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African-centred Understandings of Imbeleko as an Expression of the Value of Children in Nguni Communities through Retrospective Accounts of Young Adult Women

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Faculty of Humanities

School of Human and Community Development

Department of Psychology



African-centred Understandings of *Imbeleko* as an Expression of the Value of Children in Nguni Communities through Retrospective Accounts of Young Adult Women

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community-based Counselling Psychology in the

Faculty of Humanities

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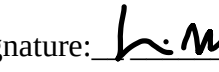
Signature:__ Date: _12/02/2024_____

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Firstly, to God, thank you Abba Father for Your grace and mercy. I owe it all to you. Thank you for giving me the ability to do the things I can do. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

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Abstract

Although there has been greater visibility of research on African childhood and African children, much of the ways in which this research has been produced and presented has been problematic. Firstly, narratives on African childhood/children are often produced by adults – often non-Africans – attempting to understand African childhoods using Eurocentric lenses. The research therefore tends to be undertaken *on* and *about* African children, but not *with* them. Secondly, the research is often preoccupied with the social problems that these children may face, creating a pessimistic view and one-dimensional image of African childhoods. In the pursuit for decoloniality, this study moves away from the stark representation of a 'deprived' African childhood and instead shifts the focus on narratives of African childhood that depict celebration and memorialisation of childhood. This study sought to qualitatively explore young adults' (aged 18-25) retrospective experiences of *Imbeleko* (if they experienced it before age 13), a ritual celebrated with joy, singing and dancing to welcome a child into the family and into society and which can remain a memory of which children remember with fondness. Although this study did not work with children themselves, it sought to engage with young adults about their childhood experiences in a South African context. Notably, this study is framed within African psychology and Narrative theory. African psychology is a significant entry lens into exploring and making sense of African lives and the meanings that they attach to their experiences and Narrative theory treats the stories that participants tell as a legitimate means of knowledge production.

Key Words: *Imbeleko*, decoloniality, African psychology, narrative, ritual

Chapter 1

Introduction

"*The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story…Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.*" – Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie

'The danger of the single story' about Africa that Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie highlighted in her 2009 TED Talk is arguably most persistent in representations of childhood and children's lives. Adichie problematises the single story as creating stereotypes, and argues that 'the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete'. In contemporary literature, African childhoods are often represented as existing in the binary of, on the one hand, the passive victim whose life is characterised by difficulty and lack and who is in need of rescue or escape, and on the other hand, the prematurely 'grown-up' child—who is a worker, parent/caregiver or a wife (Alanen et al., 2015; Botchway et al., 2019). Where African children are concerned, there tends to be a preoccupation with the social problems the children face (Wells, 2021), while the actualities and variety of mundane, everyday childhoods—even if they do come with some challenges and difficulties—are often not considered (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2016).Children are variously adored and cherished and given their rightful place in African society (Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi, 2016), yet research attention rarely focuses on this, but is instead largely focused on children's embodiments of vulnerability. In most African cultures, for example, children are seen as special gifts from the ancestors or from God. In the South African context, this view of children is pervasive, even to an extent that the birth of a child is celebrated not only by individual families but by the community at large. Zulu people (and sometimes Xhosas), due to the value they attach to their children, often perform a welcoming ritual known as *Imbeleko* when the child is still young, as a way of welcoming them into the family and into society (Ngcongo, 1996). *Imbeleko* is a family celebration and a token of thanksgiving which is performed to welcome a child to not only the living members of their family but to their ancestors as well. Although it is usually preferred to be performed when the child is still very young, there is no age limit and it can be

performed at any stage of a person's life. This ritualistic practice is a special event which is celebrated by the family and the entire community with joy, dancing and singing, and for those who the ritual has been performed for, can remain as a memory that is remembered with fondness (Ngcongo, 1996). Notably as well, not only is *Imbeleko* a 'celebration' but it also has cultural significance. *Imbeleko* is seen as incredibly important as it serves as a plea to the ancestors to protect the child against misfortunes and illnesses. *Imbeleko* is therefore regarded by some people as obligatory and a 'must-do' and for the people that celebrate it, they often derive a sense of identity and of belonging and of pride from engaging in such a ritual (Ngcongo, 1996; Ramphele, 2002). Experiencing *Imbeleko* is a common reality for some children in South Africa, which serves to re-affirm their position in their families and foster a sense of belonging within their families and communities. Therefore, other stories about African childhood exist that are not about catastrophe, and it is just as important, to talk about such stories.

Notably as well, some researchers have begun to address this gap. For instance, Mbokazi's (2020) research, delves into the complex dynamics surrounding childcare decisions among low-income mothers in both urban and rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This research uncovers the multifaceted nature of childhood in South Africa, exploring themes including resilience, agency, and cultural identity and shedding light on the diverse realities of South African children. Similarly, Titi (2021) explores the complexities of childhood in South Africa, emphasizing the need for holistic and intersectional analyses that recognize the diverse backgrounds and experiences of children across different social and cultural contexts. By challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized voices, Titi's research provides valuable insights into the lived realities of South African children and informs efforts to promote social justice and equity in child welfare policies and practices. Even so, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is more work to be done in this area. The present study therefore aims to contribute to these ongoing efforts to broaden the scope of inquiry and elevate the diverse experiences of African children. By doing so, this could encourage a move towards a more inclusive and accurate representation of childhood in Africa, one that reflects the richness and complexity of children's lives across different contexts.

This research studysought to move away from the stark and painful representation of a deprived African childhood and instead shift the focus on narratives of African childhood that depict celebration and memorialisation of childhood, so to speak. This study retrospectively explored young adults' attitudes and perceptions about the practice of *Imbeleko* and their experiences thereof, of their own *Imbeleko* as well as the value and significance they attach

to this ritual. Focus was specifically on young adults who had their *Imbeleko* during childhood, before the age of 13, but when they were already mature enough to recognise what was happening and were able to recall the event. Notably, in the South African context, few studies have been undertaken which focus on family rituals generally, and even fewer on family rituals as experienced and viewed by young adults particularly (Fiese et al., 2002; Friedman & Weissbrod, 2004). By focusing on young adults' retrospective experiences of *Imbeleko*, this study also endeavoured to fill this gap in literature.

Aims and Objectives

This study aimed to qualitatively explore and gain an in-depth insight into young adults' (who underwent *Imbeleko* in their childhood) attitudes and perceptions about the practice of *Imbeleko* and their retrospective experiences thereof. This study also sought to understand the value that young adults attach to *Imbeleko* and the perceived importance and significance thereof, of this ritualistic practice. With the notion that "being Black is not a risk factor" (Milner, 2016) in mind, this study aimed to challenge the reproduction of pain narratives about African childhood/children and sought to shift the lens to other stories of African childhood, stories that move away from the 'lack' and 'deficiency' lens. This study centres Black lives and aims to amplify the voices of people who have historically been written out of stories about their own lives.

Research Questions

Main Research Question:

- How do young adults who have undergone *Imbeleko* during childhood narrate their experiences of *Imbeleko*?

Sub-Questions:

- What are the participants' attitudes and perceptions of the practice of *Imbeleko* in general?
- What is the perceived significance and importance of *Imbeleko* in their own lives?
- What did the *experience* of *Imbeleko* mean for participants?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study is of great significance as it contributes to an under-researched area of young adults retrospective experiences of *Imbeleko*, a celebratory ritual which highlights the importance and value of children in Zulu and Xhosa society. This study also recognises the importance of decolonizing childhood studies and is committed to contributing to this decolonial turn. In Kessi et al. (2020, p. 271) decolonisation is defined as a verb entailing "a political and normative ethic and practice of resistance and intentional undoing – unlearning and dismantling unjust practices, assumptions, and institutions – as well as persistent positive action to create and build alternative spaces and ways of knowing". With regard to childhood studies, northern-centric models and narratives of children and childhood abound. Although quite a lot of work on childhood has been undertaken in the Global South, the Global North continues to dominate (Botchway et al., 2019). Not only do Euro-American narratives on childhood dominate but are often presented as being applicable to all of human diversity as well. Due to this, other ways of being a child and living childhood, usually related to and located in Southern contexts, are often marginalised and deemed as 'deprived' or 'lost' simply because they exist outside of this Eurocentric and Western norm-which is so often promoted as a global norm (Sarmento et al., 2018). In its commitment to contribute to the decolonisation of childhood studies, this study makes an argument that in order to understand the complexity with which societies and different cultures approach, see and deal with children and their childhoods, it is necessary to look beyond the Global North view of children and their childhoods. This study was therefore an attempt at rethinking children's lives beyond the western/global north normativity.

As afore-mentioned, over the years there has been greater visibility of African childhood/children narratives in literature. However, despite this, problematics, which I will mention a few, are extant in the ways in which these narratives are produced and presented. First, these narratives tend to be produced by adults – often non-Africans – who attempt to understand African childhoods using Western or Eurocentric lenses (Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi, 2016). Here, research is usually undertaken *on* and *about* African children, but not *with* them (Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi, 2016). Although this study did not work with children themselves, it sought to engage with young adults about their childhood experiences in a South African context.

Secondly, where African children are concerned, hegemonic narratives of 'deficient' African childhoods abound, whereby the lives of African children are presented as being characterised solely by lack and victimhood (Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi, 2016; Alanen et al., 2015; Wells, 2021). For example, there exists a large body of research which focuses on homeless children (e.g., Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Cumber & Tsoka-Gwegweni, 2015), the impact of HIV/AIDS on children (e.g., Ansell & Van Blerk, 2004), and fatherlessness (e.g., Freeks, 2017; Patel & Mavungu, 2016), amongst other social problems. While it is undeniable that African children may be facing these challenges and difficulties in their lives and although the portrayal of African childhood as 'difficult' may not necessarily be false, this representation is problematic as it only presents a one-dimensional, and as Adichie asserts , a 'single-story' image of African childhood which casts a shadow over other realities. While the research attention on risks is of great importance, focusing only on risks paints a negative and pessimistic image of African children and sees African childhoods merely as sites of intervention (Milner, 2016). Additionally, solely focusing on the negative also prevents the emergence of a more holistic picture of African childhoods (Kesby et al., 2006).

In the pursuit of decolonisation, therefore, this study is of great significance as it causes a detour in the approach of some of the existing literature about African childhood and the lives of African children, which have become repetitive and have reproduced narratives that view children solely as victims of exploitation and social injustices. This detour is important because it escapes 'the dangers of a single story' and recognises that more regions of African childhood, happy and hope-giving ones exist and are worth considering, which this study aimed to do. African children also experience celebration, joy and pleasure in their lives, and it is as important to consider such experiences.

Thirdly, this study is framed within the burgeoning field of African Psychology, which Ratele (2017, 2019) posits as an orientation to the study of human lives and behaviours of peoples living in Africa. For Ratele, African psychology is an important entry lens into exploring and making sense of African lives and the meanings that they attach to their experiences. This is an important antidote to mainstream psychological models of human behaviour and subjectivity that tend to engage individualistic approaches to human experiences and identities. Instead, the role of collective and relational approaches to personhood is centred as a foremost critical site for understanding human subjectivity. Similarly, Mkhize (2004) argues that an African psychology orientation that engages the worldviews and life experiences of Black peoples would go a long way towards counteracting against the continued misrepresentations and marginalization of these worldviews and experiences within the

discipline. Understanding not only the role and importance of communal and familial ritual in developing and reinforcing a person's sense of place within the family and the community at large is one such entry point to such an orientation. The practice of *Imbeleko* foregrounds the importance and value of the child to the family and community at large. Its multiple and layered dimensions – social, communal, affective, discursive, ritualised practice and connection to temporal meanings that include past, present and future – is a rich site for making sense of an individual's sense of place in the family, community and society at large.

Research Report Structure

This study is organised into four other chapters, including the theoretical framework, the literature review, the methodology, the findings and discussion chapter as well as a conclusion chapter.

Chapter Two: This chapter focuses on the theories that are anchoring the study and will undertake a discussion into Decolonisation and African psychology as well as Narrative theory. This chapter makes an assertion that both these frameworks collaboratively offer a comprehensive and culturally embedded analytical framework for unpacking the significance of *Imbeleko* in young adults' lives.

Chapter Three: Chapter three presents a comprehensive review of literature, exploring key topics central to understanding *Imbeleko* and its cultural significance in the African context. This chapter meticulously explores themes such as ritual and practice, culture and tradition as well as the value attributed to children within African societies.

Chapter Four: This chapter outlines the methodology of the research study. A discussion is undertaken into the research design, participant sampling, processes of data collection and analysis as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter Five: Chapter five presents the analysis and discussion of the findings of the study, including the results of the narrative analysis conducted. In this chapter, the results are also grounded within existing literature.

Chapter Six: This is the conclusion chapter and will include a synthesis of key findings, reflexivity section, a discussion of the strengths of the study and its potential contributions to research, the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical perspectives and framework (s) guiding the study and informing its methodology, design and interpretation of results. The two theoretical frameworks (s) that underpin and guide this research study include Decolonisation and African Psychology as well as Narrative Theory. This chapter seeks to delve into the critical examination of the historical complicity of the discipline of Psychology in the reinforcement of White supremacy, specifically during the colonial and apartheid eras. The analysis also extends to the way in which the legacy of coloniality continues to endure in contemporary times, often manifesting in the privileging of Western psychological science as the norm, while the experiences of racialized groups are pathologized and marginalized. Decolonisation emerges as an important praxis to assist in countering the persisting colonial ideologies that are deeply embedded in psychological frameworks. This chapter positions the research study within the broader context of existing decolonial efforts within the field of Psychology, aiming to facilitate a paradigm shift by challenging the dominance of Western perspectives. It emphasizes the need to re-think Psychology from the vantage point of the Global South, centring the experiences of the marginalized and oppressed. Furthermore, there is also an exploration of the challenges posed by the continued Eurocentric approach in post-colonial times, leading to the problems of extraversion and epistemic violence in the field of Psychology in Africa and the Global South. The chapter critically discusses how this Eurocentric lens contributes to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, reinforcing the idea that no valuable contributions can emerge from the Globally South but instead only emanate from the Global North.

In response to these challenges, this chapter also introduces African Psychology as a necessary alternative. African Psychology, which came out of the deliberate effort to de-Westernize and contextualize knowledge, aims to position Africa as a home for theory-making and Africans as theory-builders. This section underscores the significance of African Psychology in resisting the adoption of Euro-American theories that perpetuate epistemic violence and dehumanization.

This chapter also delves into Narrative Theory, which is presented as a legitimate means of knowledge production, especially within the context of this research study. An argument is

made that human lives are storied, and storytelling therefore serves as a fundamental strategy employed by individuals to make sense of their experiences. Narrative inquiry is positioned as a valuable tool to collect stories from people who have historically experienced marginalization and subordination. This approach not only captures thick descriptions but also empowers participants to be experts of their own experiences, challenging traditional researcher-centric perspectives.

Decolonisation and African Psychology

The discipline of Psychology has historically been a Western product which has been complicit in reinforcing white supremacy. As a discipline, Psychology has received critique for its complicity not only during colonisation but apartheid as well, and also for being complicit in its servitude of dominant groups in society (Cooper et al., 1990). The contribution to scientific racism by the discipline of psychology, for instance, can be traced back to Sir Francis Galton, whose work searched for differences between racialized groups (Jensen, 2002). The findings of his research were used in validating white superior intelligence and was also complicit in orchestrating the pathologizing of racialised groups as evolutionarily stunted (Richards, 2002; Teo, 2011). Notably, one of the prominent figures in neuropsychology, Paul Broca, also utilized scientific studies in 'proving' the superiority of white people over non-whites (Teo, 2011). Although colonialism, the period, ended a long time ago, coloniality continues to survive colonialism. Coloniality refers to the vestiges of colonial power and colonial ways of thinking and being which continue to ravage society long after the formal end of colonial rule and is maintained in modern society through norms, values, in common sense, in cultural patterns, and in institutions that seek to make the world and all of its social relations in a static image of whiteness which dehumanises Black people and relegates them to a zone of nonbeing, stripping them off of their personhood (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). As Maldonado-Torres (2007) stated, "in a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day" (p. 243).

For example, in contemporary society, Western psychological science is often privileged and treated as the standard for normality, in which other ways of being and knowing that vary from this Western 'norm' are seen as pathological, incorrect, and divergent from objective scientific standards (Atallah et al., 2018; Newnes, 2021). The experiences of the marginalised and oppressed as well, are often considered insignificant and abnormal (Marecek

& Hare-Mustin, 2009). Moreover, it is also this privileging of Western perspectives over the worldviews and knowledge systems of racialized communities that problematises and degrades them as 'inferior' and as the 'other' and thereby sustaining systemic oppression.

As such, it is essential that a shift is undertaken, to question and transform the psychology of racialized people through decolonial praxis. This study, therefore, sought to contribute to the body of work that seeks to locate psychology in the project of decoloniality (such as, Barnes & Siswana, 2018; Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Canham, 2018; Ratele, 2019; Seedat & Suffla, 2017). Decolonization is considered the process of dismantling and disrupting colonialism (Adams et al., 2015; Pillay, 2017) and also seeks to counter coloniality in psychology. It seeks to actively oppose the enduring colonial notion of a fixed, annihilating, racially biased distinction and does this through adopting perspectives rooted in Africa and the Global South. Moreover, due to hegemonic accounts often giving the impression that they are applicable everywhere-in-general, decoloniality is also aimed at denaturalising these hegemonic accounts as general truths (Adams et al., 2015). Decolonisation contextualises epistemologies and resists the idea that global north narratives are applicable to all. The present study for example, contributes to the decolonial turn, as afore-mentioned, through re-thinking children's lives beyond the western/global north normativity.

Furthermore, unlike mainstream psychology which has its basis in Western settings, decolonial perspectives seek to centre the experiences of the oppressed and marginalised who are located in the formerly colonised Global south settings. Beyond just centring the experiences of the marginalised and just diversification and simply redirecting focus to settings and social actors that have predominantly been overlooked and written out of mainstream psychological science, decolonisation also calls for re-thinking (even unthinking) hegemonic Western science from the vantage point of Global South settings (e.g., Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Osei-Tutu et al., 2021; Ratele, 2019). In this way, decolonial perspectives reverse the typical scientific gaze and takes Global South perspectives as privileged epistemic standpoints. Decolonising approaches to psychology move away from the tendency for psychology to speak only to the lives and experiences of the privileged minority that reside in Western societies, but also purports to speak to the lives of those who are marginalised that reside in the global South (Bhatia, 2018).

Perhaps, one of the biggest contributions of the present study was its move away from problematisation- the problematisation of African children and African childhood (s). From Foucault's body of work, problematisation is described as the process of which a behaviour, phenomenon and/or a people are transformed into a problem that requires a solution through

analysing , labelling, and treating it/them as such (Nichols, 2010). In the process of problematisation, the lived experiences of Black people are pathologized as deficient, as deprived and in need of intervention (Richards, 2002; Teo, 2011). In this process, the lives of Black people are dehumanized and disenfranchised.

As previously mentioned, coloniality continues to outlive colonialism in that, even in post-colonial times, a Eurocentric approach to Psychology continues to be maintained, and Psychology remains involved in the privileging of the Global North approaches and knowledges which are considered universal and in which the Global North is seen as the only 'relevant' home for theory-making (Connell, 2014). Due to all of this, this causes most Psychology in Africa and the Global South to suffer two problems, first the problem of extraversion (Hountondji, 1997) and secondly epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988). With extraversion, researchers and those who produce knowledge in Africa are required to cite Euro-American scholars and for their work to be considered worthy of recognition, they need to publish their work in Euro-American journals (Connell, 2014). This according to Mkhize (2004) reinforces the idea that nothing valuable can ever come out of Africa and therefore, there becomes a failure for Africa to be situated as a home for theory-making, and Africans as theory-makers.

Secondly, epistemic violence arises as a result of the African knowledge base being located in Euro-American perspectives which leads not only to the marginalisation of African perspectives (Mkhize, 2004) but also to the reproduction of stigmatising and dehumanising knowledge about African people, including that African people are passive, primitive and lack capabilities (Dogra, 2012). This epistemic violence is problematic as it can lead to deleterious outcomes, including for instance, widespread beliefs that African people are inferior, beliefs that may come to be internalised by African people themselves (Fanon, 1986). In terms of childhood studies, for example, where African children are concerned, they are always approached using a deficit lens and the research on African childhoods is always focused on child vulnerability and African childhood is seen merely as a site for intervention. As a result, African children themselves may come to internalise these negative views about them and come to see themselves as 'risk-factors' (Milner, 2016).

However, despite the widespread influence of Westernised psychology, there have been efforts towards the development of indigenised psychologies as a means to shift psychology to reflect the experiences and needs of indigenous communities (Yang, 2012). These indigenized psychologies are a reflection of conscious efforts by researchers and practitioners to develop psychological practices that consciously avoid the idealization of a

psychology in the absence of a colonial past and present. An African psychology is one such an example. An African Psychology takes the psychology of the marginalised as the starting point for enquiry. The definition of African psychology as "psychology *in, by, from* or *of* Africa or Africans" from Ratele et al. (2018, p. 332) is adopted. African psychology emerged out of the frustration with the heavy reliance on Euro-American psychology as the only means of understanding the lives of people in non-Western contexts (Nwoye, 2015). African Psychology is a Psychology that places Africa and its people at its centre and is significant in its refusal to treat Africans as marginal. This kind of Psychology is also important as it presents an opportunity to give voice to marginalised African perspectives and to empower the oppressed and marginalised as active participants in knowledge-production, rather than spectators (Mkhize, 2004). Importantly, African psychology centres Africa as a home for theory-making and Africans as theory-builders. Moreover, an African Psychology is of great significance as it serves as an attempt to escape and get out from under a Euro-American psychology which is under the dominance of rich Western countries (Ratele, 2017).

To simply bring Euro-American psychology to Africa is to be complicit in African epistemic violence as well as in the adoption of the same theories and tools which have been utilized to defame, demean and damage Africa and Africans (Ratele, 2017). With African psychology, however, it is intentional in centring Africa as a home for theory-making and the people of Africa as theory-builders (Ratele et al., 2018). An African psychology de-Westernises and contextualises knowledge in Africa and privileges the perspectives and lives of Africa and Africans (Cooper, 2013; Manganyi, 2013; Ratele et al., 2018).

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory is an approach to inquiry which treats the process of storytelling as a legitimate means of knowledge-production (Pinnegar, & Daynes, 2007). Narrative research operates under the premise that storytelling is a fundamental strategy employed by humans to grapple with fundamental aspects of their experiences. This form of inquiry is based on the concept that human lives are storied, and people are natural storytellers and is concerned with the manner in which people experience and live through and construct the meaning of the world (Fraser, 2004). With the narrative approach, this includes the collection of stories from individuals, whereby the particular stories that the individuals tell are treated as the raw data themselves (Bleakley, 2005). This approach is noted to be used by many qualitative researchers

within the field of psychology in exploring and learning more about the experiences, culture, lifestyles and identities of narrators (e.g., Frosh, 2003; Tamboukou, 2010). Narratives within this approach are often collected through interviews as well as other forms of qualitative data collection such as oral histories, biographies and autobiographies amongst others (Butina, 2015).

Moreover, narrative is a means by which human beings have the ability to construct subjectivity. In Lieblich et al. (1998), it is noted that stories represent an inner reality in which an individual is able to construct and shape an identity. While narrative identities have personal connotations, they are however also shaped by broader social contexts within which they are produced (Murray, 2003; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narrative inquiry is therefore also interested in the context in which the stories are produced and pays deepened attention to the influence of the place and location within which the production of narratives takes place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry is therefore not just concerned with the mere storytelling but is also concerned with meaning-making.

Furthermore, the narrative inquiry can be a useful way of approaching research given that human beings are natural story-tellers and people bring meaning to their realities and experiences through narrative (Ricoeur, 1984). This form of inquiry is also significant as it makes in-depth data collection much easier given that stories usually provide very thick descriptions and are usually richer and give context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Within the context of this study, narrative research was relevant as it allowed for the participants to be involved in storytelling about their own lives and treated them as experts of their own experiences. Instead of writing stories *about* African childhood from the researchers' own lens, the narrative approach offered a way of centring the stories of those who have lived African childhoods themselves, granting them an opportunity to give voice to their own experiences and tell their stories on their own terms. In this way, the research was written *with* the participants as their stories are taken as the raw data themselves. The narrative approach was well-suited for this study as it sought to legitimize the voices of people whose stories have historically experienced marginalisation and subordination within Eurocentric epistemic power structures.

Chapter 3

Overview of Literature

This chapter delves into the cultural practices associated with the birth of children, particularly the *Imbeleko* ceremony that is often performed within the Zulu and Xhosa societies, highlighting its significance in welcoming children into the family and society and also exploring its multifaceted purposes. Additionally, this chapter also examines rituals as essential components of African societies. This chapter also highlights the historical influence of Western perspectives on African rituals, critiquing the tendency for African rituals to be labelled as irrational or superstitious. It is also emphasized in this chapter the importance of understanding rituals within their cultural context, challenging Eurocentric assumptions and acknowledging the meaningful role rituals play in many African communities. The concept of culture and tradition is elucidated, offering clarity on their definitions and their distinct roles in shaping collective ways of life. The chapter challenges stereotypes surrounding African culture, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding that moves beyond simplistic categorizations, that are often harmful and misrepresentative. Furthermore, the literature review sheds light on the value attributed to children in African societies. While acknowledging existing research on children's vulnerability, the chapter highlights the often-overlooked adoration and cherishing of children within African societies, challenging Eurocentric assumptions about the lack of love and affection in non-Western parenting, presenting evidence that underscores the deep care and concern shown towards children in African cultures.

Culture and Tradition

Before we can have an appraisal of African culture and tradition, it is necessary for us to understand the concepts of culture and tradition and their distinct meanings.

Multiple definitions of the term culture are extant, but put simply, culture encompasses the accepted behaviours, beliefs, and values that constitute the way of life for a particular group of people. Tylor (1958, p. 1) defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. Culture, thus, can be said to be the collective term used to identify particular customs, ideas, and social behaviours that represents a group of people and which serves to distinguish them from others (Aziza, 2001). Where African culture is concerned,

perceptions exist that most of its practices are primitive and backward (Mkhize, 2004). People, mostly those who have not fully experienced and attempted to learn about the African indigenous culture often are the ones who hold these views due to the lack of knowledge of the cultural values and practices of Africans. This may also stem from assumptions of Western culture as being universal, and Indigenous cultures and practice, on the other hand, being marginalised and seen as less-than (Connell, 2014). Culture denotes the learned behavioural patterns that define the way of life for a specific group of people. Not only is culture that which brings an entire group of human beings together but it is a shared sense of community identity as well.

Tradition on the other hand is understood as the customs and events to honour one's culture. The term tradition is often utilised in describing individual practices or events, such as the use of *imphepho* to communicate with one's ancestors, for example, which is a practice upheld by many African people, especially among the Nguni people including the Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, and Ndebele (Mnguni, 2006). Traditions are ideas and beliefs which are transmitted intergeneration-ally and it is possible for different families within the same culture to possess their own unique traditions while at the same time, sharing other common ones.

Ritual and Practice

Given the multi-layered nature of the term 'ritual', no single definition of the term exists. However, put simply, ritual may be referred to as a sequence of symbolic acts, practice or behaviour which involves words, physical movements, gestures and objects, and is performed by people for the purpose of invoking interaction with gods, ancestors, deities or any other preternatural forces, and is performed in anticipation of results and consequences (Kreinath, 2018; Turner, 1973). Ritual is pervasive in many traditional African societies and forms a major part of the traditional African adherents' religious expression (Ogunleye, 2014). Notably as well, rituals may take different forms which range from but are not limited to prayers and exorcism; dancing, playing musical instruments, song, and chanting; fasting; departure from home to live in areas such as desserts, forests and other designated areas; and participation in ceremonies, festivals, meals, and sacrifices (Etim, 2019).

Moreover, rituals may be seasonal, contingent or divinatory. Seasonal rituals are those that are performed for the purpose of honouring a culturally defined moment of transition in the climatic cycle for example, or the inauguration of activities such as harvesting, change from

summer to winter, or planting, amongst others. With contingent rituals, these include life-crises ceremonies which are performed at different life stages including birth, puberty, marriage and death, to mark the transition from one phase to another in a person's life cycle. For example, in the Xhosa culture (though not exclusively), when they reach puberty, young boys undergo the process of *ulwaluko* which involves traditional male circumcision and marks the transition from boyhood to manhood (Magodyo et al., 2017; Mpateni & Kang'ethe, 2021). In Yoruba traditional practice, for example, following the death of a person, a fowl known as adìe ìrànà (fare fowl) is often slain immediately after the death , for the purpose of making the road easy for the deceased (Adelowo, 1990). Contingent rituals may also include rituals of affliction or what Ranger and Kimambo (1972) refers to as redressive rituals, which are performed to placate spiritual powers which are believed to have afflicted people with misfortune and bad luck and are performed to redress this misfortune, affliction and calamity which may include famine or drought, for instance, or a persistent illness or any other form of epidemic. The redressive ritual is then performed to appease the gods and restore peace and bring about good fortune (Etim, 2019). For example, the Akamba people of Kenya are known for their rainmaking rituals known as *Kilumi* dance which is used to beseech blessings from the water spirits (Koster, 2011). Another class of rituals is inclusive of divinatory rituals which are ceremonies performed by political authorities to ask the ancestors to ensure the well-being and health of people, plants and animals in their territories. Many African societies practice a finite number of traditional rituals which may be inclusive of some or all of the diverse types of rituals listed above (Turner, 1973).

Furthermore, from the colonial times in Africa, religious understanding has been deeply influenced by Western and Eurocentric thought. Due to this, any religious phenomenon, including African rituals, which could not be subjected to Western rationality was simply seen as irrational and as superstition. African rituals, like other religious phenomena of African cultural heritage are usually criticised of being on the one hand, either outright irrational, or on the other , superstitious, savage or primitive (Ombati, 2017). These criticisms are often made on the basis of certain logical, mostly Eurocentric criteria and have categorized the African way of thought and doing as unreasonable and illogical (Etim, 2019). This view however is problematic given that African people derive value and meaning from their rituals and their ritualistic practices are reasonable. Mkhize (2004) also problematises these assumptions that Eurocentric experiences and traditions are universal and are the 'be-all', as well as the marginalization of African practices and knowledge systems. Rituals are of great importance

to African people for some of the reasons mentioned above- they are a way of ensuring success of activities such as harvesting, they are useful in preventing calamities such as drought, they are used to mark transitions from one life stage to the next, amongst others, and they represent an invaluable phenomenon which enables people to communicate and be in communion with the spiritual world. After all, no known religion exists without ritual. Let us take Christianity, for example, where there are rituals such as tithe, offering, and penitence, to name a few, which are observed (Davis, 1987). In traditional African environments likewise, rituals are necessary to appease the Gods and form a major part or people's religious expression and has important functions, as afore-mentioned. African ritual and traditional ways of doing things are not unreasonable and should not be judged on Western scientific rationality principles (Mkhize, 2004).

Imbeleko

In most African societies, the birth of children is regarded an important occasion and celebratory moment (Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi, 2016). In Zulu and Xhosa society, due to the value that they attach to their children, a welcoming ritual known as *Imbeleko* is often performed for the child when they are still young as way of welcoming them into the family and into society (Ngcongo, 1996; Ohajunwa, 2019). The purpose of *Imbeleko* is to 'introduce' the child to both the living members of the family and the ancestors (Bogopa, 2010; Cocks & Dold, 2008), and this ceremony also serves to express gratitude to the ancestors, as in African society, many believe that every good thing is orchestrated by the ancestors (Ngcongo, 1996). When *Imbeleko* is performed, the whole community, from family to neighbours, is invited and they all come together in singing, dancing and celebration to observe the entry of the child into the family (Ramphele, 2002). Notably, while the ceremony is preferred to be performed when the child is still very young, it can be done at any age or period. For example, *Imbeleko* may be performed later when an adult who did not undergo *Imbeleko* as a child is troubled with persistent illness or are engaged in risky behaviour such as theft, for instance (Ngcongo, 1996).

Beyond being simply performed for formally introducing the child to the family, *Imbeleko* is performed for other reasons as well. Amongst these reasons, first, as afore-mentioned, *Imbeleko* may be performed for the purpose of thanksgiving in order to acknowledge and give thanks to the ancestors for the gift that is the child (Ngcongo, 1996). Secondly, Imbeleko is often performed to protect the child from misfortune or *amashwa*. The

failure for Imbeleko to be performed for an individual is viewed in a negative light as it is believed to make the child vulnerable to *amashwa* (misfortune) (Ramphele, 2002). In the same way that good fortune is seen in Zulu and Xhosa cultures as coming from the ancestors, misfortunes are also viewed as a result of not having the blessing of the ancestors and the ancestors having turned their back on you. As a result, people make attempts to try and avoid finding themselves in a position where they lack ancestral protection and performing *Imbeleko* is an example of such an attempt (Ngcongo, 1996).

Lastly, *Imbeleko* may also be performed for the purpose of naming the child. This type of *Imbeleko* may also be referred to as a naming ceremony and it does not necessarily imply that the child will be named for the first time on that day, but rather that the name of the child is publicised on that day. The child may have previously been named by their parents and grandparents in private, and the parents were waiting for the right time to disclose to other people what they have named their child (Ngcongo, 1996).The sequence of Imbeleko takes place as follows. At times, *Intlawulo*, which often precedes the *Imbeleko* ceremony would take place. Intlawulo holds significant cultural importance, particularly in cases where parents are unmarried (Kaufman et al., 2001; Hunter, 2010). The process of intlawulo involved paying a “fine” to the maternal family for rendering the mother pregnant. While commonly referred to as "damages", it is essential to recognize that intlawulo embodies a more nuanced reality whereby the man (father of the child) acknowledges his paternity and makes himself known to the family of the unmarried woman. *Intlawulo* does not invariably lead to the *Imbeleko* ceremony, and the performance of *Imbeleko* is not exclusively tied to *intlawulo*. The decision to conduct *Imbeleko* may also involve considerations of the child's maternal lineage and the circumstances surrounding their birth. In some instances, *Imbeleko* may occur on the mother's side, highlighting the fluidity and contextual nature of these cultural practices.

Before the ceremony, traditional beer is brewed, and *umancishana* (a small pot of traditional beer) is offered to the ancestors to mark the commencement of the ceremony (Ramphele, 2002). Following this, *imphepho* which is a shrub usually growing in the bush and is similar to incense is burnt (Mnguni, 2006). *Imphepho* is used in a case where communication with the ancestors is needed (Mnguni, 2006) and serves as an invitation to the ancestors as it is believed that if the ceremony commences without inviting the ancestors, the child cannot be properly welcomed into the family. The family *isiduko* (clan names used to praise ancestors) is used to implore the ancestors to bless and protect the child (Ramphele, 2002).

There is then preparation of a goat to be slaughtered as similarly to *imphepho*, a goat is also important in communicating with the ancestors. A paternal family member then prays to

the ancestors and informs them that the goat is here. While the prayer takes place, the child is required to stroke the goat in order for the ancestors to be able to associate the goat with the child. The slaughtering of the goat then takes place, and the goat is expected to bleat out loudly before it dies as an indication that it has been accepted by the ancestors . The failure thereof of the goat to bleat is seen as an indicator of bad luck or that something is amiss. Finally, the child is poured with *inyongo* (bile). The child is then not bathed until the following day as the *inyongo* is believed to attract the ancestors who will protect and bless the child. The goat skin is then utilized to make *isiphandla* (a bracelet made of the goat skin), which is required to be worn on the child's right wrist. *Isiphandla* is also said to make provision for the ancestors to identify with the child (Ngcongo, 1996).

In discussing the *Imbeleko* ceremony and its cultural significance, it is imperative to recognize that not all African people or families practice this particular rite of passage in childhood. There are diverse reasons why *Imbeleko* may not be practiced, including factors such as religion, modernity, and personal choice. Religion, for example, can play a significant role in shaping cultural practices, and some African families may opt not to participate in *Imbeleko* due to religious beliefs or practices that conflict with traditional customs (Onuzulike, 2008). Additionally, modernity and changing social dynamics may lead some families to deviate from traditional rituals such as *Imbeleko*, as they adapt to evolving lifestyles and values in contemporary society. Furthermore, it is also essential to acknowledge that imbeleko is not compulsory for all African families, and individuals may choose not to participate for various personal or cultural reasons.

By acknowledging and respecting these diverse perspectives, this is in line with the principles of African and Decolonizing Psychology, which emphasize the importance of honouring differences and resisting the homogenization of African cultures (Ratele et al., 2018; Titi, 2023). This approach fosters inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, recognizing the multifaceted nature of cultural practices and beliefs across the continent.

The Value of Children in African Society

As aforementioned, although much of the research on African children/childhoods tends to focus largely on African children's vulnerability, in most African societies**,** children are variously adored and cherished and given their rightful place in society (Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi, 2016), yet research rarely focuses on this. Even a simple literature search on how children

are treated in Africa generates results on child violence, maltreatment and neglect in the African context, which indicates the pervasiveness of negative views about African children and African childhood. However, it is important to note that in many African societies, children are highly desired and loved, and their presence in families and communities presents far-reaching consequences for, amongst others, respect, social status, quality of life and family survival (Caldwell & Caldwell, 1987; Dyer, 2007). Research has indicated, for example, that in Nigeria, high value is placed on childbearing and having children is widely celebrated in Nigerian society (Feyisetan & Bankole, 2002; Ibisomi & Odimegwu, 2011).

Across the African continent, ancestors are taken very seriously and children are believed to be a representation of a connection to the ancestors and the birth of children is seen as representing a continuation of the family lineage, not only in the physical world but in spiritual terms as well (Makiwane & Kaunda, 2018). Children are thus seen as important in the continuation of the descent line and ensuring that their cultural heritage does not die out. Moreover, in most African societies, children are seen not only as important for their families' survival, in that they can assist with household labour and will support their parents when they age, but they are also seen as the 'futures' of their different communities (Makiwane & Kaunda, 2018; Sam et al., 2005). This also depicts how children in African societies are not born only to their parents and families but to their communities as well. Furthermore, in terms of the social value of children, children present far-reaching consequences for respect and social status of their parents. In Zulu culture for example, marriage is seen as incomplete without a child (Ngcongo, 1996). Johnson-Hanks (2006) as well, noted that, in Cameroon, even among the highly educated Beti women, they agreed that honour and respectability was associated with reproductive achievement. While this can be problematic as it can mean that for those that do not have children, they may experience a lack of respect from their communities and may suffer from the stigma of being perceived as 'useless', still though, this is the reality of the high value that is placed on children in most African societies.

It is of paramount importance to note that the existence, however, of these social and economic values placed on children in the African context does not imply that personal joy and happiness derived from having children are also not important rationales behind having children among African parents (Sam et al., 2005). In fact, Inhorn and Van Balen (2002) note that the belief that children in developing countries experience less love, affection and value is not just Eurocentric but is actually a fallacy as there is evidence that suggests the contrary. This is evidence which has indicated that highly loving, affectionate and committed parenting styles are extant throughout the world and are often abundantly seen and found in non-Western

contexts. In Trawick-Smith (2010) for example, it was shown that adults in Africa show a high degree of care and concern towards children. For example, In traditional African culture, when children would become parentless due to a number of reasons, including death, amongst others, none of these children were left without care but were cared for within their extended families or kin systems (Foster, 2002) and the practice is said to continue to the present which indicates how children in Africa are loved and cared for. As has been indicated in this section, children are important as they offer family security, are helpful in labour, provide continuity through the maintenance of family lineage and also confer social status. Parents also experience joy, happiness and companionship from having a child (Sam et al., 2005).

Chapter 4

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative Research Design

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative research design was utilised. Qualitative research allows for the in-depth study of issues and the results emanating from qualitative research often include a wealth of complex, detailed information about a small group of people (Butina, 2015). In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Creswell, 2013) and given that this study sought to focus on the meanings that the research participants held about their experiences, this made a qualitative research design well-suited. Moreover, unlike quantitative inquiry which is concerned with confirming hypotheses and with cause-effect relationships (Willig, 2013), qualitative research has an interest in the ways in which individuals undergo and experience a specific phenomenon and the significance they assign to it (Creswell, 2013). The aim of qualitative research is therefore to explain and describe an experience or process, rather than to predict (Willig, 2013), which was in alignment with what this study aimed to do. Furthermore, within qualitative research, reflexivity is treated as an important principle - which is warranted given that in qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary tool of both gathering and analysing data (Butina et al., 2015). Reflexivity highlights the importance of researchers to be critically reflective of how their subjectivities and positionalities influence the research process and the ways in which their positionality may shape the research that is produced (Berger, 2015).

Phenomenological Approach. In addition to the adoption of a narrative approach in this study, this study also made use of a phenomenological approach in gaining insight into the lived experiences of participants. At the basis of phenomenology is the belief that knowledge and understanding are embedded in people's everyday worlds and that truth and understanding of life can emerge from people's lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). This study made use of phenomenology in examining the participants' lived experiences in an effort to understand and give them meaning as well as in gaining understanding of the essence of those lived experiences

(Byrne, 2001). Instead of writing about participants from the researchers' own lens, phenomenology allows for the study of lived experience from the perspective of the individuals themselves. Phenomenological approaches emphasise the significance of personal perspective and interpretation and as a result, are a powerful tool in understanding subjective experience as well as in gaining insight into people's actions and motivations (Creswell, 2007). This kind of approach is especially adept at revealing the firsthand experiences and outlooks of individuals from their own viewpoints, thus challenging conventional or structural assumptions. The inquirer in phenomenological research collects data from individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon and then develops a description of the essence of such experiences which describes what they experienced and how they experienced it, also making connections to broader social and cultural systems and structures (Moustakas, 1994).

While mainstream phenomenological approaches posit that they start from a perspective free from preconceptions (Husserl, 1970), more recent humanist approaches to phenomenology refute the idea that it is possible to start without bias and preconceived assumptions and ideas (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). As such, these recent approaches put emphasis on the importance of researchers to make it clear how meanings and interpretations have been placed on research findings as well as making themselves, as researchers, visible in the 'frame' of the research as both interested and subjective actors, instead of as detached and impartial observers (Qutoshi, 2018; Stanley & Wise, 1993). The latter was adopted in this study, hence reflexivity (Berger, 2015) was taken seriously in the context of this study.

Sampling and Participants

This study made use of a purposive sampling technique in the selection and recruitment of participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique whereby participants are selected by virtue of being well-experienced and knowledgeable about the topic of research (Battaglia, 2011; Campbell et al., 2020; Palinkas et al.,2015). With purposive sampling, the researcher identifies willing participants who possess expertise and knowledge related to the research topic and given that within this sampling technique, participant selection is focused, this makes purposive sampling more prone to yielding rich information (Gentles et al., 2015). Given that this study was aimed at the in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and was not intended at generalizing results to the entire population (Etikan et al., 2016), this made purposive sampling suitable.

The study sample included 4 young adults. All the participants were women. The criteria for selection was inclusive of Black, Xhosa or Zulu-speaking young adults between the ages of 18-25 and who could recall undergoing *Imbeleko* during their childhood (before age 13). According to research, young adulthood might be an appropriate age to gather retrospective accounts as during this developmental period, young adults are often reflecting back and looking forward as they prepare to face the challenges of adulthood (Arnett, 2000), hence this chosen age group. Notably as well, a decision was made to not include participants younger than 18 years, as a way of ensuring that all participants were at an age (legal age) where they could consent to the research study on their own.

The selection criteria for participants in this research study were intentionally broad, aiming to encompass individuals who had experienced *Imbeleko*, regardless of the specific familial or marital context in which it occurred. *Imbeleko*, as a cultural ceremony within South African traditions, can manifest in various forms and contexts, including but not limited to the marriage context or outside of married parents. Therefore, the study sought to capture diverse experiences of *Imbeleko*, recognizing that the practice unfolds differently depending on individual family dynamics and cultural traditions.

It is important as well, to emphasize that the study did not impose restrictions based on whether *Imbeleko* was experienced through biological fathers or other caregivers. Rather, the focus was on individuals who had undergone the *Imbeleko* ceremony, irrespective of the specific familial relationship involved. By adopting this inclusive approach, the research aimed to explore the multifaceted dimensions of *Imbeleko* experiences and their significance within the broader cultural context.Although the number of participants may appear to be small, the intention of this study is not to generalize to a population but instead to develop an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, and research has noted that smaller samples in qualitative research are more likely to allow for an in-depth exploration of the research topic than do larger samples (Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2012). Moreover, sample size in qualitative research is also influenced by practical considerations (Creswell, 2012). Data collection and analysis of qualitative data and people's stories in narrative research is a labour-intensive task. Using a large sample in a qualitative study would be time consuming and impractical (Creswell, 2013; Morse, 1994). Given that the researcher collected and transcribed the data themselves, a small sample size was well-suited as it allowed for an intensive analysis of each case to be conducted, and for adequate time to be given to each participant during the data collection process. Finally, if this study argues that peoples stories and narratives matter, then it was of great importance that individual cases have a locatable voice within the study as much as

possible, and this was only going to be possible with a sufficiently small sample size. Furthermore, given the specific criteria for inclusion, i.e., young adults who are able to retrospectively recount their experiences of *Imbeleko*, the sample size was guided by the restrictions of this. It is also important to note that only people of Zulu origin came forward to participate in the study.

The following is a table with the pseudonyms of the participants, their ages, their ethnic group as well as the age at which their *Imbeleko* was performed:

Table 1: Sample Description

Name	Age	Ethnic Group	Age at *Imbeleko*	Interview Mode	Language of Interview
Thandeka Gumede	21	Zulu	12	Virtual	English
Lindiwe Dlamini	29	Zulu	Unspecified	Virtual	English
Lulutho Mbatha	21	Zulu	7	Physical	English
Sphe Mazibuko	23	Zulu	Unspecified	Virtual	English

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical clearance was applied for and obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-medical) at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS). Once ethical clearance had been obtained (see **Appendix A**), permission was requested from the necessary chair members at the University to conduct this research, as WITS was one of the sites that the researcher was looking to use (see **Appendix B**). Following these two steps, participants were purposively selected according to the above-mentioned selection criteria (Black, Zulu or Xhosa, and between the ages of 18-25). Access to participants was achieved using different modes. The University of Witwatersrand (WITS) database for accessing students via email was utilised. Following liaison with the Deputy Registrars office asking for assistance with disseminating the email call for research participants, an email was sent out to students informing them about this research study. Secondly, participants were also accessed digitally

through the use of social media platforms. Social media platforms are beneficial for their wider reach as well as the ease of information sharing where people can see the research study and then repost, quickly and effortlessly disseminating details about the research within their personal networks. The researcher created a poster advertising the study, which was published on the researchers' personal social media platforms including Instagram and Facebook. For potential participants to be able to reach the researcher, the researcher's email address was provided in all the research advertisements (**Appendix C**). Those participants who are selected were then contacted via email where all the aspects of the study including the nature, aims and duration of the study were explained to participants both by the researcher as well as in the form of an information sheet (**Appendix D**). All participants were then given an informed consent form (**Appendix E**) which they needed to read and sign prior to the interview. Due to low participation, an additional strategy was implemented. Participants who were interviewed were encouraged to share the study with their networks as a means to expand the participant pool. The decision for participants to share with others remained entirely voluntary so as to respect the participants' preferences and autonomy.

With all participants, interview times and dates were mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participants and participants were given an opportunity to choose between either face-to-face or online interviews via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Online interviews were helpful as they reduce the geographical constraints associated with face-to-face interviews and offer an opportunity to reach participants that are geographically dispersed and cannot make it in-person. Data bundles were provided for online participants. For face-to-face interviews, these took place at a selected private office space at WITS, Emthonjeni Centre (this is for participants within the WITS community). This specific location was selected due to convenience to the researcher as well as due to its private nature, which allowed for a private conversation with the participants. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted according to an interview schedule (**Appendix F**) (which was never followed strictly). While interviews were scheduled to take place for a duration of one hour, others were shorter than this duration. The scheduled time was, however, never exceeded. For online interviews, these were recorded through a record function that the video communications software (Microsoft Teams or Zoom) has, while in-person interviews were recorded by the researcher through their laptop, using the voice recorder application. Following this, the recorded interviews were transcribed onto the researchers' password-protected laptop. The steps of data analysis which will be outlined below were then followed to analyse the data, the results of which are compiled in the further sections of this research report.

Data Collection Tool

In this study, data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Ruslin et al., 2022). Put simply, semi-structured interviews are a blend of both structured and unstructured interviews. While a few questions are predetermined in the semi-structured interview process, the others are not planned. Unlike in an unstructured interview, in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has predetermined questions in mind, but unlike a structured interview, the wording and sequence of questions are not predetermined (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are advantageous due to their potential to result in more richness and in more detail, as they are open-ended in nature. In a semi-structured interview, participants can be asked to clarify and/or elaborate on their answers if need be. This approach is well-suited for this study as it does not comply to a structured question-and-answer session, which has the potential to supress participants' narratives (Mishler, 1991). This manner of interviewing allows the interview to be conversational, allowing each participant to guide their own narrative. As mentioned already, the agenda in a semi-structured interview is flexible and is open to change as well (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

Interviews were primarily conducted in English to ensure a common communicative ground. However, recognizing the potential limitations of language, participants were encouraged to express themselves in their native language wherever they deemed necessary and particularly when discussing complex concepts. This decision aimed to facilitate nuanced expression and ensure accuracy in communication. Despite my limited proficiency in Zulu, participants graciously clarified terms and expressions, highlighting their commitment to collaborative engagement in the research process. The interviews unfolded as conversational exchanges within the flexible structure of the semi-structured format (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The agenda remained adaptable, allowing for exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences related to the cultural phenomenon under study.

Data Analysis

A narrative method of analysis was utilised in this study, whereby the stories that the participants share were used as the objects of investigation. Both thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993, 2008) and Fraser's (2004) method of narrative analysis are utilised. In terms

of thematic narrative analysis, as is consistent with the general thematic analysis, the data was coded which was followed by the identification, refinement and selection of themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) six steps of doing thematic analysis were followed in this study:

- The researcher began with the step of *familiarising* themselves with the data, which was done through listening to the interview recordings, transcribing the data and re-reading the interview transcripts.
- Following this, the researcher began the process of formulating the research data into *codes*.
- From these codes, *themes* were searched for and identified. The themes are basically recurring patterns or trends that emerge from the dataset (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Once identified, these themes assist in drawing conclusions about the research findings. Notably, themes are not simply arbitrary but are supposed to align and contribute to answering the research questions posed (Joffe & Yardley, 2004).
- Following the identification of themes, these themes were then *reviewed and refined*. This is the step where one checks if the themes work in relation to the coded data. Notably, some themes may not really be themes (for example, there is not sufficient data to support the theme), while others collapse into each other (for example, two separate themes forming one) or it may be recognised that some themes need to be separate themes. This is the step where all of this was considered and addressed.
- Additionally, the researcher then engaged in the step of defining and *naming the different themes* that have been identified, searching for what the essence of the different themes is and what aspect of the research data they capture.
- Finally, the last step involves *writing a research report*, in a logical, well-written manner and a research report which involves an outline of the story that the research data tells.

In terms of the steps outlined by Fraser (2004), these share some commonalities, and yet some differences with the steps outlined above, as will be seen in this discussion. The first step includes:

- *Hearing the stories that the participants tell:* here, the researcher is required to be actively engaged in the interview process and the analysis process is said to begin as the participants are telling their stories .

- *Transcription:* whereby, after hearing the participants' stories, the researcher acquaints themselves with the narratives through the process of transcription .
- *Interpreting the individual transcripts:* whereby the researcher is actively involved in immersing themselves in the individual transcripts, noting down themes and looking at what types of stories emerge from the data.
- *Scan across domains of experience*: this is said to be essential in avoiding the mistake of looking at participant narratives through a singular lens as here, the researcher will be required to examine the experiences of participants along different dimensions including the interpersonal, intrapersonal, structural and cultural.
- *Linking the personal to the political:* whereby the researcher connects the themes that they have identified to larger systems and structures.
- *Looking for similarities/differences in the data:* contrasting the stories across the participants.
- *Writing academic narratives:* this is the step whereby the researcher writes an interpretive analysis of participant narratives also taking into account that there are no 'correct' or 'right' stories or truths to tell.

The following table is a demonstration of how the process of formulating the research data into codes and the searching of themes was executed.

Table 2: Example of data analysis technique

Coding	**Data Extract**
Father's involvement in Imbeleko	*"So, the first step is the damages where the guy goes, the father goes and pays damages to the mother's side. And then, they call it the "buying of the child" or something. Yeah. The father now takes account for the child"*- Thandeka. "*You know how sometimes other people don't do ceremonies, sometimes the father is not invested in doing such things for you,*

	whereas you really want them. So, to have a father that does that for you, yeah, but it's really a hype thing because some people actually would like to have that."- Thandeka
Imbeleko as a Community-based Activity	"*But then like afterwards, the festivities is everyone around the community comes in because I think like a lot of the Zulu culture is based in community and all of us being there for each other and all of us being like guardians of each other."*- Lulutho. *"The community does come to assist, the community gets involved more when it's time to celebrate"*- Sphe.
Sense of Belonging	*"...you are actually recognised in the family, you know. It gives you that sort of belonging. Yeah, it gives you the sense of belonging, that I belong somewhere. Even my ancestors, they know me…"*- Lindiwe. *"...you legit just feel like I'm officially a member, like I've been, you know, it's been made official that ngi nguwa la e khaya, like I am a part of them. This is my family."*- Thandeka

Following the above coding and searching of themes, the themes were then reviewed and refined and named. The themes were fine-tuned to ensure that they are clear and that they accurately captured and represented what the data was showing. For example, the theme "Father's involvement in *Imbeleko*" was changed to "Reaffirmation of the Father-child Bond" to more accurately capture the profound essence and cultural significance embedded in the data. "Reaffirmation of the Father-child Bond," reflects a broader conceptualization beyond

mere involvement. Through further investigation and refinement of the theme, it was recognised from the participants' narratives that beyond just the "father's involvement in *Imbeleko*", the theme actually highlighted the symbolic nature of ceremonies such as *Imbeleko* in expressing parental love, dedication and acknowledgment. According to participants' narratives, the act of a father going to great lengths to participate during *Imbeleko* becomes a tangible demonstration of appreciation for the child's existence- emphasizing the enduring and crucial nature of the father-child bond. Another important step according to Fraser's (2004) method of analysis is to connect themes to larger systems and structures. This was also considered. For example, the theme "Reaffirmation of the father-child bond" was written against a historical backdrop of father absence, especially in the South African context, to capture *Imbeleko*'s poignant significance in a society where father absence is not merely a statistical reality but a lived experience for many. By refining the theme from merely "Father's involvement in *Imbeleko*", the refined theme is more culturally resonant and contextually relevant. This refinement was done for other themes as well. The major themes for this research study have therefore been grouped as follows:

- Reaffirmation of the Father-child Bond
- A Tapestry of Community and Togetherness
- *Imbeleko* and Social Belongingness

The final step of writing an interpretive analysis of participant narratives is undertaken in Chapter 5 below. Here the story that the research data tells is presented. Notably, the participants' narratives are contextualized to the South African context and the African context more broadly. Interpretation is also conducted in alignment to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underlie this research study.

Ethical Considerations

As afore-mentioned, ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) before participants were reached and data was collected.

Voluntary and Informed Consent

Informed consent refers to the act of ensuring that participants have adequate information about what participation in the research entails and ensuring that their decision to participate is non-coerced and is made freely of their own volition (Terre Blanche et al., 2014; Shaw, 2008). Prior to participation, after participants had reached out and shown interest in participating, the researcher explained to the participants (in writing, via email) all aspects of the research including the nature, aims and duration of the study. Participants were also informed of their right to request for recording to be stopped at any point during the interview and of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Participants were also given an opportunity to ask any questions and voice any concerns. An information sheet with all of this information was sent to the participants via email and was also accompanied by an informed consent form which participants were required to sign prior to participation.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

In terms of confidentiality, this refers to ensuring that participant information is kept safe and private (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). To ensure privacy, all the in-person interviews were conducted in a private office at Emthonjeni Centre at WITS with the door closed. For the participants who had opted for an online interview, the researcher always began each interview by ensuring that they are in a private room which no one else has access to for the duration of the interview. All the research data, including interview transcripts and voice recordings are kept in a password-protected laptop and mobile phone. It has also been ensured that research data is only accessible to the researcher and their research supervisor. Notably, pseudonyms will have been utilised in research reporting. Regarding the issue of anonymity, participants will remain anonymous to every other person, including the research supervisor. However, there are limitations to anonymity in that it is not guaranteed by the researcher as participants will still be known to her. Anonymity means that no one, not even the researcher, knows who the participants are and that no personally-identifying information can be collected through the study (Wiles et al., 2008). However, given that participants were required to sign documentation of consent, the participants are known to the researcher. Notably, the study involves interviews (both face-to-face and online via video conferencing), which cannot be considered anonymous.

Risks and Benefits

Recall of childhood memories may be distressing for some participants, potentially reminding them of triggering memories of trauma in their childhood. Participants were informed of their right to avoid any questions that they feel might be triggering or make them feel uncomfortable and were also requested to share only what they were comfortable sharing. A referral list of freely-accessible counselling services (**Appendix G**) has been compiled, which will be provided to participants in the case that they might need emotional and psychological support. In terms of benefits, the participants will be given an opportunity to share their experiences and in so doing, contribute to an under-researched area of study.

Dissemination of Results

The research report will be hosted on the Wits Institutional Repository on DSpace (**WIReDSpace)** which is an electronic database which houses all theses and dissertations submitted to the university and will be accessible to all. Moreover, while this research will be used for educational purposes, there is a chance that this work might be published in an academic journal. Parts of the work will also be presented at conferences and/or workshops as well. Upon request, the study participants will be sent a copy of the research report.

Limitations of the Study

Given that this study explored young adults' retrospective experiences of *Imbeleko,* this makes the study prone to accuracy and reliability issues. This is because, in retrospective studies, sometimes people simply cannot remember accurately the details of events that have taken place in their lives in the past. Some accounts of people's recall, therefore, may be inaccurate. What people remember is an elaborated story of the event and not necessarily the event itself thereby making the study prone to issues that have to do with biased, distorted recall (Halverson Jr, 1988). And yet, it is also worth noting that what people choose to remember and narrate is also of interest itself.

Notably, the sample size of this study is small which will limit the generalizability of the research results. However, this is accounted for as this study, anyway, does not aim at generalizing the results to the larger population but is instead interested in gaining an in-depth

insight into a small group of people's experiences. With the option for an online interview, this also has limitations. The option for online interviews may have precluded those individuals who have no access to resources that are needed to facilitate online interviews such as a laptop, mobile data and a stable internet connection, and were unable to make it in-person due to location constraints, for example, from participating in the study. In terms of mobile data, however, this was accounted for as data bundles were provided for all online participants. However, the nature of online interviews may still present challenges. Online interviews may place a barrier to the amount of information that is shared by participants and may lack the rich and detailed information conveyed by face-to-face interviews due to problems such as participants' not being comfortable with online interactions, for instance. Issues such as this might have potentially impacted the depth of information shared.

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented and interpreted. This chapter provides a profound exploration of the *Imbeleko* ceremony within the South African cultural context, drawing directly from the participants' rich narratives. Through the participants' narratives, the multifaceted significance of *Imbeleko* is highlighted, illuminating three primary narratives namely: *Reaffirmation of the Father-child Bond, a Tapestry of Community and Togetherness* as well as *Imbeleko and Social Belongingness*. It is important to note that participant narratives are not presented in isolation in this chapter, but are instead carefully analysed, contextualized within theoretical frameworks, and interwoven with historical perspectives and broader research discussions. Excerpts from the participants' narratives are included and pseudonyms have been used.

Notably, while the data collection approach embraced a narrative methodology, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the reporting of the data may not have entirely reflected this narrative approach. While the data collection process was designed to elicit narrative accounts from participants, the subsequent reporting of the data may have introduced elements of structure and interpretation that deviated from the pure narrative form. For example, participant stories have been organized into thematic categories and condensed for the sake of brevity. While these reporting decisions may have been necessary for analytical purposes, it is important to acknowledge that they may have inadvertently obscured the organic flow and texture of the narratives themselves.

Reaffirmation of the Father-child Bond

The narrative of fatherhood within the context of the *Imbeleko* ceremony in South Africa is one of profound significance. In order to understand its significance, it is of great importance to examine the historical currents that have not only influenced and shaped, but have at times strained paternal roles in the South African context. In South Africa, the history of fatherhood is intricately linked to the influences of both colonialism and apartheid and cannot be explored in isolation from these systems (Rabe, 2018). It is widely known that South Africa endured periods of colonialism and apartheid, both of which left an indelible impact on many facets of people's lives, including familial structures. Colonialism, with its oppressive

systems and exploitative policies led to the creation of a social climate in which familial ties and bonds were strained, and in many cases, severed (Makusha & Richter, 2014).

During colonialism, local people were forced into paid work due to laws that levied taxes, which required them to find means to make money (Horwitz, 2001). Within the apartheid system, migrant labour was firmly established, which led to the disruption of family life as men (and then much later, women) had to migrate from rural to urban areas in order to find work, leaving their families for prolonged periods of time (Posel, 2004). Men, and later women, were pushed into mining, working in factories as well as into other forms of employment (Moore, 2018). During these times, especially for men, they had to weather the storms of forced labour, being separated from their families, and oftentimes, being displaced to distant lands. This created male absence in families.

Soon after, the notion of economic provision as the primary dimension of fathering started to gain traction (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Malinga, 2018). Men began to view their success as fathers through the lens of financial provision- their ability to work for and provide for their children and families. For these men, the ability to financially provide for one's children became a central aspect in the construction of their identities- both as men and fathers (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Malinga & Ratele, 2021). Being able to buy clothes, provide money for children's healthcare, and the overall ability to ensure their children's economic well-being became profoundly important. This created in many cases, a situation where many men were not able to be financial providers while simultaneously being present fathers, as they had to spend most of their time away from their homes and families, seeking employment. In a doctoral thesis by Mandisa Malinga (2016) on *precarious employment and fathering practices among African men*, for example, this study showed the extent to which men's physical absence from home due to financial provision having to take priority made and continues to make present, and nurturing fatherhood unattainable for most men, especially the economically marginalised who find themselves having to choose between being able to financially provide and other aspects of fatherhood.

To this day, fatherhood continues to bear the imprint of the apartheid and colonial eras through the protracted disruption of family life. While other responsibilities such as physical presence, nurturing, loving and being an emotionally supportive father are often acknowledged as important, financial and economic provision remains the most significant dimension of fatherhood (Malinga, 2016). This emphasis on economic provision, notably, does not only underscore the harsh realities of labour migration but also reinforce patterns where the father's role was and continues to be seen primarily through the lens of a breadwinner.

In addition, the centrality of economic provision to men's constructions of their identities has also given rise to a situation where men experience shame and feel like failures when they are unable to provide financial support to their children. This is especially significant in the current climate in South Africa where high unemployment rates are extant. Due to failures to financially provide, this may lead some men to disengage from involvement with their children (Desmond & Desmond, 2006; Richter et al., 2012). Research has shown that fathers who were able to fulfil their financial responsibilities were more likely than those were not, to be present and actively involved in their children's lives (Desmond & Desmond, 2006; Halle & LeMenstral, 1999). Notably, these fathers who are able to fulfil the financial providing responsibility were also most often the ones that had more positive relationships with their children. A study by Makusha and Richter (2014), for example, revealed that fathers that were not able to financially provide were often antagonised by both wives and children. This tension that stems from the pressures on men to be financial providers, and men's inability to provide, erects further barriers between men and their families, especially those who are marginalised, and disrupts the formation of bonds crucial for positive parenting between men and their children.

The discussion this far is indicative of the fact that father absence is not as simplistic as it is sometimes made to appear. Instead, socio-economic and other factors such as the history of apartheid and colonialism, impact men's practices and experiences of fatherhood. While undertaking this discussion, it is important to note that the arguments presented so far are aimed at underscoring the complexities of fathering practices, which extend far beyond simplistic portrayals often presented in research. The arguments made are not an attempt to absolve men of their responsibilities, but rather to emphasize the multifaceted challenges and societal pressures that influence the intricate dynamics of fathering and fatherhood. By recognizing the nuanced nature of these practices, we can shift towards a more comprehensive understanding that considers the broader socio-economic context and its impact on paternal roles.

In post-apartheid South Africa, as it stands, many children lack positive father-child relationships. South Africa has also been noted to have the second highest father absence rate in Africa, following Namibia (Posel & Devey, 2006). Additionally, South Africa grapples with low levels of paternal maintenance for children (Khunou, 2006), and alarmingly elevated rates of abuse and neglect of children by men (Richter & Dawes, 2008). The absence of biological fathers in South Africa is framed in many studies as an issue affecting children of both genders, with a more pronounced impact on boys. The prevailing narrative, however, often stigmatizes

non-nuclear, female-headed households, also portraying fathers as either ‘absent’ or characterized as negative figures (Ratele et al., 2012). Father absence has also been associated with adverse psychological effects including amongst others, poor academic performance, lower self-esteem and self-perception, and lack of security in relationships with the opposite sex (Richter et al ., 2012; Smith et al ., 2014). This is a pervasive theme that exists in research, one which involves pathologizing children with absent fathers. This prevailing tendency to ascribe negative outcomes solely to the absence of a father in a child’s life oversimplifies the complex interplay of factors influencing children's development. Such an approach is not only reductionist but also fails to consider the resilience, adaptability, and various support systems that children, even in non-nuclear families, can access. The importance of moving away from this pathologizing narrative cannot be overstated. It is very crucial that we instead adopt a more nuanced understanding that recognizes the multifaceted nature of individuals' experiences in diverse family structures.

Continuing in the exploration of South Africa's fatherhood narrative, it is essential to recognize the resilience and adaptability inherent in familial bonds, countering the challenges posed by historical disruptions already discussed. In South Africa, fatherhood extends beyond the confines of biology, embracing the broader concept of social fatherhood (Mkhize, 2006; Richter & Morrell, 2006). Social fatherhood recognises that even in the absence of a biological father, people can still find paternal figures, for example within their extended families or communities. In the *2018 State of South Africa’s Fathers report*, the term *social fathers* is said to refer to those people that are not the biological male parent of the child but who assume responsibility for the child and play the role of being a father to the child. Maternal and paternal uncles, older brothers, grandfathers, and stepfathers are all examples of social fathers. One of the participants, Lindiwe, made references to this concept of social father in her narrative. She said:

> *“when you are born out of wedlock, for us it's a belief that you belong to your mother's family. Even using your father's surname is not a thing that is promoted on this side. It's not promoted… We even call them kuthi iNgane zoMalume because uMalume is your mother’s brother. So, they play that father figure role to you.”*

Here, we see that the term ‘social father’ extends fatherhood beyond biology, and instead to a social status. These men take on many responsibilities, including financial, material, practical, and emotional support for the children that they father (Nathane & Khunou,

2021) and contribute to the multifaceted and communal nature of fatherhood in the South African context.

Against this historical background, Imbeleko emerges as a ritualistic practice that transcends time and historical disruption to reaffirm the importance of the father-child bond. In a society where father absence is not merely a statistical reality but a lived experience for many, Imbeleko becomes a poignant celebration of paternal commitment, dedication, and love. It serves as a cultural bridge that reconnects individuals not only with their cultural and ancestral roots but also with the broader concept of fatherhood.

Some of the participants' narratives, offer a lens through which we can comprehend the father's involvement in Imbeleko. In her narrative, Thandeka explained that within her family, Imbeleko commences with *intlawulo*, which is the paying of a fine by the father's family to the mother's family for rendering the mother pregnant (Kaufman et al., 2001; Hunter, 2010). This is done when the parents are not married:

> *"So, the first step is the damages where…the father goes and pays damages to the mother's side. And then, they call it the "buying of the child" or something. The father now takes account for the child, to like to buy the child or something. That's not the correct term, but like, yeah, in rough, that's just the idea of it."*- Thandeka

Thandeka's narrative underscores the central role that a father plays during the Imbeleko ceremony. The mention of the father going to "pay damages" to the maternal side highlights the father's active involvement and responsibility right from the initiation and beginning of the ceremony. Although not the most accurate terminology as Thandeka asserts, the phrase "buying of the child," captures the symbolic and ceremonial actions through which the father assumes accountability for the child. In Samukimba and Moore (2020), it is also noted that whilst the process of *intlawulo* is often conceptualised as a fine or 'paying damages', its significance is greater than this. *Intlawulo* can be better understood as a means of uniting families, whereby the father of a child acknowledges their responsibility of fatherhood to both their family and the maternal family, as Thandeka said, where "the father now takes account for the child". It is also a process whereby the maternal family accepts the father as part of the child's life, irrespective of their relationship status with the mother. This process underscores the father's commitment and investment in their child, highlighting a tangible and meaningful expression of fatherhood within the context of Imbeleko.

Notably, in Thandeka's family, beyond *intlawulo*, the father also plays a central role in the rituals that take place during the Imbeleko ceremony:

> *"So, the dad side, we have Bab'omncane no Bab'omdala, my dad's cousins. So, in English, those are called uncles. But there's a differentiation. If that makes sense. So, there was my uncle's from my dad's side. So, they bought a goat. And. So around the afternoon, that's when it started, because they take the goats and they take me. Then we kneel in , so usually there's a rondavel where we do every ceremony. We like speak to the ancestors. So, there's usually, standard, because there's all the things that we usually use the like Imphepho, the incense that we burn, the candles, everything that stays there. So, they take the goats. Everyone kneels down. Me and then the elder of the family, which is my grandfather. He's the one who does the talking. So, my dad's cousin sits in between my dad and my grandfather. Then he starts the introductory and then they burn the incense. And then they like "this is …, Zenzele's child who he got from…" ….then they mention my mom and her surname and all of that. And then they'd be like "so we're here with the goats to request an introduction. Please this is our child. Please accept her… Please guide her. Have her back. Have her on your back. Lead her way, Mkhanyisele, clear things up."*- Thandeka.

The paternal family, including the cousins and grandfather, take on an important role in the introductory rituals, burning incense and formally introducing the child to the ancestors. The active involvement of the father's cousins, *Bab'omncane* and *Bab'omdala*, also shows the collective responsibility that the paternal lineage undertakes. Their active involvement in the Imbeleko ceremony signify a collective commitment to embracing the new life that is entering the family. As the proceedings of the Imbeleko continue, the paternal family as Thandeka explains, actively participates in the rituals aimed at linking the present generation with the ancestral spirits. The sacred space, often a rondavel, becomes a symbolic bridge connecting the earthly realm with the spiritual. Here, the elder of the family, who is the grandfather in Thandeka's case, the father, and his cousins engage in a sacred dialogue with the ancestors. The father's active role in this dialogue, not only demonstrates his commitment to the well-being of his child but also reinforces the familial bond that extends beyond the visible and transcends generations. By seeking the blessing and acceptance of the child from the ancestral spirits (Ramphele, 2002), this is also an acknowledgement of the importance of the child to the paternal family. By presenting the child to the ancestors, this serves as a powerful declaration

of the child's intrinsic value within the family. In the African context, many people hold some form of reverence for their ancestors (Zulu, 2002). Therefore, it is rare that a family would incorporate their ancestors into a ceremony that lacks importance or care. The decision to introduce the child to the ancestors suggests a genuine commitment from the paternal family, as individuals typically approach ancestral connections with a sense of seriousness and respect. Furthermore, by asking the ancestors to guide the child and light up their way, this also underscores a shared commitment to the well-being and prosperity of the child.

Another participant, Sphe, explains that although Imbeleko can take place independently of the paternal family, it becomes a very complicated process:

> *"Sometimes in cases where the father is not known, they usually phahla at a field. You know those holes that have insects inside? I don't know what you call them in English or Tswana. You go into the fields and find something like that. We call at "esthubeni". Uphahlela esthubeni. So, you go there as you cannot go to the grave. So, you go there with knowledge of your clan names, then you phahla there and that becomes your intimate place but it's not necessarily that space only but wherever you can find a clean space, as long as it's clean, then you can use it to communicate as long as you have the necessary stuff, the umqombothi and stuff."*- Sphe.

Sphe's explanation highlights the complexity that is presented when having to navigate Imbeleko without the presence of a biological father. In cases where the father is absent or not known, the ceremony is explained to take place in locations like a field, referred to as "*esthubeni,*" where individuals can commune with their ancestors. This situation, while a cultural adaptation to father absence, introduces unique challenges. By having to make adjustments to perform the Imbeleko ceremony in non-traditional settings, such as a field, this may lack the formality associated with the usual way in which Imbeleko is often performed. This also entails a departure from the dignity associated with a conventional Imbeleko. The common ceremonial space, such as a dedicated rondavel, provides a structured and culturally recognized environment, which enhances the formality and symbolic richness of the ritual. When having to adapt and have the ceremony in a field due to father absence, this may present challenges in keeping to the same level of formality and may lack the symbolic richness associated with more traditional settings. This may also impact on the ceremonial experience's dignity.

Thandeka also shed light on other challenges that are presented by father absence or when a father has no willingness to participate in the Imbeleko ceremony:

> *"So, let's say the father said, this is not my child or I'm not doing it. So, you get someone of the same surname as the father of the child. Let's say my child is a Khumalo. The father of the child was a Khumalo. So, you go to anyone you know who's a Khumalo, speak to the elder of the family and be like, I have a child that belongs to your roots, like the Khumalo clan. Oh, and then they do the damages and the paying and everything. So basically uYasihlawula."*- Thandeka

As can be seen from Thandeka's assertion, when a father is absent or unwilling to participate, the maternal family has to carry the responsibility to find a substitute of the same surname as the child's father. This process may be demanding, requiring the maternal side to reach out to that person who is going to be a substitute, explain the situation to them and seek their involvement in the ceremony, including the traditional damages and payments. Here, the financial and logistical aspects come into play as the maternal family has to navigate finding someone and then paying for the ceremony themselves. This process may require significant effort and negotiation, presenting an additional layer of stress.

Moreover, the mention of "*uYasihlawula*", directly translating into "you pay damages yourself" adds a layer of complexity to the Imbeleko ceremony and also signifies a significant departure from the conventional process where the father, or the paternal family, typically assumes this responsibility of paying the damages. Notably as well, not only does this term have a financial connotation but it also speaks to personal dignity. In societies where cultural norms place significance on the paternal family's active involvement, the absence of the father's participation may subject the maternal family, especially the mother, to social judgment. For children, not having a father present can affect their sense of belonging and cultural identity leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion, for instance.

These adaptations and adjustments that have to be made (as highlighted by Thandeka and Sphe) when a father is absent, unknown or unwilling to participate therefore emphasize the socio-cultural challenges that individuals may encounter when their fathers are not present. It is noteworthy, however, that the adaptability is commendable and shows the resilience and resourcefulness of individuals facing such circumstances. It is important that we do not pathologize such experiences because not only do they underscore the resilience of those

navigating these unique circumstances but also reveal to us the ways in which cultural practices are able to change and evolve to accommodate diverse family structures.

Still though, Sphe re-emphasizes the necessity for a father or an elder from the father's family to be present in Imbeleko proceedings:

> *"if I don't have my dad by my side, or my aunts or anyone from my dad's family to can show me how it's done and participate…because I cannot do it by myself. I need an elderly person to can do it for me. And then I go immediately after that person to can say do this, do that. And then the elderly person has to speak first before me. He or she knows those ancestors that were, that died before I was even born. You have to acknowledge them first. So even if I would want to, I'll just have to make sure that I have an elderly person who is highly willing can help"*- Sphe.

As can be seen from Sphe's narrative, the indispensable role of a father or another elder from the paternal family in the Imbeleko ceremony is highlighted. Sphe acknowledges that one cannot perform the ceremony alone and needs either the presence of an elderly person from the paternal family. The presence of the paternal family is not only crucial for the procedural aspects of the Imbeleko ceremony but for the profound connection to ancestral spirits as well. Where a father is unknown, this presents challenges as already mentioned. Here, we see that the Imbeleko ceremony underscores the integral role of the father in shaping the identity and connection of the child to their roots and to their ancestors.

Finally, Thandeka also mentioned:

> *"You know how sometimes other people don't do ceremonies, sometimes the father is not invested in doing such things for you, whereas you really want them. So, to have a father that does that for you, yeah, but it's really a hype thing because some people actually would like to have that. So, I was happy… it gives a feeling that your dad actually appreciates having you as a child because he went through that length to actually do it for you when some people don't do it. "*- Thandeka

In Thandeka's reflection, the emotional depth tied to a father's active participation in the Imbeleko ceremony is noted. She emphasises on the rarity of such ceremonies and the significance of a father's investment, which highlights the profound impact that such an investment has on a child's emotional well-being and sense of value. The term "hype" in

Thandeka's expression may suggest that the joy and excitement resulting from a father's involvement during Imbeleko is not just a fleeting emotion but a meaningful affirmation of the parent-child relationship. This sentiment becomes particularly pronounced when contrasted with the absence or lack of investment from other fathers, emphasizing the uniqueness and special nature of such commitment. Furthermore, Thandeka's statement underscores the symbolic nature of ceremonies such as Imbeleko in expressing parental love and acknowledgment. The act of a father going to great lengths to participate becomes a tangible demonstration of appreciation for the child's existence and a recognition of the responsibilities that come with parenthood.

In essence, through the lens of Imbeleko, we see a re-definition of the narrative of fatherhood. The reflections offered by participants contribute to the broader understanding of Imbeleko as a vehicle for fostering emotional connections within families. It highlights the potential positive impact of fathers actively participating in cultural ceremonies, not merely as rituals but as heartfelt expressions of love and appreciation for their children.

A Tapestry of Community and Togetherness

In the African context, the idea of community has a long history. Historically, people in African communities have been characterized by a deep-rooted sense of collectivism, where individuals have strong ties to not only their immediate but extended families (including relatives and neighbours), as well as to their clans and villages (Khoza, 2005; Mabovula, 2011). In such a collectivist culture, there is emphasis placed on social bonds to both one's kin and non-kin, and social relationships are prioritised (Schwartz et al., 2010). Unlike in individualistic cultures where individuals value independence, people in collectivist cultures are more inclined towards cohesion and interdependence (Burholt et al., 2018; Gyekye, 1987). In the African context, the communal ethos that reflects shared values, responsibilities as well as a collective identity is deeply embedded in the fabric of the society.

In pre-colonial times, for example, it is noted that African communities were often organized around kinship and lineage, fostering a web of relationships that extended beyond the nuclear family. Lineage as well, is noted to not only be biological nor always objectively genealogical, but can instead be sociological as well (Siegel, 1999 as cited in Makiwane & Kaunda, 2018; Waghid et al., 2005). This reflects the flexibility and adaptability of lineage and kinship, and the ways in which it can be edited. In this flexibility, individuals can be incorporated into certain lineages, or choose to associate themselves with particular kinship

groups , expanding the notion of family to non-blood relations, but which hold familial meaning and significance. Moreover, families in African communities are not static and were and continue to be expanded through marriage, for example, expanding the familial network to include in-laws and their respective kin. Furthermore, the communal nature of life also extended to friendships, whereby close friends could also be considered family, depending on the length of the friendship and the levels of trust, reliability and closeness. This ability to incorporate non-biological members into one's kin highlights the inclusive nature of African communal life.

Notably, in pre-colonial African societies, the responsibility for the well-being of individuals was intimately linked to the prosperity of the community, and communal decision-making played a crucial role in shaping social norms (Waghid et al. 2005). This collective orientation was evident in various aspects of life, including but not limited to agricultural practices, rituals, communal celebrations and child-rearing. For example, child-rearing is often a shared responsibility within African communities, with the responsibility of raising a child not being placed only on the parents but children also being cared for within their extended families or kin systems (Foster, 2002). Hence it is not uncommon for slogans such as "your child is mine [and] my child is yours" to be used in this context (Waghid et al., 2005, p. 108), which are an epitome of the sense of community extant within African society. In the African way of life, people share, care for each other and also stand in solidarity with one another (Igboin, 2011).

Central to the African communal ethos is also the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu originates from a Southern African isiXhosa proverb that states, "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," meaning "a person is a person through their relationship to others." Ubuntu represents a humanistic philosophy originating from African culture, highlighting the interdependence of individuals within a communal collective (Koenane & Pius Olatunji, 2017). Rooted in Southern Africa as both a spiritual and practical lifestyle, it embodies core human values such as generosity, hospitality, friendliness, care, and compassion (Swanson, 2007; Vanier, 1998). It reflects the idea that one's humanity is intertwined with that of others, emphasizing the notion that "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share." (Tutu, 1999, p. 31). This philosophy shapes interpersonal relationships, transcending the individualistic tendencies often associated with Western societies, and instead promoting an interconnected understanding of human existence. It reflects a worldview that values interdependence, collective well-being and the shared humanity of all individuals within a community.

The African way of life is in direct opposition to Western individualism, which unfortunately, through colonialism, threatened African communalism. With the commencement of colonialism, this threatened the structure and way of life of traditional African communities. Colonial powers were looking to reshape African societies to align with their own culture, values and norms (Dolamo, 2014), often viewing traditional practices as obstacles to their goals. The arrival of colonial rule presented disruptions to traditional African communities. The colonizers came with a Eurocentric worldview that privileged individualism and capitalism over communalism (Chimakonam et al., 2014; Ezenweke & Nwadialor, 2013). This clashed with the African communal way of living, which does not deny the individualistic nature of the person but places the well-being of the collective ahead of individual pursuits. This influence affected and eroded the communal principles of African life. Colonial powers often sought to exploit the existing social divisions and create artificial boundaries, disrupting the communal structures that had prevailed for centuries.

One of the ways through which communal structures were dismantled was through the economic exploitation by colonial powers. In traditional African societies, there existed communal resource-sharing, whereby resources including land, livestock, and other fundamentals were collectively owned and used for the prosperity and well-being of the community (Green, 2016). Under the oppressive state of colonialism, however, there was a shift. With their capitalist ideologies as a driving force, colonialists brought with them private ownership models that placed emphasis on individual control over resources, compromising the collaborative spirit of communal economies. By imposing wage labour systems, this also led to the disruption of traditional communal work structures, encouraging people to work for personal wages rather than contributing to collective efforts. This transition to capitalist economies prioritized profit-oriented production, promoting individualistic economic pursuits. The processes of urbanisation and industrialisation also fractured family and social life (Igboin, 2011). Furthermore, there was also the disruption of local cooperative systems, such as communal farming, and the monetization of exchanges, which further accelerated the dismantling of communal economic practices.

The impact of such economic changes endure in many African societies today, highlighting the enduring impact of colonial economic interventions on communal structures. Some of such impacts include greed, corruption, animosity and competition (Ezenweke & Nwadialor, 2013). For example, in South Africa, reports of cases of community violence are not rare (Mabovula, 2011), reflecting the strains on communal living.

Despite this "erosion" of some traditional communal practices, however, many people in African continue to maintain a sense of community, prioritizing shared values, support networks and interconnectedness within their extended families and communities. This also becomes apparent trough participant narratives on community in the context of the Imbeleko ceremony, highlighting the enduring spirit of togetherness and solidarity that has been a hallmark of African societies for generations. Participants, for instance, gave account of the community's involvement in the Imbeleko ceremony:

> *"We had like, the night before, the aunts, the uncles and other women in the community coming to help to prepare the food, the chopping, the cooking, making umqombothi and all of that."*- Lulutho.

In Lulutho's account, the communal nature of the *Imbeleko* ceremony is highlighted. Not only is the ceremony the responsibility of the immediate family, but involves the collaborative efforts of extended family such as aunts and uncles as well as other members of the wider community. The shared tasks of chopping, cooking, and making umqombothi involves a sense of unity and cooperation. On the surface, the collective effort and willingness to help the family eases the logistical and practical aspects of the ceremony. However, beneath the surface, this collective effort speaks volumes and is a testament of the communal support present in the cultural fabric. Lulutho also added:

> *"So, the part of like the slaughtering of the goat and the part in the morning where you go, that is like a family event. But then like afterwards, the festivities is everyone around the community comes in because I think like a lot of the Zulu culture is based in community and all of us being there for each other and all of us being like guardians of each other. So, I think it is actually a very community-based activity."*- Lulutho.

Here, the dual nature of the *Imbeleko* ceremony as both an intimate family event and a communal celebration that extends beyond the family is highlighted. Lulutho emphasizes the importance of community in the Zulu culture, viewing the Imbeleko ceremony not just as a family affair but as a broader community-based activity. The celebrations that follow the initial family-centric and sacred proceedings highlight the communal spirit ingrained in Zulu cultural practices, where collective support and guardianship are foundational values. As afore-mentioned, colonialism sought to dismantle and erode African communal frameworks through

the imposition individualistic ideologies. However, in many African societies, including the Zulu culture as Lulutho highlights, the communal ethos has deep roots and continues to persist until the present.

Similarly, in Sphe's family, although the community is not involved in some of the practices considered sacred as well, there is still some involvement:

> *"um usually when we appease the ancestors, when you phahla[1], it's more about family than the community because it normally happens in the early hours , let's say before the sun comes out yeah. That's when you phahla so you cannot have the community there. Even if they're in the yard but they cannot be at that space (the sacred space where Imbeleko takes place) because it's only for Abakwa Mkhwanazi. You cannot be part of that because you're not part of the surname, the family. The community does come to assist, the community gets involved more when it's time to celebrate but when it comes to um matters of ancestors it's more of family than the community."* – Sphe

The act of appeasing the ancestors, as Sphe explains, is inherently private and reserved for the specific family lineage and not community members. Still however, the community's involvement is noted. The community may attend the ceremony and it is also noted that they may "come to assist" and partake in the celebrations that take place after the sacred rituals have been performed. Igboin (2011) notes that in the African communal way of life, the joy of one extends and becomes the joy of other members of the community in profound ways. Here too, we see the coming together of the community to come and celebrate the welcoming of the child with the family of the child. The act of community members sharing with the family in the joyous celebration reflects the cultural importance of shared experiences and the understanding that communal bonds enhance the richness of life's milestones. *Imbeleko* thus becomes a reflection not only of familial ties but also of the broader web of relationships that constitute the community fabric.

Another participant, Lindiwe, too explained that there are some parts of the ceremony that are sacred and reserved only for the family, such as the pouring of bile. In her narrative, Lindiwe highlights the vibrant communal character of *Imbeleko*, particularly during the celebratory phases following the more sacred rituals:

[1] *Ukuphahla* is a ritual performed to communicate with the ancestors. It involves invoking the ancestors to seek guidance, answers and protection (Bogopa, 2010).

"Well, I think the only sacred part is when there's a pouring of bile and the cleaning with mswane. But I don't know, there are celebrations when the bride comes back with the baby, you know, to the groom's family… If you have money, a cow will be slaughtered and depending on a number of people which are there. But in the rural areas, you know, people are always showing up. So, there is a celebration after that"- Lindiwe.

The phrase "people are always showing up," highlights the spontaneous and enthusiastic engagement of the community. It illustrates the inclusive nature of such a gathering, where people are welcome to join and partake in the festivities. The statement is a reflection of the communal ethos that remain prevalent in many African societies, emphasizing a collective spirit where individuals collaborate and come together to share in moments of celebration and joy. The consistent presence of people signifies not just attendance but active participation in the communal tapestry, reinforcing the significance of togetherness and mutual support. This shows the interconnectedness that still exists within some communities. People do not live in isolation but instead in community with each other. Another illustration of the communal nature of Imbeleko is highlighted in Thandeka's narrative:

> *"And they also make dumplings to cook the meat and everything. And then when it's done, maybe around 12 the following day, 12 during the day, we all go there and sit down. So, whoever's in the yard, like the kids, the uncles, the aunts, the mothers, the grandmothers, everyone goes there. And then you just have a feast"*

A communal feast follows the *Imbeleko* ceremony and extended family members partake in enjoying the feast. This description depicts the embodiment of the spirit of shared joy and togetherness present as the ceremony takes place. Despite attempts by colonial rule to weaken and undermine communal living during colonialism, the enduring importance and value of communal bonds in Zulu society and other similar communities becomes apparent. Lulutho too, said looking back on her Imbeleko experience, she cannot help but reflect on the beauty of people gathering specifically for her, making her feel like a valued member of her community. This also denotes a sense of belonging and of communal support as well:

> *"It's like your community coming to support you and it's like a declaration, like very implicit declaration to say that like should anything ever happen, should you ever need*

help, you have this whole community of people there to guide you to like, for you to go seek help, seek advice and things like that. Like you have people around you and you're not just existing in a bubble, like you're not alone."- Lulutho.

This collective presence, people gathering together, for a singular individual, reinforces the idea that ceremonies such as *Imbeleko* are not merely rituals but essential expressions of communal care and interconnectedness. The communal involvement serves as a symbolic and implicit declaration, signifying that the community stands ready to offer support and guidance. It goes beyond the immediate event, creating a network of assistance and advice for the individual. Notably, the emphasis on not being alone highlights the interconnectedness and shared responsibility ingrained in the community, providing a social safety net that extends beyond individual households. Life can often be isolating and challenging, and this can be further exacerbated in the absence of a support system or people one can rely on. The presence of supportive people, therefore, can be profoundly comforting:

"because I think life can be very isolating, and it's important that from a young age, that is something that is really instilled and grounded in you, until you really learn and know like I am going to hold your hand, or there are people who are going to be holding your hand, and guiding you through whatever it is that you need, and that like as you get older and you experience those things, you're going to get to a point where you're also able to reciprocate what you've received"- Lulutho.

Lulutho's acknowledgment of the communal gathering for her *Imbeleko* and its significance to her reflects the fundamental human need for connection and community. In the face of life's challenges and complexities, the shared moments and collective support offered by the community may be a great source of solace and reassurance. This sentiment resonates beyond the specific context of *Imbeleko*, illustrating a universal longing for companionship and shared experiences. It reinforces the idea that, amid life's isolation, the presence of people—be it during cultural ceremonies such as *Imbeleko* or even in everyday moments—can offer a profound sense of comfort and belonging. As Lulutho said:

"But like looking back on it, I find it so beautiful that like everyone was gathering just to come see you, acknowledge you as part of the community, telling you that like whenever you need help, you know you can call me. Like if you ever need help on this

avenue, I'm here to help you, if you need help here, I'm here to help you. And it's something that has like rang true all over my life, whenever I do go home, and like I go out to see my family, it's like if you ever need help, just know that I'm a phone call away. If you need help with this, call this person, or actually whatever you need, just call someone and we will be there for you. So, like looking back on it, I think it's such a beautiful thing, and it's like whenever I'm starting to feel like forgetting, it's something that's always like ringing through my head, whenever you're feeling alone, there's a whole community of people that have been telling me from the time that you're young, we are here for you, whatever you need."- Lulutho.

Lulutho describes the profound beauty and significance that she finds in the communal gathering during the *Imbeleko* ceremony, which signifies the enduring power of community bonds. The act of the community coming together, not just as witnesses but as active supporters, serves as a testament to the shared commitment to collective well-being. The participant reflects on the lasting impact of this communal support, emphasizing that it extends far beyond the specific event. The assurance of help and guidance, reiterated by the community throughout the participant's life, highlights the enduring nature of these communal ties. This sentiment serves as a constant reminder that, even in moments of solitude or uncertainty, there is a network of individuals ready to offer assistance, fostering a profound sense of connectedness and belonging.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, in many African cultures, including the Zulu culture, ancestors play a pivotal role (Zulu, 2002), and their influence is considered a guiding force. In her narrative, Lulutho also touched on the concept of community that goes beyond the physical:

"Like your whole family lineage that are looking out for you, which is, I think is, I find it very beautiful that everyone else that has ever existed in my lineage is looking out for me, and it's just very calming and it brings you a lot of peace, to know that even outside of things I can see, there are people that are looking out for me and guiding me in whatever I do."- Lulutho.

Lulutho unveils a profound understanding of community that transcends the physical realm and extends into the spiritual. The mention of the entire family lineage looking out for and guiding the individual underscores the interconnectedness of the living and the ancestors.

The belief that one's lineage, including generations that have passed, is actively watching over and supporting the individual adds a spiritual dimension to the concept of community. This spiritual community is not bound by the constraints of time or physical presence but encompasses a collective consciousness that provides guidance, support and a sense of interconnectedness. The acknowledgment of the spiritual dimension within the concept of community reflects the holistic worldview prevalent in many African societies, where the living and the ancestral realms are intertwined in a continuous, supportive relationship. Thandeka also touches on this:

> *"so, we called then they call everyone. We're calling people that are no longer here. Calling. You know, they call them by their surnames. Either they were married to the family or, you know, so they call them by their surnames. Those kinds of things. This is your child. This is her. Look at her clearly. She has what eyes, she's our child. And we've admitted that she's our child. Please look after her, guide her and all of that. She's still in primary. You know, set her future bright and right"*- Thandeka.

Despite the complexities and challenges faced by many African societies, the participants' reflections underscore the enduring importance of community in shaping people's life experiences. In many African societies today, people continue to uphold traditional African values of community and *ubuntu*. Through rituals such as Imbeleko, as is highlighted by the participants' narratives, communal participation is encouraged and promoted ; hence, the Zulu idiom, *ayikho inkomo edla yodwa* which directly translates into *there is no cow that grazes alone*. The whole community is invited to the celebratory ritual- to drink, eat and be merry, as families engage with their ancestors. This commitment to community bonds, as evident in the continuation of communal practices such as the *Imbeleko* ceremony, serves as a testament to the resilience of traditional values in the face of historical challenges such as colonialism.

Imbeleko **and Social Belongingness**

A sense of belonging is widely recognized as a fundamental human need (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Throughout human evolution, experiencing belonging, in which one knows where and with whom they belong –has been and continues to be an integral part of human existence (Arslan, 2018). Research has defined belonging as the feeling that is

derived from the awareness that one forms part of a collective entity (Allen et al., 2022). This fundamental need of belonging has been noted to be rooted in the intrinsic desire for connection, acceptance, and meaningful relationships. This need is deeply embedded in our psychological and emotional makeup, influencing our well-being, self-esteem, and overall life satisfaction. In a study by Moeller et al. (2020), for example, in which they worked with college students, it was found that a positive association existed between a sense of belonging and greater happiness and overall well-being, and not only this but an overall reduction in mental health outcomes as well. This is testament to the beneficial outcomes of experiencing belonging.

Afterall, we as humans are social beings. We have a deep desire to connect with others. There exists a longing in most people to feel supported and valued and people long to share their feelings, thoughts and overall life with others. As humans, we have an innate inclination to seek affiliations with social groups, be it family, friends, or communities, as these connections provide a sense of identity, purpose, and support. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, for example, it can be seen that after one meets their most basic needs (both physiological and safety needs), this is followed by the needs of love and belonging (Maslow, 1943, 1987). People seek to feel included within the social groups in which they exist and to be understood and paid attention to.

Notably, similar to most psychological constructs, the need for belonging can be traced back to prehistoric times when cooperation and communal living, as already discussed, were essential parts of people's lives. During those times, people lived in community with each other and shared and relied on each other for various tasks such as gathering and hunting, amongst others (Waghid et al. 2005). Attempting to navigate the challenges of life alone and in isolation was not only impractical but also significantly lowered the chances of success and long-term survival. This collaborative nature of early human societies underscored the importance of belonging and belongingness.

While modern societies may celebrate independence and individual achievements, participants in this study still shared stories that revealed that the innate human need for connection, acceptance, and community persists and that people still seek belonging. The ritualistic aspects and procedures of *Imbeleko,* such as introducing the child to the ancestral spirits and the communal celebrations, are noted to be symbolic expressions of acceptance and inclusion within the family and community. Through this ceremony, the child becomes an integral part of a lineage with shared history, values, and traditions. The participants' narratives illuminate that beyond just a celebration, *Imbeleko* creates a cultural space where individuals

are welcomed, celebrated, and integrated into the larger social fabric- which plays a pivotal role in fostering a profound sense of belonging. Lindiwe notes:

> *"It was important, number one, because you are actually recognised in the family, you know. It gives you that sort of belonging. Yeah, it gives you the sense of belonging, that I belong somewhere."*- Lindiwe.

This narrative delves into the deep-rooted significance of *Imbeleko* in fostering a profound sense of belonging. Lindiwe highlights the primary importance of being officially acknowledged within her family. This acknowledgment goes beyond mere familial recognition but instead, serves as a powerful conduit to instil a profound and lasting "sense of belonging". It implies a connection to a shared history, a network of relationships, and a place where one's identity is not only acknowledged but celebrated as well. The *Imbeleko* ceremony therefore becomes a symbolic rite of passage, marking an individual's formal integration into the family. Not only into the family but the ancestral lineage as well. Lindiwe highlighted this as well:

> *"Even my ancestors, they know me, you know. You have that idea that you belong to a particular family and you possess a particular position within the family"*- Lindiwe.

In Lindiwe's words, the recognition extends beyond the physical even to the realm of the ancestors, adding a spiritual dimension to the sense of belonging. Lindiwe's understanding of belonging is one that transcends the immediate family context to encompass a larger, enduring kinship that includes both the living and the ancestral spirits.

Another participant, Sphe said:

> *"Imbeleko is an introduction of new birth to the family. It's when they introduce and combine the child with the genes and the lineage of the family."*- Sphe.

The use of the term "combine" in the context of *Imbeleko* carries a profound significance, suggesting more than a mere biological introduction. It implies the integration of the child into the broader familial and ancestral lineage, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the individual with the family's genetic and cultural heritage. The word "combine" suggests

a blending or merging of elements, indicating that *Imbeleko* is not just about acknowledging a new birth but intricately linking the child with the familial roots. This process involves more than biological recognition; it involves a symbolic joining of the child's essence with the collective identity, values, and history of the family.

In the cultural and symbolic realm of *Imbeleko*, "combine" underscores the idea that the child becomes an integral part of a larger narrative. It is not solely about the child's presence but about their incorporation into the fabric of the family's past, present, and future. The act of combining signifies more than just recognition; it represents an intentional effort to weave the child into the cultural tapestry of the family. This blending symbolizes the child's integration into the collective identity and heritage of the family, reinforcing a strong sense of belonging. The child is not just born into the family; they are merged with its collective narrative. This integration serves as a foundation for a robust sense of belonging, as the child is now an integral and valued part of a larger familial and cultural whole. Thandeka also said:

> *"everyone is just happy because you're finally officially a part of us… you legit just feel like I'm officially a member, like I've been, you know, it's been made official that ngi nguwa la e khaya, like I am a part of them. This is my family."*- Thandeka.

The phrase "officially a part of us" in this narrative highlights the role of the *Imbeleko* ceremony in marking a formal recognition and acceptance of an individual into the larger familial community. The emphasis on happiness as well, is a reflection on the positive emotions that accompany this acknowledgment, signifying not only the individual's personal achievement but also the communal joy in welcoming a new member. The use of the word "finally" appears to convey a sense of fulfilment, accomplishment, and the attainment of a desired status within the familial and cultural context. Thandeka's narrative signifies official recognition and acceptance within the family and community and the fact that she belongs, officially. She also added:

> *"So, it's a huge thing. Also, your child has a sense of belonging. We all have senses and stuff. So, imagine feeling like you don't belong here. You know, you get people who are suicidal at the age of 17. I feel like in your teenage years, it plays a huge role because you're getting a whole wave of different types of emotion and the last emotion you need is to feel like you don't belong anywhere. So, for me, I think it plays a*

huge role of ensuring that you don't reach that part in your crucial years as a teen of feeling like you do not belong and feeling like you're not appreciated."- Thandeka.

During adolescence, individuals undergo significant emotional and identity development (Becht et al., 2016; Klimstra et al., 2010), and a strong sense of belonging becomes essential for their well-being. The participant highlights the potential consequences of not feeling a sense of belonging, such as increased vulnerability to mental health challenges, including suicidal thoughts. The *Imbeleko* ceremony, by formally recognizing and integrating the child into the family and ancestral lineage, contributes to building a foundation of belonging. This sense of belonging becomes a protective factor during the tumultuous teenage years, providing emotional support and validation. The participant implies that the ceremony serves as a preventive measure against the negative impacts of isolation and lack of recognition during this crucial developmental phase.

In essence, the Imbeleko ceremony is portrayed as a cultural practice that not only celebrates the individual but could also potentally safeguard their mental and emotional well-being, particularly during adolescence when the need for acceptance and belonging is paramount. Notably, however, while the Imbeleko ceremony undoubtedly plays a significant role in providing emotional support and validation within the family and community context, it is essential to recognize that adolescents' sense of belonging is multifaceted and influenced by a myriad of factors beyond familial rituals. Adolescence is a period marked by a complex social landscape, where peer interactions, school environments, cultural influences, and personal experiences all contribute to adolescents' sense of identity and belonging. To centre Imbeleko as a singular protective factor against social ills would be an oversimplification of the intricate dynamics of adolescent development. Adolescents seek belonging in diverse social spheres, including friendships, romantic relationships, extracurricular activities, and online communities. Each of these contexts presents unique opportunities and challenges for fostering a sense of connection and acceptance.

Moreover, while the Imbeleko ceremony may provide a sense of rootedness and belonging within the family and cultural community, it may not fully address the broader social pressures and challenges that adolescents encounter. Issues such as peer pressure, bullying, discrimination, and societal expectations can profoundly impact adolescents' well-being and sense of belonging, independent of their participation in cultural ceremonies. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of adolescent belonging, we can better understand the complexities of their experiences. While the Imbeleko ceremony holds cultural significance

and may contribute to adolescents' sense of belonging, it is just one piece of the puzzle in understanding and promoting adolescent well-being.

It is important to note here that while the stories that participants told draw out the positive outcomes associated with rituals such as *Imbeleko*, such as fostering a sense of belonging for instance, these African rituals are not commonly perceived through such a lens- that recognizes their benefits. For example, a preliminary version of this research was presented at the *2023 Psychological Society of South Africa Congress*. Following the presentation, attendees came forward with questions and issues of discussion around the research study. It was interesting to see the narratives that were coming up in conversation with the attendees. People were concerned about issues such as uncertainty in paternity, for example, where a father performs *Imbeleko* for a child and then later finds out that the child is not theirs, as well as the implications of this. Not only this but there were also concerns about issues of father absence and the implications of this on children. There were also discussions around how *Imbeleko* is not a celebration and there was questioning of how it can actually bring joy to those who undergo the ceremony- a narrative which overlooked the idea that African cultures are incredibly diverse, and practices such as *Imbeleko* may vary significantly from one community to another and that while *Imbeleko* may involve rituals that are serious, the overall purpose is to strengthen connections within the family and community and foster a sense of belonging, which can present an element of joy.

Indeed, it is completely understandable for attendees to express concerns and question the celebratory nature of *Imbeleko*. Beyond this, it is entirely valid that participants may have reservations about absent fathers and uncertainties in paternity, particularly within the specific socio-cultural context of South Africa. These concerns likely stem from complex historical, cultural, and societal factors that shape individual perspectives. It was crucial that these issues were acknowledged and addressed with understanding, to foster a more nuanced understanding of the experiences and narratives surrounding *Imbeleko* within the South African context. These issues were therefore not dismissed but taken into account and considered.

What was interesting, however, was the way in which people almost immediately gravitated towards these narratives of familial challenges, for instance, while overlooking the positive psychological aspects of ceremonies such as *Imbeleko*. The impacts of coloniality cannot be ignored here. The tendency to employ a deficit-based language when discussing topics related to Africa and the Global South is deeply rooted in historical and colonial legacies. Colonialism not only imposed economic and political systems but also imposed a narrative that portrayed indigenous cultures and practices as inferior or lacking. This narrative, often fuelled

by Eurocentric perspectives, created enduring stereotypes and biases that have been perpetuated through generations.

The socialization process, influenced by colonial histories, has ingrained in people a predisposition to focus on negative aspects, reinforcing a lens that emphasizes pain, lack, and catastrophe. Post-colonial societies may still grapple with the aftermath of imposed narratives that emphasize lack, suffering, and inferiority (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This is evident in the way some individuals responded to the research, immediately focusing on the negative. This lens becomes a default mode of interpretation, making it challenging for individuals to see beyond the preconceived notions and appreciate the richness and diversity that exists within African cultures.

Decolonisation involves a deliberate effort to break away from these imposed narratives (Kessi et al., 2020). It requires acknowledging the historical context, challenging inherited biases, and actively promoting narratives that reflect the diversity, strength, and resilience inherent in African cultures. It is paramount to note that this study is not meant to dismiss or ignore critical issues, such as those brought up by the attendees at the Psychological Society of South Africa Congress, but is rather looking to expand the conversation to include a broader spectrum of experiences. Continuously emphasizing negative narratives can perpetuate stereotypes and limit the understanding of the richness within African cultures. Creating space for alternative narratives allows for a more comprehensive and accurate representation of African childhood experiences, fostering a more inclusive and nuanced discourse that goes beyond conventional perspectives. This research study therefore aimed to challenge prevailing deficit-based narratives about Africa and African childhood(s). *Imbeleko* can play a particularly important role in fostering connection and community, strengthening parent-child bonds and fostering a sense of belonging as revealed by participants' narratives. By shifting the lens to such positive aspects, this disrupts the prevailing skewed perspectives on African childhood(s).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study endeavoured to explore young adults' retrospective experiences of *Imbeleko*, with the aim of redefining the prevailing narratives surrounding African childhood- which often accentuate social problems, creating a one-dimensional image of childhood (s) in Africa. In response to these deficit-based narratives, this research study instead shifted its focus towards narratives that are not about catastrophe and pain but those that are about celebration and memorialization of childhood, particularly through the lens of the *Imbeleko* ceremony in South Africa.

This research study, framed within the realms of Decolonisation and African psychology and Narrative theory, engaged young adults in retrospective reflections on their experiences of *Imbeleko* during childhood. The narratives provided by the participants revealed a multifaceted tapestry of significance, challenging existing deficit-based paradigms and offering nuanced insights into the cultural phenomenon. The participants' stories uncovered a richness of experiences intricately woven into the fabric of *Imbeleko*. The ceremony emerged as a cultural cornerstone, shaping individual identities, fostering emotional connections within families and communities, and contributing to a profound sense of belonging. Through participant narratives, it became evident that *Imbeleko* played a pivotal role in cultivating cultural pride, celebrating heritage, and instilling a deep appreciation for community bonds. The participants' narratives provided a counter-narrative to the prevalent pessimistic view of African childhood, showcasing joy, pride, and a strong connection to cultural roots. The participants' accounts illuminated *Imbeleko*'s role in shaping positive memories and emotions, also revealing the ways in which *Imbeleko* transcends its ritualistic nature, emerging as a transformative vehicle for fostering well-being.

Furthermore, this study has various implications. Through challenging the tendency for existing literature to perpetuate Eurocentric perspectives on African childhood, this study actively contributes to the ongoing discourse on decolonizing research. The shift in focus from deprivation-centred narratives to those celebrating childhood experiences marks a significant departure from conventional academic approaches. This redirection encourages a more holistic and nuanced understanding of African childhood, emphasizing the importance of cultural context and individual experiences.

This study also demonstrates the effectiveness of frameworks such as African Psychology in exploring and comprehending African lives. The findings underscore the need for academia to embrace diverse perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to research. When we utilize culturally sensitive frameworks, not only does this enrich scholarly endeavours but also ensures that research outcomes are more reflective of the complexities inherent in different societies, especially those located in the Global South.

Moreover, this study's implications also extend into the societal realm, challenging prevailing stereotypes and prompting a paradigm shift in the representation of Africa and African childhood. By showcasing the positive dimensions of the *Imbeleko* ceremony, the research actively contributes to reshaping societal perceptions. The celebration and memorialization of childhood experiences portrayed in the narratives foster cultural appreciation and challenge colonial legacies that have perpetuated Eurocentric perspectives and stereotypes about African cultures, including childhood experiences and that are deeply embedded in research practices.

Essentially, this research serves as a catalyst for change, urging both academic and societal spheres to adopt more inclusive, culturally aware perspectives. It advocates for narratives that embrace the richness and diversity of African childhood experiences, ultimately contributing to a more accurate, respectful, and equitable portrayal of these experiences in the broader discourse.

Reflexivity

Being a Black researcher interviewing fellow Black young adults provided a foundation for establishing rapport and trust, which facilitated open and candid conversations. However, a nuanced consideration emerged regarding age dynamics. As a 22-year-old, I recognized the potential for a power imbalance, particularly when engaging with participants younger than myself within the 18-25 age range. Conversely, interactions with older participants were anticipated to be less prone to such imbalances. Surprisingly, these age differentials did not seem to significantly impact the quality of engagement. I am also aware that I am a researcher and master’s student while some of my participants were undergraduate students. While I, too, similar to the participants, am engaged in academic pursuits, the participants' status as undergraduate students created a potential power differential. As a master's student, there exists a hierarchical distinction that could impact the dynamics of the researcher-participant

relationship. I was aware from the very beginning of the potential of this power differential to influence participants' comfort levels in expressing opinions or sharing experiences, as they might perceive a knowledge gap or hierarchical structure. I remained mindful of the need to create a space where participants felt comfortable expressing themselves freely, irrespective of their academic status. It is important to note, however, that on the other hand, my shared identity as a student might have facilitated a sense of camaraderie and understanding.

Notably, in the process of conducting this research study, there was an intention to interview individuals from both Zulu and Xhosa backgrounds. However, despite efforts to recruit participants from various Nguni groups, only individuals of Zulu origin came forward to participate in the interviews. It is therefore important to recognize that the insights gained from this study predominantly reflect the perspectives of Zulu participants. Given that culture is a nuanced and sensitive topic, this necessitates caution when discussing the cultural practices of others (as I am of Tswana origin). By recognizing the complexity and variability within cultural contexts, I aimed to approach discussions about the Imbeleko ceremony with sensitivity and cultural humility.

Notably, despite being of Tswana origin while my participants were of Zulu origin, creating potential cultural and linguistic distinctions, the interviews unfolded smoothly. The decision to primarily conduct the interviews in English was made to ensure a common communicative ground. However, I was conscious of the limitations this might impose, potentially hindering the nuanced expression of certain ideas. Participants were therefore encouraged to also express themselves in their native language. While participants graciously clarified terms and expressions that I did not fully understand due to my limited proficiency in Zulu, I acknowledged the inherent challenge of translation, recognizing that some ideas might get lost in translation. This language barrier also highlighted the additional effort that participants had to invest in ensuring effective communication. Despite these considerations, participants exhibited a willingness to navigate these challenges collaboratively. Their openness to explaining terms and expressions reflected their commitment to the research process.

Furthermore, although effort was put into forming a collaborative relationship with participants, whereby they were provided an opportunity to share their experiences on their own terms, data analysis and writing up of the final research report were my responsibility. I therefore do realise that my own biases may have impacted the interpretations made. Another researcher, based on their own biases, may have different interpretations to the ones made by myself (Mphigalale, 2021).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study had a small number of participants (four), which implies that the findings of the study may not capture the diversity of experiences within the broader population. Notably, however, it is important to clarify that the intention was and is not to generalize findings to a broader population but rather to delve deeply into the experiences of participants. The emphasis lies in providing a comprehensive understanding of the chosen participants' narratives, ensuring that each voice within this limited sample is distinctly heard and considered. By opting for an in-depth exploration, the study prioritizes the richness and depth of individual experiences over broad generalizations. This approach aligns with the qualitative nature of the research, which seeks to uncover nuanced insights rather than producing universally applicable conclusions. This, however, opens avenues for future research with more extensive and diverse samples to capture the broader spectrum of experiences surrounding *Imbeleko*. Notably, this study exclusively featured women, with no perspectives from individuals of other gender identities included in the exploration of *Imbeleko* experiences (as only women came forward). This also presents an opportunity for future research to strive for a more inclusive participant representation to capture a broader range of perspectives but also gain a comprehensive understanding of how *Imbeleko* is experienced across diverse gender identities.

Another significant limitation of this study pertains to its exclusion of children's perspectives on the Imbeleko ceremony. Despite the focus on childhood experiences, the research has essentially presented a study about children without directly involving children themselves. By prioritizing the voices and narratives of adult participants, the study inadvertently perpetuates an adult-centric view of childhood. The failure to include children in matters that concern them reflects a hierarchical approach that marginalizes their perspectives and agency. This exclusion not only limits the comprehensiveness of the study but also reinforces power imbalances inherent in traditional research paradigms, wherein adults dictate the terms of inquiry and interpretation. Moreover, by researching childhood experiences solely from adult perspectives, the study may unintentionally reproduce the very colonial dynamics it seeks to critique. The adult-centric lens undertaken in this study risks overlooking the unique insights and experiences that children themselves could offer, thereby perpetuating a narrative that prioritizes adult authority and control over children's agency and voices. This oversight underscores the need for future research to adopt more inclusive and participatory approaches

that center children's voices and agency, thereby challenging hierarchical power dynamics and advancing a more equitable and nuanced understanding of childhood.

This study has unveiled the richness embedded in the *Imbeleko* ceremony, offering a counter-narrative that celebrates African childhood. The narratives provided by the participants not only contribute to academic discourse but also hold broader implications for societal perceptions, cultural appreciation, and the ongoing journey of decolonizing research in the context of African childhood.

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Appendices

Appendix A

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MACC/23/05**
PROJECT TITLE:	Decolonising African Childhood Studies: A Narrative Exploration of Young Adults' Retrospective Experiences of Imbeleko.
INVESTIGATOR	Mosime Otsile (2111347)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	16 May 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2025
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 23 May 2023	**CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Dr Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Prof. Peace Kiguwa (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

LMosime
Signature

07 / 06 / 2023
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B

PERMISSION LETTER

Psychology department
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Dear Ms. Nicoleen Potgieter,

Re: Permission to conduct research at the University of Witwatersrand's main campus.

My name is Otsile Lesedi Mosime and I am a Master of Arts in Community-based Counselling Psychology Candidate at the University of Witwatersrand.

With this letter, I'd like to formally request permission to conduct interviews at the university premises in partial fulfilment of the above-mentioned programme of study. The research that I am proposing to conduct is titled *Decolonizing African Childhood Studies: A Narrative Exploration of Young Adults' Retrospective Experiences of Imbeleko* and is a qualitative study which seeks to explore and gain an in-depth insight into young adults' (who underwent *Imbeleko* in their childhood, before age 13) attitudes and perceptions about the practice of *Imbeleko* and their retrospective experiences thereof. This study also seeks to understand the value that young adults attach to *Imbeleko* and the perceived importance and significance thereof, of this ritualistic practice both generally and in their own lives. This study came out of the frustration with the tendency for studies on African children and childhoods to be undertaken and produced by adults – often non-Africans – who attempt to understand African childhoods using Western or Eurocentric lenses. Here, the research is usually undertaken *on* and *about* people who have lived African childhoods, but not *with* them. Notably, where African children are concerned, hegemonic narratives of 'deficient' African childhoods abound, whereby the lives of African children are presented as being characterised

solely by lack and victimhood. This study seeks to shift the lens away from stories of pain and lack and instead recognises that more regions of African childhood, happy and hope-giving ones exist and are worth considering. *Imbeleko* is a family celebration and a token of thanksgiving which is performed to welcome a child to not only the living members of their family but to their ancestors as well and is celebrated with joy, dancing and singing. Experiencing *Imbeleko* is a common reality for some children in South Africa, which serves to re-affirm their position in their families and foster a sense of belonging within their families and communities. This study, therefore, aims to centre Black lives and to amplify the voices of people who have historically been written out of stories about their own lives.

The research will entail collecting data from young adults between the ages of 18-25, both from within and outside the university, who are Black and either Xhosa or Zulu speaking and who can recall undergoing *Imbeleko* before they were age 13. I therefore ask that I may conduct this research on the main university campus in the second semester, provided that it does not affect or impose on any student's academic obligations and well-being, and on condition that my proposal and ethical clearance application is approved by the university Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-medical). I specifically am requiring interviewing my participants in one of the rooms at Emthonjeni Centre. Participation entails a one-on-one interview with the researcher and all interviews will take approximately an hour (nothing longer than this) and will be audio-recorded with the participants' consent and agreement. Notably, I would also like to gain access to students through the Wits mailing list, in order to be able to reach potential participants.

Prior to participation, participants will be asked to give their written consent through signing an informed consent form. The researcher will take strict precautions to safeguard the personal information of participants throughout the study. All the raw data will be kept in the researchers' password-protected laptop and in the case that potential participants choose the option of participating anonymously, pseudonyms will be utilised in research reporting. Once the study is complete, the participants' tape-recorded information will be stored for a further 5 years and after this period, will be destroyed. While this research will be used for educational purposes, and the results of which will be communicated in a dissertation, there is a chance that this work might also be published in an academic journal and presented at a conference, however, participants will not be identifiable through the study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, with the only personal benefit being the contribution to the expansion of knowledge on the topic at hand and brief experience in research participation. Notably, no data costs will be incurred for online interviews as data bundles will be provided for all online participants. The research participants will not be disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty or consequence. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study and neither is it in the interest of the researcher to violate any ethical code or local law. Although the predicted risks for participating in this study are close to none, should participants end up being negatively affected from their participation in this research for any reason, all participants will be provided with a referral list with free counselling services for opportunities to seek counselling or psychological support. If participants experience any distress or discomfort at any point of the research process, the interview will be stopped or resumed at another time.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research on the university campus.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

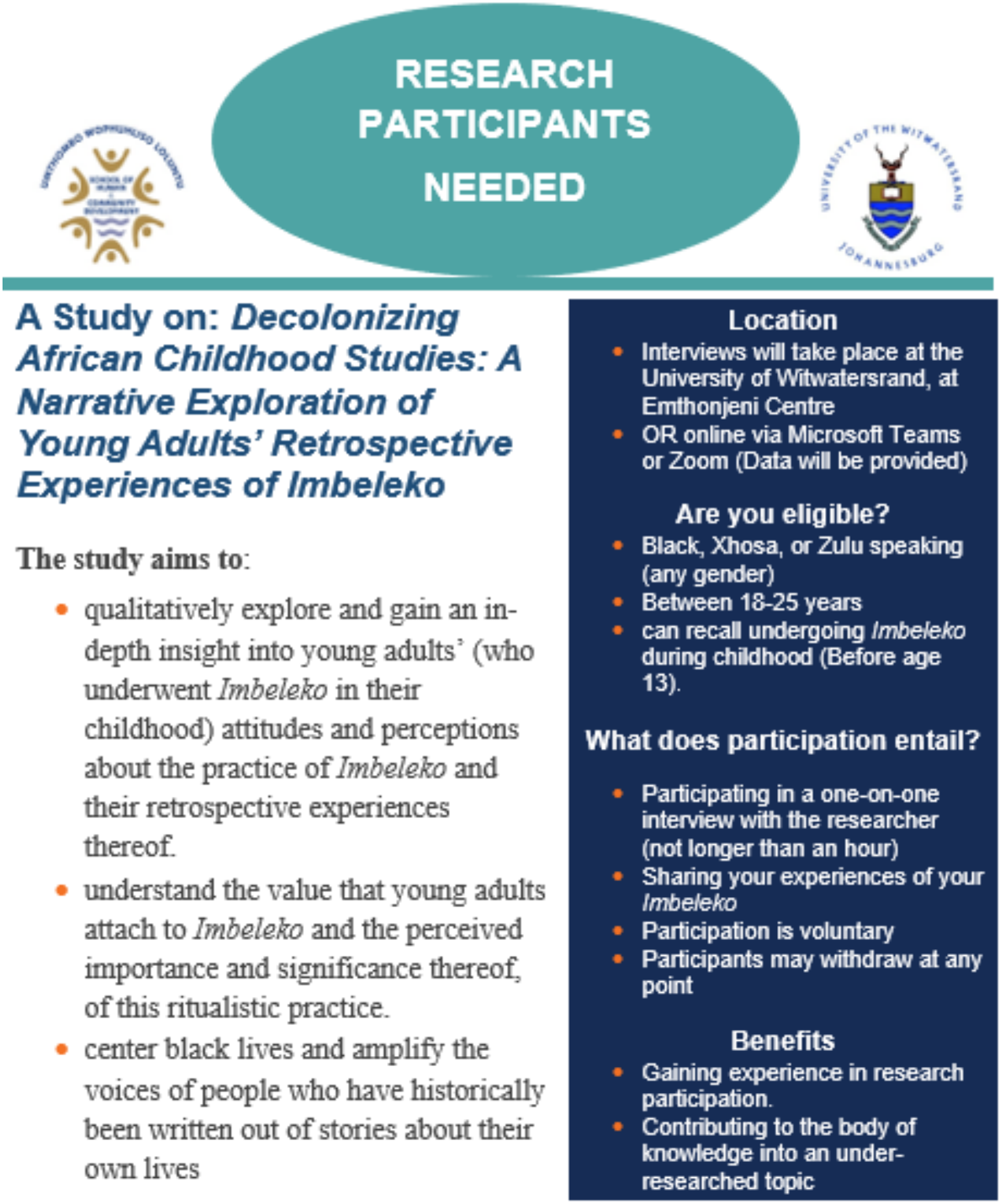
Lesedi Mosime
[079 341 4933]
[2111347@students.wits.ac.za]

Supervisor: Professor Peace Kiguwa
[+27 11 717 4537]

[Peace.Kiguwa@wits.ac.za]

Appendix C

RESEARCH STUDY ADVERTISEMENT



Appendix D

INFORMATION SHEET

Psychology department
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Greetings,

My name is Lesedi Mosime, and I am a Masters student in Community-based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and my research project is titled *Decolonizing African Childhood Studies: A Narrative Exploration of Young Adults' Retrospective Experiences of Imbeleko* and is being conducted under the supervision of Professor Peace Kiguwa.

What is this study about?

This study is centred on decolonizing African Childhood Studies, specifically focusing on young adults' retrospective experiences of *Imbeleko*. Studies on African childhoods tend to be undertaken and produced by adults – often non-Africans – who attempt to understand African childhoods using Western or Eurocentric lenses. Here, research is usually undertaken *on* and *about* people who have lived African childhoods, but not *with* them. Notably, where African children are concerned, hegemonic narratives of 'deficient' African childhoods abound, whereby the lives of African children are presented as being characterised solely by lack and victimhood. This study therefore seeks to cause a detour from these narratives that view African childhood as deficient and solely characterized by victimhood and instead, recognise that more regions of African childhood, happy and hope-giving ones exist and are worth considering. *Imbeleko* is a family celebration and a token of thanksgiving which is performed to welcome a child to not only the living members of their family but to their ancestors as well and is celebrated with joy, dancing and singing. Experiencing *Imbeleko* is a common reality for some children in South Africa, which serves to re-affirm their position in their families and foster a sense of belonging within their families and communities. This study

is therefore interested in gaining insight into young adults' (who underwent Imbeleko in their childhood, before age 13) attitudes and perceptions about the practice of *Imbeleko* and their retrospective experiences thereof. This study also seeks to understand the value that young adults attach to *Imbeleko* and the perceived importance and significance thereof, of this ritualistic practice generally and in their own lives. This study centres Black lives and aims to amplify the voices of people who have historically been written out of stories about their own lives.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

Should you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to share your experiences about your *Imbeleko* through a semi-structured interview of approximately one hour which will take place on the University of Witwatersrand campus at Emthonjeni Centre (for participants who already have access to the Wits campus), or online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom in the second half of 2023 (details will be communicated in due time). Data costs will be covered for online participation.

What are the benefits of this research?

Because participation in this research is purely voluntary, there is no reward for participating in this study, nor is there a penalty for not participating. Participation in this study is purely out of your own interest in the research and the research topic. Once the research has been completed, the researcher will contact you and ask if you would like to receive a copy of the research report, which will then be provided to you. The only presented personal benefit of this research is thus the expansion of knowledge on the topic at hand and brief experience in research participation. By participating in this study, you will be giving voice to African narratives that are often written out of literature. Notably, no data costs will be incurred for online interviews as data bundles will be provided for all online participants.

Would my participation in this research be kept confidential?

The researcher will take strict precautions to safeguard your personal information throughout the study. All the raw data will be kept in the researchers' password-protected laptop and in the case that potential participants choose the option of participating anonymously, pseudonyms will be utilised in research reporting. Once the study is complete, your tape-recorded information will be stored for a further 5 years and after this period, will be destroyed. Notably, the research report will be hosted on the Wits Institutional Repository on DSpace

(WIReDSpace) which is an electronic database which houses all theses and dissertations submitted to the university and will be accessible to all. While this research will be used for educational purposes, there is a chance that this work might be published in an academic journal and presented at a conference, however, you will not be identifiable through the study.

What are the risks of this research?

It is in the best interest of the researcher that the interview and this research will not pose any risks for any participant. Neither is it in the interest of the researcher to violate any ethical code or local law; however, if you feel that you have any concerns regarding the contents of this research or if you require any additional information, please contact the researcher or research supervisor at the email addresses provided below so that we can address your concerns. Although the predicted risks for participating in this study are close to none, should you end up being negatively affected from your participation in this research, the researcher will provide a referral list with free counselling services for opportunities to seek counselling or psychological support. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume at another time.

Do I have to participate fully in this research or can I stop participating at any point?

All participants have the option to withdraw their participation in this research at any point , without facing any consequences. Should a participant wish to withdraw, please kindly inform the researcher of this decision in due time.

Contact details

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the study, please contact the:

Researcher: Lesedi Mosime on **079 341 4933** OR **Email** at **2111347@students.wits.ac.za**

Research Supervisor: Prof Peace Kiguwa on **+27 11 717 4537** OR **Email: Peace.Kiguwa@wits.ac.za**

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone **+27(0) 11 717 1408** OR **Email** at **hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za**

L. Mosime

Appendix E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Psychology department

School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Title of Research	Decolonizing African Childhood Studies: A Narrative Exploration of Young Adults' Retrospective Experiences of *Imbeleko*
Researcher's Name	Otsile Lesedi Mosime

(Please only fill this form in once you have read and understood the information sheet)

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will entail. I agree to the following:

☐ The purpose of the research has been described to me in a language that I understand.

☐ I freely and voluntarily agree to participate.

☐ My questions about the study have been answered.

☐ I understand that my identity will not be compromised and that I may participate anonymously.

☐ I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in their research report.

☐ I agree to participation in a one-on-one interview with the researcher.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw from participating in this study at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant's Name (optional)	
Participant's signature	
Date	

PERMISSION TO AUDIO-RECORD

I consent to the one-on-one interview with the researcher being audio-recorded. I understand that the interview will be recorded and that the researcher will take strict precautions to safeguard my personal information throughout the study.

Participant's Signature _____

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone **+27(0) 11 717 1408** OR **Email** at **hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za**

Should you feel that not all above mentioned criteria was met or you need any clarity regarding this research, please contact the researcher using the details provided below.

If you have any further inquiries or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the research, please contact the research supervisor using the details provided below.

Researchers Name	Otsile Lesedi Mosime
Cell phone number	079 341 4933
Email address	**2111347@students.wits.ac.za**
Research Supervisors Name	Prof. Peace Kiguwa

Telephone number	+27 11 717 4537
Email address	**Peace.Kiguwa@wits.ac.za**

Appendix F

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Psychology department

School of Human & Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, your name and age and your place of origin?
2. Are you of Xhosa or Zulu origin?
3. How old were you when the *Imbeleko* ceremony was performed for you?
4. If you can recall, what was the procedure of your *Imbeleko*? What are some of the events that took place during that day?
5. When you think back to the day of your *Imbeleko*, what feelings and memories are elicited?
6. What did the experience of undergoing *Imbeleko* mean for you?
7. Generally speaking, what is the importance and significance of *Imbeleko* in your culture?
8. What is the significance and importance of *Imbeleko* in your own life?
9. Do you think *Imbeleko* is a necessary practice?
10. What do you think might happen if one does not perform *Imbeleko*?

Appendix G

RESOURCE LIST

Below is a list of where free counselling can be accessed.

Name: SADAG

Contact Number: 011 234 4837

24hr Helpline: 0800 456 789

For counselling queries e-mail: zane@sadag.org

Name: Lifeline

24 Hour counselling line

Contact Number: 011 422 4242 OR 0861 322 322

Email: lifelineoffice@gmail.com

For WITS Students:

Name: Counselling & Careers Development Unit

Wits University

Contact Number: Tel: 0117179140

Email: info.ccdu@wits.ac.za

Web: www.wits.ac.za/ccdu/