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Maria van Driel

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## **The Social Grants and Black Women in South Africa<sup>i</sup>: A Case Study of Bophelong<sup>ii</sup> Township in Gauteng**

By Maria van Driel<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

In post Apartheid South Africa 12.4 million people receive a social grant. This paper discusses the significance of the grants, and black women's role through the prism of the grants. The paper is based on a case study in Bophelong township near Johannesburg. The methodology draws on primary and secondary sources, a small socio economic survey, indicative interviews with black women grant recipients, and the relevant literature. The principle of 'triangulation' is used to validate research findings. For a substantial number of families, especially single women with children, the grant is their sole income. Black women provide the necessary (unpaid) labour and care for children on a 'hand to mouth existence', but the grant does not assist recipients to break the cycle of poverty. The patterns of social reproduction in post-apartheid South Africa reinforces patterns of patriarchy inherited from apartheid, and reinforces the subordinated position of women in society. The role of women as carers hampers black women's mobility to seek work and/or educational opportunities. Despite far-reaching Constitutional rights, the state, through the nature of the social grants, inadvertently reinforces the subordinate and unequal position of black women, structurally responsible for the caring for the young and the aged. This is indicative of neoliberal accumulation and social reproduction in post apartheid SA.

*Keywords:* Neoliberalism, social grant recipients, social reproduction

### **The Research question and Methodology**

There are two aspects to the research question:

1. What is the significance of the social grants in South Africa and
2. What is the specific position of black women in South Africa with regards to social reproduction as viewed through the prism of the social grants?

The four main grants discussed in this paper, paid monthly in 2007, include the old age pension grant (OAP), the child support grant (CSG), the disability grant (DG) and the foster care grant (FCG)

The research is based on a case study of Bophelong, a black township near Johannesburg, in South Africa. The paper draws on primary and secondary research: snowball interviews with grant recipients between March-July 2007; a socio economic survey in December 2007 (Van Driel: 2007a), and relevant literature. Thirty-one interviews were completed, twenty-five with grant recipients and six with key township informants. The recipients included 2 on OAPs, 4 on DGs, 2 on FCGs and 17 on CSGs.

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<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate: Sociology Department, Wits University, South Africa

Only one male recipient (DG) agreed to be interviewed, hence the paper focuses on the 24 women recipients (Van Driel: 2007b). Interviews were conducted in English and Afrikaans<sup>iii</sup> and a fluent Sesotho/ English/Afrikaans translator was present in all interviews, to assist if needed.

A random Survey (2007) of 5% of the population was proportionally drawn from the three housing types in Bophelong to ensure a representative sample. An official town-planning map<sup>iv</sup> of Bophelong was used to calculate the 5% questionnaires needed for each geographic section (counting each house-stand). The informal settlement shacks were counted manually during the Survey. The housing types include:

- i) The (1 054) four-roomed township houses built during apartheid, with an inside toilet, piped water in the kitchen and bathroom and municipal electricity.
- ii) The (10 000) tiny two-roomed RDP houses with one inside tap in the toilet, and one outside, and prepaid electricity meters, built in post apartheid SA.
- iii) The informal settlement (488 shacks), built by occupants in post apartheid SA have no water, electricity and toilet facilities.

The Survey<sup>v</sup> was completed with the assistance of sixteen local ‘volunteer workers’<sup>vi</sup> from the Department of Social Development (DSD), from the African Skills and Development Initiative (ASEDI). Interviewers were trained to use the questionnaire and understand the survey. While the questionnaire was in English, the training enabled interviewers to clarify possible queries, and all of them could communicate in local African languages. Interviewers worked in pairs to assist each other. All questionnaires were checked together with the interviewers to ensure data accuracy and reliability. A total of 599 questionnaires (73 from the Old Township, 502 from the RDP houses and 24 from the shacks) were completed.

### **The Case study method**

This study is informed by Burawoy’s (1998) case study method, which, he argues, can be used to contribute to knowledge about society in general. This method implies being familiar with the experiences and understandings of interviewees, being sensitive to their social and historical context, and relating individual experiences to social, structural relations and processes in contemporary SA. Burawoy emphasises the importance of relevant theory and literature (even before entering the field). The ‘detail of lived life’ and ‘thick description’ is needed to convey ‘other people’s ways of life’ (Geertz: 2000, p. xi). The paper is based on the principle of triangulation to validate research findings.

### **The Bophelong Case Study**

#### *Overview*

Even after apartheid Bophelong remains a low-income black township in Emfuleni municipality, 70 kilometers south of Johannesburg. After 1994, Emfuleni municipality was restructured to include black townships and former white towns (FWTs). Emfuleni has a population of 658 422 (Census 2001), 47% are economically

active, 23% are employed and 24% are unemployed (Slabbert 2004, quoted in IDP 2007: p.15).

Poor households increased from 30% in 1991 to 53% in 2000 (ibid). Wealth is extremely skewed, 80% of households (blacks) earn 40%, and 20% of households (whites) earn 60% of the total income in the region (ibid) – an apartheid legacy. Income is sourced from wages, informal activities, pensions, remittances and other means (ibid).

Historically this (Vaal) region was important for SA's capitalist development - coal mining, iron, steel, metal and related secondary industries. Powerful parastatals - the Iron & Steel Corporation (ISCOR), the SA Oil and Gas Corporation (SASOL) and ESKOM (energy), anchored the development of secondary industry in the region in the 1950s. Historically, the black workforce was largely unskilled male migrants from the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu Natal (and some urban workers), who were subjected to stringent pass laws. Until the late 1960s White workers did skilled and semi-skilled work, till the demands of manufacturing for increased skills drew in black workers. However, the declining economic situation in the 1970s, and the international shift to neoliberalism influenced the National Party<sup>vii</sup>, and SASOL was privatised in 1979 and ISCOR in 1989. The ISCOR workforce declined from 44 000 in 1980, to 12 200 in 2004 (groundWork Report: 2006) through 'lean' production methods associated with neoliberalism (Hlatswayo: 2005). In 2004, following a global restructuring of the steel industry, ISCOR was bought by Mittal Steel. The workforce at SASOL and ESKOM was also reduced as a result of production changes, and/or their relocation to the Mpumalanga province. Besides Mittal Steel, work opportunities in the region are few. Manufacturing still dominates the region providing 42% of the region's economy (IDP: 2007, 14). Informal, casual and/or contract work is increasing (groundWork Report: 2006).

Bophelong was built in 1948 as a dormitory township for cheap black labour for surrounding industries. The heart of Bophelong remains in the old (apartheid) township where a few amenities exist – a clinic, a library, council offices, a satellite police station and a few local shops. There are no banks; no Internet cafes, no post office and residents have no landline telephones. Historically, ISCOR used mainly migrant labour (Hlatswayo: 2005) in its Fordist production methods (groundWork Report: 2006). While there are no work opportunities in Bophelong, it now provides casual and contract workers for Mittal Steel and surrounds, given the production changes. Bophelong residents still buy 80-90% of their groceries and clothing from the FWTs (Slabbert, 2004, 10).

### *Post Apartheid*

The 10 000 RDP houses built in 1998/9 enveloped the old (apartheid) Bophelong, but no additional amenities were built. The (apartheid) facilities have been stretched to accommodate the additional population. Except for weekends, sombreness descends on the township by 8am, children are in school, the taxi rank is empty, the employed have left, and casual workers will come back tomorrow to seek work.

Bophelong remains dusty and polluted. There are few trees, few tarred roads and no drainage. Rains cause flooding, and inconvenience pedestrians and motorists. There is no public transport and people depend on (private) mini-bus taxis. Informal garbage dumps are visible everywhere. In contrast, the FWT of Vanderbijlpark across the road, is

tree-lined, lawned, with tarred roads, pavements and drainage; and large three-bedroomed houses, historically built for white skilled and semi-skilled workers.

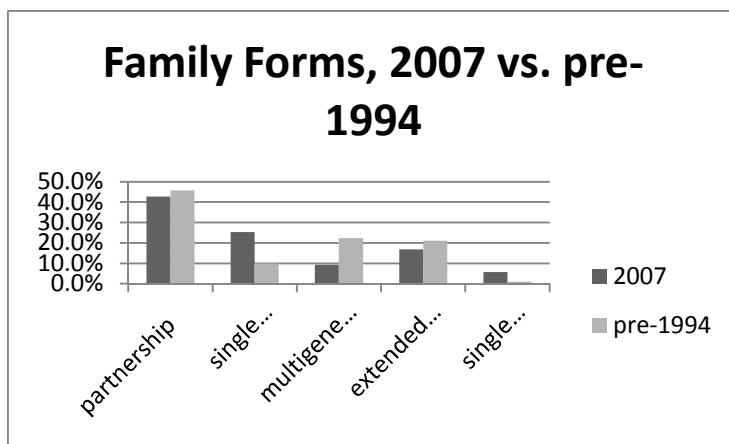
### Bophelong Survey Results

Only Survey (Van Driel: 2007a) results relevant to this paper will be discussed. The respondents were mainly women (73%), Sesotho speaking (72%), with some high school education (68%). Respondents were generally youthful, 50% were between 20 and 40 years old, and 20% were between 40 to 50 years. Most families (69%) have lived in the township for 5 to 10 years, (when the RDP houses were built). Five people live in each home (80%), amounting to about 60 000 people. This is plausible as in 2000 Bophelong had a population of 37 779 (Stats SA 200a, quoted in Slabbert: 2004, 62). People live in RDP houses (84%), old Bophelong (12%) and shacks (4%).

#### *Family and family forms*

Respondents generally lived with family members or blood-relatives (95%). This is informative as surveys tend to focus on ‘households’ and not families. Family forms are defined as follows: partnerships (civil, church and customary marriage and those ‘living together’); single parents (both women and men living with children); multigenerational (the presence of grandparent(s)); and extended (uncles, aunts, cousins, etc).

Table 1 (below) indicates a significant increase in the single parent family form, from 10% in 1994 to 25% in 2007. Single parent families are significant in all three housing types, (averaging 24%), with the highest number in RDP houses (26%). Single female parents with children are the majority (91%). While Men ‘head’ partnership families (91%), females ‘head’ all other family forms: single parents (91%), multigenerational (71%) and extended families (53%). Overall, children lived with their mothers (61%), and mothers (78%) maintained the children compared to fathers (57%). Amongst single parents with children, maintenance is done predominantly by females (more than 80%).



**Table 1. Bophelong Survey 2007**

### *Income distribution and skills*

A substantial number of all families (69%) live on less than R1000<sup>viii</sup> (US \$133) per month. While this included 61% of partnerships, it was especially high in female-headed family forms, 79% of single parents, 70% of multigenerational and 72% of extended families. Partnership families (31%) had the highest monthly income between R1000 and R2000. Respondents were fulltime employed (27%), unemployed (47%) and did casual work (16%). Of these, Sixty-six percent (66%) sourced their sole income from a social grant. The skills base in Bophelong is low amongst all family forms (averaging 14%). But the skilled are higher in partnership families (21%) and low in all female-headed family forms: single parents (9%), multigenerational (5%) and extended (11%).

The Survey confirms dire socio economic conditions prevalent for many people in Bophelong. Many respondents (51%) had incurred debt for furniture, clothes and school fees. Some (14%) had turned to local moneylenders (who charge 50% interest per month) to provide food (10%), services such as electricity (5%), schooling (6%), and other (11%). The main food eaten was: pap [maize porridge] (98%), vegetables (72%), bread (65%), morogo [spinach] (49%) and maas [sour milk] (40%). While people like meat, 36% eat meat twice a week, 33% eat meat once a week and 9% eat meat every day. The meat eaten includes frozen chicken (89%), sausage (43%) and bones (43%). The prevalence of low monthly income (R1000 pm) in the midst of high unemployment, across all family forms and housing types, indicates the importance of the social grants Bophelong.

### ***Moments of Normality...Social Grants in Bophelong***

In Bophelong, the SA Social Security Agency<sup>ix</sup> (RSA: 2004) pays the social grants over a three-day period every month. Recipients queue for 3-4 hours at the Bophelong Community Hall. Although safer, a minority (the 1 male interviewed), is paid through commercial banks, as recipients need transport (R14 or US \$1.80 per return fare), to access commercial banks in the FWTs, and because bank charges will decrease their grants.

Despite the long wait, there is laughter and lightness in the queues, confirmed by Hunter's (2007) study of CSG recipients in Kwazulu Natal. The old township is transformed into a 'normal town', a colourful hub of people. Traders sell a variety of goods from afval (ox/pig: feet, intestines, lungs and heart), to cheap clothes and plastic kitchenware. Customers queue to buy prepaid electricity, food and 'something nice for the children' (Hunter: 2007), like Parmalat yoghurt for a grandchild (Mosotho: 2007).

On payout days almost R3 million is paid out in Bophelong in social grants, and a significant amount is spent immediately, mainly on food, (Interviewees: 2007, De Koker et al: 2006). There is a pronounced difference in the social atmosphere and the social energy in the township. One can sense the joy and relief on the streets –before the money runs out and the cycle begins again.

<b>Types of Grants</b>	<b>Old age Pension</b>	<b>Child Support</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Foster Care</b>	<b>Care Grant</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>No. of Recipients</b>	1 224	2 442	914	211	44	<b>4 835</b>
<b>Percentage Of Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Social Grant Recipients in Bophelong Township** (Based on telephonic interview with SASSA official, Sharon X, 25 June 2007.)

The grants are paid monthly. The OAP is R870 (US \$114) for men over 65 and women over 60. The DG is R870, for men, women and children with a disability, between 18 and 60. The Care Dependency Grant is R870, for children who need fulltime care, from 1 to 18 years, and a medical certificate is needed. The FCG is R620 (US \$82) for orphans/children at risk, between 0 and 18 years, and can be extended to 21. The CSG is R200 (US \$26), for children between 0 to 14 years of age, compliant with a means test. In 2007, families must earn less than R9 600 per year or R800 per month, (US \$1 280 per year or US \$107 per month respectively) to comply with the means test.

Based on Table 2 below, about 4 835 people or 8% of 60 000 people are grant recipients. For indicative purposes, we assume 5 000 recipients and (conservatively) four people per home. This indicates that 20 000 people or 33% of the Bophelong population sources income from a social grant.

The total Social Grant payments in Bophelong (Table 2) for June 2007 (including unpaid or uncollected grants) was: R 3 022 260 (SASSA: 2007)<sup>x</sup>. If the total payments are divided by the assumed 5 0000 recipients, this averages R626.00 (US \$82) per month. In a family of four, this averages to R156 (US \$21) per person per month, or R5.00 (US \$0.66) per person per day, to cover basic expenses (food, electricity, transport, clothes and school fees). Bearing in mind that 51% receive a CSG (Table 3), this amounts to far less. For many families in Bophelong, making ends meet is difficult, confirming the Survey results. The national picture of the social grants will broaden the understanding of living conditions of women and children in SA.

### **Social Grants: The National Picture**

<b>Type of Grant</b>	<b>April 2003</b>	<b>April 2004</b>	<b>April 2005</b>	<b>April 2006</b>	<b>April 2007</b>
Old Age Pensions	2 009 419	2 060 421	2 093 440	2 144 117	2 186 189
War Veterans <sup>xi</sup>	4 594	3 961	3 343	2 832	2 326
Disability	953 965	1 270 964	1 307 551	1 319 536	1 437 842
Foster Care	138 763	200 340	252 106	312 614	381 125
Care Dependency Grant	58 140	77 934	88 889	94 263	103 992
Child Support	2 630 826	4 309 772	5 661 500	7 044 901	7 879 558
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 808 494</b>	<b>7 941 562</b>	<b>9 406 829</b>	<b>10 918 263</b>	<b>11 991 032</b>

<b>Province</b>					
Eastern Cape	1 071 448	1 501 031	1 743 007	2 094 642	2 255 034
Free State	366 979	503 063	596 083	678 522	734 145
Gauteng	701 962	976 533	1 165 679	1 318 981	1 406 375
Kwazulu-Natal	1 344 936	1 836 975	2 149 969	2 498 888	2 913 720
Limpopo	808 553	1 152 621	1 412 882	1 640 032	1 750 286
Mpumalanga	395 636	580 684	704 070	836 451	893 647
Northern Cape	138 969	169 102	188 578	213 512	233 592
North West	462 418	637 312	777 722	888 065	998 382
Western Cape	517 593	584 241	668 839	749 170	805 851
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 808 494</b>	<b>7 941 562</b>	<b>9 406 829</b>	<b>10 918 263</b>	<b>11 991 032</b>

As we can see from Table 3 below, from April 2003 to April 2007, the number of people receiving the four main social grants increased consistently, especially in the poorest provinces - the Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal and Limpopo. The FCG, also for children, three times the amount of the CSG, is for non-biological parents, and constitutes only 3% of the total recipients. However, CSG recipients increased the most, from 2.6 million in 2003 to 7.8 million in 2007, an increase of 300%. The increase reflects the expansion of the CSG initially for children from 0-7 years in 1997, to 0-14 years in 2007. The spread of grant recipients in Bophelong (Table 2) is consistent with national trends (Table 3): the CSG grant is the majority (51%), and this is also confirmed by De Koker et al' (2006). The steep increase in the total number of recipients, especially for OAPs, DGs and CSGs, reflects the increased access of all South Africans to social grants after Apartheid. However, the 300% increase in the CSGs and its predominance (67%) nationally over the other grants, reflects the conditions under which 8 million children live, in families with low 'means-test compliance' income.

**Table 3: Social grant beneficiaries: Grants by Type and by Province: April 2003-April 2007**

*Source: Intergovernmental Fiscal Review, Socpen, National Department of Social Development, In Social Development Vote, (2007: p 334).*

Earlier studies indicated that OAPs maintained the whole family and by 1999, nine million people benefited from the OAP (Hassim: 2005), whereas there were only 6 million recipients in 2003 (Table 3). Statistics SA Report on Income and Expenditure (2007) states that one in ten households rely on state grants for at least half the family's total income. This accounts for 1.5% of the total population's earnings; while the richest 10% earn more than half of all income; and the wealth gap within black society is wider than in any other community (Quoted in Boyle: 2008,3).

In the context of shrinking employment, many share grants meant for children, the aged, and the disabled. This research on Bophelong and the national picture discussed above indicate a daily struggle for (12 million) recipients, of which 67% are black women with children.



Since SA's first democratic elections in 1994, there is a significant increase in social inequality amongst black people (Terreblanche: 2002), especially amongst black women (Hassim: 2005, Makgetla: 2004). For some (Lehulere: 1999, Bond: 2000, and Seekings&Nattrass: 2006), this is linked to the implementation of the government's neoliberal Growth Economic and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy in 1996. Since then one million retrenchments occurred, associated with deregulation, trade liberalisation and lean production. Unemployment is currently at 40%, and 70% of this is people under the age of 30 (Makgetla: 2004). Statistics South Africa (2003) confirms that women generally have lower incomes, higher unemployment and less access to assets than men, supported by Razavi & Hassim (2005: 1). Women also have little promotion and/or training in the workplace, and are locked into gendered jobs (Casale: 2004, Makgetla: 2004). The apartheid nexus of colour, class and gender remain the determinants of deep-seated social and economic inequalities for working people, especially black women. This is exacerbated by GEAR policies such as the privatisation of basic services, increased user fees for education and health care, jobless growth and precarious forms of work (Van Driel: 2005). Makgetla (2004) and Hassim (2005), argue that Black women are more adversely affected by poverty and rising unemployment.

In terms of answering the first aspect of the research question: the social grants are the sole income for many family forms, especially single women with children, in Bophelong and SA nationally, and barely keep hunger at bay. The government's stated aim to bring about changes in social relations so that the poor can take control of their own lives (RSA Government: 2006, 15) is a dream, in this context. Indeed, the policies adopted after 1996 arguably militate in an opposite direction to government's stated aims.

This begins to answer the second aspect of the research question on the position of black women. The CSG recipients are predominantly single black women with children and the grants are the main source of their family income (Hassim: 2005, 8 & De Koker et al: 2006, Hunter: 2007). De Koker et al's (2006: 2730) found that nationally CSG recipients were 90% black (African) and 10% are so-called coloured women, with a mean age of 36. In terms of marital status, De Koker et al found that 30% were married and 52% were never married. Sixty-six percent (66%) were biological parents and 85% were sole-caregivers. Clearly black single women with children play a pivotal role in the care and responsibility for children, and the CSG is the main source of income. The interviews with 24 black women, while not a representative sample, enable closer observation of the living conditions of black women grant recipients and their families.

### **A Profile of Black Women Recipients**

Table 4 contains summary information of 24 women recipients interviewed in Bophelong during March to July 2007 (Van Driel: 2007b). The women spoke Sesotho (88%) and Xhosa (12%), and lived with five family members, (including grandchildren). The youngest woman was 23, and the oldest was 65 years.

1	Age	20-30years	31-40years	41-60years	60+	N/A	TOTAL
		4	11	6	3		24
	%	17%	45%	25%	13%		100%

2	<b>Grant Type</b>	OAP	DG	FCG	CSG	N/A	TOTAL
		2	3	2	17	-	24
	%	8%	13%	8%	71%	-	100%
3	<b>Other Income</b>	Domestic	Caregiver			N/A	TOTAL
		1	1			22	24
	%	4%	4%			92%	100%
4	<b>Occupational Skill<sup>xii</sup></b>	Domestic/ Caregiver	Farm worker	Shop Assistant	Receptionist	N/A	TOTAL
		12	1	3	1	7	24
	%	50%	4%	13%	4%	29%	100%
5	<b>Marital status</b>	Never married	Married	Widow	Single	N/A	TOTAL
		16	3	3	2	-	24
	%	66%	13%	13%	8%	-	100%
6	<b>Sole children's Caregivers</b>	Fulltime	-	-	-	N/A	TOTAL
		19				5	
	%	79%				21%	100%
7	<b>Adult males living at home</b>	Husbands	Grants	Unemployed	-	N/A	TOTAL
		3	Brothers (1)	Son (1), uncle (1) Brothers (1)	-	17	24
	%	13%	4%	13%	-	70%	100%
8	<b>Family forms</b>	Multi-generational	Extended	Single women & children	Partnership	N/A	TOTAL
		4	1	16	3	-	24
	%	17%	4%	66%	13%	-	100%

Of the 24 women interviewed, the majority were CSG recipients (71%), in the 26-40 year age group, with a mean age of 36.5. Twenty-six percent (26%) were married/ widowed and 66% had never married. Sixty-three (63) percent were family 'heads'. Family forms were mainly multigenerational (17%), extended (17%) and single parents (66%) looking after biological children as sole-caregivers (79%). Two women had part-time jobs with additional income, (Rita<sup>xiii</sup>, a domestic, works 12 days per month for R400 (US\$ 53); and Katlego<sup>xiv</sup>, a caregiver, works for the DSD for R1 000 (US \$133) per month). The grant is the sole income for 92% of recipients. The profile of the 24 women tends to support more detailed and representative studies by Hassim (2005), De Koker et al (2006), Hunter et al (2007) and the Bophelong Survey (2007), that CSG recipients are largely single women with children, living solely on grant income.

All CSG recipients expressed their preparedness to do any work to earn money but as the sole-caregivers they were structurally hampered - local kindergardens in

Bophelong cost R100 (US \$13) per child per month, excluding food, and recipients get R200 (US \$26) per month. Most recipients (87%) moved from other provinces to live in RDP houses since 1998/9, (13% lived in the old township), and had no family or kin close-by to support them. The normal township practice of leaving their young with relatives was thus not open to most of the women. The women bear historical/structural limitations related to their skill and work histories. Their previous work experience includes domestic work, caring, farmwork, shop assistant and reception work. This confirms the historic pattern of black women's work in SA (Hassim: 2005, Makgetla: 2004). Besides their male children, no adult males lived in 70% of the female-headed homes.

All interviewees said the old township was quieter, safer and less violent - the old houses are bigger with more privacy than the RDP houses. Most women (79%) agreed that despite daily struggles, they were happier without men as 'there was no domestic violence' (sic). They shared some common illnesses, which they related to stress and previous work experience - including asthma (13%), strokes (8%) and high blood pressure (29%). 'Making the grant stretch' meant constantly worrying about food for everyone; whether to buy electricity or school shoes; and what to do when the money is finished and the next grant is far. All interviewees had to mediate children's differences, conflicts and demands, and this was also stressful.

#### *What do they use the Grant for?*

The main needs reiterated were food and money for daily living. Everyone said the grant didn't cover their needs. Lena<sup>xv</sup> said, 'Before the month is out, food is finished and there's no money'. Rita<sup>xvi</sup> said, 'In three days the CSG is finished'. 'People only eat when they have money, when the grant runs out the food runs out'<sup>xvii</sup>. Demands are gendered: Katlego<sup>xviii</sup> said 'The boys want meat for every meal, every day, and this causes tension as there's no money for meat.' Josephine<sup>xix</sup>'s teenage daughters wanted clothes. Mary<sup>xx</sup>, (a DG recipient herself), looks after two disabled brothers, said, 'My brothers fight with me, they think I use their money, but food is expensive'. 'The last days in the month, there's only pap (maize) and left-over fat. Sometimes there's no electricity', said Rita. The interviews confirmed the survey (Van Driel, 2007) results, and the work by De Koker et al (2006): when available, recipients' spend their money on food, electricity, clothes and school fees.

There is some differentiation amongst the grant recipients. Based on the interviews, all CSG recipients live a 'hand to mouth' existence and couldn't afford to use a moneylender as the repayment interest (50%) was prohibitive, except for Rita (who earns additional income as a domestic). The other nine recipients on OAPs, DGs and FCGs – who get 3 to 4 times the CSG amount – use moneylenders, have clothing accounts at Edgars Stores/Jet, bought furniture/appliances on hire-purchase at Lubners, and participate in funeral societies. No recipient could afford to participate in a stokvel, (where money or food is pooled and rotated amongst members). Of the interviewees, the majority (83%) could not afford television sets and cell phones

#### *What food is eaten every day?*

All the women wanted to provide meat for lunch on Sundays – a township tradition, but this was not possible. The daily staple is pap (maize) porridge for breakfast,

black tea, and a piece of bread for lunch, and pap for supper. During the week people eat pap with morogo (a spinach) and potatoes. When money allows, the diet includes chicken feet, pork bones, eggs and maas (sour milk). This was confirmed in the survey (Van Driel, 2007).

All interviewees bought food hampers especially prepared for grant recipients locally, at Olas Store, (groceries) and Nhlapos (a butchery). For example, Hamper 1 includes 12 kilograms of mielie meal, 10 kilograms of white sugar, 2 litres of cooking oil, 1 kilogram of washing powder and 10 kilograms of cake flour – for R177, 95 (US\$23) (Ola: May 2007). A small meat hamper contains beef and chicken pieces, and sausage, for R40 (US \$5). ‘People buy fatty pieces of meat, like Rainbow frozen chicken and fatty beef’ said one informant<sup>xxi</sup>. Hamper 1 and one small meat pack, costs R217.95 (US\$29) - more than the CSG (R200/US \$26) - and excludes basic necessities like vegetables, electricity and medicine. Interviewees spent between R50-R100 (US \$7 to US \$13) each month on prepaid electricity.

Makgetla (2004), confirms that 44% of households with their sole income from a grant had difficulty meeting their food needs. This is worsened when combined with the HIV/Aids pandemic, and the need to eat nutritional food. The survey (van Driel, 2007) confirmed that 33% eat meat once a week, and that some (14%) turn to moneylenders to buy food. Seria (2003) argues that the grants are not keeping up with rising food inflation. Statistics SA (2007) confirms that people on the lower end, including grant recipients, spend 50% of their income on food (quoted in Boyle, 2008). The interviewees also confirmed this (van Driel: 2007b). In addition, the Government’s Value Added Tax of 14% is charged on everything - including most foodstuffs (some foods are zero rated), transport, clothes and electricity - reducing the real disposable income of recipients. The result is that many black children under five years suffer serious malnutrition (Patrick& Stephen: 2005: 7).

#### *Daily Struggles, the Grants and Black Women*

The Bophelong Survey indicated a shortfall (in all family forms) between low monthly income and the daily struggle for food security. A clear link exists between low incomes, unemployment and providing for family needs from a grant. Smith and Wallerstein (1992) discuss this as ‘survival strategies’ and contrast households in developed and developing countries in relation to the cycles of the world economy. They argue that households in the former are dependent on wage labour and therefore too inflexible, whereas in the latter ‘income is pooled’ and households survive through transfers, (social grants or remittances), wages, market sales, rent, and ‘subsistence’ (ibid).

Smith & Wallerstein’s understanding of households, however, is too generic. There is little reference to family forms, gender, affective social relations (if any) and particular conditions. The survey (Van Driel, 2007a) and the literature (Hassim: 2005 and De Koker et al, 2006), confirmed that predominantly women maintained children in the framework of single women households. As the sole-caregivers, the women had no-one else to ‘pool’ resources with. Structurally, childcare and subsistence rhythms hamper women’s flexibility and mobility to seek work and/or educational opportunities - women often have no time, space and/or taxi-fare to seek work in FWTs.

For many women, the means to survive is linked to access to resources. The variation amongst recipients getting different grants, discussed above, influences their survival attempts. Some CSG recipients (17%) attempted to supplement their income by selling cakes, chips, traditional beer, roast chicken and knitted jerseys. But additional income is needed for trade of this nature, which is often unsustainable because their sole income is the grant.

For Smith & Wallerstein, households in the 'periphery' are undifferentiated with no internal struggles. Mosoetsa (2005), however, outlines conflicts over money (including grants), gender, and generational issues in her Kwazulu Natal study. To the extent that the grant is 'pooled' this causes tension in households (ibid). The survey (van Driel, 2007a) confirmed domestic conflicts in 83% of respondents, including over money (34%), unemployment (28%), housework (17%), food (10%), alcohol (6%) and childcare (5%). Interviewees (Van Driel: 2007b) also confirmed conflicts within the family.

The strategies outlined by Smith and Wallerstein (1992) all derive from national income already in circulation, so no expansion of society's productive base takes place. Given the limits of redistribution in the context of a regressive tax regime that increasingly favours those already in employment, the survival strategies these women engage in are not sustainable. The social grant itself is derived from surplus value, which the state allocates in terms of the different social class' 'national share'. This explains the limitations of the grants in bridging poverty and inequality - as no additional sources of value are created and distributed.

#### *'Connectedness'*

Bott (1957: 112) argues that amongst the working class, one is likely to find a 'high degree of connectedness'. Bott is referring to the mutual social support amongst people in similar circumstances (ibid). All interviewees turned to neighbours first, and then to friends; and this is confirmed by De Koker et al (2005) and the survey (van Driel, 2007a). This was evident during the research itself. It was difficult to maintain appointments as the women often had to attend to problems in the family and the immediate neighbourhood. The problems included assisting with childcare, accompanying a neighbour to hospital, and assisting someone in labour. Other support included funeral societies (8%), and attending the church (60%). Amongst all the women there is a clear recognition that they can depend on neighbours, friends and each other.

#### **Black Women and Social Reproduction in SA**

Based on Burawoy's method (1998) the Bophelong case study is a reflection of conditions nationally. The research confirms the grants' importance as the sole income for 12 million people, across family forms, and the struggle to live on less than R1000 per month. The majority grant, the CSG, is for children from very low-income families, in all family forms, but especially for single women with children. Given the national importance of the grants, especially the CSG, and predominantly women's role in social reproduction, a discussion of black women's position in SA society is possible.

#### *Social reproduction*

Engels (1968) and Sehgal (2005), agree that social reproduction includes reproducing production and society in its totality, and this is historically and socially

determined. Social reproduction includes key aspects of ‘species being’, that distinguish human beings from animals (Marx, cited in Bakker et al: 2003, 18). Bakker outlines three aspects to social reproduction, namely biological reproduction of the species, the reproduction of the labour force and the reproduction of provisioning and caring needs (ibid).

Under neoliberalism the reproductive gains of the working class historically and internationally, including the social wage, has been reversed. Increasingly, ‘socialised risk’ and/or important aspects of social reproduction, is based on market fundamentalism, privatisation and the role and responsibility of the individual (Hassim: 2005).

### *Social grants in a neoliberal context*

While Government’s spending on the social grants increased significantly the research illustrates that this has not reversed the drift into poverty by the majority of the population. Neoliberalism as a social and economic doctrine represents a particular response to the crisis of profitability that affected the capitalist world economy in the 1970s (Lehulere: 1999). Following the end of the Second World War the social democratic consensus socialised key elements of social reproduction, including education, provision of basic amenities like water and energy, transport, health, pensions for aged, unemployment benefits and so on (Bezanson & Luxton: 2006). The idea of ‘grants’ did not feature in this paradigm, as citizenship bestowed certain rights, including access to employment. In its search for profitability, the new neoliberal orthodoxy de-socialised these key elements of social reproduction, or at least attempted to. This meant ending state provision or subsidisation of the cost of these elements to the individual citizen. The policy of privatisation of social services and state enterprises in general was thus meant to bring these services into the orbit of the market. While this de-socialisation is proving difficult to complete in the north, in the south, various institutions and social actors have pushed through changes that have realised the de-socialisation of key elements of social reproduction. In South Africa, as the grant was extended to more people, new expenses were being added to their basket. The installation of pre-paid water and electricity meters, the lack of affordable public transport, the rising costs of education, all exert a downward pressure on the real value of the grants. Contrary to Rashad Cassim’s (Deputy Director, Stat SA) contention that “The grants have been a central factor in reducing poverty,” (quoted in Boyle: 2008), the grants’ location in a neoliberal framework has undermined their potentially positive impact.

The discourse of ‘grants’ is itself a neoliberal discourse. ‘Grants’ are not regarded as a ‘pension’ as they bear no relationship to the income the recipient earned when they worked. In this sense, ‘grants’ are a form of state philanthropy – an attempt by the state to deal with the ‘plight of the poor and marginalised’. Grants are therefore not seen as a right earned by the recipient’s contribution to national development. The South African state’s attitude to grants as a form of state philanthropy, comes up in the way grants are associated with ‘dependency’ – grants are not payment for services rendered, but are a favour granted by a benevolent state. The way different child grants are valued points to another way in which grants are positioned in a neoliberal discourse. Since women’s unpaid labour is not recognised, the CSG makes provision for the child, but not for the mother - whose labour mediates the grant and the needs of the child. It appears that the reasoning is that the biological mother should perform unpaid labour, and non-biological

mothers should be paid as they are positioned in a similar position to the creche's school-teacher. Foster-care parents are thus recognised because they are positioned in a manner analogous to the market, whereas biological mothers are not. This contrasts with the State Maintenance Grant (SMG) to parents (largely white women) under Apartheid, acknowledging their labour as primary caregivers. The SMG was replaced by the CSG - excluding parents, especially women - in 1997/8.

*Black women and social reproduction in SA*

In SA, under neoliberalism, black women bear the burden of social reproduction in their families (Mosoetsa: 2005). The nature of social reproduction of substantial sections of black working people in SA, especially single black women and children, is based on a social grant. Black women endure daily struggles as sole caregivers. Black women mediate conflicts in the home over money, gender and generational issues, and try to keep children at school. Hunter (2007) indicated that black men are ashamed and refuse to access social grants because of the stigma attached. In Bophelong, only one male agreed to be interviewed, for similar reasons. Given the workload, the grants, especially the CSGs, are viewed as 'women's work'. With the FCGs - three times the CSGs amount - the state lowers the burden on non-biological parents. In comparison, CSG recipients are predominantly black, biological mothers, but they receive one-third of what children on the FCG gets. While all children have similar needs, the state differentiates between 'non-biological' and 'biological' children. Effectively, 'biological' children get less state support thereby increasing the burden on black women. While women are blamed for 'dependency on the grant', the state provides no support for black women between 14 and 60 years, despite their vital caregivers' role in social reproduction - in producing the next generation of workers and providing for 'caring needs'.

Standing (1999: 583) states that under neoliberalism the labour market's demand for workers with specialist-skills is small, compared to the need for workers with no 'accumulated technical skills'. In SA, the demand is for domestics, casual and contract workers, in precarious unskilled and semi-skilled work. Daily, casual workers sit on the edges of black townships, at roadside intersections, waiting for a chance to work. This is the specific workforce that black women are reproducing, based on the social grant and their unpaid labour. Social reproduction occurs under conditions of impoverishment. The Interviews (Van Driel: 2007b) are indicative of the stress and pressure black women live with on a daily basis.

The task of social reproduction is a significant barrier to black women's general mobility, work options, and training opportunities. Most CSG recipients can't afford township (private) crèches, and only 35% of CSG children between 0-6 attend a crèche (De Koker et al: 324). In general, early childhood development facilities - influencing black children's education and life-chances - are non-existent, including existing township crèches.

In SA single women with children have become a significant family form. During the democratic transition, many women moved into RDP homes. This was (partly) indicative of their new democratic Constitutional rights, black women are no longer minors under husbands, fathers and sons. However, through the specific form of the social grants - especially the 8 million CSG recipients - the state reinforces black women in conventional childcare positions, and in social reproduction in general. Black women

with a mean age of 36, at the height of their productive potential, are structurally forced into being caregivers, with little prospect of improving the quality of their lives (and their children), or exercising their human potential. Even though they underwrite the state and capital accumulation with their unpaid labour, black women's work is not socially and economically valued. Black women recipients are made to feel that they are a burden on the state, whereas their impoverishment results from current capitalist restructuring and accumulation patterns (Seekings & Natrass: 2006). Women's oppression it seems, doesn't hinge on a specific family form, but the way in which social reproduction is organised in its totality. In other words, the sexual division of labour characteristic of the patriarchal nuclear family is not overcome when women move out of this family form. Instead, this sexual division of labour is transferred to the level of society as a whole, and so the role of women as carers is re-established on new historical grounds.

### **Conclusion**

In SA the social grants make a difference in people's lives. The grants are a lifeline to recipients and their families, tottering on the brink of poverty, but do not enable recipients to break the cycle of poverty. The reality is that black people, especially women and children are subsisting and sinking into poverty. Black women's own potential and development is structurally hampered as they are responsible for social reproduction. In post apartheid SA, black women's oppression occurs under conditions of democracy, and far-reaching Constitutional rights. The gap between rights and reality continues to widen, and in the long-run this may threaten democracy itself.

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## Footnotes

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<sup>ii</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect interviewees' identity.

<sup>iii</sup> The researcher doesn't speak Sesotho, and besides Sesotho, interviewees were relatively fluent in Afrikaans.

<sup>iv</sup> EVS Town and Regional Planning map of Bophelong was used to confirm the questionnaires needed for each geographic section for the Survey.

<sup>v</sup> An adult in the random home was formally requested to participate in the survey and confidentiality was assured.

<sup>vi</sup> Called 'volunteers', they are fulltime women workers, who receive a monthly stipend from the DSD.

ASEDI is a community-based organisation, doing community training.

<sup>vii</sup> The NP formally adopted the Normative Economic Model only in 1993, but neoliberal policies gaining ground internationally in the 1970s, influenced its economic and social policies.

<sup>viii</sup> The exchange rate of SA ZAR 7.60 to US \$ 1.00 as at 25 June 2007, is used.

<sup>ix</sup> SA Social Security Agency Act, passed by the SA Parliament in 2004.

<sup>x</sup> Information made available from a SASSA official, Sharon, in a telephonic interview on 25 June 2007.

<sup>xi</sup> For veterans 60 years and older, those under 60 years for medical reasons.

<sup>xii</sup> Based on their previous work.

<sup>xiii</sup> Interview with Rita, 16 April 2007, part-time domestic aged 42, on CSG.

<sup>xiv</sup> Interview with Katlego, 8 May 2007, volunteer caregiver for DSD, aged 23, on FCG.

<sup>xv</sup> Interview with Lena, CSG, 8 May 2007.

<sup>xvi</sup> Interview with Rita, *opcit.*

<sup>xvii</sup> Interview with key informant, Terence, a community activist, on 15 May 2007.

<sup>xviii</sup> Interview with Katlego, *opcit.*

<sup>xix</sup> Interview with Josephine, *opcit.*

<sup>xx</sup> Interview with Mary, 53, on a DG, 8 May 2007.

<sup>xxi</sup> Interview with Terence, *opcit.*