

**Ethnographic Explorations of Childhood and Childhood Sexualities in a rural village in  
South Africa**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

**I, Nyasha Grace Piloto, declare that this dissertation which I hereby submit for the degree of Master of Social Science (Anthropology) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution. Where secondary material is used, this has carefully been acknowledged and referenced in accordance with University requirements.**



**Signature**

**Date: 1-09-2017**

## **Acknowledgements**

*I humbly dedicate this thesis to one respected academic who made this whole research possible. Professor Elaine Salo began this journey for me before having to relocate to America, leaving me with a seed that turned into the vineyard of discoveries and journeys of this ethnographic expedition of childhood and childhood sexualities in Mpumalanga. Rest in peace Elaine. There is No dissertation that I can attempt to produce that will fully represent the academic footprint that you have engraved in my life. Ms. Inge Kriel, thank you for carrying the torch that Professor Elaine had ignited in this journey. I truly appreciate the tireless effort you have put in to making sure that I see the day that this degree becomes reality and not a mere distant wish.*

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## **Abstract**

*This ethnographic exploration tackles meanings of childhood in Qondwa village, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, by illustrating how childhood is constantly shifted, negotiated and contested. These attempted definitions of childhood defy the Western constructs of childhood, regarding the ethnography here is undertaken in African context. I dedicated six months carrying out qualitative research on these meanings. For purposes of my research, I adopt the local term, rather than recorded Western definition of a 'child' in Qondwa which is expressed as any boy or girl who is financially dependent on parents or guardians, regardless of age. Furthermore, a boy only transitions into a man, as a girl into a woman, when financially independent of their parents/guardians, regardless of age. I hereby argue that there is no universal meaning of childhood and provide comparative ethnographies of childhood to cement this argument. I adopt Karp's theory of personhood to further argue that personhood of children determines how children experience realities. I go further to discuss childhood in the context of parents/guardians, childhood in the context of defined socio-geographic spaces, childhood in the context of traditional cultural events which show that there is no universal meaning of childhood, even within a culture displaying the complexities of such definitions.*

**Keywords: childhood girlhood personhood sexuality shifting identities negotiated meanings Swaziland Mpumalanga.**

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## Chapter 1 : Realities of Fieldwork

‘You people from your school are brave to just get onto a bus and go live with people you don’t know in a place that you don’t know. Borderline crazy I think.’

– Thandiwe (Informant)

In this chapter I argue that anthropological theory and experienced fieldwork do not necessarily mirror each other, though theory is indeed necessary to equip one for the field. Indeed it is of paramount importance that student be equipped with the tools that are necessary for embarking into the field. However, from my own experience as a researcher, one may express that the experienced realities of fieldwork differ from learnt theories. Six months of fieldwork in Qondwa village in the year 2013 presented various accomplishments as well as quandaries. In the year 2012, as part of an Anthropology module at honours level, I studied Bernard (1996) who discusses anthropological research methods, methodologies and ethics. Here I was provided tools that I was to apply into the field as a researcher. Diligently learning these methods was an undemanding task. However, applying this knowledge in the field was trying. Many a times I was faced with situations that demanded me to deviate from what I coin as ‘*Bernard’s book of fieldwork*’. The following account of my entry into the field, data collection methods and ethical considerations, exhibit the impasses between the ‘*Bernard’s book of fieldwork*’ and the practical realities of fieldwork.

One may also argue that this account of the field is too detailed and vivid. This chapter is written in thick description manner of ethnographic writing. I adopt this style to display the importance of the body as a tool in research, its ability to gain data or its reason for data retention. Throughout my chapters I also give voice to my participants by literally applying speech bubbles. I do this because as will later be displayed, a child is seen as a passive being without an audible voice. Children are regarded as hollow beings waiting to be filled in by adult knowledge. Therefore, giving my participants verbatim speech bubbles is my own way of giving these minority labelled individuals voices.

## 1.1 Entry into the field

Entry into the field was relatively undemanding. My initial supervisor Elaine Salo, (may her beautiful soul rest in eternal peace,) had previously introduced me to a number of my key informants on a preliminary visit to Qondwa village in March 2012. She had embarked on an outreach programme launched by the Centre for the Study of Aids (CSA) at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. This undertaking tackled Gender Based Violence (GBV) issues in 13 villages in Mpumalanga, of which Qondwa was one. Prior research carried out by the CSA on public knowledge about GBV highlighted how rural communities were generally uninformed about GBV and human rights. Following which, CSA outreach team held focus group discussions to raise awareness about GBV in the villages. The project was implemented in a village at a Crisis Centre in Mpumalanga. With volunteers from the 13 villages were trained to hold focus groups in the various villages. These volunteers together with the CSA team carried out focus group discussions which were guided by a questionnaire formulated by the CSA.

It was at this crisis centre where I began my technique of snowballing informants. My initial point of entry was when Elaine Salo introduced me to one of the volunteers who resided in Qondwa village, whom I give the pseudonym *Mama* (Mother) Lucillah. In the siSwati speaking region of Qondwa, any woman who is a mother is addressed as *Mama*. This term is the respectful local term for mother, as explained by the Director at the Crisis Centre. Mama Lucillah later became my host mother while I was carrying out fieldwork.

I took part in this outreach programme for a week by compiling reports on the focus group discussions. In that week I formed rapport with three GBV volunteers whom Mama Lucillah introduced me to and whom I named Mama Linda, Mama Saki and Mama B. They later participated in my research as informants. These women introduced me to girls that they knew in the village whom I named Thandiwe, Buhle, and Menenhle. These girls later became the main informants for my research and they introduced me to several more informants.

## 1.2 Embarking On an Ethnographic Journey – A Thick Description.

This chapter of methodology has been executed in a thick description style of writing. I emphasise the relevance of ‘the body’ when in the field. A thick descriptive narrative of the ethnographic journey extracts the relevance of this observation of the body as a tool.



**Photo 1: En route to Qondwa village from Pretoria City**

After having been introduced to volunteers from Qondwa village during the GBV outreach programme, I returned to the University of Pretoria where I had to wait for funding to carry out my six months of fieldwork from the month of March 2013 to August 2013. After a fortnight since my initial visit, I boarded a bus destined for Mozambique via Mpumalanga at Pretoria’s station. I nervously sent a text message to my host mother on her cellular phone to inform her of my expected time of arrival.

As the bus headed swiftly along the roads, I debated as to whether this fieldwork would be a success or not. One of my major concerns was whether I would be able to obtain information regarding childhood sexuality in a village where the topic of sexuality was a cultural taboo. ‘*Bernard’s book of fieldwork*’ states that before entering the field, one must have a coherently structured questionnaire in one’s possession (Bernard 1996: 251-260). I decided against this particular research method for I reasoned that I needed to spend time in Qondwa in order to



understand how people spoke about sexuality and the colloquial terms they used to refer to sex and sexuality. As a result, I designed questionnaires having built on these observations that I sought out.

I had managed to shelve the dilemma of the questionnaires after grappling with it for several minutes however one shelved worry made room for another. I pondered on the disadvantages of the language barrier. The fact that I am a Shona speaking Zimbabwean meant that I would have to rely on a translator in instances where my informants and I were unable to communicate in English. Hiring a siSwati speaking individual from Qondwa village as my translator would be an advantage in that communication would take place where otherwise impossible, however misinterpretations and mistranslations were a risk that would impact the quality of my data.

Progressing from the language barrier distress, I proceeded to wonder about my safety in the field, or the lack thereof. The possibility of getting mugged, physically abused, sexually abused, were possibilities as in any space that one occupies. Bernard (1996:341) focuses on the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the safety of the participants, but not the safety of the researcher himself/herself. This is because one has to deal with the dangerous situations as they present themselves. I quickly realised that I was driving myself into frenzy. I was toying with these worries that most fieldwork researchers most probably toy with at one or another point during their field work. One of my anthropology lecturers also pointed out that being an attractive woman would also place me in a position where men would approach me proposing romantic or sexual relations, which worried me. However, in order to make sure that I did not literally jump out of the window of the bus to return to Pretoria, I had to silence my wandering mind. Little did I know at the time that all these worries would materialise in the field, proving that I was not unnecessarily fretting. Throughout the chapters, I outline how I used dilemmas I encountered to my advantage in terms of data gathering.

### 1.3 Sticking Out Like a Sore Thumb

After sitting for six hours on a sultry bus, I arrived at Malelane shopping complex in Mpumalanga. As I disembarked, I swiftly looked around in an attempt to spot the taxi rank my host mother had described. I needed to locate a taxi that would head down to Qondwa village from Malelane Shopping complex. A wave of panic rushed through my body as I only spotted Checkers grocery store to my left, Pick n Pay grocery store ahead, two shoe shops to my left, and Kentucky Fried Chicken food outlet. I wondered if I had disembarked a stop too early, however I gathered that if I had stayed on the bus I would have found myself crossing the Mozambican border. The bus driver had announced that Malelane was the final stop in South Africa. Nevertheless, I assertively clutched my two suitcases and briskly made my way to one of the shoe shops where I enquired directions to the taxi rank. My eyes are a book of emotions meaning when I feel uneasy in a foreign space I wear my sunglasses in order to conceal all emotions that appear when in unfamiliar territory. Most think that this gesture is a fashion statement; on the contrary, those sunglasses are a material representation of feigned confidence.

I arrived at Jet Mart clothing shop where I approached a petite woman elegantly dressed in a blue Nigerian iro. An iro is a cloth wrapper that matches with a headscarf, usually worn at Nigerian weddings. As I enquired where I would board a taxi that heads to Qondwa, she swept me with her eyes from top to bottom and dismissively pointed towards the direction of the taxis. I could not gather why her attitude towards me was unpleasant however I had more pressing issues on my mind. I needed to spot the taxis headed to Qondwa. I also had to silently pray that my phone battery did not die before I reached my destination in case I had to communicate with Mama Lucillah. I approached a group of people that were gathered outside the Jet Mart store, marvelling at a dance group display a performance. I decided against approaching the group for I did not feel safe approaching a throng of people while carrying my suitcases for I thought that this increased my chances of getting robbed.



Photo 2: People gathering outside Jet Mart clothing store to witness a dance group perform

I walked briskly with my head held high to the taxi stand where there were approximately a hundred taxis for different destinations. I asked the taxi driver in my nearest proximity to direct me to the taxis that headed to Qondwa village. He abruptly responded, ‘*You won’t find it here*’ as he walked away. I gathered that the negative responses I received from both the taxi driver and the woman dressed in the *iro*, was because I had addressed them in the English language. The language barrier dilemma was quickly materialising here. During my preliminary visit to Qondwa, Mama Lucillah explained that speaking in English in the villages comes across as not being proud to be an ‘African’ by being unable to speak an ‘African language’. There are numerous languages in the continent of Africa, and realised that the particular language referred to here was siSwati, the dominant language in Qondwa shrugged at this possibility for my inability to speak siSwati was not going to magically transform but would take a process of learning.

I proceeded to approach a taxi driver who appeared to be in an exultant disposition after engaging in an animated conversation on the phone. While engaging in casual conversation with me, he escorted me to the taxi that I was meant to board and instructed the driver to drop me off at Qondwa village. I thanked him as I hauled my luggage into the taxi as the driver geared the taxi up for a forty five minute journey on the dust road to Qondwa village. My window could not shut, thereby consenting the dust from the dust road to rise into the taxi resulting in my constant sneezing which attracted much attention. Not only was my braided hair sticking to my forehead and my clothes sticking to my skin due to the humid weather, I had a congested nose and blocked ears due to the excessive sneezing. I so desperately wished to reach my host’s abode and recuperate from an interesting but exhaustive and uncomfortable journey.

Several eyes were fixed on me and I figured it was because I still wore my sunglasses in the taxi. I stuck out like a sore thumb thereby drawing much attention. My dark sunglasses, earphones plugged into my bright pink Samsung touch phone, and my flamboyantly coloured scarf wrapped around my head to avoid my braids from matting on my forehead, all screamed ‘sophistication’. In my haste to disembark the bus and arrive at the taxi rank, I forgot to ‘dress down’ for I am aware that as a researcher, your body determines where, how, and why a researcher accesses to information. Oozing sophistication could possibly communicate that I could afford luxurious materials therefore people would draw close to me for what they could gain financially, or one who is a snob looking down on the rest of those who live in underprivileged conditions.

The approach that I adopted was to go into the field and live as the people lived. Off came the scarf, earphones, and shades. Worthy of note how the body can pass off several messages, for I had specific reasons why I had all those items on my body. The scarf kept my braids away from my face in the searing heat that made the braids stick to my sweaty forehead; music relaxes my nervous disposition – hence the earphones and I have already explained how the shades conceal my eyes which are the window to my emotions. I did not intend to make any fashion statement; however I was well aware of how my disposition would appear as a fashion statement, which powerfully displays how the body is a tool in the field



**Photo 3: Malelane Taxi Rank**

#### 1.4 Final Destination

After forty five minutes, the congenial driver parked at Qondwa taxi rank. I sent Mama Lucillah a text message informing her of my arrival and she replied that she had been waiting for an hour. I was relieved to see her when I disembarked that I almost ran for her but I maintained my composure for she stood elegantly in her white dress decorated with green polka dots which shaped her voluptuous body, complimented with a black hat on her head. We embraced each other and expressed our happiness to see each other and proceeded to walk on a dust road to her compound.



Photo 4 : My host mother Mama Lucillah and her two children

Growing up I lived in middle class socio-geographic areas. I was born in Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare and later moved as a family to New York City, United States of America. Having completed high school in New York City. I proceeded to attend Rhodes University for three years and thereafter University of Pretoria for another 3 years. I have only experienced life as a middle class female and rural areas were an unfamiliar territory. I tried my utmost best to conceal these facts from my host, so that she would not feel as if she had to live beyond her means to accommodate me snugly. Bernard (1996:224-226) suggests that one has to be oneself in the field. However, being 'myself' here would entail asking my host mother to provide luxuries that she clearly stated she did not own, which is why I would not classify this strategy as deception. It would have been purely rude and selfish of me to expect Mama Lucillah to snugly accommodate me.

*'I am sorry my dear friend. I can tell that you are not going to be used to not having a bathroom or a toilet. I also do not have a room just for you. We are going to have to share my room and sleep on the same bed as my daughter and me. Is that ok? I do not have money Nyasha. I am sorry'.*

Her melancholic apology was saddening. Adapting to rural living conditions was indeed going to be a thorny process for this was my first exposure to rural living abodes. Financially I had the means to reside in Malelane town in a Bed and Breakfast accommodation whereby I would travel to Qondwa village and return to Malelane daily for the convenience of comfort. However, my fieldwork motto was *'live as the people live and do as the people do'*. My informants did not own abodes in Malelane where they were able to experience luxuries. I needed to sleep where my informants slept, eat what they ate, and wash how they washed in order to experience daily life in Qondwa village as experienced by my informants. Doing so granted me thick descriptions of the experiences that my participants encountered daily. However, every fortnight of the six months that I spent in Qondwa, I booked myself into a Bed and Breakfast in Malelane city for two nights where I would transcribe my notes, read up on more material, and appreciate my private space as I discuss further in this chapter.

I was delighted to have arrived at her homestead after an exhausting journey from Pretoria. On entering her one bed roomed house, I first noticed the queen size bed for I desperately wished to dive onto. Adjacent to the bed were folded clothes on the floor for lack of wardrobes or closets. The same room served as the bathroom for one would utilise a square green bathing dish hanged behind the door. The same dish served as a toilet throughout the night due to fear

of walking in the dark to the pit latrine across the compound. At meal times, Lucillah would rearrange the room to resemble a dining room space by placing a small three legged table in the centre. Food dishes would be placed on the table and we would sit on the floor around the table to eat.

Exhausted and sweaty, I asked if I could bath and she laughed and nervously responded ‘*Of course! At least we have electricity for you so I can boil water!*’ I laughed as she brought in a bucket and a bath of warm water for me to wash my sandy and sticky body in the room. I shammed confidence as I washed in her presence, yearning for privacy. I took my bath there in the middle of the room while Mama Lucillah sat on the bed explaining the dynamics of her family set up while the recorder captured our conversations for it was switched on and strategically placed on the bed. As she plonked on the bed she explained,

*‘Ok so here my two brothers and my two sisters, we live here with my mum that you met at this compound. My one brother Ntumi is married to Nhlanhla my sister in law and they have two children a boy and girl Sazi and Mezi. Ntumi is a carpenter so he only work when someone in the village come and look for him to come and fix something. Ok so they live in that house there which is next to my mother’s main house. Then my other brother Kuzi is not married. And he does not have kids. He lives in the main house with my mother in a room there. My sister Sihle is a teacher at the primary school there. She is not married. But she has three children. Babi, Kensi and Sarai. She stays in the house near the kitchen there with her children. Her husband runs away four years ago. No one knows where he is. Then there is me with these three children of mine. Buhle, Nonhlanhla and Sibehle. Their father, I divorced and he lives somewhere there in the village’.*

I went on to ask her what the main sources of income in her family and she replied:

*‘Eish (Goodness) we are suffering my friend. The only one who is ok is my sister, the one who teaches. She gets ok money. My mother is on a social grant because my father passed away a long time ago. My brothers just do jobs around the village to fix things when they are called to do so and me I just volunteer when I can. It is tough. When there is volunteering work to do we get pay R900 for the month. But lately we have not being paid so I now rely on you*



*when you come here and you pay my rent. I just ask my family to help me with food when they can because that is what is important. For my children no one will let any other child go to sleep hungry so at least we try to help each other. But we are suffering’.*

During my preliminary visit to the crisis centre, the director explained how the crisis centre financially relied on South African business donors, as well as the South African government for funding. However these partners were no longer able to channel funds to the crisis centre, for reasons that the director was unaware of. As a result volunteers and workers had gone without their income for a total of six months, hence Mama Lucillah’s financial crisis.



Photo 5: Entering Mama Lucillah’s homestead

## 1.5 Malelane Bed and Breakfast Escape

After meeting Mama Lucillah's family that eagerly awaited me in her brothers' house, I went straight back to the room where I fell asleep without a single toss or turn. The exhaustion sent me straight to the land of dreams where I then woke up the next day and made my way to Malelane. I had planned to book all my fortnightly weekends and pay for them in advance so as to be budget conscious. The Bed and Breakfast represented a private space where I could write out my fieldwork notes. I was able to transcribe, to reflect in my fieldwork journal, and to recuperate physically, mentally and emotionally for I found my topic emotionally taxing. I however realised that whenever I resided at the Bed and Breakfast, I experienced a sense of guilt – a sense of guilty privilege. Whenever I would rest on the fluffy mattress that bounced twice, my mind would travel back to Qondwa where Lucillah and her daughter would be sleeping on a queen size bed which comprised of two folded blankets as a mattress. When I would roll out of bed and take two steps to the toilet that I could flush without thinking twice, I would mentally walk the distance it took to reach the pit latrine in Qondwa where one child once fell in for the hole was too wide for her to balance steadily. When indulging in a steaming shower until the hot water in the geyser ran out, I would think of the dish at Mama Lucillah's that served as both the bathtub and the toilet during the evenings. I however managed to channel this sense of misplaced guilt into writing and pondering how my dissertation would make a difference.



Figure 6: Bedroom at the BNB



Figure 7: Bathroom at the BnB

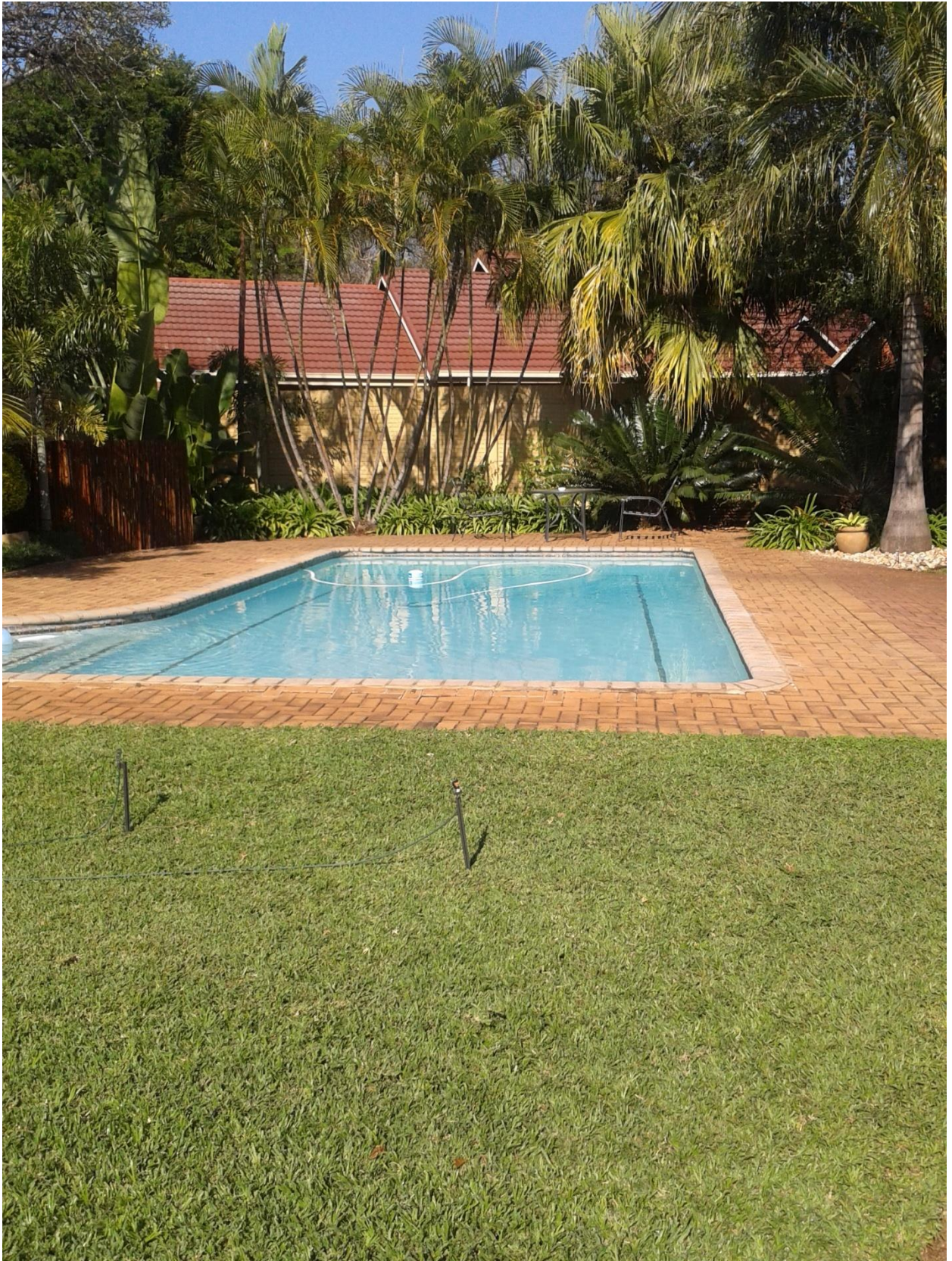


Photo 6 : Bed and Breakfast garden

## 1.6 Data Collection techniques

I utilised qualitative data collection techniques in the course of my fieldwork. I relied on the classical anthropological method of participant observation. I obtained information about Qondwa village's constructions of childhood and childhood sexuality through other research methods such as informal and structured interviews with key informants and a limited number of focus groups with identified members of the Qondwa Village community, as described below.

### Focus Groups

Holding focus groups was an efficient means of data collection only after I had formed rapport with the informants in the group beforehand. For instance, I asked Mama Lucillah to invite her friends who are mothers, to attend one of my focus groups. They attended the focus group however participation was minimal for I had not formed rapport. Mama Lucillah explained that the mothers felt they were disclosing information to a stranger and wondered how I would utilise the information despite my explanations. I postponed further focus groups I had scheduled to factor in the time needed to form rapport with informants. I visited the mothers in their homesteads, assisted them with chores and spent time with their children. Once rapport was formed, focus groups became an efficient means of data collection.

These focus groups were recorded as instructed in 'Bernard's book of fieldwork' (Bernard 1999:238). I obtained consent from participants to carry out these recordings which were transcribed in the days immediately after the focus groups were held. Recording the interviews was beneficial in that all information provided was captured. It was difficult to write notes or type out information while simultaneously engaging discussions with informants. I observed that writing or typing while informants shared information distracted them. The participants would wait for me to complete writing the notes before they carried on speaking, which disturbed their train of thought. I resorted to recording without writing notes or typing when carrying out discussions and focus groups despite Bernard's instruction that recording must not substitute note taking (Bernard 1990:386).

I also discerned that informants would agree to be recorded although they did not wish to be recorded. It was a matter of agreeing with majority and the few persons who were not comfortable with being recorded would keep quiet throughout the whole session, even when probed. When the session ended, and the recording device was switched off, the participants

that did not actively engage in the focus group would then provide information. Whenever I asked why they chose to present this information outside of the focus group, the general response was they were shy to speak out. Informants who presented views, opinions and facts in a dominating fashion, stifled the less dominating characters. Having observed this, after every focus group I would then approach the quiet members and have a one on one session where we would discuss their views on the topics that would have been discussed in the focus groups. '*Bernard's book of fieldwork*' did not present any of these dilemmas which meant that as a researcher, I had to think on my feet.

### One on one interviews

I found that data that I gathered from one on one interviews were of thicker content compared to data collected from focus groups. One on one interviews meant spending quality time with one person where attention was focused on one person whereas in focus group discussions attention would be divided among six to eight people. Here the informant was able to provide more information that he or she perhaps would have been unable to in a focus groups. There are no interferences in one on one interviews. Also in focus groups participants would sometimes disagree viewpoints of a topic leading to deviation. These setbacks were not present in one on one interviews, which made it easier to carry out and more efficient.

One difficulty that I encountered with one on one interviews was that if the participant was not vocal or as involved in the discussion, the interview would be fruitless due to lack of in-depth conversations. I observed that the participants that I formed rapport with engaged in more depth compared to those I had not formed rapport with. However it was not possible to form rapport with all the participants on a one to one basis due to time constraints.

### Hanging out

I managed to hang out with two specific groups, mothers and girls. I was unable to hang out with men because in Qondwa it is culturally forbidden to hang out with the opposite sex that one has no relations with as explained by Mama Lucillah. I managed to spend most of the time hanging out with the girls because of our close age gap which made visiting places together and getting along easy. The Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria expected me to list the participants that I was to hang out with. I was not able to hang out with males and religious leaders as the realities of fieldwork presented themselves as I explain further.

When proposing my research to the Ethics Committee, my proposal was rejected on three accounts because of intricate ethical concerns. The major concerns were that I had not efficiently explained how I would obtain informed consent from my informants, and that my topic was on children therefore on ‘minors’. There were also concerns as to how I would notify authority about sexual abuse cases that I would come across in the field however it is not as black as white in the field as it is in writing. In the following section I present the realities of the field regarding these ethical issues.

### Informed consent

I went into the field with my consent forms clearly written and printed out both in English and siSwati as instructed by the Ethics Committee. However, these forms created a barrier between my informants and I. Firstly, most of my informants were unable to read and write. They were able to speak siSwati fluently; however the ability to speak a language does not imply having the skill of reading and writing. A number of my informants were unable to read consent forms as well as provide signatures.

Those who were able to read and write reacted differently to these consent forms. To a couple, The University logo and the signatures by supervisors and lecturers at the bottom of the form presented an intimidating institutional authority. This intimidated informants that were not presented with opportunities to attend universities as explained to me by three informants. Some of the comments that I received included ‘*yoh (damn) am I signing my soul to the devil?*’ and ‘*This form just looks complicated, just tell me what it says.*’ I was faced with a situation where I had to change my strategy and did away with the consent forms. Before holding a discussion, I would explain the content of the forms in lay man’s English. In order for the informants to indicate their agreement, I passed around a simple plain paper whereby I asked them to write down their names. This was a form of register which was not intimidating to the participants. For those who were unable to write, I asked them to say their names out loud as I wrote down in the register. Every participant was well informed about my research before participating. He or she was able to withdraw from participating at any given time and I used pseudonyms throughout when discussing people and places for privacy and safety from exposure.

There are several photos that I took in the field which I was unable to include in this dissertation because participants were not comfortable with having their photos appearing in a public document. Participants would take photos in the spur of the moment or because everyone else



was taking photos, but later I would then be requested not to publish these photos because they would then decide against it.

The department had requested that field photos needed to be included in the write up however I could only publish a selected few. Those that I selected due to informed consent, I had to colour in their faces so that they could not be recognised as the ones that were providing sensitive information.

### Responsibility to the public

*‘The results of my research will be stored in the University library after this dissertation has been assessed. The script will also be distributed to the participants in Qondwa village; those who sponsored this research namely SanParks, Gender Institute and the Centre for the Study of AIDS– all at the University of Pretoria. This means that I also take responsibility for the factuality of the statements and representations that will be made. I also intend to do a public presentation about my findings in Qondwa Village after my dissertation has been examined.’*

The above is an excerpt from my Masters Proposal which I submitted to the Ethics Committee. In order to have approval granted, I needed to state how my findings would be made available to the public. These requirements are indeed necessary however there are a few qualms I carry regarding this. As I previously mentioned, most of my informants are unable to read and write. This means that although my dissertation will be available to the public, the general public in Qondwa is either illiterate or unfamiliar with the English Language. One way around the language barrier is to find a translator to translate the whole dissertation from English into siSwati. However I know that this is financially impossible. Furthermore there is no public library or book store in Qondwa village where I can make my dissertation accessible. The alternative is to provide my script to the Crisis Centre where workers will be able to utilise the information provided and incorporate it into their outreach programmes.

I find a more hands on approach with the community, a more efficient approach of involving the community in issues that involve them. The research organisation I am currently employed under has embarked on an outreach programme whereby residents in South African villages are educated about their human rights. Research carried out by the organisation highlights how rural communities do not have access or hold knowledge about their human rights due to high levels of illiteracy. I proposed to the organisation that Qondwa village be included in the areas of outreach. One of the proposals in the pipeline is that the organisation holds a fun day at the

village hall whereby different activities will be targeted at different groups. During and after activities are held, discussions on human rights will then take place.

One of my colleagues once pointed out that we anthropologists are no different from conniving thieves who invade a space and grab materials for personal gain. In this case after my dissertation has been examined, I will gain my degree and progress in my career. I aim to give back to the very people who made my research possible which are why I proposed Qondwa village to be included in the outreach programme. In no way do I imply that Qondwa's involvement in the development program is the resolve to the many quandaries that are faced. Development programs themselves are contested and provide challenges that perhaps were not even there before they got involved. For instance, having collected data in the village and simply handed it over to the organisation, I have no control over how findings were interpreted and implanted in the community.

#### Sensitivity of the topic

It took half of the year 2012 for my topic to be accepted by the Ethics Committee. One of the concerns was that sexuality regarding children is a sensitive and taboo topic which is not advised by the Ethics Committee. I had to defend my case by clearly stating the following regarding my research.

The point of my research was not to seek sexually active children and hold discussions with them. My aim was to understand how Qondwa village constructs childhood, and if Qondwa villagers accept and acknowledge their children as sexually active.

None of my participants were below the age of 18 as insisted by the Ethics Committee. However, individuals above the age 18 who were financially dependent on their parents/guardians are considered as children in the local setting. Ethically unless given exceptional permission from parents and guardians, one cannot engage a person under 18 for information regarding such sensitive issues. These issues are to be discussed with adults and legally an adult is any person above the age of 18. I did not use any information about specific child sexual crimes from the Crisis Centre. The crisis centre volunteers were only to provide information on what they themselves have experienced in terms of childhood and childhood sexuality in the village.

Indeed I agree with the fact that these are all serious ethical implications that need to be taken into consideration. However I persistently defended my topic because I believe that if

researchers are discouraged from digging into sensitive topics, how do we as researchers expand the fountain of knowledge in our communities?

### Use of financial incentives

One dilemma I tackled on numerous occasions was the difference between the use of financial incentives and providing financial aid. For example, my host mother was surviving from hand to mouth. I on the other hand was well equipped financially by the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria, and also from my personal funds. As a requirement from the ethics board committee regarding my research, I must not use any financial incentive for participants to participate. Practically this meant that the money I possessed was to be allocated to paying Mama Lucillah her rent, purchasing groceries for the household and personal transportation. How does one define the thin line between financial incentive, and assistance in a dire situation? For instance, I asked my host mother to introduce me to some of her colleagues from the crisis centre whom I had not met. Her response was that she would gladly introduce me to her friends if I paid for her child's crèche fees which amounted to R300 for she had fallen behind in her monthly payment. I paid the fees because it saddened me that the child was absent from school for a total of three months because there was no financial means for her attend. How was I to explain to Mama Lucillah that her child's predicament was a divorced issue from my intentions in the field? I did not draw the money from the resources that the department had allocated to me for I had not included this in the budget. This amount of money came from my personal account which I separated from my research funds.

I was also faced with a situation where I noticed that her two sons walked to school barefoot in torn uniforms that barely fitted their body frames for they had outgrown the uniforms. I could not annul myself from this situation and again dug into my own personal account and managed to buy uniforms and school shoes for these little boys.



**Photo 7: Mama Lucillah's children going to school**

### **1.7 Lonely Realities of Fieldwork**

The field became lonely many times especially since I experienced language barriers. I was not able to communicate with people as much as I had wished to. I picked up that people would discuss me knowing that I would not be able to decipher what they said about me, positive or negative. I was fortunate enough to be located in a geographical area that was accessible to the local mobile network provider. Here I would log onto social networks such as Facebook. Facebook is a social forum on the internet where one sets up a profile and shares thoughts, photos, articles as well as music. I resorted to this forum to tap into the social world that I was familiar with. I would stare longingly at photos of my varsity colleagues who studied in the comfort of the Anthropology postgraduate lounge area. I would admire the photos of them hanging out in night clubs and parks. I also resorted to a lot of text messaging to my close friends and family. Sharing my experiences with them, especially fellow anthropology researchers, was highly comforting. I was truly grateful for the technological space that provided friendship and comfort in the field. Those who had not experienced the realities of fieldwork did not fully comprehend my loneliness. I received phone messages stating, *'I don't get it. You are surrounded by people yet you say you are lonely. Go out there and meet people.'*

Those who had partaken in fieldwork understood that the loneliness I referred to here comprised of culture shock and language barriers.

Overall I believe that these conundrums and dilemmas were an opportunity to provide a thick description of my ethnography. My decision to live in the community also contributed to the frequency in which I faced contradictions between research ethics and the realities of fieldwork. I owe my decision to anthropologist Clifford Geertz who carried out research in Bali on cockfighting. Geertz' hands-on involvement in the community made it possible for him to form rapport with the Balinese, where he was carrying out research on the meanings of the Balinese cockfight. He expresses how the first several weeks for him and his wife were difficult because the members of the community hardly spoke nor glanced at him or recognised his presence (Geertz 1972:1).

His entry point was when he attended an illegal Balinese cockfight. Police raided the cockfights in an attempt to disperse and arrest those in attendance. The crowd then dispersed from the police and Geertz and his wife decided to run away with the crowd. Geertz could have chosen to display his documents that showed that he was there as a researcher to the police (Geertz 1972:2). But Geertz explains that 'Everyone in the village knew we had fled like everyone else. Everyone was extremely pleased and even more surprised that we had not simply pulled out our papers' (Geertz 1972:2). Like Geertz, I managed to integrate in Qondwa households where I experienced everyday life. It was an emotionally, mentally and physically taxing journey, however it was worth it for as a result the voices of Qondwa residents are now presented in words in the form of my dissertation.

## **Chapter 2: South African Histories and Personhood of Children**

I begin this chapter by discussing the history of South Africa in specific terms of Bantustan formation so as to understand the socio-geographic placement of Qondwa Village. There-after I discuss the different ethnographies in different African contexts regarding childhood and childhood sexualities embedded with the theory of personhood. I wish to highlight the fact that there is very thin research regarding childhood and childhood sexualities in the context of African literature. There is a need for research that covers topics such as these in the African context to add to the body of knowledge.

### **2.1 History of South African Bantustans**

Qondwa Village is located in the former Bantustan region of Kangwane, Mpumalanga. I find it fitting to provide a historical account of Bantustans in South Africa so as to provide a richer socio-geographic illustration of Qondwa village. This historical account on South African Bantustans is divided into three parts. In the first section I provide a brief background on apartheid in South Africa which resulted in the formation of Bantustans. Secondly, I provide D'Amato's (1996) definition of a Bantustan and I draw upon King (2006). Lastly I employ King's (2007) analysis of Kangwane in particular as a former Bantustan, as well as the uprising of Kangwane as discussed by Ginindza (2012).

### **Apartheid in South Africa**

In 1948, racial segregation was established in South Africa. This segregation was based on a system of laws which were upheld by the Race Classification Boards whereby each individual in South Africa was designated as white, native, coloured or Asian. A person's racial identity was codified in an ID document. Those who were identified as Black had regulated and restricted mobility to the point where from the 1960s to 1980s, 3.5 million blacks, coloureds and Asians moved to segregated townships and this is when Bantustans were formed. This era of segregation is known as the apartheid era. The idea of geographical isolations of each of the black ethnic groups into separate homelands was the apartheid government's main idea behind forming Bantustans. This separation meant that the remaining territories of South Africa would be governed by white people. According to the apartheid government, the reasoning behind the

separation was that different races would cease unrelenting threats of conflict. In 1963 the idea of Bantustans materialised (King 2004:177).

King (2004) states that prior to the onset of democracy, South Africa was divided into a resource rich area legally set out for the inhabitants of European descent, historically known as 'white South Africa'. The 1913 Glen Grey Act set down the legislative grounds for the formation of the Bantustans (King 2004:182). King (2004) indicates that the division of South Africa into white South Africa and the black Bantustans served only the interested of the white minority. White South Africa which occupied 81% of the geographical area was the site in which industrial, economic, and commercial farming proceeded apace. In contrast, the Bantustans, legislatively demarcated for black political and civil aspirations, occupied only 19% of the geographical area. Wolpe (1982) argues that these Bantustans (also called 'native reserves') served merely as underdeveloped labour reserves of black migrants for the white economy. He questions these methods of distribution and separation of land by arguing that the apartheid government advocated for Bantustans by claiming that black people would become politically independent and economically self-sufficient (King 2004:183).

King (2004) argues that realistically speaking, political independence meant economic interdependence with the white areas. Economic interdependence covered a spectrum of situations, ranging from virtual self-sufficiency with moderate trade to subservience of a manpower pool that would exploit its labour for mines and industries. Such exploitation meant capitalists had no intention of losing their workforce due to resistance. New factories were located along the borders of the Bantustans, phasing out. In this way, white people managed to get labour from Bantustans but remained on English soil which did not advocate for any kind of independence (King 2004:183).

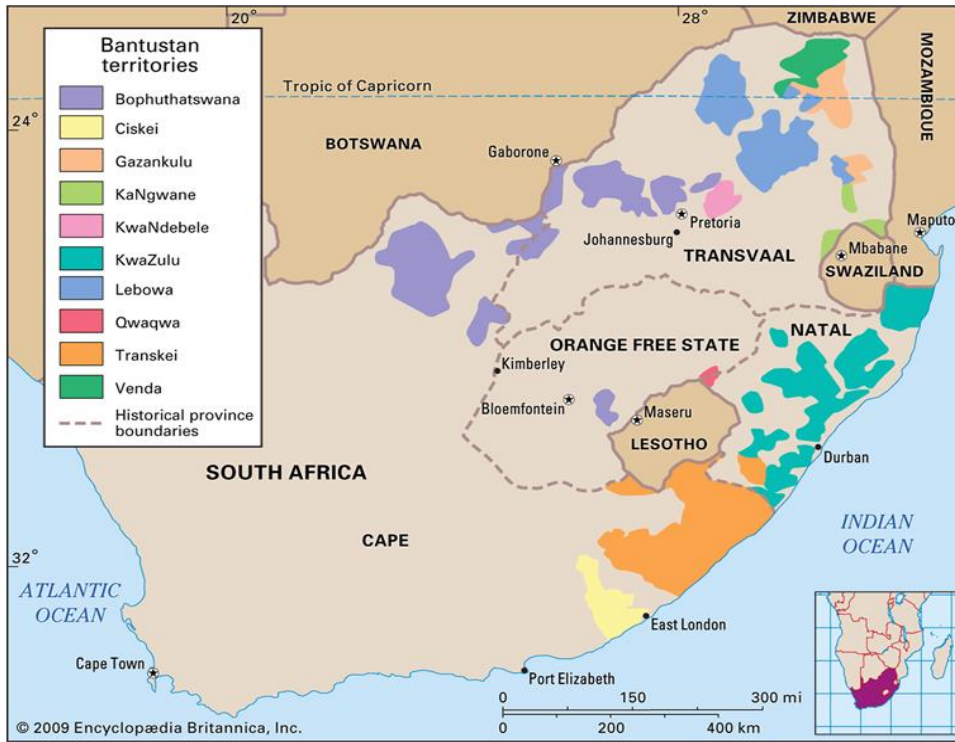


Photo 8: Map of the Bantustans formed during apartheid in South Africa



South African historian Simeon Ginindza (2012), informs readers in his narrative of Kangwane that the masses of people in Kangwane desired to be accorded self-governing status. Such status would give them additional powers to take decisions politically and economically for the improvement of the quality of the socio-economic lifestyle of the oppressed Swazi people at that time (Ginindza 2012:146).

The apartheid government had decided to incorporate Kangwane Bantustan into the region of Swaziland. The size of population of the homeland of Kangwane was in the region of 850000 people. This was the number of people whose citizenship would have to be fortified through the incorporation of Kangwane into the Kingdom of Swaziland, as a means of pseudo-independence. Young and old within and outside the borders of the homeland opposed the incorporation where the Inyadza National Movement was looking for political and financial support and started consultation with the ANC political party in South Africa (Ginindza 2012:146-147). Ginindza states that the ANC was totally against the incorporation of the Kangwane homeland into the Kingdom of Swaziland and supported the programme of politicisation and mobilisation of the masses by the Inyadza National Movement. Despite the political hardships, the Inyadza National Movement triumphed. The Kangwane Legislative Assembly was reinstated in 1983 and in 1984 Kangwane was accorded self-governing status (Ginindza 2012:146-147).

## **2.2 Theories of personhood**

The aim of my research is not to illustrate or highlight how apartheid affected the personhood of South Africans. I rely on the theory of personhood to discuss the personhood of children in Qondwa village located in the former Kangwane Bantustan. I draw upon the works of Fortes (1969), Karp (1995), Kratz (2000) and Salo (2004), which confer the meaning of personhood and agency. Subsequently, I then draw upon Chambua&Kamugisha (1994), Mustafa (2006), Holly (2006) and Arnfred (2007) who all provide ethnographic illustrations of personhood and sexual agency. In these ethnographic examples, I highlight recurring themes. One of the recurring themes is that the notion of personhood is not a fixed notion; rather personhood is constantly negotiated, contested and redefined through everyday social interactions. Secondly, the notion of personhood and agency differs cross-culturally. Lastly, while cultural meanings of personhood and agency may appear to be readily apparent, fixed and commonly shared amongst all members of a specific community, this is not so (Salo 2004:28).

## 2.3 Defining personhood

Different persons are culturally defined and recognised by different rights, abilities and responsibilities (Kratz 2000:137). The social actions, responsibilities and choices that any society attributes to an individual reflect its socio-cultural construction of personhood. Persons are attributed readily identifiable agency, as well as responsibilities. However these attributes differ in relation to generational cohort, gender, and socio-economic status. Furthermore, these attributes do not remain fixed through time but is constantly negotiated, reproduced or contested in everyday social interaction and relationships. In addition, responsibilities and agency extend to the realm of sexuality and reproductive responsibilities.

Salo (2004) explains how the notions of persons as individual socially recognised actors free from the influence or constraint of socio-cultural relationships and contexts, are regarded as western and associated with the rise of individual economic wealth associated with capitalism. She goes on to state how Fortes' (1969) and Karp's (1995) conceptualizations of personhood allow for a more complex notion of agency, that is always relationally defined and negotiated, as well as constrained within these relationships.

Karp (1995) states that personhood ought to be analysed from objective and subjective facets. The objective facet of personhood is the capacities and roles with which society endows an individual whereas the subjective facet is the individual's own lived experience. This means that although there are societal norms, values and expectations ascribed to an individual, his or her sense of world and sense of themselves are by no means invariant. Occasionally, one may see himself/herself as differentiated and detached from others, other times as one with others (Karp 1995). Here Karp (1995) further argues that emphasis on studying personhood through modes of self-consciousness also entails a praxaological perspective and interest not only in how people construct meaning in social life, but in how life is experienced and lived from within the mind of the person (Karp1995:17).It is therefore important to explain agency when discussing personhood.

Salo (2004) draws upon Whyte's (1990) and Karp's (1995) explanations of agency, as an expansion of Forte's (1969) conceptualization of personhood. Whyte (1990) and Karp (1995) indicate that agency is the semantic and bodily means for generating and regenerating the world. Agency is complexly intertwined and determined by history, social structure, and

individual choices or intent (Salo 2004:28). Karp (1995) goes on to emphasise that agency itself can never simply mean the free exercise of choice or carrying out of intentions because choice itself is structured (Salo 2004:29). Therefore norms, values, and expectations that society ascribes on individuals are not necessarily how individuals experience these attributes. This notion of personhood differs cross-culturally and is constantly negotiated, defied and contested through agency.

When it comes to the personhood of children, rightly asks how children experience, understand and resist or reshape the complex frequently contradictory cultural politics that inform their daily lives. To what extent is this identity conceived as singular and exclusive and what sorts of priorities are asserted in cases where various forms of cultural identity – regional national ethnic minority or indigenous come up against each other. There is a need to re-examine the meaning of childhood where more and more children are living in multi-cultural settings demanding that they move in and out of diverse social roles and create identities foreign to parents as displayed in the ethnographic journey in this review.

Philippe Aries challenge to naturalistic orthodoxies had major impact on social sciences. The basic assertion here was that the idea of childhood did not exist (Aries 1962:125). Aries argued that modern conception of childhood as a separate life stage emerged in Europe between 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries together with the bourgeois families' notions of the home and privacy. The critique of this dissertation may be that there is not enough ethnographic display of the meanings of childhood in the African context. Most literature is embedded with the meanings of childhood in the European context as argued by Aries, which show just how relevant my dissertation is to the body of knowledge regarding the multiples meanings of childhood in Africa (Aries 1962:126). Institutions then contributed to the notion of childhood though the notion mainly catered to upper class society. This opened up the channel of the notion of childhood not being natural but a social construct. As a result, the exploration of the child and its structural role in modern society are still underdeveloped, further highlighting the lack of thick ethnographic examples of the different meanings of childhood.

I seek to illustrate how the notion of personhood differs cross-culturally by citing various research carried out regarding the personhood of children. In the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights there was no specific reference to children. The foundation for a global standard for children's rights was laid down in 1959 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration specified for children separate from and in

addition to the rights of adults. Child welfare was identified with protection of the family with no sense of the dangers to the children that that modern family might impose. The charter did not recognise cultural differences in what constitutes the children's best interest. This declaration was aimed at protecting and nurturing childhood as defined by adults in Western contexts. It is important to note that what this notion of culture has in common with the universal notion of culture as a special symbolic domain. Both emphasize culture as the realm of symbols, language, values and beliefs. Thus a child's right to a cultural identity is built on liberal democratic principles of tolerance for diverse views and freedom of self-expression (Sanders & Sanders 2006:34-37). These various research findings further highlight how there is no universal meaning of childhood which is why I embarked on a journey to find out the meanings of childhood specifically in Qondwa village, South Africa. For instance, personhood of children in Qondwa village would differ from the personhood of children in Samoa as researched by Margaret Mead as discussed below.

#### **2.4 Understanding the meanings of childhood in Samoa**

The age of marking agency for children differs across cultural and national contexts. Margaret Mead's (1961) research focuses on the rites of passage that mark the child's entry into adulthood in Tau, Samoa. Mead's (1961) key method of research was participant observation where she spent much time in Samoa observing the cultural rituals and feasts especially those associated with childbirth, childhood and parenting. Her ethnography draws on these experiences as a participant observer in Samoa. Participant observation provided her with the ability to analyze childhood from a particular cultural perspective through observing and learning about the different rituals performed by adults and children that map the key cultural meanings of childhood. The time Mead spent hanging out in the diverse social settings for three years observing these rituals provided her with an opportunity to map out the textured, layered manner in which children's personhoods were constructed and informed with specific social, economic and cultural meanings in Samoa.

She describes the meanings of childhood in contrast to adulthood in this process. Mead's (1961) findings illustrate that in Samoa birthdays are not celebrated or regarded as important. The initial birth of the baby is considered an important social event and that is when the great and only event is celebrated for the individual. Mead's (1961) work highlights that the notion of transition from one age to the next, and of increasing responsibility in childhood through birthdays are not universal.

Mead (1961) explains that in Samoa before a baby is born, the father's relatives bring gifts in the form of food to the mother. These prenatal rituals serve to mark the gendered expectations of the child as a contributing member within Samoan society. The mother's female relatives make pure white bark cloth for the baby and weave dozens of tiny mats which form the layette. Once a baby girl is born, the cord is cut off and buried under a paper mulberry tree from which cloth is made. The association of the tree's productivity in the materiality of the cloth symbolizes the hope of the girl growing up to be industrious in the performance of household tasks. If the baby is a boy, the cord is thrown at sea so that he may be a skilled fisherman. The cord can also be planted under a plant which symbolizes him developing farming skills as he grows up into adulthood (Mead 1961:16).

There are no celebrations that are held for children from the point that the cord is buried to when the child enters puberty. A girl does not receive recognition as a visible person with agency and responsibility until she is married. Her recognition as an individual with acknowledged agency is activated through marriage. Before then, children are defined as silent, insignificant social actors, as persons-in-becoming. Adults engage with children merely to reinforce their relative social insignificance through remarks such as, 'Keep still! Be quiet! Stop that noise!' At this stage, they are still regarded to be invisible, muted, and non-participatory members in society except as extensions of adults' reproductive responsibilities. Objective personhood holds it that children are not expected to be sexually active because they are incapable of biological reproduction, whereas adults would reproduce and therefore are expected to have sexual agency (Mead 1961:16-17).

## **2.5 Gendered childhood sexualities in Samoa**

The adults in Samoa are described as holding dominant views of children as insignificant social actors and sexually immature persons. This does not mean that children are passive participants or unknowledgeable of their sexuality. After hanging out with ten year olds, and conducting informal interviews with community members, as well as observing how adults and children communicated on the Island Tau, Mead (1961) learnt just how educated and informed the children were about sex and sexuality. She learnt that the children had complete knowledge of the human body and its functions regardless of the adults' belief that the children were sexually uneducated. Mead describes that there is a custom on the island where both men and women walk around naked and also bath in the sea together. Mead regards this as a general positive

view of nudity in this community as ordinary and every day and so a disregard for privacy (Mead 1961:96).

Self-masturbation by boys as well as girls is considered a norm which generally began at the age of six. Boys between six and twelve years of age would self-masturbate in groups of friends. Mead suggests that at this age, masturbation may be considered innocent sexual experimentation (Mead 1961:96). Children also observe the youth who used palm groves for their sexual rendezvous. Boys masturbate in groups while adults openly shout sexual advances in front of children. Mead (1961:95) quotes one man shouting across the road to a woman: 'Ho maiden, wait for me in your bed tonight'.

These illustrations do not show open discussion with the children about sex in terms of dialogue. However, the normative definition of children as sexually immature and as insignificant social actors allowed for the exchange of sexual innuendos and suggestive behavior between adults that children observed (Mead 1961:96). Subjective personhood which is the experienced realities of the children here holds contrary to the expectations held by the adults in the community. This illustrates how indeed personhood is not a fixed notion and is experienced from an objective and subjective facet. The adults may perceive the children as sexually uneducated however Mead's findings illustrate how the children negotiate and shift these expectations ascribed to them.

Mead's research method of hanging out with the adults as well as the children was an efficient method. By doing so she managed to find out personhood of children from both the objective and the subjective facet meaning her findings were not one sided. I adopted this research method in my own fieldwork where I spent time with the parents/guardians as well as the children in Qondwa village. This provided me with insight into the realities that the children lived compared to the expectations that were held for them by the adults.

One may argue the relevance of Margaret Mead due to its 'foreign outdated input,' however as I expressed before there is a thin spread of literature regarding childhood and childhood sexuality of which the study carried out by Mead proves to be of historical importance.

## 2.6 Personhood of children in Tanzania

Chambua & Kamugisha (1994) contribute to the thin study personhood of childhood, particularly girlhood, from a public health perspective. Public health studies that were carried out here were motivated by the concern for Tanzanian girls' reproductive health, and for their educational careers to continue uninterrupted by marriage and early pregnancy. The studies illustrate the contestation between institutions such as the family, the community, and the formal education system in demarcating the boundaries between childhood and adulthood and the associated expectations about latent and active sexuality. As such, these illustrations serve as important sources of insight into local assumptions of gendered childhood sexualities as these are defined in contestation with that provided in state legislation (Chambua&Kamugisha 1994:25).

Chambua&Kamugisha (1994) found that in the Tanzanian towns of Kilimanjaro, Mwanza, Pemba and Tanga, girl children are married off to older men at the age of twelve which is the normative age of menarche. Menarche is regarded as the social marker of adulthood when girls are expected to become active sexual agents. This is the norm and expectations of the society in terms of young girls and marriage. Chambua & Kamugisha report that as long as girls are married, they are referred to as 'women' regardless of the fact that the 'women' in question could be twelve years of age. From this cultural perspective, a child is no longer a child once she or he has reached the normative age of menarche. The use of numeric age as a means of delineating childhood is used by the Tanzanian state and the educated sector of the population, and remains a minor marker for the rural and semi-literate sectors of the population. This already illustrates the multiple meanings of childhood, depending on the socio-economic demographics. Once children defined by numeric age are married, they are expected to bear children. These pregnancies cause many physical complications for the young mothers (Chambua&Kamugisha 1994:26).

The biological evidence indicates that a twelve year old is too fragile to bear children. However once menarche has set in, a twelve year old girl is viewed as a woman who is expected to be married off. After marriage she is expected to go through the processes of pregnancy and child birth. At a tender age, a child has not reached mental or physical maturity. Biologically a 12 year old is too fragile to bear children. However, socially this 12 year old is viewed as a woman who must go through the process of pregnancy and child birth. At a tender age, a child has not reached mental or physical maturity. The relative scarcity of adequate bio-medical facilities in

most rural Tanzanian settings imply that these ‘child-mothers’ lives may be at risk when they experience complications with pregnancy and childbirth. Another challenge that the young mother faces is competition between the young growing mother and the fetus in the womb due to scarcity of food and nutrients. This results in the woman showing stunted growth, malnutrition, anemia and high blood pressure (Chambua&Kamugisha 1994:26-27).

## **2.7 Negotiation of girlhood and womanhood**

Health researcher Masabo (1994) equally carried out research on health and pregnancies of girls and women in Tanzania. What is of interest is how in Masabo’s research, girls who fell pregnant out of wedlock were viewed as a disappointment, and the girls themselves sought measures such as abortion. It is rather acceptable for a child of 12 years old to fall pregnant when married for she is considered a woman. The teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17 here are still considered girls and are therefore shunned on by the adults for engaging in sexual activities (Masabo 1994:150).

Masabo (1994) conducted a study in Ilala District in 1990. The aim of the research was to find out how teenage mothers in Tanzania know about sexuality and childbirth. Masabo (1994) found that sex is not discussed with children and they are expected to possess a latent sexuality until the onset of menarche for girls and for boys. In this context, children are not expected to have sexual agency (Masabo 1994:150). Forty girls between the ages of fourteen and seventeen participated in the study. All of them had gone through childbirth once. Most of the girls said that they gained knowledge on sex from their peers because their parents and relatives were not willing to discuss sex and sexuality (Masabo 1994:162). Masabo argues that society expects these children not to be sexually active, and when they do become active they are seen as problem children. However, these children are not educated about sex, sexuality, and pregnancy and fall pregnant due to a lack of guidance and due to ignorance although the study was based on an assumption that most teenagers have babies before they are fully aware of their reproductive capabilities. Masambo (1994) states that the problem is that the girls who become pregnant out of wedlock are afraid to approach their parents and relatives for help regarding childbirth and their responsibilities.

What is of further interest here is how Chambua & Kamugisha (1994) express that their research is on the childhood in Tanzania, yet they do not present data about boys. Their data focuses on girlhood and how girls experience childhood. I came across similar outcomes as I



spent time engaging with my informants in Qondwa village. The word child appeared to be a synonym to the word girl, meaning boys were excluded from the notion of childhood.

## **2.8 Personhood of children in Swaziland**

Kuper (1963) explains that most of the Swazi families she encountered during her ethnographic research practiced medicinal rituals as a lifestyle. Children born into families that practiced medicine were highly respected at birth and as those children grew older, they received training from adult family members on how to mature into an *inyanga* (medicine practitioner or traditional healer). Swazi families viewed this familial inheritance of being an *inyanga* as highly important. Knowledge of rituals and medicines were imparted to some children in some families as a part of inheritance (Kuper 1963:4). Kuper (1963) only discusses childhood in this sense of inheritance of medicinal practices and does not provide a detailed account of childhood among the Swazi.

Anthropologist Ntuli (2006) expands on Kuper's ethnographic account of Swazi childhood by focusing on how Swazi speaking people construct childhood and the meaning of childhood. She carried out her fieldwork in Manzini town in Swaziland through interviews and surveys with caregivers and parents in the Swazi community. Her criteria for selection depended on whether the participant had experience of the day to day care of children as well as the running of Child Education programmes (Ntuli 2006). Her study explored practices implemented by Early Childhood Development caregivers and pre-school teachers. She investigated how a lack of appropriate policy on the Early Childhood Development programmes impacted on the delivery of services to the sector.

Ntuli's findings illustrate that Swazi caregivers implement diverse, uncoordinated practices and that there is no uniformity in terms of professional training, classroom practice, and curriculum application. Ntuli further draws from Lewis (1999) who states that there are a number of Swazi children who experience traumatic situations due to the lack of efficient education. Lewis argues that most Swazi children lack the social problem solving skills necessary to interact or to deal with conflict (Lewis cited in Ntuli 2006:2). Ntuli (2006) argues that the caregiver provide the best care that they can in a situation where the government does not provide adequate training to caregivers. She further argues that caregivers have the opportunity to observe children and interact with them and through their observations they can make enormous contributions to the children's education having been provided with necessary training and equipment. However, there is no systemic training for caregivers in Swaziland to

deal with the emotional and psychosocial aspects of children's development. South Africa and Namibia pose different issues when dealing with personhood of children. Research that Ntuli (2006) carried out here focused on the educational personhood of children, whereas the research by Jewkes et al (2005) focused on the personhood of children regarding sexual abuse. This illustrates how childhood is not one dimensional or as simple to categorise.

## **2.9 Growing Up In Cape Town South Africa**

Rachel Bray (2010) carried out research in Fish Hook valley located on the southern part of the Cape Peninsula in South Africa. Fish Hook valley which she refers to as 'The Valley' throughout her research, was a space created for black people in 1960 during the apartheid era by the apartheid government. She carried out her research in the Valley where she aimed to research the realities of children growing up in the Valley during the post-apartheid era. Here she focuses on the subjective personhood of children. She carries out research on multiple aspects such as the relationships that the children experience, the quality of education, and the mere diversity of their experiences on a day to day basis (Bray 2010:21).

Bray emphasises that 'we do not focus on those who are especially vulnerable or in most need such as orphans... we seek to understand the lives of ordinary urban children facing many challenges in life' (Bray 2010:21). I grapple with the term *ordinary* because it implies that children, who do not grow up in urban spaces, are not ordinary. Perhaps a definition of how the term is used here for the purposes of the research, would have enlightened the reader

Bray (2010) explains that carrying out research after the apartheid era is crucial because policies that directly affected children and youth changed in the post-apartheid era. For instance, the welfare state was extended through child support grants, racial restrictions of jobs were alleviated, interracial dating was no longer forbidden, and they argue that such policies had a direct effect of the shift on the meaning of childhood (Bray 2010:22). They spent some time holding discussions with children and youth that they identified in spaces such as schools and churches. Bray states that after much discussion with girls and boys from the age 12 in the community, they found that the topic of sexuality between the adults and children was a topic that was not discussed. Should the topic have been discussed, it was discussed in a repressive manner whereby the issue of sex was regarded as a negative act that girls in particular were not expected to engage in before marriage (Bray 2010:260). Bray quotes Preston Whyte showing the notion of silence between adults and children in society:

‘Secrecy in human society is often an integral aspect of and a major mechanism for maintaining existing relations of power and patterns of respect. So is an increasing social distance between the generations as children grow up. An aspect of this may be the silences over sex and reproduction between generations... typical of many societies over the globe’. (Whyte quoted in Bray 2010:97).

Each of these ethnographic illustrations of childhood, narrate different accounts of childhood from different cross-cultural perspectives. Similar in these ethnographic illustrations, is the fact that the topic of sex is not discussed between the younger generation and the older generation. Mead carried out her research in Samoa from 1959 to 1962, and Bray carried out her research in the Cape Peninsula in 2008 to 2010. Although there is no universal meaning of childhood, it is possible for children in cross-cultural settings and spaces to experience similar realities.

### CHAPTER 3: The Ideal Girl Child

In this chapter I present the notion of childhood and childhood sexuality from both sides of the coin, childhood according to the guardian, and the experienced reality of the children. Throughout this narrative I provide speech bubbles instead of paraphrasing the conversations for two reasons. Firstly, I expressed that I presented my ethnographic journey in a thickly described manner which I find verbatim as one. Secondly, as illustrated in literature, children are seen as mute marginalised beings who are passively waiting the input and direction of adults. Presenting the ‘children’s’ voices in verbatim gives them a voice which they wish they were provided as will materialise further on in this expedition.

*‘Qondwa village has raised children who obey everything that we say. I am proud to be a parent here because our children have been taught values and morals.’* – Mama Saky (mother in Qondwa village).

*‘The stupid adults think we are so angelic and heavenly. Well its either they are really dumb or they choose to believe that.’* – Menenhle (child in Qondwa village)

#### 3.1 Personhood of childhood as perceived by parents/guardians

This chapter aims to confer how meanings of girlhood are socially constructed in Qondwa village from the side of the parents and guardians which eludes my argument that personhood is shifted in different contexts.

I do so by exploring whether girls are acknowledged as social persons and what, if any, socially recognised agency is ascribed to them. I further examine the expectations, values and norms of girlhood in Qondwa. These meanings of childhood which mostly centred on girlhood, unravelled daily by actively participating in everyday events and activities in Qondwa village.

The day after my arrival at Mama Lucillah’s household, an intimidating cock which I named ‘beastie’ (nickname for beast), was my reliable alarm whether I wished to arise or not. Beastie was intimidating, well fed and wobbled in an unshakable pompous manner. He always flapped his wings as if he was preparing for a Balinese cock fight. As embarrassing as it is to admit, I was frightened of Beastie and as if he sensed my fear, he enjoyed hanging out just outside my door as if he enjoyed my cautious movements around him. Nevertheless, I could rely on him as my daily alarm. I arose, bathed, and made sure that I paid much attention to my style of dress. My supervisor’s colleague spent a total of two years in Qondwa village where he carried

out research on sexual violence in the village. Before I headed to the field, he shared with me that Swazi elders regard dressing a symbolism of respect to one's own body and to others. It is deemed that a respectable woman is one who does not reveal much skin or accentuate body parts such as the thighs, breasts, back and buttocks. Bernard (1996:245) explains how as a researcher, one has the decision or choice to dress to fit different circumstances, which is what I had to do in order to be accepted in the space that the mothers occupied.

I normally dress up in sleeveless vests and loose fitting shorts, and occasionally short sleeveless dresses. I had to burrow through my packed clothes in my suitcase searching for the longest dress that I had packed at the bottom of the suitcase. The long plain black, loose fitting cotton dress that brushed my ankles was however sleeveless exposing my shoulders and upper back which is deemed unacceptable in the space I was to occupy that day. I threw on a brown shawl that covered my shoulders and upper back despite the heat.

As I tied my long black braids into a bun at the back of my head, I walked towards Mama Linda's compound where the focus group discussion was to take place. My dress appeared as if it had swept all the dust off the dust road and my face as if I had stuck my head through a sauna door and applied dust as makeup on my face. I direly wished for my shorts and vest but quickly shoved my uneasiness at the back of my mind as I approached Mama Linda and her neighbours, Mama Saky, Mama Thuli and Mama B.

A warm inviting smile complimented Mama Linda's cheerful demeanour. She had a full voluptuous figure wrapped in blue patterned one piece West African attire with a brown embroidered head piece. *'Hello my friend come into the house with that nice dress that you are wearing!'* As I supposed, much attention was paid to my dressing for Mama Thuli was next to comment *'Wow you must borrow me that nice dress. It is lovely,'* as she shook my hand and spun me around so as to inspect more. Tall and light in complexion Mama Thuli's braids were styled into a French plait which fell on her long loosely fit grey dress. Short, bald Mama B had cheek dimples that lit her face. Mama Saki had her feet up on a stool for she suffered from swollen legs. I was grateful that despite her health condition, she had walked from her household a street away to attend this discussion.

We settled in Mama Linda's hut built of brick and layered over with a brown thick mud. Mama Linda excused herself in order to boil water to serve tea for us as her visitors. The mere thought of drinking tea in the heat made me sweat. However I knew from my colleague who originates from Swaziland, when a person visits another's household, he or she is offered tea and bread

as a welcoming gesture, regardless of whether he/she had eaten or desires to eat or not. Declining this gesture is deemed as boorish because the hosts interpret the decline as the visitor not being comfortable in the space or wishing to be elsewhere. As much as I wished to decline this I accepted the tea as my token of appreciation for having been welcomed in their space. As the kettle boiled on the open fire outside, the women finished off a conversation in siSwati which I figured was a melancholic conversation judging from the solemn expressions on their faces. We sat in Mama Linda's round thatched hut which comprised of a brown two seater couch and a brown three legged coffee table. The two eldest women sat on the couch while we younger women sat on reed mats with our legs stretched out. In Qondwa, offering the elders the only chairs available in a space while younger members sit on the floor is a sign of respect. My host mother and her brother explained this when I had first arrived at their household as a means of explaining why I had to sit on the floor. They explained that biologically, it is argued that younger members are physically healthier than older members. Younger members of the household are able to sit on the floor whereas the elderly need to comfortably rest their ailing bodies. From a cultural perspective it was explained that sitting on the floor symbolises acknowledgement from the younger members that they are less imperative than the elderly and they have much to learn from the wisdom of the elderly.

Upon returning, Mama Linda served us all a cup of tea and two slices of bread and shortly the room went quiet which was my cue to start the discussion. I explained to them that the aim of the discussion was to understand how children grow up here, what adults expect of them, and whether their experience of growing is the same or different to that of older people. Mama B was very jovial and said, *'Yes ask all the questions as long as you then write me in your book and tell them that I was the one who gave you all these answers!'* I switched on my recorder after asking for permission from all the participants. As I switched it on, Mama Saky joked asking if they are going to be on radio. As the women laughed Mama Linda tapped my shoulder saying, *'Ignore my friend she is crazy. Start your questions my child,'* and with that I started.

**Q:** How do you describe a child in Qondwa Village? **Mama Linda:** A child is a young person who needs to be take care of by their parents or anyone at home who make sure that they are ok.

**Mama B:** Yes as long as you are in my house and you eat my food and I work for you so that you are ok, you are still a child.

**Q:** The law says that a child is anyone who is under eighteen?

**Mama Thuli:** Hai. Hai. (*In a challenging tone directed at me*) Mama Linda and Mama B are right. Even if you are thirty and you do not know how to make yourself ok (*you are still financially dependent*), you are still a child. You can only support yourself when you are now a big person (*adult*). It does not matter how old you are.

**Q:** What expectations and roles do you set for your children in the household?

**Mama Saky:** It is very important that these children listen to what we say and to what we tell them. If I tell you as a parent that I do not like what you do. You must stop. Because I say so.

**Q:** May you please give me examples of what you do not like in your household?

**Mama Saky:** I do not like it for example, when children do not come home when I say that they come home. They should not be outside playing there after five o'clock, and my children I tell them that it is time to come home before the sun go down. They need to listen to me.

**Q:** What is your reason that they should be home at a certain time? And do they know why they need to be home at that time?

**Mama Saky:** When they are the age that they understand why they should not be outside after five for example when they are now fourteen years old all the way up to twenty, I tell them. I tell them that it is not safe for them to be outside after that time because when it is night a lot of bad things happen. That is when the thief comes out and those people who drink alcohol who are violent. It is just safe to be at home.

**Mama Linda:** My children should listen to me when I tell that I want them to do something for me in the house. If I tell my children that they should wash the dishes, they should wash the dishes and not ask any questions. Then after I ask them a few times, they then just know that they are supposed to do the dishes without being asked to do the dishes. Like my child who is twelve years old, she already knows that she should cook when it is now four o'clock and I do not have to ask her to do it because she already do it.

**Mama B:** I also teach my children to listen to me and to all the elderly in the house and in the community. For example, if my child is playing outside and the elderly woman or man from next door ask my children for something, I teach them that they should do it. Because it is their elderly and they should listen.

**Mama Thuli:** I just tell my children to respect their elders by not wearing clothes that show their flesh. Hai. Elders must not see your thighs, your breasts, and your back. No. It is very rude because as girl only you should see those parts. Those parts are private. So girls should cover their bodies. Just like you have done.

**Q:** What if it is just fashion and that is what is sold in the store?

**Mama Linda:** Haibooooono (Gosh) no fashion there. Just a cheap girl.

**Q:** Cheap girl?

**Mama Linda:** (*Nods her head vigorously*) These girls who just want to sleep around.

**Q:** Do these expectations and roles differ between girls and boys? If so can you tell me how they differ?

**Mama Thuli:** Yes they do differ from boy and girl. When you have daughters you want to teach them about things about the house. You want to teach them how to do the dishes, how to sweep the yard and inside the house. You want to teach them how to cook for the family because one day they will get married and they need to cook for their family and if they do not know how to cook, it is you who will look stupid for not teaching her. You want to teach her how to wash clothes and how to sew clothes also. She needs to know how to keep order in the house.

**Mama Linda:** Yes for a boy it is different. The men of the house teach them things about the outside. They are taught how tend to the cattle; feed the chicken, the goats. The boys are taught also how to fix things around the house. For example if the light bulb break, they have to fix it for us, or if the radio is not working. They are in charge of the things to fix.

**Q:** Mama Saky you mentioned something about having the children home by 5pm every day, does that also mean the boys too?

**Mama Saky:** No with the boys it depends at what age. If the boy is still small like 7 or 8, yes they should be home at that time. But when they grow older and they are like 23, 24, they can do what they want because they are now old enough to do what they want and they can take care of themselves out there (*protect themselves from the dangers of the night whereas the girls are unable to do so*). I just want to know when he is coming home late so that I know not to wait for him.



All: Ehhhhhhh (*saying yes, in agreement*)

**Q:** You said that the boys can take care of themselves. How about the girls?

**Mama Thuli:** No we are not saying that girls cannot be able to take care of themselves. We are saying that the girls are weak and they are the targets of crime. So it is better that they should be home. The boys can fight, girls cannot.

**Q:** Do children get punished if they do not listen to what they are told to do by adults? If so what form of punishment is used?

**Mama Thuli:** Yes children do get punishment if they do not listen to what we tell them to do. I smack my children on the bum, not too hard. I just want them to know that I am not happy that they did not listen and then I smack. Next time, they will not want me to smack then they will not do it again. With my eldest child who is 24, I do not smack him anymore. I talk to him and I tell him that I do not like what he does. Then I tell him that he cannot go and see his friends for a week. The next time he decides not to listen, he will know that I will say again that he cannot see his friend. Because he loves his friends, he will listen and he will not do it again.

**Mama B:** Ehh you cannot go up to 26 years and you still beating up that child. That is a bit too grown up you have to find other ways. Like with my child who is now 20, I tell her that if she does not listen I will take away the cellular phone that she saved up money for so long so that she could buy. And because she loves that phone, she will not do it again.

Just then an elderly man entered the hut which we were holding the focus group. All the women stood up as the man went around the circle shaking their hands. As he shook their hands, the women held their left hands over their right arms as a sign of respect. This gesture is carried out by all women when greeting elderly men in the village as a sign of respect to them as the male heads of the households. He then quickly left the hut and I proceeded to thank the women for coincidentally I had reached the end of my discussion.

The local meanings of childhood emerged in this discussion. When I shared with the women that the law states that a child is defined by age, there was intense disagreement. Here a child is defined by financial independence regardless of age. This was the pivotal point where it dawned on me that although in my ethics proposal I stated that I would not include children in

my fieldwork, it was inevitable that in the local sense of the term, many children were going to be involved in my fieldwork.

What was of further interest was that when I posed a question regarding children, the responses from the group concerned girls specifically. The profile of the participants determined the gendered data. Females in Qondwa are responsible for grooming the girls in order for them to have principles and morals for when they become women. When I raised the question of expectations that are held for children, Mama Thuli focused on the style of dress that is expected of girls. She focused on how girls are not expected to dress in a revealing manner as a sign of respect towards males yet my initial question had not been gender specific. Additionally when I probed about the expectations the women hold for children, specific attention was on how the girls are expected to be obedient to orders and instructions.

The ability to diligently perform chores in the household was another expectation that focused on girls. Only when probed further and asked what expectations are there for the boys, the responses focused on how boys are expected to fix items around the house. I thought it worthy of note that when I communicated the term ‘child’ here, the delivered term to the informants appeared to be the term ‘girl.’ I had to pause my running thoughts on this discussion in order to mentally prepare for the focus group I was headed to at Kentucky Fried Chicken eating place in Malelane.

### **3.2 Realities versus Expectations**

I spent a good deal of my time hanging out with three high school girls whom I named Thandiwe (18), Menenhle (19), and Buhle (18). Legally, these three individuals are not children therefore academically qualifying them eligible to participate in my research. On the other hand all three reside with their parents in Qondwa village. Their parents financially care for them, meaning that locally, these girls are categorised as children. Mama B introduced me to Thandiwe for Thandiwe is her niece. Thandiwe then introduced me to Menenhle who is her best friend and further introduced me to Buhle who is Menenhle’s cousin. I refer to these three as *‘the girls’* throughout my research.

Hanging out with these girls showed a sharp contrast between the objective and subjective personhood of children in Qondwa village. Buhle, Thandiwe and Menenhle invited me to lunch soon after my discussion at Mama Linda’s. I felt uncomfortable in the heat with the ankle length dress and the shawl wrapped round my shoulders. I threw off the shawl as a means of

preventing combustion from the furnace ball, oblivious to the disapproving looks from elderly women I passed along the road. I was content as being viewed as ‘*Jezebel*’ if that meant that I would cool down. A *Jezebel* is a term used in the village to describe any young woman who dresses in a manner that reveals shoulders, thighs and her back. This term is derived from a biblical character whose name was Jezebel. She was known as the village harlot who was able to seduce any man that she encountered. Her name, Jezebel is both a noun and a verb in Qondwa whereby a girl or woman who seduces boys or men is known to be ‘*Jezebelling*’. It is interesting to note that there is not a negative term that describes a boy or man who womanises. These boys and men are given different labels such as, ‘*Mr lover boy*’ or ‘*The Main Man,*’ which are both terms linking their actions to awe, encouragement and praise. This illustrates the gendered expectations of behaviour in Qondwa village.

I arrived at the eating place and I literally stood by the entrance of a grocery shopping store called PicknPay, for there was a fan by the door. Paying no mind to the stares cast by passers-by, I continued fanning myself, and drinking a bottle of warm water due to the heat that had turned my bag into an oven. I then gathered the strength to go and sit in the Kentucky Fried Chicken diner where I prayed that the air conditioner was on. I reached the air conditioned place and plonked myself on an empty table waiting for Buhle, Thandiwe and Menenhle. As the server shouted an order frustrated that the person was not coming forth to collect the order, my informants walked in and I waved my hands frantically hoping they would spot me so that I would not have to bustle among the crowd to walk towards them.

Buhle caught me off guard as she pointed at my dress and the shawl on the table and exclaimed. ‘*Why the heck are you wearing that? Did you come from church?*’ This comment was in sharp contrast to that of the women that I had interviewed earlier at Mama Linda’s compound. The very same girls that they expected to dress in a certain manner only did so in certain spaces such as in churches and in households where their parents and guardians were present. These girls did so in order to avoid upsetting the adults and to avoid conflict. Spaces where their parents and guardians were not present, allowed these girls to dress in a manner that pleased them, allowing expression of subjective personhood. They were not too concerned by the disapproving looks of other adults for they did not reside with them and they were strangers to them for Qondwa village was an hour’s walk away from this diner. The possibility of adults in Qondwa from spotting them was possible but slim. However, if they were to be in the same space with their specific guardian or parent their manner of dress would be the same as mine during the focus group discussion I held at Mama Linda’s compound, regardless of the space

they occupied. Thus, considerations on appropriate dress are not only about space but also about whether a parent or guardian will be present in the same space.

I laughed and answered that I held a focus group with some mothers and they all echoed, ‘Ah,’ acknowledging that there was a need to be dressed in that manner in that space. Petite, light in complexion Buhle wore a short green skirt that ended just above her knees and a black lace sleeveless blouse that hugged her flat stomach. Her red lipstick complimented her red nail varnish. I yearned for the shirt that she wore for I imagined it let the air conditioner work its magic on her skin. Thandiwe wore a long black skirt and a sleeveless red see-through blouse which showed her matching red bra which also matched her red clutch bag. Menenhle wore a green jumpsuit. Her mascara was perfectly applied on her eyes and her toe nails perfectly painted in black nail polish. The reason I was particularly interested in observing how they were dressed was because of the discussion that I held with the parents earlier that morning. I also asked them when they had had the time to change their school uniforms. Mene (*her shortened name for Menenhle*) answered, ‘*It was easy. We knew that we were coming here so we put these clothes in our bags so that we do not waste time to go home and change.*’ I asked them if they had to change when out of the school uniform and Buhle responded saying, ‘*No but who wants to walk around in that nasty ugly uniform! The skirts are so long like what the hell?*’ We laughed while we decided what to eat and as we waited I asked them if they usually wore those clothes at home. Menenhle laughed and said, ‘*No at home I would not wear this only. In my bag I have a little jersey that I will wear when I am going back to the house otherwise if I get there just like this they will look at me.*’ Buhle then said, ‘*I do not always dress like this. I picked this because I knew that I was going to go back home when my mother would have not returned from work. Usually I wear miniskirts and high heels, but that is only when I know that they will not see me at home.*’ Thandiwe then said, ‘*Well I wear what I want when my mother and father are not around. Otherwise I wear ugly clothes, like what you are wearing now*’ (*laughter*).

I then asked them what would happen if they wore those clothes at home and they all agreed that their parents would punish them for they would have been disobedient. Buhle further explained that their parents took dressing seriously saying that people in the village should see that they respect their bodies by the way that they dress and that failure to do so would lead to disappointing the parents. Buhle then exasperated said, ‘*I just don’t damn get it though. It is bloody hot like blistering hot yet we should be dressed like monks. I like dressing like this*

*because this is cool, it lets in fresh air dammit! It has nothing to do with Jezebeleeweee (dragging the last syllables for Jezebel) Ah!’*

They all nodded in agreement as I asked what they thought about the term Jezebel regarding clothing. ‘*That’s just stupid,*’ exclaimed Mene, ‘*Yes there are a lot of Jezebels here but just because you wear clothes like this it does not mean that you are a Jezebel, just like if you wear those long garments it does not mean that you are innocent either!’*. Thandiwe chipped in saying, ‘*Uh yes hey. Like a lot of those girls you see always wearing those amagamanzi (garments), oh some of them will steal your man while you are looking. It has nothing to do with what you wear.*’

The issue of dress code sparked a heated discussion with these girls. They were irritated by the fact that they were expected by their parents to wear full clothing in the heat. They were irritated further by the fact that the term *Jezebel* was used to describe a girl who wore revealing clothes. They expressed that some of the girls simply wore revealing clothes because of the hot weather so as to keep cool. These girls and I seemed to have a similar strategy in terms of dressing for the space. This is a situation which required negotiating personhood. We wore clothes we were expected to wear when in our households, however away from that space such as the park; we wore clothes that we desired. Objective personhood here, drawing from Karp (1995) meant displaying the ideal girl that was explained by the women which entails dressing in the manner that they prefer. Subjective personhood here is the style of dressing away from the spaces occupied by parents or guardians. I was eager to spend more time with these girls in order to observe this duo personhood in different spaces. The girls and I parted ways for they had to head back to their households to assist in dinner preparations. I headed back to Mama Lucillah’s household where I laid my head on the pillow and did not awake until the next day when the alarm crowed, startling me from a dream where I was literally dreaming about taking a hot shower in a private bathroom.

### **3.3 Family Affairs at Mama Lucillah's**

I was slowly adapting to lifestyle in Qondwa, but still struggling with activities such as bathing in the same room where my host sat on the bed trying not to gaze in my direction. I also struggled with bathing in a dish in the absence of running water. I could not psych myself into bathing where people had urinated in, so I devised my own bathing method. I simply poured water from a copper tin onto my towel and rubbed my body with it – a technique known as dry bathing. I found it less pompous than buying my own dish, and boiling my own water. I however enjoyed cooking on the fire with my host and the three women who lived in my host mother's homestead by virtue of being married to my host's brothers. The kitchen was structured behind one of the couple's hut. Here a fire was started and pots placed on the fire stood one at a time. In the morning we gathered there to cook porridge made from mealie meal. We delegated each other duties to make cooking easier. I would fill the pot up with water from the well and place the pot on the fire which my host would have started already.

One of the household wives would sit on the ground with a board on her lap, cutting bread for breakfast and applying thick layers of butter. I learnt that applying thick layers of butter was symbolic of showing that the cook was not parsimonious with food and made it out of love. One day Lucillah, my host mother teased that when she is upset with one of her brothers, she does not have to say a word to them for she just gives them bread with no butter. By doing so, the brothers would know that she was upset with them and would try to make amends. I had to get used to eating thick layers of butter without gagging because I felt that if I removed some of the butter from the bread, I would be rejecting their hospitality.

### **3.4 The frustrations of being a girl in Qondwa**

After eating breakfast, I prepared to go hold a focus group with the girls. I was excited that I was going to a space where I could dress as I normally do. I wore three quarter denim jeans and a black vest. I arrived at the park and bought us all ice lolly ice creams that provided a false sense of cooling down but was needed nonetheless. I walked towards the tree that the girls were sitting under and as I approached Menenhle started clapping her hands, and the rest joined in. I asked why they were clapping and they said that I was dressed like a 'normal' being. They explained that by 'normal' I was not dressed in the style that the adults dressed in the village. I threw the ice creams to them in a joking manner as a result of their teasing and explained that

the aim was to discuss their experiences of being a child in their respective households. Mene raised her hand as a school child would in a classroom and asked to be picked first in the discussion. The other girls laughed as I switched on the digital recorder and begun my session.

**Q:** What do your parents expect from you as a child, in terms of behaviour?

**Mene:** Ugh being a child sucks so bad. I wish I could move out.

**Q:** What really frustrates you about being at home?

**Mene:** I mean you have experienced it Nyasha even here. It is hot, and you had to wear that thing of a dress and a scarf because you are going to see older people. That is rubbish! So now I must burn and keep sweating because you do not want me to show my legs? They say that girls who show skin are cheap but I think there is something that is called common sense. And common sense has it that when it is hot, you wear clothes that cool you down. Common sense (*laughter*).

**Thandiwe:** Yes. As a child you are told do this, do that. Wash the dishes, cook, and sweep, go serve your brother food. I mean I do not have a problem with all those things but sometimes it gets too much. Like even if you are so tired maybe you come from sweeping the yard like they tell you to then you have to go and do all those other things. It's boring. We also want to hang out with our friends and have fun. But it is like fun is not allowed.

**Buhle:** It still happens now. And we have to listen because we are still staying at their home. You have to do whatever they tell you. There is not even one compromise.

**Q:** Are these roles and expectations different between boys and girls?

**Menenhle:** Well, boys can relax and not do anything around the house. Let me tell you my brother is five years younger than me but my parents want me to serve him the way that I would serve a man who is years older than me. In the morning I make him food and I give it to him after I have given my father. Then when I am cleaning the rooms around the compound, I have to clean his room too like he cannot do it by himself. Then at night also I have to serve him food.

**Buhle:** Yes boys can go and leave the house and the people at home will not even wonder where he has gone. Sometimes he goes to see friends in the morning and he does not come back until the night where food is served for him.

**Q:** At what age are these boys allowed to go places unaccompanied by an adult?

**Thandiwe:** As soon as they turn like five years old, they go outside to play and they come back themselves. It remains like that for life. Because even now when they are grown men, the women take care of them while they can do what they want.

**Q:** Are there any chores that they are expected to do? Just like you are expected to do the chores that you mentioned?

**Buhle:** Yes. They are told to go get firewood. Sometimes they cut a tree that will be dangerous around the compound. *(long silence)*

**Thandiwe:** Most of the time they are told to fix things around the house that will be broken like maybe the light is broken or the water pumps at the well. Something like that.

**Q:** From the expectations that you have mentioned, what were some of the consequences of not following those expectations?

**Buhle:** You get beaten. Ho very hard. I remember the other time when I did not clean the dishes when they had asked me to clean it. My mum told me to go and pick a stick that she would beat me with. When I came back I come back with a stick that was very small because I knew that if I take a big one, it will hurt. She tell me to go back and pick a bigger one and that if I come back again with a small one, she will go pick one by herself! *(laughter)*

**Thandiwe:** Yes. We get hit very hard. And after that you will not want to do it again.

**Buhle:** But some other parents are too mean. There is this man who used to live down the road. He had a daughter who was twelve years old. So I don't know what the daughter did not do that he want her to do. Then she did not have food to eat because the father had told people not to give her food because she did not listen. We could hear her cry it was very sad. That is abuse.

**Menenhle:** Yes some parents are just too much. Other parents hit so hard until the child had to go to the hospital. But they do not take the child to hospital. Cause maybe they do not have money or maybe they just do not care. Or maybe they just don't have the money. Ah who knows? And the adults say it's ok because they are just teaching their child to listen but I think that like Buhle has said, it is abuse.

**Q:** What, if any praise would you receive from abiding to these expectations?



**Buhle:** Praise? Hmmm maybe sometimes they say thank you. But sometimes.

**Thandiwe:** eh I do not remember getting any praise. Are you supposed to? (*laughter*)

**Menenhle:** Yes are we supposed to get praise Nyasha?

**Q:** How have expectations that were set for you as a child impacted your youth experiences?

**Buhle:** Ah nothing has changed. We are still being treated like children because we stay in their house still. So we just say that we are not children anymore but the truth is that we are.

Central to this discussion was the chores girls are instructed to carry out in their households. This particular aspect of personhood of girls in Qondwa village can be juxtaposed with Reynolds' (1989) research on personhood of children in the Cape Flats. In her study of childhood, in *Crossroads on the Cape Flats*, Reynolds (1989) begins with a quotation by Freud (1918:584) who illustrates how agency of children in communities remains invisible and underestimated. Freud (quoted in Reynolds 1989:72) states that, 'My own observations show that we have rated the powers of children too low and that there is no knowing what they cannot be given credit for'. Here Freud discusses how the invisibility of children in society is reflected in the relatively small body of anthropological literature on research about children compared to women's agency or the gendered agency of men who are part of a sexual minority.

Reynolds' ethnographic study focuses on the personhood of seven year old children in *Crossroads* (Reynolds 1989:1). Her research aim was to describe and analyze aspects of life experienced by seven year old children in the squatter settlement. Here, the theme of analysing childhood in a particular cultural perspective in a context of structural racism and socio-economic constraint emerges. She focuses on Xhosa ritual patterns associated with childhood and the child rearing norms amongst Xhosa speaking people who at the time lived in an illegal squatter settlement, in the context of apartheid. She argues that anthropologists leave out the nature and range of cultural experiences of children when carrying out research on childhood (Reynolds 1989:1).

Reynolds (1989) says she chose black Xhosa speaking children as her research participants because of the anthropological need to document their experiences in an oppressive society. The ethnographic method enabled her to analyze childhood in the context of South African poverty and oppression. Reynolds (1989) explains that her method included choosing participants who were all seven years of age because in Xhosa culture, the age seven is pivotal

in the lifecycle status of children. At age seven, black children begin to attend school and Xhosa speaking people see it as an age where a child emerges from the first period of childhood to a time where chores are delegated indicating an age that children are recognised as capable of assuming individual responsibility. At this age, children begin to understand what it means to have responsibilities which show that in this urban Xhosa speaking culture, at age seven, children are only then recognised to be persons with a degree of agency and not passive individuals (Reynolds 1989:8-9).

Reynolds (1989) sought to find out children's own passage through time, notions of space, kinship, and dreams. In this way, the children's own understandings of the world were highlighted. She conducted life histories with crèche leaders; interviews with teachers as well as focus groups with young executives of the Crossroad Committee for these were the people that the young children spent time with (Reynolds 1989:9).

Reynolds (1989) found that a seven year old child was only regarded as important by the adults, when that child could assist with chores. It was a pivotal age for socializing boys and girls into consciousness of their gendered agency and responsibility. This age is marked by a rite of passage ritual of a seventh birthday feast that is marked as a significant social occasion which family and community members attend. This feast marks the acknowledgement of growth, and marking the time where gendered chores are delegated to the boys and girls. At this age, girls are taught how to cook meals for the family, rear and nurse infants without adult supervision, collect wood and clean the house. Similarly, boys at this age would be taught how to fix broken items around the house, and manage the household chores by overseeing the chores that the girls would carry out throughout the day (Reynolds 1989:15).

Children's responsibility of household chores in Reynolds' research is similar to the focus of chores that emerged in my focus group with the girls. The girls discussed these expectations in a melancholic tone. In their opinion, the expectations and demands that are piled on them were too much for them to carry. By virtue of being a child, they have to swallow their whinges and obey their elders, which is one of the expectations of being a child in Qondwa Village. The children here have to abide by the expectations from the older generation so as to avoid friction as explained by Teacher Eh.

### 3.5 Generation Barriers between Parents and Children

Mr Eh is a Qondwa primary school teacher I met through Mama Lucillah who is divorced from him. He gave me permission to use ‘Eh’ as his pseudonym, for he frequently uttered ‘eh’ when holding a conversation, for he is a stutterer. I took the risk of going to hold my interview in a sleeveless but long leopard print dress, for I was feeling hot. The fact that it was long and swept the ground comforted me in terms of my bear arms. Here I negotiated personhood by merging both the objective and subjective personhood in terms of style of dress. Ideally I should have wrapped a scarf around my shoulders, for my shoulders were bare. I made my way to his compound on foot where he awaited me by his gate.

*‘Eh Miss Nyasha. Come come in I have prepared some juice and some biscuits for you!’* We sat under a peach tree which provided much welcomed shade. We drank the orange juice and munched on Marie biscuits before starting our session.

**Mr Eh:** *‘You know can can can I just elaborate on something Nyasha if I may... you know I think I am one of the privileged people here to be able to acquire an education, because let me tell you, education is everything. It makes you think of things that you would have not otherwise thought of and makes you see things that you would not have seen before, for example eh this issue of childhood eh. Many people here do not know that children have rights... children have rights. But here unfortunately in the village people do not know that there is such a thing or if they have heard of it they write it off saying that it is a thing for white people. Let me start by talking about it from the cultural point of view. Eh.*

*From the cultural point of view, children are supposed to do anything and everything that an elder tells them to do. Elders can tell them what to wear, what to eat, how to talk and can even tell them who to talk to. Children are always ordered around do not drink alcohol! Especially the girl child. Do not drink alcohol! Do not have sex! Do not go outside there at night! Do not! Do not! Do not! I sometimes wonder what it is that a child especially a girl can do around here! (laughter).*

*No but seriously our culture is a very demanding culture and we expect these kids to just act like a machine that does something when we press a button. We forget that these children are human beings that are complex, have emotions, they have questions that they are even too scared to ask because we do not welcome questions. If we say to them do not wear that do not go to the tavern! They should just say ok even though they want to ask why I should not wear*

*that. What happens if I go to the tavern? I don't know if you get what I am trying to say, we train machines and not humans. And the scary thing is eh that eh this system that our culture has, it destroys our kids! It destroys them they do not learn anything from being trained to be obeying machines. Because look at what happens and I am sure that you know exactly what I am talking about because yes you might be from Zimbabwe but I am quite sure that the culture there is similar to ours because it is still a black cultural society in Africa (laughs). So you know what I am talking about I am sure you go through the same things.*

*What then happens with this machine eh eh eh eh training is that you will have two persons in one person. You have that one person who behaves the way that you have trained them to behave by ordering in the house. Then there is another person outside of the house that you do not see as the parent because you are not always with the children. They go to school. They go play; they are not always in the house. I am a teacher and I see what these kids do. The boys come and they go to the play grounds where they learn and practice how to smoke dagga (marijuana) and cigarettes. Some of them even bring alcohol in their juice containers eh eh pretending that it is juice but if you go close to them, they will be smelling of alcohol. I am talking about kids as young as fourteen here. At home they are nothing like that because they are told do not smoke! I asked three of the boys that I caught smoking if they know what smoking does to them and only one knew the answer. The others just said no we are just told not to do it. You see what I mean? Then the girls I see that they wear small skirts so that they can attract attention from the other boys, some wear makeup on the face in the bathroom of the school because they cannot wear it at home. They do all these things that they are mechanically told 'do not' at home but are not educated as to why and how.*

*Humph so what I am saying is this. I think we need to break away from a culture which treats children as machines that just do as we say when we say so. We should talk to our children; we should be able to have children who can come to us holding cigarettes in their hands and ask us, what does this thing do? We should have girls who come to ask us papa (respectable term used to refer to an older man. Direct translation is father, but the person does not have to be a biological father) why can we not go to the tavern and have fun with the boys there? Then we use that opportunity to educate them about sex and life. I think we should change the way that we expose values and morality to these children. And should any of these children be brave enough to ask! Punishment. Ho my friend. People here are not scared to hit their children until they are bleeding. It is believed in our culture that if you hit you are teaching, and the child will listen. You get hit so bad by branches, belts, some mothers hit with their high shoes*

*and anything that will be lying around the house. That is all we do. We hit and shout hit and shout like primitives, like gorillas, like apes. I actually wonder if gorillas actually do that. Eh and you know I see these kids coming to school with really bad marks on their bodies and these children are not expected to go report their parents for hitting them like this. Also the police also will just say that it is the parents teaching them that they need to behave so it is ok to get hit. So the kids do not have anyone to report to, or they don't even know that they have a right to go and report. And so I take that child and I ask them, why are you so hurt on your body and they are afraid to tell me that had happened. It makes me sad to know that there is nothing that I can do even though I know that they would have been hit by their parents. When they are hit by other peers, they are not shy to say so, but when they are hit by their parents, there is a fear. A home should be a home where education continues beyond the walls of the school, not a place where children fear'.*

The issue of communication barriers between parents/guardians and children was the recurring message in the discussion held with teacher Eh. The communication between parents/guardians and children in Qondwa appears to be a one way channel whereby parents/guardians give orders to children. These orders as mentioned by teacher Eh include do not smoke, do not drink and do not have sex, without forming a platform for discussion as to why these activities are forbidden. As a result children either obey due to fear of corporal punishment, or they display a facade of obedience when in the space of the parents/guardians and carry out these activities where parents/guardians are absent. Menenhle was a physical representation of teacher Eh's point of view.

After my discussion with teacher Eh, I passed by Menenhle's compound on my way back home. I was welcomed by her grandmother sweeping the dusty veranda with a broom that was made from several dry twigs, tied together with a rubber band at the end. Gogo (*grandmother*) wore a long brown pleated skirt, a plain white shirt and wore a black scarf on her head. She was tall and had elegance about her. Her English was polished for she had spent some years working for a white family that taught her English during the apartheid era. 'Aah hello my daughter. Menenhle told me that you are coming. She will be out soon. She is just cleaning the rooms.' Just then a Menenhle that I had not encountered before entered the kitchen area where I was seated. She wore a long grey loose fitting dress with three quarter arms. The Menenhle I encountered in parks and eating spaces, was not the same Menenhle that I encountered in the household. In the household she displayed a facade pleasing to her parents/guardians so as to avoid conflict as mentioned by both Menenhle and teacher Eh. She hugged a bucket full of

brown water indicating that she had done some heavy scrubbing. The weight of the household chores she was engaging in was displayed heavily on her face. We exchanged glances as she walked in to sit next to me and she uttered, ‘Don’t you dare laugh. I look like crap!’

### 3.6 Childhood Sexuality in Qondwa

*Everyone knows that children ‘have no sex’ which is why they are forbidden to talk about it, why one closes one’s eyes and stops one’s ears whenever they show evidence to the contrary (Foucault 1976:4).*

It took several weeks of forming rapport and probing to reach the point where parents/guardians were comfortable to talk to me about sex and sexuality of children in Qondwa village. The topic of sex and sexuality is deemed taboo in this community especially with regards to children, for sexuality is not ascribed to them. Also, the adults viewed me as a child because they knew that I was unemployed at the time, making it difficult for them to discuss this issue with me. However with time, close to two months, rapport was formed and they managed to accept me more as a researcher rather than a child. I held a focus group discussion with Mama Linda at her homestead, where they made clear what they expected of children in terms of sex and sexuality.

**Q:** Are children allowed to ask questions to adults about dating, sex, genitalia, making babies and the difference between men and women in this community?*(Laughter and clapping of hands in disbelief)*

**Mama Linda:** Eh abantwana (*children*)? Why would they ask such questions? Why?

**Mama Thuli:** I remember when I was a child and I asked my mother a question. I remember I asked her mama (*mother*), why do boys have a long something in their trousers and we do not have a long something in our skirts? (*Embarrassed laughter rips the room*). My mother lift up her hand and *wobo* (*gesture of hand coming down hard on her cheek*). She hit me so hard that I remember feeling like my cheek was given boiling water. From there I knew that you do not ask questions like that to your parents and elderly.

**Mama Linda:** Eh that is what happened still to children who want to ask these questions. Why should they ask these questions? Why do they want to know? What are they going to do with the information that they are given? Eh? Sex is for married people who know what they are doing. So until you are married, you should not know these things. It is for grown people.

**Mama Thuli:** Children who want to know things about sex and the body, they are too fast forward. They will learn when they are adults and we do not see why they should know now. If they start knowing these things now, they will just get curious and when children get curious that is when they want to play with the things.

**Mama Linda:** I think it is best to have children not know until they are now married and they are now able to have sex and all those things. When they are young like fifteen, eighteen and so on, why should they know? Ok so let's say they know, and then what will they do with the information? They will want to play around with it.

**Q:** Do you know with whom children discuss sex, relationships, and genitalia?

**Mama Thuli:** They discuss at school. When they are in grade 7 that is when they learn about the reproduction, girls, boys in the subject of biology. There they can ask the teachers all the things that they want, and the teachers will answer their questions. In grade 7 they also do life orientation which is a subject where they are told about sex and how dangerous it is if they have it before marriage and so on and so on. There they can ask their questions and it makes us parents happy that they are being taught to know that sex before marriage is wrong.

Interesting dynamics of childhood emerged in this discussion regarding childhood sexuality. Mama Linda stated that '*Sex is for married people who know what they are doing. So until you are married, you should not know these things. It is for grown people*'. I met several married couples in Qondwa village who are children in the local meaning of the word. When a boy impregnates a girl, the girl moves into the household where the boy is financially dependent on his parents/guardians. The statement that Mama Linda made means when one is married; one is no longer a child and is therefore allowed to engage in sexual activities with one's spouse. This implies that the boy has transitioned into a man, and the girl into a woman, despite financial status. These dynamics not only illustrate the fact that there is no universal meaning of childhood, but also highlight the complex shifting and contestation of the local meanings of the term.

Children in Qondwa village are instructed in schools and in churches that sex before marriage is unacceptable, from a religious point of view. The dominant church in Qondwa village is the Zion Christian Church, which draws its teachings from the Holy Bible, as well as traditional customs. The Holy Bible is a book where Christians draw their instructions on how to live everyday life as intended by God. I attended church services with Mama Lucillah every

Sunday, despite the fact that the services were in *siSwati*. I managed to make out the bible readings, for I too attend a bible believing church. One of the Sunday teachings by the pastor was from the book of *Colossians 3 verse 5* which states that, ‘*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness.*’ The pastor preached that sex before marriage is said to encompass the listed characteristics, which is a universal Christian interpretation of the verse.

The girls in Qondwa village are aware of these expectations from the parents/guardians and elders in the village. Some parents/guardians in Qondwa village are pleased by their children who obey their expectations and rules. However, if ever some parents and guardians were to observe their daughters in spaces away from them, I believe they would suffer from shock. The manner, in which these girls switch from one facade to the next, is astonishing.



## Chapter 4: Subjective Personhood of childhood and childhood sexuality

### 4.1 Hanging out in the tavern

This chapter aims to draw out how childhood is negotiated in the particular socio/geographic space of the tavern hereby eliciting the argument that childhood is constantly negotiated. Menenhle, Thandiwe, Buhle and I had organised a Saturday where we would hang out at a youth tavern without their parents' knowledge. Their parents frowned upon hanging out in taverns. Menenhle's mother once described the tavern as a space where '*kids go to get babies.*' Once I bought bread from one of the village grocery outlets where I listened to a conversation between the vendor and one of her customers. The vendor explained that her grandchild was influenced by promiscuous girls to attend a party at a tavern. This implies that taverns are a place where promiscuous girls hang out. Again the focus is on the girl child with little or no mention of the behaviour of boys at taverns. I looked forward to becoming one of those 'promiscuous girls' together with Menenhle, Thandiwe and Buhle.

That afternoon, I dressed up in a manner acceptable for a tavern space. From my own experiences of attending clubs and also just passing by the taverns I knew what one was expected to dress like when going to a tavern. Long skirts, scarves and shirts that cover the upper body, are not typically considered to be the style of dress in tavern spaces. A tavern is the turf where one can wear dresses that look as if the tailor ran out of fibre to complete it. It is the turf where women show off their biological gifts and men feast their eyes upon these females. My dilemma was leaving Mama Lucillah's household dressed in the outfit that I wanted to wear at the tavern. The outfit that I had set aside for the tavern was tight black jeans that stuck to my skin as if trying to become my skin. The shirt was green, backless. The other girls were faced with the same dilemma so they made an arrangement with a woman named Lethabo whom I so desperately wanted to meet because of the number of times she was referred to by the girls when discussing adventurous weekends. Lethabo is categorised as a woman in the local meaning of the term because she owns an apartment in Malelane town away from her family in Qondwa village. She does not depend on them financially; therefore she transitioned from a girl to a woman. Lethabo and the girls agreed that we would change into our tavern attires at Lethabo's apartment so as not to be seen wearing those clothes by family members. I too left Mama Lucillah's household wearing a long white skirt and a black full sleeved t-shirt.

I told my host mother that I would be back before dark and I made my way to Lethabo's apartment with a change of clothes in my bag.

I arrived at Lethabo's apartment where Menenhle unlocked the door. Lethabo was absent but she had given Mene the key to the house so that we could use the facilities there to dress up and then head to the tavern. Dressing up was enjoyable and interesting with much exchange of jewellery and make up. Mene's famous statement was, *'Girls you got to look good out there,'* while Thandiwe expressed how she was careful not to apply too much makeup so that it would be easy to remove it when going home to her parents. Menenhle wore a silver one piece jumpsuit and painted her fingernails silver to match the outfit. The black shoes that she wore complimented her black clutch bag and a black chain that she wore round her neck. Thandiwe wore a short pink dress and white sandals. The dress defined her petite figure. Buhle wore black jeans and a yellow sleeveless blouse and a black figure belt around her waist bringing out her small waist and her big derriere. We all complimented each other on how elegant we looked and I asked them how they got their outfits for I was certain their parents would not have purchased these clothes for them. Mene got her outfit from one of her ex-boyfriends, Thandiwe from a cousin who works as a waitress in Johannesburg, and Buhle got the outfit from different friends around the village.

We then headed to the tavern using a route that Mene described as 'hardly used', reducing the chances of being seen by any of the neighbours, or even worse, her parents. We were well aware that the adults would disapprove of the way in which we were dressed for they would see it as sexually provocative yet we saw this style of dress as fit for the tavern space. We attracted a lot of attention on the way to the tavern and I was not sure why this was so until Mene explained that I was the talk of the village at that moment as the girl from Pretoria. *'Don't worry just ignore them they are just jealous'*, commented Buhle, brushing her hair away from her forehead. I asked Thandiwe if it was a tavern for young people and she explained that it was for all ages but most of them had curfews so the young people generally came late afternoon and left around 8pm.

We strolled into the tavern to buy some drinks and as I walked in I got the feeling of walking into a sauna. This particular sauna would be accompanied by sweat and the smell of urine which swept through from the toilets. The chipped cream walls dripped of sweat as people were standing on the tables, dancing and breathing heavily to the heart vibrating bass of South African house music by the popular group Mafikizolo. By the bar, boys bought drinks for girls

who giggled and smiled constantly while enjoying having alcoholic drinks come their way. One could tell that the boys buying drinks were wooing the girls by the way that they held the girls around their waists or perused their legs and backs. It was as if Menenhle read my mind when she shouted into my ear over the music, *'Now this is how you get men and boys to hook up with. Just make eye contact and they will come and get you a drink'*. After we bought our own drinks, we went outside in search of fresh air, but the heat welcomed us as we sat on hot cement benches.

A group of four girls seated on the table next to ours attracted most of the attention from the collective group for they sang along to songs that the deejay played the loudest, danced in provocative manners which delighted the men, and made girls who were with their boyfriends feel intimidated and insecure. *'These girls are irritating'*, commented Mene and I asked if they knew each other and Mene responded that they did not like each other. Thandiwe then offered more information:

*'You see that one, the one in the zebra dress, she is only 13 and we do not know how many abortions she has had. She has had so many and when you go to church, she is one of the ushers there. She stands there looking like she love God so much and then we come here when it is not Sunday, and see for yourself. Humph that one, hai (expression of disgust)'.*

From the information Thandiwe shared about the girl, the girl is a prime example of an individual displaying duo-personhood depending on the space which she occupies. In the church space she had to behave in a reserved, obedient manner as preached and instructed by the Holy Bible. Away from church spaces she was free to engage in sexual activities and attend taverns, much at the judgement of others such as Thandiwe. What was interesting is that Thandiwe was quick to point her out for displaying two characters, yet Thandiwe had another set of clothes to change into when returning to her household.

I had to use the toilet and to reach it at the far end of the tavern I had to pass the bar and all the tables. On my way there, I passed a table where one man grabbed my hand and pushed me to him. My immediate reaction was to grab my left pocket where I had pepper spray for safety precautions, but I quickly reminded myself that I was in a tavern where these gestures were bound to take place. I took back my hand and he stood up and whispered in my ear in siSwati. He was tall and skinny and wore clothes that seemed to be triple his size. He wore a number 11 basketball jersey and brown jeans with brown tennis shoes. His left ear was pierced with a

gold stud that complimented his front gold tooth. I told him that I did not understand siSwati and with the smell of a Hunters Gold alcoholic drink, he whispered again, *'let me buy you a drink'*. My immediate reaction was to decline the offer but I quickly remembered that I was there for research and opportunities like this would help a great deal in terms of gathering data. I told him that I needed to go to the bathroom and that I would return to his table.

The toilet was grimy. The white floor was sticky which made me guess that it was not water spilled from the taps but urine. The hand basins contained wet tissue with which people had wiped their hands. The cubicle that I first entered had blood smeared on the toilet seat – possibly from a tampon or sanitary pad. The second cubicle that I entered was a tad cleaner and I squatted over the seat to avoid touching it. The toilet did not flush and when I wished to wash my hands there was no water. I did not want to take out the face tissue that I had in my bag for fear of being viewed as a snob, but for hygienic purposes I had to, despite being stared at.

I returned to the table where the guy I named Zaki awaited me. We went to the bar together and I thanked him for the drink and walked away to the table where the girls were sitting, not realising that Zaki had followed me although I had expected it. *'Who is that guy?'* Buhle asked. And I responded saying that he bought me this drink. *'Oh no, he is going to stick on you the whole time now'*. Indeed he did. We had small conversation and he asked me what I was doing in the village, showing that he had already heard about me. When I explained he just laughed and said he could *'show me a good time'* which is colloquial speech for 'engage in sexual activities'. He plopped himself next to Thandiwe where he slurred, *'You girls are so beautiful. I want to buy drinks for all of you. But this one (pointing at me) I already buy her a drink'*. Menenhle was annoyed and said, *'Nyasha, give him back his bloody drink or give him back his money so that he can leave you alone'*. He then started speaking in siSwati to the girls and I could see that they were getting irritated. I suggested that we leave for the sun was now setting. As we left, Zaki grabbed my hand again and demanded *'let's go'*. He then let go of my hand and we left the tavern while he was shouting obscenities in siSwati.

I relate this ethnographic experience to Wojcicki's (2002) ethnography of taverns in Soweto and Hammanskraal. She explains that it is argued that when a woman accepts beer from a man she is obliged to exchange it for sex because *'she drank his money'*. According to Wojcicki (2002), this agreement is entered into by women who seek survival sex. Survival sex is a process whereby a woman accepts a beer from a man and exchange sex whereby they then form a relationship where the man financially provides for the woman. She highlights that this

is different from commercial sex where sex workers stand in the streets specifically looking for money in exchange for sex with no relationship aspect to it (Wojcicki 2002: 272). In Qondwa village, adults share the same sentiments. My host mother, for example, once said to me, '*In the taverns girls look for money and the men look for sex*'.

This explains why Zaki was so furious when I walked away after I accepted his drink, but did not offer anything more than a 'thank you'. This general understanding that when bought a drink, some transactions must take place is further illustrated in Wojcicki's findings. One participant in her research was quoted saying '*They buy me beer and as we are busy drinking, I ask him not to buy anymore because I know the right time will come. So then comes the time when I have to go to his place*' (Wojcicki 2012:275).

I find Wojcicki's research limited due to her methodology based purely on interviews. She used a standard questionnaire and the disadvantage of her sole reliance on it was that the participants felt inclined to tell her what they thought she wanted to hear (Wojcicki 2012:269). Also, spending time with the participants would have revealed more information. I, for instance, learnt after several visits to taverns that requests for sex did not always follow accepting a drink from a male. Zaki was the only one who shouted obscenities at me after I had received a drink from him but then left him without falling for his suggestions. Upon refusal of their requests, other boys and men I encountered just moved on to the next girl or woman. Different boys and men handled the situation differently, thus to state categorically that taverns are places where women look for sex and men expect it, paints a generalised distorted picture.

We proceeded back to Lethabo's apartment where we had to change and remove our makeup before returning to our prospective households. I then took the opportunity to discuss some of the issues that I wanted to discuss in a focus group. I spoke casual English in an attempt not to change the atmosphere from playful to serious.

**Q:** Whilst growing up, how did parents and adults in the community respond to you guys when you would ask about sex and relationships?

**Buhle** (*washing her face in the bathroom and yelling*): Questions? Questions? Nyasha this is not the movies where you see white parents sitting with their children and asking them about their sexuality and telling them what to do and not to do. Here we do not ask any questions to anyone. You just have to figure it out by yourself!

**Menenhle** (*throwing herself on the bed and removing her heels*): Yes! That is it. You do not ask adults questions here because they will think that you are being too fast forward.

**Q:** What does ‘fast forward’ mean?

**Menenhle:** Yes fast forward is when a child wants to know or do things that only adults should do. So me asking about sex is me being fast forward because here sex is only for adults.

**Thandiwe** (*brushing her teeth to get rid of the smell of alcohol*): You can even get beaten for asking those questions. If you have a question you go to ask your friends at school. You do not say anything at home.

**Q:** Where do children mostly learn about sex and sexuality? (*laughter*)

**Buhle:** Let me tell you, from many many places. These parents think that because they do not talk to us, we don’t know how to find out about these things. When I was 13, I had this boyfriend who was 18 years old. He taught me a lot of things.

**Thandiwe:** Stuff like what? Tell us. (*laughter*)

**Buhle:** You guys know (*laughter*)

**Menenhle:** Yes but Nyasha does not know!

**Buhle:** Ok Ok. He taught me how to give him head (*colloquial speech for performing oral sex*).

**Thandiwe:** How did it feel?

**Buhle:** (*laughter*) At first I was scared of that thing (*penis*). It was my first time seeing it so I didn’t know what to do with it and I wanted to see exactly what it is like. It was scary.

**Menenhle:** Tell her what happened afterwards.

**Buhle:** Eish, (*Damn*) it was horrible. He put a little bit too much in my mouth and I almost vomited because I could not breathe and there was too much in my mouth. (*Roar of laughter*). But with practice I got good at it and now it’s like nothing. I can put all of it down deep into my throat.

**Menenhle:** Yah (*Yes*) that’s true. We learnt from older guys. The guy that I lost my virginity to was 20 years old when I was 15. He taught me everything that I know. But also we learn from other places like by listening to other older kids talk about their experiences.

**Q:** What do you think of the legal term called ‘statutory rape’ where a person older than 18 engages in sex with a person under 18?

**Menenhle:** That’s rubbish because it is not like I did not want it. Rape happens when the other person does not want to be touched but the person touches them anyway. Lethabo told us that.

**Menenhle:** Yah (*Yes*) so when other people talk about what is going on in their sex lives in front of children, children remember and then they do what they would have heard from the other people.

**Thandiwe:** There is also pornography. There are a lot of porn DVDs (Digital Versatile Discs) that we can buy and then watch at a house of a friend for example. We used to go watch it here at Lethabo’s house because we knew that at our house we would get caught because there are always people there.

**Q:** Where else do you think children learn about sex? Are there no ways that they could learn from home?

**Thandiwe:** Home? No ways!

**Q:** Do children experiment sexually? And if they do, with who?

**Buhle:** Yes it goes back to dating older guys who know what they are doing and they teach you. That is who you then start experimenting with. It has to be done in secret otherwise oh if any of these older people find out, they will beat you til you are almost dead, and they will chase you out of the house.

**Menenhle:** That is why Lethabo had to go and live by herself. Her father caught her doing stuff with the step uncle. So she had to leave.

**Q:** Are conversations held with children about their sexual rights and responsibilities? Where?

**Thandiwe:** Yes but all they tell you is no sex before marriage. That does not help us much does it? (*laughter*)

**Buhle:** One time I asked what is the best way to prevent pregnancy between the pill and condoms. Then the teacher said why should I know that when I am not yet at the stage where I can have sex. And he never answered my question.

**Menenhle:** Yes the three of us are not liked by teachers. They think that we know too much because of the questions that we ask in school during Life Orientation. One time I also asked that why is it that we should just know that we mustn't have sex and not talk about sex itself. The teacher just continued marking his paper without even acting like he heard me. And there have been many rumours about the three of us. Some are true though! (*laughter*). We will tell you some other time don't worry.

The above conversation confirms that sex is not a topic discussed between parents/guardians and children, girls in particular. However, this does not imply that these girls do not possess subjective personhoods. These girls explore with boys and men who are knowledgeable about sex and learned from there. It is understood that sex and sexuality is a taboo topic to discuss with parents/guardians. Jewkes et al (2005) had similar findings in their research about sexual behaviour in rural South Africa. After carrying out several focus group discussions in a rural area in Durban South Africa, one of their findings was that sexual behaviour was a taboo subject. Jewkes et al (2005) also found that there was hardly direct usage of the term 'sex'; instead, their participants found ways of saying the term in a polite way. For example, they used the isiZulu term *shaya*, which actually means 'hitting' or 'beating', as a euphemism for 'sex'.

I then wrapped up the session and we walked to the taxi rank from where we were to go to our respective households. When I reached my household I said my goodbyes to the girls and was immediately welcomed by my host mother who was ironically at the same spot where the taxi dropped me off. '*Who are those girls?*' she asked me. I told her that they were my friends and she linked arms with me saying, '*Just be careful of the people that you go to play with. Those girls are not so good girls*'. I asked her what she meant by that and she just replied '*nothing just be careful*.' I found it interesting that she asked me who they were and immediately after warned me about them. This meant that she knew who they were and that was her way of seeking confirmation.

Judging by the knowledge of sex and sexuality that these girls held, the clothes that they wore upon our first meeting, and the warning that I received from my host mother about hanging out with them, it seemed these girls were knowledgeable about sex and sexuality. As much as they attempted by all means to engage in secret sex, the community was tiny and it took just one person to spread what one had encountered. Holly (2006) carried out research with a similar calibre of participants in Tari town, Papua New Guinea, where she spent 26 months among the



Huli people. Her core interest was Papua New Guinea's gender relations in contemporary context. Her key informants were four sisters whom the community labelled as *pasinja meri*, literally meaning 'deviant women'. These sisters were labelled as defiant because they sexually flirted in public and were sexually intimate with men in public. Holly (2006) notes that one of the sisters embraced the *pasinja meri* label by deliberately flirting in public, shouting provocative words in the streets, and socializing with men while dressed in revealing clothes. In the case of Thandiwe, Menenhle and Buhle, their sexual activities were carried out away from the public eye; however their style of dress and rumours of having been spotted at the taverns was sufficient enough to be labelled as *iyapapa* (fast forward). The term fast forward here means that the girl knew too much about sex, yet they were children who were expected to be ignorant about sex.

The term *pasinja meri* carried a dual meaning. Holly (2006) explains that on the one hand, the term was mobilised by community members including men, hospital employees, police officers and religious authorities. The term was meant to categorise women, stigmatize their behaviour, and control other women. On the other hand, some women such as these sisters embraced the label *pasinja meri* as a means of contesting societal expectations, norms, and values ascribed to them. They embraced the label with gleeful impudence. Similarly, Menenhle referred to herself as '*the bad bitch*' and Thandiwe as '*man stealer*.' The term bad bitch here means that she is '*fast forward*' and proud. Man stealer means that she had the sexual power to lure married men or boys in relationships, into sleeping with her. These girls were adamant that their parents believed the obedient child facade that they displayed when they were in the household. The rumours of them being 'bad bitches' began and ended with the children in the village and never reached their parents.

Overtime I did begin to realise that as much as children feigned ignorance regarding sex and sexuality when in the space of parents/guardians, many of them were well aware as well as experienced. This was also an important finding of the research that McLaughlin *et al.* (2012:44) carried out in South Africa, Tanzania, and Kenya regarding consultation of children about sex and AIDS in Africa.

McLaughlin *et al.* (2012) sought out to deal with questions that have long been asked about children and educations. What do they know? What do they need to know? What is the best way to teach them? Who should teach them? And how did the advent of HIV and AIDS change some of the answers to these questions. Just as my interactions with the youth show that they

are knowledgeable about sex and sexuality, and that some of them are sexually active, McLaughlin et al. (2012) also demonstrate that contrary to adults' belief, children are knowledgeable about sex because they witness sexual intercourse in the streets and public spaces. They state that though resources varied across the three countries the countries were characterised by limited sanitation systems and overcrowded homes. Pupils reported that they were from single parent homes and that they lived in communities where people visibly abused drugs and substances and had commercial sex. Kustiantu, one of the informants from Kenya, bemoaned the fact that

*'My environment is bad, people engage in drinking all the time. There are people who give children drugs to make them survive and push on the day. Some children roam around, some are not in school and some have dropped out of school. People engage in sex anyhow (unprotected and often) it is easy to be lured into sex. There is no one to tell us a positive thing about sex and HIV'* (McLaughlin et al. 2012:45).

Binti, one of their participants, was also quoted saying that in Kenya,

*'When they inhale these substances, they don't wait to get a room; they get any man and start having sex in public. There and then at the point of contact, I see them. Outside our house... in the football field. Especially on Saturday and Sunday, the field is packed. The prostitutes, the drunkards... it means that the children know what sex is because they see it'* (McLaughlin et al. 2012:46).

In Qondwa village, the difference is that public sex in the presence of children does not take place. When I asked the girls whether this happens and whether they have witnessed it, they responded as follows:

**Buhle:** Oh gosh no. Here you will be beaten if you are seen having sex outside in the open. Yes as much as there are a lot of sexual things outside here like condom wrappers on the ground and there are like porn DVDs that circulate here, you will never see someone do sex just outside here.

**Thandiwe:** This is true. You will get killed by people here. Sex is done in secret.

**Menenhle:** No matter how drunk you are you will never be too drunk to know that when you want to have sex, you go to the bedroom or if it is too far, you can take a risk and go to one of these public toilets, but still you will run the risk of someone seeing you.

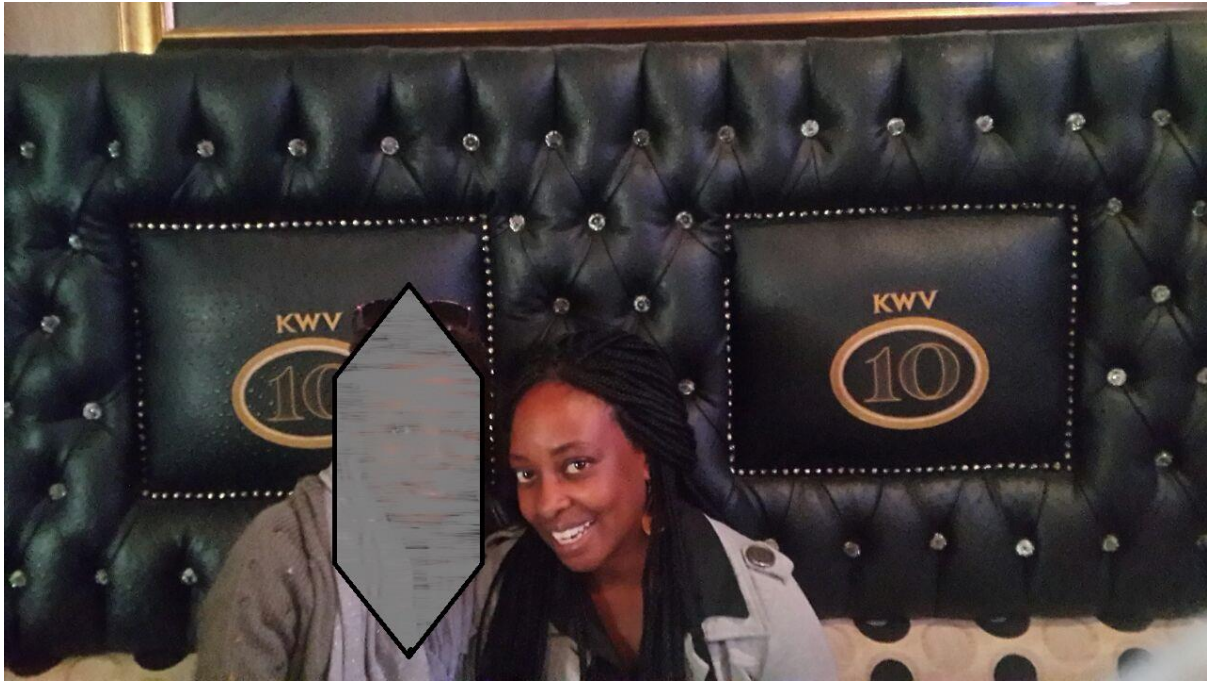
Ironically as we left Lethabo's apartment, she sent me a text message stating that she had taken interest in the various discussions the girls had told her about. She suggested that we meet at a cocktail diner in Malelane town the following evening. I decided to book myself into the Bed and Breakfast in Malelane for I was not comfortable with then having to travel an hour and a half back to Mama Lucillah's household at night.

#### **4.2 Disco Balls and Cocktails**

As I arrived at the Bed and Breakfast, the sweet smell of chlorine filled my nostrils as the cool air splashed my face. I was escorted to my room which comprised of two single beds, a television, and what was most important to me, a spacious bathroom with a shower that just screamed my name. I stared at the shower in awe, waiting to spend a good hour in it. I had adjusted to dry bathing but I was still overjoyed when my eyes rested on the shower.

After a long shower, I plonked myself on one of the beds and flicked the channels until I came across one of my favourite television shows, Dexter. I watched Dexter as I lay on the bed under the ceiling fan, appreciating the birds chirping outside and the cushion of the mattress. I fell into a light sleep aware that in an hour's time I was to meet with Lethabo.

I arrived at the diner where by the door I was welcomed by two sales women who offered me a shot of vanilla vodka so that I would be tempted to buy it. I took the shot as I walked in the diner and spotted Lethabo at a corner table nodding her head to a house song that blasted through the speakers. The diner oozed elegance and I was happy that I had picked out an outfit that suited the space. I wore black jeans and a black vest which I then adorned with a long red chain and red shiny bangles. For once the weather was chilly, and so I threw on a grey coat for warmth. Lethabo stood up and showed off her short green dress which was splashed with diamante. She too had thrown on a grey jersey for warmth but this jersey did not conceal the sleeveless dress that hugged her voluptuous figure and highlighted her cleavage. We greeted each other and commented on how lovely we each looked.



**Photo 9: Lethabo and I at a diner**

The diner was lit by a blue disco ball in the middle of the room, oozing a seductive ambiance. ‘*May I take your orders ladies,*’ asked a waiter dressed in formal black pants and a formal black shirt, as all the other waiters. I ordered a glass of Southern Comfort and lime while Lethabo ordered whisky. As we waited for our drinks, Lethabo took out a cigarette from her silver purse and began the conversation in a manner that indicated that the girls had filled her in on a lot of the discussions that had taken place.

**Lethabo:** So tell me what nonsense these people in the village have been telling you about childhood and sexuality? I would really like to know.

**Q:** I was hoping you would share with me what you thought and experienced as a child?

**Lethabo:** Well I know that children here are as miserable as shit... As a child, your whole life is dictated upon. You cannot breathe without permission, fart without permission, let alone sneeze without permission (*puffs and waves her hands in the air as a house song was introduced by the deejay*).

**Q:** What were some of the expectations that were placed on you as you grew up?

**Lethabo:** Crap. To be a slave. .. I was one slave and a half. Every time that I came back from school from here in Malelane, if I was not cleaning, I was cooking, if I was not cooking I had to baby sit, if not that I had to serve the elders and their visitors tea or I had to bathe the baby

or do someone's hair or make the bed which had been left undone just waiting for me to return. All you could say was yes, yes, yes. And they did not understand that I had homework to do and that the homework would be due the next day. So the only time that I had to study was when everybody in the compound had gone to bed. And by the time that I wanted to do my homework I would be tired as shit because I would have spent the whole morning at school and then done chores the whole afternoon and half the night. I hated my life.

Just then the waiter brought our drinks and I diluted mine with juice so as to make sure that I did not get inebriated while interviewing Lethabo. Lethabo laughed and said, 'Did those bastards (*referring to the village elders*) lie to you and say that a decent girl mustn't get drunk? Well screw them; I'm going to raise my glass and drink. I paid for my own damn drinks they won't stop me!'

**Q:** How did you get a break from all the chores and expectations that were set for you?

**Lethabo:** We used to come here to party in Malelane, my friends and I, with these rich business men. Oh girl when I think of those days I just remember the thrill and the excitement of just being able to be yourself. There is this one particular weekend that I will never forget when I was 17. My friends and I all had sugar daddies from here in Malelane. So they would come to Qondwa and we would meet at a shebeen (tavern) where they would buy us alcohol and then we would drive back here. So that day we did just that. We escaped from home when everyone was sleeping and they then took us to a lodge in Nelspruit. I know maybe to you it is nothing fancy, but to us village girls it was like being in Hollywood. We spent the night there at the lodge doing... you know what. You know, you know (laughs). But it was protected. I should mention that always use a condom, girl. You don't want any of that disease or a baby yet. Then early in the morning we drove back to compound and quietly got into our homes. One of my friends was unlucky that her mother was awake so she got into trouble. But she was such a reliable friend because she said that she was by herself and another man and she did not tell her mother that we were together. I totally loved that night. Now that is just my lifestyle. I live by myself, I go to lodges and hotels with whoever wants to take me whenever, now that I stay by myself.

**Q:** So I am guessing that at that age you had quite a lot of knowledge about sex and sexuality?

**Lethabo:** Yes, don't listen to those dumb fools who tell you that children should not know what sex is about. They are very stupid because how can a child not know what sex is about when they are the ones who show us what sex is from a young age!

**Q:** What do you mean, Lethabo?

**Lethabo:** Uh what is your next question?

At this stage Lethabo was slurring her words for she had started drinking in the afternoon. This made interviewing her difficult.

**Q:** (*hesitating*) Where did you get your knowledge of sex from?

**Lethabo:** I said next question!

**Q:** Lethabo, we do not have to continue talking about this. We can stop at any time that pleases you.

Just then she stood up and went to the bathroom. When she returned her mascara was smudged, suggesting that she had been crying. I took her hand and led her to the dance floor. We danced under disco ball lights until her friend came to fetch her from the club and I took a cab back to the Bed and Breakfast. I could not help but wonder what nerve I had hit with my questions.

Having met Lethabo it became apparent to me why the girls admired her and wished that they lived her lifestyle, as stated by Thandiwe. The girls lived a double life, which was taxing. It was exhausting for them to constantly be aware of the spaces in which they occupied, and behave accordingly. Lethabo on the other hand had the freedom to dress in the manner that she wished, visit different places whenever she had the desire to without any curfews expected of her and lived a lavish lifestyle. This constituted an ideal lifestyle for the girls; however I observed a melancholic disposition about Lethabo. The poignant direction in which the conversation steered further proved that my observation was accurate.

#### **4.3 Headscarves and Hangovers**

The following day I went to visit Lethabo at her apartment to see how she was holding up after the previous night. She complained that her head hurt from drinking too much wine and from excessive crying as well. She wore a red dhuku (*headscarf*) on her head and a green oversized plain shirt as she drank lots of water to keep hydrated. She invited me in and said she wanted to talk to me and apologised for dismissing me the night before.

**Lethabo:** Ok so you asked me where I know and learnt about sex? The answer is simple. I learnt it from home. When I used to stay at home, it was my mother, my father, and my older brother and four cousins. These cousins were my father's brother's sons. So I was the only girl besides my mother.

I was since six years old, my grandfather, the elder one who was at that time 45 years old, used to have sex with me. He used to have sex with me and I did not even know what sex was at that time. And he was so nice too. He would buy me food and clothes. He work hard for my family by building houses in Nkomazi. He took me to go play with other children. But when it was always time to go to sleep, he would come and he would touch me. He would touch me everywhere. My breasts, my ass, my vagina. He would put his fingers in me, then put his penis in me and he taught me how to pleasure him in so many ways.

**Q:** How often was this? Like how many times do you think he touched you?

**Lethabo:** Almost every day from when I was six years old until I was seventeen years. I then ran away at eighteen to Nelspruit where I made money by being a maid, and then I started doing people's hair, which is what I still do now. Then I got myself a small house here where I now date very rich men so I am never poor.

**Q:** What would he say to you afterwards? Did he tell you not to tell anyone or to say anything?

**Lethabo:** Yes. He would say that I am a good girl and that if I go and tell people about what happen in the bed, I will not be a good girl. He would say that good girls listen to their elders. So I keep quiet because he made me happy and take care of me. I wanted him to be happy and not upset with me.

**Q:** Did you ever feel like telling someone?

**Lethabo:** No matter what age you are you know that someone is not supposed to touch you there when you do not know what they are doing or if you do not want him to touch you. So as much as I wanted to tell someone, I could not because he told me not to. And because he was older than me, I did as he said I should do (pause).

When I was fourteen years old, a policeman come to the school and talked about rape. He say that when someone touch you and have sex with you without you wanting to or without you knowing what is happening, that is rape. He then also say that it is not only a stranger who can rape you but even family. A father, uncle, mother or grandfather. Then I started to think that

what grandfather did that to me when I did not know what was happening. Even though later I then started wanting it. Something just felt wrong after the police came to talk. And the police said that if anyone was going through that, that we should tell him or our teachers. But then I remember him saying that I should not tell anyone because he will be sad. So I was the good girl and I went home to talk to him about what the police man had said because I wanted to ask him if that is what he was doing to me (laughs). When you are a child, you think something is a good idea, and you want to please the elders and you do things that are stupid. So I went to him and I tell him everything that the police had say. And I asked him I say ‘Papa, are you doing rape to me?’ When I ask him that he slap me so hard on my face that I started to come out blood through my nose. He shouted at me and say that what I had ask him was rude. And that I should never say that word to anyone because it is a bad word. Then he walked out of the house and I went into the bed crying.

That is when I knew that that is what he was doing to me. But I was confused and scared. I did not know who to believe. The police or him who come back and then tell me that no that is not rape. He says that if it does not hurt then it is not rape. He said if it does not hurt, it is called love. Showing love. Then after that he have sex with me.

The next day I go to school. I was feeling sad because the teacher in the class then ask that if anyone was going through what the police had explain, we should go and talk to her. But I was scared so I kept quiet.

**Q:** So this continued?

**Lethabo:** Yes, it continue. But when he see that I was now on my period he started giving me the pill to drink. I did not understand what it was at that age but I just drink it because everyday my grandfather would come with it and watch me drink. So I would just drink to make him happy. And he was happy. And the sex continued. But until today I have not told my family.

**Q:** Why have you kept it a secret for so long?

**Lethabo:** I know it is easy to say that once I know what was happening to me I should have gone to the police or even told my teacher. But the reason why I was not able to tell anyone about what my grandfather was doing is because he told me not to and at that time I listened to everything that adults would tell me to do.

**Q:** Are stories like yours common in the community?



**Lethabo:** Yes, very common. Talk to any of these kids walking around the street of Qondwa. The ones that parents say are full of nonsense. What these stupid parents do not know is that they let things happen to us as kids, we learnt what was happening to us and now we just do it. Why are they so mad to see us walk around the streets now with other men? At least these men are not related to us.

**Q:** You said you did not tell any of your family members. Do you think they knew though?

**Lethabo:** Uh yes they knew. Come on you have seen how small those houses are. We all hear each other laugh, cry, talk, gossip, but all of a sudden no one could hear that I was getting raped? Only a curtain divided his room and the room of the other brothers where the rest of them shared. Then sometimes I would bang on the wall of my parents' room so that they can come in and check if everything is ok, but no one came. Nyasha, you may not believe me but I am telling you, those motherfuckers heard everything and just chose to turn a blind eye. Trust me I can even get you other of my friends who have similar stories. These adults in the village are sick in the head. They expect us to respect them but they don't even give a shit about us. So I don't go back there. People tell them that I am busy whoring around here in Malelane but must I care?

#### **4.4 Childhood and Sexual Abuse**

Lethabo's encounter with her grandfather resonates the research findings of Jewkes et al (2005) regarding child sexual abuse. Jewkes *et al.* (2005) conducted a study in a South African and Namibian context provide us with contemporary insights into the gendered cultural meanings of childhood in these contexts in an attempt to understand how sexual abuse is perceived. They do not provide the name of the villages so as to maintain anonymity regarding the sensitivity of the topic. They conducted their research in rural Mpumalanga South Africa as well as in rural Windhoek Namibia. They argue that for men and boys, rape is used as an instrument of communication with oneself (*the rapist*) about masculinity and powerfulness. They further argue that whilst it is often said that communities abhor child rape, responses to cases show that often strong action is not taken against perpetrators and the victims may be equally or solely blamed (Jewkes al 2005:180).

One of their interview questions read, '*How do communities and families perceive child abusers?*' This question was included to elicit comparative information about how child abuse is perceived in the two research settings. The general response in Namibia was that children

are precious beings who need protection from the community, even if this meant the use of physical violence. A Namibian father was quoted stating that,

*'It looks as if the community reacts more strongly when a small child is raped, than when it is an adult woman. I have seen marches on TV by angry women when a child is raped but I have not seen it when an adult woman is raped'* (Jewkes et al. 2005:1815).

Another father in the community claimed that men who rape children are outcasts in my culture. Further research showed that from the community's point of view, the younger the child victim, the more serious the crime. Discussions of serious child rape cases centered on babies and toddlers more than on those cases involving children above the age of fifteen (Jewkes et al. 2005:1816).

The findings in the rural Namibian context were not similar to the findings in rural Mpumalanga, South Africa. Whilst Namibians defined sexual abuse as a heinous social crime against children, this did not appear to be the case in Mpumalanga, South Africa. In the latter setting a female community member contended that,

*'The community doesn't say anything about this incident (referring to incest). Which means it's your own problem. No one can help you nor can they ever say anything. Even the community leaders, they don't care about it. Nobody will be responsible for sharing your problems. They just relax or may become happy because they are jealous by nature'* (Jewkes et al, 2005:1818).

Jewkes et al. (2005) suggest that in the South African context, there appears to be more interest in protecting the adult perpetrator than the child victim. I regard these findings to be suggestive of a situation in rural South Africa where childhood sexualities are considered to be latent and without social value, and furthermore where the adult perpetrators who are recognised as persons may be more valued than children.

Jewkes et al (2005) have illustrated the different notions of gendered childhood and of childhood sexuality that were expressed in perceptions of child sexual abuse in two countries. Their findings show that there are social and cultural differences in the meanings given to children as 'persons-in-becoming', and the values assigned to their expected latent sexualities.

Unfortunately, they failed to explore how these different perceptions of children's sexuality in relation to child abuse may or may not be relate to wider structural issues of economic constraint and changes in the social configurations of families and communities.

#### **4.5 Definition of rape and sexual offences**

Lethabo stated how the inability to openly express the abuse that she was subjected to, having to listen and obey the perpetrator who told her never to tell by virtue of being older than her, and also the expectation that she must know nothing about sex, contributed to the real tragedy that she faced daily in the household. Sexual abuse is a problem in South Africa. Children are not exempt from being victims. However the legal literature on sexual abuse mainly refers to sexual offences against adults. As stated by the South African Law Commission, 'In terms of our common law, rape is committed by a man having intentional unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent. Non-consensual anal or oral penetration does not constitute rape in common law, although it can constitute indecent assault' (par 3.4.7.1).

In the common law definition, sexual intercourse is restricted to the penetration of the vagina by the penis. As a result, the Commission proposes a re-appeal of the common law definition of rape. The Commission stands for a replacement with a new statutory offence. The Commission states, 'sexual penetration is unlawful per se when it occurs under coercive circumstances. Coercive circumstances include the application of force, threats, the abuse of power or authority, and the use of drugs among others' (par 3.4.7.1).

Sexual penetration is further explained by the Commission to include the penetration 'to any extent whatsoever by a penis, any object or part of the body of one person, or any part of the body of an animal into the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person. Stimulated sexual intercourse is also included under the Commission's definition of 'sexual penetration' (par 3.4.7.1).

In terms of the Commission's recommendations oral, anal or vaginal penetration or even stimulated sexual intercourse under coercive circumstances constitutes rape. The Commission goes on to provide better protection for children, and proposes that the sexual penetration of any child below the age of 12 years should constitute rape (par 3.4.7.3).

For research purposes, the definition that I adopt is the Commission's definition which embraces the aspect of child protection from sexual abuse.

### Statistics of sexual assault in South Africa

Orkin (2000) states that there are various studies of rape in South Africa from which statistics have been extracted. However, none of the studies were specifically designed to measure the prevalence and/or the incidence of this crime. Orkin (2000:1) explains that prevalence refers to how many cases there are altogether and at a given point in time; how many people there are in any country on the day of a population census. Incidence refers to the number of cases over a specified time period.

In 1996, S.A Police statistics recorded that throughout South Africa, 40% of reported rape cases were that of children under 18 years of age (Orkin 2000:2). In 2003, similar research was done in Gauteng, with a section focusing on children aged 0- 11. 0.2% of sexual abuse victims were aged a year or less. Another 0.9% was two years old while three year olds accounted for 1.7% of the sample. In total, victims aged three years and younger accounted for 2.8% of all victims in the study where an age could be determined (Vetten 2008:7). It was stated that girls were twice as likely to be raped by friends and neighbours than were adult women (52.1% versus 24.8%). Relatives also accounted for nearly one in three (31.8%) of those raping young girls. Furthermore, girls were more likely to be raped in their own homes (28.5%) than either adolescent or adult women (Vetten et al. 2008:7).

Internationally, all crimes, including rape, are reported as incidence statistics for a given year. Within that year they are reported as a proportion of 100 000 of the total population census. Stats SA continues to follow this reporting method. These statistics show to be problematic considering the outcome depends on the population (Orkin 2000:1). Orkin (2000:2) challenges statistics for two main reasons. There are several sources based on studies using considerably different methods of data collection and with different objectives, not necessarily focusing on the incidence of rape. Also Sample sizes used during data collection differ from one area to another, which affects the outcome of the statistic.

#### **4.6 Notions of masculinity in post-apartheid South Africa**

Although shifting notions of masculinity is not the crux of my research, I find it important to identify how notions of masculinity have shifted in contemporary Nkomazi. This is in relation to sexual offences towards children of Tonga community in Mpumalanga South Africa. According to Ward (1995), feminist theorists view rape and sexual offences as constructs of patriarchy. Theorists assume that patriarchy shapes attitudes and beliefs, women's roles, men's roles and their relationships to each other. All these relationships determine the forms of violence against women (Ward 1995:180). On this note, Posel (2005:239) takes the argument forward, stating that the scandal of manhood is a result of the political issues in South Africa from its initial marginalization and minimization during the apartheid era: 'Until you address the issue of men, and the violence they perpetrate in our society, you will not begin to steer society towards moral regeneration' (Posel 2005:240).

Posel (2005) asks how and why sexual violence is seen as a problem of manhood and sees the issue as a wider political and ideological anxiety about the new democracy of the country. Her argument draws on Michel Foucault's theory by emphasising that the regulation of sexuality has inhered in the product of the modern state and its conditions of citizenship as much as? In its colonial permutations (Posel 2005:241-242). She goes on to argue that modern sexuality is a political phenomenon entangled in relations of power. Modern sexuality is also fashioned in ways that bear imprints of other vectors of inequality and differences, for example race, class, status, and generation (Posel 2005:242). In the case of the region of Nkomazi, Posel's argument proves efficient in that the area is highly underdeveloped with problems of illegal immigrants, unemployment, and poverty. As a result, there is a high rate of sexual offences by men towards young children (Posel 2005:242).

Petersen (2005) conducted research on sexual offence prevention programs in semi-rural Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. This area has similar geographic and social characteristics as the Nkomazi region. One of the aims of the study was to ascertain what makes this particular place notorious for rape. Their findings point to the ways in which masculinity is constructed, as I describe in the following section.

##### Naturalised constructs of gender

Petersen et al. (2005) state in their research that young boys in Durban were socialized into patriarchal notions of masculinity. These notions promote and legitimize unequal gendered

power relations. In one of the focus group discussions that they carried out, the discussion focused on gendered expectations between men and women in relation to sexuality. One participant stated that,

‘Boys grow up thinking that they should get whatever they want from a girl. She is supposed to respect him without any refusal. If he wants sex, a woman has to agree’ (Petersen et al. 2005:36).

The idea that girls have to provide sexual services to boys as normative behaviour is also highlighted in the following words of another participant: ‘We need girls to give us ... that’s what the bible says. You cannot let the girl pass at night without raping her’ (Petersen et al. 2005:40). Petersen et al. (2005:42) argue that the other major sphere of influence is that of male peers: ‘Other guys laugh if you haven’t had sex. And those who don’t have any stories to tell want to, as stated by one of their informants’. This quotation implies that those who do not have stories about sex to tell their fellow peers, will do anything out of desperation (they will even rape) in order to be able to tell a story about sexual encounters that they allegedly had.

In terms of family dynamics and structure, Peterson et al. (2005:45) show that brothers of a young girl child can get bribed by their friends to let them have sex with the young sister, whether she is willing or not:

”Yes they can do anything as long as they get liked by their friends. How can you do that to your own sister? Girls, we have no one to trust. We are on our own.” These negative peer influences have weakened the traditional protective role that brothers have played in protecting their sisters. One girl from the focus group stated that, “Sometimes mothers are not careful enough. If they get married to a new father, they need to leave their daughters”.

Anthropologist Sideris (2004) carried out research in the Nkomazi region on sexuality and masculinity. He illustrates how peers are able to influence behaviour. The research examines individual men who attempt to break free from the social pressure of male peers to use their masculinity as a tool of power and control. It provides insight into the structural and subjective dimensions of change.

Most of the households in which children reside that I have encountered in Qondwa Village, are headed by men but most of the men work in cities distant from the village. According to

Morrell (2006:2-3) the term *baba* (father) is not only a biological but also a social term. The term defines the role of care, protection, and provision in relation to children and it does not necessarily denote an old man. Morrell (2006:2-3) argues that in order to fully appreciate the specific context in which fatherhood has been experienced and understood in South Africa, one needs to examine the sociological and historical determinants of fatherhood in the country.

Experiences of fatherhood are defined by the history of South Africa. Black fathers are said to have always been distant because job opportunities were in the cities away from the villages. During the apartheid era, most black men were employed in the mines where they were permitted to visit their homes on an annual basis. They were exposed to violent environments and were trained to work physically hard through unpleasant circumstances. Caring and nurturing children was left for the women in the villages. Morel (2006:9) argues that even in the post-apartheid era, men still view themselves in this particular historical context whether they are physically absent or present in the household. During my field research, I wanted to find out how these family structures define childhood and childhood sexuality.

#### **4.7 Economic factors in relation to child sexual abuse**

Ward (1995) discusses some research that has been carried out by feminists on sexual violence. She states that feminist research has a vision of a patriarchal system as defining, limiting and misrepresenting women's experiences and realities as well as their economic status. Patriarchal expectations dictate that in a household, the man is the bread winner and the women of the house depend on him for support. The wife turns a blind eye to the fact that her husband rapes her daughters for in the case of incest, exposing him would mean being cut out from economic support (Ward 1995:76) Ward is one of only a few feminists working on sexual abuse of children. Her work provides insights into the reasons why women tolerate incest by male partners in their households.

Most feminist research on sexual violence and rape are silent on sexual abuse of children. Anthropologist Tina Sideris (2004) carried out research in Qondwa village where her research illustrates how the head of the family and his contributions are depended upon greatly by the family members. Family members are willing to turn a blind eye to violence that occurs in the family, so as to avoid the breadwinner having legal action taken on him which could result in imprisonment which means absence. Her work focuses on the physical and sexual abuse that

women experience in the household, and not on the abuse that children experience. The following is a direct quote from one of Sideris' (2004) research participants in Nkomazi, Tonga Village on gender violence

*'As you know there has been no water in Block A (neighbourhood in Tonga Village). It was late when I arrived home, about 8 o' clock, but I decided to go and fetch water at the river. On the way I met my husband. He was with another woman. I have known about this woman. He asked me where I was going and why I did not stay in the house that he built for me. He asked me why I was spying on him. In front of that woman he beat me and beat me. I have just come from the hospital. I do not want to lay a charge of assault against him because in October my daughter was raped and we need him to help us with her case. For the sake of my daughter I won't put him in jail (Sideris 2004:92).*

Lethabo channels frustration to her family for failing to protect her from the abuse that she suffered at the hands of her grandfather. She is adamant that people in the household used to hear her screams and her banging on the walls as she attempted to resist him. The blind eye that the family members turned on the breadwinner is a glaring representation of the crisis of poverty in Qondwa. The arrest of the perpetrator who economically supports the family would mean a lack of income that provides day to day basic needs for members of the household. Lethabo represents the girls in Qondwa village who experience sexual abuse in their households by household members. Ironically the personhood of girlhood in Qondwa households is such that girls must not gain or display any knowledge of sex and sexuality. The reality in Qondwa village is that child sexual abuse is an open secret, and as I later discovered, is one secret among many.



## Chapter 5: Personhood of childhood and childhood sexuality at a memorial ceremony

### 5.1 Chief Memorial Ceremony Preparations

This chapter illustrates how childhood is further negotiated in the particular instance of traditional gatherings. The chief of Qondwa village was due to host a memorial weekend for a former chief of Qondwa who passed away a year prior to my visit. Mama Lucillah explained that these memorials that they held for chiefs were very important and special rituals whereby all villagers were expected to gather at the chief's homestead were held here. A day before the ceremony men in the village slaughtered cows and goats for sacrifice to the deceased chief in celebration. During the celebration, women were expected to cook the meat and those gathered would then later eat the cow and goat as part of the celebratory meal. Girls in the village were in charge of doing the dishes and keeping the homestead tidy throughout the ceremony.

Women in Mama Lucillah's homestead were extremely excited about the upcoming event. They searched for the best looking pots in their possession to use at the event. Meanwhile Mene, Thandiwe and Buhle dreaded this ceremony. For them it was a ceremony where girls slave away in the kitchen catering to boys and men. They also despised the fact that they had to behave in a certain way because all the parents/guardians that resided in the village would be in the same space. Menenhle and Buhle's mothers bought them outfits that they expected them to wear to the ceremony. Lethabo used to reside in the village and I asked her if she was attending. Her immediate response was, *'Why would I torture myself like that? You do know that at those events that where you see all the people that you had run away from in the first place right? I left that place for a reason now why would I want to put myself there now?'* I gathered that the person that she was referring to was her grandfather. Immediately after her response, she paused and reconsidered attending the ceremony in order to drink the vast amounts of alcohol that was to be provided.

I pondered on the information I was provided about the ceremony. I realised that this was going to be a wonderful ethnographic ceremony. Parents/guardians and children would occupy the same space meaning would be able to observe personhood of children materialising in a natural setting rather than in recorded structured focus groups and interviews. I wished to observe and analyse the behaviours and interactions between the girls in the village and the women, the girls and the men, the women and the men, the girls and the boys. I was meant to return to the University of Pretoria during that weekend to update my supervisor on the data that I had

gathered, however I eagerly rescheduled my visit to Pretoria for I believed that this was going to be one of the best days of fieldwork.

On the day of the memorial ceremony, the atmosphere at Mama Lucillah's household was thick with excitement. I woke up to the clanging of pots just outside the window. I made my way to mama Lucillah who sat by the veranda of the kitchen with other women from the household. *'Today is the day that I show these women Nyasha that I am the one who can cook the best,'* exclaimed Lucillah as I walked towards them. *'The men today at the ceremony are going to love my beef, they are going to keep calling me to go and cook for them!'* One woman who was drying the pot using a dish cloth which was dipped in bees wax in order to polish the pot, laughed and said, *'Some of us have husbands that we cook for. We do not need those other men to like our food if our husbands already like our cooking'*. Lucillah responded laughing saying, *'Yes you have husbands but today your husbands are going to leave you and come to me because my cooking will be so good that they will wish that I was the wife!'* This was the moment I realised that the ceremony was a space for women to domestically compete with each other. Efficiently carrying out household duties such as cooking is a sign of one having embraced the characteristics of an 'ideal woman' in Qondwa village.

During one of my visits to Menenhle's household, I overheard her mother shouting at her for not having scrubbed the floor properly. *'Menenhle! You will be an embarrassment to the family where you are going to marry into if you keep doing the floors like this!'* she shouted as Menenhle discretely rolled her eyes. This statement shows how girls are trained to be women by being taught how to efficiently carry out household chores. When they then move into their marital homes, they will be expected to be the 'ideal woman', having transitioned from the 'ideal girl'. The women of Qondwa village had the platform to show off their 'ideal womanhood' at the ceremony, hence the conversations about who will cook the best. Judging from their conversations as they waxed the pots, their cooking skills would be judged by the men that they would serve. Positive reactions from the men would entail approval of womanhood, which is what they strived for.

Having finished the washing and the polishing of the pots, Mama Lucillah proceeded into our room to grab her washing stone. A washing stone is a stone used to scrub off scales that develop on feet due to walking barefoot. *'When you see me take out this stone then you know that there is a very important occasion. Nyasha I might just find a man tonight to marry me!'* I laughed with Mama Lucillah and exclaimed that I thought we were going to celebrate the life of the

chief who had passed away, not to look for men to marry us. She turned her head and said, *‘the guy died a long time ago. Why waste time remembering that when you can get a man there’*. This ceremony not only was a space for Mama Lucillah to display her cooking skills, but a space to meet potential husbands as well.

I proceeded to visit Mama Linda whose household was located twenty minutes away from Mama Lucillah’s household. I knocked on her door and she opened it with her hands covered in flour. *‘Come in my child! I’m busy baking the bread for tonight. I hope this little gas oven that my friend gave me works properly’*. I greeted her and sat with her next to the gas oven in the kitchen. I offered to help her and her response was that she wanted to cook by herself, so that when asked by the men if she had cooked alone, she would receive the praises without having to mention a helper. Mama Linda was so focused on baking that she did not have the time to chat to me. She served me tea and immediately engrossed herself in baking and I decided to visit Mama Saky.

When I entered Mama Saky’s home, she was staring in the cracked mirror of her bedroom door. *‘Which scarf looks better on me for tonight?’* she asked. I picked the blue scarf for her rather than the yellow one for she was going to wear a white loosely fitted dress. I personally just prefer blue and white to go together. *‘Thanks my child, what are you wearing tonight?’* she asked. It dawned on me that I had not packed appropriate clothes for that night’s events when I asked Mama Saky what would be appropriate for the ceremony. She replied as follows:

*‘A long dress that is not tight fitting, it should be long up to your ankles. Or it can be a skirt which is also very long and not tight fitting. If you are wearing a skirt then you must wear a blouse that is not see through (transparent) and not tight fitting. It should be comfortable. Whatever you wear should be comfortable because you are going to do a lot of work there. You are going to help with the cooking, taking care of the little kids, and whatever it is that you are asked to do and also you are going to dance so hard! You also have to make sure that you have a headscarf because we do not want your hair to be falling into the food we will be serving. Also wear very comfortable shoes because if they are not comfortable then your feet are going to be very sore’*.

Most of my clothes were loose fitting jeans and dresses that did not reach my ankles. I phoned Menenhle and asked if she, Buhle and Thandiwe would accompany me to the village shops

where I could purchase a simple dress and a head scarf. I then left Mama Saky's household and proceeded to meet the girls.

The girls were nowhere near excited about the event and wished to avoid it. Thandiwe exclaimed that, *'Nyasha watch you are going to be sore for days. They are going to make you work. We are going to be told to serve beer all night to the men, cook, take care of the kids, and also we are expected to dance to the drums. That part is fun just that sometimes I get tired but the adults will always ask you why you are not dancing when you decide that you want to sit down.'* I asked her if girls and women will also be drinking at the festival and they responded saying that the women were allowed to drink but were only allowed to do so in moderation because they will have most of the chores to do. Girls were not allowed to touch the alcohol unless they were serving the boys and the men. Boys were allowed to have alcohol on this occasion because they were seen as future men expected to be able to hold their liquor. Buhle got excited when she explained:

*'But you have to be smart. When you are serving the men the alcohol, you have to hide some of the alcohol at a spot that we will show you. During the whole night you just keep going to that spot and you drink so that they don't see that you are drinking so much. A lot of girls do this as well. They drink without their parents seeing and the trick is to just make sure that they don't see you. That is the only fun part of that whole thing.'*

We reached the village shops where I entered in the first clothes shop that we spotted. I was searching for a simple loose fitting dress that reached my ankles, and a headscarf to match the dress. I spotted a blue plain dress which was fitted on a mannequin in the display window. I decided to purchase the dress for I did not particularly care what kind of dress I purchased as long as it was appropriate for the occasion. I needed to be presentable to the parents/guardians so as to maintain the rapport that I had formed with them. As if Buhle had read my mind she exclaimed, *'Just buy that dress that is in the display and let's go somewhere else fun.'* The contrast between the excitement from the women and the boredom displayed by the girls was as sharp as a knife. It was interesting to see how the women in the homestead were so excited to get dressed for the ceremony to the extent of searching for washing stones, yet the girls could not have cared less about appearing fashionable. I recalled how Lucillah had said that perhaps she was going to find a man therefore she had to dress up and look desirable. I wondered whether the girls had the hope of meeting boys and men at the ceremony. When I asked the

girls they responded, *'Find a man? At that stupid thing? The men in the villages? I could not even care less about those losers. What kind of men do you think we hang out with Nyasha? You are still to meet the kind of men that we hang out with.'* This showed that the calibre of men in the village were not the kind of men they were interested in and indeed, I later in this chapter explain the kind of men with whom they entered into romantic relationships.

I spotted a bright green scarf that would complement the outfit that I had bought. I purchased it without hesitation and proceeded to a diner with the girls, for we were thirsty. *'I need a drink (alcoholic beverage) to cheer me up,* exclaimed Thandiwe. *'This is one of the wackest (boring) events I have ever been exposed to in my life'*, she said as she plonked herself on the chair in the diner. The girls ordered Vodka while I had a Coca-Cola. Having finished the drinks, Menenhle suggested that we take a taxi to Lethabo's house and return to the village with her.

We arrived at Lethabo's apartment where she gave us all hugs and quickly picked up that the girls had been drinking. *'Well you are just in time for some weed (marijuana)'*, she said as she led us through her bedroom door where we were greeted by the strong smell of weed. *'Awesome pass the joint (marijuana butt)!'* exclaimed Mene as she plonked on Lethabo's bed ready to inhale some of the *'powerful medicinal drug'* as she referred to it. *'Don't bother passing the joint to Nyasha she isn't going to join us,'* chuckled Lethabo as she plonked next to Menenhle on the bed. *'She's scared to get into trouble with her school there if they find out that she was doing drugs with us here in Mpumalanga!'* chuckled Thandiwe as she stripped to her bra and underwear for she was feeling hot. *'Anyway Lethabo today is that stupid day when we have to go to that memorial. Come with us for once,'* said Buhle. *'Actually yes I am going to come this year because I want to show Nyasha who is who in the village. And I want to expose all those pathetic people there. Ok but if I'm to go I need to take a nap first it's hot outside I'm tired'.* The girls responded saying we all needed to nap because we were going to be awake all evening doing chores around the chief's homestead. I fell asleep effortlessly on Lethabo's king size bed where the five of us managed to squeeze onto. An hour later Lethabo woke us up pointing out that we needed to head to the village before the girls' mothers started looking for them.



**Photo 10: Menenhle, Thandiwe, Buhle, Lethabo and I ready to take a nap before heading to the ceremony. Picture taken by Lethabo's helper.**

Lethabo got dressed and wore an attractive yellow figure hugging dress which defined her curves. Lethabo was curvaceous and teased by the girls that she can balance a dinner plate on her buttocks. ‘Yoh! (Gosh) Lethabo are you wearing that? You will be chased away by the women in the village when they think that you are trying to take their men away from them because you look too beautiful. We all know that they make us wear ugly things so that those stupid ugly men and boys don’t get attracted to us.’ Lethabo responded:

*‘I want to see who will try chase me away from there. I do not live there anymore I live by myself and I am independent enough to wear what I want. I want them to try and provoke me. Of which they won’t, they know that I can always attack them by revealing the truth about their husbands and how they were busy raping us when we were young. I want them to try me and I will clap back!’*

She tied her headscarf in a manner that did not fully cover her hair despite the fact that all hair was to be covered as ordered by the women in the village. Her braids brushed her shoulders as she said *'Let's go see what nonsense we are going to partake in tonight,'* she said as we walked out of her house to go catch a taxi to Qondwa so as to get changed at Menenhle's house.

We passed by Buhle's house to fetch her attire for the ceremony and proceeded to Menenhle's house where we got dressed silently. Everyone seemed to be lost in their own mental worlds as robotic movements led to the final placing of loose fitting cloths over our bodies. Lethabo laughed at our dresses and exclaimed, *'Yal look absolutely disgusting,'* and Buhle responded stating, *'Yeah that's kind of what we are going for so that them stupid ones don't think we are trying anything funny. Let's go early and help the mothers set up the kitchen for their food,'* sighed Menenhle as she locked up her room and we proceeded to the chief's place where the event was to take place. The stupid ones that Menenhle referred to here were the parents/guardians that were going to be present at the ceremony. The word 'stupid' here is used to express frustration at people causing discomfort. In this case, the people who expected her presence at the ceremony which were her parents.

## **5.2 Chief Memorial Ceremony**

The chief's homestead was a vast plot of land that anchored eight different huts that served different purposes. On the plot of land grew plots of maize corn, sweet potatoes and green vegetables. I became oblivious to my surroundings as soon as we walked towards the hut where I spotted Mama Linda and her friend Mama Muti. Mama Muti ran towards us holding a black wrap over used to tie around a woman's waist to resemble a skirt. She embraced Lethabo and wrapped the wrap over around Lethabo's waist. This gesture meant that she noticed that Lethabo was not 'decently dressed.' Her dress defined her curves therefore it was deemed unacceptable in the presence of women and men, particularly the respectable chief.

Lethabo did not appreciate the gesture and slowly undid the wrap over. She placed the wrap over on Mama Muti's shoulder and said, *'Thank you however, I am fine like this.'* She continued walking towards the hut where the women had stopped their chores, staring in our direction. Mama Muti scrunched up her face and asked Thandiwe, Buhle and Menenhle to go fetch water from the boreholes so as to fill the buckets with water for cooking. Lethabo and I proceeded to walk to the hut where the other women were, and greeted each one of them. I observed that when they greeted Lethabo, none of them looked her in the face and seemed to look away or were fidgeting. Lethabo made these women feel uncomfortable and I started

thinking perhaps she made them feel insecure about their husbands. Lethabo is a very attractive woman, such that if I was not secure in myself, I would not introduce Lethabo to my partner! Perhaps this is how the women felt when they saw her, and why Mama Muti was quick with the wrap over. I smiled at myself and at that moment admired Lethabo's confidence. She did not have the struggle of having to carry out the expectations of children in the village for she was a woman who had moved out into her own abode.

We walked out of the hut and walked towards the boreholes where the girls were fetching water from. *'Stick with me and you won't have to do chores. These women don't want me to be near them because I am an embarrassment because of what I am wearing'* she stated. I responded, *'Embarrassment or a threat to them? Perhaps you will take their men?'* I laughed. *'Actually you are right Nyasha. Them men here are perverts. Wait till you see the look on that old stupid man's face when he sees that I'm here. Haven't been here since I ran away'* (referring to her grandfather). *'Look at you girls looking so domesticated carrying buckets of water on your heads!'* she laughed as the girls each mounted a bucket of water on their heads. Thandiwe in an irritable tone ordered Lethabo to fetch a bucket of water as well. Lethabo jokingly analysed her well-manicured nails and in zest responded, *'Do these nails look like they are for doing all those sorts of things?'* I left Lethabo and the girls and proceeded to the hut where all the village girls old enough to wash dishes, were sitting.

The floor of the hut was placed with several huge buckets and washing cloths. The idea was to wash dishes used by the women who were cooking throughout the ceremony, so as to avoid a pile up of dirty dishes. Buhle walked into the hut and began introducing me to the 10 girls that were present in the hut. They all wore long, loose fitting dresses that swept their ankles and headscarves that covered up their hair. In the corner where we were washing our dishes, there was Sonti and Sara who appeared to be close friends of Menenhle. A conversation among the three of them ignited. They organised who was to be in charge of serving alcohol to the men for the person in charge of alcohol distribution would be in charge of making sure that alcohol was hidden in a spot away from parents and guardians, for the girls to drink.

**Sara:** Goodness. That one over there is probably going to be asked by the mothers to serve the alcohol because the adults like her because they say that she listens. And that is the problem.

**Menenhle:** Yes that is the problem she won't be giving us the alcohol. She won't hide it. She is too obedient. She is pathetic though gosh. (*Laughter*).



**Sonti:** Ok so one of us, Buhle or Thandiwe should be the ones to give the alcohol. Those three girls in the corner too are also good candidates. But the problem is that we are not really friends with them so they won't be giving us too much alcohol because they are going to be saving for their friends.

**Sara:** Let's devise a plan because we need that alcohol.

**Menenhle:** Nyasha everyone in the village likes you and they want a chance to talk to you if they have not talked to you. You do the giving of the alcohol to the men! Just go to the *mamas* (mothers) and offer and say that you have not been allocated anything and then you can do the giving and hiding.

I explained that I was not willing to be in such a position for that would be deception. As expected by the girls, Mama Lucillah appointed me to be in charge of the alcohol distribution to the boys and men. Menenhle saw an opportunity to volunteer to be my helper, and Mama Lucillah agreed to her suggestion. I knew that Menenhle was pretending to take genuine interest in being a helper. Her ulterior motive was to hide alcohol for the girls. Mama Lucillah eagerly agreed showing that she did not suspect any misdemeanours.

Menenhle clapped her hands in glee as we returned to the hut where we were cleaning the dishes. Mama Lucillah followed behind us and reached the hut to be greeted by a choir of girls. All the girls in unison greeted Mama Lucillah and made it a point to display their hard work. I reached the hut before Mama Lucillah and I saw Sonti lying on the floor cleaning her nails, but as soon as she heard Mama Lucillah's voice she got onto her knees and started scrubbing a pan in a dish in feigned concentration which almost made me chuckle. As soon as Mama Lucillah left, Sonti left the pan in the dish again, and continued to clean her nails using a corner of a piece of paper. When Mama Lucillah left, Menenhle grabbed everyone's attention explaining that she was to devise a hiding spot for the alcohol. Furthermore she warned that whoever had the bravery to inform any parent or guardian of her actions would be punished by means of physical punches. As she was speaking, she targeted a petite girl who sat near the door wearing a blue pleated dress and a headscarf to match. Upon finishing her announcement, I asked Menenhle why it seemed as if she was targeting that girl and she explained that,

*'Last memorial we did this whole thing of hiding the alcohol. Then that bitch decided that she was going to tell her mother who of course is friends with our mothers. We denied of course because there was no proof, but that means that*

*this year our mothers are probably going to be watching us closely so we need to come up with a solid plan. If she dares to sell us out I will knock her teeth out. She can go be mother Mary elsewhere. I do not have time for Mother Marys here’.*

‘*Mother Mary*’ is a biblical character in the Christian religious faith. She is the mother of Jesus Christ who is believed to be the example of how to lead a Christian life. She is portrayed as a person who obeyed all instructions and possessed no characteristics of a rebellious woman. In Qondwa village, she would be characterised as the ‘ideal woman’. Here the girls refer to any girl who is obedient to their elders as a Mother Mary, however in a negative light. Mother Marys are known to cause trouble for girls such as Menenhle who are disobedient, hence the conflict.

Just then the slow beating of a drum began, indicating that the men of the village were arriving at the homestead as explained by Menenhle. Every girl and woman in their respective huts was expected to go outside and form a straight line at the gate which signified the welcoming of the heads of the households. We formed a straight line and as the men drew closer, the beating of the drum grew louder and louder. Hands on our sides, heads looking forward we welcomed the men who had all gathered in a homestead down the road in preparation for the procession. Lethabo was absent from the welcoming. She later revealed that she was not ready to see her grandfather who she knew would be a part of the procession. She had decided to go to the lavatory for the time that it took to welcome the men. When the procession finished, the men sat under a baobab tree where chairs were placed for them in a circle around the tree. The women returned to the huts when Mama Linda came into our hut ordering us to go with a dish of water to the men so that they could wash their hands. Mama Linda gave us each a dish and a jug which we had to go fill up with clean water for the washing of hands. Before I left the hut Mama Linda instructed me to kneel down before the men while they washed their hands. Menenhle explained that the washing of hands symbolised the welcoming of the men into the homestead. It was also a means of communication from the women and girls that they recognised their authority as household heads. In a patriarchal society such as Qondwa, there are different ways of women showing respect to the heads of the households.

As I poured water into the dish for the man who was washing his hands, Sonti approached the man who sat next to the man I attended to. This man instructed Sonti that he wished to be attended to by me and not by Sonti. Sonti indiscreetly rolled her eyes but the man paid no mind

to her. As I attended to him next he whispered in my ear that he wanted to see me after the festival alone. I ignored him and continued to attend to six other men until the water in the jug was finished. Back at the hut, I asked Sonti if she knew who the man who had whispered in my ear, and she explained, *'He is such a womaniser. He is only 30, got married two years ago but I don't know how many women he has impregnated. Women tend to like the fact that he is the only good looking guy in this village'*. I chuckled as I thought of Mama Lucillah who used this space to seek for a potential husband. I thought to myself how unfortunate that the man who whispered in my ear was married, and a womaniser, for he used the space for the same interests as Mama Lucillah. I did not return with another dish of water for the men to wash their hands. I observed the girls who presented the dishes of water to the men and the manner in which the men responded. I spotted one man caress a girl's headscarf as he smiled at her while she poured water for him to wash his hands. Another man also whispered into the ear of one of the girls who was attending to him and she quickly arose and moved on to the next man. I wondered if this behaviour from the men was the reason why the women in the cooking hut reacted negatively towards Lethabo. These women probably knew that when the girls attend to the washing of hands, some of their husbands and men will take advantage of the opportunity to be in close proximity of the girls.

I then found Lethabo sitting on a crate of alcohol smelling of vodka, which she had stolen from one of the crates that were in the hut where the women were cooking. She managed to steal the alcohol while we were out welcoming the men. *'Sies (term expressing disgust) there he is'* she said pointing out to a frail man who needed a stick to assist his movements. *'It's so disgusting sies'*, said Lethabo. I asked if he had seen her and she responded in a shrug to point out that she did not want to talk about it. She continued talking about the people that we could see in our vicinity.

*'You see that other old thing over there that can barely sit on that chair?'* she asked pointing to an elderly man who sat slouched on a chair in the circle of men. *'He got his granddaughter pregnant. Eish the child came out a retard of course. The woman left the child at home one day and just did not come back. No one knows where the woman and the child is being taken care of by some woman I don't even know who she is. That girl you see there, the one carrying the firewood? Yah every night her step father does (rapes) her rough that the hut next door can hear her crying in pain and the next morning, you see her not being able to walk properly. That one down there, washing that man's hands*

*the one in the hat, same story, her dad or step dad I'm not sure, she is like 12 years old if I'm not mistaken... that man holding that branch like a stupid fool? He was in jail for 3 days because he raped three of his nieces. One day for each niece I guess. Fucking judicial system. That old man dancing there, he was in jail for a day for raping that girl over there, I don't know how they are related, anyway he was in jail for a day and his wife came and begged the policemen to take him out, and guess what he is here now. . . if you really look at the girls that I have showed you, they are walking around in fear, and they are spending most of the time in that hut because men are not allowed to go into those huts. So for now it's a protected space.*

Processing the information Lethabo had shared with me was a difficult task. I remember I started to shake for I was livid at the fact that rape perpetrators were in the same space as their victims meaning there were no consequences to their actions. Girls walked around in fear of being in the same space as their perpetrators and preferred to hide in the hut under the disguise of performing household duties.

My thoughts were cut off by another loud, quick beating of drums, which signified that another procession was to take place. The first procession that had taken place was for the men in the village, this time the procession was for the boys in the village. The boys walked past the straight line that we had formed for them as they headed towards their own chairs that were organised in a circle under a peach tree not so far away from the men. The same washing of hands protocol that had been carried out with the men had to take place with the boys. This time around I did not take part in the washing of hands of the boys. Menenhle and I were instructed by the women to start with the distribution of alcohol to the men.

Again I was instructed to kneel down before the men as they picked their alcohol from the crate I carried. This protocol was not to going to happen throughout the night. After the round of distribution, the men were then expected to pick out their own beers without being served. I asked Menenhle why we were expected to distribute the alcohol in the first place if afterwards the men would serve themselves. She shrugged and said, '*It's one of those dumb traditions I don't know.*' She scurried to the hut carrying a crate of alcohol hoping not to be spotted by one of the women in the adjacent hut. She poured the alcohol in a large pot used to cook mealie meal at large gatherings. I asked her what happened to the original plan of hiding bottles in a

bush. She replied that since ‘Mother Mary’ had exposed her to her parents the previous year, she figured that the women would be monitoring closely.

Lethabo devised a different strategy of pouring the alcohol into a large pot and place it in the corner of the hut where four other empty teapots were placed for storage. Those who desired alcohol would then bring with them mugs, so as to disguise the alcohol as tea or coffee. The rule was that no one was allowed to drink outside of the hut. The teapot and mugs were disguises for in case one of the women entered the hut. I was concerned that if the women were to find out, the girls would be punished. The girls did not seem to care about getting caught provided they drank the alcohol in secret. Of the ten girls in the hut, eight participated in the drinking of alcohol. Menenhle laughed at them asking if they were scared of getting caught although they knew that the women were not going to enter the hut. I asked Menenhle why she was so certain that the women were not going to enter the hut and she explained that it would be seen as degrading for the women to hang out with the girls in the hut.

This ceremony was a space where the social hierarchy in Qondwa village became apparent. The heads of the households were the highest in rank. They were the first ones to be welcomed to the household and the ones who were served by the women and girls throughout the ceremony. The boys ranked second for they were welcomed by the girls and women after the men had been welcomed. They washed their hands after the men had washed their hands, and they were not of the same ranking as the men for they sat around a different tree away from the men. Third in rank were the women for they gave orders to the girls, and the girls were at the last ranking level, hence Menenhle’s explanation that the women would find it degrading to hang out with girls. The hierarchical structure in Qondwa village is a complex and fluid structure. For instance, a 20 year old sat with men as old as 70 because he had a wife and children and did not rely on financial assistance from his parents. Therefore he did not qualify as a boy. On the other hand, a man as old as 35 sat with boys as young as 13 because he lived with his mother and depended on her financially. In the hut that the girls occupied, there was a girl as old as 28 who lived with her parents, yet in the hut where the women cooked there was a woman who was 17 years old who lived with her husband financially independent of her parents.

This hierarchical structure worked to the advantage of the girls who wished to consume alcohol. They were confident that none of the women wished to hang out with the girls because of the pride in hierarchical positions. The two that did not take part in the drinking of alcohol were

referred to as the Mother Marys in the hut. Lethabo authoritatively stood on an empty crate of alcohol with her arms folded on her chest. The hut went quiet as soon as she did that and she proceeded to lay down the rules:

*‘Girls listen up. Those of you, who are taking part in these festivities here in the corner, be smart about it. Don’t get drunk stupid because then that is how all of us then get into trouble. Any mother Marys in here mind your own damn business otherwise we will make sure you never set foot in here again. We will fix you. So the rule is if you decide you want some ‘tea’ (alcohol) come with your mug to me. I’ll be sitting here in the corner, in charge of the teapot and I will pour some tea for you. You must not go out of the hut with that tea in your mug. Drink and finish it then you can go out there. There is also some toothpaste that I have that we should all take in our mouths so that the people out there won’t smell the tea on us when they talk to us. Thanks’.*

As she stepped down from the crate she added,

*‘By the way don’t be stupid about it. Don’t make a line of tea here. People must come get the tea individually. Don’t come in groups. And if anyone sees an adult person coming if you do see them just start singing the Mqomboti song and that will be the code that we need to be on our best behaviour’.*

As much as the girls were in their own space in the hut away from the women in the adjacent hut, they were in near proximity to the women. This is the reason why they had to be calculative about their behaviour. They needed to make sure that in order to avoid conflict with their parents/guardians, they displayed the behaviour expected of them which was to wash dishes and serve the men and boys when need be.

I stepped outside in time for Mama Linda to instruct me to tell the girls that the food dishes were ready for serving to the men and the boys. I relayed this information and all but Lethabo proceeded to the cooking hut in order to fetch the plates for serving. I was standing next to Thandiwe when one woman jokingly shouted, *‘This needs to all be over so that us real women can go and drink some of that beer.’* This statement was directed at us girls in a show off manner for we were not expected to drink alcohol. Thandiwe responded in an innocent manner, a pitch I had never heard. *‘Yes Mama how we wish to also grow up and be like you, married and respected, and able to drink alcohol!’* Us girls picked up the sarcasm in her tone for we

shared the joke. The woman laughed and responded, *'Wait your turn my child, I tell you now, there is nothing to alcohol. The next morning you wake up and you feel sick. Wait your turn'*. Thandiwe's response made me chuckle out loud out of disbelief, *'Ah Mama I would never want to be sick because of alcohol. I will just stay away from it'*. *'Good my child,'* was Mama Linda's response. As soon as she left, Thandiwe rolled her eyes in disbelief, *'Are adults that dumb or they choose to be naive?'* It was as if I had seen two completely different people in one person. I could not hold back my laughter as we walked towards the men to serve them their food.

After serving the food to the men, the women dished up for themselves and for their young babies that they had to feed. We then dished up last and as we dished I listened to the comments the women passed. *'I'm so tired from cooking all that fish that I cooked,'* which was a means of letting the others know that she had cooked the fish so as to fish for compliments. As expected the girls complimented her that the fish looked divine. We quickly dished and returned to the hut where almost everyone was headed to the corner of the teapot. *'Gosh (Goodness), can you imagine the number of dishes that we are going to have to wash now,'* exclaimed Sonti. *'I need to be drunk for that shit,'* said Mene as she asked Lethabo to pass her the teapot. As Lethabo poured the 'tea' in Menenhle's mug, she said to them, *'The Mozes are coming to town next weekend, and we need to have our act together. Also do you think we can fill Nyasha in on the Mozes, I'm guessing no one told her about the Mozes yet right?'* Buhle spoke and said, *'No she doesn't know anything about them.'* Just then Lethabo whispered that the two of us should eat on the veranda outside the hut.

### **5.3 The Mozes' Money**

We sat on the veranda and Lethabo asked me if the recorder I had placed in my brassier was still running. I told her that it was and she asked that I destroy the recorder after she had shared the information she wished to share. I assured her that I would after I had written up the data and she began talking as she munched on her fried chicken.

*'Ok so here is the thing. The Mozes are men from Mozambique that me, Mene, Lethabo, Buhle, and Sonti, hook up with every time they are in Nelspruit town for business. These are major business men in Mozambique they deal with farming stuff as you can see there is business in Malelane and Nelspruit for*

*farming and all that crap. So they come almost every two months and we meet up with them in Nelspruit for a weekend’.*

This information did not completely take me by surprise, for I spent much time with the girls and picked up on comments that they had made about the boys and men in Qondwa village, stating that they were not their calibre of boys and men. I was soon to find out exactly what calibre of men they entertained as Lethabo continued talking.

I asked her what the girls tell their parents in terms of where they are going for the weekend and her response was,

*‘They tell their parents that they are going to work on this farm as orange pickers and fumigators. It is true there is a farm just outside Malelane that does that every weekend. You just arrive and say that you need the money and if you are good enough you can work there all weekend if you are luckier you will be employed by the guy. So they tell them that that is where they are going because we now need to explain where we get money from (pauses as she looks to the sky). The fucked up thing Nyasha is that the same parents who ignored us when we were getting raped in their houses by their people, are the same parents who we take this money back to. Menenhle pays for her little sister’s primary school fees with the Mozes money, Buhle buys groceries and clothes for the whole damn household and I can go on and on. I wonder if they actually believe that their children are going to pick oranges at a farm. You can’t tell me that they are dumb enough to believe that from orange picking you can make that much money in just one weekend? And why would they go orange picking just once every two months? If they were really going orange picking wouldn’t they go every damn weekend cos that would be a source of income? I think they know very well that their daughters are up to something and they just choose to ignore it. And that is why I don’t have an ounce of respect for any goddamn adult here and that is why I can do what the hell I want with none of them telling me a word. They are all pathetic fakers’.*

This information threw me off guard for I had many more questions than I did before I had entered the field. I voiced this to Lethabo and said, *‘But I thought they said that a child is any person that they take care of? But now you are telling me that the girls are the ones who take care of the parents, so why do they call them children?’* Lethabo responded saying,



*'You are fucking clever Nyasha you figured this out pretty fast. Well the parents don't see it as they are being taken care of because remember I said that they come once every two months. So when they come obviously by the time they come back the money will be finished so the girls will still need money from their parents and that is why they are still seen as kids. Because they still ask for money and they still live with them'.*

Lethabo took a swig of her alcohol from the mug and explained further,

*'Look Nyasha these girls are not dumb about this. I have trained them well. They are securing their future and they need to be smart about it. Their parents cannot know that they get so much money, so they should not buy expensive clothes and all that stuff as you have seen they don't have much to show for the money that they make. It's all a strategy if the parents know how much they actually possess; they will make plans for that money. So I taught them how to save. I opened up bank accounts for them and they are saving a lot of money so that when they get stable jobs, they can easily move out with the money that they saved, buy or rent an apartment, buy furniture, clothes, all that stuff, and have nothing to do with these people. Just like me.*

I had underestimated the extent to which the girls had mastered leading double lives. Lethabo carried on explaining,

*'How do you explain the television set that is at Thandiwe's house? The kitchenware at Buhle's? Menenhle gets paid the most cos her lover thinks the world of her. He is actually in love with her but I keep telling her to keep her emotions in check cos these men are married and trust me they will never leave their wives for kids in a village. You know all those mother fucking people there don't work good jobs that make it possible to buy their kids the phones that they have. For crying out loud Nyasha, Thandiwe has a Samsung touch screen. The popular phone in the village is that Nokia thing that screeches whenever you touch a button. I know you had figured this out, you just needed proof.*

I asked Lethabo how much money they made in that one weekend, and she said,

*'Buhle gets R3000, Thandiwe R4000, Sonti R3000, Menenhle R5000 and I can get up to R10 000. It all depends on the Mozes (Mozambican man) and how much he really*

*likes your sex and how much he has that weekend. Come on now you tell me in a household where the average person who has a sad job like being a gardener earns R400, you can buy a television set with that? Of course it's the girls who do this for the sick households'.*

These facts distorted what I thought I had understood in the beginning of the fieldwork. From the data that I had gathered, the women made it clear that a child is any individual regardless of age, who is financially dependent on their parents. Therefore a female who is in this situation is a girl, and only transitions into a woman when financially independent. Thandiwe, Buhle and Menenhle were financially dependent on the Mozes, and contributed to household necessities using that money. Their parents depend on these girls financially from time to time therefore does that make the parents children in those circumstances? Are these girls actually women in the local sense of the term, for they largely contribute financially to their respective households? The meanings of childhood, girlhood and womanhood here were constantly shifting in ways that made my head spin.

It was midnight when we eventually finished washing all the dishes. Menenhle continuously filled up the teapot with alcohol making sure that it did not run dry at any given point. The girls in the hut were hilariously intoxicated. They tried to conceal this fact by constantly washing their faces at the tap outside so as to hide the red eye syndrome that develops from drinking alcohol. They also sucked on toothpaste in order to hide the smell of alcohol. The Mother Marys sat on the veranda outside the hut, not wishing to be a part of the drunkenness that was taking place in the hut. The slurring of words and increasing tone of voices gave away the fact that sobriety had flown out of the window. The drums were beating loudly where men had formed their own circle dancing rhythmically and powerfully chanting ancestral praises. The women together with the young girls formed their own circle of rhythmic dance. Some of the women were too drunk to notice that a few of us girls were missing from the circle although it was mandatory for us to be present. The dancing symbolised the celebrating of the great chief who had passed on, and those who were not dancing were to be seen as ungrateful for the services that he had rendered, as explained to me by Lethabo.

*'I can't wait for the Mozes!'* exclaimed intoxicated Menenhle who struggled to stand upright and resorted to holding on to the wall for balance. *'Shh!'* whispered Lethabo while she could barely hold back her laughter. *'Do you want a Moze, Nyasha!'* shouted Thandiwe from the corner where she guarded the tea pot jealously. *'Leave her out of this!'* said Lethabo as she

placed her finger on her lips. *'Don't try messing her up just because you are messed up!'* The statement *'Don't try messing her up just because you are messed up'*, illustrated how the girls wished they were not in such situations where they provided sexual services for financial gain. They were not proud of these activities, but saw it fitting against the backdrop of the poverty they grew up in. The time was approaching 3am. I was now exhausted and bored. I found being the only sober person in the group exhausting for I was now expected to look out for 'adults on the prowl for drunken children' as Thandiwe phrased it.

I must have fallen asleep for two hours, for I awoke at 5am as the sun was rising. All the girls that had been drinking alcohol slept on the floor in different corners. I returned to sleep and woke up at 11am when Mama Linda banged on our hut waking us up. *'Siyahambe ekaya (Let's go home to our houses!)'* As we dragged our feet to our respective households, I could not help but wonder how the girls effortlessly embraced both objective and subjective personhood. I also wondered if the parents were truly unaware of their children's secret behaviour, or whether they feigned ignorance. Did they believe that the money their girls regularly brought home was from the earnings they made from orange picking? Did they not question how one could afford a television set after one weekend of orange picking? My mind went further to question if they were truly unaware that some of the children suffered from child abuse in their own households? My mind buzzed with all these questions as Lethabo ran to catch up with me for I was a few feet ahead of her. *'Hey,'* she said, *'you want to come to Nelspruit with us next weekend? You will enjoy yourself!'*

#### **5.4 Headed For the Mozes**

Again I postponed my trip to go visit my supervisor in Pretoria, for this was an opportunity to observe the girls in a space away from their parents and guardians. It was an opportunity to observe how they negotiated and contested personhood in a space with their 'partners' as they termed them. I made it clear to Lethabo that if I was to join them on their escapade; she was not going to attempt to pair me up with one of the Mozes for I was not interested in any partnering with any of them. I also made it clear to her that I was to use my own finances during that weekend, and that I did not wish for any of the men to spend their money on me lest they find it an opportunity to propose sexual relations. She promised that she would make it clear to the men that I was 'off limits'.

That week could not go any slower, for I was so excited to be a part of the escapade. On the Friday morning Menenhle, Thandiwe, Buhle and I met at Qondwa taxi rank so as to head to

Nelspruit city which is a two hour drive from Qondwa village. *'Guys the Mozes can't meet us wearing these hideous things. Let's stop in Malelane city first and get changed in one of those nice toilets and then we can take the taxi from Malelane to go to Nelspruit. Nyasha there is no need for you to change because you already are dressed nicely,'* said Menenhle as she eyed me from head to toe. I was dressed in a long blue sleeveless dress, at the disapproval of Mama Lucillah who expressed that my arms were uncovered. I assured her that I would throw over a shawl, as I left her household. I wondered if Menenhle was not particularly pleased with my presence among the Mozes for her comments that day suggested that she experienced me as a threat. Perhaps she feared that her partner would take sexual interest in me, and not her. I responded to Menenhle nonchalantly, *'Girl I don't need to dress up for those men, I dress up for my man back home in Zimbabwe,'* as I winked. She visibly relaxed her shoulders as they were tense and laughed, *'Yeah good'*

We embarked on the taxi that was headed to Malelane city where we then went to the public toilets located in the service station next to the taxi rank. *'Hurry up girls we must not keep the men waiting. Nyasha the recorder in your bra (brassiere) makes you look like you have big boobs (breasts),'* said Thandiwe as she walked briskly towards the toilets. *'Is that a problem my love?'* I asked smiling and she responded in a shrug. Again I thought that these girls were not happy with the fact that Lethabo had invited me to hang out with their men. The recorder that I kept in my bra for easy keeping was a problem for Thandiwe for she thought that the men would find big breasts more appealing than smaller breasts. They continued into the service station and headed for the toilets where they ripped open their bags and changed into revealing, seductive clothes. Menenhle had the most revealing outfit which complimented her curvy shaped hips and her light in complexion toned legs. She changed from her grey cotton sweat pants and white plain tee-shirt which was complimented by white sneakers, into a plain black tight fitting short skirt. She wore a yellow V-neck vest which revealed her cleavage. Her golden sandals showed off her well-manicured toes in black nail polish. She tied her braids into a bun and decorated her ears with black earrings that were in the shape of chandeliers. She effortlessly applied red lipstick and sprayed sweet smelling cologne. Thandiwe changed from a pair of loose fitting blue jeans which she wore with a black shirt. She changed into a black and white striped dress that reached her knees. She complimented this dress by placing a black and white bangle on her wrist. She too sprayed cologne which smelled like apple juice. Buhle wore blue denim shorts that defined her big buttocks and showed the dimples on her thighs. She wore a white vest which also showed her cleavage like Menenhle's and further drew attention to her

cleavage by wearing a sparkling necklace. I definitely appeared the odd one in the group in terms of style of dress, and remembered how Menenhle had discouraged me from changing out of the clothes I wore for she was definitely appearing more fashionable than I was.

We rushed back to the taxi rank with the aim of catching a taxi that was headed to Nelspruit. We attracted attention from people because of the manner in which the girls were dressed. One woman commented that *'You kids of today (younger generation) look at you, you are just a disappointment to what we wanted you to be.'* That comment illustrates the objective personhood of children which vocal Menenhle challenged by stating, *'Don't be jealous. We know you wished that you looked like us. And you are just scared that we are going to take your husband's!'* A group of vendors overheard Menenhle's comment and jeered at her in disappointment. As we approached the taxi that was headed to Nelspruit, the taxi driver passed a comment to Thandiwe saying, *'I want to make you my wife you beautiful creature.'* Thandiwe politely greeted him and ignored his comment as she took her seat at the back of the taxi.

None of the girls carried out any conversation with me while we were in the taxi. Whenever I attempted to speak to one of the girls, the response would be short and snappy. I wondered if I underestimated the extent to which the girls were unhappy with my presence around their 'partners'. Lethabo eagerly welcomed us to Nelspruit as we disembarked the taxi. The girls pulled Lethabo away from me and carried out a private conversation. Fifteen minutes later Lethabo walked towards me and said,

*'Ok so here is the thing Nyasha, I'll be honest with you. I hadn't discussed with the girls if they cool (comfortable) with you coming with us to chill (hang out) with the Mozes. They obviously don't want me to tell you this cos they said that I should make up an excuse like there is no more space at the hotel that we will be staying, but I know you are not dumb enough to believe that. They kind of feel like the men will like you and they will compare them to you and obviously you will win.'*

I asked her what 'win' meant here and she said,

*'They feel like because your English is polished, and you are probably the most beautiful person to come visit this side of the earth (areas in and surrounding Qondwa) they feel that the men will pay them no mind. Basically you are a*

*threat and so you need to be eliminated. I should have asked them first but yeah they are not happy’.*

I placed myself in the shoes of the girls and I understood their predicament. For the first time in my fieldwork I had been denied access and found no possible manner to negotiate this access. The girls had been comfortable with me when they saw no ‘threat’ but where there was cause for concern such as this situation, access was denied. I wondered if also my position as a researcher also threw them off because they feared that I would expose more than they wished I would. ‘Bye Nyasha,’ waved the girls as they headed towards a blue Audi motor vehicle. Lethabo mouthed the word ‘sorry’ as she headed in the same direction. I assumed one of the Mozes had come to fetch them, to take them to their destination where the secrets held in that space would not be revealed to me.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This ethnography of childhood and childhood sexuality in Qondwa village proved to be what I term a rollercoaster escapade. I embarked on this journey with suppositions of the journey for instance the notion that all participants above the age of 18 were adults, when this clearly was not the case. I quickly learnt that I had to preamp what I thought I knew including some of the ethics that I was expected to abide by in the department of Anthropology and Archaeology.

Throughout Chapter 1, I argue that the realities of fieldwork in some cases were in sharp contrast to theory and ethics that I learnt before embarking on fieldwork leaving a many dilemmas. I refer constantly to Bernard's (1996) *Qualitative and Quantitative methods of fieldwork*. Here I discuss the tools that are presented prior entering the field. I then continue to provide accounts of how my experiences in the field either needed me to negotiate some of the ethics or completely discard them. This does not mean that I did not abide by ethics in the field; it means that some of the ethics were not recognised in the field. By doing so, I already entered into a dilemma with the Ethics Board which largely goes by the theoretic requirements of field presentations.

I discuss the dilemma of entering into the field with well-structured questionnaires. Indeed I went into the field with many copies of the questionnaires that I had allocated for the different groups that I anticipated to interact with. [Those pre-constructed questionnaires remained in my folder throughout the time that I spent in the field for various reasons.

Only after hanging out in the field did I realise that social and biological understandings in the village were different from my own understandings based on socialisation. For example, the very definition of a child, which is the crux of the research, is different from what I had pre-understood what a child to be. The definition of a child that I ascribed in the pre-constructed questionnaire was banked on the legal definition of a child which is that of any person under the age of 18. However, as findings illustrate in Qondwa village a child is any person who is under the care of a parent or guardian, regardless of age. With this in mind, in the questionnaire that I had constructed prior entering the field, a question phrased as '*How many children do you have,*' would have been understood in the local term of the word child, whereas I would have interpreted it differently. This would have been a case of misrepresentation of data. This is where the beauty of simply hanging out in the field brings

about the local pair of eyes compared to questionnaires and surveys. Hanging out presents opportunities of different angles to present themselves. Hanging out with my host mother is what made me quickly realise this particular definition of a child in Qondwa village, which only later made it possible for me to construct a questionnaire which would then confirm this notion and carry it through.

Following the issue of questionnaires, is the issue of informed consent. Rightly so especially due to the sensitivity of the topic, I was required to enter the field with written informed consent. These consent forms explained the research scope and requirements from participants. These consent forms were on a University of Pretoria letterhead, with signatures of my supervisor, my signature as the researcher and below there was a space for the participant's signature after having agreed to all that was written in the consent form.

Indeed I presented these consent forms in my initial focus group where challenges cropped up. Firstly, half of the participants were illiterate. Although the consent forms were also translated into SiSwati, the fact that some participants were illiterate the language presented did not make a difference. I negotiated this dilemma by verbally the research and the requirements from participants. Participants showed their willingness to participate by a show of hands, and on rare occasions those that were not willing to participate freely excused themselves from the sessions. .

Also, the presentation of the consent forms seemed to have some participants at unease. Some participants expressed that they were too lazy to read all that was written on the one page consent form, and others exclaimed awe at the information that the letterhead presented. The 'presence' of University of Pretoria in the remote area made some of the participants feel that they had to voice the 'right' opinions for the sake of providing what they thought was right information for the University of Pretoria the right things because of whom the research was for. All of a sudden I no longer was just a researcher in Qondwa village; I was now a representative of a prestigious university which in such instances prompted changes in behaviour and demeanour in my presence. This definitely affected the kind of information that was shared with me. This posed to be a problem with those participants that I had not formed strong rapport with.



Perhaps consent forms in the structured sense of it, are efficient for certain spaces for research. For example, a researcher entering a corporate space will have to follow rigid organisational protocol. . Some of the participants were less than concerned about what the research entailed. The fact that after every session there was a serving of juice and biscuits was enough to arouse their interest in participating.

Another dilemma I constantly toyed with was deception versus indulging in actions that favoured one to receive information that one would have otherwise not have received. Some have argued that the fact that I pretended to be comfortable in a rural setting when I actually had a difficult time adjusting, was a form of deception. However, what good would have me displaying my uncomfortable state had?

There is a common saying in anthropology which says that you should live as they live and eat as they eat. For an individual like myself that has always lived life as middle class citizen, I had to feign confidence in the rural setting. The reason I decided to pretend as if I was comfortable with bathing in a dish, dry bathing, using a toilet that does not flush or living in a one roomed bedroom is because I figured if I was blatant to my host mother that I was not comfortable, she would have had a hard time accommodating me. She had already apologised about having to house me in a place that she thought was not as posh as she would have wanted me to have stayed in.

This dilemma appears regarding the use of financial incentive throughout the research. Money allocated by SanParks was strictly budgeted. I was expected to account for every rand that was spent in the field. I also carried with me personal money which I could spend without having to account for the amount spent. Financial incentive and financial assistance boundaries were however blurred a couple of times For instance, how was I to turn a blind eye to the fact that my host mother expressed that t she would introduce me to her friends if only I bought school shoes for her children? I without second thoughts bought the shoes for the children that were in need for the shoes and as a result she then introduced me to her friends who then made up a big part of my research, not because of the fact that I was to then meet my host's friends. The fact that her children walked to school barefoot touched me emotionally, making it easy for me to decide to meet the requirements that were set by my host mother. Whether these blurred gestures fall under financial incentive or financial assistance is debateable. Moving on to the ethics regarding sexuality, I had to state in my Masters proposal, that if I stumbled upon cases of child sexual abuse, I had to follow official

reporting procedures at the village. Indeed, I came across a couple of child sexual abuse however not once did I mention this to police or any elders for a couple of reasons that I quickly learnt in the field. Firstly the issue of child sexual abuse in the villages more of an open secret in Qondwa Village. Most people are aware of the instances that happen and as explained by Lethabo has slowly become a norm. There are reasons as to why people in the village do not report these cases that they are aware that occur rampantly. I was quietly warned by one Peace Corps volunteer that I engaged in conversation with frequently at the crisis centre. Peace Corps is an American based volunteering organisation which dispatches individuals to areas that are in need social assistance. She shared with me how one year a Peace Corps volunteer reported child sexual abuse that frequently occurred in the homestead that she spent most of her time. Within two weeks of reporting the case, she was murdered by villagers and the belief is that the villagers blamed her for the arrest of the father who was abusing his daughter. I asked her how best to handle such issues and she advised that I do not head to the official police, rather secretly express concern to the director at the Crisis Centre. She highlighted the fact that villagers did not take kindly to outsiders who ‘meddled’ in their sensitive social issues such as child sexual abuse also cautioned against me thinking that I was totally welcome in the community and that alerting such things even at the centre could possibly produce dangerous consequences.

This however took an emotional toll on me to the point where I had to attend a couple of therapy sessions at the crisis centre, because I felt helpless. I knew some of the toddlers that my host mother pointed out as victims of sexual abuse but I was unable to rescue them from the situations.

A glaring concern in chapter 2 is the lack of ethnographic studies on Qondwa Village itself, and the minimal discussions of childhood experiences in Africa from an anthropological perspective. This issue made it complex to place Qondwa in a literature context. I managed to provide a geographical history of Qondwa in terms of the formation of Bantustans to the current geographical setting of Qondwa itself. Here I narrated a history as to how Qondwa began as a part of a Bantustan to its current socio geographic placement.

The theory of personhood anchors my argument that there is no universal meaning of childhood and no universal experience of childhood sexuality. Further along in Chapter 2, I drew upon the works of Fortes (1969), Karp (1995), Kratz (2000) and Salo (2004), who discuss personhood not as a fixed notion, as a constantly negotiated, contested and redefined

notion through social interactions meaning this notion of personhood and agency differs cross-culturally (Salo 2004:28). Karp (1995) importantly outlines how personhood cannot only be analysed through subjective lenses or objective lenses, but from both perspectives.

Keeping in mind the complexities of personhood, I sought to illustrate how the notion of personhood differs cross-culturally by discussing several ethnographies carried out by anthropologists regarding the diversities of personhood. Ethnographic comparisons of Margaret Mead (1961) who discusses Samoan children, Kamugisha (1994) who narrates on childhood in a Tanzanian village, Swazi personhood by Kuper (1963) and Bray (2010) illustrate the multi-faceted experiences of childhood and sexuality. . The minimal ethnographies of childhood made it possible for me to contribute to this body of knowledge by extending to childhood in Qondwa.

.Margaret Mead's (1961) research focuses on the rites of passage that mark the child's entry into adulthood in Tau, Samoa. Here a girl does not receive recognition as a visible person with agency and responsibility until she is married, similar to the findings in Qondwa village. Before marriage the girls, are defined as silent, insignificant social actors, as persons-in-becoming (Mead 1961:16-17).

This however does not mean that children are passive participants or unknowledgeable of their sexuality. Mead (1961) learnt just how educated and informed the children were about sex and sexuality. For instance, self-masturbation by boys as well as girls is considered a norm which generally began at the age of six. Boys between six and twelve years of age would self-masturbate in groups of friends. Mead suggests that at this age, masturbation may be considered innocent sexual experimentation (Mead 1961:96). In as much as these illustrations do not illustrate openness about sex in terms of dialogue the exchange of sexual innuendos and suggestive behavior between adults that children observed (Mead 1961:96). Subjective personhood which is the experienced realities of the children here holds contrary to the expectations held by the adults in the community.

Chapter 2 continues to compare different contexts of childhood and childhood sexuality illustrating the complexities of these. These comparisons are then buffed even further by the data that I collected in the field in the context of Qondwa childhood and childhood sexuality. Chapter 3 aimed to confer how meanings of childhood are socially constructed in Qondwa village. I carried this task out so by exploring whether children are acknowledged as social persons and what, if any, socially recognised agency is ascribed to them. What was interesting

was how the term child appeared synonymous to the term girl. The focus group discussions that I held with the adults were centered around the expectations that adults had of girls, and in this chapter I toyed with different angles as to why this was so.

What stood out in this chapter were the disparities in terms of what childhood. The objective facet of personhood of children is defined by financial independence regardless of age. This was the pivotal point where it dawned on me that although in my ethics proposal I stated that I would not include children in my fieldwork, it was inevitable that in this objective local sense of the term, children were definitely going to make up a huge sector of my participants.

Having clarified how age does not determine childhood, Mama Thuli focused on the style of dress that is expected of girls. She focused on how girls are not expected to dress in a revealing manner as a sign of respect towards males yet my initial question had not been gender specific. Additionally when I probed about the expectations the women hold for children, specific attention was on how the girls are expected to be obedient to orders and instructions. The ability to diligently perform chores in the household was another expectation that focused on girls. Only when probed further and asked what expectations are there for the boys, the responses focused on how boys are expected to fix items around the house. I thought it worthy of note that when I communicated the term ‘child’ here, the delivered term to the informants appeared to be the term ‘girl.’

Hanging out with the girls showed a sharp contrast between the objective and subjective personhood of children in Qondwa village. Buhle, Thandiwe and Menenhle were irritated by the fact that they were expected by their parents to wear full clothing in the heat. These irritations led to the constant negotiations of personhood. The girls wore clothes that they were comfortable in depending on the spaces that they occupied at particular times and occasions. When they were in the adult spaces, they dressed accordingly so as to avoid conflict.

Chapter 3 went on to discuss how sexually, children are not expected to be knowledgeable or active agents however the visit to the tavern with the girls in chapter 4 was a representation of subjective personhood. Subjective personhood of ‘children’ was embodied at the tavern by suggestive dressing, sexually provocative dancing, and sexually heated altercations.

Lethabo’s narration of how she was introduced to sex, revealed a whole different dynamic of childhood sexuality that can be experienced in Qondwa village. She explains how like herself,

some children in Qondwa village experienced abuse from their households, and that is how they acquired knowledge about sex. She angrily states how the irony is that adults pretend that children are not knowledgeable, or are supposed to be ignorant about sex when the same adults are aware of the abuse that happens in the household. Here I discuss the several dynamics and factors regarding child sexual abuse including definitions and attempted explanations given regarding these.

The revelation of the ‘Mozes’, the rich men from Mozambique that Lethabo and the girls had sexual relations for monetary gain, brought about an interesting twist to the whole journey of seeking the meanings of childhood and childhood sexuality. This is the moment that it was made clear to me that in fact, these girls who were considered children, were actually the ones that brought in money to the households. This ‘bread winning’ was disguised under the job of picking and fumigating oranges on one of the nearby plantations. Due to the objective personhood, the girls had to conceal the means in which they were able to contribute financially to their households. The anger again in Lethabo’s voice was how the adults in the households pretended as if they were convinced that the money was from the piece job of orange picking, when it would be unrealistically achievable. I then ended with the question of if we were to adopt the local meaning of the term child as expressed by the adults, who really are the children in this case? If the girls are contributing largely to the households through these Mozes, then are they not independent of their parents and guardians to a large extent, and are the parents and guardians not dependent on the girls making them the children?



: Lethabo and I last day of fieldwork

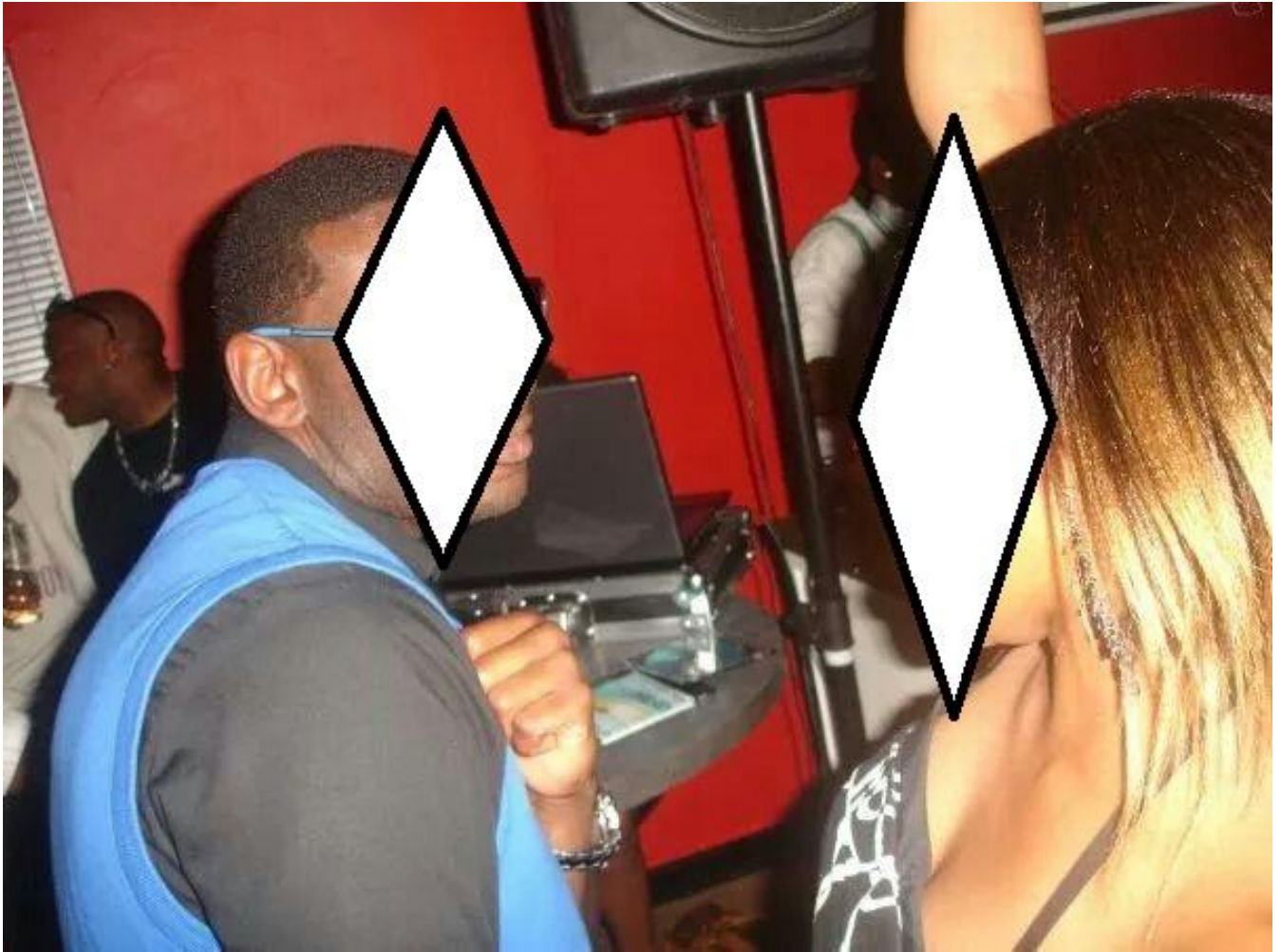


Menenhle and I before a church service



Menenhle and Thandiwe at a club





Thandiwe and a friend in club



Lethabo's friend and I



Crisis Centre team

*IN LOVING MEMORY OF*



*ELAINE ROSA SALO*

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