in social anthropology which explores the lives of black people in Southern Africa focuses on the very poor, frequently the residents of rural or informal settlements

— in short, people who are furthest from the cultural, social and educational backgrounds of the majority of those who, until now, have been doing the writing. While this is partly a direct product of the academic history of the discipline, the subject matter of anthropology (and of other disciplines in the social sciences) is profoundly shaped by the political-economy into which academies are inserted. As *Gordon and Spiegel* comment, *apartheid* is the context within which research has taken place:

... its discourse perniciously dictating what should be written by both its supporters and, significantly, its opponents (1993:86).

The processes of 'othering', the salience of language in this process, and the authority of discourse have been documented elsewhere (see *Asad, 1973; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Said, 1979*). It is not my intention to delve into these processes in detail here. Rather, in the remainder of this chapter I explore the ways in which text and authority are interlinked, examining the assumptions that texts are 'true', that they are accurate and unbiased accounts, and thus that what is represented is an accurate image of what is 'really there'.

Researchers and 'Others': The political economy of text production

The social-cultural research undertaking, with its inherent researcher's decision-making (what and who constitute an appropriate unit of study, for example), gives a clear insight into the complexity of knowledge production, and the kinds of output which result. Text production is further complicated by those who do the research (and thus define 'Others') in the first place. We cannot divorce the kinds of writing which make themselves apparent in theses from the political economy of South Africa as a whole, and its infamous education system in particular. It is no accident that of the more than 50 theses reviewed a total of only eight were from three 'bush universities': Zululand, Fort Hare and the North, compared with 11 from Rhodes University alone, and 15 from the University of Cape Town. This points to the constraints operating on academies, and also to the ways in which South Africa makes its anthropologists (see *Gordon & Spiegel, 1993*) and social scientists. Academia in South Africa has a history of inequality — even in those universities defined as 'liberal'. This is reflected in both the 'racial' make-up of undergraduate classes (see *Spiegel, 1993*, for an analysis of the records of Southern African anthropology department undergraduate students), and, as we have seen, the categories that are created as 'Other'.

Discussion of the production of texts requires contextualisation within the relevant historical moment — that is, both the moment of production and of review. It is not my intention to explore these contexts deeply (those interested should refer to *Sharp, 1985; Boonzaier & Sharp, 1988; Gordon & Spiegel, 1993*). Instead I briefly set out the

parameters of the moments under consideration, before turning to a discussion of the effects on the kinds of writing produced as academic text between 1975 and the present, and the implications of these for the search for data relating to support networks.

In addition to the complex location of the academies in Southern Africa, a range of other factors sets the parameters within which research topics are (and have been) formulated and research undertaken by the mainly white researchers of the region. These parameters include constraints on access to fieldwork sites, location of fieldwork, and the uses to which research findings have been put. Chief among these factors is that of access to fieldwork sites. The infamous pass laws which constrained the lives and movements of black residents in South Africa had a counterpart in the laws which operated to control and curtail the activities of academics in the social research field. Text production was thus constrained not only by the theoretical orientation of researchers, but also by the practicalities of their location within the political economy of the region.

It is of great interest that so few researchers in the theses reviewed here mention the difficulties posed by doing fieldwork under the *apartheid* regime, or overtly recognise the extent to which perceptions of themselves in relation to the state-mediated fieldwork. That the state, or perceptions thereof, are inherent in fieldwork legitimation are apparent in chance comments. Hirst, for example, comments that his arrest by the Special Branch of the South African Police while he was undergoing apprenticeship to a diviner in Grahamstown 'inadvertently came to my assistance' (1990:11) legitimating his position *vis-à-vis* 'the people' and 'the state'. Where the complexities of expectations are explored, it is frequently as an aside, a footnote in the text (see for instance, Ross, 1993:14). In itself the relegation of such localised but crucial power dynamics to the periphery of researchers' writings is an indication of the extent to which researchers persist in the notion that fieldwork can be objective and self-effacing, and lends a (spurious?) authority to texts written about the 'other'.

Related to the constraints on fieldwork which operated during the *apartheid* era is the choice of fieldwork area. Problems in obtaining permission and permits to conduct research in particular areas meant that there was a preponderance of research focused in specific areas at particular times. Lesotho, as an independent state, was one of these. In addition, the exigencies of *apartheid*, and the nature of anthropological research, resulted in a proliferation of research in rural, particularly homeland, areas into which thousands of people were condensed. As a result urban lifestyles have not received as thorough an investigation, although this trend is changing. The change is witnessed by the fact that of the theses reviewed which deal with urban populations, nine were written in the period 1990 to 1993, compared with three between 1985 and 1989, four between 1980 and 1984, and three between 1975 and 1979. In other words, 47 % of the urban-focused theses were written in the post-1990 period. In part, at least, this change can be attributed

to the increased structural ease of access to township areas (although violence in these areas is frequently cited as a constraining factor in research). Nonetheless, the bulk of theses reviewed concentrate on material gathered in rural areas, particularly the homelands and 'independent' states; a fact which itself bears mute testimony to the exigencies of academic pursuits in the period which predates majority rule in South Africa.

Underlying assumptions in text production

Interestingly, it is in those urban studies which have been conducted that the question of support networks has been most systematically explored. There appears to be an unstated, but underlying assumption that people in rural areas have intact systems of support, usually of kin; systems which collapse or are radically transmogrified as people move into urban areas. In itself, this points to an underpinning, equally unstated model, namely that of the urban transition, which presumes some degree of disjuncture between rural and urban areas. In its most extreme form this model informs the 'men of two worlds' scenario, which bedevils studies of migrancy and of urban development (see *Mabin, 1993*), and which tends to characterise *volkekunde* documentation (see, for example, *Coertzee, 1978; Thompson, 1980; Rascher, 1991*).

The prevalence of urban transition models in social research points to normative expectations held by researchers as to the role of culture. As *Thornton (1988)* comments, culture is a resource, theoretically available to all, yet constrained in particular ways. The urbanisation model which posits discontinuities of experience is part of the theoretical baggage of anthropologists, made most specific, perhaps, in *Mayer's (1961)* famous encapsulation model, which drew a distinction between 'Red' and 'School' Xhosa speakers; the former with a greater orientation towards Western education and ideas, the latter turning inwards, towards a reified notion of culture and tradition, through which to generate meaning and being in the world. Encapsulation saw the notions of culture as a resource being deliberately articulated; and yet also representing the expression of dualist theoretical perspectives. As we shall see, these theories persist in academic discourses, and colour the ways in which information is sought and represented.

Its effects are apparent in many of the theses which explore support structures and networks in *urban* areas. In part then, it seems that texts concerned with support networks are constructed with particular views of society and its functioning in mind. The assumption is that people in rural areas are organised into relatively homogeneous social groupings based on kinship or descent, and that these structures operate to maintain an equilibrium in which support networks are automatically in place. In fact this is not so, as *Murray (1976)*, *Spiegel (1979)*, *Sharp and Spiegel (1985, 1990)*, among others, show. Material differentiation is as apparent within rural areas as it is in urban ones. Some of the difference may be accounted for in terms of the family life-cycle — in

particular, in terms of the number of males in a household who can be sent away as migrants. Migrancy and dispersal of kin, the use of labour as a resource through which to negotiate support, are all crucial components in the survival of black family relationships in Southern Africa. The operation of support networks is thus integrally related to the regional and global political economy, making nonsense of the dualist paradigm.

It is clear that rural and urban dwellers are both impoverished, particularly when dwelling in homelands. Yet the assumption that kinship remains a viable and vital resource which is available to rural but not necessarily to urban dwellers, persists as a subtext in the theses. On their first arrival in urban areas, black people are generally portrayed as being confronted with an alien world; one in which their culture requires significant modification in order to make it appropriate to its new surroundings. It is at this point that questions of 'modernisation' come to the forefront of many theses concerned with urban residents, particularly those concerned with male migrants working on the mines of the Witwatersrand (see for example Thompson, 1980; Connaway, 1983).

These points bring us to the question of culture and its representation in theses. It may seem inappropriate to discuss culture in a report which deals with support networks, but in fact it is crucial to do so, as the notion of culture contains within it the seeds of the kinds of questions which anthropologists and ethnologists ask and thus explains the kinds of discussion of support which are described in the theses reviewed. A number of these share certain commonalities. They can be divided roughly in terms of the theoretical approaches or discourse, in particular between those theses which explore social structure and process, and those where the unit of study is taken to be *a culture*. The distinction is important, and brings light to bear on the perplexing issue of why it is that some theses address the question of support in substantially more detail than others, and why that divide appears to be expressed as anthropology *versus* ethnography.

As Van Binsbergen (1981:60) comments:

... adopting a particular unit of study enlightens a certain problematic, but at the same time forces, like all classification, an essentially volatile and dynamic reality into a strait-jacket.

The question of the unit of study is paramount in understanding the contexts of text production and thus the ways in which the content of theses is shaped by fieldwork and theoretical orientation. *Volkekunde* research, with its emphasis on the homogeneity of culture and its presupposition that cultures are 'bounded systems of meaning' (Sharp, 1985:81; see also Wolf, 1982), tends to assume that cultures in and of themselves operate to support those in need. The net effect is that this kind of ethnography emphasises the similarities among people defined as belonging to the unit of study, and in so-doing does not really ask questions about the nature of processes of daily life, particularly where

daily life is represented as a struggle for survival. Jonas, for example, explores the significance of 'clanship in Xhosa culture and for human social relationships' (1981:xix), yet does not really explore the location of the study group in the political economy of South Africa, nor the precise shadings of clan membership and its meanings for interpersonal relationships. *Xhosa culture* is thus depicted as static and unchanging, and as being almost completely economically self-sufficient.

This is, of course, not to deny the existence of culture nor to deny its role in daily survival. There is no doubt that a range of complex mechanisms and strategies exist through which people mediate and experience their lives. Equally, there is no doubt that culture sets at least some of the parameters of these (see *Comaroff & Comaroff, 1987; Comaroff, 1985*). However, there is equally little doubt that the ways in which culture is viewed and written determines the ways in which it is made accessible to the reader — the other 'other', an unseen partner in textual production. Processes of production of texts and the implied authority of texts thus contain powers of representation, and so enable one to think the 'other'.

The assumption that characterises *volkekunde* theories and texts — to wit, that culture is bounded, intact and complete in and of itself — indicates that exploration of social differentiation is an important distinction between *volkekunde* anthropology and that practised by the (mainly) English-language universities. For the purpose of this review, it is clear that those theses which deal with questions of support are, for the most part, derived from the liberal universities. Theses from these schools tend to explore the question of material differentiation in considerably more detail, and — overtly — also the implications of insertion into the regional and national political economy. In this way the research process is immediately oriented to questions of how it is that in conditions of dire poverty black families survive (see for example, Murray, 1976).

In many ways the questions of support are addressed through the theoretical discourses adopted within theses. In particular those theses utilising network theories are likely to have an emphasis on support. The growth of network theories in international literature in the 1950s and 1960s was a direct response to the problems inherent in structural-functional timelessness; a shortcoming of much *volkekunde* anthropology also. Structural-functional and cultural approaches which emphasised homogeneity at the expense of difference, equilibrium at the expense of conflict, and thus stasis at the expense of change, could not explore change nor conflict, and were found to be of limited value when used in 'modern' contexts. Network approaches sprang out as a response to these shortcomings, and received much impetus from material derived from Southern and Central Africa (see *Mayer, 1968; Epstein, 1969*). These approaches have tended to be confined to the theses from English-language universities. There appear to have been various trends in the use of network theories in exploring social relationships;

those which evolved in the 1960s in response to the inadequacies of structural-functionalism, and those which followed, albeit already in their demise in the 1970s and 1980s, when more radical arguments posited on political economy theories were implemented. There has been a subsequent resurgence in network analyses in the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s. In part this transformation of theoretical approaches reflects responses to the political and economic climate of South Africa, and to changing concerns within academia.

In some ways then, the process of exploring theses for descriptions of support networks among the impoverished imposes a spurious homogeneity on academic documents, each of which is produced at a specific historical moment, and with particular questions in mind. In contexts of extreme impoverishment questions of support are foremost in researchers' minds (witness, for example, the work of Wilsworth, 1979; Spiegel, 1979; Dentlinger, 1983; Quinlan, 1983; James, 1987; Niehaus, 1987; Heron, 1990; Jones, 1991; Ramphele, 1991; Rascher, 1991; Annecke, 1993; Ross, 1993). In different contexts, other questions come to the fore and, even as impoverishment is recognised, discussion of support is more limited. This is particularly true of theses submitted to the Afrikaans-medium universities (see for example Steyn, 1977; Pauw, 1978; De Beer, 1986; Van Niekerk, 1986). However, see also Lamla (1976), Gitywa (1976), Sibaya (1981), Sobahle (1982) and Zide (1984) which had been submitted to the historically black universities.

Two significant factors have been highlighted through the research findings presented in Chapters 2 and 3. One is the distinction between theses whose main thrust is theoretical, and the other is the importance of the particular moment in determining the questions asked and the kinds of data sought. Both of these bring us full circle to the necessity of an awareness of assumptions which underlie the production of academic texts, and the contexts within which these texts are produced. These contexts, themselves located within the broader social and political context, define the parameters of research hypotheses, informing the kinds of questions which researchers ask of their informants and the ways in which responses to these questions are analysed. Detailed knowledge of research and social contexts is thus essential to understanding the perplexing issue of why some theses deal with questions of support networks of black families in greater detail than others.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Wilsworth (1979:411), writing about black residents in Grahamstown in the turbulent 1970s, argues that

the community survives not only by exploiting a large range of material resources ... but also because of the value given to the ideal of *ubuntu*.

Centred on its title *Umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu*, this report has explored the creation and, to a lesser extent, the contestation of social relationships of support. In it I have argued that, notwithstanding the complexities of documenting such support, there are several forms in which support is formally manifested, such as through work parties, savings organisations, *amakhaya*, and so on. These arrangements are established, manipulated and sanctioned in ways which are socially meaningful. That is, the processes through which support is sought, negotiated and accepted are constituted within particular contexts which set the parameters of meaning. Consequently the meanings which inhere in the structures and in the contexts are subject to individual interpretation, and also to the changing particularities of the historical moment. Meanings, as *Cohen (1989)* has indicated, are neither inherent nor fixed. It is the variability and differing intensities of meaning which accrue to specific practices at particular times which give them their salience and also their malleability.

Ubuntu is one such symbol which is socially constructed and culturally located. Its meanings are created and contested; both by its practitioners and also by social researchers trying to comprehend the ways in which it is used. *Ubuntu*, as the way in which humanity is manifested, is the socially constructed manner of relating to others and reflexively constituting oneself as belonging in society, and thence being recognised as a member of such. Thus, 'a person is a person by means of other people'.

This is not to say that *ubuntu* is the sole underlying mechanism through which society is constituted. A number of these contest this point, arguing that material self-interest underlies co-operative interaction (see Kuckertz, 1984). Nonetheless, notions of humanity are essential components in defining and sanctioning what action can legitimately be sought by and from whom.

This indicates that support networks themselves are socially constructed, and as such, however manifested, are not neutral mechanisms. Instead, assumptions inhere in them — assumptions which define the parameters of differentiation. Support networks are thus not simply inert organisations, devoid of political meaning and impetus; they are also social (and thus political) constructs, replete with contested meanings.

This report has largely addressed traditional social anthropological concerns of support, kinship and neighbourhood. I turn, briefly, to a discussion of ritual and perfor-

mance in order to elaborate on the themes which have been discussed in the preceding chapters. In itself this is a dangerous enterprise; the association of cultural anthropology with the legitimisation of the *apartheid* state is too historically close to be comfortable. Nonetheless, a range of theses introduce the idea that notions of culture are important resources (see also *Thornton, 1988*) through which support can be activated, not least because cultural expectations legitimate resource allocation. In some instances the activation of culture as a resource is overt, as in Jonas's study of Xhosa clanship (1981), or Connaway's discussion of acculturation among mineworkers (1983). In others the role of culture in transmitting and legitimatising support is implicit, located in discussions of *ubuntu*, kinship, work parties, ritual and performance.

The limited emphasis of theses on the roles of ritual, cultural performance and culture as *support networks* does not preclude these forms from playing an important role. Initiation rites (see Gitywa, 1976) and their role in creating cross-cutting, enduring linkages between people, for example, indicate the extent to which these facets are an important source of social support. Gitywa argues that not only is performance of the rite necessary in order to create adults, but that

[n]ew pressures for initiation are linked with the universal need for money. There is a belief among the Xhosa that one is paid according to whether one is a boy or man in the traditional sense in the same kind of work (1976:136).

Cultural activities are thus reinterpreted and made meaningful in the context of the need for money with which to sustain rural life-styles. This is not to belie the importance of culture itself as a means through which ideologies can be expounded and sustained, and thus rights and obligations generated and maintained. Cultural performances such as initiation, 'beer drinks', reincorporation ceremonies held for returning migrants, and rituals surrounding death, the initiation of healers, and so on, all serve to reinforce ideas which define in fundamental ways what it is to be human, and to share social relationships. Culture itself comes to express *ubuntu*, and to provide the legitimatising and ordering tropes through which assistance is solicited.

Reified notions of culture should not blind us to the social contexts within which interactions take place. Social differentiation, hardship, poverty and inequality to lesser or greater extent all characterise the lives of those about whom I write. Differentiation in access to resources (including culture) is closely linked to the particularities of domestic cycles, of agricultural production, and of daily urban life.

This report has shown that support, whether in terms of migrant remittances or baby-sitting, is necessary to maintain black domestic social relationships. We have seen that the need for support is not homogeneous; that even among the very poor there are still gradations of power and poverty. From this we are able to see the differentiation which

occurs in processes of activating support networks. Some authors have suggested that those who are most in need of assistance in various forms are also those who are most disadvantaged by the processes of obtaining support. Thus Simon's comment: 'the only time a woman's belly is full is when there's a baby inside' (1989:145), accurately summarises the complexities of negotiating support and assistance within the contexts described above. It is not only young women who are disadvantaged, although a superficial glance at the literature would indicate that this is so (see Annecke, 1993). The contexts of disadvantage differ. Thus for example, old people may be disadvantaged in some contexts (particularly in relation to labour and agricultural practice), while being relatively advantaged in others (e.g., old Zulu women are controllers of culture, according to Brindley (1982), and frequently older women have first claim on migrant remittances). Documentation of the contexts within which support is sought must therefore be sensitive to change both over time, and between categories of people.

We have seen that a number of support mechanisms can be activated, usually premised on the basis of kinship or affinity, neighbourhood, friendship, and notions of cultural similarity. I have suggested that specific relationships of obligation and rights underlie these forms, and that people consciously choose which type of relationship to manipulate, depending on the intensity of the obligations incurred. There is a need for substantial research to be conducted into the question of how these choices are made, and having been made, how they are activated.

Several areas of support have not been explored in this report — mainly because they are only implicitly addressed in recent literature. Chief among these issues is the importance of reliable, regular incomes as a determining factor in support networks. My own research in *Die Bos*, for example, indicated that those people whose incomes were regular (even if not high), were more likely to be involved as central points in support networks than were those whose incomes were irregular but higher (Ross, 1993). Crucial in this regard were those people who had access to state pensions, disability grants and formal child support (see also Spiegel, 1990).

The report has also not systematically explored the question of changes in networks over time. In part this is because the nature of the project prohibited such a focus by imposing what has turned out to be a spurious similarity on diverse texts. A review of numerous theses written in different parts of the country and at different times in the history both of Southern Africa and also of the disciplines of social anthropology and ethnology precludes extended attention to change, both as a result of the particular characteristics of the regions under study and also because of the different theoretical approaches involved in the studies.

Nonetheless, the ways in which support is solicited and obtained by individuals and groups over time, and the changes in these activities, merits serious future attention in

order to throw light on how individuals deal with change. The contexts of hardship may have altered, especially over the 19 years covered in this review (which itself spanned the period of the first democratic elections in South Africa), yet the need for support will continue. The ways in which that support is generated and maintained require urgent attention. Equally necessary is research exploring the processes that are used to legitimise support, and the reasons for the endurance of particular kinds of support (such as that generated through kinship). Above all, it is clear that a detailed understanding of historical processes is a necessary component in any research relating to the types of support which are activated and also to any analysis of their endurance over time. The ways in which cultural and social ideals of behaviour are converted into commodities which can be exchanged (see *Appadurai, 1986*) through the activation of social networks may be an appropriate place to begin such an investigation.

Endnotes

1. Italicised references indicate published material. Those references and citations which are in blank type indicate theses reviewed. The two sets of references are differentiated in the bibliographic component of this report also.
2. Where, indeed, this exists.
3. Reciprocal exchanges are described by Van der Waal (1985:146) as '[die] belangrike beginsels waarmee die verspreiding van goedere in die Swart gebiede georganiseer word'. Note, however, that this contention is disputed by others — see for example, Spiegel (1979), and James (1987), both of whom explore material differentiation in homeland areas.
4. Note, however, that in these instances there are alternative mechanisms through which assistance can be generated, for example the practice of child-fostering. This and other manipulations of social relationships are the focus of Chapter 3.
5. Murray, 1976; Webster, 1976; Coertze, 1978; Pauw, 1978; McAllister, 1979; 1986; Spiegel, 1979; 1990; Jonas, 1981; Manona, 1981; Vorster, 1981; Sobahle, 1982; Quinlan, 1983; Kuckertz, 1984; Van Niekerk, 1986; James, 1987; Simon, 1989; Heron, 1990.
6. This title is derived from commentary by a healer, quoted in Hirst (1990:57).
7. A fifth thesis — Jansen (1982) — has been excluded from this discussion as its focus was not related to social relationships engendered around healing, but rather provided an overview of medical anthropology.
8. An interesting set of debates which essentially centre on the question, 'Is kinship irreducible?' capture the controversy between descent theorists and their opponents. I refer the reader to *Leach, 1963; Barnes, 1962, Barth, 1971*.
9. I have characterised these functions as (re)production and consumption (Ross, 1993). The activities involved include child-birth and socialisation, the production and consumption of food and material goods, household labour, and a number of other processes which are usually assimilated under the notion of domesticity.
10. *Volkekunde* — 'cultural ethnology' in the words of *Gordon and Spiegel (1993:86)* — 'emphasizes the boundedness of cultures, focuses on ethnic difference, and is generally motivated by an ideal of *volksdiens* for the maintenance of ethnic purity' (*Gordon & Spiegel, 1993:84-5*). This is compared to a social anthropology located in 'an exposé tradition with roots in liberal scholarship and using ethnography to focus on people made invisible by apartheid ... [using models that were] often overlaid with neo-Marxist analyses' (*Gordon & Spiegel, 1993:89*).

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