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Single Mothers in South Africa and Germany in Formal Employment Contexts. A Case Study on the Relationship Between Education, the Re-conceptualisation of the Role of Women and the Influence of Social Networks

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Abstract: Many studies dealing with the situation of single mothers focus, in particular, on the negative consequences of this way of life. This qualitative study presents the results of a comparative empirical analysis carried out in the Republic of South Africa and the Federal Republic of Germany, in which 25 single mothers employed in the formal labour market participated. Besides the different historical and socio-economic backgrounds and conditions of both countries, the interviewees demonstrate distinct similarities. These similarities will be discussed on the basis of three key themes: personal and social networks as a resource, the re-conceptualisation of the role of women as well as the relationship between education and current life situations.

Keywords: Education, Family, Single Mothers, Social Networks, Social Policy

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Single Mothers in South Africa and Germany in Formal Employment Contexts. A Case Study on the Relationship Between Education, the Re-conceptualisation of the Role of Women and the Influence of Social Network

Introduction

At first sight, it appears to be a very bold endeavour to compare the situation of single mothers in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) with those in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) because both countries substantially differ from one another not only in terms of their historical and cultural characteristics but also in terms of their gross domestic products (GDP). According to the estimations of IMF, the GDP ranking of Germany was 4th in 2017, while South Africa was ranked 33rd (International Monetary Fund 2018). Even if a comparison of national economies solely based on GDP can be viewed critically, it nevertheless shows that economic prosperity significantly differs between both countries.

Despite the abovementioned differences, the present case study offers a comparative perspective on the socio-economic situation of single mothers in South Africa and Germany because beyond the different contexts, there are many comparable experiences of single mothers in South Africa and Germany. Thus, to a certain extent, factors that are independent of the living environment are brought into focus.

An overview of the international state-of the-art research on the situation of single mothers reveals that the overwhelming majority of studies refer to the group of mothers (and in part fathers as well), who are dependent on government transfer payments and/or are informally employed (Raniga/Mthembu 2016; Broussard/Joseph/Thompson 2012). Single mothers in the formal employment sector have received less attention internationally. Furthermore, the focus of most studies (Lenze/Funcke 2016; Jaehrling et al. 2011; Härkönen 2018) is on the problems and challenges of this target group and thus significantly contributes to the stigmatisation of this type of family arrangement. A multitude

of distinct factors of influence at the personal, social, and political level play a prominent role in this regard.

The present comparative qualitative study by Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Germany), the University of Johannesburg (Gauteng – South Africa) and the University of Durban (KwaZulu Natal – South Africa) explores the resources and potentials of single mothers in South Africa and Germany without ignoring the complex challenges of their life situations. The authors' interest in knowledge was guided, in particular, by the question of whether similar challenges can be identified in Germany and South Africa. They consider, of course, the obvious differences in the socio-economic living conditions and the fact that the results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized. In doing so, it is indispensable to outline the heterogeneity of families, their contemporary significance and their historical transformations. Against this background, we discuss and empirically analyse three core themes: personal and social networks as a resource, the re-conceptualisation of the role of women, and the relationship between education and the current life situation.

Families in Transition

Since the 19th century, "family" has been perceived as a social institution, in which love, protection, and security were provided (Raniga/Mthembu 2016, 276). It, therefore, fulfilled an essential function for social cohesion and the ability for societies to reproduce (Peukert 2012, 12). So it repeatedly has been and still is at the centre of social dysfunctionality and is frequently identified as a "germ cell" for social transformation and/or deformation. Furthermore, people agree in both the northern and southern hemisphere that the main task of the "family" as the first socialisation institution consists in raising children in the context of broader social norms and in supporting them in taking on their future role as responsible citizens (Crow 2008, 11ff.).

If we take a look at the birth rate of mothers in South Africa with 2.2 children, which is a much lower rate than the African average (4.6), we see developments quite similar to the transformations of families in the Federal Republic of Germany (The World Factbook 2019). One explanation for this similarity is, that despite all the changes and diversifications in the post-apartheid era, the impact of European colonial policy and the influence of European missionaries has remained intact (Mayer/Metzger/Wilhelmi 1985, 169). For example, the Berlin-Africa Conference arranged by the German government, which took place from 15 November 1884 to 26 February 1885 and in which the United States of America along with 13 European countries participated, not only aimed to establish and

preserve the colonial order (Gatter 1984, 76) and randomly draw borders (Biel 2002, 21). It also set the strategic objective to impose Western European norms and values and replaced existing economic and social structures with European standards (Gatter, 1984, 77f.). But despite the influence of colonialism, as Ache-ampong Yaw Amaoteng (2007) and Busisiwe Nkosi and Priscilla Daniels (2007, 13-14) among others point out, essential traditional family structures still persist. A Eurocentric reduction of the concept of family to the nuclear family does not do justice to the African social and family structure. For example, numerous forms of pre-colonial living arrangements continue to exist up to now (Twikirize 2014, 55ff.) such as mutual assistance, the strong influence of older generations and the respect for their experiences to solve current problems as well as a distinct collective consciousness, which extends far beyond the narrow definition of the European nuclear family (Tembo 1988).

Along these lines, children in the South-African context undertake a special social, economic and political role and are viewed as a symbol of the preservation of the family community (Wolf 2006, 135). They are also involved in raising their siblings and thereby take much of the burden off their parents (Liebel 2017, 201). Furthermore, children in South Africa are part of the village community and thus much more significantly share responsibility for the community. This constitutes a crucial difference to the ideal of a European-western upbringing, in which taking care of children is primarily seen as the central and specific task of parents (Pence/Nsamenang 2008, 21). This *Ubuntu* philosophy, according to which one's own personality and the community are very closely related to one another has supported the resilience of African families up to today and has a big influence on the recursiveness between individuals and society. Nevertheless, many influences have become apparent in post-apartheid South Africa, which have led to new family arrangements and challenges. Moreover, Jean Triegaardt refers to the influence of rapid industrialisation and its effects on the erosion of traditional family structures (Triegaardt 2009, 1). Along these lines, accelerated urbanisation led, among other things, to strong migration movements, in particular among the male population. A severe consequence of this development is that fathers are frequently absent in the family system. In some cases, they even create new families, resulting in a rapid increase of single mother households. Lucy Holborn and Gail Eddy indicate that, for example, in KwaZulu Natal, a province of South Africa, 40% of children aged 0 to 17 only live with their mother (Holborn/Eddy 2011, 2). This trend can be observed in a large number of Sub-Saharan countries, in which the number of single mother households, the absence of fathers, the number of orphaned children and child-headed households has increased due to poverty, unequal opportunities and the

severe consequences of AIDS (Frye 2007; Sewpaul 2005; Sewpaul/Pillay 2011; Vreeman et al. 2013).

However, the family in European and German history is also shaped by a multitude of influences and transformations. In the early modern age (16th to 18th century) the family as a "full house" (Peukert 2012, 28) had to fill a multitude of social functions. Not only the nuclear family but also relatives and non-related labourers were considered part of the extended family so that a new image of the family established itself in the context of capitalist forms of production. The separation of the place of work and residence gave rise to the so-called middle-class family, which later asserted itself as the predominant family ideal and still functions as a family reference model from a social policy perspective. "Love became the central motive for marriage [...]" (Peukert 2012, 28). Moreover, a re-configuration of gender roles took place, in which the husband was responsible for matters outside the house, and the wife for matters in the house. Especially, in the 1950s, the middle-class family was the most predominant family arrangement in the Federal Republic of Germany. As a result of the destabilisation of conservative ideals in the mid-1960s and the pluralisation of ways of life, non-traditional family arrangements emerged, including unmarried cohabitating couples, single households, one-parent families, etc. and increasingly influenced the image of an increasingly diversifying society. One important factor of influence for this development was the increasing economic independence of many women in Germany (Träger 2009, 26ff.), which went hand in hand with the transition of normative models of the life-long, monogamous realisation of marriage (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 2014; Peukert 2012, 29ff.). The contemporary situation of families in Germany is very heterogeneous. Married couples with children (68 %) are still the most frequent family arrangement (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017), followed by more than 23 % single parents, 15 % of which are fathers. Cohabitating couples with children account for approximately 8 % of all families. This reflects a general trend of the past 30 years, according to which single-parent households are becoming increasingly significant compared to cohabitating common households. If we take a closer look at the data, the unequal distribution of the family arrangements in towns with less than 10,000 people and large cities is striking. In the towns with less than 10,000 inhabitants, almost 75 % of parents had a marriage certificate and in large cities, approximately 60 %. One reason for this could be the population in rural regions which is more oriented towards traditional values as well as the significance of structures of economic dependency. The average number of children slightly declined between 2008 and 2016 from 2.03 to 1.96 children per mother (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017).

Despite all the differences in the social and family structures of South Africa and Germany, the following can be ascertained: in both countries the share of women-headed households has strongly increased in the past 30 years, which can in part be traced back to similar factors like the changes in the labour market and in part to very different factors (AIDS). As elaborated in the introduction, the present paper subsequently explores the opportunities and strengths of single households in South Africa and Germany and comparatively discusses three essential factors in particular: personal and social networks as a resource, the re-conceptualisation of the role of women as well as the relationship between education and the current life situation.

Research Methodology

A comparative, qualitative, feminist, and contextual strategy of inquiry was carried out to construct the biographical profiles of 25 single mothers and gain insight into their psychosocial and economic experiences while employed in the formal work sector in two provinces in South Africa, Kwa Zulu-Natal and Gauteng as well as Dortmund, Germany. Using feminist methodology, Catrina Brown's assertion that "feminist unpacking of women's narratives places the problem stories outside of the women themselves" (Brown 2007, 128) grounded this study. A critical part of the research process comprised a literature review of female-headed households, which focused on the interface of poverty, gender and economic relations. A non-probability, snowball sampling technique was used to select 25 women for the research study. Due to the greater heterogeneity of the living conditions of the South African mothers, a large number of women had to be interviewed in order to achieve the saturation of the data.

The authors approached key stakeholders (social workers, educators etc.) in their respective province/communities to identify single mothers who met the following guidelines for selection (Marlow 2012):

- The women resided in an urban formal community.
- The women were employed in the formal work sector at least one year.
- The women were the head of the households.
- The women were responsible for the care of children.

First, three women from each of the respective contexts were interviewed and asked to refer the authors to other single mothers based on the characteristics for selection. The advantage of this sampling method was that it allowed the researchers to understand and utilise the existing social support networks

between the women in their communities (Marlow 2012). The researchers were committed to understanding the unique life experiences of each of the women within their social and economic life situations – thus recognising their individual circumstances while affirming their collective solidarity (Baines 2007).

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to gauge the life stories of the single mothers. Throughout the data collection process, we engaged with the women in a genuine, open and egalitarian manner about the objectives of the study and the ideological position of the researchers (Marlow 2012). One interview was conducted with 25 single mothers from KZN, Gauteng and Dortmund until data saturation was reached. The interviews were conducted during April to November 2018.

Firstly, the semi-structured interview allowed the researchers to explore whether the participants were willing to share their life stories and to establish them as equal partners in the research process (Baines 2007). Secondly, it provided a platform to engage the women in understanding their biographical profiles and experiences within the broader socio-economic and gendered framework. This "conscientisation" (Freire 1993, 41), which is central to Freirean and feminist thought, draws on the profound elements of human awareness and deep introspection which "forces" the individual to critically engage with their social reality with the potential to transform rather than merely adapt to such a reality (ibid.). Each woman's narrative shared during the interviews provided insight into how living in uncertain economic times and with high levels of stress and burnout had had a profound impact on their roles as mothers, their household financial situation, psychosocial experiences as well as their coping resources.

The interview schedule was developed by the authors and the topics covered included their understanding of motherhood, financial situation, social networks as well as coping resources. The average time spent on each interview ranged from two to four hours. An ethical clearance was received from the Ethics Committee at the respective universities and all the women signed consent forms during the interviews. It was also agreed that no names would be used in the reporting of the findings. Permission was also obtained to tape-record all interviews. Member checking, a method to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, was applied to all the women in this study. The researchers kept field notes and a journal and numerous critical reflexive discussions were held jointly to reduce subjectivity and biases (Marlow 2012). The interviews were transcribed word for word by the authors. In the data analysis phase, the authors were guided by Marlow's ethnographic summary which refers to a "systematic coding for qualitative data" (Marlow 2012, 64). The re-

searchers used this approach to move back and forth between the raw data and the transcripts in order to gain more abstract insight into the emergent themes that would go into the final research report.

The data was thematically and critically analysed in relation to the literature and feminist social work theory. The researchers were constantly mindful of interpreting the single mothers' experiences in relation to gender oppression as constructed by the complex interplay of socio-cultural, gender relations and the economic forces that had a profound impact of their daily lives (Baines 2007, 51).

In particular, the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice (Bourdieu 1976; Bourdieu 1983) have been important frameworks for the study. In the Global South, the sustainable livelihood approach shares a conceptual synergy with the social development paradigm as a key poverty reduction strategy in communities. Leila Patel notes that in contemporary South Africa, SLA has been widely advocated as a means to improving the livelihood outcomes of single mother households through "increasing income, reducing vulnerability, strengthening social networks, improving resources and opportunities for a more sustainable household" (Patel 2015, 242). The SLA is structured on the principles of people-centredness, social justice and human rights. This approach is aligned with the pillars of social development, namely, partnership, economic self-reliance, holism and dynamism. Hanna Nel (2015) argued that households adjust to their physical, social, economic and natural environments through a focus on these set of livelihood capitals designed to protect the household from shocks during times of crisis such as the adjustment from a two-parent income household to a single-income household. Bourdieu's theory of social practices, whose key concepts will be introduced in conjunction with the analysis later, significantly parallels with SLA. The integration of the five capitals: financial, natural, human, social and physical which is enshrined in the sustainable livelihood approach aligns with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural, economic and social capital which he refers to as symbolic capital in a habitus. The authors embrace that these capitals are interconnected and have a profound impact on households' activities and strategies that allow individuals to overcome existing challenges and enhance socio-economic upward mobility away from the overarching tentacles of poverty (Raniga 2018, 397).

Discussion of Findings

The empirical results were analysed on the basis of the 25 interviews carried out and critically discussed by the authors of the study.

No.	*Age*	*Highest level of education*	*Employment*	*Area relocated from*	*Number of dependents in household*	*Number of economically active in household*
1	38	Grade 12	Police Service	Umlazi (RSA)	3	2
2	27	Master's Degree	Department of Social Development	Bizana (RSA)	1	2
3	41	Degree	Department of Health	Mandeni (RSA)	1	3
4	37	Diploma	Clinic	Esiphahleni (RSA)	4	1
5	31	Degree	Department of Social Development	Durban (RSA)	2	1
6	40	Master's Degree	Mining Company	Phalaborwa-Limpopo (RSA)	2	1
7	50	Master's Degree	University	Pretoria and Durban (RSA)	2	1
8	41	Master's Degree	University	Durban (RSA)	3	1
9	42	Grade 12	Mackensie @ Co	Parkmore (RSA)	1	1
10	41	Not specified	Self Employed	Johannesburg (RSA)	1	1
11	49	Diploma	Self-Employed	Winsor West, Randburg (RSA)	2	1
12	43	Bachelor's Degree	Self-Employed	Westdene (RSA)	3	1
13	37	BTECH in IT	Car Company	Fourways (RSA)	1	1
14	54	Diploma	Self-Employed	Victory Park (RSA)	2	1
15	46	Master's Degree	Car Company	Centurion (RSA)	2	1
16	41	Master's Degree	Self- Employed	Darrenwood, Randburg (RSA)	4	2
17	50	Diploma	Mall	Not specified (RSA)	1	1
18	49	NQF Financial Services	Health Care Consultant	Radiokop (RSA)	None	1
19	60	Degree	Welfare Organisation	Hagen (FGR)	1	1
20	51	Degree	Welfare Organisation	Dortmund (FGR)	1	1
21	32	Degree	Welfare Organisation	Dortmund (FGR)	1	1
22	33	Degree	Welfare Organisation	Dortmund (FGR)	4	1
23	34	Grade 10	Clinic	Hagen (FGR)	1	1
24	28	Grade 12	Welfare Organisation	Dortmund (FGR)	1	1
25	21	Grade 10	Law Firm	Hagen (FGR)	1	1

Table 1: Biographical profile of the participants

Among other things, Table 1 shows the age of the surveyed women: three were aged between 25 and 30, eight between 31 and 40, 11 between 41 and 50 and three between 51 and 60 years old (N=25). The average age was 40 years. Altogether, as heads of household the women were economically responsible for 45 relatives. The average number of relatives living in the household was 1.8 (N=25). Approximately

two-thirds of the surveyed women had higher academic degrees[1], while six even had a Master's degree. Further analysis of the biographical profiles indicates that five of the South African women work on a free-lance basis which implies that they were self-employed and working on their own terms.

Overall, the biographical profile analysis reflects that 9 of the 18 (50%) of the sample of South African women were Black. This infers a steady increase of Black South African women within the middle class (Mattes 2015, 666-667). In the sample of German single mothers all women were German citizens. Two of the seven women stated that they had migration experience. However, this criterion was no longer addressed in the further course of the interviews.

When analysing the data, we found no blatant evidence that racism specifically shaped the participants' experiences of single motherhood, which is particularly due to the fact that only "middle class" women were selected for the sampling. However, we do need to acknowledge that three of the five South African single mothers who were self-employed were White. These single mothers were aged 40 and above. It was clear that these women's life experiences and economic power were in part shaped by the opportunities that favoured white privilege in the apartheid era. It is also important to take note that 26 years into democracy, white privilege is still persistent in South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2019, 5).

The results of the study in the context of personal and social networks as a resource, the re-conceptualisation of the role of women as well as the relationship between education and the current life situation are discussed below.

Personal and social networks as a resource

Theoretical and empirical studies have sufficiently proven that social capital and networks have a significant influence on the living conditions of people's life and make a significant contribution to overcoming poverty. Particularly relevant in this context are the numerous empirical studies based on livelihood approaches. If we look at the empirical data of the present study, it is necessary to extend the concept of social capital with a stronger social theory perspective. The theoretical and empirical approaches of Pierre Bourdieu, who made the relationship between cultural, economic and social capital plausible through numerous studies, are particularly noteworthy here (Bourdieu 1976; Bourdieu 1983).

1 Since the education system of the Federal Republic of Germany significantly differs from that of South Africa, an exact comparison of education degrees is not possible.

Along these lines, the possibility for an individual to access the different types of capital is decisive for his or her position in society, which Bourdieu describes with the term "symbolic capital". However, this does not refer to a finally reached state, rather a recursive process of identity change (Bourdieu uses the term "habitus"[2]) to describe the interaction between the society and individual. An additional insight from Bourdieu's theory is also very important for the evaluation and categorisation of the present data: types of capital are changeable and transformable. For example, economic capital creates the foundations for access to cultural capital; cultural capital and social capital can be used to gain access to economic resources, etc. The analysis of the present data shows a consistent relationship between cultural capital (education), social capital (social networks) and economic capital (material situation) as well as their influence on the re-conceptualisation of the role of women (habitus).

Although all participating mothers explicitly pointed out that they have to make all crucial decisions alone and they often feel abandoned, they were indeed able to draw on a broad network of social support systems. Hence, many participants indicated that they are given intense support by their own parents, friends and acquaintances or can draw on support systems such as nannies by means of financial resources. An interesting difference between both countries becomes apparent here. While the participants from Germany primarily draw on social networks from their own nuclear family (parents), the participants from South Africa also draw on additional family members and friends. Hence, different definitions and perceptions of the family configuration appear, as "extended family members" are also included in the African context, while the focus is on the nuclear family in the German context. An additional important aspect, which played a key role in the interviews in both South Africa and Germany, is the significance of social networks through work, regardless whether the mothers had regular employment or a free-lance job. This becomes apparent in statements of the participants such as:

> "Well, I perhaps had the advantage that during the job interview I got along very well with the woman, who became my boss back then, and that we are still friends today." (Interviewee 19, FRG)
>
> "For me as a person it was a very important aspect to be able to work and interact with other people." (Interviewee 22, FRG)
>
> "Work has been my purpose – my mind has to be occupied." (Interviewee

2 For Bourdieu the definition of habitus is a fundamental element of his social theory and therefore is the basis of his theory of fields and social classes. He defines habitus forms, among other things, as "systems of permanent dispositions, structured structures, which are suitable for working as structuring structures [...]" (Bourdieu 1976, 165).

6, RSA)

"I have benefited from my projects in term of self-development, in terms of international exposure and in terms of linkages with prominent people in the field." (Interviewee 15, RSA)

Interestingly, approximately 50 % of participants from South Africa indicated that they work on a free-lance basis, which enables them greater flexibility in reconciling their family and career, while all participants in Germany were employed. Potential reasons for this may be the different labour market contexts as well as higher administrative barriers.

Despite the outlined differences, it is clear that the employment of single mothers, amidst all stress factors, not only creates better overall economic conditions, but also has significant influence on the social capital of single mothers and their families. This is all the more significant, because there are no empirical doubts about the relationship between poverty and poverty-related stress factors (Broussard/Joseph/Thompson 2012, 190ff.; Treanor 2018, 81).

Re-conceptualisation of the role of women

As demonstrated in the beginning, nearly all participants had a higher education degree, which subsequently enabled them access to the labour market and to further social networks, contacts and resources. As depicted above, Bourdieu assumes that the culmination of the different types of capital exerts influence on the development of identity, or in Bourdieu's terms the habitus of a person, which should not be underestimated. This theoretical framework gives rise to the question what self-attributions the participants made in their roles as mothers and women and whether the improved access, in particular to economic and social capital, leads to a re-conceptualisation of the role of women. The following statements refer to this:

"I work hard to put my career forward so that I can be self-sufficient and not rely on him." (Interviewee 10, RSA)

"I love the freedom to make my own decisions." (Interviewee 8, RSA)

"Being a staff nurse you work with diverse people [...]. It helped me to love and respect people, to forgive and be a good mother- 'ubazi abantu'." (Interviewee 4, RSA)

"Well, I think it is important to have a certain standard of living as well as the role-model function, by somehow making advancements, by doing something and by pursuing education." (Interviewee 24, FRG)

"It was my decision. I wanted to live alone." (Interviewee 19, FRG)

The quotations give evidence to the conclusion that no dichotomous causal re-

lationship can be constructed here between education, employment and self-empowerment. However, if we compare these data with other studies on single mothers (Härkönen 2018, 31ff.) who are not employed in the formal labour market and have much lower educational degrees, effects of these factors on the re-conceptualisation of the role of women towards greater self-determination and empowerment cannot be ignored. This holds equally for Germany and South Africa. An essential difference, which should not remain unmentioned, is the very different description of stigmatisations by society. Along these lines, many German women indicate that they frequently have a guilty conscience and receive negative feedback on being employed while having children. It can be assumed here that the very wide-spread "ideal" of the classic small family, in which the mother was reduced to the role of the caring housewife, still plays a huge role (Peukert 2012, 70), while the traditional African family always made raising children a responsibility of the village or the extended family (Martin/Alber 2015, 148ff.).

On the Relationship Between Education and the Current Life Situation

The specific situation of single mothers in South Africa and Germany is closely linked with the availability of different forms of social capital. Access to economic, social and cultural capital is directly related to educational resources (Boecker 2018, 80ff.). This becomes particularly apparent in international comparative rankings such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). In no other European country are educational success and opportunities of children and youth as strongly dependent on their social origin (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2016) as in Germany. Poverty generates poverty. The unemployed patterns in South Africa reflect an overrepresentation of those with non-completed secondary education and an underrepresentation of tertiary educated, both for women and men. Clearly, in the South African labour market completion of tertiary education enlarges job opportunities and diminished the risk of unemployment greatly.

> "I provide for my child to the best of my capability. I have a good job and a good salary so I ensure that my child gets everything that is good for her." (Interviewee 11, RSA)
>
> "Yes, I did my Masters well its currently being marked. In the long term it might improve my finances." (Interviewee 8, RSA)
>
> "Having a masters there was a salary adjustment and plus there was a

salary increment." (Interviewee 2, RSA)

Qualitative data clearly show that access to education and employment go hand in hand with the empowerment of mothers and thus a re-conceptualisation of the role of women.

They no longer conceive themselves as victims of externally controlled structures and causes, rather as acting subjects who can change both their own lives as well as the lives of their children. This is clearly evident in the following statement:

"I don't become a victim [...]. These difficult times made me stronger." (Interviewee 6, RSA)

The recursive process consisting of education, employment and the re-conceptualisation of the role of women requires state stimuli. Poverty always reproduces itself because the ruling classes and thus the majority community aim to preserve themselves (Bourdieu 1982). Therefore, social policy measures are required to improve the situation of single mothers in South Africa and Germany.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Besides the enormous specific challenges of these women, which numerous authors have referred to (Nieuwenhuis/Maldonado 2018), there is from a theoretical perspective a very simple answer to improving the situation of single mothers in South Africa and Germany and it is nothing more than overcoming poverty and making access to education the main approach of an interventionist social policy. As the data of the present study show, if it is possible to positively transform these structural conditions, then single mothers can change their everyday lives and the future of their children. In particular, they can redefine their role as women and thus contribute to greater gender equality in South Africa and Germany. As long as women still remain the social group most affected by poverty world-wide (OXFAM International 2017), their situation will not change. This holds equally for South Africa as well as Germany, which only succeeded in insignificantly improving the poverty situation of single mothers and children despite being one of the richest countries in the world.

Along these lines, many of the interviewed women demand the state to establish social networks as well as better – not only financial – support for educational degrees. However, all the interviewed women also pointed out the lacking time resources, which should indeed be reflected on with regard to the availability of social networks. Therefore, existing resources should be used. In particular, the extended family configurations, which are deeply rooted in African culture, should be preserved. *Ubuntu* – humanity, brotherly love and a sense of

community – are supporting pillars of society not only for this reason. Preserving them is not only an end in itself, but also the foundation for future development prospects. Therefore, it seems all the more important to see the results of the present study as an opportunity and means of empowerment to break the cycle of lacking education, poverty and unemployment.

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