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BUILDING ROOM TO MANOEUVRE: GENDER, IDENTITY AND HOUSE-BUILDING IN AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

by

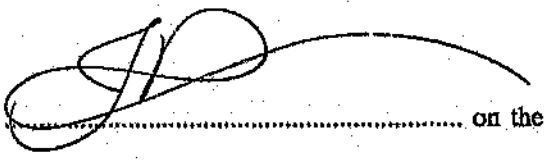
JOANNE PANNELL

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand

January 1998

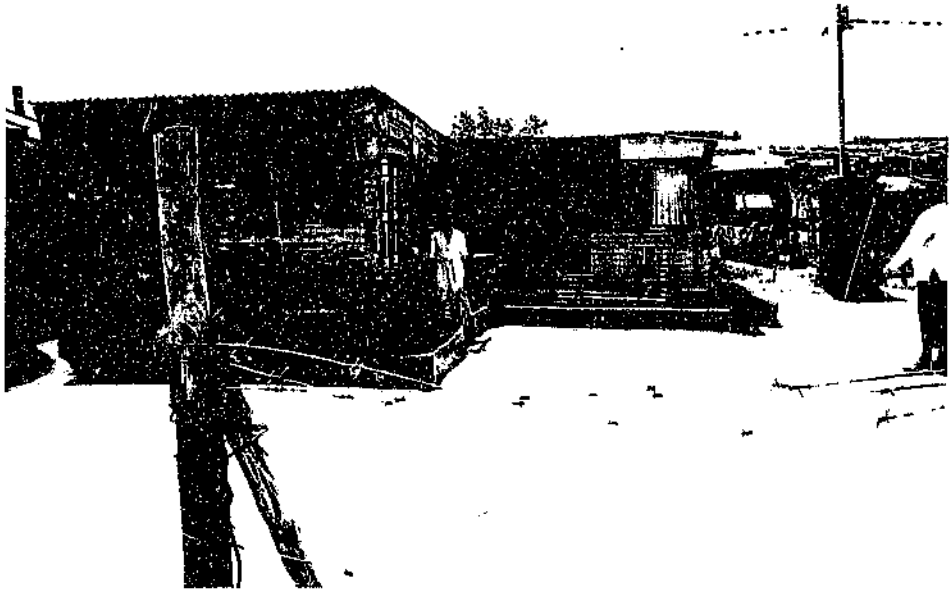
DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own, unaided, work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted previously to any other University or for any other degree.

Signed:  on the 31/01/1998

at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.





Top: A brazier burning in a passage behind a yard.
Above: Elizabeth Shabalala standing outside her home.

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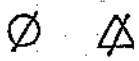
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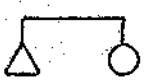
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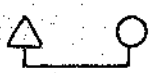

Living female


Living male

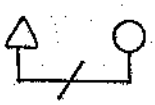

Household head


Deceased female, male


Full siblings


Marital relationship


Sexual or extra-marital relationship


Conjugal dissociation or divorce

Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my friend Elizabeth Shabalala who initially introduced me to Ivory Park and who generously shared her home with me during my period of fieldwork. Her invaluable help as a research assistant made my fieldwork experience both enjoyable and rewarding. I would also like to thank all the people in Angola Section who welcomed me into their community and especially the women who agreed to have their lives invaded for a few hours by a nosy anthropologist.

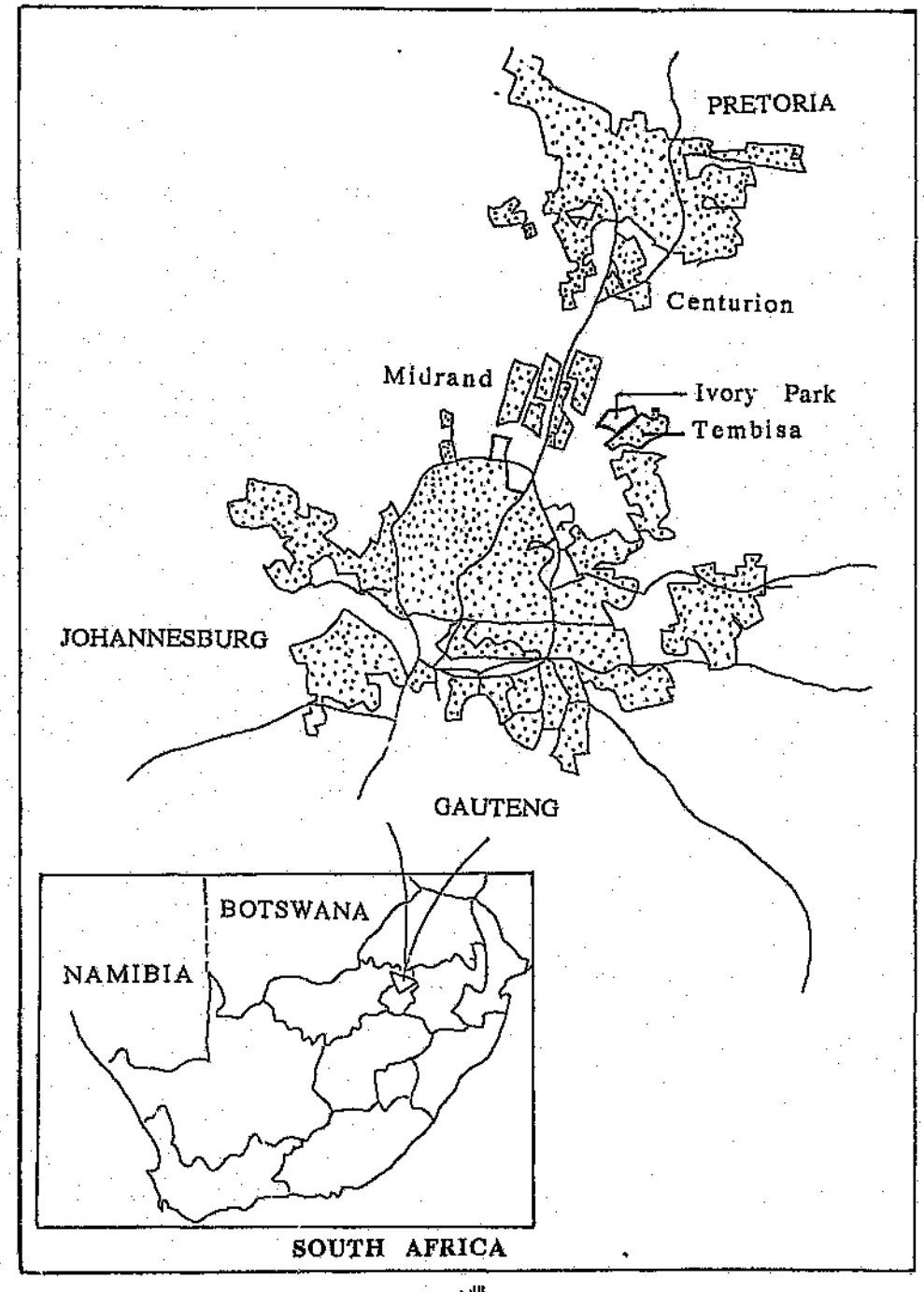
Much appreciation must also go to my supervisor Deborah James, for tirelessly assisting me in the process of writing up and to Linda Waldman, who convinced me I had something to write about. Their encouragement, support and friendship is greatly appreciated. A very special word of thanks to Sakkie Niehaus for advice, assistance and enormous patience with me and the final document.

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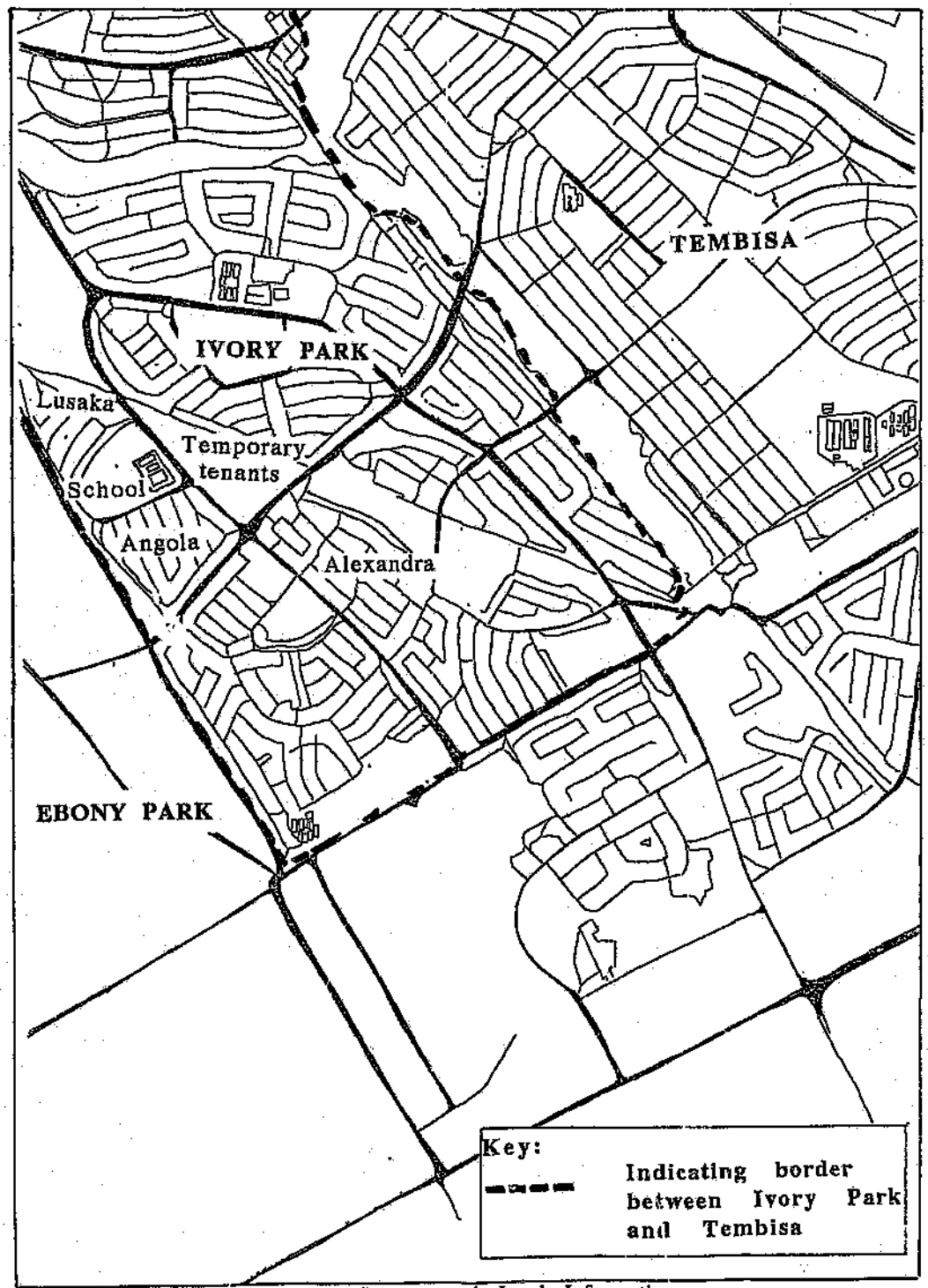
My thanks also to my housemates, Kate Stewart and Danny Keating for their support and for tolerating my mess for months on our dining-room table.

A small amount of funding from Wits University and the Centre for Science Development is acknowledged.

MAP 1: South Africa and the Gauteng Province showing the position of Ivory Park.

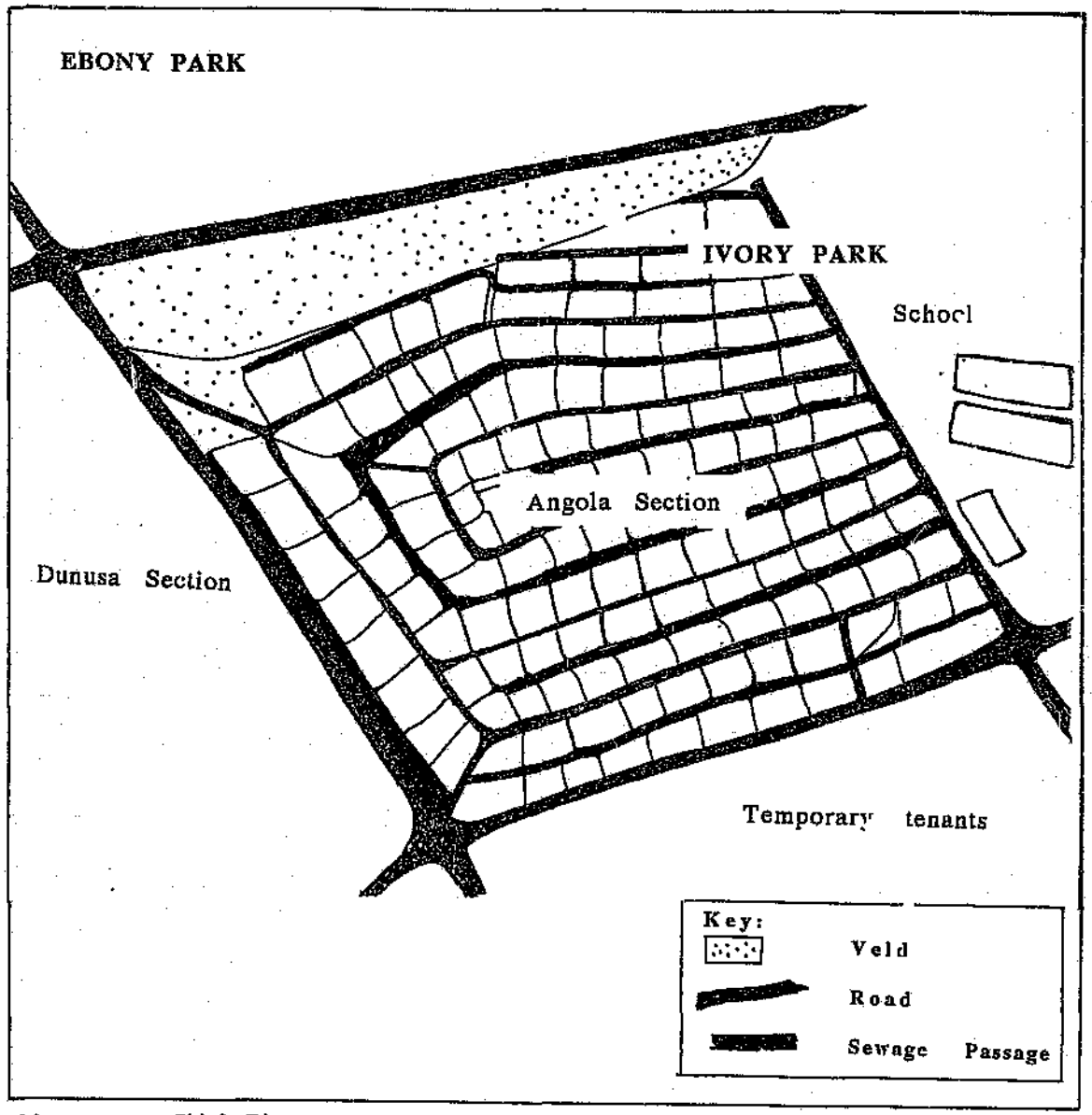


MAP 2: Ivory Park - showing Tembisa and Ebony Park



Map source: Chief Directorate: Surveys and Land Information: 2628 AA4 Ivory Park 1:10 000 (reduced)

MAP 3: Angola Section of Ivory Park.



Map source: Chief Directorate: Surveys and Land Information: 2628 AA4 Ivory Park 1:10 000 (Angola Section enlarged)

Chapter One

Introduction

> We had nowhere to go. We had been lodgers. Our children were not allowed to play. They say they are making noise, that they are making a mess. We were not happy being lodgers of other people. Now we are deciding to find our own places... I have started building my house. Now I know that I've got no other destiny. It's just here - nowhere to go[1].

Since the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, the provision of housing has been one of the priorities of the new ANC-led government. Government promises of housing delivery and of the consolidation and upgrading of informal settlements obviously appealed to the many homeless and insecurely-housed people. Although there have been a few successes, on the whole the delivery of houses in post-apartheid South Africa has been disappointingly slow.

[1] Extract from interview with Edith - 15 July 1997

The aim of this research report is to understand how the process of housing delivery has been understood and implemented in Ivory Park a particular informal settlement in South Africa. Within this context the role of gender has been acknowledged by development planners, yet not adequately explored from an anthropological perspective. The South African government's emphasis on participatory and inclusive processes of housing delivery is understood as necessitating a - preferably central - focus on the category 'women'. Whilst the government's White Paper on housing has identified the need to 'support the role of women in the housing delivery process'[2] this is merely acknowledged under a section entitled 'non-discrimination' and thus has the quality of an after-thought. Anthropological research focuses on the micro-level and contains the tools to examine these questions in a subtle and nuanced manner. In particular, my report investigates the process of house-building from the perspective of women-headed households. I explore how single mothers build and extend their homes, considering the social networks that they draw upon and how they conceptualise this process.

I argue that these women's social and familial ties are a critical resource which they draw on during the initial phase of building and extending their zinc shacks. These networks served as a crucial resource giving them access to the necessary labour and expertise. To progress beyond a shack and build a brick house, however,

[2] Housing White Paper: Government Gazette No. 16178 1994 pg. 20

required both financial resources and technical expertise that these immediate networks were unable to offer.

During the initial stages of my research, I felt that it might be appropriate to tie my research in with questions which the provincial and local government structures might find 'useful'. Though I did not think that my research report would give clear and simple answers, I imagined that it might provide a backdrop for government work done at a later stage in Ivory Park. I thus met with Enos Ngutshane the Head of the Gauteng Provincial Department of Housing and Land Affairs. According to him, there was a gap in the information available to him about the way in which government resources could best be allocated in informal areas. He knew why people wanted houses but not how they went about the process of building them. He felt that my research - which would examine, *inter alia,* the way in which people built their houses - might begin to fill this gap. For this reason my research report shows a particular uneven weighting between the ethnographic 'how' of house-building, and the more anthropologically driven questions of why houses were built. This includes an in-depth examination of the process whereby women household heads built and extended their shacks.

It is within the context of house-building that cultural notions and ideas about housing emerge. If we understand a house not only as a physical shelter and domestic space but also as a cultural product in which, and through which, we make statements about ourselves,

then to build a house - or 'unit' as it is known in development speak - is clearly not a simple and unproblematic process.

The aim of this report then is not merely to examine housing delivery or house-building. It also uncovers the cultural importance of a house as a means of defining oneself and constituting an identity. I examine how homes, and the building of houses, reflect and inform social and cultural identities in significant and meaningful ways. I look specifically at the house as a site where public statements about the owner's identity are able to take shape and be refined.

The Research Setting: Ivory Park

My research into these issues was conducted in an area called Ivory Park, described in planning and government discourse as an 'informal settlement'. Within this larger settlement, my research was concentrated in a suburb called 'Angola Section'.

Ivory Park is located in Gauteng Province and lies approximately halfway between the city of Pretoria to the north and Johannesburg to the south (see Map 1). It is bounded on the west by the city of Midrand and is situated adjacent to the formal township of Tembisa. Ivory Park is the first informal settlement in an urban area to have been laid out adjacent to an existing white town - in this case - the city of Midrand (Thomlinson 1995:11). In this regard Ivory Park represented the first 'legal' attempt by the former Transvaal

Provincial Administration to move away from Apartheid planning policies which attempted to keep black informal settlements as far away as possible from established white areas (*ibid:11*).

In 1988 the apartheid government passed the 'Prevention of Illegal Squatting Amendment Act' as an attempt to deal with and combat 'disorderly and illegal "squatting"' in urban areas (SAIRR 1989:162). The Act was designed to control the settlement of homeless people by providing land which could be developed into informal towns. In 1990 Ivory Park was set out by the local municipality within the parameters of this act as one of the first 'legal' informal settlements in the Gauteng region (Thomlinson 1995:11).

Driving into Ivory Park on a winter's evening one is confronted with the view of a sprawling settlement where *mkhukhu*' (shacks)[3] and brick houses exist side by side and where individual plots are neatly separated by low walls or flimsy fences. If one arrives in the late afternoon, as the sun is setting, one becomes immersed in the smoke of *mbaula* (brazier heaters)[4] and coal stoves which hangs over the roofs of the houses like a fog making the air thick and murky.

As an informal settlement Ivory Park began as a site-and-service scheme where sites were leased to individuals by the local municipal council (see map 3). Ivory Park had been established by the former

[3] The word used to describe a corrugated iron or zinc shack. It is also used to describe a chicken coop or an outside shack in rural areas where garbage is collected.
[4] This is a brazier heater which is a common and cheap method of heating and cooking used during winter. See example pg. ii

Transvaal Provincial Administration to house either the homeless or insecurely housed people of Tembisa and Alexandra - two of the nearby formal black townships (Tomlinson 1995:16). By August 1990 the local Administration began moving the 'overflow of "squatters"' from Alexandra into Ivory Park (Tomlinson 1995:15). Residents coming from Tembisa had been living as either back-yard tenants or as squatters in an area adjacent to Oakmoor train-station. In the suburb of Angola, where I conducted my research, the majority of residents had come to Ivory Park via the Oakmoor train-station.

Informal townships such as Ivory Park were planned so as to allow for future upgrading and development into formal townships or for their eventual inclusion into the surrounding towns (SAIRR 1988/89:188). Ivory Park was established and developed within the framework of Section 6(A) of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, as later ratified under the new legal rubric of the Less Formal Township Establishment Act in 1991 (Tomlinson 1995:15). Like squatter settlements, informal settlements are characterised by houses built of corrugated iron. Squatter settlements, however, lack the planning and infrastructure (roads, demarcated plots, allowances for sewage installation, electricity, etc.) which one finds in informal settlements and squatter settlements generally constitute an illegal occupation of land.

As a formalised informal settlement Ivory Park consists of a number of 'sections' or suburbs which have been neatly laid out with streets,

plot boundaries and sufficient space to install water-borne sewerage behind each plot (see map 3). It has been planned to allow each individual or family a plot of land large enough to build a small brick house.

There are, nonetheless, certain areas in Ivory Park that can be categorised as 'squatter camps'. They are inhabited by what Ivory Park residents have called 'temporary tenants' who have not been allocated individual plots by the local municipal council and ir shacks are built in haphazard proximity to each other. They are generally contained within certain specific limits. Occasionally one or two shacks will be built on a spare piece of ground in the more formal areas but shacks do not encroach onto residents' formal plots (see Map 3). Long-term residents of the Angola section of Ivory Park assumed that these 'temporary tenants' would be forced to move off the area in which they are presently living as it has been designated as an industrial area. I did not carry out any research in these informal areas and confined my fieldwork to the Angola section: an area which has been planned and designated for formal housing.

In the Angola section each plot was generally owned by one household who had built a shack on it. In 1990, once land which would become Ivory Park had been allocated for development, twenty residents from the Oakmoor squatter settlement arrived at the Midrand municipal offices where they stood in a queue and were given a number. This number corresponded to that of a particular

plot in a section of Ivory Park. Having arrived at the municipal offices with the materials which they would use to erect their shacks, each resident was then directed by an official from the municipal council to their particular stand. The plots in Angola section, where I was doing research, were roughly the same size (9m by 16m) unless located on a corner. The process of site allocation was arbitrary. As people living in neighbouring shacks in Oakmoor generally arrived at the council offices together, they often remained neighbours in Ivory Park.

In a number of cases household heads had allowed tenants to build shacks on their plots in return for a monthly rent of approximately R50. Tenant's shacks were usually only one-roomed structures as anything larger would begin to severely encroach on the available space within the owner's plot.

All households in Angola section now have access to cold running water from a tap located on or nearby each plot; and also to one toilet which is generally situated outside of the house or shack. Seven years after the establishment of the township there is still no water-borne sewerage system[5]. Despite the lack of adequate sewerage, the 'passages' behind the back of each plot are kept open

[5] An 'Aqua Privy' toilet system is in place where sewerage collects in a holding tank at the back of the toilet and is drained approximately every four to five weeks by the local council. The lack of proper sewerage was a common complaint among the women I spoke to. In larger households specifically these toilets quickly fill up and in summer they begin to smell. The bad smell emanating from the toilets is understood as a common cause of illness among children.

and free of debris for the future installation of sewerage systems (see Map 3).

Since the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM) installed metered electricity most houses in Ivory Park have access to electricity. It is a system which requires that units of electricity be paid for in advance by residents at the local ESCOM office. A meter box located in each shack registers the number of available units and is updated by the owner once payments have been made.

Along with the individual plots and roads, which were set out by town-planners, some areas of Ivory Park were set aside for schools and churches. During the period of my research a high-school was being built adjacent to the Angola section which opened a few weeks after I had left the area. Prior to this children from Ivory Park were forced to walk to a school in the adjacent township of Tembisa. Whilst a few of the main roads have been tarred since 1991, the roads are generally still sand roads. Water erosion has resulted in the emergence of a large number of ditches and pot-holes which forces those in a car to drive exceptionally slowly and those on foot to walk cautiously.

Individual yards in Angola section are generally well-kept and maintained. Many yards have gardens in the front. In those plots which did not have a garden the ground surrounding the shacks or houses was swept daily. The smooth sand surrounding each house was generally only disturbed by groups of children who had claimed

this space as their playground. No places had specifically been set aside as playing areas for children and they usually played their games in the streets in front of their own houses or in these neatly-kept yards of their family or neighbours.

Research Methods

I was first introduced to Ivory Park when I accompanied a friend of mine, Elizabeth Shabalala, to the funeral of one of her neighbour's kin. Elizabeth had been living in Ivory Park with her children since its inception in 1990. On the day of my visit, she met me in Midrand and together we drove into Ivory so that I was not forced to negotiate the unknown streets alone. Having spent the day at the funeral, we then drove back to her house where I met her family and neighbours for the first time. I subsequently went back to visit her on a number of occasions and became familiar with her immediate neighbourhood.

During these visits we had numerous discussions about how Elizabeth tried to save money to build a brick house. Whilst she had applied for a government housing subsidy she felt that she simply couldn't wait for what she saw as an inevitably long and bureaucratic process of housing delivery and Elizabeth felt she needed to try and build a house (or at least one room) by herself. I was intrigued by how a single mother with three children, who earned a salary of R1 500 per month, would go about building a house for herself. These observations had sparked my anthropological interests in the

problems of housing delivery. When I discussed the possibility of doing research on housing in Ivory Park with Elizabeth, she agreed that it could be feasible given the importance of housing to many people living in the area.

Elizabeth agreed to let me live with her for the duration of my research. Due to academic constraints I was only able to be in the field for one month, from mid June until mid July 1997. However, I was able to go back for a number of follow-up visits in the months that followed. Whist this can be considered a exceptionally short period of anthropological fieldwork, it was nevertheless, very intense.

For the duration of my fieldwork I shared a bedroom with Elizabeth and her two younger children, whilst her elder son slept in another room of their three-roomed shack. Elizabeth kindly gave me her bed to sleep in while she and her two children slept on a mattress on the floor. In mid winter temperatures in Ivory Park frequently dropped below freezing at night. Because it was too cold to walk outside to urinate, a bucket was placed in the corner of the room where we would relieve ourselves during the night.

Although living in such close confines was difficult for all of us, this experience gave me a real sense of what life in Ivory Park was like and an awareness of how the lack of adequate housing affected the daily lives of people and its associated discomforts. Such insights would not have been possible had I simply commuted into the

settlement each day Our close friendship and many conversations which lasted late into the night gave me an invaluable insight into the issues which were important and significant in her life and those of other women living in Ivory Park. Living with Elizabeth in her shack enabled me to engage with the residents of Angola section as a participant: I experienced the cold floors, the bucket toilets, the need to heat water in order to wash, the wind and dust which are a constant part of life.. It was this that many informants commented on and saw as being important.

Before my research could commence, I was required to get permission from the leader of Angola Section, Stanley Krotz, to carry out the interviews. Each section of Ivory Park had elected a leader who would represent them in meetings with the local municipal council. The process by which a leader was elected was simple. Each street in Angola would elect one representative who would all form part of an 'executive committee'. From this group a leader and deputy leader would be elected. On the second evening I was in Ivory Park, Elizabeth took me to Stanley's house where I was introduced to him and his wife. I explained the reason for my being in Ivory Park and that my research was part of the requirements of my degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was pleased that I had actually decided to come and live in Ivory Park as he too felt that this would enable me to better understand what it was like for people living in the area. He promised to arrange what he termed a 'community meeting' to ask the people of Angola section if my request to conduct research was acceptable to them.

The following evening a meeting was called. A person with a loud hailer walked up and down the streets of Angola calling for people to congregate on a nearby street corner. Although it was cold and already dark, approximately forty residents gathered at the designated area. Stanley Krotz had a prior engagement and was unable to attend. In his absence Ester Masilela, the deputy leader of the section, convened the meeting. It was in this context that I was introduced to the residents, given an opportunity to explain my research, and to ask them whether or not it was acceptable to them that I do research in the area. While I spoke, explaining that I was going to be talking to the single women, and discussing the reasons for my research, Elizabeth translated for the benefit of those unable to follow in English. Ester then asked the meeting if anyone had any questions to ask me or any objections to me being there. When it was clear that there were no objections I was told by Ester that I was welcome to do my research. I thanked the people who had come to the meeting and remained behind with Elizabeth to speak to some of the residents who wanted to introduce themselves to me.

During the period of my research, my host, Elizabeth acted as my research assistant and accompanied me to all the interviews conducted. As I was unable to speak the variety of local languages used in the township, Elizabeth also acted as my interpreter whenever an informant did not feel comfortable speaking in English.

Participant observation is a research methodology which is the defining feature of social anthropology although now no longer exclusive to it. It is a method which allows the researcher to establish a rapport with a community[6] and thus get close enough to allow people to feel comfortable with their intrusion (Bernard 1995:136-7). Living in Ivory Park for the duration of my research gave me - and my research - a degree of legitimacy within the community and enabled the people of Angola section to get to know me as I could them. It also allowed me to observe day-to-day social processes and interactions among people which provided more subtle kinds of information which does not emerge from formal interview situations.

During fieldwork I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty five women who considered themselves to be the head of their households. Generally they were chosen by Elizabeth who knew many of her neighbours and was able to draw up a list of names of single mothers who she felt we should talk to. My interviewees were not, however, restricted to this list. As my presence and purpose in Angola was generally well-known even women not known to Elizabeth would stop us as we walked to or from an interview and would ask if we would interview them. This happened frequently and I would always make an appointment to speak to them at a later date.

[6] I use the term 'community' advisedly in this chapter. Ramphele and Thornton (1988) have argued that one cannot assume that 'communities' exist *a priori* and that their existence within certain historic and political contexts must be demonstrated rather than assumed. In chapter three I examine how the notion of 'community' is developed by the residents in Ivory Park.

The interviews were generally conducted in the evenings, when Elizabeth arrived home from work, and over the week-ends. Semi-structured interviewing, according to Bernard (1995:15), allows the interviewer to direct the interview broadly, yet is flexible enough to allow the informant to talk about issues which might not have been asked about directly. During the first part of the interview survey-type demographic information was gathered about the head of the household and all other household members Once I had this basic information I would draw a kinship diagram of the household. I was able to extend the diagram during the interview by establishing the relationships between that particular household and its extended family living elsewhere.

My subsequent questions were structured around two main themes. The first concerned the reasons why these women had decided to come to Ivory Park, where they had lived previously, and what it was like for them living in the informal settlement. The second theme was directed towards establishing how they had built the shack (or house) that they were currently living in. Questions directed to explaining this second theme attempted to establish the social networks which they had drawn on to help them build. It was also at this point that I would ask them how they planned to build a brick house and ascertained their ideas about the government housing subsidy. I also gave all the informants the opportunity to bring up additional issues which they felt were important.

From these thirty five women I chose five informants who were willing to speak to me again for more in-depth life history interviews. Bozzoli (1985:90) has argued that oral histories and the collection of biographies enables a researcher to evaluate the impact of structural social forces on people's lives and to show how these have informed individual subjective experiences over time. This kind of approach is particularly useful when examining the common experiences of women who can often be excluded from more formal historical analysis. According to Bozzoli, the collection of life-histories allows the researcher to uncover the unique experiences of women's lives which can transcend or inform a broader class or regional analysis (*ibid:90*). This was an extremely useful approach in Ivory Park as it allowed me to establish detailed accounts of how these women's lives had unfolded prior to them coming to Ivory Park. While the detail gathered in life-histories generally illustrates the uniqueness of people's lives it was through comparing these five life-histories that I was able to draw out common trends which were noticeable in them all.

Chapter Outline

I begin my thesis, in chapter two, by situating my study of house-building, gender and the cultural significance of homes in the broader context of literature on development and housing. In particular I examine the two main approaches to housing delivery generally, and their applicability to South Africa. These can be broadly characterised as the 'top-down' or 'developer-driven'

approach and the 'bottom-up', self-help and incremental approach. More recent housing programmes have favoured the latter approach because it is assumed that this allows people to direct their own development. This approach is also thought to give households a degree of flexibility as they are able to extend and expand their housing units in ways which accommodate cultural ideas about housing and space. This is not deemed possible in standardising top-down development schemes.

Chapter two also investigates the various assumptions which informs these approaches: for example, notions of 'participation' and 'empowerment' which are associated with incremental schemes. By examining the anthropological literature on gender and households I problematise the assumptions which inform this 'bottom-up' approach. I show how incremental schemes prejudice single mothers who simply do not have the resources to expand or extend a site-and-service stand. In addition, I show how residents of Ivory Park had rejected these in favour of a more top-down or developer-driven approach. Despite earlier critiques of the top-down approach residents - in particularly women household heads - saw it as the only viable means of gaining access to housing.

In chapter three I elaborate further on the relationship between the nature of households and the process of house-building. I examine the dynamics of women headed households and explore the various options available to them. Because of the specific questions which I wanted to examine my research did not examine male-headed

households and I am thus unable to make any systematic statistical comparisons between different categories or types of households. I trace the various stages of house-building and show what kinds of resources single mothers draw upon in this process. I show that they are able to draw extensively on extended family and neighbourly networks in the building of their initial shack as well as the later stages of extending and consolidating it. However, I argue that these kinship and neighbourly networks are not adequate if a woman wishes to build a brick house. Unlike a shack, which can be erected relatively cheaply, a brick house requires financial resources which those networks are unable to provide. Moreover, I show that women-headed households severely lack the capacity to save financially for building or extending brick structures. Whilst there were not many women who had been able to finish, or even start, building a brick house, the fact that almost all the women I interviewed had extended and consolidated their shacks illustrates the importance to them and their families of establishing a sturdy structure in which to secure a home.

Chapter four examines the social and cultural significance of a house for the single mothers in Ivory Park. I look at Bourdieu's examination of the Kabyle house, where he argues that the house reflects the social and cultural ideas present in society (1969). His work discusses specifically the kinds of internal spatial arrangements which one finds in an Algerian house and he argues that the composition of space within a house is symbolic of broader cultural ideas of gender roles and fertility.

Following from Bourdieu, more recent studes have also pointed to the house as being more than simply a physical structure (Carstens and Hugh-Jones 1995). Carsten and Hugh-Jones, however, emphasis the cultural significance of the house itself rather than just the internal lay out of space. They argue that a house and a house structure can both reveal and hide a person's identity (1995). It is within the context of this literature that the final part of this report investigates the house in Ivory Park as a means of symbolically constituting both a personal and collective identity.

By tracing life-histories I show how owning a house in Ivory Park became a way in which a personal identity could be constituted and developed. I show how these women converged on Oakmoor Station in Tembisa where they would wait to be given a plot on which to build their shack. This common experience and shared history at Oakmoor was later drawn on to establish and define a sense of community in Angola section of Ivory Park. It was also the common desire to own a home and build a house for their children which motivated them to consolidate their shacks and establish their homes. In addition to this, however, I argue that the house is fundamental as a site in which the people of Angola section shape and direct their identity.

The conclusion draws together and summarises the central arguments which the research report has made looking specifically at

themes of 'empowerment' and development and how they tie into broader questions of culture and identity.

Chapter Two

Contesting Housing Policy: Development Planning, Gender and Households

This chapter aims to situate gender and housing within the broader processes of development evident in most of the postcolonial (formerly 'Third World') countries. I explore two overarching themes. First the kinds of policy discourses and approaches which underlie and guide the planning and construction of houses, as well as the way in which they either accommodate or ignore female household heads as the recipients of planning. In this regard I examine the South African government's White Paper on housing and show how it is informed by global development discourse. Second, I explore the concerns in the literature on housing and development *vis-a-vis* the complex nature of households, their structure, boundaries and characteristics.

Within the context of housing delivery in South Africa, I examine a particular housing project adjacent to my fieldwork site and show how housing projects are contested and negotiated by the recipients

of development. I show how residents in Ivory Park, especially women household heads, recognise the problems of incremental housing projects and simply refused to have site-and-service houses built in their area. The significance of the size and shape of a house which this contestation highlights is examined in the last part of the chapter.

General Approaches to Housing Delivery

I will begin with an examination of the various approaches taken by states, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and international funding agencies to housing and housing delivery. Robbins (1989:57) has argued that in order to understand the process of housing delivery and the 'culture of housing' we cannot simply look at the house as an isolated entity. We must examine the kind of international aid being given or used in house production, the economic priorities of the particular national government, as well as the dynamics within the local context.

Initial development programmes focused on delivery which was directed by the state or international aid organisations. The content of development was generally defined by the state and not by the recipients themselves. In the 1980s, when it was clear to development planners, Aid agencies and national governments that these methods had not been entirely successful, this top-down, 'technocratic' approach was questioned and its failure was thought to be a result of the beneficiaries not having any voice in their own

development (Nelson and Wright 1995). From the 1980s we see a shift from these 'top-down' approaches to ones which attempted to bring in the 'beneficiaries' of development (Nelson and Wright 1995:3). These 'bottom-up' or 'people-driven' approaches took the form of self-help schemes or site-and-service projects in housing delivery programmes.

'Developer-Driven' or 'Top-Down' Strategies.

In the early stages of development interventions, housing programs focused overtly on the modernist idea that macro-level economic growth would necessarily filter down and bring with it other improvements such as housing (Drakakis-Smith 1981:30). Housing delivery at this point was not, therefore, considered an immediate target for investment by local governments. There is, however, little evidence that simple economic growth does, in fact, result in the general improvement of people's lives. Market-driven forces have generally had the opposite effect - entrenching already existing income disparities within specific areas and benefiting urban centers to the detriment of rural areas (*ibid.*:32).

Later arguments by developers retained an underlying economic rationale but reversed the assumption. They understood the provision of housing as a means through which broader economic growth could be effected rather than simply being the outcome of such growth (*ibid:34*). In other words, the governments of some postcolonial countries were encouraged by development planners to

invest actively in the housing sector as this could have potential economic spin-offs of its own. Among other things, the provision of housing would encourage urbanisation which was seen as central to modernising agendas. Housing projects could also be a source of employment opportunities for unskilled labour (*ibid:34*). The net result, through these multiple spin-off effects, would be to improve the national economy as a whole. In addition, governments assumed that one of the benefits of improved housing would be an increased productivity of the urban poor through providing greater personal privacy, increased health and a subsequent rise in people's mental and physical capacity for work (*ibid:34*). Providing housing for the homeless, according to this logic, was an avenue towards greater economic prosperity for those being housed as well as for the country more broadly. The implicit assumption underlying this approach is that the inadequate housing had an adverse effect on the economic productivity of the urban poor and that improved housing would rectify this situation.

Postcolonial governments developed a number of policies to try and deal with increased urbanisation and the subsequent demand for housing which it engendered. One response was simply reactionary and attempted to merely try and stop the flow of people into urban areas (*ibid:46*). This was the first approach taken in South Africa: the introduction of Influx Control mechanisms was an attempt by the government to do exactly this. Whilst these controls were harshly enforced, they were nevertheless, in part, evaded as

was demonstrated by the continuing movement of people into town ar' he development of informal squatter settlements.

Policies advocating increased urbanisation, with the focus on building up various sectors of the economy, often neglected actual housing and urban planning until a stage was reached where crisis control was necessary. It was at this point that political motivations for urban planning became apparent. This was very clear during the 1980s in apartheid South Africa. It was assumed that the great mass of urban poor had a potential for political radicalism which could severely threaten the national government. In South Africa, this perceived political threat was played out in the 'upgrading' of urban townships by the National Security Management System programme which understood upgrading in the 1980s as a strategy to neutralise the political radicalism in the townships (Friedman 1993). In other words, controlling and directing housing delivery began to be seen as a means of maintaining the status quo, or as a political barganing tool which could be used by powerful ruling elites (Drakakis-Smith 1981:35). Increased international funding for housing projects gave postcolonial states even greater leverage to neutralise any possible dissent within their national boundaries.

Another alternative, which many postcolonial governments attempted, was to look to the industrialised West for solutions (Drakakis-Smith 1981:39). They saw the answer in high-rise residential apartment blocks. In order for them to build these, expertise and building materials were often imported from Western

countries. This generally led to housing units being expensive and therefore out of reach for the very poor. In addition to this, high-rise blocks were often incompatible with local cultural ideas about space (*ibid:46*). This resulted in the forced disruption or alteration of people's social and cultural arrangements. These housing blocks would be placed at the edges of the city and thus increase the costs of commuting to places of employment and making them unaffordable for the majority of the urban poor. Although not with high-rise architecture, this was also a problem evident in Apartheid planning too with townships like Soweto and Tembisa being planned and developed in areas marginal to the city center. This particular type of housing policy would become known as top-down or 'developer-driven' and their general failure lead developers and urban planners to rethink the solution to housing delivery.

'People-Driven' or 'Bottom-Up' Approaches

The 1970s saw a fundamental shift in the way in which development was conceptualised. Rather than leaving the responsibility of development and housing delivery in the hands of national governments, a new approach emerged which would attempt to harness the resources of the people themselves who needed housing (Drakakis-Smith 1981:47). This approach has been labeled in a variety of ways, initially known as 'self-help' or 'indigenous' and later 'people-driven' or 'incremental housing': the latter being the term currently used in South African housing discourse (Thomlinson 1996:8). The focus was primarily on 'participation' with the hope of

including those 'marginalised' groups that had been ignored in 'top-down' approaches - such as women (Nelson and Wright 1995:3).

A number of assumptions underpinned these 'bottom-up' approaches. Developers saw self-help alternatives as a cheaper and more effective way of housing the urban poor. According to these approaches, after the initial site and service infrastructure is provided, a house can be built up and expanded as the resources or needs of the household allow. Unlike the previous 'top-down' strategies, 'bottom up' approaches were also the 'cheaper' option as it managed to release local governments from being solely responsible for providing adequate housing by utilising the energy and labour power of the poor themselves (Moser 1987:5).

A consequence of this approach was that the urban poor - those least likely to be able to afford this hou ing - were now having to find the resources to pay for it themselves. Moser (1987:5) argues that the recipients of these schemes became doubly exploited - both at work in a capitalist economy as well as within the self-help scheme (Moser 1987:5). Yet this economic critique of 'bottom-up' programs seems to have had little impact on development schemes which still favoured this particular approach in the 1980s and early 1990s. One of the reasons for its continuing to find favour lies in the fact that from the early 1970s the World Bank and other United Nations organisations endorsed this kind of policy and made funds available specifically for these types of programs (Drakakis-Smith 1981 ; Moser 1987). Despite these seemingly populist origins and goals, 'self-help'

schemes have thus become part of highly organised government-driven development programmes.

Another reason why this kind of housing strategy remained popular and eventually became entrenched was that it became clear that the 'urban poor' were not a simple homogenous group with the same needs and values. These differences had to be taken into account in development programs. Self-help housing schemes were justified as a method which allowed enough flexibility to accommodate these differences (Low 1988:15). In a study done in Cuba, Low argued that uniform housing could not adequately respond to individual aspirations or individual family needs and changing social circumstances. The self-help option allowed a degree of variability in spatial arrangements which was necessary for changing family environments (Low 1988: 15-22).

A study by McDowell (1989) also draws out the relationship between culture and housing on a Native American reserve in Canada. In the post World War II period, driven by the modernist assumption that change was synonymous with progress, development agencies built rows of prefabricated rooms to house Native American families (*ibid:47*). When the walls separating the rooms began being torn down by these families, the developers simply assumed that Native Americans were unable to be 'modernised'. This attempt at consolidated town planning failed to take into account native ideas about family, space and social groups (*ibid:52*). Planners and developers did not recognise that the social, psychological and

spiritual ideas informing notions of community were 'reinforced through symbolic spatial ordering of the community' and emphasised clustering family groups in particular ways. A self-help approach, according to McDowell (1989:54), would have allowed this group the freedom to construct and control the development of their settlement according to their cultural ideas of family, land, sacredness and so forth. Not only did such an approach seem to be the practical solution, but it also allowed space for cultural expression and the construction of a house which reflected the owner's identity.

This participation in development was assumed by developers. Indeed authors such as Low (1988) and McDowell(1989) argued that these projects led to personal 'empowerment' as they allowed people to define and determine their own space and environment. The notion of empowerment emerged in conjunction with the idea of participation. It has informed the broader development agenda from the late 1970s and remains as a powerful force driving development today (Nelson and Wright 1995). By allowing people to become involved, and participate, in their own development it allowed the recipients of development a degree of power to define and direct development programmes. Self-help or 'people-driven' approaches would fit into this philosophy.

People's response to self-help projects could thus reflect their own creativity and individualism as well as being a culturally acceptable alternative. This had not really been an option in the previous, state-controlled, 'top-down' process as the people on the ground had

had no voice in the kind of housing or spatial arrangements which they were given. A problem with notions of 'empowerment' is the reification of 'power'. It is assumed that power is an 'object' which could simply be handed over to people who would then be empowered (Nelson and Wright 1995). Even within self-help programmes, there is no recognition of the variant power relations in the social and political interaction between people and that groups are not simply homogenous and lacking complex power structures (Nelson and Wright 1995:10; Thomas 1992:138). For example, national governments or developers assume that all households are equally capable of extending their homes and thus 'expressing' their cultural identities. According to Nelson and Wright (1995) people are only empowered when they are given space to negotiate, define or direct the terms and direction of development and when the unequal power relationships between developers and recipients, and amongst recipients themselves are recognised and overcome. One must thus critically evaluate whether these self-help projects really do empower people to make decisions about development. In the following discussion I show how these general ideas are reflected in South African housing policy and problematise the underlying notions of empowerment by looking at a particular case-study in Ebony Park - adjacent to my primary fieldwork site.

Housing Delivery in South Africa

Within the South African context, the policy issues which concern housing have been vigorously contested and debated. This is despite

the recent emphasis of the post-apartheid government on a negotiated or 'consensus-based policy-making process' in which all parties could reach an agreement and thus maximise the success of future programmes (Thomlinson 1996:7). The National Government's White Paper on housing which outlines general policy and sets out the agenda for housing delivery in South Africa, relates in specific ways to the broader intellectual paradigms underlying housing development as I have outlined above.

The history of government approaches to housing in South Africa is obviously squarely framed within the strict confines of general apartheid policy and of the legislative boundaries of the Group Areas Act in particular. The Act ensured that the four officially defined race groups in South Africa were not to share residential space. Blacks, Coloureds and Indians were allowed into industrial areas to work but it was assumed that they had a rural 'home' to go back to. Mabin (1990) shows that negative housing policies and the lack of planning or house-building up till the mid 1980s was a concerted attempt by the South African government to keep people out of the cities. Urban planning was based on an inaccurate model of urbanisation which assumed the permanent movement of people from rural to urban areas. Circular migrancy and the Group Areas Act, however, ensured that movement into and out of cities happened with regularity. Without taking into account the social dynamics which maintained migrancy - a normal feature of everyday life in South Africa - housing policy over the last thirty years was inevitably inadequate (Mabin 1990:315).

In the late 1970s the South African state ostensibly played the major role in housing delivery for the poor (SAIRR 1979:459). At this point the South African government was principally opposed to incremental or self-help housing schemes which were becoming popular in general development policy in post-colonial countries. According to the South African Institute of Race Relations, their position was as follows:

> Debate on the necessity and desirability of self-help housing schemes continued. The Department, in its report, stated that this idea seemed to have gained ground and warned against it. The mass of low-paid unskilled workers could not make a significant contribution to the provision of their own housing' (SAIRR 1979:462)

Whilst Mabin (1990:311) warns that we should always be wary of the discrepancy between official government policy and what actually happened on the ground, it is interesting to track the changes in the general policy trends of housing delivery in South Africa. In 1979 the Riekert Commission on housing was established to examine the reasons for the shortages of houses for black Africans (SAIRR 1979:407). The recommendations of the Commission signaled a critical shift in the assumptions of policy thinking. It suggested that the state should play less of a role in housing and development and that the main impetus should come from the private sector - especially the building of houses in black townships (SAIRR 1979:407).

This shift is maintained into the early 1980s with the national government calling on employers to help their employees with either loans or building materials to build houses (SAIRR 1980:310). Government committees were set up to investigate 'alternative' housing such as site-and-service structures and core-housing to deal with the increasing housing 'crisis' amongst urban blacks (SAIRR 1980:311). By 1982, yet another commission - the Viljoen Committee - advised that the government should assist with the:

> 'controlled and properly supervised self-help and owner-builder participation should be encouraged and accepted as a normal part of the housing process' (SAIRR 1982:290).

Incremental and self-help housing schemes remained entrenched through the 1980s and into the 1990s. It was assumed that every individual should take responsibility for their own housing needs and that the government's role in the process should be restricted to the provision of basic infrastructure and services (SAIRR 1983:268). This policy was firmly opposed by the United Democratic Front and by the Building Federation of South Africa who argued at this point that self-help, incremental, schemes may look good in theory but in practice it would probably 'degenerate into the construction of dangerous, badly-built, slum structures' (SAIRR 1984:378). These could only offer a short-term solution rather than fundamentally solve the housing problem.

With the abolition of the Pass Laws and Influx Control in 1986, black urban housing in townships was still in crisis. Inadequate policy and the reluctance of the government to spend money on low-cost housing had led to a severe backlog and it was estimated that approximately 1.8 million houses needed to be built from 1985 to 1990 to deal with this (SAIRR 1986:355). Not only were incremental schemes endorsed, but one of the strategies used to deal with this was to 'accept lower standards' *vis-a-vis* housing, thus bringing low-cost housing in South Africa 'in line with other Third-world experiences' (SAIRR 1986:362).

By 1989 the government heeded calls by opposition parties to identify land for site-and-service schemes (SAIRR 1988:197). Informal settlements were now legally recognised and land was designated for informal housing. The principles of delivery for the urban poor were still based on serviced sites rather than housing units with the government playing only a minimal role (SAIRR 1989/90; 1991/92).

In October 1994, just after the first democratic election, a National Housing Summit was held at Botshabelo in the Free State. All parties involved in the housing process were invited to attend and give recommendations to form the basis for a new housing White Paper. All the participants accepted incremental housing in principle (SAIRR 1995/6:336). However, over the last two years the government minister of housing has begun to question the viability of this

approach and to encourage the government to play a more central role in the provision of completed housing structures.

The general trends in international development and housing policy which I outlined earlier are clearly evident in the South African case. The modernist legacy, which informed much of the development through the 1980s and into the 1990s, is also evident in the South African policy document which states:

> The fundamental requirement to address the challenge [of housing delivery] is the economic growth and employment to be created through the comprehensive programme of economic reconstruction and development embarked upon by government[7]

The document furthermore declares that: 'it is... apparent that the housing sector has a potentially enormous role to play in the revitalisation of the South African economy'[8]. In addition to this economic motivation for the delivery of housing, the new Constitution places a positive constitutional obligation on the state to provide 'access to adequate housing' and says that it 'should take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right'.[9] According to this initial policy document the less self-sufficient a household is the more the state is obligated to support such a household to realise this right[10].

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[7] White Paper: Government Gazette No. 16178, 1994 pg. 20
[8] Ibid, pg. 7
[9] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 S 26(1) and (2)
[10] White Paper: Government Gazette No. 16178, 1994 pg. 21

So, whilst the government is obliged to create conditions conducive to effective housing delivery, it is obliged to do so only within the limits of its available resources and budget constraints. The policy document makes it clear that the government cannot afford to provide complete subsidisation. A simple 'top-down' strategy is thus impossible. In addition, this kind of approach was rejected by all the parties involved in the process whereby the national housing policy was negotiated as it was assumed that 'bottom-up' strategies or 'people-centered development' would encourage local participation and necessarily lead to economic empowerment.

> Government is committed to a development process driven from within communities encouraging local initiative and social compacts aimed at equipping and empowering people to drive their own economic empowerment...[G]overnment should help communities mobilise to satisfy their own housing needs in a way that maximizes the involvement of the community and the private sector and leads to the transfer of skills and to economic empowerment of members of the community[11]

In addition to cultural flexibility (Low 1988 and McDowell 1989) notions of local participation and economic empowerment, which necessitate far less state-directed development, seemed to be a convenient mechanism to justify incremental housing strategies in the South African context. In spite of the criticisms of this approach by newly elected ministers who argued that it was simply another

[11] Ibid. pg. 23-24

'toilets in the veld' approach (a derogatory reference to the policy pursued by the previous government), incremental or self-help housing still remained a central tenet in the policy (Adler and Oelofse 1996:134).

In South Africa these kinds of problems were recognised by NGOs. The National Housing Forum (NHF) was established in 1992 to deal with a huge housing backlog, especially amongst black South Africans who did not have access to housing in urban areas (Rust and Rubenstein 1996). The aim of this NGO was to draw together the various parties who had interests in housing, to draft policy and to pull together a fragmented and racially separated housing department. Site-and-service or 'bottom-up' projects had characterised much of South African housing programs in the 1980s and early 1990s (SAIRR 1988/9:187, 1991/2:346). In South Africa the NHF began to question the suitability of this approach, especially where the majority of the recipients were generally not in a position to afford the costs of incremental houses. The alternative, a state subsidy scheme, which was being suggested in 1993/94, was rejected by the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) as being another attempt by the Apartheid government to 'impose its own view on communities of how black people should live by insisting on standard sites and individual ownership'[12]. The NHF, on the other hand, recognised the kinds of problems inherent in incremental schemes and lobbied for a higher standard of housing than site-and-service schemes allowed (SAIRR 1993/4:339).

[12] Comment from SANCO cited in Race Relations Survey 1993/94 pg. 338

Despite the criticisms from SANCO, the ANC-led government did indeed institute a state-controlled subsidy scheme. The subsidy however, given the finite resources of the state, is a limited one. It is based on the idea that the state's contribution will be supplemented by personal savings. The eligibility criteria again compels one to examine the implicit notions of household which informs this system. Eligibility is based on a 'joint spouse monthly income' of up to R3 500[13]. The fundamental principle informing the subsidies is the idea that people are willing and able to save money to supplement the subsidy. No provision is made for female-headed households which find it very difficult, if not impossible, to save money every month given the additional responsibility of raising children or supporting an extended family.

The Concept of Household and the Problems with Self-Help Schemes.

As in the case studies outlined by Low (1988) and McDowell (1989) the underlying assumption of self-help or incremental projects is that they are flexible enough to allow the people themselves to build on as their requirements changed. In accordance with the general housing policy put forward in the South African White Paper the schemes also encouraged local 'participation' which 'empowered' people to build as they saw fit.

[13] White Paper: Government Gazette No. 16178, 1994 pg. 46

It is if one looks at the nature of households that the problems in this approach become obvious. Firstly the assumption that a household consists of a nuclear unit is implicit in the spatial plans. It assumes that a household will start off relatively small and then expand. Incremental housing is thought to allow for this expansion but does not take into account that a household might already, by the time it needs housing, consist of a much larger group of people who all need to be accommodated.

In addition to this, there are problems which relate specifically to women-headed households. Machado (1987) argues that one must examine the position of women within a broader economic environment. She alerts us to the fact that low-income groups are not simply homogenous entities and that women-headed units have particular needs. It is extremely difficult to save money when one's resources are limited and are generally consumed with the cost of child-care.

Problematising the notion of household as well as uncovering the variation and complexity of household types reveals the limitations of the incremental approach and provides a critique of the notion of empowerment. It was through an examination of the role of women and gender in development that a critical examination of the household as an *a priori* and unproblematic category would emerge.

An often explicit assumption made by developers *vis-a-vis* housing concerns the existence and nature of households. In an examination of household and community in Africa, Guyer (1981) has argued that

'the household' has been used as a unit of analysis because it is a clear and seemingly definable unit. The reason why it has been so pervasive, according to Harris (1981), is that it has various images associated with it. A household, for example, is understood as existing as a separate and private space within a broader economic sphere. In addition to this household units are generally thought to correspond to individual, or nuclear, families and these terms are often used interchangeably (Harris 1981:138). Furthermore the relations within households are defined in terms of kinship and are interpreted culturally as 'natural' and therefore also universal (*ibid:138*). The idea of a household as an autonomous unit, which tends towards self-sufficiency, justifies treating it as a economically isolable unit (*ibid:141*).

The idea of a household, associated with a nuclear family, has historical and cultural roots in the context of European society (Harris 1981:137). Yet the focus on 'household' as an analytical concept in African society has inhibited, or even prevented, a broader analysis based on a variety of possible domestic arrangements (Guyer 1981:99). By focusing on the relationships within a household, the relationships between them are subsequently not given sufficient emphasis (Guyer 1981, Harris 1981, Ross 1996). For example, Guyer (1981) has argued that in West Africa extended lineage groups may be more useful as a unit of analysis. In addition, the importance of relationships between older and younger men as well as those between men and women are hidden by an *a priori* use of household as the primary unit of analysis (*ibid*:101).

More recent studies on households in the western Cape in South Africa suggest that we are seeing a move away from an extended family amongst black Africans, to a smaller and more 'western' style nuclear family in urban areas (Amoateng 1997). Amoateng's definition of 'nuclear family', however, is a rather large category, including the 'traditional nuclear' unit encompassing a married couple and their children, as well as 'mother-child' units, 'father-child' units and married couples without children (1997:30). Whilst problematising a Marxist linear notion of changing family structures - from extended to nuclear through the process of modernisation - he fails to render any convincing argument as to the reasons for this apparent change.

The need by developers to create discrete categories, for example 'household' or in fact 'female-headed household', and the use of these categories to generate statistical data, has the effect of rendering possible variations static and unchanging over time. Koen (1998) and Russell (1998) severely criticised Amoateng's text. They both argue that statistical works of this nature tends to stop the clock at a particular moment in time and are therefore unable to show how family units and households change over time. These domestic patterns, according to Russell (1998 :176), only become clear through studies which are participative and involve long-term immersion in a particular society. In an examination of migrant labour in Lesotho, for example, Murray (1981) alerts us to the fact that household arrangements change over time and in ways that can not always be

predictable. Any household analysis, therefore, must take this inevitable change into account. Statistical studies, such as Amoateng's, tend to reify categories and standardise what is essentially a messy reality.

Anthropological studies which problematised the 'natural' existence of clearly defined households point to the possible variation in household types and to how these may change over time. They enable us to grasp the erroneous assumptions of self-help approaches to housing delivery and to assess the impact of these assumptions. One assumption is that the recipients of housing are able to contribute financially to this process by extending a site-and-service or 'incremental' structure at their own expense. Moreover, development projects of this nature largely ignored the gendered relations which are involved in house-building. It is when we examine the position of women within this self-help process that we can begin to notice how, despite its 'cultural sensitivity', it constrains women in particular ways (Chant 1987; Machado 1987). This is especially true in women-headed households. Whilst they might have a degree of autonomy and independence in determining the nature of their dwelling (Chant 1987), one should not lose sight of the economic characteristics of women-headed households (Machado 1987:59).

By examining the position of women within the economy more broadly one will notice that, even if employed, their salaries are generally lower and they have the additional responsibility of child-

care. In other words, the assumption that women are able to contribute financially to extending their houses is often erroneous. Because it often takes women longer to extend their houses, given their other financial commitments and responsibilities, they generally prefer completed dwellings to be offered through state-subsidised development programmes rather than site-and-service projects. By uncovering the gender and household dynamics which affect housing delivery, this argument effectively undermines the general applicability of self-help schemes.

The Contestation of Development in Ebony Park and Ivory Park

The following example of a housing project in Ebony Park in Midrand illustrates this point. In Ebony Park, the area adjacent to where I conducted my research, a self-help scheme was initiated. A number of 'serviced sites' were set out by state planners to house residents who had previously been living in a nearby shack settlement. A single unit with a floor space measuring 3.08m by 4.60m was built on each plot. Each plot measured approximately 16m by 9.60m. The housing unit consisted of a concrete floor, a roof held up by four corner pillars and a toilet with water-borne sewerage. Except for a wall surrounding the toilet area, the unit did not have walls on three sides (see Figure 1). The units were then sold to residents for approximately R400 which would then secure them a small plot and the beginnings of a house which they were then expected to extend themselves (see Figure 1). In order for people to actually live in

their 'houses', they needed to build walls and put in windows and a door. It was then thought that they could build on and expand the house at their own convenience and as their resources allowed.

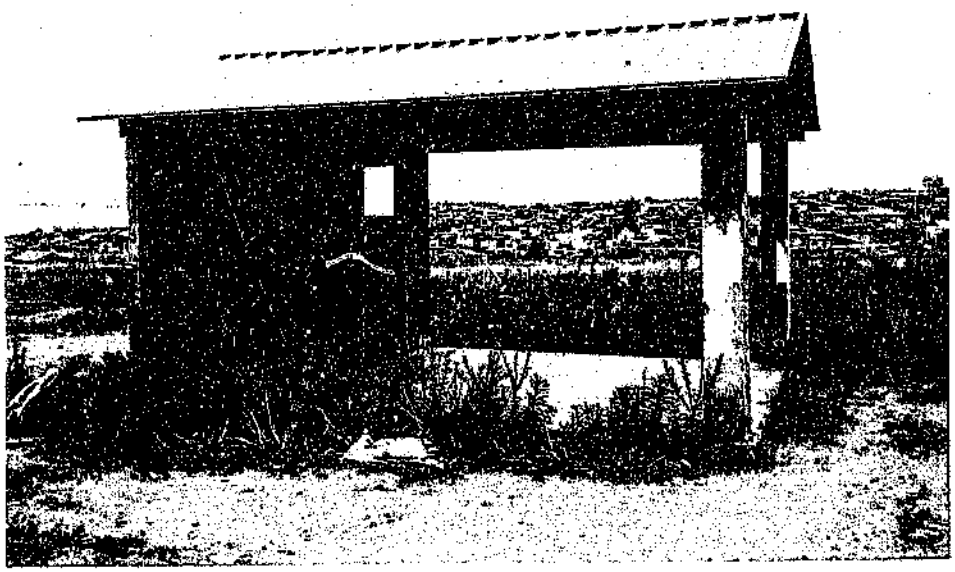


Figure 1.: **An example of a 'serviced' stand in Ebony Park adjacent to Ivory Park**

Being desperate for a home of their own, a number of residents bought these houses. One woman whom I interviewed[14] had been living with her sister-in-law in a neighbouring suburb while she tried to 'complete' her dwelling. Earning a minimal salary, and being a single parent, she had found this process very difficult. Not only did she feel as though she was imposing on her sister-in-law by living in her small yard while doing the building, but the costs of the building materials and builders (as well as the logistics of getting the materials to her house) were more than her salary could provide. She also had two children whom she was supporting but who were living with her mother while she tried to build her house. When I inquired if she was going to bring them to live with her in her new house, she replied by saying that she would like to, but that the space was very small and hardly big enough for one person, let alone her family. She said that she regretted having bought the house despite the fact that she really wanted her own place.

One can see by the example of Ebony Park how a site-and-service or incremental housing project was a way of partially subsidizing housing for these residents. It was also thought to be flexible enough to allow the people themselves to build on as their requirements changed. The planners, however, did not take into account that single parents might not be in a position to complete these dwellings, let alone expand them to include other members of their families. The projected inhabitants, on the other hand, seem to have suffered from no such shortsightedness.

[14] Interview with Fikile - 1 July 1997

This self-help policy was rejected by the residents of the Ivory Park shack settlement. Unlike the residents of Angola Section, who had all arrived in Ivory Park together from Oakmoor, residents of Ebony Park had come from a number of different places at various times from 1994. Not knowing each other, nor having spent time fighting for a specific place to live, made it difficult for them to mobilise against this kind of housing project. Residents of Angola section, however, having shared a history of resistance in Oakmoor[15], were in a position where they could come together as a group and reject this type of housing. Under pressure from these residents, the people living in Angola Section, many of them single mothers, could see how difficult it would be to build up a house of this nature and, in fact, recognised that their current shack-dwellings, while not ideal, were certainly more appropriate for their needs.

In Ivory Park the local government was forced to reconceptualise the nature of housing delivery when it became obvious that people preferred to live in their shacks rather than to buy the Reconstruction and Development Project (RDP) houses which the government was providing.

This kind of incremental project, however, was still in line with the 'negotiated development' which was to characterise much of the development work in South Africa in the 1990s (Friedman 1993). 'Negotiated development' tied into the perceived advantage of self-

[15] I trace this history of struggle in Chapter four

help programmes which assumed that a higher degree of participation necessarily led to local empowerment. Whilst these programmes may seem to be less obviously standardising, they can be just as constraining as top-down approaches in less obvious ways, which I explore in subsequent chapters. Indeed the problems with the incremental approach have been recognised by planners. Consequently housing delivery has become more developer focused and in the case of Ivory Park has returned to a more top-down approach. The housing programme which is now in place is based on a range of 'showhouses' from which residents have been told to choose a house which falls within the financial constraints of the subsidy for which individuals are eligible. This program may limit the choices available to those households which can afford to supplement the subsidy and who wish to build their own house according to their specific design. They are now forced to choose one of four or five options. It does, however, potentially give far greater choice to those households who are unable to save and supplement their subsidy. As I have suggested, this is especially true of women-headed households.

This return to a developer-driven or top-down approach may seem to be a return to earlier development approaches to housing delivery which were assumed to 'disempower' the recipients. This report will argue that whilst this approach does have limitations, it is not necessarily disempowering, especially in the case of single mothers trying to build a house for themselves and their children. In the majority of cases this approach is the only possible option for many

of the single mothers whom I interviewed who do not have the financial resources to save extra money to build a house or to build onto a site-and-service structure.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and compared the two major approaches to housing delivery which emerged within the broader context of development. It has argued that incremental housing policies claim to 'empower' the poor by letting them control and direct their own housing. This approach has been set against an earlier, 'top-down' or state-controlled process, which is understood to stifle this empowerment process and limit cultural and individual expression in house building. I have shown how the recent South African approach is an attempt to combine these two strategies although it still largely emphasises an incremental policy. I have drawn out some of the problems with this approach in the South African context by examining the assumptions implicit in the policy about the nature of households. In the case of Ivory Park, this kind of approach to housing delivery was rejected by the community who recognised the difficulties involved in trying to build on to a basic site-and-service structure.

In the following chapter I will examine more closely the dynamics of house-building and specifically the relationship between the nature of households and the house-building process. In the final chapter I examine the importance of a house as a space within which people

can define and construct an identity. I argue that if housing projects are to be 'empowering' in any meaningful way, it will be through the provision of housing which considers the importance of a house as a means through which cultural ideas about person and identity can be refined and expressed.

Chapter Three

The Nature of Households and the Process of House-building

> I'd like to stay with my kids in my house. I feel that I wish to build a house for them and I wish to have nice things for them in the house while I am [still] alive. And that time when God takes me, I can know that I've gone and I've left my children in a house, with everything. I'd like to make nice things for them but I just don't have power at the moment, but I wish.[16]

Within the context of the literature on the different kinds of development and housing policy outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter examines the specific relationship between women-headed households and the process of house building in Ivory Park. Whilst the study of households in South Africa has traditionally fallen within the ambit of anthropological and sociological research and analysis, the study of the physical process of house-building tends to have been left to social geographers and town planners. The challenge of merging these two bodies of literature has been taken up by development scholars who have uncovered the complexity of household arrangements in an attempt to inform the developmental policies underlying various housing programmes (Moser *et al* 1987).

[16] Interview with Elsie - 13 July 1997

Whilst these studies are informative they have generally taken place in South America and central Africa (Moser 1987; Machado 1987; Nimpuno-Parente 1987 and Chant 1987).

Spiegel (1993) and Bank (1993) argue that there has not been sufficient research which examines the relationship between the nature of the domestic group and housing in the South African context. In an analysis of urban development, Bank (1993:14) argues that a new research agenda should examine the importance of kinship and how ideas about kinship and the family are manipulated in situations of scarce resources. In assessing the gender dynamics in this process, he argues that more research should be directed towards understanding a strong trend towards matrifocality as well as assessing the kinds of resources available to women which are not available to men (Bank 1993:14). Similarly Spiegel (1993) argues that there has been insufficient analysis of the movement of people between urban and rural areas or between domestic units within an urban environment and how this impacts on housing choices.

My own ethnographic material, collected in an informal settlement, will start to fill these gaps in the South African literature and to uncover the dynamics of the process of house-building within the context of women-headed households. In this chapter I argue that even within the broad category 'women-headed household', there is a wide variety of difference in structure and form. This has a significant impact on the kinds of structures household heads can build. I argue that in the initial phases of building and extending a

shack, women household heads are able to draw extensively on neighbourly and kin networks in the process of building. Building a brick house, however, requires financial resources that these local networks are unable to offer. It is only when, and if, women are able to draw on broader economic links outside of Ivory Park that they are able to build brick structures. These arguments build on previous discussions of 'bottom-up' or self-help housing projects which are assumed, by developers, to 'empower' recipients. My study in Ivory Park illustrates that as female household heads, self-help schemes would in fact disempower women who simply would not have the financial or social resources to incrementally extend a brick dwelling.

Household Relationships in Ivory Park.

Anthropological literature has cautioned us against adopting a simplistic view of domestic units. One popular assumption often made about the nature of a household is that it consists of a residential unit housing one family, or 'household', whose members are linked together through kinship ties of marriage and parenthood (Harris 1981; Young 1992). A household is therefore equated with a single, often nuclear, family. Harris (1981) argues, however, that this focus has led to the assumption that both the nuclear family and the 'household' are, in fact, natural and unproblematic categories. Harris problematises the idea that households are 'natural' or universal, and argues that the household has become a very powerful image due to its association with personal, private and domestic space. Similarly,

the image of the household as an autonomous and self-sufficient entity has justified its use as an analytical unit which can be socially and economically isolated.

The challenge of examining the complexity of houscholds, which has been touched on by some anthropological studies, and of establishing how this impacts on the process of house-building, has been taken up by authors practicing in the field of housing delivery and development. By recognising the need to examine the nature of households they are able to inform the policy which underlies government housing programmes. Planners have begun to acknowledge that low-income households are heterogeneous and not necessarily similar in structure. According to Moser (1987:13) the most important type of household structure, other than a nuclear household which she still considers to be primary, are women-headed households (*ibid:13*). These domestic units, headed by women, have their own particular constraints which impact on the housing process. This research has shown that urban planning which is gender-sensitive and which takes into account the variation of household types is essential for the success of any housing programme (Nimpuno-Parente 1987; Moser 1987; Machado 1987).

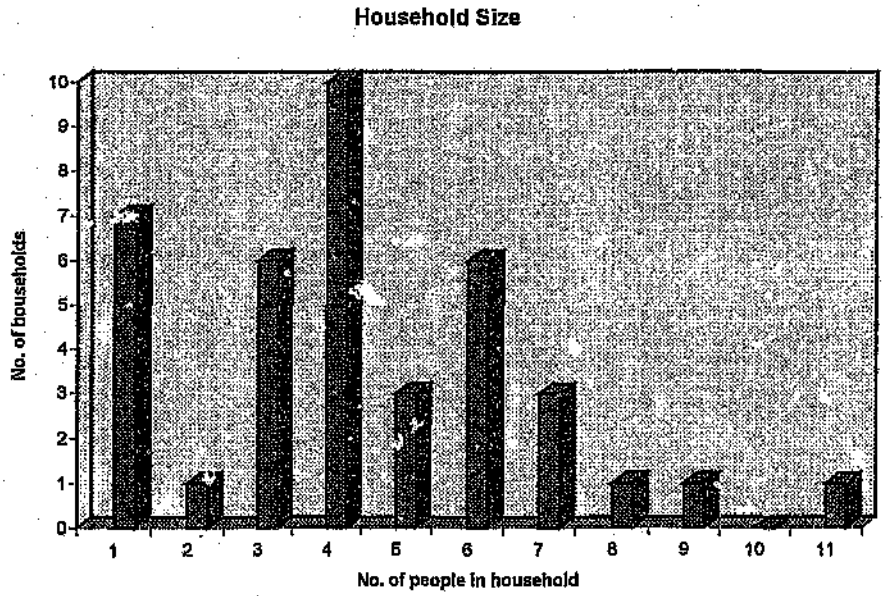
In an examination of the quality of dwellings in Mexico, Chant argues that participation by women in the housing process is a 'critical determinant' of dwelling standards (1987:33). In the study she conducted, the degree of participation was generally determined by the nature of the household to which the woman belonged. The

significant factors which affected dwelling standards were, firstly, the relationship between husband and wife, secondly, a woman's freedom to earn an income and lastly, the degree of authority she had over the allocation of household income (Chant 1987:41). Chant argues that, in the village settlement she studied, the roles of men and women were clearly defined in domestic uni occupied by nuclear families. The lack of income as well as the cultural undervaluing of domestic work within a nuclear household placed women in a position where the quality of life within their houses was generally poorer and determined entirely by men (*ibid*:4). In larger extended units, the division of labour was less marked and the availability of help within the household (especially with childcare) allowed more job choices for women and a greater voice in the allocation of financial resources within the house. In women-headed units, where women have even more scope and autonomy to build adequate housing, the standard of the dwelling unit was noticeably higher (Chant 1987:45). It is in women-headed domestic units that women's participation in housing decisions was greatest and that women were most likely to spend money on their house.

In Ivory Park, my research focused on women-headed households. The existence of this single category, however, tends to hide the large degree of variation that one finds within it and its possible variation over time (Murray 1981:155). Even within the small population I researched this variation was extremely evident. There were single women living alone whose children were living elsewhere; single women living together with their children; widows living either

alone, or with their children or grandchildren; and women who had separated from their husbands and lived with an extended family which, in one instance, spanned five generations. Within my sample of thirty-five women I interviewed, fifteen were single (44 per cent), eight were widowed (23 per cent), nine were separated (27 per cent) and three (9 per cent) were cohabiting. Size also varied greatly and ranged from households with one member to large extended households of eleven members (see Figure 2). The average household size was four members with an average income level of R475. Household income ranged from zero to R2000. These statistics show that women-headed households are far from homogenous. It is thus necessary to examine this variation within households headed by women to understand how it informs the process of house-building.

Figure 2: Graph illustrating variation in sampled household sizes, Angola Section of Ivory Park, June/July 1997.



Variations in Household Relationships

The following case-studies demonstrate how this variation in household composition has directly affected the building process and the type of structure built. Cases 1 and 2 examine the importance of the relationships within households and illustrates the different choices available to women who either live alone (Case 1) or as the heads of large extended families (Case 2). Cases 3 and 4 highlight the importance of the relationships which exist between households, either between neighbours (Case 3) or between the households of kin who are resident elsewhere (Case 4). In both these instances, the existence of these relationships had a direct impact on the women household head's capacity to build or extend her shack dwelling. The final two cases both illustrate the importance of economic relationships extending outwards, into Ivory Park (Case 5) and into the broader economy and working environment (Case 6). For those women who had begun building a brick house or completed one (Case 6), these ties were fundamentally important in assessing the choices which they made *vis-a-vis* housing.

Relationships *Within* Households:

The initial relationships which I examine concern the relationships which exist within households and show how different kinds of intra-household relationships affect the kinds of shelter women are able to build.

Case 1

Margaret: A Single Woman Living Alone.

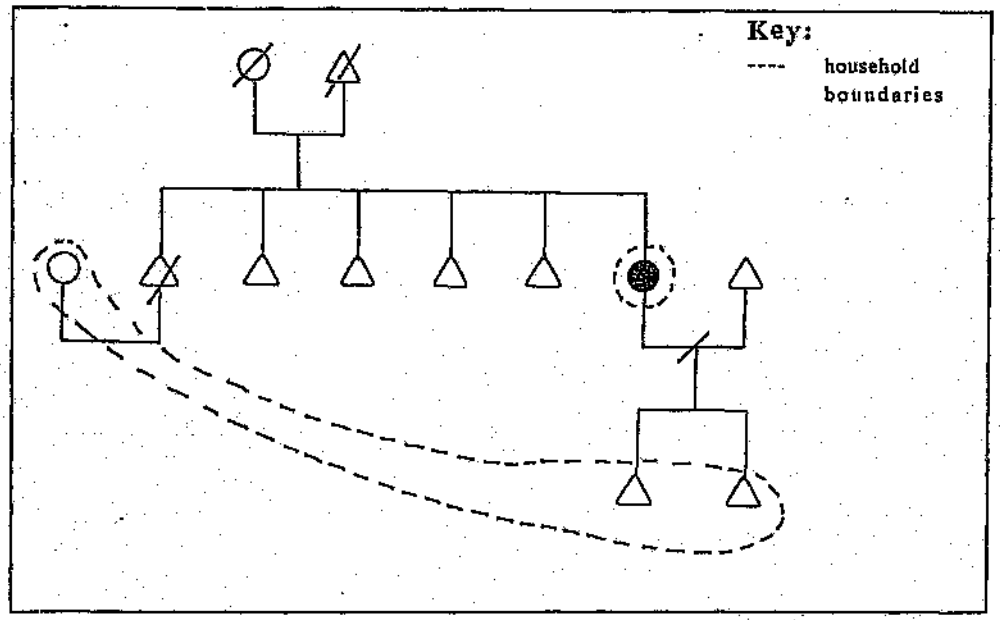


Figure 3.: The Composition of Margaret's Household

Margaret[17], lived alone in Ivory Park. She was forty years old and was born in Transkei. She was employed doing temporary domestic work in the neighbouring city of Midrand and earned approximately R800 per month. Apart from her sister who lived in Rustenburg, Margaret's natal family and her two children lived in the Transkei. Her children lived in the home of her sister-in-law. Margaret wanted them to remain there until they had finished their schooling. While her sister from Rustenburg would come and visit her

[17] Interview with Margaret - 28 June 1997

periodically, Margaret was only able to see her family and sons in the Transkei once a year at Christmas time.

Before moving to Ivory Park, when it was established in 1990, Margaret had been living with her husband as a tenant in the nearby township of Tembisa. Once she and her husband divorced she decided to move to Ivory Park where there was an opportunity for her to get her own stand. Not having any relatives whom she could call on, she cleared the grass on her stand herself and then had to hire some local men to put up her initial shack. As Margaret lived alone she had not needed to extend her initial one-roomed shack by 1997. Her decision not to extend the shack may have been influenced by her payment of regular remittances to her mother's household for her children's upkeep. As with all the women I spoke to, Margaret would have liked to have a brick dwelling but did not have enough money to pay someone to build one for her. Having applied for a government housing subsidy she was waiting for the government to come and build a house for her.

Case 2

Mamkhulu's Extended Household

In contrast to Margaret, who was living alone, Mamkhulu[18] lived in Ivory Park with the members of her immediate and extended family. Where Margaret had been unable to extend her shack, Mamkhulu

[18] Interview with Mamkhulu 12 July 1997

has managed to consolidate hers considerably with the help of her adult sons who lived with her.

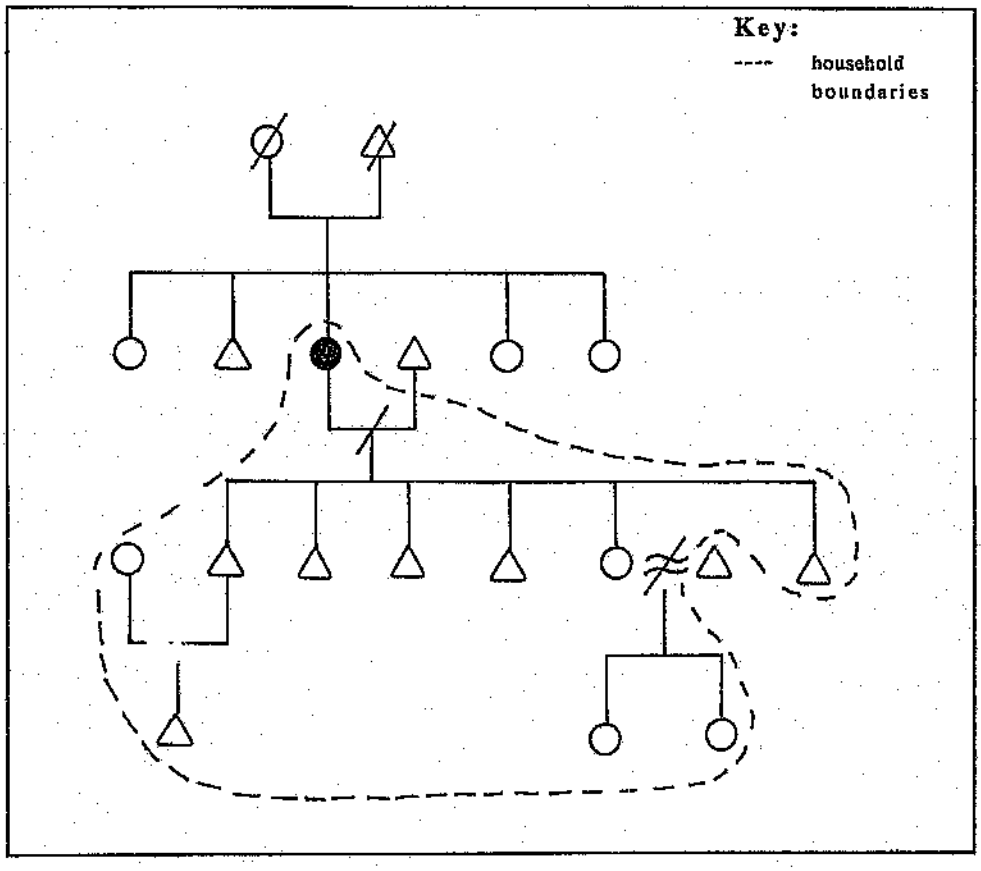


Figure 4. Mamkhulu's Household

Mamkhulu was born in 1944 in Winterveld north of Pretoria. She had been married to a man but had subsequently separated from him. At the time of doing my research, Mamkhulu was not employed and did not earn any income. She had a large extended household of eleven members, including five sons, a daughter, her daughter-in-law and three grand-children (see Figure. 4). Mamkhulu would see

her family who lived in Winterveld and in Pretoria as they would visit her in Ivory Park every second month. She, however, had not been able to make a return trip to Winterveld for the last two years as she had not had enough money for transport.

Mamkhulu arrived in Ivory Park in 1990 after living in the temporary shelter at Oakmoor station and previously having stayed in Tembisa as a tenant. At this stage her seven children lived with her father in Winterveld. When Mamkhulu was allocated her plot in the Angola Section of Ivory Park the company she had been working for as a tea-lady for six years assisted her by giving her some materials with which to build a shack. With the help of her eldest son, Michael, she was able to erect her initial dwelling. For the first few years Mamkhulu wasn't able to do any extensions as she had to send as much money as she could home to her children in Winterveld. At this point, she and her eldest son lived in a two roomed shack.

Relying primarily on the help of her immediate kin, and specifically that of her adult sons, Mamkhulu had managed to extend her shack greatly since 1990 when she and her eldest son first arrived. She lived on one of the larger plots in Angola Section and, in 1997, her shack had five rooms and two outside rooms for the younger children. She no longer worked and had been unemployed for a number of years. Her eldest son, Michael, had a job and the entire household survived on his salary.

In 1993, Michael extended the shack for the first time. He managed to find paraffin and oil drums which he cut and flattened to use for walls for the third room. A fourth room was added when Mamkhulu managed to save enough money to buy the necessary corrugated iron to extend the wall and put in a ceiling. While I was doing my research, her young teenage son, Andrew, had found some building materials from an abandoned shack nearby and was in the process of building his own separate room adjacent to the main house.

These two examples show how the variation of household types - even if they may all be broadly categorized as 'women-headed households' - has a profound impact on both the initial process of shack building and on later consolidation. Chant (1987) argues that extended households allowed domestic labour to be more evenly distributed amongst adults and thus gave women space to find outside work. The additional income generated was generally subject to a communal household budget which gave women a greater control over how the household income was spent. If the household was headed by a woman, she would have even greater control over decisions regarding how money should be spent. It was in these situations, according to Chant, that more money was allocated to extending or upgrading a house.

An ideal situation, according to this logic, would be an extended family headed by a women as was the case with Mamkhulu. Yet Chant's analysis does not examine the possible constraints on these types of households which can negatively impact on the ability of the

household head to spend money on housing. Despite the presence of other adults to lighten her domestic workload, Mamkhulu was unable to find a job and therefore unable to bring in additional income to either save to build a brick house or further upgrade her shack. The household was entirely reliant on the income of her eldest son. Given the size of the household - eleven members altogether - the whole income was spent on groceries and school fees. When I asked her how she would try to build a brick house she replied saying:

> ...I have no idea because I'm not working. I don't think I can build. Because the money Michael [her son] is bringing, we are buying only food. We can't do nothing with the money, it's too small[19]

This suggests that whilst Mamkhulu may head the household and direct the resources the size of her extended family puts constraints on how the money can be spent. In the example which Chant (1987:44) quotes the fact that there were a number of adults in the household led her to assume that there would be more than one income and that any additional resources could be spent on housing. In the case of Mamkhulu's household, the lack of a second income and the size of her family effectively negated the possibility of directing money towards building a brick house.

The case of Margaret shows that women living alone are entirely in control of the way in which resources are used in their households. In terms of Chant's analysis Margaret was able to direct how money

[19] Interview with Mamkhulu - 12 July 1997

was spent. Her level of income was so low, however, that once she had sent money to her mother's household for her children's upkeep, she did not have any additional money to spend hiring a builder. In contrast to Mamkhulu's household, Margaret's lack of an extended family network made the option of extending her shack less likely. Her case demonstrates that single women living alone without established kinship networks have limited choices *vis-a-vis* house-building.

Relationships *Between* Households

The assumption prevalent in policy documents that a household is an autonomous and self-contained entity overlooks the fundamental importance of relationships between households (Harris 1981, Young 1992, Ross 1996 and Stren 1994). Ross (1996:56) shows how there are complex interactions between different domestic units in an informal settlement in the Western Cape. It is, she argues, entirely inaccurate to assume that domesticity (production, reproduction and consumption) is confined to a single household or the physical boundaries of a house (*ibid*:65). Domestic units and household boundaries are, in this case, structurally fluid and continually changing. Lucas (1995:106) found a similar pattern of household fluidity in her study of spatial arrangements and politics in the Alexandra township in Johannesburg. This tendency is especially pronounced where domestic space and domesticity extended beyond individual physical houses. It is these dynamic relationships which

form part of the survival strategies used by household members and which are often crucial to their continued existence (Stren 1994:351).

The idea that households are economically self sufficient, autonomous and continuous over time in the same form is apparent in the South African government's subsidy scheme in which eligibility is calculated on the basis of joint household income. According to this policy a full housing subsidy of R15 000 is granted to households earning less than R800 per month[20]. It does not take into account the fact that very often, in households headed by women, money moves out of the immediate household to support children living elsewhere. In other words, these households may earn more than the specified R800 per month, but once money has been moved to other households or been distributed amongst an extended family within a household the actual money available to save within that particular home is considerably less. Studies of families and households in rural areas have also shown this tendency for mothers to 'disperse' their dependents (Spiegel 1987a; Niehaus 1988). In my study of the thirty-five household heads, 40 per cent had children residing either with family who lived in the formal township nearby, or with kin in a rural area. The majority of these women regularly remitted money to these households and this significantly reduced the actual household income. By simply assessing the individual household income, policy makers have not

[20] Subsequent to my research being done, the lowest income group (R800) has been incorporated into the R1500 bracket and qualifying for the full R15 000 subsidy. Personal correspondence - K. Richards, National Housing Forum Trust, 29 May 1998.

recognised that these economic ties between households can influence the amount of money available to the household members.

These links, both economic and social, which stretch between households have proved to be of crucial importance in the initial phases of house-building in Ivory Park. This process of shack consolidation and house-building can be divided into four phases. The initial stage involved the construction of a one-room shack when residents first arrived in Ivory Park. During the second phase, this initial shack was consolidated and extended. Once this had been done the third stage involved people starting to build a brick dwelling but remaining in their shack on their plot while this was being done. The final stage was the completion of a brick house.

The ties between households that Ross (1996) and Stren (1994) emphasise were particularly important during the initial phases of shack building and consolidation. Twenty nine (83 per cent) of the thirty-five household heads whom I interviewed had drawn on family networks or neighbourly ties when they built and extended their shacks. The remaining six household heads (17 per cent) had neither family members living nearby nor neighbours on whom they felt they could call to help them build. In these instances, they generally bought the materials themselves and hired local men to erect their shacks for them and later to extend these. This should not be taken as an indication, however, that these households did not have any ties to their extended families at all. In fact, four of these

households had children living in other areas and in all four cases, the children lived with the mother of the household head.

The following two case studies are drawn from among those twenty-nine households whose members utilized family and neighbourhood networks when they built and consolidated their shacks. They illustrate the importance of examining the social links between households and show how these links have fundamentally informed the initial process of house-building in Ivory Park.

Case 3

Elizabeth: Drawing on Family and Neighbourhood Networks.

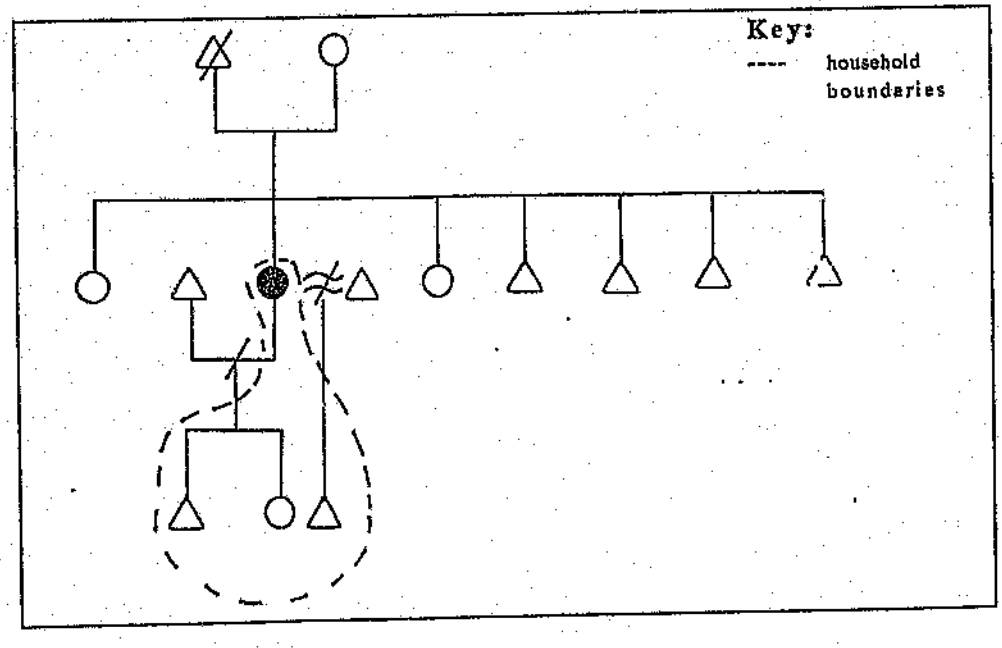


Figure 5. Kinship Diagram of Elizabeth's Household

Elizabeth,[21] who is forty-one years old, was born in Mamelodi, near Pretoria. She is divorced and lives together with her three children in Ivory Park. During the time in which my research was conducted Elizabeth worked as a clerk in the neighbouring city of Midrand and earned approximately R1 600 per month. Her mother and younger brothers lived in Dennilton in the rural area of KwaNdebele while other siblings lived in the nearby townships of Phomlong and Tembisa.

Elizabeth arrived in Ivory Park in 1990 having spent a year as a temporary tenant in the Oakmoor squatter settlement in Tembisa. Once she had been allocated a plot by the local municipal council, Elizabeth arrived at her site together with her sister, three of her sister's male neighbours who lived in Tembisa, and her brother who lived in the adjacent township of Phomolong. They arrived in Ivory at about nine o'clock in the morning and by the afternoon of the very same day they had managed to clear the grass and erect a one-roomed shack. Although Elizabeth and her sister were not involved in the actual building - this was done by her brother and her sister's male neighbours - they prepared food for the men who were working throughout the day.

Prior to this, while Elizabeth had been living in Oakmoor station, her two children had been living with her mother in Dennilton in KwaNdebele. As soon as she had established a secure place in which to live and had erected a dwelling, Elizabeth immediately brought

[21] Interview with Elizabeth - 21 June 1997

her children to live with her. She subsequently had a third child in the first year that she was living in Ivory Park and she and her three children remained in her one-roomed shack for the next four years before it was extended. During these four years, Elizabeth was unemployed and was helped, both financially and with food, by her sister who ran a crèche in Tembisa.

The opportunity arose for Elizabeth to extend her shack when her neighbours - a married couple with two children - decided to build a brick house. Before the neighbours began to build, they asked Elizabeth whether they could transfer their shack onto her plot and live with her for the duration of the building. She agreed to this and allowed them to extend her one-roomed shack by building on an extra two rooms for them to live in while their house was being built. Using the materials from their shack, her neighbours paid Elizabeth's brother to do the extensions. Elizabeth helped by going to the nearby taxi-rank to buy some wooden poles needed for the ceiling. Her neighbours and their two children were then able to live with her, in her extended shack, while their brick house was built.

Once the neighbours' house had been completed, after approximately three weeks, they were able to move back home and left Elizabeth with an extended three-roomed shack (see Figure 7 pg. 78). This larger shack was far more comfortable than her initial one-roomed shack had been. She used one of the rooms as a kitchen, one as a bedroom for her eldest son and the third as bedroom for herself and her two younger children.

What this case study illustrates is the importance of both family networks and neighbourhood ties of friendship, which exist between households, which were crucial in both the initial phases of building and then in the extending and consolidating of a dwelling unit. The following case-study shows the importance of family networks which are drawn on in the house-building process.

Case 4

Sarah: The Importance of Family Ties Beyond the Immediate Household:

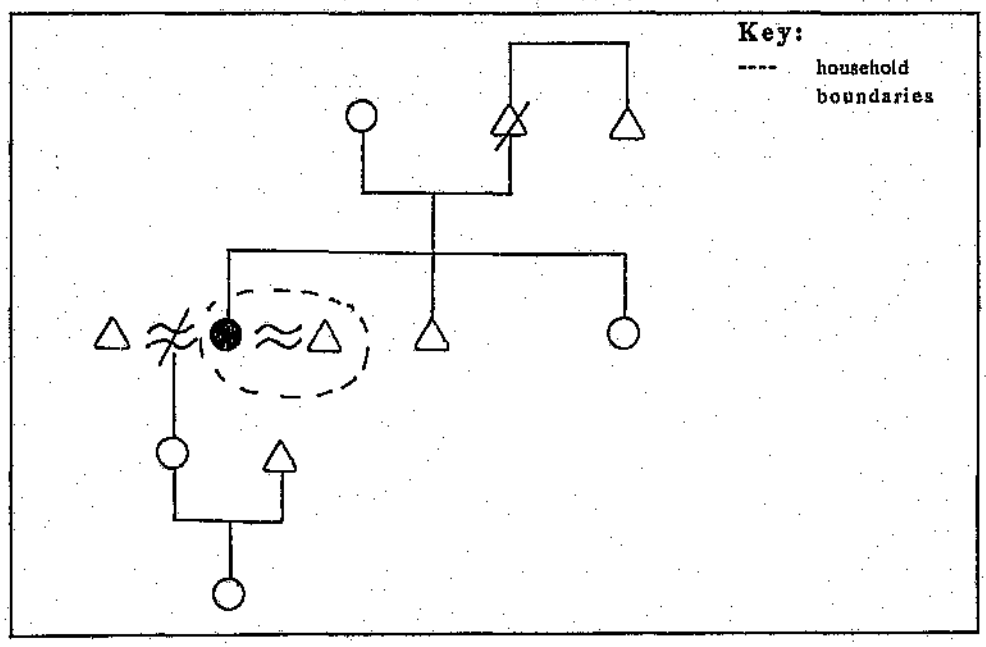


Figure 6: Kinship Diagram of Sarah's Household

In 1997 Sarah[22] was forty-one years old. It was only in 1990, with the death of her father, that she moved out of her natal home in Soweto to the settlement at Oakmoor station. Since arriving in Ivory Park Sarah had met a man with whom she was cohabiting. He was originally from Mozambique and had moved into her house with her. She has one married daughter who lives with her husband in Vosloorus. Once allocated a plot in Ivory Park, Sarah simply transferred the plastic shack that she had been using in Oakmoor and set it up in Ivory Park. As she had not yet met the man with whom she would later cohabit, Sarah re-erected her shelter on her new plot by herself:

> I just put four poles [in the ground] then I wrapped the shack with plastic. I didn't have a roof by then and I didn't have a door. So at night I ...put a plastic bag down for the door. During the night I prayed: 'Oh my God, it mustn't rain', because I was inside.

After Sarah had lived in this plastic shack for some time, her *babamncane* (Zulu for father's younger brother: lit. 'small father') who lived in Tembisa gave her enough corrugated iron to erect the walls of a shack and put on a roof. Her mother, who lived in Soweto, gave her R100 to help her build. Once she had gathered all these building materials together her *babamncane* and a friend of his put up the shack for her. Because Sarah wanted her shack to be completed on the same day, she in fact helped her uncle to build by

[22] Interview with Sarah - 4 July 1997

holding up the sheets of corrugated iron while he hammered them together.

As was the case with Elizabeth, the relationships between Sarah's household and those of her extended family were vitally important in the process of building her initial shack. In any examination of the process of constructing and consolidating shacks in informal settlements, it is these relationships between households which need to be taken into account.

Economic Relationships Beyond the Household: Building a Brick House

The case studies which I have dealt with thus far have looked at the nature of households and how the relationships within and between them have facilitated the process of house-building. It should be borne in mind, however, that the nature of the dwelling units which I have been describing is such as to facilitate relatively easy construction. They are shacks, constructed mainly with corrugated iron, but can also be made from flattened metal drums, pieces of hard cardboard or plastic. The skills which it takes to construct these dwellings are such that male relatives or friends can be called on when a woman needs a shack built or extended. The presence of male kin either within or without the household is clearly important in this regard. A brick house, however, obviously requires different and more specialised training and women's male kin are not necessarily qualified to build brick houses. In addition to this the

costs involved in building a brick house were generally too high for these women to afford.

Broader economic ties were clearly an important factor in enabling women to build a brick house. Within my sample of households twenty-two (63 per cent) of the female household heads were employed, nine (26 per cent) were unemployed and four (11 per cent) were drawing a state pension[23] Even though family and neighbourhood networks were vital and extensively drawn upon when a shack was built, earning an income was obviously important for women who had to buy the materials with which to construct their shelters. Building a brick house, however, involved a substantial financial cost in building materials and labour which even women wage earners were unable to afford.

Of the thirty-five household heads whom I interviewed seven (20 per cent) had begun the process of hiring builders and building their own brick houses. Only one had completed it. Except for one woman, whom my research assistant and I nick-named 'Margaret-the-builder' who, when we visited her, was actively helping the builders, the women generally hired local contractors to build their houses for them as they lacked the specialised skills to do it themselves.

[23] A state pension is R430 per month.

Case 5

Edith: Economic Links into the Neighbourhood - The use of Stokvels

One woman who had begun the process of having a brick house built was Edith[24]. She was forty-five years old and worked as a cleaner earning approximately R1 200 per month. Edith was a widow who arrived in Ivory Park with her mother and her four children. With the help of her brother, who lived in Tembisa, she was able to build her initial shack. As this was fairly large, she did not need to extend it before deciding to build a brick house. In fact, when she began building her house, she was forced to break down part of it to clear enough space on her plot to allow the foundations of her house to be laid.

Edith was able to start building by organising and joining a stokvel[25] - rotating credit association - with some of her neighbours in the area. Having created a club of eight members, six men and two women, each member had to contribute R100 every week. With eight members in the club, each person would receive R800 every eighth week. Due to the high cost of building materials, they found a contractor who agreed to build all their houses at a discounted rate. Various members of the group were delegated to get quotes from the

[24] Interview with Edith - 12 July 1997

[25] See S. Ardener and S. Burman (1995), S. Burman and N. Lembete (1995) and E.Thomas (1991) for an extensive discussion of stokvels and Rotating Credit Associations in South Africa.

local hardware stores for the building materials and they then bought enough material to begin building three houses.

At this point, according to Edith, there was a 'misunderstanding' within the club and they decided to break it up. Some houses had already been finished, but some, like hers, were only half completed. I asked her about the misunderstanding and she told me:

> Some of them decided [to] just become selfish. While we got all the cement to start foundations for other houses, we brought some and put them into my shack. About thirty of them. We took [another] fifty-two bags and put them elsewhere. Meanwhile...the two members went to that place where we put all the cement ..[and] they started building without letting us know what was going on. ...When we went to check for the cement, we found that about thirty bags were missing and there were only twenty left. Then the quarrel started and that's when we broke up.

Edith had begun building her house in 1992, but during the time of my fieldwork it was still incomplete and she and her mother and children were still living in her shack on the edge of her plot. She is now trying to complete her house on her own. She is in the process of paying for the rest of the materials needed to complete the house. Once this is done they will deliver it to her stand and her builder will finish it.

Whilst Edith drew on neighbourly ties to begin building her house, these relationships broke down before she was able to complete her

dwelling. A number of the women whom I spoke to were nervous about joining *stokvels* or rotating credit associations and did not see them as a viable way of saving money to build. In some instances women felt they did not earn enough money to put some aside each week. In addition, many were frightened that their money may be taken and not returned when it would be their turn to receive the money.

Case 6

Letta: Broader Economic Ties - the Relationship with an Employer

Unlike the women described in the previous case-studies, Letta's relationship with her employer was more important than the relationships within or between households. Letta was one example of a women earning an income and being able to access a loan from her employer. Letta[26], was forty-two years old and was born in Ermelo in the province of Mpumalanga. She was not married and lived in her house together with her four children and her grandson. Her cousin lived in a shack behind her brick house but did not pay rent or contribute to the overall household income. Her mother and brother live close by in the neighbouring township of Tembisa and she has an uncle living in the former KwaNdebele whom she sees occasionally when he comes to visit her.

Letta had a job as a cleaning-lady and earned approximately R1000 per month. These economic ties proved fundamental in enabling her

[26] Interview with Letta - 28 June 1997

to build a brick house. Unlike any other women whom I interviewed, Letta had been able to tie into broader economic networks by borrowing money from her employer and hiring a builder to build a brick house for her. Whilst the majority of the women household heads I interviewed were indeed employed, Letta was able to take a loan from her company and pay it back in monthly installments which were deducted from her salary. Obviously the other women in my sample, despite being employed, were unable to access loans and therefore unable to build a house as Letta had done. They were thus forced to wait for the government to come and build houses for them through the subsidy scheme. The case of Letta illustrates the importance of examining the broader economic relationships in which women household heads are embedded as they clearly play a crucial role in defining the kind of shelter that a household can afford.

Conclusion

The household dynamics which I have outlined above have clear implications for the success of 'bottom up' or 'people-driven' approaches to housing delivery. Ideals of 'empowerment', which underlie this approach, are obviously undermined in the conte·. of Ivory Park. The case studies illustrate that, even when women are earning a salary, it is difficult - if not impossible - for them to save sufficient funds to build a brick dwelling. The current housing policy which assumes that people are able to supplement the subsidy does not take these dynamics into consideration and, whilst the claim by

developers is that self-help, incremental schemes are 'empowering', this is clearly not the case when examined at a micro level.

This chapter has argued that in order to understand the processes involved in building houses in an informal settlement one must take into account the complexity of household types as well as the relationships which exist between households and their position in a broader economic framework. In the process of building the initial shack dwelling, the relationships to broader kin and neighbours were crucial. The nature of the shack dwelling, both in terms of the skills required to build them as well as their relative cost, was such that these networks were adequate and therefore drawn on when they were available. Building a brick house, however, required different skills and more importantly, financial resources, which these networks were generally unable to offer. In this instance, the financial resources which a household was able to access through loans from employers proved critical in building a brick dwelling.

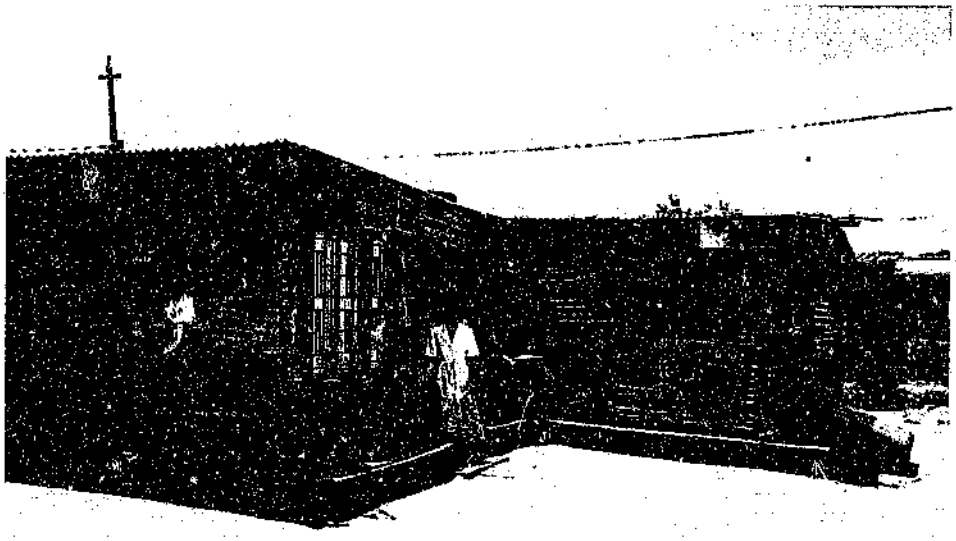


Figure. 7: Elizabeth's Extended Three-Roomed Shack

Chapter Four

Building a home and constituting identity

In the previous chapter I examined the social processes involved in house building and the kinds of social networks which people drew upon to do so. It shows how social relationships and social bonds within and between households converge at the point at which a house is built. This chapter will show that the house is simultaneously a vehicle through which those social connections are reaffirmed and strengthened. The house becomes a space within which personal and community identities are constituted. This chapter will look at the significance of home ownership in terms of defining an identity and creating a sense of community. This chapter explores the manner in which the house is a symbol of personal and collective identity for women household heads in Ivory Park. I will show how it is a space in which their identity is shaped and reinforced.

In addition to this I will argue that the existence of a shared history of deprivation and struggle against the police in Oakmoor station - the temporary squatter settlement which was one of the precursors to Ivory Park - was a force which defined the political and social

boundaries of the contemporary community. Once this had occurred, however, it was the process of constructing houses which was fundamental to defining spatial boundaries and enabling the idea of a community.

Carstens and Hugh Jones (1995:1) argue that one should understand a house as being more than simply a physical structure. If one examines the relationship between a house, people and people's ideas about the house, then the house can, in important ways, 'stand for' or represent social groups:

> The house and body are intimately linked. The house is an extension of the person; like an extra skin...it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect Carstens and Hugh-Jones (1995:2).

They argue that people use houses to construct themselves both as individuals and as groups. Drawing from Bourdieu, whose ideas I discuss in greater depth below, they show how the house forms a 'dense web of signification' and serves as a model for thinking about the world. The role of the house is very often taken for granted, as it has such a familiar and 'every-day' feel to it (*ibid*:4). It is only at the point when the house is gone for some reason (fire, house-moving etc.) that its significance becomes blatantly apparent. In the same way I show how community membership in Angola Section of Ivory Park is defined through the house specifically by looking at the process by which people are expelled from the community by having their house burnt to the ground.

By tracing five life-histories of individual women living in Ivory Park, this chapter will show how an individual's social identity as a single mother is formulated through the process of owning and building a house. Looking at the life-cycles in the South African lowveld, Stadler (1994:105-115) has argued that women's life-cycles are characterised by the movement from their natal home to that of their husband and parent's-in-law. If divorce or separation occurs, the woman has the option of moving back into her natal home (*ibid*:110). As I will show, in the case of Ivory Park, divorced or single women have been fiercely determined to establish and maintain independent homes for themselves. Whist they maintain their connections to their rural (and urban) kin, they are establishing an independent identity as single women and mothers. As the case studies will show owning a house is a critical tool in this process.

Examining the lives of five individual women I will show how they arrived at the point of establishing a home for themselves in Ivory Park. From these brief biographies I will draw out some of the common themes which run through them. Specifically I show that before moving to Ivory Park none of these women had owned a home of their own and that their lives were characterised by a significant amount of movement between residences. It is when they arrive in Ivory Park that they express the common desire to remain there for the rest of their lives. The security of having a home for their children is shown to be of critical importance. In addition to this a home became a means through which these women

could define and reinforce their membership within an Ivory Park community. Whilst there is clearly as much difference between these women as there might be similarity, it is important to examine if there are some common threads which tie them together.

Living in Many Places: Residential Movement and Life Before Ivory Park.

Bozzoli (1985:90) has argued that individual biographies, and the collection of 'life-stories' or oral histories, allows one to examine how broad social forces have impacted on people's lives and informed their experiences over time. This kind of approach, she argues, is particularly useful when looking at the common experiences of women as it allows one to uncover the unique experiences of women's lives which can either transcend or inform a broader class or regional analysis (*ibid:90*). In Bozzoli's (1991) study of women in Phokeng, she also shows how oral histories enabled her to examine women's own interpretations of their lives and the forces which have shaped them.

The biographies of the women that I collected show that until they moved to Ivory Park they had never lived in a place which they considered to be their own. Up to the point at which they arrived in Oakmoor, and then Ivory Park, their lives were characterised by a high degree of movement between different houses and residential areas. Ivory Park was the place where this movement would end - where they would all establish a home and where they had all

expressed the wish to remain for the rest of their lives. In addition, establishing a permanent home in Ivory Park allowed them to create a home for their children. By examining the life-histories of these five women, I will illustrate the centrality of these issues in the lives of these women and show why owning and building a house is central to establishing a sense of personhood.

It was specifically in the process of building a house that these women household heads could define their identity within a wider social environment. In Ivory Park a house became a symbol which identified membership within this community. Equally important is that it became the arena within which people could creatively define an individual social space which allowed them to make public statements about themselves.

The following five life-histories are drawn from my sample of interviews with thirty-five female household heads. All the women have been married and are now either separated, divorced or widowed. Their ages range between forty one and fifty four years and their household incomes range from approximately R500 to R1 600. In all five cases, the women have children who are currently living with them and the household sizes vary from eleven members to four.

The life-histories of women living in Ivory Park show how subjective ideas about home and identity are woven into broader structural events which shaped their lives in particular ways. The necessary

brevity of the following life-histories can not possibly uncover every aspect of these women's lives. In all the following cases, I have attempted to trace the movement of these women between the houses in which they had lived prior to arriving in Ivory Park. By doing this, I will uncover the significance of Ivory Park as a place in which they all wish to live permanently and later show how this sense of house ownership and permanence informs and constitutes their identity both as individuals as well as members of a broader community.

Case 7: Elizabeth Shabalala

Elizabeth Shabalala[27] was born in 1956 in the Mamelodi township near Pretoria. Her parents and elder sister lived in a four-roomed brick house in Mamelodi but they moved when she was two years old. Being an infant she did not remember much of the time she spent in the house in Mamelodi. When Elizabeth was two years old her family moved to Olifantsfontein, south of Pretoria, when her father got a job working in a hotel and where the family lived on the property in staff rooms adjoining the hotel. Her mother, at this time, worked as a domestic assistant and commuted to her place of employment each day.

In the early 1960s Elizabeth's family moved to the KwaNdebele bantustan where her father built a house. She lived in that house together with her parents, her siblings, her grandmother and her

[27] Interview with Elizabeth - 16 July 1997

aunt, uncle and their children. Her family had been living in this house for two years before they were forced to move to Dennilton. They were told by the local authorities that the area in which they had been living was designated for Northern Sotho speakers and because her father spoke Zulu they would be forced to move to Dennilton. Initially her family lived as tenants on a white-owned farm and had access to a large portion of land on which her father farmed.

In 1974 they moved from the farm to another area in Dennilton and built a house in which her mother still lives today. It was there, after completing her standard eight schooling[28], that Elizabeth decided to go to college in Pretoria. She went to live with an aunt in Hammanskraal and would commute into town to attend college. It was when she had completed her college education and found a job at a hotel that her first son - Oupa - was born in 1980. She left her job at the hotel and moved to a house which Oupa's father had bought. It was there, in 1983, that her second child was born. At this point she decided to separate from her husband who had begun to object to her working during the day as a switchboard operator.

Elizabeth sent her two children to live with her mother in Dennilton and moved to Verwoerdberg[29] to live with a friend and find another job. Here Elizabeth lived with friends from her church community

[28] In South Africa one is able to leave school in standard eight (now known as Grade Ten) after ten years of formal schooling and proceed to Technical College. A person is then able, at a later stage, to complete a two further years of education to obtain a Standard Ten (Grade Twelve) qualification.

[29] Now called 'Centurion' located just south of Pretoria - See Appendix 1 pg. 93

and struggled to find occasional odd-jobs. In 1988 she eventually managed to complete her formal schooling. Two years later, while her two children were still living with her mother, she heard about Oakmoor from her sister living in Tembisa. In 1990 she left Verwoerdberg to build a temporary shack in Oakmoor. While she was living there her children remained with her mother but as soon as she had been allocated a plot in Ivory she went to fetch her children from her mother's house in Dennilton. When I asked her why she wanted to move to Ivory she told me that she needed a place of her own and a place where she could bring her children:

> As soon as I got the place I brought the kids. I got a place in November and the school was not even closed yet [but] I went to go and get my kids.

Case 8: Mamkhulu Mabaso

Mamkhulu Mabaso[30] was born in Winterveld - a rural area north of Pretoria - in 1944. Here she lived with her parents in her grandfather's home. After a couple of years Mamkhulu's father built his own five-roomed brick house in Bophuthatswana where the whole family moved in 1962. After completing her standard five education, Mamkhulu found a job in Pretoria as a domestic worker. This enabled Mamkhulu to support her father and the eight family members living at home. She remained living in Bophuthatswana and would make the three hour commute by bus to Pretoria every morning and evening. It was while she worked in Pretoria that she

[30] Interview with Mamkhulu - 12 July 1997

had her first child. When her employers decided to relocate to a different town she was forced to find another job which she did as a cleaner at the Johannesburg International - then called 'Jan Smuts' - airport.

While Mamkhulu worked in Johannesburg she moved to live with her aunt in Tembisa It was at this point that she met the man whom she would marry and had her second child. While she was living in both Pretoria and in Johannesburg her children lived with her father in Bophuthatswana. A couple of years later, while she was still living with her aunt in Tembisa, she separated from her husband. When I asked her why she had separated she simply replied:

> '...he was naughty. He was going to the other girls. You know how men are.'

It was also while she was in Tembisa that Mamkhulu heard about the temporary settlement at Oakmoor station and she decided to join the squatters who were waiting to be given their own plots. When I asked her the reasons for her deciding to move to Oakmoor and then later Ivory Park and she replied saying:

> I'm glad because this place is *my* place. I'm the owner of the place and I'm so happy with my yard. I wouldn't change anything...I'm very happy with my place.

When I asked her why she did not consider moving back to her father's house in Winterveld she answered:

> You know Jo, if you're an adult you must think for yourself. My sister [she] has got kids, I've got kids and my brother has got kids. Everyone's got kids and we can't say in five rooms with ten kids. ...[T]hats why I decided to take my kids to come here. ...[S]ometime they can only [eat] pap and tomato, sometimes bread, sometimes tea in the night. But they don't worry,...they know this their mother's place. That is why I came here.

Case 9: Notemba Majola

Notemba Majola[31] was born in 1955 in the Transkei bantustan where she lived with her parents and her grandparents. By the time she was ten years old her parents and grandparents had died. She and her younger brothers then moved to live with their mother's sister in Butterworth. Here she continued her schooling until the age of seventeen when she met the man whom she would marry. In 1972 Notemba moved to Umtata to live with her husband's family. It was a large house where they lived with her parents-in-law and her husband's siblings. She lived with them for the next six years and during that time had two children. After the birth of her second child in 1978 her marriage began to break down and she decided to take her two young children and move to Johannesburg.

> At first it was all right, but then we started to fight and then he left me. I stayed there for a while [but] then came here [Johannesburg] to work.

Notemba moved into the home of her mother's younger sister (*mamncane*: lit. 'small mother' in Zulu) who lived in a three-roomed

[31] Interview with Notemba - 3 July 1997

house in Tembisa. She would live in this house for the next ten years and it was there that she had her third child. She found a job working in a factory in the nearby town of Olifantsfontein and would commute there daily from Tembisa. Whilst living with her aunt Notemba tried to find a house for herself but was unable to afford to buy a house in Tembisa.

In 1990 she heard about the settlement at Oakmoor Station and decided to move from her aunt's house and build a temporary shack while she waited to be given a plot in Ivory Park. For the first six months while she was living in Oakmoor she left her three children with her aunt in Tembisa. For the last few months before she moved to Ivory she brought her children to live with her in her shack in Oakmoor as she was unable to continue sending her aunt money for their upkeep. When I asked Notemba why she had decided to move to Oakmoor and then later to Ivory, she replied saying:

> I decided to move to Ivory because I've got children and I'm a single mother and I want my children to get a home. ...I'm happy here, it's my home.

Case 10: Elsie Bokale

Elsie Bokale[32] was born in 1953 near Witbank where her parents worked for a farmer. While she was still very young she and her parents moved to Putfontein near Benoni where she lived with her grandparents and her mother's elder sister (*mamkhulu*: Lit. 'big

[32] Interview with Elsie - 13 July 1997

mother'). Her mother did not live with them as she had a job as a domestic worker and lived at the house of her employer. When her father died in a car accident she was left in the care of her *mamkhulu* and remained living with her and her family in Daveyton on the West Rand where she started schooling.

It was in Daveyton in 1974, at the age of twenty-one, that Elsie decided to get married and moved into her father-in-law's three-roomed house - also in Daveyton. A year later her first child was born. During this time Elsie was employed doing 'piece work', mainly as a domestic worker in Benoni. After she had had her second child, she and her husband decided to move out of her parents-in-law's house and lived as tenants in a shack at the back of a yard in Tembisa. She lived in that shack for two years, until she and her husband decided to separate.

> I decided to move because my husband was after me,.. He was doing cruel things. He would come to look how the children are and just start to break things. I stay with my mother and there was no problem...I then told him that my life is better than before - it's better than the time he was here. My life has changed.

Her husband moved out of the shack and, after moving in with her mother for a brief period, Elsie remained living there with her two children for the next five years. In 1987 Elsie moved to Vosloorus.

In 1990 she heard about the group of temporary tenants in Oakmoor station from her sister-in-law. She decided to leave her children

with her *mamkhulu* in KwaNdebele and to move to Oakmoor to live with her sister-in-law. However, at the end of 1990, she was given a plot in Ivory Park. When I asked her why she wanted to live in Oakmoor and later Ivory Park, Elsie replied saying:

> I'd have liked to stay in Daveyton, but it was very hard to get your own place. When I heard that the people are fighting for houses in Tembisa, I came and wrote my name down so they [could] give me a small place to build my shack in Oakmoor. I stayed in that shack and we fight and fight - until we get this place [Ivory Park]. ...I told myself, when I'm finished, I'd go back [to KwaNdebele] to get my kids and then I [can] stay with them here.

Case 11: Edith Nano

Edith Nano[33] was born in Edenvale location in 1952 and lived with her parents in a shack until she was five years old. At that point she was sent to Natal to live with her grandparents who lived in a rural area in the Natal Midlands. Edith started schooling in Natal but did not complete her high-school education because she developed a problem with her eyes. Whist she lived in Natal she would take a taxi to Tembisa to visit her parents during the school holidays. In 1971, when she was nineteen-years-old, she moved to Durban where she found a job in a dry-cleaning shop. She worked in Durban for the following four years and lived as a tenant in a house in the formal township of Umlazi south of Durban.

In 1977 Edith left Durban and moved back to Gauteng to live with her mother. Her parents had separated at this point and her mother

[33] Interview with Edith - 15 July 1997

had moved out of the house in Tembisa and found a place in Winterveld near Pretoria where she built a four-roomed brick house. It was while Edith lived with her mother in Winterveld that she married. She found a job doing domestic work in Edenvale and in 1979 she had her first child. She and her husband never lived together as she lived in the house where she was employed as a domestic worker. Her husband had a job with South African Railways - now Spoornet - and was only able to see her once a month when he came home. They would meet at the house of her parents-in-law in Hammanskraal. In 1986 - when her second child was a year old - Edith's husband died in a car accident. At this point both her children were living with her mother in Winterveld.

In 1989, while she was still living and working in Edenvale, Edith heard about the group of temporary tenants living at Oakmoor station and decided to join them. When I asked Edith why she had decided to move to Oakmoor she told me:

> I preferred to find my own place because I was [old] enough. I was too big to be [living] at home. ...I want to be [in Ivory Park] permanently and I don't even dream of moving from here.

One of the themes which is evident in all of the life-histories which I have outlined above is the fact that none of these women owned her own home before moving to Oakmoor. Their lives were generally characterised by movement between houses in which they lived as paying tenants or which belonged to either their parents, their

parents-in-law or their employers. In all five cases the women whom I interviewed had been married but this, rather than implying a separate marital residence, had generally meant that they had moved into the home of their husband's parents.

Owning a Home

The significance of moving to Oakmoor lay in its nature as a place of transition - as a kind of transit camp or waiting-room. Upon arriving at Oakmoor people anticipated that, once they had been allocated a plot in Ivory Park, they would not have to move ever again. The importance of being in one place permanently and actually owning a piece of land was fundamentally important to all the women whom I interviewed. Only one of the thirty-five women whom I interviewed expressed the desire to move back to the rural area where she had been born[34]. The rest of the women were emphatic about remaining in Ivory Park for the rest of their lives. None of them had any intention of selling their homes.

Owning a permanent home was important not only because these women wanted a place for themselves but also because it would be a place where they could bring their children to live and where they could establish a home for their family. The idea of building a house for children emerges as another common theme both in the life-histories and in my other interviews. As single mothers, they understood owning a house as a security not only for themselves but

[34] Interview with Mamlydia - 15 July 1997

also as an investment that they needed to make for their children and their children's future.

Housing and the Quest for Community

In Ivory Park the common desire to own a home was also an essential element in the symbolic construction of a community (see Cohen 1985). The notion of 'community' is political and can not be assumed to exist as a primordial or *a priori* category. Thornton & Ramphele (1988:38) argue that, as an 'image of coherence', the notion of community defines social boundaries and gives people a sense of identity (*ibid.*: 38). Like Thornton & Ramphele (1988), Friedman (1993) also alerts us to the danger of assuming that communities are in fact homogenous entities and says one must be aware that within communities one can find a wide variety of values, beliefs and needs. However, the idea of a community and the corresponding notion of coherene is a powerful political tool which people can draw on in an attempt to gain access to material and ideological resources. This social and political construction of community in Ivory Park is thus central in understanding the establishment of an urban identity. It is therefore important to outline how this notion was developed and maintained by people within the Angola Section of Ivory Park.

In an ethnographic study of the Alexandra township of Johannesburg, Lucas (1995) has shown how space and access to space is politically informed and contested. In Alexandra ideas about the city and countryside serve as points of reference for the

construction of categories and identities (Lucas 1995:76). In Ivory Park, the initial experiences shared as illegal squatters in Oakmoor train-station would serve as a point of reference for later constructions of identities as urban dwellers.

The lives of the five women in the case studies would converge in Oakmoor where they had all arrived in the hope of being given a plot of land on which they could build a house. The time which they spent in Oakmoor was significant as their common experiences of their life in Oakmoor would be drawn on as a way of tying themselves together as a community both while they were living there and in subsequent years while living in Ivory Park.

It is important to examine how the construct of community became meaningful both as a w. in which personal identity is affirmed as well as a means to contest housing programmes[35]. The idea of community in Ivory Park was initially defined by the common desire to own a home and in later years by drawing on their shared history and shared experiences during the year living in the difficult environment of Oakmoor Station. People drew on this shared history as a way of defining social boundaries in their later lives at Ivory Park.

The vast majority of the informants to whom I spoke in the Angola Section of Ivory Park had spent a year living in the temporary shack settlement of Oakmoor train station in Tembisa from November 1989

[35] See chapter two

until Ivory Park was established in December 1990. The residents of Oakmoor had previously lived as tenants in Tembisa. This history differs from that of the residents of other sections in Ivory Park who had either come from the Alexandra township in Johannesburg or from Halfway-House.

Oakmoor was a temporary squatter settlement and the conditions in which people lived were exceptionally poor. The situation was aggravated by the large numbers of shacks which had been erected in very close proximity to each other. Because it was seen by the local council as an illegal squatter settlement the residents at Oakmoor were also harassed by local police. In addition to this it lacked adequate sanitation facilities and had insufficient running water. One of my informants described what it had been like living there:

> The place [Oakmoor] it was not nice. I didn't like it because there was water everywhere, mud everywhere - stinking. It was all so horrible. At night sometimes we were watching the soldiers coming. We were always running up and down - we never relaxed. We never enjoyed staying there but because we were suffering. We had to stay until we saw what the end would be. At that time I was expecting my last-born. [I was] still marching at Oakmoor with my big tummy and when the soldiers came I had to run like anything.[36]

Because the settlement in Oakmoor was considered by the authorities to be illegal the local leadership made a decision that all the shelters

[36] Interview with Edith - 15 July 1997

that were built could only be made from plastic - hence its alternative name 'Plasticview'. Shacks built from materials which looked more 'permanent' - like corrugated iron sheets - were bulldozed down and confiscated by the local police.

There was also the constant threat of fires within the settlement. Primus stoves fueled with paraffin were commonly used due to the absence of electricity. Given the over-crowded nature of the settlement and the proximity of the shacks to each other, accidents with primus stoves would result in fires which could lead to an entire row of six or seven shacks catching alight. The lack of water made the threat of fire even more severe and people felt that their lives were constantly in danger (cf. Bank 1997). Many of the women to whom I spoke had left their children with relatives in Tembisa or in the rural areas as it was simply too difficult to live in such appalling conditions with their children.

The Oakmoor squatter settlement was unable to escape the general political turmoil which characterised much of South Africa in the early 1990s. Informants recalled how police would patrol the area at night and often shoot into the settlement with rubber bullets or let off tear-gas canisters. One woman[37] described an incident with the police:

> They [the police] were shooting with rubber bullets. You would just see people running, others falling - tear gas, sniffing, coughing. It was terrible, very terrible.

[37] Interview with Edith - 15 July 1997

She went on to describe a meeting that was held to discuss the logistics of moving to Ivory Park:

> We got to the stadium and they [the local leaders] started addressing the meeting. The soldiers surrounded the place and they just intimidated us, sort of wanting to shoot. We were all terrified. We were not happy at the meeting because we were watched on all sides by the soldiers. We were waiting for [something] to happen because it used to happen when we had our gatherings. The soldiers would just interfere and shoot. [But] that day nothing bad happened actually, but we were so terrified because they were just intimidating us. ...It was very terrible but that march was not [as bad] as the one before...that one was very bad because many people were injured, severely injured.

People living in the Oakmoor station settlement had come from a variety of places. Yet whilst people initially did not know each other, a sense of community was established during this year as a result of the need to mobilise against a common enemy of the police. There were numerous occasions, like the above example, where meetings were held to discuss their future plans which would be disrupted by police action.

Police harassment, however, did not end once Ivory Park was established in 1990. Even once the township had been laid out and people had begun building their initial shacks, they would still be harassed by police patrolling the area. This police action, along with

these collective struggles in Oakmoor Station, served to create and reinforce a sense of community identity and group solidarity among people living in Ivory Park.

These ideological connections continued to be vital to people's lives with the establishment of Ivory Park. This is because people who lived close to each other in Oakmoor were assigned plots in the same or neighbouring sections in Ivory Park. The sense of neighbourhood and community initially established in Oakmoor was thus reinforced in the spatial layout of Ivory Park. When my research assistant and I would walk to our interviews in the evenings, she was able to point out exactly which households had lived in Oakmoor and on one occasion told me that in her opinion Ivory Park and the Angola section 'belonged' to those 'struggle people' who had lived in Oakmoor.

This collective identity was again highlighted in the combined efforts of residents to reject the incremental housing scheme which I discussed in chapter two. In this instance residents of Ivory Park were able to draw on the fact that they had mobilised as a group previously and threatened to do so again should the incremental housing project be extended. By contrast people living in Ebony Park, who had arrived from a number of diverse places, had no shared history of struggle nor a shared history of living together previously. They were thus not able to draw on a collective identity to oppose the incremental housing scheme in the way in which the residents of Ivory Park were able to. The local council was then

forced to reconceptualise the process of housing delivery in Ivory Park (see chapter two).

Building a House and Consolidating a Personal and Collective Identity

Whilst drawing on this common history of struggle against the police to reinforce a sense of belonging within a larger community, people moving to Ivory Park from Oakmoor also defined their membership through building a house. Constructing a dwelling and establishing a home was central to defining an urban identity. In his analysis of the Kabyle House in Algeria Bourdieu (1969) shows how space is defined in ways which are not simply neutral but rather which reflect wider ideological ideas about the nature of society. In his compl . analysis of the Kabyle house he shows how various internal spatial arrangements reflect and symbolise ideas about gender roles, fertility and Algerian cosmology.

Bourdieu's analysis is strongly structuralist and does not take into account how broader ideas about society are continually contested, negotiated, rejected or redefined by people. My analysis of the role of the house in Ivory Park does not follow Bourdieu in focusing on the internal organisation of space. It does, however, take from his analysis the idea that the house is not a simply a neutral space but rather a dynamic one in people define their place and membership within a broader community as well as being a space in which people constitute themselves.

A Personal Identity

A house is a site where people actively establish, define, affirm and redefine a personal identity. Recent anthropological literature has forced us to reconsider the nature of the household and has emphasised the importance of relationships which link households together (Guyer 1981; Harris 1981; Ross 1996.). In examining the processes involved in house-building in the previous chapter, I argued that it is precisely these social networks and ties between households which are crucially important in understanding how a house is built. Whilst relying on these broader connections in certain contexts, owning a yard and building a house should also be seen as an attempt to define a relatively bounded personal space.

Besides being a place where friends could visit, a house was also the place where 'public' events were held. During the period of my fieldwork I was invited to a number of events which occurred in people's homes. Whilst I was living in Ivory Park a woman living in our street was holding a *siyakhumula* (lit. 'taking off the belt' in Zulu) party (See McAllister 1986 for a discussion of a similar ritual). The event marks the end of a year of mourning for a widow. In one instance a woman's husband had died the previous year and she completed the required mourning period during this time she is expected to wear blue or black clothing. The night before the *siyakhumula* these clothes are taken off and either buried or burnt.

On the following day goats are slaughtered and a party is held at the widow's house where friends and neighbours are expected to attend.

Keane (1995:103) has argued that the house is a means through which people can 'talk about' aspects of their culture to themselves and to outsiders. He shows that amongst the Anakalang in eastern Indonesia, rituals bring together various members of a group where 'the house sites...manifest their identification with the ancestors as active collectivities' (*ibid*:110). In a similar way, through this public ritual, which occurs at the widow's house in Ivory Park, she is able to publicly end her period of mourning. Her house is where people are able to bring gifts to the widow to 'thank' her for spending a year in mourning. This process, however, occurs within the boundaries of her house and it is within this space that she is able to make public statements about herself.

Another event to which I was invited was a graduation party. It was a party held by Elizabeth, my fieldwork assistant and host, upon her graduation from a local college with a business-administration diploma. As was the case with the *siyakhumula* the graduation party was an event which involved inviting friends, neighbours and family to Elizabeth's house where they congratulated her and acknowledged her success. The day was characterised by a continual flow of people into and out of the house. Guests would arrive, find a place to sit and would then be given a plate of food to eat. Whilst the graduation ceremony had taken place in a community hall in the neighbouring suburb it was in Elizabeth's home, after the ceremony, that she

celebrated her success with her friends. Despite the fact that the kitchen of her shack was small, she managed to create space for everyone to be able to sit inside and eat.

As was the case with the *siyakhumula*, Elizabeth's graduation party was a way in which her house became the site in which she was able to make public statements about herself. It was an arena in which she defined herself as an individual as well as reinforced her relationships with a broader community. Both these examples illustrate the notion that the house is not simply a domestic and private domain but is a dynamic space which combines the expression of both public and private elements (Carstens 1995).

A Collective Identity

My discussions with Ivory Park residents suggested that a house also plays a role in the broader process of establishing a collective identity. This reflects Carstens and Hugh-Jones' (1995) argument that a house plays a central role in identity formation at both an individual and a social level. That a house was the site where membership within the community is established became clear when I was discussing local forms of justice in Ivory Park. One Saturday evening in Ivory Park Elizabeth became exceptionally angry with her teenage son who had not come home that evening for dinner. When I asked her why she had become so angry she explained to me that she did not want her son getting involved with any of the 'naughty' young boys living in the neighbourhood. I was interested

to find out why this issue of young teenage sons becoming involved with the 'wrong crowd' was so important because it had come up in a number of interviews which I had conducted. Indeed, one of the reasons given by single mothers for dispersing their children to live with relatives outside of Ivory Park, was that they perceived the rural areas as better places for children to grow up in. They believed that their sons would be less likely to get involved with 'naughty' children.

Elizabeth went on to tell me that if young boys are caught engaging in criminal activities within Angola Section, their mothers would forced to leave their home and their house would be burnt to the ground. She told me of an incident which had occurred in 1995 when a young boy had been murdered by his neighbour. The boy who had been killed was well known to the community and popular amongst his peers. The local leader called the police to come and arrest the murderer but when the local youths heard about the shooting they gathered at the house of the murderer, doused it with paraffin and set it alight. The family of the killer was thus forced to leave Ivory and their plot was allocated to another family who have subsequently built a new house.

This example suggests that a house is not simply a neutral space but rather is a symbol of membership within the community. By destroying a house, a household's status as a legitimate member of the community is similarly destroyed. It is through the creation of the physical boundaries entailed in building a house that people

actively define a space which is both physical and ideological. It is therefore a means through which one's identity as a member of the community is established and reinforced. Destroying a house, which symbolises a public statement of identity, effectively denies a person the right to claim or exercise that particular identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn out the significance of a house in the lives of the women I interviewed in Ivory Park. By examining five life-histories I have shown how important a house became in constituting themselves and their families in a wider community and simultaneously how that community is constituted by them. They show how their lives were generally characterised by movement between houses which did not belong to them. Moving first to Oakmoor and then later to Ivory Park was a way in which these women could secure a home for themselves and their children. In addition to this, however, this chapter has argued that building and owning a house is fundamentally important not only because it establishes membership within a broader community but also because it is a space in which people can establish and define a personal identity. It is a dynamic cultural arena in which a person is constantly able to make public statements about themselves and their relationships with others.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

This research report has problematised housing delivery in South Africa by examining how local level gender dynamics and cultural contexts inform and impact on house-building and the construction of homes in an informal settlement. I examined the nature of women headed households and I showed how the process of building a shelter was facilitated but also limited in this type of household. I showed the importance of social relations and how the existence of social networks of friends, family and neighbours contributed to the establishment of a home. This report uncovered the importance of a house as a site where social relationships are entrenched and maintained and, as such, I showed how a house is a site where identity can be constituted and reinforced.

This chapter will draw out some of the general themes which have emerged throughout the research report and examine them in greater depth. The first theme is the notion of 'empowerment' which has informed the various approaches to housing delivery in South Africa. The second theme concerns a related notion: that of 'community', in relation to the process of house building. Lastly I

will examine the link between social relations and the existence of a house. I show how a house or shelter is established by social relations but that the existence of a house in turn maintains and reinforces those social networks.

'Empowerment' and Local Dynamics in the Politics of Development

Housing has been guaranteed in the new South African constitution as a basic human right. This right, like human rights generally, is conceived of in universalist terms. It should necessarily include everyone and cannot exclude or prejudice any adult person on the basis of race, class, gender or any other perceived difference. This moral principle has informed housing delivery. While only a few housing programmes have been successfully implemented thus far, the government seems committed to reducing and possibly alleviating homelessness in South Africa.

Creating categories, like 'women' or indeed 'women headed households' would seem to negate or undermine this universal principle of equality informing a human rights discourse. What my report suggests, however, is that one cannot assume a homogeneity amongst the homeless or insecurely housed. This becomes particularly obvious when one examines local level dynamics and looks, for example, at gender relations and how they impact on the choices available to households headed by women

Another moral principle underlying housing delivery in post-Apartheid South Africa has been the notion of 'empowerment'. The idea of empowerment, however, needs to be contextualised within the history of various approaches to development more generally. The initial state controlled or developer-driven approaches resulted in programmes which proved to be inappropriate or unsuitable once implemented. As I show in chapter two, housing projects within the South African context did not escape this general trend.

In the 1980s, in an attempt to make development generally more appropriate to local needs, a new 'participatory' approach was adopted which emphasised local people's participation in their own development. This participation did not simply involve the active participation by 'communities', it was also understood as a process which enabled local people to conceptualise, control and direct development programmes which would affect them. In housing, but also in development more generally, the notion of 'self-help' emerged. This kind of development from the 'bottom-up' was premised on the assumption that, by being 'empowered' to 'participate' and thus control development, local recipients of development programmes would necessarily be more successful than the older 'top-down' approach.

Bottom-up housing programmes were generally site-and-service projects which would provide a basic shelter which would then be extended as the particular needs of an individual household changed. This kind of approach would relieve the state of some of the financial

burden of housing the poor. It assumed that once the initial infrastructure had been provided a household would bear the costs of upgrading as their resources allowed. It also allowed a household to build onto or extend a site in line with their own culturally-informed preferences. It was an idea that was also based on the stereotypical idea of a household consisting of a nuclear family confined in one house-space. It did not take into account the possible variations in household types or the relationship which exist between households which are often fundamentally important, especially in low-income groups (Ross 1996).

This self-help approach has been severely criticised by a number of authors examining housing dynamics in south America (Moser *et al* 1987). Their critiques are broadly based on the examination of gender dynamics and the nature of households and how these impact on the success or failure of a housing programme. Their studies suggest that self-help programs constrain and disempower women-headed households (Machado 1987, Chant 1987). According to these authors housing programmes must include an examination of the role of women and gender. It is only when one examines these issues specifically that such problems become apparent.

My own research in Ivory Park examined the dynamics of women headed households and my ethnography suggests similar problems with self-help, or incremental housing programmes. A single household income and the responsibility of having to support children, and possibly an extended family, meant that single mothers

were generally not in a position to extend or build onto an incremental structure. A site-and-service or self-help scheme had been implemented in Ebony Park - an area adjacent to where my research had been carried out. This approach was to be extended into Ivory Park, but was rejected by residents as unsuitable. Women household heads were particularly aware of the kinds of problems they would face with an incremental housing scheme.

It is within this context of housing and development that I further examined, in chapter three, what was actually being done by women household heads in terms of building shelters for themselves. An examination of the variation among women headed households allowed me to uncover what the possible options were for this type of household. My ethnography shows how single mothers built their existing shelters drawing on both family and neighbourly networks in order to do so. The existence of these broader networks which existed between individual households were of fundamental importance in the initial phases of building first a one-roomed shack and later consolidating this shack into two or three rooms. The presence or absence of these social networks was critical at this stage of house-building in Ivory Park and would influence what a household could achieve in this regard.

These social relations, which were so fundamental in establishing and consolidating an initial shelter, would prove to be insufficient in terms of building a brick house. Unlike a shack, which requires skills which kin or neighbours may have, building a brick house requires

both specialised building skills, as well as financial resources, which these social networks are unable to provide. The only woman who had managed to complete a brick dwelling had done so because her employer had made a loan available to her to hire builders and buy the necessary materials.

As a result of this particular limitation *vis-a-vis* building a brick house a number of these households expressed their preference for a completed structure to be offered rather than an incremental scheme. A site-and-service programme assumed that a certain portion of a person's income can be set aside and saved for the purpose of extending. In the case of many women household heads this was clearly impossible given the financial dependence of an immediate and/or extended household on her single salary. In the instances where women were not employed this type of scheme would be even more unsuitable.

While the general preference was for a housing scheme to offer a completed house, a number of women who had been able to begin building a brick house would have other requirements and not favour a completed dwelling. The variation in household types, even those broadly categorised as 'woman-headed', and the different financial and social resources available to them suggests that a household should not be understood as an isolated unit which is static and unchanging. Rather a household may evolve and change over time in ways that may not be predictable. A housing programme should be flexible enough to allow for this variability

and with it the realisation that housing needs, even within one definable community, may be significantly different (see Spiegel, Watson and Wilkinson 1996).

The uncritical use of a single category 'women-headed households' can further obscure this variation. Whilst I made use of this particular concept, my research shows that the use of a single category may negate or hide the incredible variation within households headed by women. This relates to the similar critique of early development programmes which used the stereotypical nuclear family as its point of departure. The assumption of a static and rigid household type evident in the uncritical use of the nuclear family may be similarly applicable to the notion of 'women-headed household'.

Culture, Housing and Identity

The anthropological contribution which can be made in the field of housing delivery can be to uncover these complexities within and between households so as to facilitate more appropriate housing programmes based on the specific and variant needs of local residents. Our contribution, however, should not end here. It is crucial to investigate the cultural contexts in which the construction of a house and the establishment of a home takes place. The last part of this report examined the cultural significance of building a house in Ivory Park.

A main thrust of my argument is that the house is an essential element in the process that Cohen (1985) aptly calls the symbolic construction of a community. The category of 'community' is one that we cannot assume to exist as an *a priori* or a homogenous entity. It is cultivated and constructed in particular ways at certain historical moments. Its constructed nature, however, should not deny its significance. In Ivory Park the community was established in two ways. The women whom I interviewed in Angola Section did so by drawing on their common experiences and joint activities vis a vis police interventions while they were living in the transit area of Oakmoor Station, prior to coming to Ivory Park. But, in addition to this common experiential history, shared and remembered by Ivory Park people about life in Oakmoor, building a house in Ivory Park was another way in which physical as well as social boundaries were established around their local community.

Owning and building a house with the assistance of neighbours and local networks is a way in which people established themselves and their households as member of the local community. Moreover, living in the house, and thereby using it as a place to define personal identity for the benefit of neighbours, helps to reinforce the sense that those neighbours constitute the local community. When they acknowledge personal life-crisis moments by attending celebrations in the house, they reinforce both the house-owners personal identity and their membership of the local community, which shares in that celebration. Finally, as my ethnography also shows, there are instances where such local community membership can be

withdrawn - the withdrawal being symbolised by the destruction of the house. I argue that one should understand a house as a symbol, a means through which this membership is translated into public knowledge. In my ethnography I give an example of how this membership can be denied in certain circumstances but can also be used as a resource which can be drawn on to make statements about one's identity.

A House and Social Relations

In my examination of how women household heads built their initial shack and later extended it I show how they drew on both kinship and neighbourly networks to do this. In the majority of cases it was the existence of these social networks that made the physical process of building a house possible. But once this had been done the house as a physical space was a way in which new social relations were established and old ones reinforced.

The existence of these social ties between people and between households contributed significantly to the construction of a dwelling and in turn facilitated the expression of individual and social identity. The implication of this argument reinforces the idea that one can not make a clear and unambiguous distinction between private and public domains and that in fact this dichotomy is misleading. In this regard, I have argued that a house, generally understood as only a private domain, in fact is a dynamic cultural

arena where women can also make public statements about their identity. A house then is both a private and public space.

It is when one examines the cultural significance and meaning of a house that the importance of a successful housing delivery programme becomes obvious. Development programmes tend to overlook or ignore this kind of analysis. My report has argued that, while housing delivery programmes have been informed by noble principles of 'empowerment', through 'community participation', one should continually evaluate what these terms mean in the context of local-level development practices.

I have shown that an analysis of gender is critical to any successful housing project as the choices available to, for example, a woman household head, may be significantly different to the heads of other household types. It is also critical to uncover the cultural context in which a house is built to show how and why it is significant or meaningful in particular ways. This qualitative information, which an anthropological approach provides, and the insight which it yields, would make a considerable contribution to the success and suitability of future housing projects.

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