Umemulo and Zulu girlhood: From preservation to variations of ukuhlonipha nokufihla (respect and secrecy)

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

at

Rhodes University

by

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NOVEMBER 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“I stood at the border, stood at the edge and claimed it as central. l claimed it as central, and let the rest of the world move over to where I was.”

— Toni Morrison

Thokozani boGogo namaKhehla, boMlondo oNhlangothi.BoMshengu oDonga lamavuso. BoHhashi Elimhlophe likaMbaqanga nani boNzima oMuna. Kuthokoza igodwana lenu uMaMntambo. Thokoza Gogo Nomeva. Thokoza Gamelihle. My dearest friend Khanyisile Melanie Mboya, I stayed in school, friend. My beloved mother, Gamelihle Mehatabel Thandekile MaMntambo Mpangase, who was the inspiration behind this thesis. I am grateful that while both of you are no longer with me in this world, you continue to guide me.

Standing at the border, standing at the edge and claiming that it is central is the work of Black and African women all over the world. All our projects are personal and political, if we don't theorise ourselves and our experiences - we will always be understood through someone else's skewed lens. I would like to acknowledge all the black women who have come before me, who have laid the foundation for me to be able to do this kind of work at a HWI. Continue to stand on the edge and sure enough we will move to where you are.

To my supervisor, Dr Siphokazi Magadla. I am in awe. Constantly in awe of your work ethic, passion and intellectualism - *nihlakaniphile Sisi*. I would not have done this project with anyone else, I am grateful for the journey with you. *MaDzana, Khatsini, Mncwabe, Swazi olude, Mwelase, ndiyabulela,* may we feminist together for a long long time. *Makwande!!*

To the women who so openly participated in this study, thank you for agreeing to talk to me, to teach me and to listen to me. I hope I have captured your stories as you would have captured them for yourselves. It is my joy and honour to do this kind of work that tells the story of Zulu womanhood as seen by Zulu women themselves.

To my community, made up of friends, family and chosen family. My Gran; Rev. Sethembile Magubane, my aunt; Sizakele Magubane, and my Dad, the love of my life - Dumisani Mpangase, this is it. Mbongeni Allan Magubane, *ngiyabonga kakhulu sthandwa sami,* for opening up your home to me and for carrying me through the darkest time of my life. *Kwande Nkomose!!*. Lihle Ngcobozi, Colleta Simungu, Khanyisa Nomoyi, Nasipi Mtsi, Lieketso Gogo Mapitsi Mohoto, Aus Dr Mathe Ntsekhe, Slindile Ngcobo, Esihle Qangule, Shingi Mtero and Vhonani Petla (and others who I have not mentioned but hold in my heart), *angazi ngiyonibonga ngani.* Thank you for listening to all the crazy ideas and helping me think through them - *unkuunkulu wenza u1 mhla engiphanina.* I would not have gotten through this without you.

To the community of young black feminists we have created between Mandela University and UCKAR, I am grateful for your critical ear. Special thanks to Dr Babalwa Magoqwana and Professor Nomalanga Mkhize for constantly fostering a radical learning environment.

To Ndapwa Alweendo, thank you so much for taking the time to read and edit this thesis. Your work was just impeccable.

I am grateful to the Mellon Foundation for their support and to the staff at the research office from Jaine Roberts to Nwabisa Mkosana for the opportunity. As well as the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung for their continued support.

Thokozani, Camagu, Makwande.

DEDICATION

for Gamelihle Mehatabel Thandekile MaMntambo Mpangase

My beloved. My first love. Forever.

Abstract

This study examines evolving definitions of ***ukuziphatha kahle*** that historically relied on the preservation of virginity for Zulu girls, who participate in the ***umemulo*** ceremony that marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood. It examines notions of Zulu girlhood as understood through preservation - ***ukugcina isibaya sikaBaba*** - and through respectability and secrecy - ***ukuhlonipha nokufihla***. The study analyses how conceptions of ***ukuziphatha kahle*** (good behavior) have evolved in the context of sexual rights in the performance of Zulu girlhood. It is located in the interdisciplinary literature of global girlhood studies, and African feminist lenses of womanhood and rites of passages. The study draws from 26 interviews with Zulu women who have gone through ***umemulo***, elder women who facilitate virginity testing and ***umemulo***; and female relatives of women who have gone through ***umemulo*** in Estcourt, Wembezi, Paapkalius Fountain, Ntabamhlophe and Cornfields in KwaZulu-Natal. This thesis contextualises ***umemulo*** and ***ukuziphatha kahle*** (good behaviour) in democratic South Africa. ***Umemulo*** is a ritual done for a Zulu girl whose behaviour is deemed to be good. While this is clear, what constitutes ***ukuziphatha kahle*** (good behaviour) is contested. On stricter terms, ***ukuziphatha kahle*** means to be ***intombi nto*** (a virgin). The interviews with women who went through ***umemulo*** show that most of them were not virgins at the time of the ritual. The elder and younger women expressed that ***ukuziphatha kahle*** for them goes beyond the girl's virginity. Instead, they understand it as a girl who does not have a child, and who has shown respect and obedience to her parents and elders. Strikingly, the study shows an inter-generational collusion between the younger and elder women, who maintain the outward appearance of virginity of the girls who participate in ***umemulo***. The study argues that there are variations of ***ukuhlonipha*** (respect), which in the rights context of democratic South Africa overlap into ***ukufihla*** (secrecy). Importantly, it is clear that the concept of being a good Zulu womanhood holds and remains important for Zulu girls and women. However, the ways in which Zulu women experience and perform this is complex. The findings show that while many Zulu girls want to be seen as performing accepted good Zulu womanhood, they do so in ways that allow them to enjoy their sexual rights and pleasure. This is not a tension.

IsiZulu words used in the study:

Abahlolwayo: girls and women who participate in virginity testing

Emgonqweni: seclusion

Emhlangeni: Reed ceremony

Esigcawini: open field used for traditional dancing

Imikhokha emibi: bad behavior or habits / generational curses

Isithunzi: dignity

Intombi nto: a virgin

Izimpelesi: age mates

oGogo: elder women, a term used to show seniority and respect to these women.

oNomahhoyi: the girls participating in ***umemulo*** (the girl whose ***Umemulo*** it is and her age mates)

Ukucimela: process of inviting family to the ***umemulo*** ceremony, where girls receive gifts

Ukugcina isibaya sika baba: protecting your father's kraal / preserving one’s virginity

Ukugida: traditional dancing

Ukuhlolwa: virginity texting

Ukuphanta: to hustle

Ukuziphatha kahle: good behavior

Ukuyalwa: elder council

Ukuhlonipha: to be respectful or respectability

Ukufihla: secrecy

Umama oqotho: an honourable or dignified woman

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Umemulo – Context and Process

This study seeks to examine evolving definitions of *ukuziphatha kahle* (good behavior) that historically relied on the preservation of virginity for Zulu girls who participate in the *umemulo* ceremony that marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood. This study examines notions of good Zulu girlhood as understood through preservation and variations of *ukuhlonipha nokufihla* (respect and secrecy). Broadly, the study seeks to examine the ways in which women's claim to sexual rights and freedom has reconfigured dominant ideas of socio-culturally defined Zulu girlhood in post-apartheid South Africa.

Umemulo is a ceremony that Zulu girls perform to signal and symbolise their entry to womanhood. *Ukwemula* refers to the public recognition of a woman's marriageable status. As Magwaza (2001:33) notes, it is a custom that must be done before a girl marries; older women sit down (throughout the process) with the girl and her age mates, and teach them about being a Zulu girl, a woman and a mother (Msimang, 1975:248). This process is called *ukuyalwa* (elder council). Krige (1965) notes that *umemulo* is the second ceremony of a girl's life after puberty following *umgonqo* (the seclusion of the girl). In more recent times, *umemulo* is performed when a girl "has either finished her university studies - her graduation party is held on the same day with the *umemulo*, or it is done when a girl has reached twenty-one years of age, or just before she gets married or when her lover's people have indicated their wish to lobola her" (Magwaza, 2001: 29-30).

One of the requirements for a girl who wishes to *ukwemula* is adherence to socially approved ideas about good behaviour - *ukuziphatha kahle*. The ceremony is not done for *umuntu ongaziphethe kahle* (a person who has not demonstrated good behaviour) (Magaza, 2001; Msimang, 1975). Among amaZulu, *ukuhlonipha* (to be respectful) is important in personhood construction (Zungu, 2008:179). In the context of *umemulo, ukuhlonipha* is reflected in multiple ways:; firstly, in respect for the elders; secondly, in listening to parent's advice on how to conduct oneself; thirdly, in not

having children before marriage, and lastly, in general obedience (Magwaza, 2001:35, Msimang, 1975:246). Zungu (2008:5) argues that ***ukuhlonipha*** is socially engineered to bind women in ways not observed to bind men (see also Rudwick and Shange, 2011; Ntsimane, 2007).

To be a 'good' Zulu woman, the construction and performance of womanhood must include ***ukuhlonipha*** for it determines marriageability as well as ability to occupy spaces. As noted by Zungu (2008) and Ntsimane (2007), ***ukuhlonipha*** is a concept that women must strictly adhere to, and women have laboured in sustaining a generational code of respect among family and community members in the interests of producing communities that perform respect, integrity and dignity (Motsemme, 2011:113). The notion of ***umama oqotho*** (an upright/dignified/honourable woman), "captures the embodied characteristics of township's mothers and daughter's philosophies, moralities and aesthetics of ukuhlonipha" (Motsemme, 2011:113). As the findings in this thesis will show, being a good Zulu girl is what allows the girl to transition into being umama oqotho (an honourable or dignified woman).

Traditionally, one of the main ways to reflect ***ukuziphatha kahle*** is that ***umuntu kufanele abe yintombi nto*** (the girl must be a virgin). This signifies that the girl has respected her body (Makambaonline, 2015, Sithole, 2015:2). The importance of virginity is upheld in discourse and in the process of ***umemulo***. The girl is required to publicly go through tests that prove that she is ***intombi nto*** (a virgin). These tests include jumping over a fire without getting burnt, wearing ***umhlwehlwe*** (cow fat or stomach lining) without it tearing or falling off, or ***ukuhlaba umkhonto ungawi*** (to throw the spear without it falling) (Msimang, 1975). Not fulfilling these steps would publicly constitute failure to comply with what it means to be a good Zulu girl and woman. It is made clear throughout the interviews that Zulu girls still buy into performing good girlhood. The thesis will show that elder Zulu women help young girls maintain this performance of good girlhood. Therefore, the project of performing good Zulu girlhood is an inter-generational one.

The process of ***umemulo*** is facilitated by ***oGogo***, elder women, in the community who are the custodians of Zulu culture and how it interacts with girlhood and womanhood. ***oGogo*** also facilitate virginity testing and, specifically with ***umemulo***, help the families ensure that all the involved rituals and customs are upheld.

Due to the scarcity of literature that describes the various steps of *umemulo*, I draw on my findings to explain how elder women facilitate the process and the symbolic role of songs during the different stages of it.

1.2 The Process of Umemulo

During the practice emgonqweni, uGogo uMaDladla explains to the family what needs to be done at what stage of *umemulo*. She explains throughout the practice, where the girls learn *ukugida nokucula* - what songs are appropriate for which occasion, as well as the rituals or customs performed on the day of the ceremony. She explains that there are different songs for different parts of the ceremony – *awokubonga, isigekle, umayinceke nawokugida*. The songs tell us where we are in the process.

Amaculo okubonga (songs of appreciation/thankfulness) express thankfulness and gratitude to the girl's parents for the gift of *umemulo*. Emphasis is placed on the father. The gift of *umemulo* is given to a girl by her father. This emphasis on the girl's father can also be seen in the rhetoric of *ukugcina isibaya sikaBaba* (which loosely translates to having preserved yourself and therefore your father's kraal). *Isigekle* is for entertainment, *amaculo aneStep* are those songs sung to entertain the crowd so that they come forward and give the young women money in order to show their appreciation.

Umayinceke is probably the most important part of *umemulo*. This is where *kuhlatshwa umkhonto, ukuma nokuwa komkhonto, nokungadabuki komhlwehlwe* (the spear is thrown, whether it falls or not or whether the cow fat tears or not) which is what confirms for the elders and the community that *uyintombi nto* (the girl is a virgin). If one passes this test, celebrations follow (*kuyagidwa kuculwe*). Gogo MaNdlovu ends the practice session *ngokuyala izintombi* (by counseling the girls). She also makes the distinctions between the types of *ukuziphatha kahle*. The first being someone who has preserved their virginity (*ozigcinile*), and secondly, someone who has not had a child. She then notes that both these women can have *umemulo* if their parents choose to do this for them but that the process is slightly different. She acknowledges that *umemulo* wakwaDlamini at this point is for girls who have adhered to the latter form of *ukuziphatha kahle*.

The girls enter into *umgonqo*, a process of seclusion which includes *ukuyalwa*, and practising *ukugida noMayinceke*. Often the elder women emphasise that the girls

do not want to be embarrassed on the day, and so they must practise every day. Moreover, the girls must speak softly, *bazothe*. Men are not allowed into the room. Where they expect to see male relatives, they should cover themselves with a blanket when going outside. *Kuyazothwa emgonqweni, akumele ube uvanzi* (one must be dignified during seclusion) because anything you do *usemgonqweni uzodlula* (you will overdo it, forever).

1.2. 1. Amaculo okubonga (Songs of appreciation/thankfulness)

1. "Siyamthanda mntakababa awungibongele kubaba, ngalento angenzele yona.
   Uthi Ntokela, weMngabi omuhle ngiyabonga ngakho konke.
   Ayabonga mntakamama awungibongele kumama,ngalento angenzele yona.
   Uthi weMlondo, Nhlangothi omuhle ngiyabonga ngakho konke"

2. Ngiyabonga bazalibami ngokungigcine na usiko lwami nje
   Ngiyabonga bazali bami ngokungigcinela usiko lwami nje
   Owami uMama unjengentombi, unjengentombi ziphelele nj
   Repeat

3. UBaba uthi angimule (Wemama uye).
   Ngiyasisaba isidwaba (Wemama uye).
   Repeat

4. WeBaba wami (Baba wami)
   Awu Baba wami (Baba wami)
   WeBaba wami, wangisiza wangimulisa.

   Wangijabisela isithazami. Abanomona.

   WeBaba wami, wangisiza wangimulisa

5. Abanomona balayekile (Heshe!)
   Bebethi umcimbi awukho la (Heshe!)
   Bebethi umcimbi uhlehlile. Wozani nizosibona (Shindindi Heshe!)

These songs are about saying thank you to your parents for the gift that is *umemulo*, an expression of appreciation to parents *ngokukukhulisa kahle* (for raising you well). Most of the songs specifically mention *uBaba*, the girl's father as *umemulo* historically has been a gift from him. Some songs speak to umona (jealousy), of either other girls or other families in the community. There is a type of public 'call out' of those who wish you bad luck.

The first time the *onomahoyi*, the name used to refer to the girl whose *umemulo* it is and her age mates going through the process with her, are seen publicly is for

umhlonyane. This is a rite of passage that precedes *umemulo*, which acknowledges that the girl has started menstruation. It is sometimes done when the girl is much younger. *Umhlonyane ugidelwa ebalini* (the ritual is done in the home) in the presence of family and community, after which the girls go back into seclusion. For this day, a goat is slaughtered, accompanied by *umqombothi* (maize/sorghum beer). This is usually done in conjunction with *nokubikwa komemulo emusamu*, which is informing the ancestors about *umemulo,* done one or two days before *umemulo*. The principle is that *kuyabikwa anduba kwenziwe umsebenzi*, it is a time and space where the metaphysical and physical acknowledge that indeed *kuyenzeka obekufiswa* (what is willed is being done). This would not be the first time that ancestors would be told about the ceremony. It would have been done months in advance while *umemulo* is still a desire or a wish, to ask the ancestors to help make this wish come true and to ask that the planning process be made a smooth process.

1.2.2. Keeping, discarding and romantic declarations

The day before the ceremony is festive. *Abafana bashaya indlamu, amantombazane ayasina*, there is a gathering of the community to eat and wait for the next morning. At this point *intombazane emulayo nezipelesi zakhe* are still secluded. They are moved into a larger room, so as to allow for *ukugida nokulinda* in their presence. They sit behind reed mats to maintain their seclusion and come out one by one to eat *insonyama* (a specially chosen meat taken out from the chest of the cow). *Insonyama* is a part of the cow that the young women must eat. It is accompanied by a 'game', which basically requires one to cut a piece of meat and throw it away, and then repeat the gesture and eat the second piece. The former goes along with you saying out loud who or what you are throwing away and the latter who or what you choose to keep in your life. "*Ngiyamusika usibanbani ngiyamulahla, ngiyamusika usibanbani ngiyamudla*". This symbolises the closing of one chapter and an opening of the next. At the Dlamini's home, Nondu (one of the interviewees) 'cut' a piece for her family and ate it, for myself *ngasika uMah ngamudla* (I cut a piece for my mother and ate it).

Often, the day before the ceremony is where romantic love is declared for whoever it is *omsike wamudla* (that you 'cut' and ate). Some girls are bold enough to declare love for their romantic partners. This 'game' is also how some exes are revealed *uma belahlwa* and because no one is going to ask you about it after (because it's done

in jest). The girls, who are going through *umemulo* feel free to name and throw away their exes. Once *onomahoyi* have finished, the rest of the community then participates in the 'game'. Although there is a playfulness attached to this part of the process people are open, there is still a shyness or coyness to the process. This is followed by an abundance of food and drinks, and traditional songs and dances are done all night.

1.2.3. The day of umemulo

In the early hours of the morning *onomahoyi beqa umlilo* (the girl whose *umemulo* it is jumps over the fire). This is done as one of the first tests to prove that *uziphethe kahle*. This is done outside, naked. Whoever is there at that point to witness this activity can be trusted to testify that indeed *uziphethe kahle* (you are well behaved). Once this process is done, the girls participating in umemulo wait in an open field or by the riverside for the girl's uncle/s to fetch them back home to fetch the spear. They once again inform the ancestors that it is now the day of the ceremony - *sekuyagidwa, sekuyamuliswa.* This is when *intombi emulayo* (the girl whose *umemulo* it is) puts on *umhlwehlwe* (the cow stomach lining or fat).

After this *kuyiwa esgcawini kugidwe kushaywe uMay'nceke* (they go to the open field demarcated from traditional dancing in order to perform *uMay'nceke*), family and friends can present you with gifts and money at this point. If *intombazane emula* (the girl whose umemulo it is) has a boyfriend, his family can make their intentions to marry her known at this point *bamumbese* (gifts can include blankets, an umbrella and money). In response, she can go to the boyfriend *ahlabe umkhonto phambi kwakhe* (and put the spear in the ground in front of him), as an acknowledgement and acceptance of the intention to marry. Similar processes exist for suitors, where they or their families bring what is called *imakho* or *umakho* (which loosely translates to gifts). Again, these gifts are makers of intention. This could be an intention to marry or intention to court. It is up to *intombi emulayo* (the girl whose umemulo it is) to accept or reject the gifts as a sign of either accepting or rejecting the suitor.

Figure 1.1: Esigcawini ngaphambi kokuhlaba umkhonto. (Traditional song and dance is performed before they throw the spear into the ground.). The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

Figure 1.2: Izintombi zisegcawini, zenza isgekle (The girls sing traditional songs to entertain all the guests). The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

Figure 1.3: Intombi ihlaba umkhonto phambikwe Nkosana yakubo. (The girl places the spear in front of her eldest brother.). The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

Figure 1.4: Umemulo eWembezi, Estcourt. Esigcawini sewuhlatshiwe umkhonto (Umemulo in Wembezi, Estcourt. Traditional song and dance break out after the

spear has been put in the ground without it falling). The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

1.3 Beyond culture versus rights: girlhoods in South Africa

While *umemulo* is a rite of passage widely practised by Zulu communities all around South Africa, it is not extensively written about. As will be shown in Chapter 2 of this thesis, *umemulo* is written about mostly in descriptive terms, and literature often fails to account for the socio-cultural aspects of the process. The theorisation of rites of passage as well as girlhood has mostly been done in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Rites of passages like the bat mitzvah, and female and male circumcision form a large part of the literature. While *umemulo* is often mentioned when virginity testing, teenage pregnancy and the crisis of HIV/Aids are being explored. The experiences and implications of girlhood as they show up through *umemulo*, and the women and families who participate in the ritual, are not explored in existing literature. Thus, this thesis seeks to examine the political questions around rites of passages and the experience and performance of girlhood, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa.

This study is grounded in African feminist lenses that move us beyond the 'rights vs culture' narrative and complicates our understanding of those who participate in these rituals. African feminist theories seek to not only describe and explain the makings and performances of gender and their interactions with tradition and culture specifically for African women, but to examine African women's realities outside of pathologising or victimologies of womanhood. Gqola(2016), Alweendo (2017), Motsemme (2011 an 2007), Tamale (2011 and 2008), Dill (1979), Mathonsi and Gumede (2009), LeClerc-Madlala (2001) and Posel(2011) are just some of the scholars who have contributed to the theorisation of girlhood and womanhood through African feminist lenses. These scholars seek to create and reveal knowledge on African social systems from African perspectives. Tamale (2020: xiii) defines Afro-feminism as a scholarship that "distinctly seeks to create its own theories and discourse that are linked to the diversity of African realities". Moreover, African feminists create theories with the understandings that African women have varied and multiple identities and therefore experiences, as African women. Using this lens allows us to have access to the inter-disciplinary work of the mentioned scholars and gives are access to the

nuances of African women's realities. The ways in which sex and HIV/Aids have been theorised speak to ways in which womanhood has been thought about in the different African socities, therefore giving an insight as to how womanhood and girlhood has been historically theorised. This study seeks to contribute to the scholarship that likes of Gqola (2017), Alweendo (2017) and Tamale (2011 and 2008) have generated around conceptions of African girlhood and womanhood, from the perspective of African woman themselves. This scholarship helps us to think through the interaction between girlhood and womanhood, its performance and the expectations and remakings of culture.

In apartheid South Africa, the construction of black womanhood through what Thomas (2006) refers to as 'AmaRespectable', creates the emergence of the 'modern girl'. This 'modern girl' was categorised in two ways, either as a symbol of racial upliftment or as a kind of selling-out or transgression, as they operated outside of the known construction of girlhood at the time, particularly black girlhood. 'AmaRespectable' were educated, professional (nurses, clerks, teachers, domestic workers) and cosmopolitan. According to Thomas (2006: 462), "they appeared to reject their role as dutiful daughter, wife and mother through their engagement of international commodity cultures, mass media and political discourse".

One could argue that this can be seen in post-apartheid South Africa through the concept of the 'new South African woman' (Gqola, 2016) and the 'Luminance woman' (Alweendo, 2017) explored as aspirational womanhood later in the thesis. Moreover, this can be linked to ideas around the performance of womanhood and the consumption of both girlhood and womanhood. The idea here is that not only must women perform particular kinds of womanhood that are 'consumable', but they must also have the ability to be consumers. We see these ruptures and continuities in the construction of black womanhood in both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.

Furthermore, this thesis shows that literature on African womanhood and sexuality can be categorised into two broad themes, namely descriptive and medical. Tamale (2011) and Dill (1979) argue that the African encounter with colonialism produced ideas of womanhood that associate impurity and inherent sin with women's bodies. The descriptive narratives equate womanhood and sexuality to being primitive, exotic, immoral, insatiable and bestial – depictions based largely on the fears and fantasies of

the European observer (see Tamale 2011 and 2008; Dill 1979, Motsemme 2007; Magubane 2001).

The medical discourse links African womanhood and sexuality in relation to HIV/Aids and reproduction. Motsemme (2007:63) argues that dominant discourse has feminised HIV/Aids, and that the face of the pandemic in South Africa is a young woman because the "discourse of disease and sexuality have traditionally portrayed the Black female body as the essentialized vector of evil and promiscuity." The link between women and disease can be seen, for example, within Zulu communities where women are linked with ***ubumnyama*** (darkness) or are described as ***umnyama*** (you are darkness). LeClerc-Madlala (2001:41) argues that this link between women's bodies and diseases has resulted in the labelling of women as dirty and possessing unique polluting qualities that endanger men and society.

LeClerc-Madlala (2001) also argues that the traditional practices linked to conceptions of womanhood and sexuality, such as virginity testing, are used as a means to manage the HIV/Aids epidemic by exerting greater control over women's sexuality. Virginity testing further perpetuates the feminisation of HIV/Aids because it emphasises women's responsibility for the spread and prevention of the disease and draws attention away from the role that men play. Much of the literature on Zulu girlhood has theorised the concept in relation to ***umkhosi womhlanga nokuhlolwa*** (the reed dance and virginity testing) and ***umemulo*** is written about as a sidebar to this broader conversation. The discourse around ***umkhosi womhlanga nokuhlolwa*** is often centered around the importance of virginity testing as a way to deal with social ills, such as teenage pregnancy or the spread of HIV/Aids. It thus falls into the category of pathologising girlhood – linking girlhood to a social vulnerability.

Interestingly, the literature also falls into the category of consuming girlhood – the aesthetics of ***umhlanga*** both in KwaZulu-Natal and eSwatini make ***umhlanga*** a tourist attraction. ***Umkhosi womhlanga*** can be attended by a woman of any age so long as ***bezigcinile*** (they remained virgins). For a lot of women, ***abayizintombi zomhlanga*** (their transition into womanhood) is marked by marriage. They often have ***umemulo*** just before they get married or, if their parents choose to have ***umemulo*** for them at the age of 21, they often remain ***intombi yomhlolo*** until they get married, they therefore remain ***intombi***. This extends our understanding of girlhood beyond an age category.

Sex, sexuality and conceptions of girlhood and womanhood have historically been privatised in the home and community in the South African context, especially between women of a particular community, through code words and coded songs (Mathonsi and Gumede, 2009:484). However, in the post-apartheid context, we see a clear shift of 'sex talk' (including notions of womanhood and women's sexualities) becoming part of public culture. Posel (2011) argues that this shift is integrally linked to the reconstitution of the country's political agenda since 1994 – and in particular the intense politicisation of the issues of HIVI/AIDS and sexual violence. There is an abundance of movies, magazines and pornography, previously considered taboo and censored by the apartheid government, which have created multiple public sites for more open, explicit and graphic sex talk and sexual display (Posel, 2011:55). Sex and sexuality have become part of the conversation on democratic rights, which normalises sex talk being part of public conversation and political debate. For young black women in particular, the assertion of sexualised freedom represents a rupture between apartheid and post-apartheid conceptions of young women's bodies, which erodes parental control (Posel, 2011:56).

Ceremonies like ***umemulo*** allow us to theorise on these ruptures and continuities in how culture evolves, and how that culture is 'usable' (Livermon, 2015). ***Umemulo*** remains relevant and useful to Zulu women and Zulu communities even in the context of sexual freedom, which often puts culture and rights in tension with each other. While this rite of passage can be perceived as being linked to ***ukuzigcina*** – preservation – it is clear, as the findings of this thesis will show, that the performance of good Zulu girlhood is directly linked to the creation of the desirable woman/womanhood. This thesis helps us think about Zulu girlhood and womanhood outside of the categories of descriptive, pathologised, consumable girlhood, as well as the 'rights versus culture' discourses that have been used in the past. The thesis accounts for the socio-cultural and socio-political constructions of girlhood and womanhood, and their utility for the girls and the women who make up Zulu communities.

1.4 Research Objectives

This thesis examines notions of Zulu girlhood and evolving understandings of ***ukuziphatha kahle*** as a marker of good girlhood. The main question that guides this

study is: How have conceptions *ukuziphatha kahle* (good behavior) evolved in the context of sexual rights in the performance of Zulu girlhood?

Sub questions:

- How are Zulu girls putting tradition to use and reimagining *umemulo*?
- What do the ruptures (regarding virginity and sexuality) and continuities in the practice of *umemulo* tells us about Zulu girlhood in post-apartheid South Africa?

1.5 Chapter Outline of the Study

This chapter gives contextual background to the study. It explains the general process of *umemulo*, the songs that mark the different stages of the ritual and the significance of each stage. Further, it looks at the broader ways in which girlhood has been theorised, particularly in South Africa both in the apartheid context as well as the democratic context.

In Chapter Two, I explore the different ways in which girlhood has been theorised by looking at the global history of girlhood in the context of Western defined 'Tweenhood', the pathologising of girlhood, the 'Cult of True Womanhood' and intersectional black girlhoods. I examine cultural rites of passage and their role in transitions from girlhood to womanhood, and show that the insistence on theorising girlhood from its pathologised notion has created a scholarship that speaks to girlhood through precarity and vulnerability, thus creating a false dichotomy between culture and rights. This chapter shows the importance of participating in rituals, allowing us to move beyond the 'culture versus rights' dichotomy. It is shown that moving beyond binaries productively complicates our understanding of how girls use both their liberal and cultural rituals in order to perform socially accepted conceptions of womanhood.

Chapter Three is concerned with the methodology of this study. I discuss the research sites, participants and the data collection process. I speak to my own positionality in relation to the project to make a case for the importance and complexities of insider/insider-outsider research. Moreover, I analyse the ways in which feminist scholarship, especially African feminist scholarship, interacts with methodology, specifically insider/insider-outsider research. I also make a case for

thematic analysis, arguing that it allows for the voice of the Zulu woman to come through clearly in a study about them.

In Chapter Four, I detail the findings from the data collection process and identify five major themes. The first addresses the adaptations made to the process of *umemulo* based on socio-political contexts, by expanding on the process and the roles of the songs sung as well as the role of *ukuyalwa* (the elder council). I look at the concept of being affirmed by *amadlozi* (ancestors), the metaphysics of umemulo and how this speaks to a Zulu 'world sense'. I posit that *umemulo* often happens because it has been requested by the ancestors, or because parents gift their daughter with *umemulo* in order to be recognised by the ancestors. Marriageability is one of the major themes that participants refer to throughout the interviews, and *umemulo* is a ceremony during which one announces one's marriageability, and suitors can reveal themselves. I note that for the participants, *umemulo* not only serves to announce that one is available for marriage, but also provides a platform for her family to confirm that she would make a good wife (which can be linked to the concept of *umama oqotho/honourable woman*).

Furthermore, I look at notions of performing good Zulu girlhood, noting that for the Zulu women who participated in this study, the performance and maintenance of behaving well were both key to the ways that they experience womanhood. Even as they moved away from understanding *ukuziphatha kahle* through preservation towards *ukuhlonipha nokufihla*, they engaged in intergenerational collusion in order to maintain the perception of having behaved well. This chapter also explores the utility of *umemulo*, with the participants noting that the process is valued for the role it plays in the socialisation of Zulu girls. The relevance of *umemulo* remains for Zulu people (in the physical and the metaphysical world), even as society shifts its understandings of *ukuziphatha kahle*. Even as they acknowledge problematic notions within the ritual, participants expressed that they would prefer adaptations to the ritual rather than its abolishment.

In Chapter Five, all of the above-mentioned themes are analysed, unpacked, and linked to the theories discussed in Chapter Two. This discussion chapter identifies the ruptures and continuities in the ways we understand and experience Zulu girlhood and womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa. These themes help us understand evolving

notions of *ukuziphatha kahle*, sexual rights and the performance of girlhood in democratic South Africa.

Chapter Six concludes the study by arguing that the ability to attain womanhood within cultural space and through ritual, while actively participating in sex and sexual freedom, is not a tension for the elder and younger Zulu women.

Chapter 2 – Theorising Girlhood and Rites to Womanhood: Performance and Transitions

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to trace the theorisation of girlhood in different contexts. This theorisation draws largely from sociology, anthropology and history -- creating an inter-disciplinary narrative on girlhoods globally. The chapter shows that this literature often speaks to the rituals in descriptive ways and speaks to the categories of people who are allowed to participate in the rituals and rites of passages. This thesis seeks to contribute to the scholarship that analyses the relationship between the people, rites, rituals and the socio-political conditions that allow for the rites to maintained and remade by participating societies.

For Corcoran (2017), the process of growing from girlhood to womanhood requires women to restrict their own expectations and fashion them according to the expectations of their communities. Through examining the rite of passage, *umemulo*, undertaken by Zulu girls transitioning to womanhood in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, this study seeks to understand that transition. The chapter examines the markers of womanhood, through conceptions of good virtues and the rites of passages for girls throughout history. Notions of becoming a woman are based on the norms and expectations that surround girls and women; these tell girls and women how they should look and act, and when to begin acting and looking a particular way – "they serve to restrict and control our idea of what it is to be a woman" (Steenkamp, 2005:64). Womanhood, therefore, is actively attained through meeting particular requirements and/or participating in rituals that mark one as woman. It is not simply a biological transition.

The chapter begins by examining the global history of girlhood in the context of Western-defined 'Tweenhood', the pathologising of girlhood, the 'Cult of True Womanhood' and intersectional black girlhoods. It then examines the role of rites of passages in transitions from girlhood to womanhood. The section shows that rites of passages that involve cutting or removal of body parts, such as female and male circumcision, have achieved media and academic controversy. They have led to a 'rights versus culture' dichotomy that sees the practice of these rituals as an abuse of

the rights of the participants. Conversely, rites of passages that do not involve physical cutting, such as ***Bajole*** in Botswana, the Apache sunrise ceremony in the United States and ***umemulo***, have not fallen into this binary understanding of the role of rituals in transitions from girlhood to womanhood. Like the 'cult of true womanhood', these rites of passages reward or punish girls who are seen to have performed virtues of 'good' girlhood that qualify them for womanhood and marriageability.

Importantly, I show that while the practice of virtues is important, participating in the rituals themselves ***ultimately*** distinguishes who transitions and becomes a 'real' woman and who does not. African feminist scholars such as Tamale (2008 and 2006), Kanogo (2005), Mepeukori (2016), Setlhabi (2014) allow us to think through rites of passages, by accounting for the importance of the ritual and the ways in which it shapes women's acceptence or rejection into 'true womanhood'. Scholarship on rites of passage such as male circumcision also contributes to the ways in which we are able to think through rites of passages and their social value. The chapter shows that rites and rituals provide a complex understanding of socially attaining womanhood or manhood (in the case of male circumcision). Therefore, while girls in many of these societies, like Zulu girls, can claim their constitutional rights and opt out of these rites of passages, they are significant cultural identity markers that continue to define personhood and womanhood in their societies. Therefore, moving beyond the 'culture versus rights' dichotomy allows for a complicated understanding of how girls fashion both liberal autonomy and cultural resources to access socially approved ideas of womanhood, while reconfiguring those very rituals to reflect the fluid culture and context of their lives.

2.2 Being girl, becoming woman

2.2.1 Girlhood as life course

Conceptions and experiences of girlhood and transitions to womanhood can be thought of through historically dominant notions of development that argue "that all individuals progress through a series of similar steps until maturity is attained" (Steenkamp, 2005:22). Sennott and Mojola (2016) note that Western conceptions of transitions into adulthood focus on the period where the youth separate from their parents and make adult commitments, as well as buy into institutions that are traditionally thought of as 'adult'. Elder (1975:165) refers to this as the life course. He argues that the social

structure of age includes one's life span from birth to death and importantly for this research, includes "the social time table of the life course…which is defined by age criteria norms and social roles" (Elder, 1975:165). This social structure of the life course has implications for the social roles one performs or adopts, their membership into a particular group, as well as their differentiation and succession with that group (Elder,1975:165).

Moreover, he argues that while birth, puberty and death are biological facts, their meaning in society is a social construction that gives function to age categories and age hierarchies. Therefore, if we think about girlhood as a particular age category, we can explore the notion of age hierarchies as it relates to girlhood, and for this study as it relates to good girlhood. "Age distinctions are expressed in normative expectations, privileges and rewards," which further constitute the basis of self-determination, behaviour and social roles (Elder, 1975:167-168). Through this lens, the transition from childhood to adulthood is understood through markers such as finishing school, getting a job, moving out of one's childhood home, getting married and having a child. However, if we agree that the meaning of age differentiation is a social construct, then we must agree that the conception of age differentiation, as well as its privileges and obligations, differs as societies differ. This, therefore, exposes one to a particular historical experience as they move through girlhood to womanhood.

The life course theory originally developed as an attempt to theorise on childhood development and the influence of social context. The scholars who developed this theory used the Great Depression and the Second World War as the social contexts within which they analysed development and transitions from childhood to adulthood (Edler, 1975:169). Elder (1975:2) also considered studies from the University of California in Berkeley. The Oakland Growth Study and the Berkeley Guidance Study were conducted in the 1920s and focused on ideas around children and growth – showing that particularly for women/girls, womanhood is attained through marriage or through having a child.

This theory places an emphasis on the ways in which social context affects age categories and transitions. One can deduce that this understanding of adulthood through careers or parenthood reflects the context of the time.

I argue that globally (as will be traced in this chapter) notions of girlhood evolve based on socio-political and socio-economic contexts. This study shows that life course theoretical assumptions can be further complicated by analysing cultural contexts and cultural understandings of girlhood and the transition from girlhood to womanhood. It seems that life course theory attempts to account for social meanings of age and age categories, and it does this by following biological facts (birth, puberty and death). It does not, however, account for the interaction between socio-political and cultural contexts.

2.2.2 Girlhood and the cult of true womanhood

In considering the notion that the social expectations and responsibilities common to adulthood are extended downward to the young, this section will look at the article "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860" by Barbara Welter (1966), which suggests that womanhood is achieved through certain virtues such – "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity". They argue that these virtues shape who becomes a mother, daughter, sister, wife – a true woman. I argue that examining these virtues and the idea of a 'true' womanhood will give an indication of what is expected from girls for them to transition from girlhood to womanhood. By understanding the true woman and her markers of womanhood, we are better able to understand the markers and virtues of girlhood. This transition is not necessarily linked to age but rather it is directly linked to the performance or expressing of virtues for the purpose of marriageability.

Welter (1966:153) explains that piety referred to a woman's religiosity: it was believed that the church was where good/true women located themselves (or were located), and that "unlike participation in other societies or movements, church work would not make her less domestic or submissive, less a True Woman." The links between being a true woman and religion become even more clear as the author explores ideas of irreligion, noting that a woman who was not religious or who had allowed her "intellectual pursuits [to] move her away from God" (Welter, 1966:153) was not a woman at all, even if she was a mother. The absence of purity on the wedding night was considered unnatural and not feminine:

> The marriage night was the single great event of a woman's life, when she bestowed her greatest treasure upon her husband, and from that time on was completely dependent upon him, an empty vessel, without legal or emotional existence of her own (Welter, 1966:154-5).

The true woman had to be submissive, a passive responder who focuses on household duties and created comfort in the home (Welter, 1966:159). It seems that when women began to question notions of virtue as linked to their personhood, the way that they thought about 'true womanhood' changed. The argument so far has been that the cult of true womanhood requires virtues. These virtues are dependent on each other; religiosity creates submissive, domesticated, pure women. These women create comfort in the home and achieve the 'true womanhood'. Therefore, virtues are something that girls must be able to show that they have in order to be able to marry and have children i.e. there is a need to perform good girlhood in order to transition to true womanhood.

Once we begin to speak about transgressions, it means there is an accepted girlhood (a 'true girlhood') and we have an understanding of what that is. Those who fall outside of this either are not women/girls at all or they are the 'other' – the ones we should not aspire to be. Judith Butler (1988) writes in ***Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory,*** about the creation of social realities through language, gestures and the ways in which we do gender every day. She argues that gender is created through prescribing certain attributes to a body. What seem to be "mundane bodily gestures, movements and actions constitute a gendered self" (Butler, 1988:519). Butler (1988:519) notes that gender is a "stylized repetition of acts through time". While her main argument is that to repeat different actions can constitute a different way of doing gender, I focus on the construction of gender that already exists, specifically one that is accepted to be dominant among Zulu people. I argue that purity, virtue, religion, among others, are the ways in which we do and perform 'true' girlhood every day. The concept of performance helps us think through the distinction between good girlhood and transgressions of good girlhood.

2.2.3 Girlhood and Crisis

This section seeks to complicate the categories with which girlhood has been theorised. The dominant narratives have theorised girlhood through the pathologising and consumption of girlhood. The scholars referred to below argue that this lens is limited as it does not account for the complex experiences of girlhood. This lens also does not account for girls and women's voices in the understanding of girlhood and womanhood.

In *Girlhood: A global history*, Helgren and Vasconcellos (2012) seek to theorise girlhood as a concept that is socially constructed, and framed through culture and context. Similarly to some of the work explored above, this understanding goes beyond assigning girlhood as simply an age category. The authors address three major concerns. Firstly, that "culture struggles to make meaning out of girls' biology and development at different times and different places" (Helgren and Vasconcellos, 2012:7). Secondly, they address the girl's interaction with transnational and international development, and how this affects girls' experience of girlhood. They argue for the importance of the girls' actual voices in the narrative on girlhood and how it changes over time. Lastly, they look at the correlation between the girls' wellbeing and what state or international governance structures choose to prioritise in terms of health, education and welfare. The contention is about how girls in patriarchal societies have constructed cultural identities and spaces for themselves (within their communities and at an international level) that allow for them to be agents.

Kirk, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (in Helgren and Vasconcellos, 2012) argue that girlhood has been conceptualised through pathologising or consuming girlhood. They argue that through the former lens, girlhood is often linked to sexual violence, disease, heading of households at an early age or early marriage. Essentially, this focus on biological and social vulnerability contributes to literature on women that is more nuanced, while literature on girls is often limited to access to schooling. Furthermore, they argue that children are thought of as future adults rather than as citizens and individuals. In a global context where citizenship is masculinised, they argue the denial of full citizenship and individuality can have harsher implications for girls.

The concept of consuming girlhood is in contrast with the notion of pathologising girlhood. Consuming girlhood is linked to girls in the Global North, and the notion of pathologising girlhood is linked to girls in the Global South, and this distinction is true is South Africa as well where literature on girlhood is usually linked to HIV/Aids, which is explored later in the chapter. Girls in the Global North are seen as a marketing category and thus consumers. In this regard, the idea of girlhood is centred around young girls who are seen as having a currency of their own or even a buying power of their own. Girlhood is thus commodified through the fashion and music industries (among others), in what is termed 'Tween Culture' (Kirk et al, 2012). While social and

biological vulnerability is also present for these tweens, their identity is linked to fashion and beauty.

It can be argued that this leads to the creation of an ideal identity. I would argue that it can be an extension of what was referred to earlier as the 'cult of true womanhood' but is not based on virtue. It is based on how women and girls present themselves: one must consume and be consumable in order to be seen as participating in true girlhood and, ultimately, womanhood. Kirk et al (2012) note that tween commodity culture also concerns contestations of sexuality because of the increasing sexualisation of girls through clothing, music and pop culture. Moreover, the biological aspect of girlhood cannot be ignored, particularly when it comes to gender-based violence and teenage pregnancy.

Mitchell and Rentschler (2016:94), in *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*, further problematise the ways in which girlhood has been studied, arguing that it is important to move away from writing girlhood through the lens of crisis to one that prioritises girl's engagement and participation. They trace the project on girlhood "as seen through the eyes of girls themselves". They do this through analysing a feminist group, created as an education project for young girls at schools in the United Kingdom looking at the concept of 'Girl Power'. The group attempts to create a space for girls to be "a bit of a feminist" as a way of thinking through their experiences of girlhood (Mitchell and Rentschler, 2016:109). Two things are revealed in this group. Firstly, the contradiction of having a theoretical understanding of domestic violence versus the struggles of navigating everyday encounters with sexism and sexual harassment came to light (Mitchell and Rentschler, 2016:111). Secondly, feminism is juxtaposed against sexual promiscuity – "being known as a bit of a feminist may have encouraged the boys to back off and respect and like them" (Mitchell and Rentschler, 2016:111). This feminist understanding of girlhood required the girls in this context to position themselves as 'non-sluts'. However, the girls note that judging people who choose to be sexually expressive is not the feminist way. This shows the tension between their teen activism and their girlhood.

The argument here is not that these tensions are bad, but rather that girlhood (in whatever way you choose to express the experience) is nuanced and it is important for girlhood studies to centre the voices of girls and women. Moletsane et al (2008) try to

distinguish between girls and women writing about experiences of girlhood, arguing that children (and girls in particular) often experience and are traumatised by violence and respond with fear and hopelessness. Conversely, women's retrospective writing recall's social trauma and violence but their stories often end in triumph. Even while centring the voices of girls, Moletsane et al as well as Mitchell and Rentschler, continue to write about girlhood through the lens of precarity, looking at how being a girl limits one's safety, culturally positions one as lesser, questions one's sexual expressions and increases one's likelihood of being sexually abused and being HIV positive.

One could argue that social and biological vulnerability remains a concern for girlhood, whether in the Global North or South. The distinction is to what degree this affects whether girls get to enjoy their full period of childhood/girlhood. Universally, understanding girlhood either through pathologising or consuming girlhood is a limited scope. It does not account for the kind of identity formation for black girls whose girlhood is marked through culture, or where girlhood and (particularly 'good' girlhood) is an identity marker or a requirement for one to move from girlhood to womanhood. Furthermore, I don't think that it accounts for the ways in which girls themselves have used performing girlhood to create alternative spaces for themselves. It also creates binary understandings of girlhoods, either the diseased, poor African or the fashionable, upper class American (who is often white). I argue that this is a false dichotomy. Categories of girlhoods are varied and the performances of these are complex. They change as they interact with space and socio-political context. While the authors attempt to complicate notions of girlhood, as Kirk et al (2012), also question the limitations of the ways in which girlhood has been theorised through questioning how vulnerability and tweenhood interact, arguing that all girls whether in the Global South or the Global North have access to images of the tween culture but their ability to aspire to that image is limited or broadened by context/location, class and race.

2.2.4 Intersections of Girlhoods: Thugs, Divas and Wannabes

This section speaks to the markers and performances of girlhood as they exist and have been theorised for African American women. Gillam (2017:613) notes that "Black girls have been targets of racial assaults, but continue to find creative strategies to empower themselves". As Butler (2018) notes, black women experience oppression through race, space, place, gender, sexuality and class. Therefore, liberation must follow along the

same lines. Scholarship on 'black girlhood' as an identity is focused on liberating black women, reflected through intersectional feminism. African-American feminist scholars, therefore, speak to how identity interacts with space and other oppressions. Black girlhood scholarship also aims to highlight the achievements and contributions of black women and girls (Butler (2018), Lindsey (2012), Gillam (2017)), challenging the dominant narratives that often paint black girls as passive victims. Butler (2018:36), argues that by placing cartographies of girlhood in this scholarship of Black girlhood, scholars craft a framework to understand how black girls navigate geopolitical spaces (Brooks, Sekayi, Savage, Waller and Picot, 2010).

Cox (2012) explores different categories of girlhood through the label's Thugs, Divas and Wannabes. They look at the gendered connotations and aspirations of these categories of girlhood. Her study is placed at a shelter in low-income Detroit, in the United States. She argues that these identities are created as low-income black women interact with race, gender, age, and place. "These women must navigate and negotiate the boundaries of respectability and deviance that are largely imposed by the space where race and sexuality meet" (Cox, 2012:85). Black girlhood scholarship is particularly concerned with black women's ability to claim ownership of defining and redefining their sexual identities, while continuing to perform 'the self' in public and private spaces. Ultimately, these women show that understandings and expressions of gender are complex.

'Divas' refers to women who present as hyperfeminine, fashionable and seem to have multiple boyfriends that help maintain their lifestyle; a "slay queen" in the South African context. 'Thugs' were the women who openly claimed a lesbian identity, perceived as performing different versions of masculinity by wearing oversized clothing and presenting as 'hard' (i.e. in a more masculine way) and who were perceived to be performing different versions of masculinity by others (Cox, 2012:86). The 'Wannabes' were seen to be mimicking the Thugs in their performance of girlhood – with the assumption that this would give them the respect that the Thugs were given inside and outside the shelter (Cox, 2012:86). Cox also notes that while these categories do not speak to all the complexities of black girlhood, they do allow us to think about how "young women actively rework and reconstitute social constructs, space and urban geographies that unilaterally impose identities or definitions of black women" (2012:86).

This understanding happens in a context where discourse on black woman as sexual beings has constantly been framed through stereotypes of the "insatiable Jezebel and overly-aggressive and hot tempered…video vixens and faceless booty shaking bodies that populate hip-hop and R&B videos" (Cox, 2012:89). Stephens and Phillips (2003:4) explore the ways in which African American women's sexuality has been theorised, arguing that beliefs about these women's sexuality "appear to be sanctioned by a culture that continues to embrace stereotypes about race and sexuality". In defining some of the ways that African American women have been described, they speak to the concept of Divas and Gold Diggers, arguing that Divas trade social status for sex while Gold Diggers explicitly trade sex for material and economic gain (Stephens and Phillips; 2003:17). One could argue that the phenomenon of "slay queens" in South Africa is a combination of the Gold Digger and Diva as defined by Stephens and Phillips (2003). They describe the Slay Queens and Gold diggers as beautiful young women, who are usually dependent on rich older men to maintain a particular kind of lifestyle. Slay queens have defined themselves as having managed to trick the system (i.e. patriarchy) and become self-made entrepreneurs (Kekana, 2019:1).

While this conception of black womanhood seems to dominate narratives, it seems that in reality, "sex and the expression of sexuality become signs of undisciplined, irresponsible and potentially dangerous" (Cox, 2012:89) women and girls. Women's sexuality and sexual expression is discouraged. However, the Diva category disrupts this narrative. Cox (2012) notes that the Divas conceptualised the performance of this identity as a masculine game by using traditional gender dynamics to their benefit. The Wannabes were thought of as 'transformers' as they would be able to perform the identity of the Thugs, as "girls recreated husband and wife roles to establish a fictive kin network where they provided mutual aid, emotional reciprocity, security and protection…" (Cox, 2012:). Black girlhood, therefore, seems to depend on the agency of the women, their context, their duties and their responsibilities. It is necessary to stretch understandings of girlhood beyond heteronormative understandings of gender and masculinity, and recognise that how we define girlhood is very clearly influenced by location (see Brooks et al (2010), Cox (2012), Lindsey (2012), Hill (2016), Butler (2018)).

For black feminists, girlhood and womanhood have little to do with age categories – black girlhood is an identity, and the body of work done under black girlhood studies

must celebrate and empower black women rather than problematise them. Secondly, as part of the emancipatory project of black girlhood scholarship, they problematise the ways in which black women have been written about or depicted in different forms of media and pop-culture. Arguing for a more complex reading of black girlhood outside of the already existing stereotypes, categories such as Divas, Thugs and Wannabes allow us to talk about black women and desire, and black women and masculinity in more nuanced ways.

2.3 Rites of Passage: Clitoridectonomy, Rights, Marriageability and the Erotic

This section tells the story of girlhood and rites of passages from girlhood to womanhood in different societies in Africa, American Jewish communities and the Apache community in North America. The examined African cases show the ruptures created by African society's encounter with colonialism and the post-colonial adoption of liberal democracy in many African countries that has created a tension between the practice of African cultural rituals and the recognition of and respect for individual autonomy. This tension has created the 'rights versus culture' narrative, which assumes that many cultural practices fundamentally violate human rights. Female genital mutilation and male circumcision are the dominant examples of the post-colonial tensions between the practice of rituals and liberal freedoms of African women, men, girls and boys.

Importantly, the focus on rituals that mark transitions from girlhood to womanhood shows the ways in which different societies mark different life stages. In the section on life course, I showed that the stages of finishing school, finding a job, moving out of the home, getting married and having a child are understood as transitions from childhood to adulthood. I also showed that in this Western-focused literature on (white) girlhood, girls ultimately achieve adulthood and womanhood through marriage. The cult of true womanhood shows that girls have to perform certain virtues in order to be considered good girls, who are marriageable 'true' women.

The African case studies show a combination of rituals and the need for the performance of certain virtues. Like the Jewish ***bat mitzvah,*** which is done for a girl who has studied Jewish teachings and performs certain virtues of Jewish girlhood, ***umemulo*** is a ritual done to mark and celebrate the good performance of the virtues

deemed necessary for good Zulu womanhood. It is shown through the cases of clitoridectomy in Kenya that the practice of the ritual surpasses the importance of the virtues. Similarly, in South Africa, a Xhosa man can perform virtues aligned with good manhood, without undergoing traditional circumcision, and will still not be seen in the community as a 'real man' (Mfencane, 2016). The discourse of 'uncut' women in Kenya, shows the continued importance of the physical ritual practice.

The cases below also show that the tension between 'rights and culture' is more pronounced in rituals that involve the cutting or removal of a body part. Female or male circumcision provides such an example. Comparatively, as the Bojale and Apache sunrise ceremony shows, rituals that do not involve the removal or cutting of body parts have not been criticised or garnered negative academic and media attention. *Umemulo*, as a ritual that does not involve cutting, can be placed among such rites of passages.

2.3.1 Clitoridectonomy/female circumcision and *Ssenga* in Kenya and Uganda

The transition from girlhood to womanhood is a complex one. It intersects with race, gender, class, time and socio-political contexts. Certain societies have created and maintained cultural rites of passage to signify this transition. "Culture refers to the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society, these create and maintain the social business of a particular society" (Tamale, 2008:49). It is important to understand how rites of passage intersect with socio-political contexts, as well as where different communities place these in relation to their general culture.

Different societies perform different cultural rituals and have done so for many generations. These rites of passage publicly mark one's transition from girlhood to womanhood. Jewish communities, for example, perform a ***bat mitzvah*** as a way of ushering girls into adulthood (womanhood). This ceremony tells the girl and her community that "she is now morally and ethically responsible for her decisions and actions, whereas prior to her adulthood, her parents would be morally and ethically responsible for her actions" (Grant, 2006:34). This ceremony is usually done when the girl is 12 years old, but can also be done at a later stage. It is done for a girl who has been mentored and has learnt Hebrew and the Torah. This is an honour to her family and signifies the passing down from generation to generation of the obligation to study and engage Jewish teachings (Grant, 2006:34). The girl is publicly and in community given rights and duties that she did not have before; she becomes an adult, a woman.

American Jewish women, in particular, have participated in this ceremony when they were older (Grant, 2006:35). This allows us to ask questions about the need for cultural and/or religious transitions as well as their social value beyond biological transitions. In particular, when older girls (women) value these as markers of 'true womanhood', there seems to be the need for a transition that isn't only public but also has implications for the community within which it occurs.

Literature on the transition from childhood to adulthood in African societies has been preoccupied with rites and rituals that physically alter the body, involving cutting or some kind of surgery. One could argue that this preoccupation is based on the insistence of thinking about these transitions through the lens of vulnerability and victimhood. These rituals are thought of as anti-human rights, in the context of the international discourse on human rights (with Western origins, assuming universalism). While the right to culture is protected and valued, when it interacts with other rights (such as sexual rights) the inclination is to argue that culture acts against human rights. Tamale (2008) notes that African practices of sexual enhancement have been placed in the category of 'harmful cultural practices' that violate the rights of girls and women. These practices are framed as being against sexual rights in particular. She argues that this framing is void of the lived experience of the women who participate in the practices, disregards their agency and does not account for the strong link between cultural practice and identity (Tamale, 2008:63). While there is an acknowledgement of the harm or potential harm and the violation of bodily integrity and sexual reproductive rights, these women continue to choose to participate in the practices.

Much like ***ulwaluko*** (male initiation/circumcision) among AmaXhosa in South Africa, which is one of the oldest practices observed by many societies (in different ways), clitodetomy (and the Ugandan ritual ***ssenga*** discussed below) continue to be a huge part of culture, community and identity, despite the associated dangers. Again, the literature on ***ulwaluko*** was preoccupied with the prevalence of complications or death that follow the surgery (Mavundla, Netswera and Toth, 2009:396). Recently, the literature has been expanded to think through the ritual in novel ways. The question remains, however, as to why people continue to participate in this ritual, if it is indeed harmful. One could argue that participation is based on the strong link between the ritual and identity; one qualifies as a real man, ***indoda***, only if they have gone through the process of ***ulwaluko*** (Mfecane, 2016:204). And while the alternative to traditional

circumcision exists in the form of medical circumcision, men often opt for going to the mountain (shorthand for participating in the traditional ritual) to participate in the traditional ritual because the hierarchies of masculinity in the Xhosa community dictate that medically circumcised men are inferior and given negative labels.

In some African communities, female circumcision is the process by which girls transition from girlhood to womanhood. The Kikuyu, Embu, Meru, Maasai and Sambaru are some of the groups in Kenya that practice female circumcision. However, this ritual has largely been framed as female genital mutilation/cutting which is internationally recognized as a harmful practice and a violation of girls' and women's rights to life, physical integrity, and health. Davies et al (2013) argue that there is not a general consensus on the framing of female circumcision, and it is referred to as genital cutting or mutilation or circumcision. The decision of which framework or language to use is a political process. The World Health Organisation defines female genital mutilation as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons" (Davies, 2013:1030).

However, in Kenya it is referred to as clitoridectomy. Kanogo (2005) argues that communities struggle with the label of circumcision as this does not fully encompass the complex process of initiation which precedes and follows the actual cutting. Clitoridectomy is an external marker linked with notions of identity and being. It speaks to an individual's position in the socio-sexual order and is integrated into the social, religious and political make up of communities (Kanogo, 2005:79). The influence of colonialism led to there being two different kinds of clitoridectomy. The first a less extensive surgery, while the second is more extreme, involving the removal of the clitoris, labia minora and part of the labia majora. Notably, the latter process was recorded after missionaries attempted to abolish this initiation process.

Christianity heavily influenced whether or not some people opted out of initiation; if one wanted to be formally educated, they had to reject female circumcision, which meant rejecting their elders and ethnic identity (Kanogo, 2005:81). Furthermore, because of the danger associated with female circumcision, the international NGO Amref Health Africa has attempted to facilitate an alternative rite of passage intervention programme in the Sambaru and Maasai communities in Kenya.

While it seems that the methodology and perception of circumcision has been influenced by different socio-political contexts, it appears that the socialisation of girls to woman remains at the centre of female circumcision. The process of transitioning from girlhood to womanhood is more about the socialisation into womanhood and is not only about the cutting of female genitals.

> Following the cut, girls are taken into seclusion to recuperate. While in seclusion, they are taught about womanhood, that is the bodily changes to expect during adolescence (girls are normally cut before puberty). They are also given lessons on childbearing and childcare, including how to take care of one's husband. Apart from womanhood duties, they are also taught about their role and responsibility in the society. Specifically, the importance of respect is emphasized (Mepukori, 2016:16).

It can be argued that this process is fundamentally about creating a specific kind of woman, one that is marriageable. Once women have healed from the actual cutting, they are married off (Mepukori,2016:16). Like with ***Bojale*** and the Sunrise Ceremony discussed below, the transition into womanhood is not about the individual woman who transitions, but rather the social implications that go beyond the self.

The alternative to FGM intervention by Amref Health encourages communities to maintain the cultural ceremonies and the rites of passage linked with female initiation whilst getting rid of the actual cutting, in an attempt to reclaim the nourishing aspects of the process (Mepukori, 2016:17). This intervention is directed at elders, women, young girls and boys, with an understanding that it is the elders who must first unlearn and thus endorse this alternative intervention before this kind of 're-education' occurs for the community. Amref Health focuses on bringing about awareness around the dangers of FGM, untying the link between circumcision and marriageability through targeting young men and normalising 'uncut' women (Mepukori, 2016:17).

Mepukori (2016), argues that often the focus when grappling with female circumcision is the patriarchal nature of the society, or that female circumcision is a patriarchal project in order to control women, while in reality it is often women who strongly oppose projects like the alternative rite of passage. Kango and Mepukori both note the disconnect between the way that the women in said communities think about themselves and their wellbeing, and how those observing from the outside think about their wellbeing as it relates to clitoridectomy. Alternative rites of passage also

emphasise the importance of human rights, teaching girls not to be inferior or think of themselves as inferior to their male counterparts. This is positioned against what are thought of as traditional teachings that are 'backward and oppressive'.

For me, this falls into the 'rights versus culture' narrative which frames these concepts as mutually exclusive. It seems that female circumcision or clitoridectomy is a process that all girls must go through (in the above-mentioned communities) in order to distinguish between girls and women. It is expected of all girls and their families, and furthermore is about certain qualifiers that make one eligible to transition - the initiation itself is a qualifier for womanhood. Even with an attempt to practise the alternative rites of passage, the stigma attached to being 'uncut' largely remains, taking the form of "public shaming, derision, and belittling" (Mepukori, 2016:35). Uncircumcised women are thought of as having not transitioned from girlhood to womanhood and therefore are immature and cannot perform 'feminine' duties: "they cannot speak before circumcised women, or cannot enter spaces where men occupy or be married by Samburu men, nor bear children" (Mepukori,2016:35).

Kanogo (2005), examines how Kenyan women themselves experience womanhood, and specifically the transition from girlhood to womanhood in Kenya. She notes that clitoridectomy (female circumcision) was a communal rite that marked one's position in the socio-sexual order. The surgery was a public validation of a much more intrinsic and pervasive ontological process, speaking to the construction of ethnic identity, social organisation, and individual rights and obligations, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood (Kanogo, 2005:79). Moreover, this process served as a marker of conformity, belonging and respectability for the mothers of initiates (Kagono, 2005:82). Therefore, the transition from girlhood to adulthood in this public way is about being and belonging, not only for the younger women but for the elder women as well.

The Baganda women in Uganda participate in a cultural and sexual initiation institution called ***ssenga.*** This initiation process is led by a paternal aunt whose role is to teach young women about sex and sexuality, pre-menstruation practises, marriage preparation, erotica and reproduction (Tamale, 2006:89). ***Ssenga*** also refers to the paternal aunt, who socialises "her nieces in the art of becoming 'good' wives who were subservient and ensured their husband's sexual pleasure," and further ensured that

young girls knew the appropriate feminine behaviours including how to conduct herself, respect for elders as well as how to cook, walk or sit (Tamale, 2006:90). This initiation process also includes the procedure of stretching her labia minora before she experienced menstruation. Once she starts menstruating, the ***Ssenga*** would begin preparing the young girl for marriage (Tamale, 2006:90). Tamale (2006) notes that this initiation also focused on encouraging the economic independence of women, eroticism as well as emphasising the right to leave husbands who are abusive.

Moreover, the ***Ssenga*** includes topics such as female ejaculation and clitoral orgasm – which are often considered taboo as sex is often thought of as something for men to enjoy. Interestingly, Tamale (2006) notes that some ***Ssenga*** trainees questioned patriarchal notions of womanhood that required or taught them to prioritise mothering, particularly mothering their husband as their 'first-born child'. The women have a clear understanding that sex is not purely for reproductive purposes, and reject the imposition of motherhood as a marker of womanhood (Tamale, 2006:93). Furthermore, they reject an understanding of sex and sexuality that privileges men over women.

As with the ***bojale***, clitoridectomy and the sunrise ceremony, we note that the ***Ssenga*** is not seen as an individual process but rather as an institution and a collective process. It is an institution that establishes and influences patterns of expectations for Baganda men and women, determining the social order of the community's everyday interactions (Tamale, 2006:89). The ***Ssenga***, much like any other cultural institution, is influenced by socio-economic and socio-political contexts. In colonial Uganda the construction of African people as "profligate and hypersexual led to the intensified repression and surveillance of African women's sexuality in particular" (Tamale, 2006:89). Moreover, she argues that "missionaries worked with the local patriarchs to develop and entrench rigid customary laws that were repressive and domineering", and that women's sexualities were thought of through policy, and therefore medicalised, only speaking to reproduction and disease. This created new sexual mores, taboos and stigmas. Tamale (2006) argues that because of this construction, the ***Ssenga's*** boundaries have had to be redrawn in order to reconstruct femininity and masculinities within its context.

The above discussion follows a similar pattern to the literature on rites of passage in that the latter is often descriptive. It tells the reader what a particular ritual is or, as

seen above, what its usefulness is for societies. One can deduce that with the transitions from girlhood to womanhood, the priority is often the social order or social structure of a particular community. The performance of rituals is done to publicly mark that one has transitioned into womanhood, and is therefore marriageable and/or forms a part of a sacred group.

Women who choose the alternative rites of passage intervention run the risk of not being accepted as 'real' women within their communities, as the focus of their socialisation is on human rights and independence. Conversely, socialisation for women who are circumcised is focused on social responsibilities, childbearing, respectability and marriageability. The actual surgery is heavily linked to the ethnic identity of these communities as not all ethnic groups perform it, but it further creates a hierarchy between women themselves.

While the literature is able to show the typologies of womanhood that exist, it does not account for girlhood and the transitions themselves. So, it is able to tell us what we are transitioning into, but not what girlhood is or even qualifies for good girlhood. Furthermore, it does not sufficiently account for how women themselves think about this active attainment of womanhood and how women pass on identities of survival to the next generation. The argument here is not that these existing typologies of womanhood are simply a creation of patriarchal societies for control over women, but rather that women's compliance to these is much more complex than it appears. The aim for this particular project is to examine evolving notions of girlhood as passed on through rituals or rites of passage among Zulu people.

2.3.1.1 *Bojale* in Botswana and Apache Sunrise Ceremony

Bojale is a traditional rite of passage among the *Bakgatla-baga-kgafela* in Botswana that girls go through in order to enter *bosadi* (womanhood). Traditionally, this was a puberty rite; initiates had to be virgins and could only participate freely in sexual intercourse after initiation. This process was thought of as the way for the chief to be culturally blessed by women (Setlhabi,2014:463).

Bojale was abandoned by the then chief of the *Bakgatla-baga-kgafela* in 1990 and was revived in 2009. This is important to note, because the initiates who come out of this process become a regiment that symbolises the chief's socio-political base (Setlhabi, 2014:459). This ritual is directly linked to the legitimate leadership being

constituted. Importantly, the revival of *Bojale* has seen the requirement of sexual preservation being dropped; women of any age and status can now participate whether married or unmarried, and with or without children.

This again complicates our conceptions of womanhood, begging the question that in this particular context, one remains a girl (whether married or not and having had children or not) until they go through the initiation. Setlhabi (2014: 466) argues that "a girl dies during the ceremony and a woman is born". The reason given for this shift is that the tradition had been abandoned for many years. Furthermore, it seems that the chief was attempting a reconstruction of *Bakgatla* ethnic identity and a legitimising of his leadership – this required that all women be able to participate. "Leaders in all spheres use ethnic identity to more easily rule and control their subjects…initiation evoked a strong ethnic identity that continued after the ceremony" (Sethlabi, 2014:472). In the creation of this collective identity, a membership to the regiment is more important than age and marital status. Sethlabi (2014) further notes that this transition was a constant reminder of the shift from girlhood and womanhood. The initiates create and choose a collective identity that must maintain after initiation and this was about women's unity. When the regiment is named, they attain a new social status and identity: "the real Bakgatla women".

The Apache (an indigenous group in the United States) puberty ceremony for girls "is given by parents to secure long life, health and freedom from evil for the girl, and to demonstrate that their daughter is good and strong and able to enter upon the duties of womanhood in the tribe" (Cummings, 1939:1). Furthermore, the purpose of this process is to bring health, fertility and greater prosperity to the family and the community. The ceremony is divided into two parts: the first is devoted to each individual girl and the second is the sunrise ceremony. The latter ceremony requires the girl to continue dancing through a series of chants, and to be put through a series of tests by her grandmother in order to reveal her strength and endurance (Cummings, 1939:2). Iborra and Markstrom (2003) note that adolescence is a transitional phase where one is being prepared to take on adult responsibilities, and that rites of passage ceremonies therefore play a significant role in identity transition. This transition involves "becoming and feeling like one's self…having a sense of direction in life …perceiving sameness and continuity…[and] expressing identity that is affirmed by a community" (Iborra and Markstrom, 2003:400).

The sunrise ceremony is not only about showing the girl's strength and goodness, it is also about confirming her readiness to be a woman. This ceremony carries initiates to a new identity and incorporates them into a new social status. This new social status is attached to new roles, commitments and responsibility. It is understood that the rite of passage itself socialises girls into appropriate womanhood (Iborra and Markstrom, 2003:408). Collective identity is also emphasised through these ceremonies, specifically through the ways that womanhood is passed down by grandmothers or by role models to the initiates. There is a specific feminine identity to be a Navajo woman or Apache woman, which is assigned or ascribed. However, the initiate must not be a passive recipient; they must permit the ascription of identity.

It can be argued then that these ceremonies are not only about the individual girls, that much like ***Bojale*** these have social implications for the ethnic communities within which they occur. Part of womanhood is having a responsibility to your community, whether this means bringing them greater prosperity, continuing to birth children or blessing the chieftaincy so that it may be deemed legitimate. The work of womanhood, it seems, is about the collective.

Both ***Bojale*** and the Sunrise ceremony place an emphasis on the emergence of a woman out of the process – one begins the ceremony as a girl and ends it as a woman. Interestingly, neither of these rituals attract as much attention and theorisation as others discussed above. One could argue that this is because of the lack of controversy that surrounds them. This is much like ***umemulo***, which has largely been written about in descriptive terms, with an emphasis on the virtues of the young girls who become women and an emphasis on the aesthetics of the process. Unlike other transition rituals that require cutting or some kind of physical alteration of the body, the ***Bojale*** and Sunrise Ceremony (and ***umemulo***) are not theorised as creating physical vulnerability and precarity.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ways in which both girlhood and womanhood has been theorised globally. Piety and virtue are words that come out strongly to describe what the literature has termed 'true womanhood'. There is a clear idea of what the performance of that true womanhood looks like. Moreover, dominant narratives on girlhood seek to theorise girlhood through insecurities and vulnarabilities. The theory

places an emphasis on the precarity of the girl or woman. Moletsane et al (2008), Mitchell and Rentschler (2016), Helgren and Vasconcellos (2012), problematize this kind of narrow conceptualisation. I argue that the ways in which girlhood is written about in African American literature (specificially feminist literature), for example, allows us to see the complexities and agency that girls get from the attainment of womanhood.

Life course theory thinks through the transitions between childhood and adulthood (and thus girlhood and womanhood) through age categories and the social expectations for each category. The limitation of life course theory is its emphasis on age category. This chapter argues that ritual and culture can in fact make meaning out of a girl's biology and development, contrary to the observation made by Helgren and Vasconcellos (2012). The chapter has shown that ritual and culture demonstrate that girlhood and womanhood are not just age categories, but are fundamentally social categories that go beyond the limitations of chronologically defined age. A woman can be married with children and still decide to participate in a rite of passage that officially marks her as a woman. As it is shown in Chapter One, a Zulu woman can participate in *umemulo* after going through the 'life course' stages, such as marriage and motherhood, that mark her as an adult. Therefore, this chapter has shown that rituals and rites of passage provide a layered understanding of transitions and attainment of socially defined womanhood where a biologically older 'uncut' woman can be socially seen as a girl and a biologically 'cut' woman can attain the social status and protection of womanhood.

Overall, this chapter traces different transitions from girlhood to womanhood and speaks to the ways in which the construction of womanhood is linked to the ordering and construction of societies, with a specific focus on African societies. For African societies these transitions include both virtue and ritual – one must have the markers of good girlhood as well as participate in a ritual that marks one's transition into womanhood. The performance of good girlhood and good womanhood begins to tell us a story about contestations and complexities of girlhood rather than transgressions of good girlhood.

Furthermore, studying ceremonies like Bojale, the Sunrise ceremony and *umemulo* allows us to expand on girlhood studies. It allows us to ask questions around the social

value of the transitions, not only for the individuals who participate in them but for the communities within which they occur. The rites of passage that have been discussed in this chapter continue to hold social value, even as the contexts of the societies shifts. It is important to think through and theorise the reasons behind the social value of these ceremonies. There is clearly a collective value and a collective identity that is attained through these rites of passage. This is what the findings in Chapter Four of this thesis show of *umemulo*. Zulu girls participate in this ritual not only for themselves, but for the respect and dignity of their families and community.

Chapter 3 – Insider research: ‘Awazi’ or at least ‘awukwazi konke’ (you do not know, or at least, you do not know it all)

3.1 Introduction

When I was young, my mom never really spoke to me explicitly about sex or sexuality. She always used to say “Londi, *ungabathandi/yeka ukuthanda abafana. Abafana abenzelani lutho. Ungakhulelwa.*” The statement loosely translates to ‘Londi, stay away from boys, they bring nothing into your life. Don’t get pregnant’. My mother, Gamelihle, had me at the tender age of 18. For most of her life and mine, she did everything to make sure that I did not make the same mistake. She made sure that I had more opportunities in life than she could have dreamt of when she was young. I vaguely remember us having a conversation about how beautiful *umemulo* was. We had seen something about it on TV. My mother then said ‘*uma ngiziphathe kahle*’ (if you preserve yourself), she would have *umemulo* for me.

It was only mentioned again the year I turned 21, and we had to begin planning for it. Thus, my interaction with umemulo starts with my own. I have since had questions about how and if I am different because of having gone through it. For someone who is the eldest born daughter, the transition from childhood to adulthood is blurry. For most of my life I was ‘parenting’ my siblings, and so *umemulo* seems to be a way to distinctly mark this transition to adulthood, publicly. One of the biggest questions I have battled with for the years that have followed *umemulo,* is the emphasis on the preservation of virginity as a marker of both good behaviour and achievement of adulthood. Often, when I think about *umemulo*, I think of myself as being part of this community *yekhethelo*, and then I remember that if entrance into this community is based on the preservation of virginity, I am either an illegitimate member or an imposter. This project, therefore, is an effort to understand the untidily reconciled relationship between sexual preservation, sexual freedom, identity and being. Molestane et al (2008) argue that feminist frameworks, and specifically approaches to girlhood studies, “must of necessity start with our own (the researcher’s) experience”. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the methodological aspects of this project.

The methodology chapter outlines how this research was carried out and accounts for why the project is placed in the way that it is, looking at the research sites, participants and data collection process. I speak to my own positionality in relation to the project, using Brannick and Coghlan (2007), Chaves (2008) and Mohoto (2017) to make a case for the importance and complexities of insider/insider-outsider research. Moreover, I analyse the ways in which feminist scholarship, especially African based feminist scholarship, interacts with methodology, specifically insider/insider-outsider research.

For this study, I went back home to Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal, in an attempt to centre Zulu women as the knowers and the creators of knowledge that is for and about them. I conclude the chapter by making a case for thematic analysis as the lens that will be used to read, interpret and make meaning of the data.

3.2 The complexities of ukwazi nokungazi (knowing and not knowing)

I am doing this research as both an insider and outsider. I went through the process of umemulo and I have located this research in my hometown. Yet, I am also as an outsider because my *memulo* was my first real encounter *nomemulo, okuvamisile ukuthi umemulo nomemulo uyahluka* (*imemulo* usually differ) based on the context in which it happens (region, class, urban and rural area). I suppose the strangest thing about this research has been the feeling of familiarity. I know the community, I know the people - some of us grew up very intimately together and some of us know of each other from the times we used to walk the streets of the location doing what young people do. This feeling of familiarity disturbs the idea of research for me. Often, we do research on a particular topic because of what we do not know, and this familiarity makes me want to say, “but I know!” However, my interaction with my community has told me ‘awazi’ (you don’t know) or at least ‘awukwazi konke’ (you do not know it all).

Chaves (2008:475) argues that ‘insider positionality’ can be both helpful and limiting to the researcher. They argue that both insider and outsider researchers have to deal with “similar methodological issues around positionality, a researcher’s sense of self, and the situated knowledge she/he possesses as a result of her/his location in the social order”. Mohoto (2017) defines insider positionality as

> A terminology used to refer to the phenomenon of being privy to the community in which one is a researcher. This is to say that insider positionality is the

> condition of being not only an 'objective' researcher in the positivist sense, but of being implicated in the research by virtue of being a member of the community in and on which one is doing research to one extent or the other (Mohoto, 2017:30).

Brannick and Coghlan (2007) argue that, while outsider research is seen as neutral, outsider researchers apply preconceived categories to create universal, context-free knowledge. Insider research, on the other hand, tends to generate contextually embedded knowledge. Amadiume (2017) reflects on fieldwork that she did in her hometown for the book *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1987). She notes that empirical ethnographic research is written about as a sociocultural rite of passage because outsider researchers come into the society they are studying as strangers and must learn the language, kinship relations, the society's protocols and social expectations. She, as an insider, had knowledge and memory of the space and community, and therefore did not need the 'sociocultural rite of passage'. Importantly, she notes that what she lacked in resources, she made up for through family and kinship, which gave her immediate access to space and community and therefore knowledge.

The limitations of insider research, as outlined by Chavez (2008), are based on positionality: creating bias based on over-identification with the group or over-reliance on one's own experience. Furthermore, the limitations present themselves in the interpretation and representation phase of the research project, where the insider researcher may be selective about what data to represent and find it difficult to recognize patterns due to familiarity with the community (Chavez, 2008: 479).

Amadiume (2017) notes that while she did not start from scratch (as an outsider would) when she did her fieldwork, she was aware that she had been taught falsehoods about her community and would need to unlearn these in the process of knowledge construction. One could argue that Amadiume uses this understanding and this knowledge to do research that seeks to challenge these falsehoods about her community (and thus herself). Motsemme (2011) argues that it is her experience of growing up in the township, with a single parent activist at the height of apartheid violence, that draws her to explore the lives of women in the township. She notes that her knowledge and memory of her community and the survival mechanisms of women in the township pushes her to use a methodology that would account for the women she spoke to as whole human beings. She, therefore, uses her own positionality to do research that

reflects the township women's positionality as complex. Motsemme (2011) further argues that for her to make sense of these complexities, she needed a methodology that would be flexible, where she could account for the experiences of women in the township.

> Of course throughout my university years I would visit regularly, but in short I increasingly became a 'visiting daughter,' rather than embedded in the daily life of my community. However, even now having been a university lecturer, researcher and research manager my black knees betray my working class roots and this embodiment places me right back to my visceral situatedness as a township female subject Motsemme (2011:121).

Insider research becomes important for Amadiume (2017) and Motsemme (2011). as it is their situatedness or positionality that becomes most useful for their data collection and research in general. Mohoto (2017) reflects on the experiences of black women academics who form part of an accelerated development programme, an experience that was her reality at the time, and argues that her insider position is a strength rather than a weakness. She argues that her position as an insider allowed her to think of the experiences of those she interviewed and herself as valid and worthy of theorisation (Mohoto, 2017:33). She used her 'insiderness' to gain access to narratives that may not otherwise be available to those who design such programmes, and these allowed her to reflect on the personal implications of national scaling of the New Generation of Academics Programme (NGAP).

However, Mohoto (2017) positions both herself and her participants as insider-outsiders:

> In this instance, I am certainly an insider in this research in that I am a black woman studying black women, I am a young woman studying young women, I am an academic studying fellow academics and I am an ADP [Accelerated Development Programme] participant studying fellow ADP participants. In other ways, however, I am an outsider in terms of disciplinary knowledge and seniority ranking in relation to my interview participants. In the same way, the participants are insiders as well to the workings of research: how it is conducted, why it is conducted and what the rules of conducting research are which may feed or detract from the ways in which they choose to respond to my questions" (Mohoto, 2017:32)

This positioning allows us to unpack the complexities of insider research, or the positioning of researchers in general. She argues that no researcher can actually be

positioned fully as an outsider, that polyvocality (or presence of multiple voices) means that we acknowledge that our feelings, values, political views, sexuality, culture, class and race interact with our research and thus cannot be divorced from our preconceptions of the community and people we study (Mohoto,2017:31).

Furthermore, Ngcobozi (2017) argues that her study on the Methodist Manyano in post-apartheid South Africa, an organisation where her grandmother had been a leader for as long as she could remember, forced her to be present, more so than she had ever been:

> This is my grandmother's world and I have been a part of it many times over. However, this time, I had to observe and listen instead of thinking about how hungry I am and when we will get to the last person on the programme. I had to be there this time, not just physically, but mentally and possibly spiritually too (Ngcobozi, 2017:37).

Interestingly, she notes that her research is located in the space between life and memory. Her shared memories with her grandmother, and the memories between the Manyano women, are memories that needed to be documented and theorised in order for us to broaden the ways in which memory is constructed and remembered (Ngcobozi, 2017:37). Moreover, an important part of her methodology is the collaborative research between herself and her grandmother. Her positionality as Nosicelo Ndlovu's granddaughter gave her access to different groups of women. She argues that her grandmother's "friendship and kinship she shared with the women gave legitimacy to the study and gave me an entry into the group due to the trust she had established with them over the years" (Ngcobozi, 2017:61). She further argues that this kind of access allows one to acknowledge the women as producers and providers of knowledge to the greater academic discourse which often does not account for these experiences. It further requires black feminists to "move from rigid approaches which focus solely on formally recognised voices in positions of authority and towards broad based approaches which attempt to place black women directly within discourses of community organising and the maintenance thereof" (Ngcobozi, 2017:61).

Magwza (1993) studies ***umemulo nomabo*** as oral traditions passed on from generation to generation in Zulu communities. She is preoccupied with the recurrences in the ceremonies that she has participated in and has observed. One of the assumptions that her study makes is that ceremonies have oral elements, practices and rituals that do

not change over time, in spite of encounters with Christianity, colonialism and urbanisation. I would argue that her advanced participation and experience with the ceremonies allows her to make the above assumption. While Magwaza does not reflect on the usefulness of her insiderness, her situatedness to me seems clear in the way that it aids her study. She notes that part of continuity of the ceremonies is the collective nature of the ceremonies, while what is communicated to and with the collective may vary based on region, age, need, and circumstance but remains "repeatedly pronounced, proclaimed, listened to, heard and remembered; hence it has not died" (Magwaza,1993:3).

One could argue that her interaction with the ceremonies for research purposes is influenced by her participation in these ceremonies, but it appears to me that part of the aim of the study is to challenge the falsehoods about these ceremonies (and communities). The assumption is often that communities' encounters with colonialism, Christianity and urbanisation leads to fundamental shifts to the ways in which societies organise themselves and as well as their identities. However, the oral nature of these ceremonies has ensured the maintenance of the ceremonies and rituals, showing that knowledge is generated and preserved in the collective, in the community.

Therefore, while I attempted to go into the field with as little preconception as possible, the reality was that I knew this community and I knew ***umemulo***. What I did not know was how ***umemulo*** and ***ukuziphatha kahle*** operated as a socialisation process. For example, while I knew that there was a category I have since referred to as Zulu womanhood, and that it presented itself differently, the field work process has allowed me to unpack the complexities of this category. I did this field work wanting to explore the agency of Zulu women in their own socialisation, as well as how they have used and continue to use the ritual to reproduce a kind of Zulu womanhood that is meaningful and useful to them. One could think about Amadiume (2017), Motsemme (2011), Mohoto(2017), Ngcobozi (2017) and Magwaza (1993) as insider-outsider researchers but still argue that the usefulness of their insiderness, is the lens with which they approach field work. It is their situatedness that allows them to immediately acknowledge the complexities of the women they study, and for them to be aware of and confront the falsehoods Amadiume refers to. Feminist approaches to insider research and insider-outsider research seek to prioritise the experiences of the women

they study, by centring the women as the knowers and producers of knowledge on themselves.

3.2.1 Breaking curses, losing my mother, finding a way

I draw on the experiences of the feminists I have mentioned in the above section to think through my own experience in the field. The study required that I reflect on my own socialisation and the choices that my mother made in my socialisation and locate these choices in the broader context of Zulu societies/ socialisations.

My mother focused on education and making sure that my dreams and life were never limited by anything. A big part of this for my mother was that I must not get pregnant. This is one of the agreements that we made very early on. When I left home for university, we reinforced that agreement. For my mother, it was about me escaping the generational curse of having a child at 18 as she, and her mother before her, had done. It was to escape or remove *imikhokha emibi* (repetitive generational occurrences or bad behaviour). The way that my mother approached generational curses/*imikhoka emibi* was threefold: the first (as mentioned) – to not get pregnant; secondly, to go to school; and thirdly, to move out of Estcourt. Therefore, the commitment to breaking generational curses is what gives me access to *umemulo*. For my mother and I, the ritual of *umemulo* was used as a tool *yokususa imikhokha emibi* (removing generational curses) and to claim both physically and metaphysically that these would no longer affect us.

When I told my family that I would be doing this research, and asking questions about our thinking around girlhood and womanhood, they were pleased. More so because I was doing a Masters degree, which for them meant that I was continuing with what is expected (*ukuzi phatha kahle*) by furthering my studies.

uMah (my mother) was integral to getting the word out about my research to the elder women who lead the virginity testing in our community. *Umemulo* happens between December and February. Therefore, invitations to the different celebrations start being sent out in the Spring (between September and November). As she received invitations, she ensured that I was connected to families who were going to have *umemulo*, even though I was not in Estcourt at the time due to my studies. My mother set up the focus groups and interviews eWembezi (a township within Estcourt). These led to me being referred to other women and families who were either going to have *umemulo* or had had *umemulo* already.

Unfortunately, as the fieldwork process was unfolding, my mother passed away. This was at the height of the summer, the *umemulo* season, which meant that I had to pause my fieldwork to mourn and be with family. The week after we had laid uMah to rest, I continued the fieldwork with the help of the families that I had been in touch with while planning the fieldwork. My mother's passing was what unexpectedly kept me going. Even when I told the families I interviewed of our bereavement, they were surprised and empathetic and all expressed that uGamelihle would have wanted me to continue, to finish the work that we had started together not so long ago.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Research Sites

This research is located in Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), in the townships as well as surrounding areas, namely Wembezi, Paapkalius Fountain, Ntambamhlophe and Cornfields – these are a mixture of urban and rural contexts. A total of 26 participants from Wembezi, Paapkalius Fountain, Ntambamhlophe and Cornfields (both young and older women) were interviewed for this study.

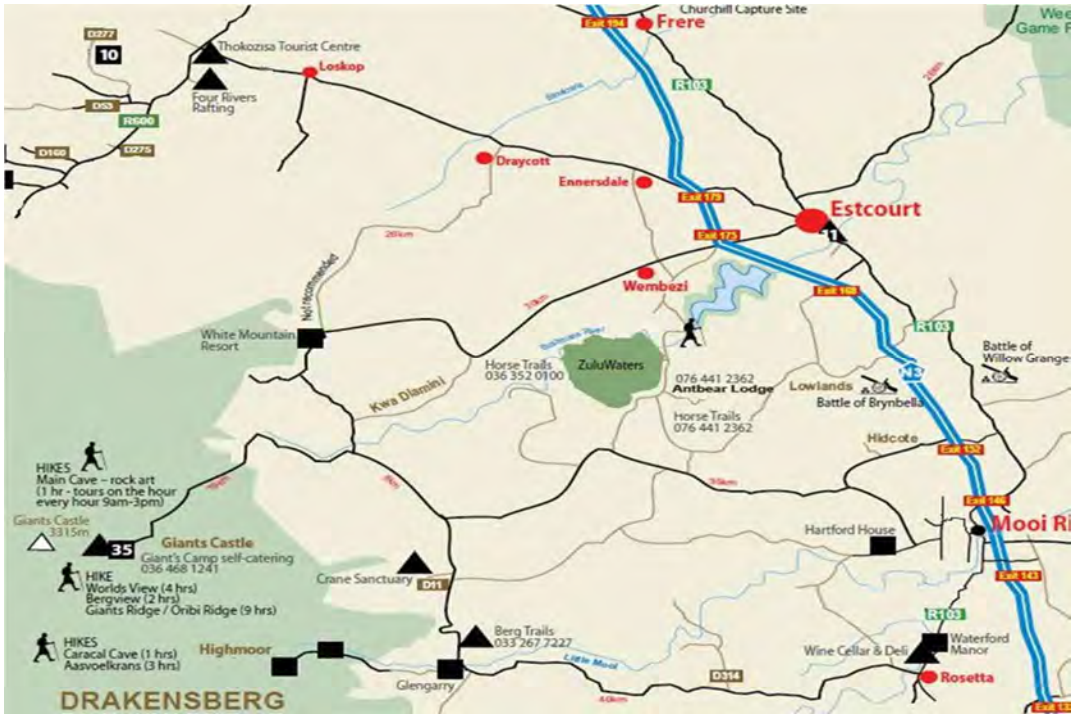

Figure 3.1: Map showing Estcourt and the surrounding rural areas where research was conducted (sourced from Google Maps).

The original idea was to locate this study in two towns, Bergville and Estcourt. Unfortunately, there were no responses from the women in Bergville that I or my mother had reached out to, and therefore fieldwork was conducted entirely in Estcourt.

Estcourt was more accessible because it is home. The community seems to have a keen interest in participating in research projects done by students from our community and about our community. Estcourt is a small town towards the north of KZN with a population of 22,071 (last updated in 2011). Like many of the towns in South Africa, it is made up of urban and rural areas with Africans making up the majority of the population. This was a great asset when it came to identifying other participants, most of the people in the study were identified through snowballing, a sampling method where other participants connect the researcher to more participants.

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups. The use of semi-structured questions allows for participants to lead the conversation and so while the prepared questions were fairly direct (see appendix 1), they allowed for participants to respond openly and for me to ask questions that I had not prepared for, which were important to the participants in their understanding of ***umemulo***. In focus group discussions, it allowed participants to respond to each others' experiences and observations. This study uses qualitative research methodology in order to fully capture the individual and collective experience of umemulo and the "dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants…" (Mason, 2002:1). Mason (2002:1) explains that qualitative reseach accounts for the nuances in specific contexts which produces 'cross-contextual generalities'. With this study, I seek to account for Zulu girlhood in particular, and the the interaction between girls/girlhoods and their context (culturally, socio-politically and socio-economically).

Due to the sensitivity of conversations around women's sex and sexuality, the focus groups were separated between elder women and young women, in order to create a space where all participants could answer questions openly and comfortably. The implications of sex and sexuality for ***isithunzi*** (dignity) of the women and their families are discussed indepth in Chapters 4 and 5, ultimately arguing that conceptions of Zulu womanhood often consider sexual freedom a taboo. The elder and younger women in this study have reimagined girlhood and how it interacts with sexual freedom, in ways

that maybe seen to controversial and even contradictory. Their names in this study have been anonymised in order to allow for their experiences to be shared explicity, while protecting their individual identitits and maintaining *izithunzi zabo* (their dignity*).* The images that have been used in this study were submitted by participants themselves for the purposes of use in the thesis. They have been blurred to protect participant identities, while still giving a portrait of the various stages of *umemulo.*

My mother connected me to two elder women abahlola (virginity testing) and help facilitate *imemulo* for different families, these women are known affectionately and hieratically as oGogo (a term of respect used for elder women). oGogo were the ones who then connected me with different girls *abazomula noma asebamula* (who had or were to go through *umemulo*). This work is an intergenerational work, as both focus groups and individual interviews are made up of participants from three categories:

1) oGogo *abahlolayo nabamulisayo* (elder women who facilitate virginity testing and the ceremony)
2) *Umndeni omulisayo* (the family of the young women initiates)
3) *Nezintokazi ezimulayo* (the young women who are going through the process of *umemulo*).

I separated the focus groups and interview into these categories, with each group having their own session at each site, with the understanding that some of the questions would refer to sex and sexuality.

In total, I conducted four focus groups and two individual interviews with the young women, *asebamula nabebemula* (who had or were to go through umemulo). The majority of the focus groups and interviews were with young women *asebamula* (who had gone through umemulo) over the years and for one of the focus groups, the umemulo was ongoing, *besemgonqweni* (while they were in seclusion). With the elder women, I conducted two focus groups and one individual interview.

3.3.1.1. Ntabamhlophe and Cornfields

These two areas make up part of the rural areas that surround Estcourt. These communities are still very traditional. I interviewed one participant from each of these areas, and part of the limitation of this project, in terms of access to participants, was

the sheer vastness of the area. I always tell the story of my field work through the story of my journey to the Cornfields. Geographically, this area seems close to the town, however, I discovered that it is much further than I initially understood it to be. This interview took place on a Sunday, which limited public transport and so I hitch-hiked to the main road and then walked for 2-3km to the family home. It is difficult to get focus groups together unless it is during ***umgonqo*** (seclusion) and unfortunately I had missed ***umemulo*** by a week or two and okaNtombi the other had taken place years before.

These two sites were the ones that had individual interviews. While these were incredibly informative, they were much more rigid than the focus groups. The interview process gave me the more formal or procedural understanding of ***umemulo nokuziphatha kahle*** – the more traditional understanding.

3.3.1.2. Wenbezi and Phaphakhulu

These areas can be classified as urban areas, townships to be more specific. These two areas make up the majority of the study, being the site of all the elder women interviews and focus groups, and four out of the six younger women interviews and focus groups. These areas are also relatively close to each other and town, which meant they were easily accessible using public transport.

I needed to be creative about how I conducted the focus groups, and some took place over Whatsapp. Interestingly, this did not seem to change the nature of the focus groups; we were able to recreate the space ***somgonqo*** (of seclusion) even in the virtual space. I think this is because the focus groups happened with people who knew each other, and therefore the discussion ***ikhululeke*** (was free) as much as it would have been in person.

Figure 3.2: Izintombi zibuya ukuyougeza nokuhloba emfuleni, sezizocela imikhonto (The girls have comeback from the river and will receive their spears). The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

Figure 3.3: Izintombi zigcoba ibomvo nomcako zivela emfuleni (The girls have put on a red and a white clay after returning from the river). The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

Figure 3.4: Umemulo, esigcawini receiving gifts from her family and friends esehlabe umkhonto. These gifts mostly include money and blankets. The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

Figure 3.5: Esigcawini ngaphambi kokuhlaba umkhonto (This is just before they throw the spear into the ground). The image has been blurred to protect the identities of the participants.

Names (Young women)	**Age (at the time of umemulo)**	**Attendees or Participants Emhlangeni (Reed Ceremony)**
Mpilo	21	No
Khwezi	16	No
Phumi	20	No
Sibonga	18	No
Nompumelelo	21	No
Mbali	25	No
Thobile	21	No
Fezile	21	No
Enhle	21	No
Fezeka	16	Yes
Zipho	22	No

Mpho	22	No
Sihle	21	No
Ndalo	19	No
Buhle	18	No
Ntombi	29	No
Zinhle	21	Yes
Khanyisa	21	Yes
Thembelihle	23	Yes
Thando	28	Yes

Figure 3.6: Participant information of the younger women

Names (Elder women)	**Age**	**Relationship to intombi emulayo (the girl whose Umemulo it was)**
MamNdwandwe	48	Mother
Mamkhumalo	62	Grandmother
Thandi	35	Aunt
Sibongile	36	Aunt
MamShezi	50	Mother
MaKheswa	55	Family friend
Gogo MaDladla	60	Gogo omulisayo nohlolayo endaweni (the elder women who facilitate Umemulo and virginity testing), Emahhashini, Estcourt

Figure 3.7: Participants information of the elder women

3.4 Limitation of research: Age and what is sayable

The women I interviewed were all very different. One of the notable differentiating factors is that some bought into the notion of ***ukuziphatha kahle*** through preservation: these were the girls ***abahlolwayo*** (whose virginity was tested). These particular groups completely shifted my ability to 'over'-identify with the group and limited my ability to rely on my experience because we simply had different understandings of ***ukuzipatha kahle*** and womanhood; mine leaned more towards liberal than conservative (this will be explored further in Chapter 4). This limited or erased the need to speak to them about

my own experience of umemulo because in the way that they thought about *umemulo nokuziphatha kahle*, I should not have had *umemulo*.

I understood that me sharing about *umemulo wami* would change the conversation by making it more rigid. In other conversations where the young women *abangahlolwa, abamula bengezona izintombi nto* (those who did not participate in virginity testing and had *imemulo* as non-virgins), I found that, at first, they did not want to openly speak about this. They were shy, as if they had never said it out loud. I would then share with them my own experience and this would open up the conversation. I began by exploring how I felt, and my personal anxiety around *umkhonto nomhlwehlwe*, and my ideas about sex. My level of 'freedom' (*ukukhululeka*) in my answers seemed to set the tone for a conversation *ekhululekile* (that was free). I would argue therefore, that my access came from a combination of positionality, age and personality.

Brannick and Coghlan (2007) note that for insider research both primary and secondary access are easier to gain; the former refers to being allowed to do the research, while the latter refers to having access to specific parts of the organisation that outsiders would not automatically have. However, this access can also limit the insider researcher if a hierarchy dictates who has access to what. Here, I would argue again that what gives me secondary access is my positionality, age and personality. Moreover, the ability *yokuhloniphisa* (to use the *ukuhlonipha* code), specifically with the elders, allowed me to have a conversation with them that might have been considered taboo.

The *ukuhlonipha* code is a custom of reverence where young people and married women avoid male elders as a way of showing respect. In the broader sense the *ukuhlonipha* code extends to the respect shown by any young person to any older person irrespective of sex (Ntsimane, 2007:116, Rudwick and Shange, 2011:67). This is seen through "behaviour, speech and general conduct" (Ntsimane, 2007: 116), and notably, this code is based on the idea of avoidance. When it comes to language, it allows or requires us *ukuhloniphisa*. This means avoiding the use of vulgar words or words that can seem too direct, the use of these words shows respect to the person being referred to (instead of saying *umuntu ufile,* we say *ushonile* and for a King we say *ikhotheme*). Understanding this when it comes to conversations about sex and sexualities was fundamental.

I found that with the younger women, I could use the word ‘sex’ or even ‘sexuality’ (if I was asking the question in English), whereas with the older women I had to say *ukulala nomfana* or *ukuthintwa umfana* or *ucansi* (to have sex) – and they would use the same language. And for some of the responses that required the women themselves to use the word ‘sex’, they would either be embarrassed or uncomfortable and would instead say *leyonto* which translates to ‘that thing’. The space required an understanding of the *ukuhlonipha* code, as a Zulu woman, in particular *omulile* (those who have gone through umemulo). I had this understanding as I was socialised within this code.

Doing research in my home about a process that I had been through requires a complex balance between my own experiences, the other young women’s experiences and our context – it has taught me that even when we think we know, often we don’t know. I position myself as an insider-outsider. An insider because I had done *umemulo* and this was my home. An outsider because I was not a virgin when I did *umemulo,* and I was a visiting daughter to the community at the point at which I conducted this study. I think that the value of my insiderness is attached to the access I gain from the kinship and friendship my mother had within our community, particularly with oGogo *abamulisayo nabahlolayo* (elder women who facilitate virginity testing and *umemulo*). These are the women who connected me to the rest of the community of women *abamulile* and *abamulayo*.

3.5 A case for Thematic Analysis Approach

In *Feminism and Methodology*, Harding (1987) argues that an attempt to creating a feminist methodology often results in the creation of essentially three categories of scholarship. First is the recovery and re-appreciation of women’s scholarship that has been erased or trivialised, where men’s work would have been given recognition. Secondly, researchers focus on the existing contributions and fields in the social science made by women. Lastly, there is an emphasis on women as victims of male dominance – what Harding (1987) calls “victimologies”. Ladner (in Harding,1987) problematises the ways in which research has been done, arguing that often the relationship between researcher and subject takes the form of oppressor and oppressed – research is dominated by men as knowers, and so knowledge is gendered and furthermore is classist. In addition, white women insist on speaking on behalf of black women.

A feminist methodology would be one that movers away from recreating these kinds of relationships. This project specifically seeks to speak about Zulu women's experiences in the way that they themselves speak about them. For this purpose, thematic analysis was the chose tool of analysis. I sought to understand the participants' experiences rather than to draw conclusions or give judgements. The idea is not to resolve the issues (which are explored in the following chapter) but to understand them. This is emphasised by Attride-Sterling (2001:387), who says "thematic networks aim to explore the understanding of an issue or the signification of an idea, rather than to reconcile conflicting definitions of a problem." She further posits that what "thematic networks offer is the web-like network as an organizing principle and a representational means" – these networks show how the researcher moves from text to interpretation or data collection to interpretation. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis is a process for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". As a tool, it allows the researcher to give details about their data and moves away from simply giving participants a voice, and rather identify themes which "capture[s] something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent[s] some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set " (Braun and Clarke, 2006:79).

The themes must be connected to one another, as they tell the broader story of participants. They are drawn from the data once interviews have been transcribed and one 'sits' or 'lives' with the data, trying to see the patterns and commonalities or even conflicting ideas about one theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue further that "an account of themes 'emerging' or being 'discovered' is a passive account of the process of analysis" (2006:80), noting that this ignores the active role played by the researcher as they chose the patterns and themes they write about. Importantly, they caution against equating the number of times something might appear in the data set to it being more crucial than the other themes. This decision requires flexibility in one's understanding of themes and patterns. The consideration the researcher must make is whether the theme captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006:82).

Bruan and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis can either be essentialist or constructionist. The former refers to a method that simply reports the experience or lived reality of research subjects and participants, whereas the latter examines "the ways

in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society". This is where I locate my research, within the constructionist approach, through the lens of meanings and experiences being socially produced and reproduced, rather than individualised (Bruan and Clarke, 2006:85).

Using thematic analysis allows us to examine the social conditions that allow for the creation and maintenance of notions of Zulu girlhood and womanhood, and further what has *ukuzi phatha kahle* meant or means as a tool of constructing Zulu girlhood and womanhood. As the next chapter will show, the themes vary from those that come up frequently to those that may not come up as frequently but have a huge impact on the ways in which Zulu women conceptualise girlhood and womanhood.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter traces the logic of the research, starting off with how I was introduced to *umemulo* at home, and my eventual decision to study it. I do so through reflecting on family notions of curses and what needs to be done to remove them (*imikhokha nokususwa kwayo*). I do not suggest that all the families that I interviewed conducted umemulo for the same reasons, it is simply my entry point to the conversation.

Furthermore, this chapter makes a case for insider/insider-outsider research, arguing that while *ukwazi nokungazi* is complex, it is essential to this study. It also gives an overview of the research site and the demographics of participants. Lastly, this chapter speaks to the tool of analysis, locating this study within a feminist methodology that centres the Zulu girls and women as the knowers and thematic analysis.

Chapter Four – “Intombi eziphethe kahle ikhula ibe umama oqotho”: Zulu Girlhood and Public Secrets

4.1 Introduction

Umemulo is a ceremony that Zulu girls perform to signal and symbolise their entry into womanhood. This transition is based on ***ukuziphatha kahle.*** If one shows clear markers of good girlhood, they are gifted with ***umemulo***, a public ritual marking this transition. This study seeks to examine evolving notions of Zulu girlhood as constructed and passed on through umemulo. It analyses the ways in which the understandings of ***ukuziphatha kahle*** have shifted for Zulu girls and women. Furthermore, it seeks to examine what the ruptures (virginity and sexuality) and continuities in the practice of ***umemulo*** tells us about Zulu girlhood in post-apartheid South Africa. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I wanted this study to center Zulu women as the knowledge creators, I wanted to explore the agency of Zulu women in their own socialisation as well as how they have used and continue to use the ritual to reproduce a kind of Zulu womanhood that is meaningful and useful to them. This chapter seeks to bring this out, centring the voices of Zulu women and girls on girlhood and womanhood. This chapter outlines the themes that come across from the conversations with young and older women, these themes vary from those that come up frequently in the conversations to those that may not come up as frequently but have a rich impact on the conversation.

The focus groups were designed in such a way that would create a space for the women to share their own experience of Zulu girlhood and womanhood but further for them to share their collective experiences. Young girls go through ***umemulo*** in groups and therefore share this ‘big’ moment, this confirmation of having been good girls entering womanhood (good womanhood). This chapter brings out the Zulu girls and women’s experiences in Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal.

In each focus group the process of ***umemulo*** was discussed, this showed the ways in which ***umemulo*** is done differently or in similar ways by different parts of the Zulu society. The women make these distinctions clear including some of the changes the ritual has seen over the years, while still maintaining a general patterned understanding of how and when ***umemulo*** is done. One of the other major themes is what I have termed the metaphysics of ***umemulo***. In this theme, various women articulated the clear

ancestral value of *umemulo*. The relationship between *amadlozi* (ancestors) and *umemulo* further presents itself through the concept of affirming *isithunzi zomuntu nesizwe sakhe* (one's dignity and the dignity of their people). This concept will be unpacked further in the discussion chapter.

Ukuziphatha kahle is at the core of girlhood, womanhood and the purpose of the practice of *umemulo* (*ukwenziwa komemulo*). The markers of *ukuziphatha kahle* can be seen in different ways i.e. the preservation of one's virginity versus not having a child, *ukuhlonipha nokufihla* (respect and secrecy), perception and performance. Moreover, the definitions, performances and aspirations of womanhood arise as major talking points. All these themes ultimately reveal the different ways in which *ukuziphatha kahle* has been thought of and continues to shift as the socio-political context of Zulu people evolves. Further, these themes help us understand the ways in which sex, sex talk, play and pleasure show up as ruptures of democratic South Africa for Zulu women (and Zulu societies in general).

4.2 The process of umemulo: ritual, custom and nemikhuba (habits)

For most of the families I talked to, *uGogo ohlolayo nomulisayo*, an elder, a custodian *yamasiko*, particularly for Zulu girlhood and womanhood in these instances, played a major role in umemulo. She guides the family through the process of *umemulo*, largely because *umemulo* is an oral tradition passed on from generational custodian to generational custodian. It is in more recent years that *umemulo* becomes more prevalent, where families outside of the rural areas also participate in the tradition and are unfamiliar with the process but want to ensure that all the rituals have been done. For this study, three elder women including uGogo MaDladla, were the elders who helped connect me to families *abamulisayo noma asebamulisa* (families who were doing the ritual or have done it before) and spoke to me about some of the concepts and rituals that are central in the process of *umemulo*. This section details some of the themes that speak specifically to the process of *umemulo*, what happens when and why it is so.

4.2.1 Stages and rules of Umemulo

The women describe what happens before the actual day *yomemulo* and on the day, and they mostly describe it in the same way. This includes a series of 'tests' or rituals (*imikhuba*) that symbolise or tell the family and community that one is or is no longer a virgin. Interestingly, these rituals occur even when it is known that one is not a virgin. The following contains some of the participants' descriptions of the ritual.

uNtombi details the process:

> Once a date has been set, your parents accompany you to ask *izimpelesi zakho* (the people who will accompany you through your process) to join you in the process. *Ukucimela* follows, *ukucimela* is to go to your relatives to inform and invite them to *umemulo*. Relatives will give gifts to the young girls, when you come to each family, you don't greet them, you pretend to be very serious and they will talk to the other ladies.

She then explains the next stage which is *umgongqo* (seclusion):

> At this time, you spend about a week to ten days in the room. You are not allowed to go out even to fetch the food from the kitchen, everything you need is done for you or brought to you.

She is unclear as to the reason for this seclusion. She notes that she has heard that it is a way to prevent the girls from encountering any bad luck leading up to *umemulo* (and of course to prepare for the day of the ceremony).

She goes on to talk through stage 3, the day before the ceremony, and the ceremony itself.

> On the day of slaughtering the cow, which is usually a Friday, you go out with *impelesi* (the girl's age mates accompanying her through the process) to the mountain to sit there and wait for your father or uncle to fetch you. Then they come with a spear that they will give to you. The belief is that when you left home you were a girl, and when you come back you will then be a woman. You will come to meet them singing. They give you a spear and you come and stand at the gate. You will wait at the gate until they bring the goat. They hold the goat there at the gate and report to the ancestors: "Here is your daughter, Ntombi. She is no longer a girl now, she is a woman." You are now led into the Rondavel. You will wait there for the cow to be slaughtered, so that they can get the gallbladder (a very important part of the slaughtered animal). They will smear it on your hands and feet. They will burn the incense (*impepho*) and talk to the ancestors. The gallbladder is then wrapped or tied around your wrist. The spear is still in your hand, you now go out to the yard to sing and dance. As you sing and dance, your whole body is covered with red clay and one side with white clay. You will now go to the river to bath. You cannot bath inside the house because you are being cleansed to wash away all bad luck (*amabhadi*). You go back to your room to continue seclusion and to

> finalise rehearsals for Saturday, the big day. Reed mats (*amacansi*) are used to separate the young girls who continue to be in seclusion for the people who are there *bezokhwaya* (sing and dance through the night) and participate in the game *yensonyama. Insonyama* is part of the cow that is used to play a game on the night before *umemulo*. Each person cuts off two pieces of meat and throws one away as a gesture of closing a particular chapter of their lives, and eats the other piece as a gesture symbolizing moving forward. Very early in the morning you go outside, where the uncles have prepared a tent for you to get ready for the function. It is time for the celebration. The father and uncles identify the ground not far from home. They make sure it is safe. They use *intelezi* to spray/sprinkle there to make it safe from all evil spirits. People are starting to arrive.
>
> You now start singing from the tent and go to wait for the father at the gate, who is going to come with the cow fat (*umhlwehlwe*). They will let you wear it as you would wear a jersey. All your relatives are watching and are waiting to give you some more gifts. At this moment your father has the spear and it is going to be given to you in public. There is another spear from your boyfriend if there is one, or from uncles. The girl's father or uncles walk straight to you with the spear and hit it hard into the ground and she with *impelisi (age mates)* takes the spears and starts dancing with them. Then your relatives bring gifts and money. The next day, which is usually on Sunday, you go to town where there are many people and walk around, dressed like in a newly-wed bride's traditional attire. This is when you buy sweets with some of the money you were given, and throw them or give them away, this is done as a form of getting rid of bad luck.

Ntombi's narration of the different stages of the ritual, show the collective nature of *umemulo*. From the customs performed for *ukubikwa komsebenzi*, to *umgonqo* to the actual day of the ceremony. Family (including the ancestors) and the community *nezimpelesi zakho* (your peers) are included in every step. It is important to note that the stages of the customs and rituals differ based on family and region (and often class).

4.2.2. The role of songs: *Amaculo omemulo*

As stated in Chapter One, songs are integral to *umemulo* and define and mark different rituals and different stages. Gogo MaDladla notes that the songs differ between *awokubonga, isigekle, umayinceke nawokugida*.

Different African rituals and cultures follow *lomkhuba* (loosely translates to habit). Weddings, for example, are divided into stages, where the groom or bride's family mark the stage with a particular song. There are songs to ask for the bride, for welcoming her, as well as songs that plead with the groom and his family to treat *umakoti* well. This is also the case for AmaXhosa and *ulwaluko* (male circumcision).

- *Amaculo okubonga* (songs of gratitude) - These express thankfulness and gratitude to *intombi's* (the young woman's) parents for the gift of *umemulo.* Emphasis is placed on thanking the girl's father. This will be examined further as it comes up in interviews below.

- *Isigekle* (songs for entertainment) - *Amaculo aneStep*: these songs are accompanied by a choreographed dance. They are sung to entertain the crowd so that they come forward and give the young woman money in order to show their appreciation of her.

- *Umayinceke* - Probably the most important part of *umemulo* - this is where *kuhlatshwa umkhonto, ukuma nokuwa komkhonto, nokungadabuki komhlwehlwe* (the girls participating in *umemulo* must put or throw the spear into the ground, and the spear either stands or falls and the cow fat tears or does not). This is what confirms for the elders and the community that *uyintombi nto* (a virgin), the song sung basically indicates that it is time for the spear to be thrown in the ground and further emphasises that it is the father of the girl who gifts her with *umemulo*:
  Lyrics to umayinceke: Oohh mayebabo. Oohh ooMay'nceke. Ubaba uthi angemule ngishay' umay'nceke" *repeated until the spear is in the ground and is followed by celebration*

Iculo lokuchimela – Ukucimela is the process where the girls who are about to have *umemulo*, referred to as *onomahoyi*, visit different parts of their family to inform and invite them to the ceremony. Interestingly, when leading up to *umemulo kucinyelwa*, the young women are allowed to sing songs that contain profanity. This is not usual in any other gatherings or celebrations that are accompanied by singing. It is unclear why this ritual occurs or why it is important. One could argue that this is a moment of absolute freedom, where young women can be as 'unwomanly' as they want to be, before they enter the social category of Zulu womanhood that requires *ukuzotha* (to be humble or dignified). It is also accompanied by girls hitting any men or boys who don't look away or run away when they see oNomahhoyi (word used to refer to the girls

having umemulo), the girls *abacimemelayo* sing: Sizocimela hoyayaho, sizocimela hoyayaho, wenomahoyi hoyayaho (repeated)

4.2.3. Adaptations to the process and ritual

The women speak to some of the adaptations that have been made to the process of *umemulo*. The elder women acknowledge that, generally, the distinctions between *imemulo* is largely dependent on different families. They express that there are no major adaptations between *umemulo emandulo* and *umemulo manje* (in the past and in the present). Some of these adaptations are contrary to the young women's expectations. Where they expected their mothers (or the elder women) to enforce strict rules, they were met with a freedom they could only enjoy *emgonqweni* (in seclusion) and not publicly -

Mpho noted the difference in expectations of her 'good' behaviour:

> But it was not as formal as people say it is because what we hear is that uhm ukuhlala emgonqwini awukwazi ukuphuma, you can't do this, you can't do that … and then now siChill-ile and we are drinking in here hhayi kumnandi.

While some of the changes made to the ritual are a result of concerns for the safety of young girls, there is an acknowledgment of the ways in which the prevalence of rape and rape culture have made the world unsafe for girls. One of the elder women, uMaKheswa, placed an emphasis on things being done traditionally and was wary of the reasoning behind these adaptations. She thought that girls are often just too lazy to do things the traditional way. She is, however, understanding of adaptations to the process that seek to protect the girls from violence:

MaKheswa:

> Emalokishini kuhluke kakhulu, ngoba yikho lento yokweqa umlilo khona, kweqiwa umlilo esangweni, bagijime bayogezela ngale emvakwezindlu.
>
> [In the townships it's different because there are no rivers nearby, they jump over the fire and go bath behind houses (probably the neighbors').]

Other elder women echoed this thought.

MamShezi:

> The fact is that the girls are scared to be exposed to the boys who might rape them. They are scared even to go out when it's still dark, it is not safe.

MaKheswa:

> Apart from rape the girls are too lazy. The Zulu culture is clear: we need to bath in the river, in the running water.

At the same time, the reasoning for other changes is unclear. For example, there is no explanation for why the fire that the girls must jump over (as part of the tests for virginity) is smaller than it was in the past. In the conversations in preparation for *umemulo*, the fire is exaggerated and is thought of as one of the major tests for *ubuntombi*. It is second only to *ukungawi komkhonto nokungadabuki komhlwehlwe* (the spear not falling and the cow fat not tearing). This part of the ritual was described by the young women interviewed.

Zipho:

> In the morning, we jumped over the fire naked.

Mpho:

> Kodwa umlilo wawumncane mina ngangithi bazokwenza umlilo oSerious like owokupheka.
>
> [But the fire was a small one, I thought they would make a serious like the kind we use to cook]

It is important to take note of the process of *umemulo*: as a whole, it is a ritual that encompasses different rituals or *imikhuba*. *Imikhuba* differ according to regions and families. Therefore, while every u*memulo* has a generic structure, it differs in *ngemikhuba* (the habits or customs) that are prioritised. The different stages as described by Ntombi will be found largely in Estcourt and the surrounding areas. These stages might be slightly different in stricter rural areas, where virginity testing is still heavily prioritised, and might be less strict in the more urban areas, where *umemulo* closely resembles a 21st birthday celebration. *Umemulo wentombi nomuntu ongenangane* (*umemulo* of a virgin and *umemulo* of someone who has not had a child)

are different, this difference is based on who gets to participate and accompany the girl *omulayo*. And of course, there have been adaptations made based on the socio-political contexts.

The process of *umemulo* infers and evokes a particular kind of womanhood, *imithetho yomgonqo* (rules of the seclusion process*),* for example, gives a clear indication of the kind of woman a Zulu woman must be. The belief is that if you act outside the expected norms and customs in ways that are out of sync with the essence of the ritual, it will result in *ukudlula*, which loosely translates to the state of having a lack of self-control and a lack of reverence for ritual, custom and daily life.

4.2.4 Ukuyalwa: Elder Counsel

This theme presents itself in two ways: as an unmet expectation for the girls, or as something that the girls experience outside the setting of *umemulo*. Regardless of context, the conversation is often punitive. *Ukuyalwa*, to counsel, is the custom of giving advice to the younger women. It is part of different rituals – both Zulu and Xhosa women *bahlaliswa phansi bayalwe* (they receive elder counsel) before they get married. In the process of counselling, the person entering into a new social category is told the secrets and complexities of that social category and further given the tools to navigate that category. They are given 'words of wisdom' from elder women.

At three out of the six families the young women noted the absence of *ukuyalwa* (elder counsel). They noted that often older women within the family would pass by *emugonqweni* to make comments, and never have real conversations on womanhood. The girls expected that part of the customs integral to *umemulo* would be *ukuyalwa*, and expressed a level of frustration at this lack. In particular, they expressed that older women are simply scared of talking to young women about sex.

Zipho:

> Kwakule kufika olokhu oAunti mhlampe bezosho something funny not ukuthi besho into eSerious, bezosho ukuthi hawu hheyi onomahoyi nton nton but nobody was like esiyala.
>
> [The people that would come by are younger aunts and they would say something funny, nothing serious, and they would tease us saying 'hheyi onomahoyi' and so on but no one provided elder council [as was expected]]

Sihle:

> No, they would just tell you ‘don’t have sex before marriage’ and that’s the whole sexual conversation and they don’t tell you why you shouldn’t have sex.

Ntombi:

> No abasiyalanga, kodwa kwakufanele basiyale, abasiyalanga.
>
> [No, they did not provide elder council, they should have but they did not]

Nompumelelo:

> I just think that they don’t wanna do it… to speak to us in depth that ‘sex is like this’.

Mbali:

> No, they were very low key about it…you had to catch it.

Sihle:

> No, they would just tell you don’t have sex before marriage and that’s the whole sexual conversation, and they don’t tell you why you shouldn’t have sex.

For the young women who participate in virginity testing, *ukuyalwa* begins when they are younger. It occurs before and outside of the space of *umemulo*: when they participate in virginity testing, the elder women counsel them.

Fezeka:

> When they advise us, they say it does not mean that you are in love with a boy, just because you are standing and talking with them. The problem starts when you start dating and begin to fall in love with every boy. The girls start to live their lives around the boys they claim to love.

Zinhle:

> Into abayiEcourage-yo ukuthi we should just learn ehh sifunde sibe neziqu zethu sikwazi ukuba independent and then sesingabeka abafana manje usuzazi ukthi unayo yonke into and uzizimele.
>
> [What is being encouraged is that we should go to school, learn and obtain our degrees and be able to be independent; and then we can start thinking about boys, knowing that you have everything, [and that] you won’t depend on anyone.]

Fezeka:

> Babethi ke, umemulo awusho ukuthi njengo ngisekuleminyaka engikuyo, umemulo awusho ukuthi ke sengingenza noma yini kodwa kuwukungikhulula kwezinye izinto, kodwa mewukuthi mina ngiyathanda yini ukuthi mhlampe ngikugqamise lapho engithanda khona ukuthi kuphi khona…Njengokuthi nje

> mhlampe ngicelwe…, babesho izinto ezikanjalo…Baye bethi umangabe ulala nomfana njengoba sihlolwa nje, uyakhona ukubonakala ukuthi usuke walala, noma kuthiwa umfana akakungenanga esithweni sakho sangasese, bayakhona ukubona ukuthi (in unison) kukhona oke wakuthinta. Yebo… Kuchaza ukuthi awusaphelele.
>
> [*Umemulo* does not give anyone the license to do as they want. It is done by the proud father as a thanksgiving to the ancestors. If the lady has someone who has asked for her hand in marriage, yes this is the right for the elders to begin the negotiations. You are by no means allowed to have sex before marriage. Those who go to *emhlangeni* (reed ceremony) say that it is easy to see if a girl has already had sex. There was a safe way to do this, but boys would easily deceive you and you find yourself pregnant before marriage. Yes…it would mean you are no longer complete.]

Zinhle:

> When oGogo (elder women facilitating virginity testing) provide elder council, I would say yes, they do talk about sex and being sexually active and they talk about everything to do with being a girl. They also teach us that you will eventually have sex but that you must get an education first, and that having sex young and without experience leads to teenage pregnancy… [they] teach us that, as a girl, you have to know yourself and where you are so that even if you do decide to sleep with a boy you know that there are consequences that you have to face. You also know of the different sexually transmitted diseases that you might get. You have to know who you are and what you want so that a boy can never force you to do anything you do not want to do and never allow your feelings to control you and force you to do something just because you want to make a boy happy, your happiness comes first. But they (oGogo) don't encourage us to have sex, no.

Khanyisa:

> oGogo (the elder women who facilitate virginity testing) never taught the girls in detail about sex. They emphasized the fact that it is part of marriage and it is the way in which babies are born. They don't tell us about the pleasure, just that it's something we do when we are grown up and married.

Interestingly, in any conversation one would have about *umemulo*, *ukuyalwa* is mentioned as one of the important customs and practices that must occur. It is seen as one of the crucial ways in which we pass on notions and constructions of womanhood. The question then becomes: in the absence of *ukuyalwa*, how is womanhood passed on from generation to generation? What is the purpose of *ukuyalwa*?

Sex, pleasure and eroticism are clearly not part of the conversations that do happen. Sex is an exercise within marriage and for the purpose of reproduction. These conversations are pre-emptively punitive in the sense that elder women are usually warning the girls about the dangers and consequences of sexual, such teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS.

4.3 The Metaphysics of *Umemulo*: Affirmations from the Ancestors

Umemulo is a site where the physical and the metaphysical worlds meet to affirm a member of the clan has met the requirements to enter into the next stage of their lives. Participants expressed that *umemulo* is requested by the ancestors and, even when it is not explicitly requested, it cannot be done without calling upon the ancestors. *Abantu abadala* (the ancestors) must claim you as a woman or rather must recognise you as a woman, *okhulisiwe* (who has been raised).

Mpho describes an encounter she and her sister had while walking on the street, where a group of men was ride and derogatory towards them and an elder walking by advised that their family should do *umemulo* for them in order to affirm their dignity so that they would be respected:

> So sahlangana nabanye obhuti yabo it was 4 or 5 and apparently, they said something about us, but we didn't hear them. Baziwa ilobaba owayehamba emvakwethu and then mase sifika ngasekhaya he says that uhm kumele nicele ekhaya kini banenzele umemulo because what these guys said about you kutshengisa ukuthi amadlozi awanigadile, aninako ukuhlonipheka phakathi kwabantu besilisa so kuzomele ukuthi ekhaya kini banenzele umemulo noma umhlonyane just ukuthi banikhuphule.

Mbali:

> It was requested, yes it was requested by abaphansi, abantu abadala (ancestors)- and specifically by my grandmother from my father's side, even my mothers side…

MaKheswa:

> They also get sick when it is necessary to do *umemulo* and they get better from illnesses once umemulo is done, it is something that the ancestors request.

Sihle explains here first encounter *nomemulo* and the reasons behind her mother's *memulo* even though she had had two children at the time:

> It was for my mom, and they did it because she kept getting these tooth aches and they were so severe that she literally had to remove the teeth, I think it was for three weeks in a row or three months in a row…you could tell ukuthi there's something wrong here, like amazinyo akhe kusho ukuthi ayezophela wonke so then angazi ke abantu abadala were like no kudingeka umemulo(they believed that she would lose all her teeth and the ancestors then made it clear that umemulo was necessary) because she is the first born.

There are clearly spiritual implications attached to ***umemulo***. For Sihle's family, there was a need for ***umemulo*** to be done for the firstborn daughter, even if she already has children. It is done at the request of the ancestors. The metaphysical world begins to have a tangible impact on the physical world that cannot be explained in any worldly terms. It is the elders in the family who then read or interpret that message from the ancestors.

One of the major implications as expressed by MamShezi, MaKheswa and Ntombi, is that the lack of ***umemulo*** or need for ***umemulo*** can manifest in illness. Magwaza (1993) notes that the need for ***umemulo*** can also be seen through married women struggling or even failing to have children in their marital home. Furthermore, ***isithunzi*** (dignity) is associated with ***umemulo***. This ritual is seen as one that is able to affirm or reaffirm the dignity of the girl, as well as that of the homestead and clan. Therefore, ***isithunzi*** is a concept that not only refers to humanness but rather has a spiritual aspect. This will be further explored in the discussion chapter.

4.4 Marriageability

Ukukhuliswa kwentombazane (transition from girlhood to womanhood), announces the young woman's marriageability. This announcement is also understood in metaphysical terms. The physical and the metaphysical world meet to confirm one's marriageability. This is a public declaration that the father of the girl doing ***umemulo*** is now ready to receive ***ilobola*** for his daughter. In doing so, ***umemulo*** is an opportunity for suitors to reveal themselves, to the girl or her family, or both. At times, the girl is aware of the suitor, ***isoka lakhe liziveza. Isoka*** must show clear intentions of marrying. It is then up to her to agree or not to the proposal.

MamKhumalo:

> Traditionally umemulo would be done by the girl's father to thank the ancestors for a daughter would bring wealth through cows in their family). I think it was to advertise this girl ukuthi now she is a fully grown woman who can make a good wife.

Ntombi:

> ... it means that you have grown up, you are a woman...it means you can now get married. They affirm this entrance into adulthood and recognise that as a woman, you are no longer a young girl, you have grown up.

In one of the interviews I learnt about *imakho*. This is where interested suitors and their families bring gifts to *umemulo* to indicate their interest in marrying you. If you accept the gifts, then you accept the proposal. If you send the gifts back, it is a sign of rejection. uFezeka received gifts from three people/families and sent all these back! She says she "does not want any men"- "*angibafuni kabi nje abafana, angibafuni nhlobo*". If the young woman has a boyfriend at the time of her *memulo,* she can make this known to her family *esigcawini* (open field where traditional dancing is done):

Mpho:

> There was nobody to give the mkhonto to, the guy, because apparently you need to bring your boyfriend and you need to go and thing (putting the spear in the ground in front of your boyfriend) the mkhonto because that's the time where your boyfriend officially knows, or your family officially knows about your boyfriend.

Umemulo does not only announce that one is available to be married but rather that she would make a good wife. There is a public confirmation that in fact *ukhuliswe kahle* (you are raised well), and can therefore be *umama oqotho* (an honourable woman). The wellness of her potential marital home ikuye. Therefore, *umemulo* is given as a gift for someone *oziphathe kahle* and has shown *ukuthi uzofika akhulise awubambe ngesithunzi umuzi wakhe* (someone who will grow and bring dignity to the household).

4.5 Ukuhlaba Umkhonto: Performing Virginity

All the young women speak about the anxiety around *ukuwa komkhonto noma ukudabuka komhlwehlwe* (the spear falling over or the cow fat tearing). The act of the spear falling over, or the cow fat tearing is said to signal if the girl is a virgin or not. The young women expressed this anxiety even while acknowledging that they don't think that there is a real correlation between this act and one's virginity.

I also found it interesting that oGogo, who help one through the process of *umemulo,* help prevent anything that will reveal *umuntu omulayo* as not being a virgin. What also struck me is that even when elders do not conduct a virginity test, they confirm to parents and family that the girl is a virgin.

Zipho:

> Then she looked at me and she was like hhayi intombi impela… so wathi lona intombi nto (this one is really a virgin) and I was like girl it has been years…But then I didn't want to embarrass my parents, mina into engangiyisaba (what I was scared of) is that if it came up that my parents would be embarrassed.

Mpho:

> No but shem, I'll never forget that day logogo was busy esigcoba (the elder who was inspecting us) and she is like, "no, no, no this one is a virgin."

Sihle:

> When my mom arrived to help us put on the traditional attire, uGogo (elder woman) told my mom that she had done virginity tests on us and that we were all virgins

Some of the young women then speak about why it is that they do not believe in the symbolism of ***umkhonto owayo*** (falling spear) with as specific relation to what they have come to know about virginity testing, and their experience of ***imemulo*** of young women who are not virgins.

Thobile:

> …apparently (laughs), that's what they say that when you put it in the ground, if it falls then obviously you're not a virgin. I was worried because you thought that would be embarrassing or humiliating.

Mbali:

> umama lo owayesenzisa umemulo (the mother who was facilitating ***umemulo***), she, was like girl when you go and practice the things you make sure you scout around… I think she knew the situation. You know the situation with everyone that you never know so she just gave me [advice] like, "look for a wet spot [to direct to spear towards] use both hands and use all your power."

Sihle:

> I think my biggest fear was that we were going to be tested (laughs).

Khwezi:

> Kufana nokuhlolwa yabo I don't wanna say people's names kodwa khona abantu abahambayo beyohlolwa abantu obaziyo ukuthi hhaybo (laughs) and I'm sure uyamazi lomuntu engikhuluma ngaye, that girl goes to Umhlanga and futhi nalento yokuthi umhlwehlwe uyaqhephuka.

> [It's like this virginity testing, without mentioning names, but there are girls who go to be tested but they are no longer virgins and people know and I am sure you know who I am talking about, that girl goes to Umhlanga (the reed ceremony) and also the fact that the fat will be torn…]

Fezile:

> The ones who go for virginity testing. But they can also fake it though… there were rumours back in the days, in the times when virginity testing happened in this area and girls would attend and they would came back and you know they say that oh no scandals on scandals like other elder women get paid to lie and all of that and that's when I heard that okay sometimes this is a bit shady.

Butler (1988:519) argues that gender is a "stylized repetition of acts through time", and here we see a constant back and forth between performance and perception. The young women note that based on their performance of girlhood (including ***ukuthi bayafihla kubazali***, meaning they conceal things from their parents), they are perceived as good girls (***bazi phathe kahle***). They further note that the public performance of good girlhood on the day of ***umemulo*** is more important to their parents, ***isithunzi somuzi nesizwe sakini*** (the dignity and reputation of the family) is dependent on the ***mkhonto*** not falling and ***umhlwehlwe*** not tearing. Therefore, it is not only important that one performs good girlhood, but also that they are perceived as being a good girl by their parents, family and community. MamShezi explains that ***umemulo*** is not only a gift to ***intombazana emulayo*** (the girl whose ***umemulo*** it is) but that they (as parents) give the child this as an acknowledgement that they, as parents, have not been disappointed by her behaviour.

MamShezi:

> We had children and they grow up behaving well or showing good behavior, we then decided that there was no other gift we could give them, to make them happy. We therefore started planning ***umemulo*** as a gift to make them happy because they have behaved well and have never disappointed us. That's when her father and I had the conversation about having ***umemulo***.

Fezeka:

> ukuziphatha kahle kwami ukunikeza umuzi walay'khaya isithunzi, noma kungazekuthiwa kuno…, abazali bona abekho right mhlampe ukuthi bayaphuza abanaso lesosithunzi kangaka kodwa ukuziphatha kahle kwentombazane ikona okunikeza isithunzi emndenini.

> [My good behavior affirms the dignity of my family and our household, no matter what happens…, even if the parents or adults are not upstanding community members, for example if they drink and don't have that dignity or respect from the community but the good behaviour of a girl child affirms the dignity and respect of the family.]

Sihle:

> I think that's the picture our parents have, awujoli, awulali, awunangane nje (you are not dating or having sex and you dont have a child)...I think it's just respecting your parents, respecting their wishes and you know ungazenzeli nje ngokuthanda (that you dont do as you please) like you know even though we drink and have boyfriends …but like we do it orderly yabo you still remember 'that I have parents.

Mpilo:

> *umemulo* is not really for us, its for our parents… it's about how they have raised you and everyone looking at them. Basically, they want people to see that they can afford this whole thing.

Ntombi:

> Esakho nabazali futhi ne village ngoba phela kuza wonke umuntu beze kumemulo. Abantu basemakhaya umemulo bayawuthanda so wonke umuntu uzokwazi ukuth wena awusesiyona intombi. Kushukuthi kahlekahle u-embarrassa abazali bakho ngaphandle kokhuthi uzi-embarrasse wena.
>
> [It's about you, your parents and the whole village, everyone will come to your *umemulo.* People from rural communities love umemulo, so they would all know if you are virgin or not. if you were not you would embarrass your parents outside of just embarrassing yourself]

The young women in this section clearly outline what they thought their parent's expectations were. They understood that their parents expected good behaviour and had the impression that this is what was happening, but for the girls the maintenance of this impression meant that they had to perform virginity for as long as possible. The girls don't only perform good behaviour but rather maintain the perception of being virgins, as this is closely linked to good behaviour. Some of the girls even mentioned how virginity can be or is faked. While they expressed their scepticism or cynicism about the idea of virginity and virginity being testable, they still actively participated in the test and further, ensured that the perception that they were virgins was maintained.

4.6 Defining Good Behaviour

The theme of *ukuziphatha kahle* emerges through makers of good girlhood. The women speak to *ubuntombi* (preservation of virginity) versus *ukungabinangane* (not having a child), *ukuhlonipha nokufihla* (respectability and secrecy) and education. *Ukuziphatha kahle* is at the core of good girlhood; one must show ukuthi uziphethe kahle in order to be afforded the ability to transition from girlhood to womanhood. *Ukuziphatha kahle* is therefore a key part of girlhood and in the construction of Zulu womanhood.

4.6.1 Withholding versus not having a child: Ukuvala versus ukungabinangane

Gogo MaDladla makes clear distinctions between the types of *ukuziphatha kahle*. The first is the state of having preserved one's virginity (*ozigcinile*), and the second refers to not having had a child. She notes that both these women can have *umemulo* if their parents choose to do this for them, but that the process is slightly different.

Gogo MaDladla acknowledges that the reason the girls are being gifted with *umemulo* is because of their good behaviour, she notes that good behaviour can be shown in various ways and that this particular group has shown this through being respectful, obedient and not having any children. She further advices the girls, saying that it is possible to like and boy and be in a relationship with him without having sex. She places an emphasis on the need for women to have preserved their virginity until marriage, she does this while knowing that the girls who are in seclusion awaiting the day of the ceremony are not virgins. One could argue that she does this because she understands that she is not speaking to the girl's whose *umemulo* it is but that she is speaking to the other younger girls in the room. I would further argue that this conversation forms part of the intergeneration collusion examined in this thesis.

MamShezi also makes a distinction between the different kinds of *umemulo* that different women have. She says that young girls who are virgins share their *memulo* with other virgins:

MamShezi:

> To my knowledge, when they explained to me, they say that it is different. Good behaviour can be divided into categories, those who have not had sex, those who have had sex but do not have children and those who have had children (they sometimes have to have *umemulo* if it is requested by the ancestors). Those who are virgins do their ceremony with age mates who are also virgins, those who

> haven't had children do their ceremony who have had sex but also have no children. Those who do *umemulo* having had children also do it with age mates who have had children.

uMamshezi here explains that in her understanding *ukuzihatha kahle* differs, there is *ukuziphatha kahle* that is seen through preservation of virginity as well as *ukuziphatha kahle* where one has had sex but does not have a child. It is clear that these distinctions are not only made by the young girls but by the elder women as well, and that often when one is not a virgin this is something that is known by the elder women. She explains that those who are virgins do their ceremonies with other virgins and for those who are not virgins they do their ceremony with other non-virgins. As seen in the quotes below, the definition of good behaviour is not rigid. While virginity is spoken about as important, in reality, it seems, it is not having a child that allows women, virgins or not, to perform good girlhood.

Sibongile:

> In terms of girls and how they are behaving, I think probably we are braver ... and because we have more information and more access to clinics and all of those things. So girls are probably not virgins by the time they do *umemulo* (laughs) uhm I think yeah they definitely not - I don't know if people are really preserving virginity for *umemulo* or that it just becomes celebratory that you reach 21 without pregnancy (laughs) as for virginity we are not sure.

MaKheswa:

> Good behavior means you should not date, don't have children and if you are in school you must finish school.

Thando:

> Good behaviour as someone who attends virginity testing and the reed dance, means that you are a virgin. When your parents see fit and they are proud that you have respected your body until the age of 21 and well some of us are well over 21 and have been gifted with *umemulo*, I think there is someone in this group who is 30something others are over 25 but they are all still virgins, we are in the same schools as boys, we live in communities with boys but we have chosen this form of good behaviour to preserve our virginity.

Mbali:

> I think it changed over the years, from being just a virgin but that's like more overall a daughter that's been you know easy to raise and you've made us proud, more than you know [not having sex].

Thobile:

> Good behaviour mean respecting your elders, when you are asked to do a chore you do it, just simple things and that you're focused in life, I think it's that and don't fall pregnant.

Phumi:

> Listen, let's say for instance I am a girl who enjoys going out (to the clubs) and I sneak out from home but I am a virgin, I go out and do all the things associated with going out and everyone sees me misbehaving and at home I am not well behaved but am disrespectful and everyone knows that Phumi is all over the place but I am still a virgin. Then there is Nompumelelo who stays at home, doesn't go out and everyone who sees here see a well behaved girl in comparison to Phumi, but she (Nompumelelo) is not a virgin and nobody knows, she comes home and she is respectful - between these two girls who is well behaved?

Khwezi responded to Phumi's concern about the distinctions being made on ***ukuzi phatha kahle*** based on behaviour. Phumi had made the point that it is difficult to determine who is well behaved and who is not, because if someone is a virgin but does not adhere to any of the other social norms should they be considered as ***uziphethe kahle***:

> Both of us are not well behaved, the one drinks and does everything and the other is a virgin and sneaks out and I leave as if I am going to school and I go to have sex and so I appear as well behaved to my parents but I am not.

Khwezi:

> My grandmother used to tell me that when they were still in school she had a friend who would sneak out and generally misbehaved and when they would walk together with my grandmother the boys would want to court them but everyone would say that they should all court the one who is not a virgin. In the olden days being a virgin often means that you are respected, now nobody cares whether you are a virgin or not, it's all the same. People now respect you for not having a child and that's it.

Ukuziphatha kahle is clearly a contested concept. One of the main contestations is clear – either one has preserved their virginity and in doing so, has shown good behaviour, or one is no longer a virgin but does not have a child, and has also shown good behaviour.

I have structured this conversation in such a way that the conceptions of the young and elder women speak to each other. It seems to me that while the elder women are sure that the above-mentioned contestation is the main or even only contestation, reading their conceptions of *ukuziphatha kahle* alongside those of the younger women shows that the disputes are more complicated than they would appear. Of the younger women, Fezeka, Zinhle and Thando buy into the idea of the preservation of virginity as *ukuziphatha kahle*, and *ukuhlonipha umzimba wakho* (respecting your body) is prioritised. On the other hand Mbali, Thobile, Mpho, Phumi and Khwezi expressed that there had been a shift from understanding good behaviour through sexual preservation, to a broader understanding that included one's day to day behaviour, and so *ukungabi uvanzi* (to not behave badly or be all over) is prioritised.

4.6.2 Ukuhlonipha and Ukufihla: Public Secrets

Ukuhlonipha (respectability) is a concept and custom that forms a large part of Zulu culture and identity. *Ukuhlonipha* is spoken about in each interview and each focus group. Both the young and elder women felt that *ukuhlonipha* was a major part of *ukuziphatha kahle*. Respect is shown not only to one's parents but to elders in the family and community. Respectability can be shown through *ukubingelela* (greetings), *ukusaba noma ukumazi umuntu omdala* (fearing or respecting elders), and *ukuhlonipha umzimba wakho* (and respecting your body).

Interestingly, the idea of *ukuhlonipha* was always spoken about in conjunction with the idea of *ukufihla. Ukufihla* (secrecy) presents itself in different ways. One iteration is what I have termed 'public secrets', where something is generally known but unspoken. Public secrets are made up of actions and information that would be contrary to *ukuziphatha kahle kwakho*; these secrets would ideally exclude one from the group of *amantombazane aziphethe kahle*. It is also seen in the form of secrets that girls keep from their parents and their elders. It seems that the girls have lives that they live in front of their parents, and lives that they keep away or hidden from their parents.

Secrecy is considered respectful. It is thought of as a way to maintain respectability between parents and their children. It is also extended to the elders in the community.

Below, MamShezi speaks about how respect is extended to parents, neighbours and elders in the community. She points out that a child who accepts being sent for chores by members of the community displays their general sense of respect:

MamShezi:

> There is one way of showing that you have behaved well, you must respect your parents, respect elders in the community. You have to respect elders, give them respect they deserve. You have to greet, be willing to be sent to do chores, your behaviour must show that you are the child and you know how to recognise and elder.

Sihle:

> I think uhm morality is at the front of them, like it goes back to what we were talking about ukuzi phata kahle basically still draws back to you respecting your parents and doing what's right in front of your parents, like okay and then we hide it from them obviously but as long as you're in good terms with your parents and they think that you are good.

Mbali:

> I think it means respecting your parents, respecting their rules because we live under their roof, so we have to fall under the rules of the house and also not doing something that will humiliate them or drag the family name through the mud so yah.

Phumi:

> Can I just say, so what I was saying earlier on - basically I feel that good behaviour goes with respecting your parents teachings, whether you go out or not if your parents aren't happy with you then they could say that you have not shown good behaviour. As long as you respect people in the community and if your parents say they would like for you to be a virgin till 21 and you do that, that's what good behaviour is according to your parents. So good behaviour is not shown in one way for everyone, society changes meanings of things all the time, everything changes with time and things like that but as long as your parents as the ones who gift you with ***umemulo*** are happy with the way you behave, they are the ones who view you a particular way. I just feel that it depends on things within the home, sticking to your parent's teachings and how you behave at home.

Secrecy shows up through public secrets or open secrets, where it is known by the girl ***omulayo*** and elder women in the family or by uGogo omulisayo (elder women who help with ***umemulo***) that the girl is no longer a virgin. This secret is usually kept by

those people and oGogo help to maintain that secret by giving the girl *nezimpelesi zakhe* (tips on how to pass) the tests of *ubuntombi* (virginity) during *umemulo*. Zipho and Thando speak to this secrecy. Thando notes that this is see even with girls who continue to attend the reed dance but have had sex, those girls hide that from their parents. She uses the example of girls having miscarriages while attending the reed dance to how this secrecy plays itself out. Zipho further notes that if there is anything wrong that they do as young girls they simply hide this from elders, there is a respectability attached to this secrecy.

Conversely, uMamShezi was of the opinion that young people actually no longer hide anything from their parents and do as they please, and shared her opinion that the human rights dispensation is largely the cause of this, as rights are in favour of young people. While the younger girls further emphasise *ukufihla kwabo*:

> Mina kodwa ngendlela engibona ngayo izingane zamanje azisafihli. Umuntu nje umethi ngiyahamba ngiyahamba. Umuntu methi ngibhemiwunga nje ubhemiwunga. Umuntu methi ubhema ugwayi, izingane zanamhlanje iyawuthatha ugwayi iwulayithe phambi kwakho ibheme. Nakumzali wakhe uthola ukuthi uphuma ekhaya ushuquza ugwayi iyawubhema uyibone iphuma nge gate iphuma ngomgwaqo.
>
> [For me, what I see is that children no longer hide anything. When they want to leave, they leave. When they smoke, they smoke in front of elders, children of today can light a cigarette in front of you and smoke it. Even in front of their own parents]

MaKheswa:

> I would say it's the secrecy, they hide. We don't know what children are doing when they are at University.

Mpilo:

> [And they dont suspect that I would do that (have sex) because I don’t do things in front of my parents or do things to a point where they would know about it. I don't make a point of elders knowing what I am up to, so they don't know, and they don't suspect anything. If they do have suspicious, they have never share those with me and I don't think they would know how to have that conversation - how would they ask me that.

What I find most interesting is that, while there is an agreement on *ukuhlonipha* as an important marker for *ukuziphatha kahle*, there is an obvious contestation about what *ukuhlonipha* looks like and how it is performed. *Ukuhlonipha* is something that is

actively performed by Zulu people in different ways, such as ***ukuhloniphisa*** within isiZulu as a language. This will be unpacked in the next chapter.

There is a sense of blurring between ***ukuhlonipha nokufihla***; even the elders who facilitate the process of ***umemulo*** are often part of maintaining public secrets, where it is known (for example) that the girls are not virgins. Furthermore, the younger girls clearly speak to the different lives they live in front of and away from their parents, and also noted the indistinct boundaries between ***ukuhlonipha nokufihla*** for themselves.

4.7 The utility of umemulo

When the conversation turned to whether ***umemulo*** should continue, or whether those who had been through ***umemulo*** would do it for their children, most of the women said they would do it for their children as long as ***amadlozi ekhona*** (your ancestors) and emphasised the importance of the transition ancestrally. Interestingly, none of the elder women I interviewed had had ***umemulo***. This is because they had either had children or been married by the time they were 21.

However, when it came to questions of why ***umemulo*** was important for the way our society operates, it seems that ***umemulo*** is important because it is important (***ubalulekile ngoba ubalulekile***). It seems that part of the reason oGogo help prevent it being public knowledge that someone is not a virgin is that ***umemulo***, as a process, legitimises those who go through it. It says, 'I have moved from ***intombi eziphethe kahle*** to ***umuntu wesifazane oqotho***' (an honourable woman) and have done so publicly. The family and the community bear witness to this.

For the young women in one of the families, they did not see the use of doing ***umemulo***, and said that they would not do it for their own children. Whereas the women in two other families said that they would do it because it was a positive experience. They expressed that the bonds they created during ***umgonqo*** are relationships that have become even more important to them as time passed. The other women said that they would do it because they value ***ubuntombi nokuziphatha kahle*** as something that young women should aspire too.

4.7.1 Imvelaphi yethu (our roots/where we come from)

For uMaKheswa and the young women in the group yakwaMamShezi, umemulo is also useful insofar as it connects us to ***ukuba ngamaZulu*** (to be a Zulu person). It is one of the traditions that differentiate amaZulu from other cultural groups - ***kukhomba imvelaphi yethu, nosiko nokuthisiyaphi*** (it points to our roots, culture and where we are going). ***Umemulo*** forms part of the identity formation for Zulu people.

Mbali:

> Yeah, it's definitely gonna be a thing, especially because abadala will forever be there (laughs) you can't be there like no I'll never do that, they will be like no I want it so.

Ntombi:

> [Because I would want to encourage them (my children) to preserve themselves, be virgins. You have to tell children while they are young to wait until the time is right to have sex, after such a time then they are free to do as they please with their lives. But they must wait, I would really encourage my children to wait.

For the elder women uMamShezi speaks to it to continue as something that is aspirational:

> Yes, definitely. I would love for the tradition to continue because children really look forward to things like this a lot.

Sibongile:

> Whether it is relevant I don't know hey. I think it's never a good thing to abolish something that served a purpose without having something to replace it with that can serve that purpose better. What ***umemulo*** did was to allow girls to aspire to something that is good, it's good that as a woman even as a man that you take your time with these things so that you are able to be emotionally and physically mature by the time you engage in them just for your own uhm emotional wellbeing. It's not a mistake to do that but uhm we might just want to be clearer about what it is that we are trying to achieve so that we don't create women who have a dysfunctional relationship with sex to begin with and we create men who have a complete different set of values when it comes to intimacy, to the extent that these two don't align. So, we just need to be clear on what we are trying to solve and make sure that we become responsive to solving that problem as opposed to holding on to ceremonies, which are nice I am not gonna lie. It's nice and festive and all of that, but it might just need an update.

In thinking through ***umemulo*** and its relevance, what uSibongile is saying here is that even when we find a ritual problematic, it is important to point out and deal with its problematic aspects. Rituals like these are often social interventions, created to deal

with certain social issues. Therefore, simply abolishing the ritual (based on the problematics) is not helpful if the community has not come up with another social intervention. For me, what became clear is that social interventions must also adapt to meet whatever social issue they seek to address; if *umemulo* seeks to address teenage pregnancy for example, it must also be adapted to speak to some of the other issues of womanhood, such as what Sibongile refers to as a "dysfunctional relationship with sex".

4.7.2 Practising 'good' Zuluness and Aspiration

For the young women who participated in virginity testing (*ukuhlolwa*), *ukuziphatha kahle* was very clearly linked to virginity. They mentioned that they first learned about *umemulo* when they started virginity testing. oGogo (elders who facilitate *ukuhlolwa nomemulo*), speak to *umemulo* as one of the benefits of *ukuziphatha kahle*, "*uma ukhulile waziphatha kahle uyahlonyaniswa bese uyamuliswa*" (if you have grown up and have shown good behavior you will have *umhlonyane* and then *umemulo*). There seems to be an aspirational element of *ukuhlolwa nokuziphatha kahle*, according to the elder women. Therefore, *baziphatha kahle* because they know that *bazomuliswa* (they behave well or show good behavior and therefore they get umemulo) as a way for their parents to show appreciation and pride. While these women also spoke to *ukuhlonipha*, they emphasised *ubuntombi* as the marker for *ukuziphatha kahle*.

Thando:

> It's a big deal, it shows you have behaved well and been an example to your younger siblings because if you don't show good behaviour, your younger siblings won't see any reason too. Especially if they see that there isn't some kind of reward, they may not follow in your footsteps, they aspire to being gifted with *umemulo.*

Zinhle:

> Ubalulekile because iskhathi esiningi uyaEncourage-a izingane ukuthi ziqhubeke ziziphathe kahle.
>
> [It is important because a lot of the time it serves to encourage the younger children for them to continue with their good behaviour.

Sibongile:

> Look, its a bit problematic for me the way, the emphasis of one over the other is problematic because unfortunately it doesn't solve the problem of uhm kids that are, of course if it is a problem to have kids outside marriage, to focus on only the girls does not actually ensure that there are no kids born outside of a family structure that can protect and raise them. So, it's an incomplete thing and it also creates the kind of discrepancy that even marriage readiness where

> there is a party that is meant to be ready then the other party but these parties are expected to marry each other. There is a readiness disjuncture that exists in the way that we raise boys and the way in which we raise girls. So, we raise girls to believe that they must preserve themselves for something special at a certain point in time and we don't do the same for boys and these boys - its problematic uhm and also its just for me its invasive. I just you know and I mean I get it if it's something you felt like it was a pride and joy for you to preserve, you wanna celebrate it and that's totally up to an individual but for me it's trying to solve a problem or it's trying to instil a principle in a roundabout way instead of dealing with it directly. To say that you know these are the consequences of going this and this routine and so in order to protect yourself do ABC and D so now you are creating a cloud around an issue without just being direct about the risks involved within that issue. So, for me it was a way that tried to solve a problem by being round about and not being straight.

The utility of *umemulo* is seen here through its links to identity and identity creation or affirmation. *Umuntu wesifazane owumZulu nomndeni wakhe* value *umemulo* based on its ability to affirm the dignity and respect for themselves, family and community (*isithunzi nokuhlonipheka komuntu ne sizwe sakhe*). The women expressed a value or importance placed on the ceremony as something that allowed them to know and remember who they are and where they come from – *imvelaphi yethu.*

The women further express that *umemulo* is important particularly in its public nature as a way to encourage young girls *ukuthi baziphathe kahle* as there is a 'reward' for their good behaviour. For the women *abahlolwayo umvuzo omuhle* (those who participate in virginity testing the reward) is marriage and starting a family (legitimately). For other girls, umvuzo omkhulu (the reward) is the glorious celebration. For both categories of girls, it is *ukuziqhenya kwabazali* (the pride of their parents).

4.8 Aspirational or True Zulu womanhood - a "flip flop between two worlds"

Umemulo as mentioned above marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood, as voiced by the participants. I asked the women about how Zulu womanhood is defined and/or demonstrated. Again here, *ukuhlonipha* (to be respectful) comes up as one of the main characteristics of womanhood, as well as domesticity. However, the women also made it clear that domesticity is not necessarily the dominant characteristic of a good woman.

The question in English is phrased as “what is your definition of a good Zulu girl and woman?” or “what is your definition of Zulu womanhood?” The question was not often immediately understood, and I used “*umama oqotho*” (an honourable woman) or “*umuntu oqotho*” (an honourable person) instead of womanhood or good woman, as this seemed to translate better. MamShezi placed emphasis on a woman’s ability *yokufundisa* (to teach), as a ‘good woman’ must teach her children particular values. She noted that this teaching should not be gendered; children (regardless of their gender) must be taught to be independent. A good Zulu woman also keeps the peace with the neighbours and community and creates a peaceful space in her household.

MamShezi:

> Uma sikhuluma ngomama oqotho, umama okwaziyo ukubheka ikhaya lakhe, akhulise abantwana. Nje nemisebenzi ayenzayo afundise, afundise wonke umntwana akakhethi ukuthi umntwana owomfana noma owentombazane. Kodwa ngendlela afundisa ngayo ufundisa wonke umuntu ukuthi akwazi ukuzimela empilweni. Ungaxabani nomakhelwane, umama ongathi uma ngabe umtshela inkinga yakho asizakale ngayo noma ahambe esexoxa ngayo. Umama oqotho unjalo ke.
>
> [When we talk about an honourable woman, that is a woman who can take care of her household and raise her children. Her work is to teach all the children and raise them correctly, she doesn't have any favourites. She must teach them to be independent. She does not fight with her neighbours, she is the type of woman who does not gossip, when you tell her your problems, she does not share them with other people. That's what an honourable woman is]

Thandi:

> My definition of womanhood is more about growing up, finishing school and knowing how to make things happen - even if you were alone in the world, you would be able to live, be independent. You should be celebrated as a woman but that is an individual thing, I don’t think it's necessary to spend all this money (on *umemulo*). As a woman you have to learn to take care of your family and be well behaved, this is not only about chores, because women are not made just for the kitchen. An honourable woman must know how to talk to people, the way they dress and the way they carry themselves around the community is important. Respect is the main thing. You have to be a lady, that's a typical Zulu woman for me.

In the above quotes, the women clearly express what they think womanhood, particular Zulu womanhood, looks like (other participants echoed the sentiments here). The

concept of *umama oqotho* (an honourable woman) – which will be unpacked in the next chapter – comes through strongly. This is a woman who builds a home, who is respectful and is mindful of herself, her family and her community. This is a woman who is educated and educates her children, as well as a woman who 'makes things happen'. These women also emphasised that womanhood is not purely measured by domesticity.

There is a general understanding of good Zulu womanhood, passed on from generation to generation. However, the women also note the changes in notions of womanhood. While some of the women focus on home making (not just domesticity) as a marker for good Zulu womanhood, others note the complexities of trying to maintain 'home making' while developing their professional careers. They point to the constant switch they have to make between different kinds of womanhood – what Mamdani (1996) calls the bifurcated public sphere.

Mbali:

> I mean we understand what they expect, what they want, you see, like what they know but, what we ourselves nje want in terms of being a woman in 2019 is completely different but you wouldn't dare, like you know, voice out your feminism (everyone laughs). So, you like, know what, I will just let you, old people, be happy, I'm gonna please you guys. It is what it is but ay shame when I'm out, it's gonna be a different situation in my house.

Sibongile:

> Definitely going forward, we can look at more empowering things and you can see that it is geared or the previous dispensation was geared at the woman being a home maker and that was the extent of your qualification. Hence we measure your ability to be a home maker, to make fire to cook to bear kids, you know those were the standards of measure and definitely in 2019 women are going to go beyond that they are not limited to that although they can still flourish in those departments. Home making now is not about keeping the house clean but it's about earning money and building a house, it's about increasing the families balance sheet so going forward of course it would be wise to expand it beyond the home maker sort of project as it were and it will become interesting as to how we package that because it talks to also the kind of personality that it calls you to be right hence the struggle in the workplace, you feel like you must be schizophrenic as a woman because there is a demeanor that you must have in the home because there is a hierarchy in leadership that you must submit to and yet in the office you must be assertive you must be strong you know, so you must sort of flip flop between two worlds and so they have not been reconciled for us where as a man just has to be strong everywhere and so his clarity of mind is - he gets to be consistent whereas we need to balance the two and clearly if you are married [even more so].

Both uMbali noSibongile point to the changes in conceptions of womanhood and what is expected of women nowadays versus how women determine themselves within their families and outside of that space.

It is important to note however that even during the process of *umemulo*, there is a socialisation that the transition creates, from *intombi eziphethe kahle* to *umama/ umuntu wesifazane oqotho*, that produces a kind of Zulu woman. Specifically, the young women describe *umthetho womgonqo*. There is a belief that whatever you do or however you behave while *ugonqile* determines the way you will behave for the rest of your life. This is why there is an insistence that one should *azithobe, angachasuki, angakhulumi kakhulu, abheke phansi and achobozelele abantu besilisa* (be humble, not be quick to anger, not talk too much, look down) as a way of showing respect. All these then create *umuntu wesifazane ozithobile*, and therefore, *oqotho*. Zinhle explains some of the rules of the seclusion period. These heavily emphasise on *ukuzithoba* (being humble), the seclusion period requires the girls to stay in the designated room and not leave except to go to the bathroom. Even when one leaves the seclusion room they cover themselves with a blanket and are not allowed to walk around the yard or house. She further emphasises that all these rules seek to guide you into the kind of woman that you should be, *uzothe ungadluli.*

The rules of *umgonqo* speak to the kind of women that the family and community want to create and want girls to aspire to be. That is, a girl who is seen as humble, respectful and who withholds her sexuality, will become a 'true woman' (*intombazane ezithobayo nengelona uvanzi* will become *umama oqotho*).

Domesticity seems to be a given but is not at the core of Zulu womanhood. How you treat yourself and others is what is important. The expectation of the ability *ukwenza izinto zenzeke* (make things happen) tells us the kind of womanhood we want girls to aspire to. The maintenance of peace (within the family and in the community), how one treats themselves and other people is important to achieve this womanhood. Importantly, Zulu women operate between *ukwenza izinto zenzeke* (to hustle) and *ukuzotha, isithunzi nokungabi uvanzi* i.e. they find these conceptions or performances of womanhood useful in different ways depending on their context.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter documents the themes that emerged in focus groups and interviews conducted with the 26 women who participated in this study. *Ukuziphathe kahle* (good behaviour) shows up in different ways for different women. Some believe in preservation of virginity as a clear marker for good behaviour while others focus less on preservation. Both categories of women value *ukuhlonipha* (respect) as a marker for both good girlhood and womanhood. Importantly, the findings show the link between being a good girl and being *umama oqotho* (an honourable woman).

The findings show that *umemulo* is a practice that is important for the parents, family and community. Younger girls often prioritise their parents *nesithunzi sakubo* (the dignity of their family) in this process and therefore, conceal or avoid anything *engacekela abazali phansi* (that may bring into disrepute the dignity or reputation of their parents). This is seen in the overlap between *ukuhlonipha nokufihla*, where young women hide what is considered as bad behaviour from elders (which includes not just parents, but also family and community). This is because so much emphasis is placed on the women's sexuality (i.e. whether they are having sex on not). The findings show that most of the women interviewed were not virgins when they had *umemulo*. The findings also show that elder women who are supposed to 'test' and publically celebrate the girl's virginity, are aware that many of the girls transitioning into womanhood are already sexually experienced.

Importantly, it is clear that the concept of good Zulu womanhood holds and remains important for Zulu girls and women. However, the ways in which Zulu women experience and perform this is complex. The findings show that while many Zulu girls want to be seen as performing accepted good Zulu womanhood, they do so in ways that allow them to enjoy their sexual rights and pleasure. This is not a tension. I suspect that this has always been the case, what is important is the *performance* of good girlhood in order for one to attain womanhood. The next chapter will unpack the concept of *umama oqotho* (an honourable woman) in order to show the ways in which this has changed or remained as a useful concept for Zulu women themselves. The social value of *umemulo* is clear, firstly as a way of affirming *isithunzi* (the dignity) of the women, their families and communities. As well as its value as a social intervention, *umemulo* is a ritual to which young girls aspire, and in turn aspire to a particular kind of womanhood. Notions

of how this womanhood is performed and passed on from generation to generation particularly in post-apartheid South Africa must be considered especially in the broader context of what Gqola (2016) calls ‘the new South African woman’. Furthermore, umemulo is seen as a way to affirm Zulu identity, the ways in which the concept or identity interacts with context will be analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five – Becoming an honourable Zulu woman: Ukuhlonipha nokufihla ukuze wakhe umuzi (respect and secrecy to build a homestead)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter unpacks the themes identified in Chapter Four. It shows how these themes help us understand evolving notions of *ukuziphatha kahle*, sexual rights and the performance of girlhood in democratic South Africa. Based on the focus groups and interviews, it is clear that Zulu people have used *umemulo* not only to mark the transition from girlhood to womanhood, but also to create and pass on a particular identity for Zulu women, as people who are humble and respectful (*abantu abazithobayo abahloniphayo*).

This chapter first examines the ways in which rites of passage have changed, in ways that mirror the realities of contemporary society. Then it discusses themes of *ukuyalwa* (elder council), sex and sex talk, reflecting on the different ways in which elder and young women talk about sex. Specifically, I focus on the lack of *ukuyalwa* (as noted by younger women) and the punitive and metaphorical nature of sex conversations between elder and younger women. Then I examine the theme of intergenerational collusion. As the findings show, the majority of participants do not limit their understanding of *ukuziphatha kahle* to the preservation of virginity, even though younger and older women affirm the outward appearance of good behaviour as the retention of virginity. This outward performance of virginity is not only dependent on the performance of good girlhood but is dependent on the older women collaborating and affirming the 'virginity' of the younger women. Other themes include the utility of *umemulo* for Zulu girls and women, as well as for Zulu societies in general. Looking at the role of *umemulo* and the kind of woman it creates which allows us to theorise the concept of *umama oqotho* as the woman which Zulu girls must aspire to be. Thinking through the utility of *umemulo* leads us to the conception of the collective process and collective experience of the women who participate in *umemulo*, as well as the collective world sense of Zulu people. This requires us to unpack what I have termed the metaphysics of *umemulo*, which speaks to the utility of the ritual beyond the

individual *omulayo*. *Umemulo* affirms *isithunzi* of not only the individual but of the family and the community as well, because it is the ancestors who affirm this.

These themes tell the story of *umemulo*, how it has been thought about and experienced historically, as well as how it is experienced and remains useful now. Moreover, these themes speak to the constructions of both Zulu girlhood and womanhood and how these are passed on from generation to generation. They make visible the ways in which culture and ritual have and continue to account for biological transitions, while also complicating the ways in which girlhood studies understands girlhood and womanhood as social categories.

5.2 Adaptations to Rites of Passage, Rituals and Culture

It has always been clear that culture is not static, it is influenced by context. As communities shift based on their interaction with the socio-economic and socio-political conditions of the time, their culture and way of life changes. This is the case for rites of passages in African communities and cultures. This section will discuss the adaptations we have seen with male and female circumcision as well as *umemulo*. As seen in previous chapters, these adaptations to the rite of passage can be accounted for in different ways. With *umemulo*, the women noted that these changes are based on where the ceremony is taking place i.e whether it is in the township, the rural area or the urban areas. Female and male circumcision are some of the rites of passage that have had to adapt as the societies in which they are practiced have changed, and as the dangers associated with them have increased or been brought to the attention of public and pro-rights organisations such as the World Health Organisation.

For example, *ulwaluko* (male circumcision/initiation) is a long-standing tradition practised by AmaXhosa (and many different ethnic groups around the world). It is the process through which Xhosa boys attain manhood (*ubudoda*). Young boys must be circumcised in order to be regarded as men who are able to marry or start a family (Mavundla, Netswera and Toth, 2009:396). The process of initiation must produce men (from boys) “who are strong, disciplined, [and] must endure pain and the hardships of life” (Douglas and Maluleka, 2018:585). One of the ways in which the concept of enduring pain and hardship presents itself throughout the initiation process, is the way in which the boys are deprived of clean water or discouraged from drinking fluids. While, on the surface, this is done to allow the circumcision wound to heal with very

little moisture, it is also seen as a test of endurance (Douglas and Maluleke, 2018; Mavundla, Netswera and Toth, 2009). However, dehydration has been noted as one of the biggest contributing factors to the high mortality rates associated with *ulwaluko* (Douglas and Maluleke, 2018:585). This has led to adaptations to *ulwaluko* over the years, with some elders and parents shifting the understanding of water restriction during initiation. They noted that they did not understand where that particular practice came from and that for them, 'no longer [living] in ancient time[s]' meant that practises that were and were perceived to be harmful should fall away. The argument made here is not to do away with initiation schools, but rather to remove practices that make the ritual unsafe and no longer serve the intended purpose. This has led to government interventions through the Application of Health Standards in Traditional Circumcision Act (Act No. 6 of 2001), which is aimed at regulating traditional initiation school and to set health standards to which initiation schools must adhere (Douglas and Maluleke, 2018:585). This regulation also requires initiates to attend pre-circumcision medical check-ups.

Interestingly, all these interventions neither change the process of initiation fundamentally, nor do they require a change in the way that societies think about the ritual and the practices of initiation. For these interventions to work, a partnership between government and traditional practitioners is necessary and, crucially, public health practitioners must be culturally orientated (Douglas and Maluleke, 2018:591). They must value the culture and understand why the community still participates in the ritual even with the risks associated to it. These adaptations show the ways in which governance and policy can influence cultural change and further show that even the people who buy into the ritual influence the social change and can change narratives on rituals at the point at which the communities themselves no longer find particular practices useful and harmful. In other words, it is the community that starts that discourse and starts to change the ritual.

In Chapter Two, I discussed in detail female circumcision and the adaptations that have been seen within the communities that participate in the ritual. The creation of alternatives to clitoridectomy, much like with the adaptations to *ulwaluko*, required and were motivated by societal change. The elders and the men (and not just the young girls) within the Kenyan communities had to buy into the alternative in order for the intervention to be accepted. The alternative to FGM intervention, spearheaded by

Amref Health in the Sambaru and Maasai communities, is based on re-education and shifting the narrative of the link between circumcision and marriageability, thus placing less importance on clitoridectomy as a marker for 'true' womanhood. However, girls themselves as well as their aunts and mothers still seem to value the ritual and choose to participate. They do so because circumcision affects their position in society, their identity as women of particular ethnic groups, as well as their womanhood. And while we have seen an international move towards the ban of FGM or clitoridectomy, and 26 of the 29 African countries where FGM is practiced have enforced a ban on the practice, these countries often struggle to enforce this ban when communities continue to find value in the ritual and insist on practicing it. The concerns about the dangers associated with female circumcision in most instances have led to an outright ban of the ritual, however the continued occurrences speak to the need for consultation and partnership with communities and, further, community-led change in the ways that they think about female circumcision. Ultimately, what is needed is a change in what the ritual has meant for women's identity and womanhood. If circumcision or initiation continues to be at the centre of how communities construct girlhood and womanhood, they are unlikely to stop participating in ritual.

The above comparison is not meant to draw conclusions about whether or not communities should continue to participate in female and male circumcision. It is meant to show that culture and rituals do adapt, and are in constant conversation with time and context. With ***umemulo***, I would argue that the changes that we have seen do not fundamentally change the process, like ***ulwaluko***, but speak to changes in the ways in which we think about womanhood and what we value as markers for good Zulu girlhood.

Furthermore, these changes are based on the context in which the rituals occur. South Africa has a crisis of rape, rape culture and femicide. Moffet (2006) argues that rape narratives refer to the ways in which we speak about and perceive rape; and that rape culture is an environment in which rape is prevalent and sexual violence is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. ***Umemulo*** happens within this context. It is thus unsurprising that the findings show a general concern for safety, specifically safety from rape. ***Umemulo*** has been adapted to reflect this reality.

For instance, the practice of going to the river in the early morning before *umemulo* has been adapted. uMaKheswa and uMamShezi mention that this concern has meant that girls no longer have to go to the river, but rather bath down the street or at a neighbour's house. In my experience, this is done in a manner that stays as close to the practice that would have been done at the river as possible. The water used to bathe is cold, you bathe outside, as if you are at the river using traditional herbs and medicines that you would have used at the river is in the water. This bath is more about being spiritually and metaphysically cleansed and *kususwa amabhadi* (removing bad luck), than it is about *ukugeza* (to bath) which I will discuss later on in the chapter.

5.3 Intergenerational collusion to avoid *ihlazo*

Umemulo includes rituals and practices that are done leading up to the ceremony and during the actual ceremony, these are seen as tests that confirm and affirm that the young woman *omulayo* and her age mates are virgins (*baziphathe kahle*). Often, the young girls are warned heavily about these tests. The tests are emphasised based on the humiliation that parents would face should you fail any of the tests, "*umuntu wenzelwa umemulo ngoba engakaze abaphoxe abazali*" [Umemulo is done for some who has not brought shame or disrepute to their parents].

These tests include; *ukuhlolwa* for some, u*kweqa umlilo, ukungawi komkhonto nokungadabuki komhlwehlw*e (virginity testing, jumping over a fire, the spear not falling over and the cow fat not tearing). These tests seek to publicly confirm *ukuthi ukwazile ukugcina isibaya sika Baba*. As noted in the previous chapter, while the women did not believe that virginity can be tested in these ways or even at all, there was still a huge anxiety associated with these tests, because of the fear of *ukuhlaza abazali* (embarrassing their parents).

The concept of *ihlazo*, I would argue is closely linked to ideas around *ukuhlonipha* or *ukuhloniphisa*. As previously articulated, this refers to the ways in which we speak to each other, refer to each other and refer to certain events. In general, in the Zulu culture *kuyayingwa*, which refers to an attaching of embarrassment to certain behaviours or never fully saying/talking about embarrassing topics or to never directly behaving in ways that bring embarrassment to yourself and your family. I would argue, therefore, that *ihlazo* operates in the same way, it must be avoided at all times. A young girl's behaviour is connected to how she and her family are perceived. And because

ihlazo is emphasised as guideline for behaviour, the young women interviewed expressed that for them, *umemulo* was more for their parents and that their main concern was to not embarrass their parents.

This was true for all the girls, whether they were virgins or not. Interestingly as shown through the findings, the majority of the participants bought into '*ukuziphatha kahl*e' that meant not having a child. This, however, did not mean that they need not participate in the tests, out of the six families participating in the study, only two families had virginity testing the night before the ceremony. Both these families were of girls who participate in virginity testing anyway, *abahamba uMkhosi womhlanga* (attendees of the reed dance). This virginity testing is not only for the girl *omulayo* but for her age mates a well. It is to ensure that the person *omulayo umula nabantu abafana naye* (whose memulo it is, does so with people who are like her). Surprisingly, even the girls *abahlolwa* (who had been tested) had an anxiety about these tests and understood that part of these tests was performative.

Performing virginity through these tests involved what I have termed intergenerational collusion and public secrets. The young women who went into *umemulo* knowing that they were not virgins note that oGogo who help with process of *umemulo* told them how to do the tests in a way that will ensure that the perception of being a virgin is maintained. As the findings show, even when a virginity test was not done, *oGogo* confirm to the parents and families that the girls are virgins. The theme of intergeneration collusion and the maintenance of these public secrets come through quite clearly. These secrets are held between generations of women, either between *uGogo omulisayo* and the girls, or between the elder women within the families and the girls or between the girls and both *oGogo abamulisayo* and elder women in the family.

Often when elder women in the family know that the girl is no longer a virgin, this is not spoken about openly. It is usually only a few women who know, who are also part of the preparations for *umemulo.* These are usually the aunts older than the girls but younger than *oGogo* (the elders), they steer the conversation away from any virginity testing throughout the preparation stages and maintain the perception that the girl *omulayo* is indeed a virgin. On the day of the ceremony, *ukungawi komkhonto nokungadabuki komhlwehlwe* (the spear not falling and the cow fat not tearing) are both symbols *ukuziphatha kahle*. The majority of the girls interviewed were not virgins, but

with each ceremony, the spear did not fall over nor did the cow fat tear. All the girls managed to get through all the tests with the help of elder women. The maintenance of the perception that ***baziphethe kahle*** is important for the parent's and family's i***sithunzi*** (dignity), which will be discussed in depth later.

For this perception to be maintained, it is dependent on both the girls and elder women. They work together to maintain this. It seems to me that while the elder women acknowledge that young women are having sex or that there is a possibility of them having sex, they are happy to keep this information between themselves and to actively claim that the young girls are virgins.

Mpho:

> no but shem I'll never forget that day logogo was busy esigcoba and she is like no, no, no this one is a virgin.

Sihle:

> and the thing is, did you hear ugogo in the morning when my mom arrived, she told my mom that she tested us and we are all virgins [ukuthi usihlolile samatshitshi sonke].

The transition from girlhood to womanhood for Zulu girls and with girl's rites of passage explored in this thesis, have implications for parents, families and communities. I would argue therefore, that the elder women in the context of ***umemulo*** are aware of this. They are aware that ***umemulo*** increases the respectability of the girls as well as the family. Furthermore, that this public announcement of marriageability also implies that ***uzoba umama oqotho*** (she will be an honourable woman) and thus be an asset to whatever family she marries into. The maintenance of family and community as we know it for Zulu people, is dependent on women ***abakwazi ukwakha umuzi/ikhaya*** (who can build a homestead). Good girls, who are acknowledged by their community to be so, grow to become resourceful honourable women who build homesteads and the community.

5.3 Sexual rights: Ukufihla, isoka nesifebe

Often studies on culture and tradition automatically create a comparison between the 'olden days' and modern time. Whether this is about the adaptations to the ritual or the social utility of the ritual, it can be argued that this is based on the question of how

socio-political contexts shift ideas of culture, tradition and even identity. While this is a fair assumption or question, it is important for researchers to not overemphasise the role of 'modern time' on the changes in culture and tradition. As Mark Hunter (2010:35) points out, it is important to "approach tradition and modernity as a dynamic concept rather than static opposites".

Hunter, in the book *Love in the Time of Aids: Inequality, Gender and Rights in South Africa* (2010), speaks to the ways in which Zulu people have constructed and reconstructed masculinities and femininities, and the ways in which sex and sexuality have played itself out in the post-apartheid context. Interestingly, he shows how ideas around sex and sexuality have shifted, arguing that courting, *ilobola* and the *ukuhlonipha* culture have always been in flux, even before the arrival of colonisers. However, his work does show that colonialism had an influence on the ways in which Zulu people thought about and experienced courting, sex and marriage. Colonialism brought about two major changes: the dependency on male wage labour and Christianity. The latter opposed polygamy and placed an emphasis on romantic love and companionship when it came to marriage (Hunter, 2010:41). Hunter is able to show how it is that we end up thinking about sex and marriage (which is important for this thesis) in the ways that we do. He demonstrates that Zulu people's conceptions of sex and marriage have always been complex. Here, I want to explore what I think are some of the reasons for the intergenerational collusion for the maintenance of the outward performance of virginity, and the discomfort with a public acknowledgement of girls' and women's sexual activity.

The argument I make here relies on Hunter's (2010) historical tracing of the constructions of masculinities, femininities, sex and marriage for Zulu people. For Hunter, *isoka* became the ways in which Zulu societies understood masculinity. *Isoka* refers to a man with multiple girlfriends, an unmarried man, who is liked by many girls. Like the term bachelor, it is associated with an unmarried man who might be associated with multiple women. To be known as *isoka* speaks to a man's availability and often sexual prowess. A woman with multiple partners is known as *isifebe* (a loose woman). To be known as *isifebe*, just like having a reputation of being a 'slut', is to put into question a woman's marriageability status. *Isoka*, on the other hand, is encouraged to court and have sex with multiple women while deciding which of them is suitable for marriage.

It seems to me that girls could have multiple sexual partners (penetrative or non-penetrative), but that the issue with a woman having multiple partners is that she is *known* to have multiple partners. Being known as *isoka* does not change anything for men; whatever perception of him exists or remains. In fact, he is thought of as more manly/masculine because *uyisoka*. Hunter (2004) notes that *ubusoka* is seen as a man's entrances into manhood; they enter the courting stage and start to look for a wife, and part of looking for a wife *ozokwakha umuzi,* is having multiple girls from which to choose or enter into polygamy with. Even in post-apartheid South Africa, notions of Zulu masculinities still depend on *ubusoka*, "men's inability to work and become *umnumzana* ('success[ful]') with multiple women has become a critical marker of manliness." (Hunter, 2004:139). For girls, the opposite is true. Being known to have multiple partners, or having had multiple partners, is known as *isifebe*, which limits your ability to enter into womanhood as well as your ability to enter into marriage. Women choose to hide their sexual activity or anything that could lead to them being perceived as *isifebe,* because "women with more than one lover, particularly unmarried women, faced heightened public censure" (Hunter, 2004:132). In this reality, *ukufihl*a (to hide) has been and remains a tool for women to attain both sexual freedom and entrance into womanhood.

These distinctions in the construction of manhood and womanhood, and their interactions with sex, lead us towards a construction of women's sexuality that is conservative – one that prioritises preservation. Even in post-apartheid South Africa, where sexual rights have made sex part of the public discourse, Zulu woman continue to *ukufihla* their sex and sexuality – and so with and without rights these women are subjected to conservative constructions of womanhood and sexuality that require them *ukuthi bafihle* (to hide). These constructions of manhood and womanhood play themselves out in contemporary examples – these can also be seen outside of Zulu societies. The former president, Jacob Zuma, uses the notion of *ubusoka* throughout his rape trial, arguing that as *isoka* (a man) he could not leave a woman aroused (a state he bases on her wearing a kanga). This shows clearly how conceptions of Zulu masculinity are conceived through conquest and sexual freedom for men. The narrative of a '100% Zulu boy' around the Zuma rape trial, links the construction of manhood and masculinity to Zulu culture (Suttner, 2009:225). The argument here is that *ubusoka* is seen as the way that Zulu men (and men in general) are supposed to be. It is

unsurprising, therefore, that Zuma continued to live a life that lacked consequence following the rape accusation; his reputation remained intact, and he went on to become South Africa's most powerful citizen – the president. Conversely, we more recently seen (in May 2020), the example of author, social commentator and speech writer Malaika Mahlatsi, whose sex life was made public by an ex-lover who accused her of writing the doctoral thesis of the City of Ekurhuleni Mayor, Mzwandile Masina. This case made it clear that sexual freedom for women is not as accepted by society. Even when women have consensual sexual relationships, this being public knowledge can endanger their careers and damage their reputations. As the statement from the African National Congress Women's League noted: "The reality of the situation is that Malaika is not alone. She symbolises many women in our society who have been harassed, victimised and blackmailed by men who refuse to accept 'no' for an answer" (Mokhoali, 2020).

I argue that the public tests during ***umemulo*** and intergenerational collusion happen because we do not want to know that girls have become sexually active, because we think that that diminishes her ability ***yokwakha umuzi*** (build and maintain a household). The conception of ***ukugcina isibaya sikababa*** is directly linked to one's ability ***yokwakha umuzi*** (preserving one's virginity is seen as directly linked to one's ability to build and maintain a household), even if you did not ***gcina isibaya*** in the strictest sense. Maybe what this shows is that, when it comes to how women experience sex in the Zulu culture, the experience has always been through the lens of ***ukuhlonipha nokufihla***. Zulu girls and unmarried women have always participated in sex. The caution given to them has always been that there must be no physical evidence of this participation (i.e. pregnancy) or that one must ***afihle*** (hide) their participation. Both are done to maintain the perception of ***ukugcina isibaya sikababa*** and thus the ability ***yokwakha muzi***. Intergenerational collusion and public secrets happen as a result of these constructions of manhood and womanhood – even within the liberal rights context of democratic South Africa.

None of the elder women who participated in this study had had ***umemulo*** done for them. Most of them had had children by the time they were 18 and some had even married. uMamKhumalo mentions that when she was a teenager, abortions were prevalent, which indicated both the lack of 'good behaviour' among girls at the time, and that only a few bought into preservation as a form of ***ukuziphatha kahle***:

> ngezikhathi zethu ke thina there were lots of abortions so ukuziphatha kahle nj into eyayiOut of the question babili bathathu mhlampe kulaba abahlolwayo abey'phatha kahle ngeqiniso.
>
> [In our time there were lots of abortions so good behaviour was actually out of the question, there were a few of our peers who participated in virginity testing, who really showed good behaviour]

This is interesting because of how much emphasis the elder women put on ***ukuziphatha kahle*** and the need for ***umemulo*** as a way to encourage girls ***ukuthi baziphathe kahle*** – even as it is clear that they did not buy into preservation in their teenage years.

The fact that most of the older women interviewed in this study had children when they were young, suggests that Zulu women have always practiced some kind of agency when it comes to sex and pleasure. It is also clear that this has always been into ***efihlwayo*** (something that is hidden); it is not to be discussed or known publicly.

What is interesting for me becomes the interaction between this ***ukufihla*** and the very public rights discourse and sex talk in post-apartheid South Africa. One could argue that the rights discourse gives young women a public platform to claim their sexual and bodily rights. Yet, most of them still choose ***ukufihla***, whether this is a secret kept between them or between generations of women. They choose ***ukufihla*** but still claim the protection of rights should they need to do so.

In this regard, young black women's assertion of sexualised freedom represents a rupture between apartheid and post-apartheid conceptions of young women's bodies that erodes parental control (Posel, 2011:56). Sexual freedom is seen by the prevalence of erotic images in the media post-1994, as well as by the control women start to have over their own sex lives. The argument here is not that women did not have sexual agency before democracy, but rather that their sexual agency became more public, because sex itself become a part of the public discourse on rights, and of bodily rights. While this is clear through Motsemme (2011), Posel (2011) and Hunter's (2010) work, what this thesis is able to show is that ***ukuhlonipha nokufihla*** still form a significant part of the ways in which sex and sexuality are conceptualised. ***Ukufihla*** (to hide) means that the ideas of being a good woman and having sexual agency are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the idea of being a good woman no longer requires one to put

traditional virtues like *ukuhlonipha* in contrast or conflict with rights. This, importantly, moves us away from the culture versus rights narrative.

While the word 'rights' never actually comes up in the conversation with the younger women, their sexual agency and sexual freedom is often seen through the nature of their conversations and through their 'sex talk', which will be discussed in the next section. Both elder and younger Zulu women want to be seen as performing accepted ideas of good Zulu womanhood, and they do so in ways that allow them to enjoy their sexual rights and pleasure. This is not a tension. This is also true historically, as the elder women (and Hunter's work) show. Even though there can be a contention about how we think about rights between the different generations of women, the passing on of conceptions of womanhood, *ukuba umama oqotho* (being an honourable woman), does not negate woman's sexual freedoms and pleasure.

5.4 Ukuyalwa, Sex and Sex Talk

Ukuyalwa (elder counsell) is the process of being given words of wisdom. This is a practice where elders advise younger men or women who are transitioning into different parts of their lives (Mfecane,2 016:211). *Ukuyalwa* is a practice that new brides go through as they enter into marriage; it also forms a part of young men's initiation schools as they transition into manhood.

This is a practice that exists in different cultures, and is an important part of growing up and transitioning. This process allows elders to tell you about their own experiences of the transition you are going through at the time, also to teach you the values and principles that make up the category of life you are entering into. Luvuno (2004) refers to *ukuyalwa* as the process a *mokoti* (a bride/wife) who has fallen out of favour with her husband and/or her in-laws goes through: she must be sent back home to learn to be respectful as *umakoti* (a bride/wife).

Within the ritual of *umemulo*, the young girls *bayalwa* (are counselled) by the elder women; these include aunts, grandmothers and *oGogo abahlolayo noma ogogo bendawo* (elder women who facilitate virginity testing and elder women in the community). Details of what is spoken about are hard to find, but the general understanding is that the elder women will pass on principles of Zulu womanhood. In the interviews and focus groups, the younger women noted a lack of this during the

process of *umemulo*. The women who had grown up *behamba umhlanga* (attending the reed dance, practising virginity testing), were the groups that had experienced *ukuyalwa* in clear and explicit terms. Fezeka and Zinhle (*nempelesi zakhe*) speak about their experiences of *ukuyalwa*; this happens *uma beyohlolwa* (when they are getting tested) part of the practice of *ukuhlowlwa* is to advise and teach young girls how to maintain good girlhood (with preservation being the first step) and what that looks like.

Fezeka:

> Laphana sifike siyalwe ukuthi mewuyintombazane kufanele wenze kanje nakanje nakanje. [When we get there, they advise us about how we must do things as girls.]

Khanyisa:

> oGogo when they are with us, they do talk to us about sex and sexualities. It's not like they are talking to us about in a way that is encouraging us to have sex, but they talk to us about sex and warning us about sex, making us aware of what sex can turn us into.

Sex talk is part of *ukuyalwa*. Sex, as in many other communities, is thought of as a taboo subject. The young women speak about it in metaphors and vague language. They also experience any conversation about sex with the elder women in punitive ways, as well as in vague metaphors. Girls are constantly being warned about the dangers of sex: being sexually active is talked about as something undesirable. When Khanyisa says oGogo "make us aware of what sex can turn us into", it does seem that whatever 'sex can turn them into' falls outside of understandings of good girlhood and/or womanhood. I would argue that the kind of language used by oGogo shows the girls what they should and should not aspire to as a form of womanhood. While they do not explicitly say in these interviews what kind of woman you would be if you had sex, it is implied in the ways they talk about themselves as *amantombazane ahlolwayo* (participants of virginity testing) in comparison to those *abangahlolwa* (those who don't participate in virginity testing*)*. Moreover, those who participated in virginity testing always made it clear the kind of girl that they were not: "*ungahambi nje uthatheka ungabi wuthathekile*…. cause whatever *engikwenzayo njenjamanje kuRuin-a ikusasa*" (one who easily please and is all over the place as what I do now will ruin [my] future) as uZinhle makes remarks here.

This kind of language is punitive; it shows the ways in which uZinhle herself has had these conversations as if *uyathethiswa* (to be reprimanded) in her experience of the

conversation. The ways that she experiences sex talk from oGogo informs the ways that she thinks about sex, and the ways that she thinks about other women who choose to have sex. For her, those are the women who become ***othathekile***. Other women noted a lack of ***ukuyalwa*** (in the formal sense) in general and in particular during ***umemulo***. They also note that when sex talk came up, it was always vague and the notion of '***ukugada isbaya sababa***' was emphasised, a metaphor which means 'to preserve one's virginity' but can also be directly translated to 'guarding the father's kraal':

Thobile:

> They were there, our aunts, family friends that came to the ceremony, they would come and see you and tell you to practice good behaviour, repeating the same... They spoke to us and gave us advice.

Mbali:

> They were just thanking us for ukuziphatha kahle and all that and she was just telling us to continue to do that and to respect our parents, to respect ourselves yah…the key does not mean that you can be free or to unlock everything, yes… well I wouldn't say that they told us to become an honourable woman. I just think they were emphasising more about being a well behaved girl, who watches over the father's kraal, isibaya sikaBabab and yah basically it was mostly centered around sexuality.

Thobile:

> You cannot go hoe around and unlock the keys now of every guy, you know you still have to respect yourself and yah basically conduct yourself with respect (silence) oh yah nezibaya zababa and all that stuff.

Fezile:

> I think they do, they just get scared. They don't know how to approach it yeah they don't know where to start. If there was a way to start it they would say hey listen it's like this, that's how it's done, they would just tell us but now they feel very awkward about it and very uncomfortable about it.

This conversation between uThobile, Mbali and Fezile shows a lack of a formalised kind of ***ukuyalwa***, which is usually expected as part of the process of ***umemulo***. Instead, elder women often ***bancoma*** (compliment) ***amantombazane*** on showing ***ukuziphatha kahle*** and encourage them to continue behaving well and, in particular, to continue being virgins. Fezile's observation is that even if elders want to talk to young people about sex, they would be scared to do this, which speaks to the nature of sex talk in

general in African communities – the idea that being sexually active is not something we should aspire to outside of marriage.

While I think that some of these comments can in fact be interpreted as *ukuyalwa* of some kind – advising the women *ukuthi baqubeke bagcine isbaya sikababa* – which also forms part of intergenerational, public collusion (as discussed earlier), there remains an insistence on publicly affirming that indeed these girls *baziphethe kahle* and that we know this because we know that they are virgins.

Sibongile and Thandi in their focus group show concern for the ways in which punitive approaches to sex have become less useful. Sibongile speaks to rituals such as *umemulo* that place a heavy emphasis on a girl's sexual activity or lack thereof, creating girls with unhealthy relationships to sex which is coupled with a socialisation of boys that prioritises *ubusoka* (multiple sexual partners). This concern is shared by MamShezi as well, in the form of concern about the socialisation of children in general. She expresses the need to raise boy and girl children in the same ways, and that gender should not heavily alter the ways in which children are parented. When asked about the differences between the marking of manhood and womanhood, the elder women spoke of desiring a context where women and men were held to the same standards and socialised (specifically around sexuality) in the same way. The pressure on women to uphold *ukuziphatha kahle* in order to transition from girlhood to womanhood is clear, while for boys and young men there is no real pressure when it comes to the preservation of virginity. The women problematise this but do not seem to know how it is that Zulu people can go about changing this.

One could argue that *ukuyalwa* (elder council) *nemfundiso* (what we teach children) are not just a function of ritual. These form part of the socialisation process of Zulu children. The elder women see the need and utility of parenting boy and girl children in the same way, however, still maintain *umemulo nokuziphatha kahle* as a ritual to aspire to for girls. Part of their concern is clearly a safety concern, that if girls *abayalwa noma abafundiswa* about sex this puts the girls in danger and may have unwanted consequences such as pregnancy. Yet again, they fall into the same punitive narratives that they themselves warn against.

One could argue that the relationship between *ukuyalwa* and sex is a constant negotiation between what we know (meaning what the elder women themselves have

experienced) and the shifting socio-political context, particularly one where sex is brought into public culture. Sex and sexual rights/bodily rights becoming public culture means that children will encounter (and experience) these concepts, regardless of how much parents warn against them. One could argue that ***umemulo***, as an aspirational ritual for girls, is being used as the social intervention against this early encounter of sex and sexual rights. ***Umemulo*** is used as a way to encourage girls to not be sexually active at an early age, and is enforced by the fear of ***ihlazo*** (shame to themselves and family). Even if girls do end up having sex before they have ***umemulo***, as they express throughout the interviews, they are extremely cautious to not get pregnant. This translates to practising safe sex. And so, while ***ukuyalwa*** might not always happen explicitly or may not be labelled as ***ukuyalwa***, creating and maintaining something to aspire to, ***umemulo***, and attaching good behaviour as a requirement, allows Zulu societies to sort of 'police' girl's and women's behaviour and performances.

When sex and sex talk came up in conversation with the elder women, it was also vague. uMamShezi expressed that she is honest with her children about sex, both male and female. She notes that when elders or parents are secretive about these topics, children go out and experiment, which she says is more dangerous. Furthermore, I asked questions around how the notion of sex talk can become less taboo or less vague, or rather how ***umemulo*** can be used as a space to speak to young women about sex, sexuality and pleasure. uThandi responds in this way:

> It would have to be during seclusion because it is something we don't talk about; how do you even begin to have such a big conversation? It must be during seclusion and be done by elder women and girls on their own and basically make them aware about the dangers and consequences of this [sex] and how it contributes badly in their lives, if they engage in sexual intercourse, there are dangers attached to that instead of not telling them anything outside of the nice party (umemulo celebration).

While this response can be read as progressive, they still fall into the ***ukuhlonipha*** code of Zulu people. The ***ukuhlonipha*** code is a practice of avoidance that operates within the Zulu culture. It presents itself in different ways, firstly through the ways in which ***omakoti*** (brides/wives) avoid using their father in-law's names and any word that in its linguistic make up is related to the father in-law's name. It is also seen through the ways in which we refer to death in general as well as distinguish between ***ukushona komuntu nokukhothama kweNkosi*** (the passing of someone and the passing of a chief or king which accounts for the king's seniority and position). The above responses show the

ways in which the *ukuhlonipha* code presents itself in everyday tone and language. uMamShezi never explicitly mentions sex, she says '*kanje kanje*' which translates to 'this and that' and even when uThandi suggests ways in which we can make sex talk less of a taboo, she still suggests that this should be done in a private space between young and elder girls that expands on the current practice of *ukuyalwa* to include sex. Even then she speaks more about the dangers and consequences of sex and never about topics like pleasure or erotism.

Sex talk that includes pleasure and erotism happens between the young women on their own; those who are sexually active have conversations about sex (during the focus groups as well as during seclusion), but even they are often still shy and/or respectful when doing so. When referring to sex in one of the focus groups, they used the phrases "*leyo mpambosi*" loosely translated to 'that thing', or they say "*ukulala nomfana*" (to sleep with a boy) or "*ukuthintwa umfana*" (to be touched by a boy). For this part of the conversation, the young women asked each other and myself questions about sex, virginity and *ukuziphatha kahle*, and they made it clear that this is a conversation they would only have among themselves. In two other focus groups, the young women noted that they also would have these conversations with each other, but not with elders, and mentioned that the elders are uncomfortable and unwilling to have conversations about sex, and specifically, pleasure.

The idea in this section is not to suggest that there is no sex talk or even elder counsel between generations of women, but rather to show the ways in which girls experience these as they grow up, and specifically the ways in which they experience both sex talk *nokuyalwa* during *umemulo* as a point of transition. *Umemulo* as a ritual that serves to publicly announce one's marriageability, and the young woman moves from being a girl into a woman and further into a married woman, who can now have sex. It is important therefore, to note the ways in which *ukuyalwa* and sex talk interact, because this interaction informs the girls' ideas around sex and their own sexuality. In post-apartheid South Africa, where girls know and are taught about their rights at an early age (including rights to choose as well as sexual rights or bodily rights), one wonders whether the ways in which sex talk and *ukuyalwa* have presented themselves in this project are still useful. Further, one wonders how frequently the lack of sex education in general means that girls turn to each other for sex talk, and how this can simultaneously create a bond between them and be detrimental to them as well.

5.5 The Metaphysics of Umemulo: Isithunzi and the Zulu world sense

The metaphysics of ***umemulo*** can be discussed and categorised, in this study, in two ways. Firstly, through what Oyewumi (1997) calls a world-sense - which speaks to how African people experience the world without separating the physical and metaphysical. Secondly, through the concept of ***isithunzi***, your own dignity and your family's dignity. It is clear from the interviews and focus groups that ***umemulo*** is either requested by the ancestors or generally done for the ancestors. ***Umemulo*** is where the physical and the metaphysical worlds meet to affirm one's womanhood and ***isithunzi*** of the individual and of the family. The ancestors must affirm the transition from girlhood into womanhood. In this section, I explore notions of ***isithunzi*** and how these interact with the ways in which Zulu people and Zulu women experience orview the world.

Oyewumi (1997:2) argues that in Western epistemologies, the body is emphasised because the Western experience of the world happens primarily through sight. She makes a distinction between a world-sense and a worldview, arguing that the latter speaks to the ways in which the Western experience priorities sight and the former speaks to the ways in which African people experience the world. The notion of a world-sense refers to cultures that, in their experience of the world, privilege senses other than the visual or experience the world through a combination of senses (Oyewumi, 1997:3). This often means that the body carries our spiritual selves in the physical world, and that the interconnectedness of the physical world and the metaphysical world make visible that we are not just human beings on earth, but rather that our physical being in always in conversation with our spiritual beings as well as those who have come before us – ***amadlozi*** (ancestors). As Magwaza (1993:11) notes, an "intimate connection exists between the ancestors on the one hand and the acts of their living descendants on the other hand". She further notes that Zulu societies are made up of ancestors and their descendants, thus the descendants cannot have a separate existence from the ancestors. Mpho speaks to some of her experiences in this world that were caused by what was required in the metaphysical world:

Mpho:

> Yes, because this guy is telling me things I don't know about myself and you know I actually reminisced about previous relationships that I had been in and maybe that's why relationships were not going well because we had not done anything at home [referring to doing something for the ancestors].

The above quote shows a Zulu world-sense: a specific way in which Zulu societies are built and the ways in which Zulu people navigate the world. There is a constant interaction between the ancestors and their descendants. uMaKheswa and Sihle in the previous chapter show how not having *umemulo* can lead to illness – kuyenzeka *umuntu agule*. MaKheswa cautions against not having *umemulo*, as the implications for the individual can be dire. Within Mbali and Thobile's family, *umemulo* was specifically requested by the ancestors. Before this request was made known, uMbali faced difficulties getting a job, difficulties at university as well as in any romantic relationships. The ancestors must be told what is being done (even if it is being done at their request), and they must be informed that the individual is transitioning from girlhood to womanhood. This is done through talking to the ancestors *emusamu* (at the ancestral place in the home), the slaughtering of *imbuzi yokubika nenkomo yokumula* (the goat that informs the ancestors of the ritual and the cow for the actual ceremony), as well as by burning *impepho* and *ukufaka inyongo* (burning incense and putting on the gallbladder).

Isithunzi was emphasised in all the interviews. *Umemulo* is seen as a way for the ancestors affirm *isithunzi* of the individual, her age mates and her family. The word *isithunzi* is an isiZulu word that can be translated to dignity, this is a concept that exists in other cultures. AmaXhosa refer to it as *isidima* and baSotho refer to it as *serithi* (Vellen, 2010:314). The metaphysical implications of *umemulo* are directly linked to the idea of *isithunzi*. Vellen (2010) reflects on human dignity in South Africa from the perspective of black Africans and argues that the concept of *isithunzi* (*serethi/isidima*) asserts a deeper cosmological meaning than the English translation, dignity. *Isithunzi* is the virtual force identifying an individual and is the part of a person that becomes *idlozi* (ancestor) after death (Vellen, 2010:318). Using the concept of a world-sense allows us to think through the cosmological and metaphysical parts of ourselves. The words *isithunzi* or *serithi* can be used to denote ancestors and the link between *amadlozi* and *umemulo*.

The nature of *umemulo* points to a collective consciousness and collective behaviour: the process cannot happen without age mates and family. In turn, *umemulo* affirms *isithunzi* of all who participate: the individual, her age mates and her family. There is a public affirmation from the ancestors. Again, understanding this collective world-sense is important because it moves us away from theorising rites of passage

through victimology and pathology, which looks at the individual experience of the rite. *Umemulo,* much like *Bojale* and the Sunrise Ceremony discussed in previous chapters, has implications for the collective – one's good behaviour gives the family *isithunzi*. Maintaining the family's dignity (and prosperity with regards to *Bojale* and the Sunrise Ceremony) is often the burden of women, as women's behaviours have implications not only for their own *isithunzi* but for that of their families as well.

This can also be seen through the culture of mourning, *ukuzila*, in the Xhosa and Zulu cultures (as well as other African cultures). According to Guzana (2004), this mourning practice can be thought of "as a rite of passage and as an adaptation to loss." The widow transitions from being married to unmarried – the mourning practices and rituals 'induct' one into the next stage of their lives. Guzana (2004 in Ngqagweni, 2013:80) goes on to show the differences between the mourning practices for men and women, showing that men mourn for a shorter period and are less restricted throughout the process. Often it is emphasized that a woman must be a 'dignified woman' (*umfazi onesidima*) (Ngqangweni, 2013:26). This woman is described as having less privileges in the home than her husband, and to be responsible for *isidima* – the dignity of the home or family.

Ngqangweni (2013) argues that with mourning in particular, it is understood that death affects the whole family and the women are regarded as more 'contaminated'. Much like the burden of maintaining *isidima*, the burden of mourning falls on the women and her mourning is not just about her but about the family; *uma kusazile umama kuhlonishwa umoya wokuzila* (if the mother or woman is still in mourning this is respected and a sense of mourning is respected). This can be seen through the way some of the limitations placed on family members are lifted when they have removed their mourning clothes and have been cleansed, but the widow continues her mourning. The rest of the family would not be allowed to have any celebratory functions or any ancestral rituals during this time. It can be argued that the collective cultural identity is in conversation *nokuzila kukamama* (the mourning period of the mother). *Ukuzila kukamama* not only has collective implications, but carries the collective mourning practice. How she behaves during this process, and whether or not she maintains *isdima/isithunzi sakhe,* have a direct impact on whether or not the family or household will have *isidima/isithunzi* after the mourning rituals are completed.

I argue that we can think about *isithunzi* in two ways. First, it is something that is inherent to everyone but can sometimes be diminished or undermined. Second, ***ukuba nesithunzi*** is also dependent on ***ukuba umuntu*** i.e. how you interact with other people. Dladla (2017) argues that notions like *isithunzi* evoke ubuntu and therefore speak to a process of becoming. There is a need for constant evolution: ubuntu requires ***izenzo zomuntu ezikhomba ubuntu*** (your actions point to your humility and humanness)– it is important for the ancestors to be a part of this evolution. ***Umemulo***, therefore, as a 'dignifying' process requires one to become ***umuntu (mama) oqotho*** (which is judged by how you maintain ***isithunzi*** that has been affirmed) and ***ubuntu bakho*** (which refers to how you treat people). Even if ***isithunzi sakho*** was not diminished, the ancestors still affirm it (in the context of ***umemulo***) and still require that one must become an honourable woman based on actions and how you treat other people. Therefore, "dignity (***isithunzi***) is manifested in the gestures of Ubuntu through which we relate to others, considering them human as we are…" (Vellem, 2010:316).

It can be argued then that a Zulu world-sense means that we are not only concerned with how things appear on the surface. A Zulu world-sense allows us to make sense of ourselves, in relation to each other and in relation to our ancestors.

5.6 Becoming Umama Oqotho and Democratic Seductions and Illusions

It is clear throughout the conversations with both the young and elder women that Zulu women found ***umemulo*** useful, and also found the aspirational womanhood it created and passed on to be useful. One could argue that the kind of womanhood that Zulu girls aspire to is implied through the rules of ***umgonqo*** (seclusion), as well as through notions of ***ukuhlonipha*** and obeying elders (and men in particular) which are emphasised throughout the girl's life. Out of all the interviews, it was only the young girls in one focus group who doubted the usefulness of ***umemulo*** and said that they would not continue the tradition for their own children.

However, the rest of the younger women said they would continue with the tradition. Often this was based on an inherent value they placed on ***umemulo, umemulo ubalulekile ngoba ubalulekile*** (it is important because it is important). Livermon (2015:17) argues that in examining the usefulness of tradition and culture in post-apartheid South Africa, we find that redefinition of existing African traditions depends

on access and participation in them. While Livermon (2015) speaks to the experiences of queer people, I draw similar parallels when it comes to Zulu women and the utility of *umemulo*. Livermon (2015) looks at the ways in which culture can be 'usable' for people who often fall outside of the dominant heteronormative ways of being within those cultures. He argues that in order for us to reimagine and reconstitute culture, queer bodies must participate, especially in cultures that seek to police sex and sexuality. For Livermon "…tradition becomes a necessary and important cultural reinvention. Because these traditions are not in the past they constitute a present and a possible future that make them available for reworking" (2015:36). This insistence of combining culture with queerness, uses what he terms "usable traditions" to shift understandings of culture and how they interact with sex and sexuality. I would argue, therefore, that *umemulo* as it stands is a usable tradition within the Zulu culture.

For the tradition (*umemulo*) to be usable, different women must participate in it, who shift and even remake some understandings of *ukuziphatha kahle*. Much like the queer people Livermon (2015) focuses on, Zulu women find utility in *umemulo* because they are able to include sexual freedom in their conceptions of womanhood (whereas this would not traditionally be the case).

This section discusses the question of what it means to be a good Zulu woman. I argue that the understanding of good Zulu womanhood which the women interviewed speak to, can be attained in various ways. This thesis does not account for those different ways, but this does not mean that *umemulo* is the only way to attain this good Zulu womanhood. In my observation of Zulu womanhood – no woman is actually left behind and, therefore, even those who have not behaved well in the ways outlined in this thesis, can still attain womanhood and, specifically, good womanhood.

Unlike the distinction that is made between men who are circumcised and those that are not, there is no social separation between women *abamula nabangamulanga* (those who have had umemulo and those who have not). The categories of women are usually grouped into *ngamantombazane* (girls) *nomama* (and women). There is no hierarchy between women *abamula nabangamulanga*. Those who are excluded from good Zulu womanhood, which was defined by the participants as '*umama oqotho*' (an honourable woman), are excluded based on general social bad behaviour, such as drunkenness, being a thief or being an irresponsible parent or a nuisance in the

community. Hierarchies between categories of women are created by seniority rather than *ukumula*. This is in contrast to a rite of passage such as *ulwaluko* where there are clear hierarchies between those who have gone to *entabeni* (the mountain) and those who have not.

One of the participants, Mpilo, questioned the idea of being a good Zulu woman. She asks:

> What is the difference about a good Zulu woman? There she is going to drink Black Label in Freedom. She has 3 kids. She takes the social grant money and uses it all, is that a good Zulu woman? Is that who we are talking about?

Her age mate, Phumi, thinks that there is something specific and important about the ways in which Zulu womanhood is constructed. The contestation points to the ways in which womanhood interacts with the cultural and socio-political context. These contestations reveal the complexities of Zulu womanhood, the ways in which different women experience it, and what they value about the concept. Again, what seems to exclude one from good Zulu womanhood is perceived bad social behaviour and one's interaction with the people around them and their community.

Ukuba umama oqotho (to be an honourable woman) seems to be the aspirational Zulu womanhood i.e. what we as Zulu girls and women aspire to be. I think through the different constructions of this womanhood and further how it interacts and intertwines with other conceptions of womanhood with a specific reference to what Gqola (2016) calls the 'new South African woman' and Motsemme's (2011) idea of *ukuphanta* (hustling) which comes through from the interviews as "*ukwenza izinto zenzeke*" (to make things happen).

5.6.1 Umama Oqotho: The Aspirational Zulu womanhood

When asked the question of what it means to be a good Zulu girl or a good Zulu woman, this question was more understood when asked in isiZulu "*uma sikhuluma ngomama oqotho sisuke sikhuluma ngomuntu onjani*?" (when we talk about a dignified women, what kind of person are we talking about). Motsemme (2011) explores the same concept, and translates *umama oqotho* to being a dignified mother/woman, while the participants in this study translated it to being an honourable woman:

> Ozihloniphayo-akaphuzi, uqgoka ngokuzihloniphayo, ukhuluma kahle, uhlalisene kahle nomakhelwane She respects herself. She does not drink alcohol. She dresses modestly, she speaks well, and she has good relations with her neighbours (Motsemme, 2011:113)

MamShezi:

> When we talk about umama oqotho (honourable woman), this is a mother or woman who can take care of her family and her home, she must raise the children and in all the work she does, she must teach all the children. She shouldn't differentiate between boys and girls but teach them all that they must be independent in life. She does not fight with the neighbours, when you tell her your issues, she should be able to help you and not talk about those issues around the neighbourhood. That is an honourable woman.

Khwezi:

> Before, an honourable woman was said to be, you know, give birth, yes. You see someone who will wake up at 4am. They would go and collect firewood, collect water, cook porridge and sweep the yard before their mother or father in-law wakes up. Everything must be done by then, you see. Now it is not like that anymore, you see…Now we live in modern times. The new bride/the wife can now wake up along with the mother and father in-law and the owner of the household, it's no longer like before.

Umama oqotho has been described as a strong, independent, resilient, not afraid to speak the truth, someone who listens and teaches, and is a woman of integrity – all in all MamKhumalo understands this person to be an honourable woman. This woman is also respectful, and she must be able to '***ukubheka ikhaya'*** (looking after the homestead) as described by MamShezi.

In the descriptions given by the younger women, they seem to link ***ukuba umama oqotho*** to marriage and domesticity. But they also make the distinction that being ***umama oqotho*** correlated with marriage and domesticity 'before' or 'back then'. It is clear, however, that for both categories of woman that this concept is a proactive one. It relies on the actions of the person being described. The emphasis on education and independence seems to imply that while women have always had to uphold households, Zulu girls now should and need to aspire to more than marriage. ***Ukuba umama/umuntu wesifazane oqotho*** is linked to what you are to other people – it is about a performance of certain duties.

One of the most interesting things for me was the definition of womanhood as "*umuntu okwazi ukwenza izinto zenzeke*" (someone who can make things happen), Motsemme (2011) calls this *ukuphanta* (hustling). She argues that the insistence on separating *ukuphanta* and *ukuhlonipha* means that "we will once again fail to grasp the concrete dilemmas, strength-force and socio-cultural transformations of poor urban women during these complex times, and thus once again miss the opportunity to tease out just how and why '*ukuphanta*' and '*ukuhlonipha*' together constitute such deep and integral facets of township culture and being" (Motsemme, 2011:104).

I want to use the concept of *ukuphanta* to speak through the ways in which Zulu womanhood has been constructed. This is because, for most of my life, I have experienced the women in my own family and in my community in this way. Maintaining households or *ukwakha ikhaya* has always been the burden of women. *"Ukuphanta'* as a means of 'finding a way in order to survive,' 'getting by' and 'making ends meet,' is a social concept that can be found in several communities, particularly the working class, throughout the world" (Motsemme, 2011:104). *Ukwenza izinto zenzeke* (to make things happen) seems to imply a survival by all means. In the context in which Motsemme is theorising, this includes what she describes as non-conventional ways of making money (whether legal or not).

Amadiume (1987:27) in *Male Daughters Female Husbands: Sex and Gender in an African Society* argues the "gender ideology governing economic production was that of female industriousness." She notes that industriousness can be traced through the matriarchal line; a daughter gets this industriousness from her mother. She further notes that women's industriousness was rewarded with prestigious titles and, because they controlled the subsistence economy, this allowed for the Nnobi society to create flexible gender categories. What is clear to me through *ukuphanta, ukweza izinto zenzeke* and female industriousness as concepts to understand African womanhood is the centrality of hustling. The African woman's reality is to hustle. This is never divorced from context, and so for Amadiume this industriousness allows for women to have power that would have largely held by men. For Motsemme (2011), the women in the township blur the lines between what is legal and what is not. It can be argued that hustling for Zulu girls (and black girls in general), in post-apartheid South Africa, occurs within the context of the sex political economy.

I would argue that *umemulo* happens in a context where the sex political economy has shifted, and the characters of 'Slay Queen' or 'sugar daddies' or 'blessers' speak to a kind of provider love that is transactional. This sex political economy is seen as part of *ukuphanta*, where young women have to participate in transactional sex in order to survive or create and maintain particular lifestyles for themselves. And while I did not encounter the young women's sex lives in this study as transactional, I do think it is important to consider that the elder women teach the younger women that one of the core principles of their womanhood is *ukuphanta* (to hustle) in a context of the sex-positive political economy. It is not unthinkable, therefore, that part of the ways in which these young women experience sex is through provider lover – with two of the groups interviewed, boyfriends would bring goodies during the seclusion process before the ceremony.

My argument is not to say that this meant that those girls were participating in transactional sex outside of the space of seclusion, but rather to say that the concept of provider love played itself out even in this process. As mentioned before, the young women interviewed did not all buy into the concept of *ubuntombi nto*, but were all educated and all prioritised careers and financial or economic independence. I argue that economic independence is part of *ukwenza izinto zenzeke* but that this can be attained in different ways (including transactional sex). The burden of *ukwenza izinto zenke* (finding a means to survive) has been that of women. The primary objective within the Zulu culture and life is described as *ukwakha umuzi*. Both these concepts work together in order to create the actionable womanhood I mentioned earlier. If we agree that, for many young women, the notion of *ukuphanta* happens within the sex political economy and provider love, as well as in the context where education and independence are emphasised, we must agree that it is possible that when the above intersect (in the ways that the young women live their lives) it shifts our understandings of good girlhood and good womanhood.

5.6.2 Other kinds of Aspirational Womanhood

The understanding of womanhood attached to *umemulo* has been linked to marriageability. The ceremony was historically a way to announce a young woman's marriageability and to affirm that they have been able to *ukugcina isbaya siakaBaba* (protect their father's kraal), and therefore have the ability *ukwakha muzi* or *ukuvusa ikhaya*. However, both the elder and younger women emphasise education as a part of *ukuziphatha kahle*, that a young woman must 'be doing something' with her life. It is clear that womanhood is not just about marriage and domesticity. The idea of *ukuphanta*, as explored above, further complicates notions of womanhood.

Young women no longer simply aspire to marriage and, in fact, the elder women themselves encourage the younger woman to aspire to be independent. This section of the chapter seeks to unpack different kinds of womanhood that young women now aspire to, with education and careers becoming a big part of aspirational womanhood. These understandings of black womanhood are performed and experienced by different black women. I explore how these interact with Zulu womanhood.

Sibongile was part of the group of elder women in this research. Her understanding of womanhood prioritises more than just marriage. She expresses the need to move away from understanding womanhood through marriageability and domesticity. I would argue that this is based on the socio-economic and socio-political contexts, which include class, culture, access and whether one is based in an urban or rural area. Furthermore, Mbali, one of the younger women, notes that that there are often contestations in the home and between generations about what womanhood should prioritise and that often feminist conceptions of womanhood are not welcome. And so, they just keep these ideas to themselves and apply them to their own lives. I would argue that women exercise different tools of their womanhood in different contexts and perform different kinds of womanhood. Some of the interviewees note this 'flip-flop' between performances or ways of being.

In thinking through different kinds of womanhood that young girls aspire to and how this 'flip-flop' between kinds of womanhood works, I use what Gqola (2016:120) refers to as 'the new South African woman'. She argues that "in a democratic South Africa, the body had to be imagined anew: as free, mobile, flourishing, exploratory", and because often empowerment policy in the post-apartheid era was aspirational, this

also gave rise to aspirational ideas of what it meant to be a woman. The new South African woman is therefore linked to the increase of women in public and politically powerful spaces as well as women's increased ability to have a consumer status (Gqola, 2016:122). Again, this woman is constructed visually and textually and finds high circulation on television and magazines:

> The "New South African woman" is a working, urban, upwardly mobile woman. She has a career, and she is ambitious and driven. She has smooth skin, straight, shiny hair and "tastefully" manicured nails, and an arched brow, all of which communicate through the body a specific location within a global economy and a very controlled feminine aesthetic whose transgression is ridiculed (Gqola, 2016:123).

The complexity of this identity is seen in the way that it interacts with traditional expectations of womanhood as well as in its interaction with the workplace. So, the new South African woman "lives in the suburbs, is a cisgender heterosexual woman, aspires to reproductive marriage, two cars, and travel outside the continent for business and leisure" (Gqola, 2016:123). And so here, a Zulu woman would fulfil traditional expectations of ***ukwakha ikhaya*** and marriageability but still be educated, have a career and be successful.

I would further note the different articulations we have of this woman. For example, Minnie Dlamini-Jones is a public figure/celebrity, who has made being a 'modern Zulu girl' something that girls can point towards or even aspire to. Another interesting iteration of this new South African woman is former Miss South Africa, Basetsana Khumalo, who is a long standing businesswoman but has been known for taking care of her family in ways that still fall into understanding womanhood through domesticity and marriageability. Gqola (2016) argues that in attempt not to be too masculine, the new South African woman must also have a soft or feminine power. The construction of this woman is based on woman empowerment that still buys into feminine tropes of womanhood or what Gqola (2016) terms "desirable patriarchal femininity". Alweendo (2017) explores the notions of black womanhood through what she terms the Luminance woman, and notes that this woman has a public image of effortlessness but is "…hardworking and considered an economic pioneer by her peers and admirers," such as the founder of the Luminance boutique, former newsreader and business woman, Khanyi Dhlomo (Alweendo, 2017:87).

It seems to me, that regardless of the kinds of shifts that happen when it comes to the performance of good womanhood, what remains at the core of this ***ukubaqotho*** (is being honourable). Even the new iterations of modern-day womanhood and Zulu womanhood rely on women ***ukuthi benze izinto zenzeke*** (who make things happen). The kind of narrative that exists around the women used as examples above, especially in social media, is that they are always on the move, always doing more and could never appear or be perceived as being tired or resting (outside of a well-placed self-care Sunday).

I would argue that this might not, at face value, be called hustling but that the reality for black women is that work and working is their condition, whether we are referring to formal or informal work. The burden of work, building a home and sustenance of that home rests on women's shoulders. Therefore, ***umemulo*** can be seen as a way to teach girls these tools without being overt. They do so in the rules of seclusion, the performance of ***isithunzi*** and avoiding ***ihlazo***.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I unpacked five major themes based on the findings in Chapter Four and how these themes help us understand evolving notions of ***ukuziphatha kahle***, sexual rights and the performance of girlhood in democratic South Africa. While the transition from apartheid to democratic South Africa has a huge influence on culture and rites of passages within different cultures, it is clear that culture itself has never been static and has depended on the people who practice it to constantly reconfigure it in ways that are useful to them. I argue that adaptations to the rites of passages discussed throughout this thesis are based on socio-economic and socio-political contexts, these adaptations are also based on concerns for health and safety, and often do not change the fundamental principles of the rites and the rituals attached to them.

Secondly, I note that ***umemulo*** is a collective experience with implications for the collective and not just the individual whose ***umemulo*** it is. This shows up in different ways, firstly through intergenerational collusion in order to avoid ***ihlazo,*** and also in the shift from understanding ***ukuziphatha kahle*** through preservation towards understanding it through ***ukuhlonipha nokufihla***. As this study shows, often girls who have ***umemulo*** are no longer virgins at the time of this rite of passage. I argue that this is never overtly discussed. Rather, the elder women in the family or the ones that help

facilitate *umemulo* will actively affirm one's virginity in order to avoid embarrassment for both the girls and their families. This avoidance of *ihlazo* is directly linked to the ways in which we think about *isithunzi*. *Umemulo* that lacks *ihlazo*, affirms the girl and her age mate's dignity and enhances their family dignity to the ancestors. This exercise is not about a dignification process which assumes that you lack *isithunzi* entirely, but rather is a process that allows us to think about a Zulu world sense marked by the notion of a collectiveness, where a living person cannot be separated from their ancestors.

Notions of elder council and sex talk were also discussed. I note that the girls experienced sex talk and elder council as punitive. This nature of sex talk between elders and the girls shows the ways in which women are held responsible for avoiding HIV/Aids and early or unwanted pregnancy, as shown by LeClarck-Madlala's work in Chapter Two. The women interviewed in this study allow us to broaden the ways in which girlhood has been theorised.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to theorise conceptions of Zulu womanhood, the idea that "*intombi eziphethe kahle ikhula ibe umama oqotho*" (a girl who shows good behavior becomes an honourable/dignified woman) come through clearly in all of the interviews. The concept of *umama oqotho* can be described as a dignified woman or an honourable woman as described by the participants, and is aspirational and dependent on action. As discussed, this action (for all the different kinds of black womanhood), is about how a woman treats people in her family and in the community, *ukuthi ubaphatha kanjani abantu.* Furthermore, this concept includes industriousness, hustling and work – *umama oqotho wenza izinto zenke.* For Zulu girls, this concept of economic stability or independence happens within the context of liberal sexual rights and a thriving sex political economy. This further shifts our understanding of how girls interact with sex while participating in traditions and rituals that make up the Zulu culture.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine evolving definitions of *ukuziphatha kahle* (good behavior) that were previously understood through preservation of virginity for Zulu girls who participate in *umemulo,* a ceremony that marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood. This thesis examines notions of good Zulu girlhood as understood historically through preservation, as well as through variations of *ukuhlophi nokufihla*. The study has done this by examining Zulu girls' ability to claim sexual rights and freedom while maintaining a performance of culturally good Zulu girlhood. I argue that this ability to claim sexual freedom and still be perceived as a good Zulu girl does not constitute a tension for both the young and elder women in Zulu communities. Importantly, this thesis has shown that conceptions of *umama oqotho* (an honourable woman), industriousness and economic stability in the post-apartheid context makes it possible to shift our understandings of the relationship between Zulu girls and sex. In this regard, an educated and economically stable Zulu girl, with sexual experience but no children, still qualifies to be seen as a good Zulu girl who will become an honourable Zulu woman.

In trying to understand the transition from girlhood to womanhood, I traced theories of girlhood and the different transitions that various cultural groups and communities participate in. Markers of good girlhood allow for the transition from girlhood to womanhood – in the dominant literature, these include a display of good virtues. This is the same for *umemulo*: the performance of good girlhood (*ukuziphatha kahle*) is what allows for this transition – the idea of becoming a woman is based on social norms and expectations that tell women how to behave. Understanding girlhood and the transition to womanhood through life course theory, looks at it through age categories, and posits that people (girls) move through similar steps until adulthood. For life course theorists, adulthood is marked by the ability to work, to marry and to have children. With *umemulo* however, it is the ritual that marks this transition, publicly announcing that one can now marry and have children.

Girlhood has further been theorized broadly in two ways, through the notion of both consuming and pathologising girlhood. Within these categories girls and girlhood are thought of as either commodified, with the ability to be both consumers and

consumed, or as being biologically and socially vulnerable. However, Mitchell and Rentschler (2016), along with other feminist scholars, argue that it is important to complicate the theorisation of girlhood. They suggest that scholarship on girlhood must move beyond understanding girlhood through crises of victimologies. They importantly argue that a scholarship on girlhood must account for experiences of girlhood as theorised by girls themselves rather than those observing the experiences.

This thesis has shown that sticking to the lenses described above does not allow us to account for girlhoods that are constructed within cultural contexts and community. The literature on rites of passage as explored in this thesis account for transitions marked through culture and ritual. For African communities in particular, the encounter with colonialism and Western constructs of society has created a rights versus culture dichotomy. The literature on rites of passage (especially those that involve cutting) focuses on the harm to and vulnerability of participating girls. This creates and maintains the narrative that cultural practices are fundamentally against human rights. A closer look at these rites allows us to complicate this narrative, and rather account for the utility of these rituals in the construction of identity and communities.

In Chapter Two, I examined at the Apache sunrise ceremony, the *Ssenga* rituals, *Bojale,* the *bat mitzvah* and both female and male circumcision. There is a clear distinction in the ways that these rituals are written about. There is more literature on the rituals that require cutting, which I have argued is due to the emphasis on vulnerability and harm when trying to think through cultural practices. Rituals like umemulo, Bojale, Sssenga and the sunrise ceremony have been theorised less as there is no overt harm attached to them. I argue, however, that all these rituals complicate our understanding of the transition from girlhood to womanhood, they force us to think outside of victimhood. In a time where FGM has been declared a danger around the world, we must ask why have communities continue to practice it even when alternatives have been put in place. The argument is not about making a judgement about whether FGM or clitoridectomy is right or wrong, but rather to show the nuance that occurs when socio-political contexts interact with culture. This argument is true even for male circumcision practices. It is clear that all the rituals and cultural practices discussed go beyond being about the individual – there is a collective construction of identity and womanhood. This allows us to expand the girlhood studies to look at the

social value of the transition not just for the girl or girls, but also for their family and community.

The study has shown the ways in which Zulu girls and women have been able to perform good girlhood while still being able to claim sexual rights and freedoms. The findings move us away from simply understanding *ukuziphatha kahle* through preservation but through different conceptions of *ukuhlonipha nokufihla*. Even though for some of the women who participated in the study still subscribed to *ukuba yintombi nto* (preservation/being a virgin) as a marker for good girlhood, the majority of the women in the study were not virgins at the time of their *umemulo*. However, it is clear that the perception of *ubuntombi nokuziphatha kahle* is maintained. This is demonstrated through the overlap between *ukuhlonipha nokufihla*, as well as the occurrence of intergenerational collusion between younger and elder women. The elder women help the younger maintain the perception *yokuziphatha kahle* by affirming that the girls are virgins, even in instances where they are aware that is not the case, and by teaching the girls know how to successfully get through the public tests for *ukuziphatha kahle*. It is clear that both Zulu girls and women reimagine and remake *umemulo* by shifting notions of *ukuziphatha kahle* in order to experience sexual freedom. I would argue that this has always been the case. Women use their agency to act upon the rites and rituals that frame their access to socially approved 'good' womanhood and make them usable. Furthermore, the study shows that women in democratic South Africa have some power over their own bodies. For example, the idea that one has not gotten pregnant by the age of 21 is made possible by the access to reproductive rights and reproductive health care. Girls are, therefore, able to reconfigure good behaviour largely because of their access to state and private reproductive healthcare. Therefore, the socio-political context of reproductive provision and protection as citizens allows Zulu girls to participate in *umemulo* in ways that suit their individual ideas of bodily autonomy and pleasure.

I argue that this is part of the exercise of avoiding *ihlazo* and affirming *isithunzi* – both of which speak to a Zulu world sense. I have argued that the Zulu world sense is based on the ways in which Zulu people experience themselves through the physical and metaphysical world and have shown that this is a collective experience. For Zulu people, rituals and customs around *umemulo* go beyond the individual and the physical; there is a collective construction of identity and womanhood.

This study goes on to show that the ways in which girls experience *ukuyalwa* (elder counsel) and sex talk as punitive. The literature on womanhood in post-apartheid era largely focuses on women *nobunyama* (as darkness) and being the carriers of the disease or unwanted pregnancies, actively shifting the responsibility away from their male partners. However, the elder women in this study speak about the need for a shift in the ways in which we have intergenerational conversations about sex. It is clear from the findings that this is a new conversation and there are no clear suggestions of how this can be done.

Finally, this study explored the concept of *umama oqotho* as the kind of womanhood that Zulu girls should aspire to. I show the complex understanding of aspirational Zulu womanhood: while the concept of *umama oqotho* has always evoked action and industriousness, it is further complicated for Zulu girls in democratic South African society. Woman and girls perform *ukuba qotho* in a socio-political context that places a heavy emphasis on liberal rights (including sexual rights) and a context with a sex-political economy in which women often participate as a way *yokuphanta* (to hustle). This context requires us to complicate our understanding of how girls transition into womanhood.

The study shows that, for Zulu girls, the ability to attain womanhood within cultural space and through ritual while still actively participating in sex and sexual freedom, is not a tension for the elder and younger women. Future areas of research that focus on *umemulo* may seek to look at sexuality in more diverse ways, this study does not account for the participant's sexual identities or sexual orientation. I would argue that the lens used in this thesis is a heteronormative one, largely because the participants in the study did not openly express their sexual identities and were not asked to. I think that questions around sexual identity /orientation would allow us to account for how queer girls interact with culture and specifically how they choose to perform Zulu girlhood and womanhood. As shown in Chapter 2, rites of passage such as male and female circumcision have an impact on the ways that people are seen as 'real' men and women within their own communities. It would be interesting then to explore the ways in which queer women, who choose to participate in *umemulo* or other rites of passage, remake these rituals in order for them to continue participating in their culture and communities. Livermon (2015) shows how queer men have been able to do this with *ulwaluko,* given the context of Zulu culture, I wonder if Zulu girls and women

would be able to do the same or if they would either opt out of ***umemulo*** or simply continue to perform girlhood in the way that is expected as this has implications for meaningful acceptance. Particularly with ***umemulo,*** the acceptance into womanhood assumes that once ***umemulo*** has been done, the woman will then marry and have children, in the hetroenormative sense, this is not the case for every woman. This begs the question of what kind of acceptance the women themselves find useful. Looking at ***umemulo*** through the lens of queerness could potentially bring an added complexity to whether or not it is possible to remake rituals and rites of passages in a way that not only accommodates queer people, but that they would still be able to participate and find value in their participation and performance of culture.

Moreover, I think that this study forces us to explore other rituals and practices that express Zulu girlhood. ***Ukuhlolwa noMkhosi womhlanga*** (virginity testing and the Reed Dance Ceremony) are practices that a large part of Zulu girls still participate in. These practices have implications on how girls expresss and experience Zulu girlhood. Particularly, if we accept that there is a shift in the ways that we think about aspirational girlhood, it would be interesting to see how these practices influence or are influenced by this shift. The Reed Dance and virginity testing are used as tools to encourage Zulu girls to delay sexual activity. However, as we have seen in this study, Zulu girls are not delaying sexual activity but are rather using their access to reproductive health care and bodily rights to maintain the perception of ***ukuziphatha kahle***. Further studies on girlhood or specifically Zulu girlhood could explore the relationship between these rituals and practices and the democratic/rights discourse in South Africa. Debates about what was termed ‘the maidens’ bursaries’ sparked in Soth Africa a few years ago. University bursaries were going to be offered to young women who remained virgins (The Gaurdian,2016). Human Rights groups argued that this would “violate the women’s constitutional protection to equality, dignity and privacy” (The Gaurdian,2016). This bursary was then declared unconstitutional by the Commission for Gender Equality. This allowed greater access for girls and women to use their constitutional rights to maintain the perception of ***ukuziphatha kahle*** in ways that they defined, instead of ways that were prescribed by culture. I would argue that the rights discourse in South Africa has allowed for a shift in not only the ways that these practices are performed, but has also had an impact on the implications of these practises on those who choose to continue participating in them. While this study adds to the discourse

that allows us to shift from the ‘rights verses culture’ narrative, further studies on rituals and girlhood would add to this nuanced debate.

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APPENDIX ONE

SEMI-STRUCTURE INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS (YOUNG WOMEN)

Background:

1) Please tell me about yourself, where you grew up and your family background, ikakhulukazi uma kukhulunywa ngama siko (with specific reference to tradition)

2) When growing up, how and when did you first hear about *umemulo?*

3) When you were growing up, did your family or people you know talk about why umemulo is important?

4) How do children in the community participate *kumemulo?*

5) Did your parents offer to do *umemulo* for you or did you ask for it?

6) What was their or your reasoning behind wanting to have it?

7) Please talk me through the process of *umemulo* (kwenziwa njani uma umuntu ezomula noma esemula)

8) What were your expectations going into *umemulo?*

9) Do these differ from your actual experience?

Ukuzi phatha kahle: Zulu girlhood and sexualities:

10) What does *ukuzi phatha kahle* mean to you or how do you understand *ukuzi phatha kahle* ?

11) How do you understand *ubuntombi nto* and how do you understand *ubuntombi* in the context *yomemulo?*

12) Were you *intombi nto* when you had *umemulo wakho*?

13) Did this change your experience in a particular way?

14) When the elder women *beniyala* (advise), do they talk to you about sex or sexuality?

15) Do the elder women tell you about what it means to be a good girl and a good woman?

16) According to the elder women and in your community, does being a good girl and a good woman include sexual pleasure?

17) To you, what does it mean to be a good Zulu girl?

18) Do you think how we understand what it means to be a Zulu girl should be the same as the time of your parents and gradparents?

19) What would you like to change about the *umemulo*?

20) Do you think *umemulo* will continue to be important when you and your age-mates are parents?

21) Would you do *umemulo* for your own child? Why or why not?

APPENDIX TWO

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ELDER WOMEN)

Background:

1) Please tell me about yourself, where you grew up. How did you first come to know about *kumemulo?*

2) Please tell me about your own *memulo*

3) Ngokwesintu nangokomlando (according to tradition and history) why is *umemulo* important? Under what conditions is it performed?

Ukuzi phatha kahle: Zulu womanhood and sexualities:

4) What does *ukuzi phatha kahle* mean for a Zulu girl?

5) How do you understand *ubuntombi*?

6) How do you understand *ubuntombi* in the context *yomemulo?*

7) Some people say that there is too much pressure on young girls to be virgins and not the same for boys, do you think this is true and if so why?

8) When amaXhosa, for instance, do their transition from boyhood to manhood, there is no pressure for boys to be virgins, why is this the emphasis for girls kwaZulu?

9) What is your definition of a good Zulu girl and woman?

10) Do you think Zulu girls are behaving the same way today as they did when you were young?

11) What has changed about *umemulo* now that we are living in a democratic country that gives young girls the rights to own their bodies?

12) Is *umemulo* something that you want your children to aspire to or that you taught them to aspire too? Or is an aspiration as the parent?

13) Why do we still do *umemulo* and how is it relevant to us now?

14) Do you think *umemulo* should continue as it is or are there some aspects that you would like to change?