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Punctuated Lives:

The (Un)Making of Thwalwa'ed Subjects in Engcobo, South Africa.



Thatshisiwe Ndlovu

A thesis submitted to the faculty of humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

August 2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the women in my life my grandmother (umaNzinda, Bhebhe, umama), my mother Thandekile Moyo and my mamncanes. I salute you!!!

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university

Signature: *Tndlovu* Thatshisiwe Ndlovu.

Date. : 08 August 2022

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ABSTRACT

This study is about a particular group of women who were married through a specific cultural practice commonly known as ukuthwala (bride abduction) in South Africa, and it details the lives and experiences of these women. The study examines the technologies and mechanisms that sustain this cultural practice, and raises questions on who sanctions this cultural practice, how it is sustained and why. While arguing that ukuthwala is a violent cultural practice, it also uncovers women's responses to this practice in their everyday lives. The thesis departs from the mainstream arguments on ukuthwala that focus on describing and detailing its scandalous nature by bringing into sharp focus discussions of the women's own experiences and representations of this practice as one of the entry points in revealing the complex multiplicity of dynamics at play that are often missed in mainstream studies. While acknowledging that women have been silenced through and by this practice, the thesis brings women's voices to the centre of its discussions and to knowledge production about the practice. It does so by prioritising the experiences of ukuthwalwa (those being abducted). Drawing on ethnographic research, including the life histories of thwalwa'ed women based on their own narration of their experiences, I ask how ukuthwala is perceived and experienced by these women and what the impact of dominant ideas is on women's experiences of ukuthwalwa. I explore two related phenomena. Firstly, the complexities that pervade thwalwa'ed women's lived lives, how these women live through ukuthwalwa, including ways that they find to resist, negotiate or adapt to their subjectivation. Secondly, the entities and technologies that ensure the continued existence of this practice, in particular, the ways in which culture works to enforce patriarchy through sanctioned forms of violence. The findings indicate that a thwala'ed subject is created through complex operations of violent power relations and within a framework of pain and suffering. I argue that understanding this complexity requires attention to how culture works in the interests of patriarchy as an ideological tool to impose a script on the lives of women such that they must come to terms with a new self – a thwalwa'ed self that struggles with itself. In that vein, I employ the notion of embodiment as the condition of "being in the world" (Csordas,1994) to uncover how the violence of ukuthwala, and the consequent pain and suffering are lived and embodied. Additionally, through the examination of the everyday tactics that these women utilise to navigate their lives, I argue that thwalwa'ed women are neither victims nor are they victors. I try to understand the women's relationship to their constrained agency through the conceptual lens of 'shifting vulnerabilities' where women find ways of using their vulnerabilities to exercise their power in small acts in their everyday lives that sometimes exhibit resistance. Mostly, though, these acts exist within the accepted norms and expectations of the system that is designed to keep them in positions of subordination. In this way, I offer a reading of ukuthwalwa as one of a process of subjectivation (after Foucault) in which those on whom violence is enacted, act in their own interests, without accepting that which is imposed on them, even if only in small and hidden ways, reclaiming their own power to shape their subjectivities, albeit often without contesting or changing the system that oppresses them in its entirety.

Key words: subjectivities, patriarchy, patriarchal violence ,thwalwa'ed woman, ukuthwala, violence, ukuthwalwa

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CHAPTER 1

Ukuthwala: A culture, tradition, or terrorising machinery?

1.1. Introduction

> This thing is not right at all, what kind of culture is that? What is that, what exactly is that? That thing is not right. This is slavery, it's like you are a slave if you are in this thing. It's been years and years since I got married but I just don't understand this. Do you understand it, you are educated isn't it? Help me understand. What is this? Why do people do this to other people? I do not know why it was done, these are old things for old people, not us and no one can understand why it is done. It confuses me. Depression starts like this, let me tell you, such things cause depression. Even if you ask the owners of this thing, they won't even explain properly what it is and why they keep doing it. They can't tell you that, right we are doing this for this reason. Or this is what we want. These old things for old people are difficult. …. this must be changed *mtakwethu*[1]. You see we are the youth that needs explanations, after explanations we want to understand why something is done, why we are forced to do it. It's not understandable, even if you ask yourself, but still, we have to follow traditions and we have to respect traditions and things that our forefathers did, we just have to do it. … you have to respect your elders, your husband and your in-laws. (Interview, Noplatana[2], 31 July 2018)

Noplatana's narrative mirrors many of my interactions I had in Engcobo during my fieldwork. Her narrative is a cry or call for an understanding of the effects of the custom of ukuthwala. Ukuthwala is a custom commonly translated to a form of 'abduction marriage' predominantly practised in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal provinces of South Africa. She pushes forward for an understanding of what ukuthwala is from the experiencing subject's perspective, what I and the women in this study refer to as ukuthwalwa. To foreground women's experiences of the practice commonly known as ukuthwala, I adopted the use of the

[1] Communicative and interactive word for 'loved one'.

[2] Noplatana was a very beautiful young woman. She and her husband were renting a hut in a homestead because his home was about 100km away. Her husband was working as a security guard for one of the spaza shops owned by a Pakistani national. Due to the xenophobic attacks that had gripped the area in the past, her husband was able to secure work as a security guard for the foreign nationals. Noplatana dropped out of tertiary education to settle into married life.

term ukuthwalwa instead - a term that women in this study used to describe their own understanding and experience of the practice. While ukuthwala is a custom practised, ukuthwal***w***a is the experience of ukuthwala by the affected subject. The idea of ukuthwalwa brings in the women's perspective and it departs from the common usage of ukuthwala which is literally translated to mean 'abduction'. Ukuthwala describes the physical event of abduction which is male – centric and positions the women as the site where the abduction takes place. In this case, women become just the bodies of evidence, their voices silenced. By using the term ukuthwalwa, thwalwa'ed[3] women are enabled to own and narrate their own subjective experiences which move beyond the physical abduction as a once-off event and persist in their everyday lives well beyond the initial act of violence. In this thesis, then, the use of ukuthwala refers to the machinery that is deployed to produce the docile thwalwa'ed subject and the use of ukuthwalwa accounts for the subjective experiences as presented by the subjects of ukuthwala.

Noplatana took the opportunity granted through the interview to speak out and to break through the barriers of the silenced and misrepresented woman and explicitly state what the custom of ukuthwala did to her and how she felt about it. In the heat of the moment, she bursts, yearning for her voice to be heard and reaching out to her emotions, her pain, her suffering and expressing herself as someone yearning to be heard, someone crying for a platform to explain what ukuthwala does to life, to the body and to emotional wellbeing. In that moment she re-lives the pain and for a moment loses herself. But then, she remembers who she is, the

[3] I coined the term thwalwa'ed to refer to *abathwelweyo*, women who were/ are married through the cultural practice of ukuthwala. Furthermore, and with the absence of a Xhosa word that refers to those who are vulnerable to being thwalwa'ed and those who are not as vulnerable. I coined and used thwal'able to refer to those who are susceptible to ukuthwala and unthwal'able to refer to those who are not (see page 55). By using these terms, I do not suggest that the unthwal'able are not affected by the violence of patriarchy and its technologies. I am aware that regardless of whether women experience ukuthwala or not, they live under constant fear and threat of violence. However, these terms are used to differentiate and pinpoint

voiceless, the silenced, the traumatised - the woman - and she suddenly realises the weight of what she has just expressed and coils back into her shell. She realises she has just done the unthinkable. She just challenged tradition[4] and culture[5] and disrespected the elders. She has crossed a line and then the load of what she says becomes heavy for herself, she is still that oppressed person, she baulks at the weight of what she has just expressed. She then throws her agency back to me and challenges me to explain what ukuthwala is and why it is still practised. In a way, she pleads with me to tell 'them' what the 'real' ukuthwala is and what it does to one's life. As if to say, 'if anything happens, I am not the one who said it, can you talk on my behalf?' Someone must define her and for her, someone 'educated', like me. Like many other accounts in this study, Noplatana's narrative depicts the unrelenting deployment of patriarchal terror through ukuthwala. Hers is a violation that was unspoken, it is a case of someone silenced by the devastating everyday life of a thwalwa'ed woman. She narrated a tragic end to her life as she knew and imagined it when she was abducted, her subsequent dropping out of school and the "loss of her life". A narrative of trauma, suffering and confusion from her ukuthwalwa experience emerges as reflected by a graphic memory of the sight and feeling of events that unfolded during the ukuthwala process.

But that wasn't all. Noplatana talked of the ways in which she tried to subvert her situation, how she thought of leaving her husband, how she took contraceptives secretly to control her reproductive capacities and how she wished to go back to school. I couldn't get her story out of my mind, especially how her trauma was inscribed in her subjectivity. But she made a crucial point that drew my analytic attention to the depth of multi-layered and complex

[4] 'Tradition' in this thesis is used to denote practices passed down from earlier generations to present generations that are accepted as part of the prevailing culture and ways of life of a community.

[5] The word culture features significantly throughout this thesis, my use of the word culture borrows from Sewell (1999:39)'s definition of culture as a "concrete and bounded world of beliefs and practices" where he elaborates that culture is "learned behaviour", that "consists of a body of beliefs, practices, customs, habits, myths passed from one generation to the next" (Sewell, 1999: 39 - 46).

experiences of ukuthwalwa - she wanted her viewpoint on ukuthwala known, she wanted ukuthwala defined through her lens and she wanted someone to tell her story.

This thesis is an unfolding analysis of the complex subject of the effects of ukuthwala and how ukuthwala, through the deployment of patriarchal violence, creates a subject that embodies trauma and suffering. It is an exploration of the lived experiences of abathwalwayo women and how the practice of ukuthwala shapes these women's subjectivities. The thesis is premised on the everyday as a productive frame and focused lens through which to grasp the complex dynamics at play in the multiplicity of abathwalwayo's narratives about their experiences of ukuthwalwa.

1.1.The Focal Concern

This thesis addresses the present dearth of research on the lived experiences of the cultural practice of ukuthwala as experienced by women in South Africa by exploring the life worlds of women who were married through the ukuthwala practice. Through narrative inquiry and telling their stories, I endeavour to grasp the meanings attached to their fractured lives and explore the formation of subjectivities to deepen our understanding of the contradictions and complexities of ukuthwala. The study examines how particular subjectivities are formed through zoning in on the thwalwa'ed - not as objects but subjects and the main participants of this study. This thesis highlights the endurance and pervasiveness of the pain and suffering of ukuthwalwa, I ask what kind of subjectivities are formed, what modes of coping do the women adopt, and what options they have. I also explore the survival mechanisms of thwalwa'ed women. This thesis highlights the endurance and pervasiveness of the pain and suffering of ukuthwalwa.

From an empirical grounding in the Engcobo area, the thesis explores two related phenomena - how women here live through the violence of the ukuthwala custom and the

complexities that suffuse their lives, and secondly, the entities and technologies[6] that ensure the continuous practice and existence of this custom. Through the examination of the everyday survival tactics that these women utilised, this research explores the contradictions and complexities of violence in their lives and how these effects are mediated through culture, gender, and experience.

The thesis also considers the ways in which the custom is defended, who defends it and why. I examine the reasons for the continuation of the cultural practice of ukuthwala and what strategies different groups use to define and defend it as an important cultural practice.

Tracing the women's lived experiences of ukuthwalwa, the thesis highlights the uneasy relationship between culture and violence. It also contributes to the understanding of how practices embedded in this custom, even if contested, significantly affect women's lives. As its mainstay, the research focuses on the ways in which the thwalwa'ed negotiate, appropriate, accommodate and resist this violent custom. I highlight that ukuthwalwa is an embodied human experience, it is seen in its lived, context specific manifestations and as a phenomenon with meaning(s) for those living through it. I also demonstrate how women's bodies are sites of contestations over culture, their bodies becoming sites of struggle as they are forced to conform to cultural norms and values. Women, although mostly silenced by the act of ukuthwala, often transform their lived and embodied pain and suffering into forms of counter discourse and experiences from which they struggle to shift their own vulnerabilities and recreate their subjectivities.

1.2.Locating Engcobo, the physical and cultural space

[6] The word 'technology' is being used in its theoretical and practical sense.

Having presented the narrative above, let me now turn to situating the Engcobo where Noplatana and other women in this study's lives take a situated form. This is the place that the women in this thesis consider as their home but also the place where a "custom of darkness" is allowed to prevail. I cannot begin to write or even talk about ukuthwala and ukuthwalwa in Engcobo without highlighting that it is a place where the landmark case ruling (Jezile v S and Others)[7] took place. This case attracted massive media and civil society attention. The events of the case begin in December 2009 or early January 2010[8] when a 28-year-old by the name Nvumeleni Jezile left his residence in Cape Town for his rural home (Engcobo) to find himself a wife (young girl to marry) through the custom of ukuthwala. Upon his arrival in Engcobo, he identified a 14-year-old girl who I call Zimkhitha (one who has dignity), who was at the time in her primary schooling (Grade 7), as his potential wife. Lobola negotiations were initiated and concluded within a day. At the conclusion of those Zimkitha was then taken to Jezile's homestead to start a life as his wife. As per custom, while there she was forced to undergo traditional ceremonies that initiated her to wifehood and she became Jezile's wife according to customary law. Jezile paid Zimkhitha's family (her grandmother and uncles) lobola to the amount of R8000 (about 565 USD). While staying at Jezile's home, she found ways of escaping several times all of which were unsuccessful. Her mother tried to intervene on her behalf, but she testified that she was afraid of her brothers (Zimkhitha's uncles) who were central in the transactions. However, noting her child's distress, she begged her not to commit suicide.

She was subsequently required to accompany Jezile back to Cape Town a few days after she was thwalwa'ed. When they got to Cape Town, she was raped several times where the first encounter was when Jezile's brother helped to hold her down. While in Cape Town, she was kept prisoner by Jezile, his sister and his brother where she was physically and sexually

[7] The Jezile story / case is adapted from Jezile v S and Others [2015] ZAWCHC 31; 2015 (2) SACR 452 (WCC); 2016 (2) SA 62 (WCC) (as an amicus curiae)
[8] The exact date is unknown as conflicting statements were given.

assaulted on several occasions leaving her badly injured. Not long after her arrival in Cape Town she reported the matter to the police. What is presented here is the summary of the events surrounding the Jezile case, and the incidents that are very closely related to what happened to the women in this thesis.

This is a rare instance where an un ukuthwala case makes it to court, where a woman successfully laid criminal charges. This incident became a point of public debate and evoked much contentions among those who rebuked the prosecution and outcome of the case and those who often secretly applauded the courts for its decision. At that point the use of the law and rights became an alternative discourse where women and girls sometimes used it to evade ukuthwalwa or its technologies.

Important to note, however, are Jezile's perceptions of the whole saga. Jezile believed that his 'wife' had willingly accompanied him to Cape Town although she had tried to escape several times within a week and that she consented to having sex with him on multiple occasions. He told the court that they "were getting along very well", which leaves one with questions about how this was possible given the fact of rape, physical assault, and captivity. He also believed that Zimkhitha only became "*very cheeky and she was not respectful"* after *"external intervention*" (when she received a call from her mother). Responding to Zimkhitha's 'cheekiness' he claims to have "lost control" and physically assaulted Zimkhitha several times. He was adamant that Zimkhitha had to be blamed for her wayward behaviour which resulted in the physical assault. He was responsible for disciplining her as her husband. He also submitted to the court that Zimkhitha was taking calls from her mother behind his back – calls which made her defiant and disrespectful. According to Jezile, Zimkhitha knew that in their culture a wife must be submissive to her husband. In his testimony in court, he said, "I'm deeply hurt, because… I don't know what I am going to do about this, because now even what has happened between the two of us, we didn't just do it on our own or elope and go and get

married, we involved the elders, and this is a traditional wedding" *(*Jezile v. S and Others, 2015). He elaborated that because he paid lobola, it meant that she had to do as she was told, she was his subordinate and she had to listen to him as his wife. Responding to questions on what Zimkhitha running away meant to him, he indicated that it did not bother him because "*This is a normal thing, always when a makoti* (daughter in law*) is a newlywed, normally she does do those things of running away and coming back, running away and they bring her back, but when the time goes on, she settles down and stays…"(*Jezile v. S and Others, 2015). Jezile's sister who assumed the position of guarding Zimkhitha in Cape Town testified that she didn't see anything wrong, she was "amazed" by Zimkhitha's allegations. She testified that Zimkhitha did not want to get married because "she just wanted to have a good time and fun as a single woman". Jezile told the court that he had followed the correct procedures to get a wife in accordance with his culture and tradition. Concluding his testimony, Jezile stated:

> …What I wanted from them, that of my heart is to get a wife and then to use the protocol, to do the right thing, involve the elderly people so that I can get a wife that I can stay with, not at all there to play … (indistinct) to. And I wanted to follow the tradition and do the right things and follow my fathers and my forefathers, to do things according to our tradition. (Jezile v. The State and Others, (2015)

The high court later charged Jezile with Charges on human trafficking, rape, assault, and common assault and sentenced him to twenty-two years in prison.

I bring up the Jezile case as a vignette or scene to convey that Engcobo and this case is just one example of incidents that create immense consternation, making such communities hostile and unpredictable living spaces for women. Rather than being an isolated case, Jezile's case represents numerous reported and unreported cases of ukuthwala that have taken place among the isiXhosa speaking people in the Eastern Cape Province recently. Furthermore, I observed that people in this area subscribe fiercely to traditions and predominantly live under the authority of traditional leaders. Like most parts of South Africa, this area is characterised

by a "stubborn persistence of patriarchy"[9] (cf. Hassim, 2009; Walker, 1990; Albertyn, 2003,2009; Gqola, 2007, 2021).

1.2.1. The Setting and Background

Engcobo is situated in Mthatha in the western part of the former Bantustan of Transkei and this area falls within South Africa's Eastern Cape Province, a predominantly rural area. It is known for grinding poverty that was structurally inherited from colonial and apartheid era (Crais, 2011). Engcobo is economically depressed, and it currently fails to create jobs and revenues as such, most of its economically active population (including men and youths) are either unemployed or migrate to other provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape etc. According to Smit, (2017) the population is chronologically young, and the majority were born since the transition to a constitutional democracy that protects individual's human rights[10]. However, they still live through the legal – cultural controversy surrounding some cultural practices. Like Noplatana above they exist within the contentious relationship between the right to practise cultural customs as opposed to the individual's human rights.

Generally, contemporary South African women are facing a complex, multi - layered relentless oppressive systems and violence, it is not a coincidence that South African women, who, on paper are empowered and have won battles live in constant fear, violence (Gqola, 2016) and imminent death at the hands of patriarchal violence. Even though the official end of apartheid in 1994 ushered in a new unifying political and legislative system in South Africa, based on constitutional democracy, a culture of patriarchal violence and fear has crippled the constitutional gains. Several policies and programmes hinging on rights-based frameworks

[9] Gumede v President of the RSA 2009 3 BCLR 243 (CC); 2009 3 SA 152 (CC) para 1. The case concerned a claim of unfair gender and race discrimination in relation to women who are married under customary law as codified in KwaZulu-Natal.

[10] As protected by the new Constitution, which was approved in 1996

were designed to improve the lives of the formerly marginalised and some to specifically redress gender imbalances. This study acknowledges the reality that the changes ushered in by the post-apartheid dispensation have transformed and improved the lives of many South Africans over the last almost three decades. However, despite these improvements, various forms of structural violence, gender discrimination and sexual violence persist in ways that cannot be understated. The persistence of gender discrimination presents South Africa's interesting story of a complex and contradictory constitutional dispensation which has not only provoked fierce contestations from a wide spectrum of the South African society but has informed some academic analyses that argue that despite its celebration it has been a "great leap sideways" (Bentley and Brookes, 2005:4). In the words of Shireen Hassim, "[b]beneath the heroic façade of the Constitution, it seemed a vicious cocktail of violence, sexism and hatred brewed" (Hassim, 2009).

It is within this context that certain cultural practices, such as forced marriages, child marriages, ukuthwala and virginity testing, whose elements are considered unconstitutional or illegal, are still practised. Ukuthwala is one of the customs that is still practised in ways that push to visibility the contradictions and paradoxes of the much-celebrated South African constitution and rights-based frameworks and a few pertinent cleavages hidden therein in redressing gender inequality in ways that call for greater scholarly attention.

1.2.2. Historical Background

The entire Eastern Cape region has a complex history of missionary proselytisation, violent colonial conquest, apartheid, and political transformations. Colonisation of the region holds a particular importance because it came with the distortion of customs (Thornberry, 2019). However, in as much as this region's colonial conquest and subsequent rule was crushingly violent, "some pre-colonial social structures, practices and customs remained

intact." In fact, I table that reverence to culture and tradition were central to resistance to colonisation and incorporation to the colonial empire (Ndlovu, 2017). Take the famous example of Sarah Baartman, a Khoisan woman whose experience as a black woman was marked by her objectification by the colonialists. Regina Andrea Bernard (2009) relates how Baartman was lured to England with a promise of returning home with a fortune, concealed to her was that instead she would be forced to parade her body as a freak of nature where "her buttocks and the shape of her vagina indicated to Victorian men and women that a 'freak' was in their midst" (Bernard, 2009: 61). This was typical of how female bodies were seen through the colonial/imperial lens. This story about Sarah Baartman is used in this thesis as a shorthand to demonstrate how women's bodies were violated during the colonial era in the Eastern Cape Province and how that violation birthed a system that would harm women even further. Thornberry contends that although the imperial project saw black Africans of different cultural backgrounds incorporated into the colonial empire, "'Xhosaland' was also home to staunch defenders of 'customary' political authority as well as harsh critics of the colonial regime" (Thornberry, 2019).

As such, here I present that culture and tradition were and are thus largely contested on and over women's bodies where women's bodies become the sites of struggle. In most ukuthwala cases, such as the two cases presented above, the female body becomes the "terrain where social truths are forged and social contradictions played out, as well as the locus of personal resistance, activity, and struggle" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987: 16).

This is the experience that I and the women in this study call ukuthwalwa. In this thesis, I show how through various articulations, the women translate the meanings of the effects of ukuthwalwa inscribed on their bodies. The lives and stories of the women of Engcobo detailed in the thesis reveal that the female body has been battered, shamed, and violated in multiple

ways. I argue that it has thus become a repository and an exhibition of violence. At the same time, however, I also show how women find ways of coping, resisting and sometimes escaping. Mostly, though, they find ways within the dominant culture to survive and make their experiences more bearable for themselves.

This is the area where Jezile (the accused in the landmark case of ukuthwala) returned from Philippi, a township in Cape Town in December 2010, to find himself a wife according to the ukuthwala custom. Engcobo and ukuthwala gained immense visibility and prominence in South Africa and perhaps beyond through numerous media reports, documentaries and the landmark case ruling of Jezile versus the State[11]. Concurrently, Engcobo and the custom of ukuthwala attracted a diverse range of humanitarian and state initiatives all seeking to conscientise people on the detriments of ukuthwala, a custom perceived by some as a "custom of darkness". Given its association with the landmark case ruling and that ukuthwala is still practised in the area, Engcobo presents a potentially interesting case for understanding the custom of ukuthwala in ways that are not detached from the concrete and specific experiences of women. This study explores the everyday lives of women in the same space and place. Against the backdrop of the landmark case ruling which led to contradictions, tensions, and shifts in the discourse surrounding the ukuthwala practice, this study is an ethnographic study about a place and about the lives of individuals (women) living within that space.

1.3. The Genesis of an Idea

Writing on rape and how it has historically been set up as a language or an expression of patriarchal violence, Pumla Gqola, (2015:71) asks, "What happens to the collective trauma

[11] An illustration of media reports ``Special Assignment looks at ukuthwala" Media Update, February 2011. Khumalo (2009) "Poverty in South Africa: Three Cows and a forced Marriage, Dec 10. Spotlight on ukuthwalwa, 3 September 2018, eNCA.

of ukuthwalwa…?" as an enquiry into and concern about what happens to the many of women who are raped under the pretext of following traditions and customs and then ignored and left to deal with the trauma. Gqola (2015: 71) goes on to say that "most of these women are alive today" and that "the usual explanations of this as state-sponsored, Black on Black violence are unhelpful because they do not tell us how to deal with that collective traumatisation" (ibid.) because "the grip of violence is tightening around our collective necks" (Gqola, 2015:71 and we are losing the battle. Here, Gqola emphasises the collective impact of the ukuthwala kind of violence. While this study does not focus on the collective impacts and traumatisation, Gqola's concerns that these women are alive today and what happens to them should be investigated is the focus of this study.

There is an alarming gap in women's studies in South Africa as it neglects to centre the experiences and voices of African women within its analysis. Furthermore, even up until now, very few women-centered perspectives that are generated by African women scholars are being fore-fronted in scholarship. This project is not a step in the direction of mainstreaming African women's experiences, but I most importantly also argue that the works need to be informed by the fact that in neglecting the women's voices we are in fact eroding the potential to further expand our theoretical frameworks to know our worlds, and therefore, to know ourselves (as African women) even better. By engaging the voices, ideas and experiences that are often obscured by more orthodox approaches, this work contributes towards fundamental shifts in how we generate knowledge about those who have been muted and overlooked. African women scholars, like Pumla Gqola and Ntabiseng Motsemme, push us to foreground our studies outside the dominant discourses and work with the marginalised groups like thwalwa'ed women in generating alternative epistemologies which can provide what can be considered "views from the cracks", "a third eye view", "post-rationalist epistemologies"

(Alzundua in Levine, 2005: 173) and "endarkened epistemologies" (Dillard, 2008). These have the potential to displace official conceptual frameworks. I am specifically referring to those women centred approaches as foregrounded by Motsemme (2011) which recognise the embodied as also a legitimate site of knowledge construction, and which demand us to have a more inclusive and nuanced vision of theory and reality. Such theoretical ruptures and contributions are important in challenging the usually taken for granted assumptions regarding African women's lives and their experiences. Thus, Gqola and Motsemme among other African scholars have felt compelled and urge us to construct alternative epistemologies and methodologies that resonate with marginalised lived and embodied experiences.

Pumla Gqola's ground-breaking book titled *'Rape: A South African Nightmare'* gives an in-depth analysis of a nightmare that speaks to a very particular form of gender-based violence - rape from the unconscious. She highlights how women in South Africa live within the terror of rape that permeates and shreds the very core of society. In what she calls a rape culture, Gqola, from an explicitly feminist critical lens and weaved with an intersectionality thread, explains the violence on women and in particular rape as a mechanism that keeps social structures intact. In part, unequivocally stating that "rape [is]… a language" Gqola says, "I make the assertion that rape is not a moment but a language...I untangle and decipher the knots, and codes of this language, to surface its structure, underline its histories, understand its rules" (Gqola, 2015: 22).

Gqola's book is also an illustration of an alternative approach to writing and thinking about black women in Africa. Elsewhere, she writes:

> I will not be policed and corralled to present in a particular way. I will not be a 'boring' academic who is restrained to think and write in one way. I too will write what I like... I will talk about the condition of black women even if you would prefer not to hear me. Black women are complex and represent in more ways than you would like. Your envy

> is misplaced. Work on yourself and don't worry about me. Deal with it. *Ndiqondisise! [Recognise me!].* (Gqola, 2013: 54)

The book centres sexual violence as experienced by women in the ordinariness of life. Gqola's style of writing influenced an exponential growth in the scholarship that departs from the common ways of black women's representations to a more contextual and nuanced writing that is attentive to the micro levels of people's lives. Gqola's writing focuses on an interiority that invites her readers to rethink the political and social. On the same note, Nthabiseng Motsemme's works foreground the idea of writing about life as it is lived and not imagined. In her seminal work, "*The Mute Always Speak: On Women's Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission",* Motsemme, (2004: 909) is very influential in expanding our conceptual tools to understand that "silences reveal the invisible but agentic work of the imagination to reconfigure our social worlds". Motsemme argues that the space for imagination as a generator allows for the "invention of the self [that] can go beyond the limits of available oppressive representations" (Motsemme, 2004). Gqola's and Motsemme's works foreground the idea that the black feminist imagination is not a "forced construction of a monolithic category imposed externally" (Boyce 1995: 1); rather it is a determination to carve our own theoretical spaces based on the knowledge that we construct from what we have witnessed and experienced in our communities. It works to deconstruct dominant perspectives on what constitutes our subjectivities, selfhood, womanhood, bodies, agency etc.

The point in this thesis is not to claim to speak on behalf of the women or men. At the same time, I do not intend to approach this study from a distance, ignoring the harsh realities of people's lives, thereby muting the experiences of my research participants. It is also significant that right from the onset, I was seen and taken in by the women I sought to study as someone who could understand their lives and tell their stories from a relationship of intimacy as another black woman, but one with greater privilege and therefore agency. As reflected in

the opening quote and in many of the other interviews I conducted, I was called ‘mtakwethu’, meaning ‘loved one’, suggesting an assumed closeness that is not usual as a form of address for someone not well known by the other. This made me feel a profound sense of responsibility in undertaking this project, one that became much more defined as I got further into the project.

The question that I often get asked is, ‘why should one write about the experience of ukuthwala?’ What is at stake here are the struggles between ‘the powerful and ‘the powerless’. This work begins to deconstruct the insidious and pervasive effects of the mechanisms of violence, underscoring how it works at the level of lived experience, but, more importantly, allowing for an understanding of patriarchal violence that is shaped by the stories of those considered to be powerless in relation to it. As such, it allows us to make sense of how a practice that is condemned in law for its violence against women continues to define how a large number of African women can live today, their choices limited and their subjectivities constituted through extreme suffering and pain.

1.4. Overview of Chapters

The chapters presented here underscore two central themes of this thesis: an analysis of the mechanisms that allow for continuities of ukuthwala and the subjectivities that are produced in the process. The thesis draws on various life history narratives that track the lives of women through their ukuthwalwa journeys. I argue that thwalwa’ed women’s lives are fractured and fragmented by the ukuthwala practice. My analysis of the narratives throughout this thesis centres on the thwalwa’ed women’s lives and their bodies as an archive for tracking the effects of ukuthwala and I look at how ukuthwalwa creates an embodied subject that somehow within strenuous conditions of suffering manages to disrupt the relations of superiority and inferiority that are established through ukuthwala. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the methodology employed for my research. In this chapter I explore through a

feminist lens the two most important relational concepts for this study, ukuthwala and ukuthwalwa. Through them and while informed by the narratives of thwalwa'ed women, I review their relations to concepts of patriarchy, patriarchal violence, cultural violence, power, embodiment, subject and subjectivity, suffering, agency, shifting vulnerabilities and performativity. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for my research as well as the description of my research process. The primary method of enquiry for this study was the narrative inquiry which allowed me to grasp the meanings attached to the stories and lives of the women. In this thesis, thwalwa'ed women's narratives are utilised as a vantage point for unearthing what has been shrouded in legal, media, sociological and humanitarian analysis. I consider these narratives as rich archives that speak to constructed identities and personal narratives of fear, trauma, and violence. Also, I foreground how fear is a way of life for thwalwa'ed women and how Engcobo is a space where fear is manufactured and distributed and how it became my way of life while I was conducting my field work. The next chapter demonstrates how ukuthwala as a custom is situated in a complex spectrum of practices and beliefs. In that way, I discuss the technologies of ukuthwala and argue that through the deployment of its overarching tool of patriarchal violence ukuthwala produces a tragic subject. I contend that ukuthwala thrives through invisibility and the normalisation of violence on women's bodies. In chapter 5, I continue to examine the tragic subject produced by the technologies of ukuthwala, I advance the idea that ukuthwala is not a once off event, rather it is lived and embodied throughout one's entire existence. This chapter contends with the pain produced by the unfettered and unrelenting violence deployed through ukuthwala produces a traumatised thwalwa'ed subject. Following this, in Chapter 6, I ask what alternatives thwalwa'ed women have, I complicate the issue of agency while arguing that a bigger story can be told about the strategies that women employ to survive, negotiate, and resist normalised technologies of male dominance - the ukuthwala custom. I examine the ways in which women respond to power and domination,

arguing that women resort to subtle ways of resistance while in a permanent state of vulnerability. I argue that thwalwa'ed women's subjectivities are dominated by the systematic and violent use of power that results in the intensification of subjection. However, women find ways in which to reconstruct and reclaim their subjectivities. Chapter 7 concludes this thesis by highlighting the main insights and identifying more areas of interrogation in further research.

CHAPTER 2

A Review of Literature and Highlights from a 'Cocktail' of Conceptual Framing

2. Introduction

Central to my investigation and to this thesis are the notions of ukuthwalwa and ukuthwala which when conceived through a feminist lens and a methodology of narrative inquiry require a closer usage of the following concepts: patriarchy, patriarchal violence, agency, subject and subjectivity, resistance, suffering, vulnerability, culture, and tradition, the everyday and the everyday practices. I use these concepts to explore the tensions, complexities, and responses that individuals use amid their troubled relationship with the ukuthwala custom. I also draw on the women's powerfully articulated narratives to describe and analyse the valued senses of selves that they have developed as responses to systematic processes and social structures which seek to dominate and subordinate them. I highlight the ways people make sense of their predicament, manage, and survive amidst challenges, sufferings, and uncertainties.

2.1. Locating Ukuthwala, the Approaches and Tensions and Finding the Gaps

The overriding justification for this study stems from my observations that ukuthwala as a practice has received fair assessment in the media and in academia but empirical work with a much more nuanced understanding and analysis of different aspects of experiencing subjects remains an uncharted terrain in existing literature. Overall, the literature remains more diagnostic, adopting a top-down approach, locating problems, and arriving at recommendations. One of the pertinent observations in reviewing the trends in existing

literature on ukuthwala is that it is sharply divided along two ideological lines. On the one hand, are those who, either as insiders or as sympathetic outsiders, see ukuthwala as an honourable, indomitable custom that has seen the test of social change. On the other, there are those who perceive it as an outdated custom that should be discarded. The growing literature that has engaged with ukuthwala tends to disengage from the experiencing subjects, thereby silencing their voices, closing them out of the knowledge production process, depicting them as victims without agency. This study perceives women as active social agents who create meaning about themselves. However, the study also understands the different structural factors that sometimes constrain women's autonomy and undermine their agency to deal with different challenges through exploring why ukuthwala still exists.

For the past decade, ukuthwala has been propelled into the national spotlight mainly by the television and print media. From 2009 there were disturbing accounts of young girls from the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu Natal being forced into ukuthwala marriages by older men. The major highlights in those cases were ukuthwala's association to kidnapping, assault, and rape. These media accounts have treated ukuthwala as a sensational, horrifying, and scandalous practice where ukuthwala is dramatised through their highly descriptive accounts, and they all rightly tell of a harrowing tale. For example, Muduna (2017) wrote "Ukuthwala: the sex trafficking scandal devastating rural South Africa", Amoati (2016) wrote on "Ukuthwala" – kidnapping in KZN, (Modisaotsile, 2013) "Ukuthwala: Is it culture correct, or culture corrupt?" Reporting for the BBC, Fihlani (2009) wrote "The stolen youth of SA's child Brides". If left to their own devices or taken as they are without any in-depth academic intervention, these usual scandalous representations of ukuthwala which are often monocausal, simplistic and heteronormative will go unquestioned. This then could be detrimental to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the sociocultural foundations of the practice. Few studies have

demonstrated empirically the practices and patterns of ukuthwala beyond such representations. This thesis moves beyond the representation of ukuthwala as the "scandal"/ momentous sensation that is often presented in the media to increase the visibility of ukuthwala as it is lived, its persistence, often in different guises. However, the merits of this attention are that it pushed forward the emergence of a scholarship that departs from venerating ukuthwala as an honourable cultural practice to dismantling it and analysing it in its various forms.

As such, ukuthwala has been documented in historiographies though minimally so (Nkosi & Wassermann, 2014, Karimakwenda, 2013) to arrive at drawing conclusions on its continuities and discontinuities. Through an historical overview of marital violence, Karimakwenda (2013, 2018) presents that it is a misjudgement to assume and conclude that violence is new in ukuthwala. Rather, she argues that the severity and the prevalence of violence are the new phenomena. Beyond tracing history, the focus is usually on the problems associated with the practice that include violence and violations of human rights (cf. Moore, 2022; Matthee, 2021; Mqidlana, 2021; Nhlapo, 2021; Geldenhuys, 2021; Wadesango, Rembe & Chabaya, 2011; Nicole 2011; Mwambene, 2009; Koyana and Bekker, 2007). Most of these recent publications have also been preoccupied with ukuthwala's connection to child/ human trafficking (cf. Geldenhuys 2021; Mqidlana, 2021; Mugari, & Obioha, 2021) basically arguing that it contributes to the "shame of forced marriage" (Geldenhuys 2021), child marriages (Mqidlana, 2021) and child trafficking (Gwe, Udu & Obali, 2021). Related to this, some have preoccupied themselves with the constitutionality of the custom of ukuthwala (Jokani, Knoetze, & Erasmus, 2018; Machaka, 2019; Jayeola, 2018; Jokani, 2018). This scholarship posits that ukuthwala will remain a salient legal polemic. Drawing from a human rights perspective, they also mainly situate ukuthwala with the child marriage debates and argue that ukuthwala manifests as child abuse, sexual exploitation, and child labour. They draw

conclusions that ukuthwala is a harmful cultural practice that is an "antithesis in the South African constitutional order" (Jokani, 2018).

The violence of ukuthwala has been another common denominator in the literature. Ukuthwala has been academically, journalistically, and publicly represented as a violent (Thornberry, 2019; Smit, 2017; Monyane, 2013; Mwambene & Sloth- Nielsen, 2011; Khumalo, 2009) and confused (Smit, 2017). Smit for example writes extensively on the ukuthwala related violence and questions whether ukuthwala has re-emerged in a transformed and violent way as the media seemed to insinuate. Smit argues that the situation is more complicated than that as he calls for a closer examination of the changing contexts or the social realities within which ukuthwala occurs as well as effects of the historical informality of ukuthwala and the conflicting perspectives on ukuthwala in the national legal discourses and in the local perceptions. He concludes that ukuthwala must be understood as a new emerging language on violence and violation wherein ukuthwala is seen as a concept rather than the actual custom itself (Smit, 2017: 193). Gqola's point about rape (2015) and fear (2021) as being a language echoes in Smit's analysis. Gqola argues that fear and rape are patriarchal tools used to remind women of their place in society, that nothing belongs to them (Gqola, 2021:19) and these are used to communicate to cast women as 'Others' and therefore safe to violate (Gqola, 2021:18-19). In the same way, Smit argues that ukuthwala is a language of violence that is used to communicate to women that they are still violable despite the emerging human rights discourses in contemporary South Africa.

Linked to that is the scholarship that advances ukuthwala and other cultural customs as the perpetrators of gender-based violence and gender inequality in South Africa (Yesufu, 2022; Moreira & Rapanyane, 2021; Karimakwenda, 2013, 2020). Through a historical overview of

marital rape and violence, Karimakwenda argues that violence has always been an integral part of ukuthwala and an examination of historical sources on the Xhosa speaking people reveal that there have always been strong linkages between marriage and violence (Karimakwenda, 2013:339). Beyond the reference to the Xhosa speaking people, Karimakwenda explains:

> In practice, marriage and violence were intertwined. The force exercised with some forms of ukuthwala is a subpart of this much larger pattern. Women were recurrently brutally coerced into marriage, with or without ukuthwala, and once in those marriages, violence was employed to subdue unwilling wives, and to discipline wives for infractions. (Karimakwenda, 2013: 342)

Recently, Karimakwenda critiques how mainstream literature on ukuthwala lacks historicization and silences women's narratives (Karimakwenda, 2020: 763). Though grounded within the legal framework, Karimakwenda's scholarship goes beyond the legal by investigating the informal forms of ukuthwala focusing on marital violence.

The most recent sociological and anthropological works on ukuthwala have tended to focus more on aspects of consent and coercion (Thornberry, 2016, 2019; Smit, 2017a & Smit, 2017b). Scholars such as Thornberry (2019) have specifically questioned the very 'customness' of ukuthwala and are especially interested in determining in whose interests claims of 'custom' are being made and how these claims invoke history. With that said, I find questions on the newness or otherwise of ukuthwala unhelpful because they do not help us examine at what point claims of custom and tradition are invoked, which becomes one of the central tenets of this thesis. Extending on Karimakwenda's analysis, I present that several studies on ukuthwala have predominantly focused on ukuthwala as a complex phenomenon, an event that needs untangling, as such the studies predominantly focus on the characteristics of ukuthwala, its related customs and its motivations (cf. Rice,2014, 2018; Smit, 2017a; Smit, 2017b, Matshidze, Kugara, & Mdhuli, 2017). Rice concerns herself with unearthing the motivations and moral values of ukuthwala on the local level. Following Rice's premise, Smit extends the debate to

both the local level and national level and situates ukuthwala within the conditions of modernity.

"The one article which attempts to situate ukuthwala marriage within a socio – cultural framework is both factually and analytically very weak, and ends with an elitist," unsubstantiated declaration that "African women who are businesswomen, professors, doctors, lawyers, secretaries, and teachers need not be concerned" (Koyana and Bekker, 2007 : 143). For them, the ukuthwala custom is exclusive to rural, uneducated people. Ethnographer, Wood (2005), attempts to describe the practice as it happens in an urban area. In a brief discussion on contemporary gang rape in an urban Transkei township, Wood attempts to link sexual violence with the practice of ukuthwala. However, the short discussion of ukuthwala that she provides is speculative rather than ethnographic. In conclusion to her main argument, Wood wonders whether there might be some"deep rooted 'cultural connection' between contemporary sexual violence"in urban areas, and the practice of ukuthwala. While this scholarship provides important insights into ukuthwala as both a practice and a language/ concept, they lack in the provision of critical reading of ukuthwala, and they barely provide perspectives from its victims. Furthermore, in these studies, ukuthwala has been generally conceived and characterised as largely private - cultural, which is usually a once off event even in the lives of those affected.

While reviewing the literature on ukuthwala it became abundantly clear that the existing scholarship's descriptive approaches have not produced meaningful explanations of thwalwa'ed women's lived experiences. In fact, what they have done is to reinforce the idea that ukuthwala is a practice divorced from the experiencing subject. To fill this void, this thesis examines the thwalwa'ed women's lived experiences of the far-reaching effects of ukuthwala

and its aftermath, endemic suffering, trauma, and despair, an initiative that foregrounds the women as experiencing subjects. In as much as this thesis uses narrative inquiry as its overarching method of research, it is however more than just stories, it is about lived lives. Yet by focusing on the experiences of a particular group of women, we are better positioned to appreciate and understand the consequences of ukuthwala and the legacy of patriarchal violence, the pain and suffering as well as the far-reaching effects of insecurity and uncertainty it brings. The thesis explores the quandary thwalwa'ed women endure and embody. It is the thwalwa'ed women's lived experiences that need to be explored in-order to grasp how a phenomenon embedded in social contexts shape the subjective experience of suffering and one's somatic sense of self. Moreover, in analysing these women's lives, I do not only focus on limiting the analysis to them only desiring freedom from unequal relations where men dominate, but I intend to rethink the relationship between constraints and agency.

These literatures share a commonality in offering purely descriptive accounts or accounts that lean closely on the human rights perspectives while over emphasising the actions of formal state power over such practices. These conservative representations of ukuthwala are grounded in structuralist frameworks on ukuthwala that tend to be characterised by an over-abstraction of this lived phenomenon. The problem of over-abstraction reflects a failure in the appreciation of the deeper effects of ukuthwala as a social phenomenon, and how the affected subjects and their personhood are directly affected. Such approaches, whether intended or unintended, result in the systematic erasure of thwalwa'ed women's subjective experiences and voices, particularly, how the violence of ukuthwala intimately folded into their everyday lives and became an existential suffering. These accounts have routinely excluded interrogating lived and embodied pain which comes from the experience of rape, force, physical assault, emotional trauma, prolonged seasons of suffering and lives being shattered. In other words,

what these analytical orientations neglected to incorporate was that there were powerful forces that continued to shape and alter thwalwa'ed' women's subjectivities and their lived lives. Therefore, taking an approach which advances constructing knowledge from the perspective of those directly affected, I use women's stories and their narratives to disrupt the legacy of thinking about ukuthwala as a concept, a phenomenon, and just a practice.

"Common to both popular and most academic discussions on ukuthwala is a lack of context. While often rich in anecdotal detail, they fail to consider the complex social field in which these marriages are taking place. From broad reflexive works like John Henderson Soga's (1931), *The Ama – Xhosa: Life and Customs*, to detailed anthropological studies like those of Krige, 1969; Bryant, 1949; Laubscher, 1951; Schapera, 1953; Fortes, 1962; Jager, 1971; Schapera, 1946; Vilakazi, 1962, the focus remains external to the lived experiences and perceptions of the people subject to the custom. Such approaches have glossed over the complex realities of the people affected, little attention is cast on the experiences, practices, and understandings of poor rural people,"in particular, women, who are increasingly caught between two giants – the customary and the common law. This study aims to fill this analytic gap by exploring the lived experiences of the women subject to the custom.

Under critique in this study is the tendency to completely misinterpret and obliterate the lived realities of the thwalwa'ed women. Moreover, representations of ukuthwala detached from the concrete experiences of people, and in particular from the complex consequences of suffering "tend to reduce theorising to an autonomous disembodied activity" (Green, 1999: 11). Additionally, most of these studies rely on qualitative methodologies such as structured interviews with small sample sizes that are limited in producing rich and detailed information about the lived experiences of the societies where the custom is revered, particularly the

inchoate aspects of their lives (see Nkosi & Wassermann, 2014; Kaschula, Huisamen, Mostert, and Nosilela, 2013, Wood, 2005). It is the assumption of this project, therefore, that such approaches elucidate experiences that are not lived or shared, but merely observed externally by the speaking subject. I am interested in the broader conceptual and theoretical premises as prompted by the ukuthwala custom. For that reason, this study aims to produce deeper insights into the phenomenon derived from the kind of rich, contextual, and nuanced data rarely captured in field surveys and other rigid methods. It privileges an ethnographic approach, involving sustained observation, participation in the observed practices and events, archival research, and in-depth interviews with participants – the aim of which is to produce rich and detailed data on the practices and politics within the communities and the lived realities of the people in the communities identified as shared through their everyday lives. This study acknowledges that there is a profound void, a destructive silence at the centre of studies about culture - a silence about living with suffering and what subjectivities are produced from that.

My project does not seek to understate and push insights from existing studies about ukuthwala to the margins but rather to contribute to existing knowledge by bringing in the voices, experiences, silences, and subjectivities of the people caught up in the middle of the storm. Furthermore, the study seeks to enrich academic debates on the intersection of gender, culture, custom, and tradition by using ukuthwala as its central concern and focus to enable a thicker analysis that pushes past the insights from the work that has been undertaken on ukuthwala.

The analysis in this thesis helps to reveal the ways in which social structures and norms positioned as so essential and enduring have contributed to a gross disregard of how variable,

changing and historically contingent ukuthwala is. This thesis gives a finely grained analysis of the custom, going beyond the spectacle of its contemporary imaginings. It attempts to disentangle the very idea of ukuthwala as a "romantic' procedure to marriage among the rural Xhosa speaking people. An ethnographically informed analysis in this case, provides a rich unpacking of the ideas of force/violence and consent in ukuthwala practice where both emerge as dynamic, multivalent concepts. In this instance, it is predominantly the narratives of thwalwa'ed women, an under-utilised vantage point for evaluating what has been shrouded in early anthropological, missionary, and legal analysis that is given priority in explicating the "analytical categories, constructed identities, and personal narratives of fear, trauma and violence" (Lawrance et al., 2015:1).

2.2. Ukuthwala: the Concept as Defined

Many scholars examining the concept of ukuthwala in Africa have long struggled with what ukuthwala is, what it constitutes, what it is not and what it should be. They have long made a case that ukuthwala is generally viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon that could have been shaped by the colonial encounter (Thornberry, 2017, 2019) and in some cases linked to acts of violence (Smit, 2017a, 2017b). It has become apparent that ukuthwala in South Africa defies many attempts at interpretation and analysis. An expansive body of literature that attempts to define ukuthwala often draws on the early anthropological and missionary texts that often lack in the theoretical and sociological aspects of the practice. The texts, (Britten, 1930, Soga, 1931, Cook, 1934, Hunter, 1961[1933]), De Jager, 1971 and Laubscher, 1975) mainly provide descriptions of how the process usually takes place and offer speculations on the possible reasons for the practice of ukuthwala. These texts suggest that ukuthwala is a long-standing irregular marital custom without giving further details with regards to context and the people. These historical sources suggest that ukuthwala consists of "staged elopements" and

the subsequent lobola negotiations (Soga, 1931: 136 -7). Ukuthwala was one of the ways which couples or a groom to be could employ in cases where they could not afford lengthy and costly negotiations that would normally be undertaken in "regular marriage" (Nkosi and Wassermann 2014, Bennet 2010, Koyana and Bekker, 2007). Such accounts of ukuthwala have influenced the ways in which the practice is defined and understood across different disciplines. Moreover, these conservative representations of ukuthwala erase the dynamic nature and the innovativeness of ukuthwala with the unfortunate consequence of essentialising ukuthwala as a typical African practice without any demerits to it.

Recently though, the legal scholarship and jurisprudence on ukuthwala has attempted to dissect the ordinarily unchallenged definitions of ukuthwala and has followed an almost uniform script in assessing the cultural legitimacy of ukuthwala. In the jurisprudence, the focus is commonly geared toward breaking down the violent components of ukuthwala including rape, kidnapping, torture, or sexual enslavement, rather than addressing ukuthwala as a distinct and primary practice. The landmark high court case of Jezile v the state and others represent the prevailing legal standpoint on ukuthwala. The judgement declared that ukuthwala as practised by Jezile and his community was "aberrant" and Jezile was convicted of rape, assault, and human trafficking. This affirms the standpoint that rape and kidnapping violate the authentic customary law (cf. Monyane, 2013, Van der Watt and Ovens, 2012, Mwambene and sloth -Nielsen, 2011, Koyana and Bekker, 2007, Choma, 2011, Wadesango, Rembe and Chabaya, 2011, Mubangizi, 2012, Mabasa, 2015). Koyana and Bekker (2007: 143), for example, describe ukuthwala as a "charming, "romantic practice" while some, for example, Mwambene and Kruuse have attempted to approach ukuthwala from a socio-legal perspective, albeit still leaning heavily on the historical definitions of ukuthwala and define it as "a 'mock' abduction of a girl for the purposes of a customary marriage" (Mwambene & Kruuse, 2017: 8).

Recently, Karimakwenda (2013, 2018) has pioneered a change of perspective within the legal fraternity by tracing the historical and contextual position of forced marriage, marital violence through rape in ukuthwala practice rather than just adopting existing definitions and perspectives and making assertions from them. However, a closer inspection of the literature reveals that generally, the legal scholarship's take on ukuthwala has worked with the assumption that the violence of ukuthwala are distortions of the original custom.

In juxtaposition to the narrowed lens of the legal analysis of ukuthwala, recent historical and ethnographic studies have attempted to change the discourse on ukuthwala by providing insider perspectives on the violence of ukuthwala. Thornberry's research focuses on the long history of contestations around the practice, and the link between marriage and consent to sex (Thornberry, 2011, 2016). Smit, Rice and Wood have also weighed in on the practice confirming that the coercive aspects of the practice are not in fact irregular in some communities (Smit and Nortermans, 2015, Rice, 2014, Wood, 2005). The literature confirms that coming up with a working definition of ukuthwala is a difficult task as ukuthwala is a lived customary practice that according to Smit (2017: 63) citing an interview with Bekker "violates many of the rules of predictability and is certainly more multifaceted than any texts could capture…". The point of this thesis is not to provide a working definition of ukuthwala; however, I am guided by the narratives of women who insist and retell of the long-standing violence of ukuthwala, and that violence is and has always been at the core of the practice. I hereby bring in how the women conceptualise, understand, and interpret the practice, it is their subjective experiences and understanding of ukuthwala which guides their own conceptualisation of the practice of ukuthwala. Their understanding of the practice is ukuthwalwa (I elaborate its inclinations in the next section) which literally describes the process of abduction and goes beyond the event from a first-hand experience rather by the

different scholars or the jurisprudence. As such, in this thesis I bring the idea of ukuthwalwa as opposed to ukuthwala which is a representation of the practice that is grounded in women's own understanding of their experiences of the practice.

2.2.Conceptual Framing of Ukuthwalwa

The previous section has demonstrated that, generally, the scholarship on ukuthwala has failed to capture the women as subjects of ukuthwala. Women have been presented as objects, removing the women, technicising discussions and focusing on the custom and the man who is the perpetrator. This study anchors on the women, focusing on how women experience the practice, how they navigate it, and how they speak for and against it. The concept of ukuthwala in and of itself distances women from the entire process of the practice as it is linked to the literal process of abduction done by men. The woman in this instance becomes an object that is picked up, owned, used, and controlled by the person who is abducting. Ukuthwala from this point focuses on the act and the actor, it already tells us of who controls the narrative and shows us what story is told and from whose perspective. In this study, I prefer to conceptualise ukuthwala from a feminist lens, where I bring women's narratives to the centre of the discussions. In the narration of their stories, women frequently used the phrase *"ndathwalwa mna*" - I was thwalwa'ed / abducted which shifts the narrative to the experiencing subject. As such, approaching ukuthwala from the perspective of an experiencing subject helps to centre their voices and subjectivities as they represent themselves and their lives. In conversations about ukuthwala, the women would always give the stories about the man who thwala'ed them because for them, ukuthwalwa is a term that describes what men did to them. It is only when you ask them to talk about themselves would they use ukuthwalwa. By focusing on ukuthwalwa, I was trying to be more reflexive and have conversations with women on their own terms. The concept of ukuthwalwa then informed my idea of theory because I was

reflecting from the women's experiences. I took the women's stories as acts of speaking back to what is normally told and presented about ukuthwala. In that way, my work does not bring a confined lens in terms of understanding the experiences of these women, but I look at the different strands as they unfold in terms of how the women are presenting their own narratives. I then look at how these narratives speak to or against and beyond the different representations of thwalwa'ed women that exist. They become the voices of their own experiences which is why in the different sections of this thesis I bring in the idea of shifting vulnerabilities, looking at women who are at the centre of dealing with, accommodating and or resisting ukuthwala as a cultural practice.

2.3. Ukuthwala effects

This thesis argues that ukuthwala repercussions /suffering is cumulative and ongoing. I use the concept of aftershocks, mostly used in the context of earthquakes, to argue that ukuthwala is the main shock that completely disrupts these women's lives followed by prolonged pain and suffering as the aftershocks. According to Bonilla and LeBrón (2019: 15) aftershocks of an earthquake continue for a prolonged amount of time and although they are often smaller, their effects can be even more damaging than the main earthquake. Building on this idea, most of what is discussed in this chapter examines the aftershocks of ukuthwala which I call the ukuthwala effects. These effects include prolonged experiences of abject poverty, physical abuse, lived and embodied pain, stigma, abandonment, taming the body to docility, imprisonment, fear, misery, feelings of regret, anger, sadness, servitude, and collective trauma. These flourish, I argue, through social controls like lobola, stigma, the dress code and patriarchal violence. Every thwalwa'ed woman I talked to found themselves jolted by ukuthwala effects. This happens when systematic failures happen, when patriarchal violence is normalized, ukuthwala terror is seemingly erased and forgotten, however, the residues of terror

live on, sustain ukuthwala and inform women's experiences and understanding of their lives. Much as we see in the women's narratives, these small but on-going residues can have major repercussions that are worse and potentially more destructive than the initial event.

This thesis advances the argument that ukuthwala effects go beyond the event itself. This is done through close and careful presentation of the experience as lived by thwalwa'ed women, retelling their individual stories as told to me. I then question who constitutes the collective, who speaks for the collective, and who shapes the knowledge on women's bodies. This work joins other emerging African women scholars who have begun to interrupt taken for granted assumptions about women's lived and embodied subjectivities.

In the narratives of the women, we see that the trauma they describe only worsens with time. Their stories provoke the need to think beyond the dominant idea that ukuthwala is a once-off event and that suffering is limited to the episode. It also disrupts the notion of a chronological timeline of ukuthwala process and healing. The common narrative within these communities suggests that there is the event of the actual ukuthwala, followed by immense sadness and suffering, then acceptance and healing - all this within a year or two years or as soon as the woman falls pregnant.

2.5. The Theoretical Framework of Feminism

This study is primarily about the making, as well as the (un)making of women's subjectivities. It is about the erasure and recovery of women's voices and experiences. It is an exposition of the dangers of overlooking women's experiences and voices, a revelation of what transpires at the intersection of violence and cultural practices. The research lays bare the condition of the black woman's body and subjectivity in contemporary South Africa, and it is

for this reason that I situate my work within African and black oriented feminist theories[12]. There are many different types of feminisms which grow out of ideological shifts, regional positioning, and identities. To enter the ongoing debates about the differences in feminist conceptions or the ineffectuality and limitations of some feminist ideologies will be futile because pinning oneself to rigid conceptions of feminism would fail to fully characterise the multifaceted nature of African women's lives. These rigid notions of what proper/ true feminism is alienates women whose lives and experiences do not always fit neatly into the reductive and unbending notions of feminism. For example, if we are to consider the work of African Catherine Acholonu, the term "motherism" that she introduces as an example of an afro – oriented feminism that considers issues neglected by western feminism (Acholonu, 1995) or that of Gwendolyn Mikell who also offers a 'different' and distinct feminism, different from western liberal feminism, it is "distinctly heterosexual, prenatal and concerned primarily with 'bread, butter, culture and power' issues" (Mikell, 1997). While these perspectives might disrupt the hegemony of western feminism, they rest on conservative notions of African life and pose a danger of ruling out the voices and lives of those that feminism is designed to foreground.

The problem with static classifications of feminism is that they can easily be taken as and be confused with identity politics rather than the practice of feminism (Karimakwenda, 2018). Instead of focusing on learning more about women's realities and moving closer to dismantling patriarchy and foregrounding women's voices and lives in their writings, the fixed categories distract us from that goal. Matebeni, cited in Karimakwenda (2018), argues that merging identity and practice creates "hegemonic generalisations and essentialisms that assume a unified interpretation" of feminism and other categories (Karimakwenda, 2018:11).

[12] My use of black in this thesis refers to black women and men of African descent.

Matebeni further comments that these "generalisations efface the problems, perspectives and political concerns of women marginalised because of their class, gender, race, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation" (ibid).

For the purposes of this study, I take feminism as a tool and a framework with which experiences and challenges of African women can be illuminated and rendered legible. I am not informed or confined to a single strand of feminism. I am more reflexive as I borrow insights from the different strands by looking at the connecting nodes in the different feminisms that give a more representative reflection of the context from which I am working. Furthermore, I move beyond these different aspects as informed by the subjectivities and narratives of the women in this study.

Departing from the prescriptive forms of feminism, Gqola posits that the feminist project is to disrupt patriarchy through the interruption of the routine terrorisation of women, what she calls "the interruption of the Female Fear Factory" (Gqola, 2021:11). The subversive acts of disrupting and interrupting patriarchy are central to the practice of feminism, they avoid identity – driven approaches. As such, my research aims are bound up with my own identity as a Black feminist woman committed to focusing on highlighting how patriarchy terrorises women and to providing a contextual understanding of not only constructions of patriarchy, but also the strategies for unsettling patriarchy. Consequently, my perspectives are shaped by my positioning in a patriarchal society, and it is from the meanings infused in my identity that shape my understanding of the lives of women central to this study and to how I contribute to the dismantling and disruption of patriarchy.

My theoretical assumptions which also orient my broad methodological approach rest on the notions of patriarchy, patriarchal violence, agency, subject and subjectivity, resistance, suffering, vulnerability, culture, and tradition and the everyday and everyday practices.

2.6. Resurrecting Patriarchy as a Theoretical Tool

Identifying and acknowledging male power is vital in this study, as such the concept of patriarchy is of critical importance. I argue that studies on ukuthwala neglect the genderedness and power relations embedded in the practice, and they misrecognise the undercurrents of domination within which the practice operates and survives. Using patriarchy as an overarching concept of this study, I will demonstrate how ukuthwala thrives on difference, gender hierarchies and dominance.

The concept of patriarchy has been used in feminist work to analyse the principles underlying women's oppression. Located within feminist thought, the uses of the concept within contemporary feminist discourse, however, have been varied. Politically, feminists within different disciplines have seized the concept of patriarchy to explain feelings of oppression and subordination and theoretically the concept has been used to delve deeper into looking at the experiences and expressions of women's oppression and address the basis for women's subordination and to analyse the forms which it assumes.

Conventionally, borrowing from the early feminist writers, patriarchy has been used to refer to the exercise of power by men over women where they dominate women. Radical feminists like Millet (1969) and Hartman (1979), used patriarchy to refer to the power that men have over women. Contrary to radical feminist writers like Kate Millet who focused solely on the system of male dominance and female subordination, Marxist feminists have

conceptualised patriarchy through an analysis of the nexus between the subordination of women and modes of production. Mitchell (1974), defines patriarchy as "kinship systems in which men exchange women" (Mitchell, 1971:24) and to the ways in which men dominate women within these systems and she highlights the consequences of this symbolic power of men on the "inferiorised… psychology of women" (Mitchell, 1974: 402).

Following its genesis that emanated from the understanding that the main objective of feminist theory is to understand the subordination, oppression, and exploitation of women and to work on the eradication of sexism, and the elimination of violence against women, contemporary usages of the concept have not departed much from its original conceptions. A theory of patriarchy retains gender as a central organising principle and focuses on the social systems and arrangements that reinforce domination. Walby defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 1989:214). In its broader definition, patriarchy "is the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (Lerner, 1989:239).

I take cues from Pumla Gqola whose understanding of patriarchy is such that it enables the exposure of the fault lines through which the seemingly natural and neutral operations of violent power relations are created, cemented, and perpetuated. In her book, ***Female Fear Factory***, Gqola uses the concept of patriarchy to theorise the manufacture of female fear. Gqola (2021) positions patriarchy at the centre of the female fear factory. Her theoretical intervention on patriarchy is that we should understand fear as a political idea and a patriarchal product that is predominantly used to control and subdue women into

obedience and rape as an expression of patriarchal violence that is enabled by the female fear factory (Gqola, 2021:15). Gqola argues that rape is not possible without patriarchy, "it is for patriarchy" she emphasises (Gqola, 2021: 45). This thesis extends the argument beyond rape to include other technologies of patriarchy that include spirituality as a mechanism of terror, the silences and secrecy behind the practice and excessive physical violence. Gqola (2021) states:

> Patriarchy relies heavily on the symbolic, on arrangements of certain events as though they are not constructed, as though their internal organisational logic is natural, automatic, and inevitable (Gqola, 2021: 13).

This study employs a feminist perspective to show that in Engcobo, patriarchal ideology naturalises skewed gender relations, enabling men to always have the dominant, masculine roles, dictating women's roles, expectations, behaviours, and positions in society. It shows how culture is used to exaggerate the biological differences between the sexes to uphold the gender differentiated dispositions, sex roles and social statuses. On the grounds of this, women occupy the inferior, subordinate roles as part of enacting the expected femininity. The ideology justifies violence on women and reinforces women's subordination to men in such a way that the construction of a thwalwa'ed subject is considered acceptable as part of the ordinary lives of women. Although it is acted on a woman's body in ways that are felt to be unbearable (that is externally), each woman is encouraged to make the experience of ukuthwala a part of her self, a part of her being a woman. It is a complicated process that includes myriad patriarchal violence techniques that are detrimental to the lives of thwalwa'ed women. This ideology is so powerful that the opportunities available to women are highly constrained and the consequences of resisting are ominous. The ideology remains unchallenged because it appeals to and dictates orders and expectations even from the revered spiritual world – the ancestors, appeals to the culture and traditions and the identity of Xhosaness.

In this thesis, patriarchy is an essential feminist tool that helps to analyse women's experiences and in identifying especially the invisible extent of men's power. The concept, however, has been heavily criticised for its conflicting interpretations and for its abstractness. At the centre of these contestations is it being "undertheorised" (Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 1990), the critics focus on those existing theories of patriarchy that have problems in dealing with historical and cross-cultural variations (Barret, 1980; Beechy, 1979; Hooks, 1984; Coward, 1978). These critics have suggested that its shortcomings are irredeemable, especially for producing a simplistic and distorted view of the world, for simplifying power relations, ignoring differences among men, failing to account for violence by women or men against men; secondly, for implying universalism; thirdly, for its failure in dealing with historical and cross-cultural variations in gender inequality and lastly, for its failure to account for differences between women and for confusing description with explanation (Segal, 1987; Hooks, 1984; Barrett, 1980; Rowbotham, S. 1981; Carby, 1982; Beechey, 1979; Molyneux, 1979). The suggested alternatives do not convince us to abandon the concept of patriarchy either. The Marxist perspectives argue for a theorising of patriarchy through capitalism while the postmodernists and poststructuralists (cf. Walby, 1989; Alcoff, 1988; Middleton, 1981) argue that gender inequality is too complex and varied to be traced back to only a particular structure. Social feminist historians argue the same (cf. Rowbotham, 1981). What remains is that

> ... 'patriarchy' is not merely a colorful term used by feminists to rebuke men. It is not a thing of bygone days, nor a rhetorical flourish. It is an important dimension of the structures of modern societies, whether capitalist or state socialist. It is a living reality, a system that quite observably shapes the lives and differentiates the chances of women and of men. The struggle for sex equality... is an attempt to contradict, to undo, patriarchy (Bryson, 1999:322).

Therefore, even though the concept of patriarchy has been faced with such criticisms, its usefulness must not be underestimated. Several theorists have tried to resurrect patriarchy as a theoretical tool argued for its expediency and presented new ways for theorising it that take into cognisance its various forms and are rigorous enough to be effective as a tool for analysis (cf. Hunnicutt, 2009, Bryson, 1999; Walby, 1989). Walby's intervention comes in to rescue patriarchy from the criticism and importantly to this thesis is her intervention that male violence is not a random individual phenomenon or a psychological derangement of a few men (cf. West, Roy and Nicholas, 1978). Men use violence as a form of power and control over women and inasmuch as not all men need to use violence to have this, it is a regular form of social control over women. Its routineness and the fact that it is constituted as a set of various practices that include rape, wife beating, and sexual assault are particularly instructive in this thesis. That being the case, in examining the subjective lived experiences of thwalwa'ed women, thwalwa'ed women's experiences convey that male violence, what I refer to as patriarchal violence in this thesis, is designed to alter women's lives in a systemic and routine way within a specific locality.

In many ways this conceptualisation shows patriarchy as having a culture (that is an unquestioned and normalised set of beliefs and practices), that reproduce inequalities between men and women. These practices are vital in the shaping of gendered subjectivity. Walby, (1989; 228) defines this culture as "a set of discourses which are institutionally-rooted", it is not a free-floating idea. For example, there is more than one discourse on femininity and on masculinity and these depend on variables like class, age, and ethnicity. All these variables have different notions of what masculinity and femininity entail. In the case of this study, femininity and masculinity are further defined by whether one was thwalwa'ed or not.

Drawing from these conceptualisations and material from the field, this thesis is premised on the understanding that ukuthwala makes available violence to men as a resource to dominate women and it is enforced through a variety of technologies, it is tolerated and condoned by the traditions and customs of the eNgcobo people. This form of force is further organised by a discourse which legitimises certain forms of violence that are central to ukuthwala through notions of femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, in examining ukuthwala and its characteristics as a practice as is the norm in the literature on ukuthwala does not sufficiently capture how women understand and make sense of their lives and the mechanisms they employ to negotiate and or subvert their situations. Disregarding the relationship between the sexes often rejects that male privilege in this context is in many ways much deeper seated and premised on the assumption that they, rather than women, are the superior gender and that society should be organised in accordance with their needs. The lives and experiences of thwalwa'ed women presents a set of dilemmas and ambiguities. Thwalwa'ed women's experiences of ukuthwala draw upon different episodes of violations such that their narratives transgressed the popular narrative consequently challenging and destabilising some popular conceptions of what ukuthwala is and what it means for those who experience it.

Understanding the different narratives from the thwalw'aed can contribute to knowledge on how patriarchy operates on a local level and how its use as a theoretical tool contributes to an understanding of suffering, agency, and resistance. In the process the thesis tries to show the brutality of patriarchy and how it is normalised in ways that silence its victims and the consequences of this invisibility. In this thesis, I join other feminist scholars in maintaining that work on violence against women should primarily focus on gendered social arrangements and power (Gqola, 2021; 2015, Rishani, 2017; Hennicutt, 2009; Walby, 1989; Jo and Gregson; 1986). At the most basic level, the core concept of patriarchy is defined "as a

system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1989: 214). Walby emphasises the importance of the term social structure because of its detachment from biological determinism and the notion of singling out men as the perennial dominants and women as perpetual sufferers. It is important to conceptualise patriarchy at different levels of abstraction, she cautions - in addition to it as an overarching social system, Walby breaks patriarchal structures down to those that include patriarchal relations in male violence, in sexuality and in cultural institutions.

The controversy surrounding ukuthwala serves as a good example of how such a theoretical approach finds expression in real-life worlds.

2.7. Cultural Violence

In examining the violence of ukuthwala, this thesis builds on Johan Galtung's notion of cultural violence which maintains that violence can take a symbolic form. The violence that Galtung terms cultural violence is a prototype of violence that involves the use of symbolic power, the legitimation of violence and the internalisation of the legitimised violence. Cultural violence, Galtung claims, can be found in all areas of social life (religion, ideology, language and art, law, science, etc.); it serves as a legitimising factor for both direct and structural violence, whereas it "motivat[es] actors to commit direct violence or [it] omit[s] counteracting structural violence;" and it can be either intended or unintended (Galtung, 1996:31). Galtung formulated a theory of violence that recognised that there are three categories of violence, namely direct personal violence, structural or (indirect) violence and cultural violence. Cultural violence, he argues, is a type of violence that operates in more subtle ways. Introducing the concept of cultural violence in 1990, made a distinction between what he calls "personal violence" and "structural violence" where personal violence involves a subject, structural violence is without a specific target. He argues that cultural violence works to legitimise both

personal and structural violence (Galtung, 1990). He states that "structural violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung 1969, 171). What can be deducted from this conceptualisation is that personal violence can be micro and structural violence takes on a larger scale.

Taking this approach, the thesis attempts to incorporate feminist contributions to a theory of violence, by using "a gender conscious approach to the relation between direct, structural, and cultural violence" in order to capture and explore the hidden power relations, uncover the ways in which the ukuthwala practice becomes experienced at an individual level and exposes how the technologies of the practice are reliant on gender relations to survive. In this way the study provides a lens through which to analyse how ukuthwala builds on the symbolic systems that provide justification and legitimacy to the use of violence.

At a rather general level, my initial theoretical impulse was a desire to explore the historical foundations and continuities of harmful cultural practices through the case of ukuthwala (cf. Nkosi & Wassermann, 1994 , 2014). However, my data suggests that cultural practices, more so, ukuthwala, should be seen as arenas of contestations where women's bodies and lives are sites of struggle over culture and traditions. Galtung's works on violence opens the door to an understanding of symbolic violence that provide justification for and legitimation for the use of violence. He states that

> if the conflicts are not solved creatively, and the (political) culture defines violence as legitimate in such situations, then structure implies conflict implies violence. But conflicts do not necessarily lead to violence; that depends more on the culture (ibid.:141).

Explaining the roots of non-physical violence, Galtung presents cultural violence as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence … that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence" (Galtung, 1990:291). In my work, I find the concept of

cultural violence as an important tool to studying violence from a gender perspective. According to Galtung, patriarchy is one of the practises of structural violence (Galtung, 1996:30-33). And in this thesis, I argue that patriarchy is "embodied in cultural violence", because it is enacted through some cultural practices that seek to legitimise the domination of men over women. It is also embodied in direct violence insofar as men rather than women apply direct violent acts on the women in this study.

Rather than viewing violence simply as a system or a structure as Galtung does, this study highlights that violence is also a process. As such, I avoid taking violence as a static and monolithic entity. Theorising violence as a process allows us to understand the complexities, contestations, and the relationship between culture, tradition and violence. Additionally, this allows us to unpack how thwalwa'ed women become victims of the invisible, unrecognised, and unacknowledged violence. At this level I see my work as a contribution to the anthropology of culture and society by broadening insights on how women negotiate, appropriate, accommodate and resist cultural customs and practices.

2.8. Patriarchal Violence

Throughout this thesis, I refer to the violence that takes place in ukuthwala as patriarchal violence because this form of violence is preoccupied with, and it specifically targets the bodies of women and girls. While patriarchy is commonly described as "a system of social structures and practices, in which men govern, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1990: 214). Patriarchal violence is then defined in this study as a collective term for violence that is rooted in the patriarchal power structures and processes it defends and avenges the loss of patriarchal power. Male dominance is upheld through violent means and in the case of this thesis, these include verbal, psychological, economic, physical, and sexual violence.

The concept of patriarchal violence has its roots in the 1990s. In his important and ground-breaking scholarship, Michael Johnson began developing a typology for describing intimate partner violence in the United States of America. The typology is organised around the concept of coercive controlling violence. He argued that there is more than one type of intimate partner violence (Johnson, 1995). In the typology he presents there are three major types, first there is what he terms patriarchal terrorism. He writes "Patriarchal terror- ism, a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control "their" women" and it "is a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that in- volves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics" (Johnson 1995, 284). He argued the advantage of the term 'patriarchal terrorism' is that it keeps the focus on the perpetrator and it keeps us focused on the tactics of the violator and the intentional nature of this form of violence. Secondly, there is situational couple violence, which occurs when couple conflicts become arguments that result in some form of aggression. Johnson presents that this type of violence is not a product of patriarchy per se, rather it happens when conflict "occasionally gets out of hand leading to 'minor forms of violence which may not be life threatening" (Johnson 1995, 285). Developing the idea in 2011, he narrows down the idea of patriarchal terrorism to introduce intimate terrorism where he extends the forms of violence to include a variety of forms such as physical and sexual violence, economic abuse, emotional abuse, threats and intimidation, invocation of male privilege, constant monitoring and blaming the victim (Johnson, 2011). With this type of violence, he adds that misogyny and gender traditionalism play an important role, especially within heterosexual terrorism (Johnson 2006, 2008).

I use Johnson's argument in my analysis, and I put it in dialogue with his initial idea of linking patriarchy with violence and terror. In similar light, describing the violence associated

with ukuthwala simply as gender-based violence or as male violence ignores how this violence is based on complex power relations. In short, gender-based violence is merely a descriptor or an obvious adjective that describes the demographic characteristics of the violence without understanding the underlying systems of domination and technologies employed by such systems. Thus, I argue that it is more appropriate to link violence to patriarchy and power. Rather than talking about gender-based violence, a more useful analytical and political framework is to talk about patriarchal violence. I believe that the concept of patriarchy still holds a promise for theorising violence against women because it keeps the theoretical focus on dominance, gender, and power (Hunnicutt, 2009; Walby, 1989). Moreover, it anchors the violence against women within a system (patriarchy) rather than an individual attribute (cf. Gqola, 2021; Johnson, 2004). I contend that as a patriarchal project, ukuthwala and its technologies serve as a 'workshop' to indoctrinate women to the normalisation of its violence. I attempt to show that the violence of ukuthwala is deployed often unremittingly and indiscriminately to all thwalwa'ed women and this has produced a legacy of ukuthwala terror which has struggled to remain undistinguished, ordinary, normal, omnipresent, invisible, to be an essential part of thwalwa'ed women's lives and remain unaccountable. Simply put, what I offer in the conceptualisation of patriarchal violence is that this kind of violence is not always visible, it is often accepted socially and culturally through practices of some women and men, not just men, and that women can also be violent against other women and accept forms of violence as a result of their own socialisation.

This analysis is not new, of course. Recently, Pumla Gqola (2015, 2021) has sought to examine the deeply embedded sexual violence in the social fabric of South Africa and beyond. Gqola has employed the concept of patriarchal violence in her analysis of the production of the 'female fear factory' which she defines as a "theatrical and public performance of patriarchal policing of and violence towards women and others cast as female, who are therefore,

considered safe to violate" (Gqola 2021, 18). Here, Gqola argues that female fear, which is fostered through repeated visual performances, audible cues, and other coded signs, is central to the construction of patriarchal violence. I borrow from Gqola's theory of the "female fear factory" to contextualise the phenomenon of ukuthwala violence. Gqola (2021) contends that the apparatus that goes into creating the fear factor are firstly practices that increasingly punish or disadvantage women and second institutional regulations designed to intimidate women to conform with dominant cultural expectations and lastly Gqola profoundly highlights that the primacy of fear in the production the female fear factory – patriarchy depends on its ability to create fear. Thus, Gqola's theory on the female fear factory is informative as it assists me to contextualise the production of patriarchal violence that is demonstrated in the production of a thwalwa'ed subject. Patriarchal violence is unequivocally an apparatus aimed to subjugate through its unrelenting deployment of gratuitous violence using technologies such as sexual violence, abandonment, punishment, intimidation, physical beatings, and fear mongering to tame women into submission. Furthermore, patriarchal violence aims to render these women as damaged, unmarriable once they are thwalwa'ed whether successfully or unsuccessfully as well as enemies of culture, Xhosaness and the violators of ancestors' will if they decide to resist. Furthermore, I demonstrate how through these, and other technologies violent masculinities and imitating femininities are constructed and maintained. I present how being a thwalwa'ed woman renders one safe to violate because thwalwa'ed women are always in the process of being kept thwalwa'ed through brutal patriarchal means.

2.9. Power and Subjectivity

One of the main preoccupations of this study has been to explore how women are constituted as particular kinds of subjects through the act of ukuthwala. In his study of power and the question of the subject, Michel Foucault (1982) presents that it is difficult to separate the question of power from the making of a subject. He argues that human beings are placed

within a matrix of power relations which are very complex. As such, he suggests a new way of studying power relations that is "more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice" (Foucault, 1982 : 780). And that to understand what power relations are about, we need to investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to disrupt those relations. What emerges, he argues, is the understanding that resistance to impositions of power is not the attack on powerful groups or institutions but rather an attack on "a technique, a form of power". The form of power described here is the power which makes individuals subjects by applying itself to everyday life and a power that imposes a way in which an individual must recognise him/herself and in which others must recognise him. According to Foucault there are two ways of understanding the subject, the first being as "subject to someone else by control and independence" (Foucault, 1982 : 781) and secondly as a subject that is "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (ibid). Both these, he argues, indicate a form of power that subjugates and makes an individual subject to. The type of subject described in this thesis is one that is subject to and controlled by someone else but at the same time struggles against subjection, subjectivity, and submission, however, remain subjected to the power and control of ukuthwala practice.

2.10. Bodies and Embodiment

Women who experience ukuthwala inhabit particular kinds of bodies. These are bodies that should be female and young at the point of being thwalwa'ed. Inhabiting this kind of body produces a particular kind of life experience, the experience that comes with being thwalwa'ed. In this thesis I argue that being thwalwa'ed comes with pain and suffering. Pain and suffering are both biological (material) realities and socially mediated experiences. The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued the body is where selfhood is carved and

culture is experienced and in other words the feeling of "being in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Merleau-Ponty has been credited with establishing a foundation for embodiment and has been credited with the concept of the 'lived body'. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that embodiment refers to a body that is embedded in a world which provides a particular context, and all experiences take place in relation to something other than itself (Thomas, 2005). Following Merleau-Ponty, Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1989) questioned the body as a cultural, historical, medicalised, naturalised and universal object. They introduced the notion of embodiment, which they defined as "how people, individually and collectively, live in and experience the body-self" (p.33). To arrive at this meaning, Scheper-Hughes and Lock expanded the concept of the body into three overlapping entities, the individual body/body-self, the social body and the political body or the body politic. They argue that the three bodies represent three different and overlapping levels of analysis and theory namely the existential/ phenomenological/ontological individual body; the social structural/symbolic (the social body); and the feminist, Foucauldian body / the body as a site of power/knowledge (the political body) (Scheper-Hughes, p. 34). Building on Merleau-Ponty, Csordas (2002) conceived of embodiment as the "existential ground of culture and self".

The concept of embodiment has been popular in anthropological analysis. The concept is associated with the work of the psychological anthropologist Thomas Csordas who introduced it as central to the study of culture and the self. Approaching it from a phenomenological perspective, Csordas postulated that "the body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture but is to be considered as the subject of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture" (Csordas, 1990: 5). The concept does not just link the individual in culture, but it also links the body and mind / perceptions with social constraints and cultural meanings resulting in a socially informed body. As such, Csordas saw the concept of

embodiment as a bridge over subject – body relations and mind – body relations. Examining the mechanisms in which women use to cope with the pressures of ukuthwala necessitates a change in the ways in which we research ukuthwala. This thesis shifts away from the fascination with describing ukuthwala in general terms to 'what ukuthwala is' from the voices and experiences of those living through it. I attempt to ask questions of 'who operationalises ukuthwala and under what conditions?'. In that way, I advance understanding of how ukuthwala norms are translated, negotiated, and contested to challenge the dominant works on it which allocate power and agency to the practice itself (cf. Smit & Notermans, 2015; Koyana & Bekker ,2007) and ignored the subjects that embody ukuthwala and what motivates these subjects to perform certain roles and behaviours.

Without minimising that the biological is a factor that contributes to a particular experience of life, here, I argue that women are women through their bodies whose identities and lived experiences are assigned in relation to their physical material conditions. The ascribed identities are determined by collective cultural meanings and in most cases, women are excluded in the production and deployment of these meanings. I therefore centre the body this way in the analysis of these women's experiences to help me understand and explain the fact that in Engcobo there is a particular idea of the body that brings together the biological, the political, and the social operative in the production of the ukuthwalwa'ed subject.

2.11. Embodiment: Agency as Embodied Practices

This thesis introduces an embodied subject who is created through ukuthwalwa. It does so by examining the experiences of ukuthwalwa as experienced by thwalwa'ed women. This thesis introduces an embodied subject who is created through ukuthwalwa. I argue that

the context in which ukuthwalwa happens is a field of contestation and negotiation over accepted norms that define how the thwalwa'ed woman must behave, as well as how her behaviour is punished or rewarded. I argue that thwalwa'ed women are constituted as subjects through their bodies, that is, particular socio-cultural practices and beliefs dictate their corporeal experience and their options for resistance.

It is fair to say that some of the most vibrant work on agency and resistance and the most challenging questions surrounding the two have come out from the feminist scholarship broadly defined. The concepts of agency and resistance have been critical in feminist studies in Africa (Teleki & Pillay, 2019; Mdege, 2017; Kok, 2017; Williams, 2017; Kabeer, 2016) for conceptualising the different forms in which African women challenge, appropriate and negotiate different forms of dominance and subjugation in their social worlds. The term, 'agency' is used to refer to the socio-culturally mediated capacity of an individual to act (Ahearn, 2001). Action takes many forms, including resistance. Agency is a transdisciplinary concept, and the search for agency as 'resistance' has been indispensable for recounting stories of colonial domination, economic injustice, with subaltern studies pushing it towards the recognition of more subtle, daily forms of subversion. The use of agency as a concept has also been criticised for sometimes being a shorthand for the actions of the powerless as agents struggling against patriarchy (Ghabrial, 2016). Actors might exercise their agency against impositions on them in their daily lives without necessarily understanding their actions as being directed against patriarchy as a system. Ghabrial also argues for the location of women's agency beyond resistance against male dominance to include women's wielding of public forms of power to effect change (Ghabrial, 2016: 561). This shift of focus from the ordinary to the notable elite (public) women whose status and experiences are extraordinary, however, comes with its demerits because they make up a minority of the population and may not be

representative of larger social patterns. If one thinks about agency in relation to Foucault's discussion of power and the subject, the concept might be understood as the power of the subject to act that is always present in a power relation even if it might not be exercised. Culture can be said to operate in a manner that often prevents women in communities like Engcobo from exercising their agency because of their own socialisation to accept their subordinate positions.

Nancy Fraser has succinctly outlined the 'problem' of women's agency within feminist theory. She writes,

> . . . we have often opted for theories that emphasize the constraining power of gender structures and norms, while downplaying the resisting capacities of individuals and groups. On the other hand, feminists have also sought to inspire women's activism by recovering lost or socially invisible traditions of resistance in the past and present. . .. The net result of these conflicting tendencies is the following dilemma: either we limit the structural constraints of gender so well that we deny women any agency or we portray women's agency so glowingly that the power of subordination evaporates. Either way, what we often seem to lack is a coherent, integrated, balanced conception of agency, a conception that can accommodate both the power of social constraints and the capacity to act situatedly against them (Fraser, 1992: 17).

In as much as the popular feminist lens on agency places emphasis on women's power to act and challenges the dominant narrative of helpless women who need external intervention to help them deal with their problems, it has been criticised for the fact that it produces an understanding of gender subordination in which women are primarily viewed as victims. A dichotomy that features mostly in the debates is "the incomplete and static view of women as either victims or agents" (Schneider, 1993: 387). Conceptualising the concepts of victim and agency as two extremes is not useful because they both fail to adequately explain the complex realities of women's lives, they fail to take account of the "oppression, struggle and resistance that women experience daily in their relationships" (Schneider, 1993, 389). To understand women as either pure victims or pure agents is

problematic because these are not mutually exclusive, in fact they are profoundly interrelated. In fact, as Schneider claims, these "victim claims for women trigger deep stereotypical assumptions of passivity, purity, and protectiveness, as well as deep resentment" (Schneider, 1993, 395). However, the strength of the concept of agency locates the discussion of women's oppression within a feminist matrix that contests all forms of patriarchal oppression and allows for the exposure of women's options, possibilities, and resistances. This is important because African women have often been studied from a stereotypical position (Nyandoro, 2018) mainly as victims (Schneider, 1993). Moreover, the concept of agency in neoliberal discourse has been largely understood as women's strategies for survival rather than struggles for transformation, and at an individual level rather than the collective (cf. Wilson, 2008, 83), that is, the focus has been on the individual subject and its ability to exercise rationality and free will. Recently, feminist post-structuralist work has re-conceptualised agency in a way that departs from the notions that individual actors are rational and have free will (cf. Mahmood, 2009, 2006; Butler, 2006; Davis, 2000) and have sought to move beyond the notions of equality and understand agency in relation to power and ideology (cf. Angella, 2017; Glenn, Chang & Forcey, 2016). This scholarship has argued for a radical shift from conceptualising agency as the continued reliance on presumed liberal political subjectivity and the frameworks of women's emancipation.

Recent African scholarship, however, has made efforts to provide a fuller picture of the simultaneity of oppression and resistance that gives a more textured meaning of the concept of women's agency. For example, Adjei (2018) discusses what he calls "the social intentionality of battered women's agency in Ghana". Adjei argues that the agency of abused women in Ghana has a '*social intentionality'* in that abused women's agency is constrained by the relational embeddedness of culture and social relations. Nyandoro (2018) has also weighed in

and explored the interrelationship between agency and resistance for poverty stricken black South African women. He examines women's agency in fighting poverty through rotating saving schemes and argues that their agency is limited by other structural factors, but they embark on a myriad activities to "triumph over poverty". Saba Mahmood (2005), writing on women disputants in Sharia courts in Kenya, argues for a shift towards theories of agency that account for the ways in which women exist with and within patriarchal frames.

This thesis attempts to contribute to the rethinking the agency of women in a context where their options are extremely limited. I argue that we cannot think of agency in abstraction from embodiment. It is not my contention that embodied agency is only specific to women. Rather through an analysis of the lives and stories of thwalwa'ed women, I examine how through thwalwa'ed women's situatedness in Engcobo exercise their agency in ways that are possible within the context.

I adopt a feminist perspective in my use of the concept of agency to account for the ways in which women negotiate with and operate within patriarchy to achieve some form of relief or create fissures within which to get some momentary relief. Drawing on this understanding of agency as being mobilised in embodied practices, I present that ukuthwala norms are continually negotiated by the embodied subjects living through the restraints of the life of a thwalwa'ed woman. The practices, relations, and processes of ukuthwala are not just instilled in "ideas, language and discourse, they are deposited in bodies and things, and practices emerge' at their convergence" (Pouliot, 2013: 45). Drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, I also contend that ukuthwala is an embodied gendered practice where agency exists simultaneously with vulnerability. I observe that Butler's conceptualisation of gender as a "repeated stylisation of the body" and a "set of repeated acts" (Butler, 1990) align with how

thwalwa'ed women are constituted through socially accepted, routinised, embodied practices performed by the subject and defined and enforced by the patriarchal forces at play.

As such, I take the approach that women can experience oppression and resistance simultaneously. The study seeks to understand the social context of women's oppression, which shapes women's choices and constraints women's agency. Conceptually, this requires reconciling the "victim" with the "agent" such that agency is theorised within the context of victimisation. The body here is seen as a site and as material for the explication of the genderedness of ukuthwalwa. The notion of society that emerges from this conception is that society is constituted by bodies – the thwalwa'ed bodies, the unthwalwa'ed[13] and the unthwal'able[14] bodies. The unthwal'able being the bodies that are designed to thwala other bodies. The self of a thwalwa'ed woman is culturally constituted. I consider ukuthwala subjects as embodied subjects who exercise their agency as they engage in living ukuthwala norms in routinised practices. Studying them requires a conceptual framework that bridges the subject / body relations and mind body relations and calls for a rethinking of the kind of agency commonly used for actions of resistance.

Therefore, my theoretical approach in this thesis hinges on the concept of embodiment to analyse these women's experiences. This concept offers a theoretical understanding of how bodies are simultaneously biological and a social construct. While I do not deny that the body is a biological and material reality, here I use the concept of embodiment more to analyse how

[13] I use unthwalwa'ed to refer to women that have the qualities and the possibility to be thwalwa'ed if identified, these are young girls and women who have not been thwalwa'ed before and have never been married. In the case of those who were thwalwa'ed before or have been married they are considered unthwal'able because they 'belong' to another man. I explain in chapter six that once a girl or woman is thwalwa'ed she automatically becomes someone's wife and that label is carried throughout one's entire life.

[14] I coined the term unthwal'able to refer to a specific category of people that cannot be thwalwa'ed. This group consists of the masculine, older women and previously thwalwa'ed girls and young women as they are considered "damaged, rebels of culture/ ancestors". I elaborate on this in chapters four, five and six.

women experience pain and suffering through the body - the body is the medium through which ukuthwalwa is experienced.

2.12. Agency and Performativity

Drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, feminists contend that gender is a practice, and embodied practices are gendered. Judith Butler (1989) endorsed Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological accounts of embodied subjects where he emphasised people's experiences as embodied subjects in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962,204). Merleau-Ponty understood the body as an affective agent and as such as the basis for human subjectivity, he argued that meaningful agency is possible and that it is made possible in the body as we find ourselves located in a physical and social world. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler and argues that agency must not be taken from a metaphysical conception of the subject in which agency is synonymous with "voluntarism or individualism" (Butler, 1993,15). In her later works, Butler abandons the phenomenological accounts of the embodied subjects and instead offers an account of performativity as "the discursive mode by which ontological effects are established" and which contest[s] the very notion of the subject" (Butler, 1996,112). This departure from a theory of embodied subjectivity results in a different kind of agency which according to Butler is discursively constituted. Butler argues that contrary to the belief that gender differences are rooted in biological and or cultural orientations, gender is an effect of power secured through repeated performance of norms. Butler declares that "gender is not an inner core or static essence, but a reiterated enactment of norms, ones that produce, retroactively, the appearance of gender as an abiding interior depth" (Butler, 1997, 14). According to Butler, at the point at which the repetition of the gender norms fails or are re-appropriated or re-signified for other purposes beyond performing as expected agency takes form. Echoing Foucault, Butler suggests:

> The paradox of subjectivation (assujetissement) is precisely that the subject who would *resist such norms* is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or re-articulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power (Butler, 1993:15).

Butler is useful in trying to understand how the experience of ukuthwala is responded to differently by its subjects. We might argue, after her, that it is the expectation that these women perform repeatedly a script dictated by the culture of their community that the most violent acts on their bodies come to be accepted by them even though we might expect them to resist. And, when they do resist, they often perform their acts of resistance within the accepted norms or in ways that do not expose their acts as resistance.

2.13. Rethinking Agency and Agentic Capacities

Kathleen Barry (1979) argued that the presentation of women as pure victims presented women as mere recipients of violence without agency. In the literature on women's responses to violence, their agency has largely been conceptualised in two ways, either they report the violence to formal sources like the police, shelters, the justice system etc and in some instances to informal sources like the family, friends, and neighbours (Andersson et al., 2010; Kim & Lee, 2011) or they leave the abusive relationship (Scheffer, Lindgren & Renck, 2008). This has been a point of contention in feminist and sociological engagements – a point that I seek to contribute to in this thesis by complicating the idea of victim versus agent. Recent scholarship has moved beyond the victim / agent dichotomies to realise that victims can also have agency and the term survivor has been widely used to substitute for victim (Dunn, 2004, 2005, 2010). The works of sociologist Liz Kelly on ***Surviving Sexual Violence*** (1988) and then two books titled ***Battered Women as Survivors*** appeared (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Hoff, 1990) popularised the term survivors. Kelly's main objective was to highlight the agency that victims of violence were not passive rather they were also active survivors. Hoff (1990) describes

women she studied as “survivors who struggled courageously” rather than as “merely passive victims” (Hoff, 1990 : 8). She further went on to describe them as “capable, responsible agents” (Hoff, 1990 : 65). Other scholars have attempted to complicate the debates by bringing in the idea of women first “as agents who are active and courageous” and “determined and brave” and, “as both victims and agents” (Jenkins, 1996:110). Jenkins, while recognising the usual tendency to blame women for their own victimisation, analyses the notion of the ‘battered woman syndrome’ as central to the creation of permanent victims “trapped by the violence and held hostage by their own perceptions” Jenkins (1996: 95 - 96).

In this thesis, I move beyond the overly simplistic conceptions of women as either victims or agents. I present an alternative conceptualisation of women that exposes the heterogeneity of real victims and their lived experiences. Looking at thwalwa’ed women’s lives, the binaries, or structures of our thinking about victims and survivors are dismantled. What emerges are lived lives that do not fall neatly into the dichotomies. Hence, I talk about shifting vulnerabilities as I move beyond the traditional requirements of victimhood that have forced us to “focus on extreme and pathological versions” and a “narrow and extreme prototype” (Lamb, 1999 : 109). Following on Dunn (2010), I argue that some of the stories presented in this thesis challenge the idea that victims are always innocent. However, an important and yet oftentimes marginalised critique of the victim and agent dichotomy has been Donilleen Loseke who has been preoccupied with the images of battered women. In 1989, in a chapter titled ***“Violence is “Violence” … or Is It?”*** she states that the images that the police and activists’ construct of battered women “do not reflect the complexity of social life” Loseke, 1989 : 2013), they are often dramatized and exaggerated. She argues that the typical stories presented of a battered a woman as “pure victim trapped in her victimisation” is not accurate because “this narrative does not easily encompass the messiness of the lived experience of troubles in general” (Loseke, 2001: 122). This messiness comes up in stories of women

prisoners who have been imprisoned for intimate partner violence. Ferraro (2006) titled her account of women offenders as “neither angels nor demons” and the victim/ offender categories fail to capture their reality. According to Ferraro, pure victims are “meek and distraught, innocent of provoking their victimisation” (Ferraro, 2006 : 4). She contends that the women she interviewed are more complex - “the lives they speak are not clean: they are complicated and confusing” (Ferraro, 2006: 7). In this way, Ferraro broadens the notions of what constitutes victimhood and victimisation, she draws in agency and above all allows for criminality in agency, blurring the boundaries. Therefore, with the added dimensions of what constitutes victims and how, the idea of agency has been complicated in ways that allow for a broader spectrum of what agency may mean in different contexts and situations. This thesis demonstrates that broadening our perceptions and allowing for greater inclusiveness allows for a greater analysis of the messiness of life.

2.14. Shifting Vulnerabilities

Just as importantly, I argue for a redefining of agency from conceptualising it as “the capacity for progressive change”, to reconceiving it, “as the capacity to endure, suffer and persist” (Mahmood, 2001: 217). I explore the role of the loss of self in relation to forms of agency found in thwalwa’ed women. I show that the experience of pain is not limited to passive suffering/ submission, rather, women engage in diminutive acts of defiance. My point is not to dismiss studies that foreground African women as invulnerable (cf. (Enloe, 2017; Abwunza, 2019, Hudson-Weens, 1993, 1998; Sofola, 1998), abandoning these will be absurd. Rather, the point here is to draw attention to the intersections of vulnerability and agency (cf. Butler, 2004; Code, 2009; Bergoffen, 2003) offering a nuanced angle from which to open conversations to think with, against and beyond these understandings.

Throughout this thesis, and in trying to break through the narrow analyses of women's agency that centres on the lens of emancipation, I attempt to re-conceptualise power relations as a set of relations that seek to dominate the subject in the long term and have long lasting reparations even long after the direct domination has dissipated. I follow feminist theorist Judith Butler whose conceptualisation of 'subjectivation' explains the paradox of how a dominated subject may use the domination as a means towards emancipation. Butler argues that the conditions and processes that ensure subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self - conscious and agentic subject (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1980, 1983). This thesis does not intend to dispute this; however, it argues that in as much as this is the case, some subjects do not reach the level of complete emancipation. The process of domination stifles their agency and alters their subjectivity. It emphasises that the lived lives and subjectivities of thwalwa'ed women are residues of a dominated self. Such conceptualisation of power and subject formation encourages us to understand that some operations of power may be detrimental to agency as they do not allow for any capacity for resistance. This draws our attention to the practical daily experiences of how individuals deal with the residues of power and domination. It draws our attention to the specific ways in which one experiences ukuthwalwa, one's thoughts, body, conduct, and ways of being.

I argue that women shift their vulnerabilities and as a result shifting vulnerabilities is a concept that allows for the reinforcement rather than subverting the agency of thwalwa'ed women. Nyuke (2013, 2021) coined the concept of shifting vulnerabilities to submit that migrant children are not always in a permanent state of vulnerability, their vulnerability shifts depending on the situation and context. Nyuke further argues that these children are not just docile players in their everyday lives, "they direct the outcome of these associations in creative ways" (Nyuke, 2021 : 1). Children are also a group that has always been marginalised because they are considered as "becoming" and not full human beings yet. The same applies to

thwalwa'ed women who are always in a permanent state of becoming in the relationships that they encounter and the spaces that they occupy.

2.15. Suffering and Subjectivity

In this study I present the constitution of a thwalwa'ed subject as a product of psychosocial and physical suffering. Within anthropological literature, suffering is now being recognised being implicated in the formation of subjectivities (Seligman, 2010; Das and Das, 2007; Lock, 1999). Suffering is usually used to refer to pain, be it physical, psychological, or social. It is also implicated to emanate from low self-esteem issues and discriminations (Farmer, 1997; Morris, 1997). Seligman states that "suffering has the potential to undermine the coherence of lived selves and create the experience of internal conflict, disjuncture, or fragmentation" (Seligman, 2010 : 297). Seligman further argues that these discontinuities in the experience of self may be a source of suffering in and of themselves. The concept of self that I employ in this study builds on this notion of the subject and subjectivity to encompass the embodied aspects of experience. I focus on the direct experience of occupying a particular body and the perceptual, non- conscious dimensions of experience. This helps me to analyse the deconstructive effects of suffering on the self, by identifying not only the reflexive elements of self but importantly for this study the experiential – embodied dimensions where suffering is concretised.

From the experiences of ukuthwalwa related suffering, I also highlight how the idea of self is affected by discontinuities produced through these experiences. My observations and analyses of subjects' experiences of suffering and their processes and journeys towards self-healing highlight that self is fundamentally embodied, and that the cognitive and bodily aspects of the self are intrinsically connected. Additionally, through thwalwa'ed women's narratives

of their lives, I demonstrate that the self-produced through the suffering of ukuthwalwa is multiple and constantly shifting.

Therefore, suffering in this study can be understood in terms of its broader usage to refer to the experience of pain and hardships emanating from the brutal social context in which the women exist. The thesis pays close attention to how everyday forms of violence and suffering structure people's everyday reality and social relations. The study also appreciates 'social suffering' as articulated by Kleinman in Das and Lock (1997 : ix); see also (Biehl, Good and Kleinman, 2007) who argue that suffering can be social and define social suffering as a combination of 'human problems' that have devastating consequences for human experience. They further point out that social suffering results from the clustering of among others, domestic violence, and the linkage of personal problems with societal problems. Furthermore, they highlight that social suffering is shared across societies, however, it is more prevalent on those who are desperately poor and powerless (Kleinman, Das & Lock, 1997). To understand how these large-scale structures affect everyday lives, this thesis deploys Kleinman's (1997) assertion that "social suffering is related to subjectivity, and it connects the political to the emotional" (Kleinman, 1997 : 317). Here, Kleinmann argues that rather than focusing on suffering exclusively in relation to pain, a perspective which naturalises suffering, we must focus on rather understanding the "every day, unmarked forms of suffering". Thus, here I use suffering to refer to an individual and social experience whereby there is both personal and interpersonal experience with pain and suffering in social relationships. I also understand suffering as a societal construction that serves as a constraining tool for the thwalwa'ed woman.

2.16. Everyday Practices and resistance

Drawing on Michel de Certeau's work on the practices of the everyday, this work explores the meanings and complexities of the lived everyday experiences of thwalwa'ed women, in particular the "strategies" and "tactics" that they employ in dealing with the trauma, violence and other forms of subordination that are inflicted on them. De Certeau's concept of practices of the everyday is not a theory in and of itself, rather de Certeau's project was "by means of inquiries and hypotheses, to indicate pathways for further research" (de Certeau, 1984: xi). De Certeau's aim is to centre the practices of everyday life or the ways in which people engage with domination in the everyday. The main engagement of this concept is not how to overthrow the networks of power that include schools, churches, businesses etc, but rather how individuals resist being heavily controlled by this "grid of discipline" (Highmore, 2002: 159). De Certeau's analytic lens focuses on "ways of operating" or on what he described as the "clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of discipline" (De Certeau, 1984, xiv–xv). His main preoccupation was to uncover the everyday actions taken by the dominated while using products provided by the dominator.

As such de Certeau's concept of everyday practices offers an analytic sense through which to engage with these responses and to understand how they produce particular subjectivities and practices. Studies on resistance also pay attention to the everyday, for example, James Scott (1985)'s ***"Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance"***. Scott advances that subordinate groups engage in hidden forms of everyday resistance, what he calls "hidden transcripts" which are activities that might be understood as resistance but are concealed from the dominant groups through their enactment within accepted forms of behaviour. de Certeau (1984) argues that to exclusively focus on the modes of

domination underplays the political agency of ordinary people. He highlights that it is important to look beyond domination and try to better understand the heterogeneous practices through which ordinary people survive, such as which are by humour and improvisation, practices that are hidden from the glare of the hidden repressive apparatus. The focus here is on what de Certeau alludes to as the "night side of societies" to describe the ambiguous shadowy quality of individual everyday practices and their modes of resistance. He argues that political subjects and their modes of resistance are formed within rather than beyond the terrains of domination. Within the practices of the everyday de Certeau presents that there are strategies for the strong and the weak utilise different tactics which he calls the "art of the weak". He writes that:

> A tactic takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep... It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse (De Certeau, 1984:30).

According to de Certeau, tactics are determined by the absence of power, while strategies are for the strong and making strategic decisions depends on possessing the power to do so. The argument is that tactics operate "within the enemy's field of vision" (de Certeau, 1984), and it is through tactics that the subordinate can find redemption from the overbearing society. These concepts compel an examination of the practices of both the thwalwa'ed women and the structure that thwalas (abducts) them. From this perspective, the thesis tries to find how the technologies and assemblages of practices operate on a local site. By invoking the 'everyday practices', this thesis analyses the complexity and plurality of women's actions, in particular on how individuals commonly assumed to be passive respond to dominant representations. The life histories give the individual accounts of women's agency, they illustrate how women use tactics to manage adversity and how their everyday practices

foreclose what is possible for them. De Certeau's work has been criticised for disregarding the relationship between agency and the given structural conditions of a place and a time (Mitchell, 1991) and as conceiving of subjects as having no power to change or disrupt the dominant systems (cf. Morris, 1990). Highmore presents a strong argument to the contrary that de Certeau's notion of resistance does in actual fact speak of acts of "opposition". He claims that de Certeau, provides for a conceptualisation of resistance that captures the tactics and strategies utilised in the practices of everyday life. As such, de Certeau allows us to see that it is not a matter of escaping ukuthwalwa marriages or simply a matter of supposing a subject who has no power to act at all because they cannot change the system that sustains ukuthwalwa in its entirety. Although these everyday tactics are difficult to reify into lasting representations, this does not render them meaningless, in fact their plurality and their heterogeneity recognises power in everyday ways of operating.

The above conceptualisation helps us to consider that the narratives presented here are not mere stories, but everyday practices that are laden with creative tactics of "escaping without leaving" (de Certeau, 1984) as they are performed within the grid of the discipline of patriarchy. They operate alongside the logics of strategies of patriarchy. By looking at de Certeau's analysis of everyday life, everyday practices of those at the margins can be seen as creative articulations of human subjectivity and agency.

2.17. The concept of resistance

The use of resistance in this thesis departs from the early focus on the more obvious and dramatic forms of resistance. Rather it prioritises the subtle and diffused forms of resistance. Scholars like Charles Tilly focused on the public, collectivised and violent forms of resistance

to domination. Contemporaneously though, the field has become more diversified, but it is still dominated by a strong focus on the public and collective performances of resistance. Resistance has been used to describe a variety of actions and behaviours whether collective, individual or at the institutional level. The term is defined variously, for example, "acting autonomously, in one's own interests" (Gregg, 1993: 172). Profitt, (1998: 543) defines resistance as "active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to … abusive behaviour and … control". And as simply "questioning and objecting" (Modigliani and Rochart, 1995: 112. While these definitions combined may accurately describe what I mean by resistance, the thesis uses two dimensions to understand resistance - the covert and overt forms of resistance. Scott (1989) maintains that the forms of resistance mobilised depend on the form of power being acted against. While some may claim that 'real' resistance are actions against dominant institutions in their entirety (cf. Scott, 1989: 51), Scott argues that they overlook how power relations constrain some forms of resistance. The kinds of resistance prioritised in this thesis are those that come from the scholarship of James Scott, Asef Bayat, Michel de Certeau and Judith Butler. These scholars prioritise the hidden or disguised everyday performances or acts of resistance which are usually informed by a desire to escape and survive some form of domination.

2.18. Conceptualising Culture

This study adopts Tamale's broad interpretation of culture where it means as "the various ways that social business is conducted and mediated through language, symbols, rituals and traditions and influenced by issues such as race, ethnicity, religion, material base and so forth" (Tamale, 2014: 54). Furthermore, she urges African feminists to adopts strategies that are

> …informed by the lived experiences of women and men on the continent and the specificities of what they hold as their culture, taking into account that there is not always in agreement among people in the same locale about nuances and meanings of culture (Tamale, 2011: 4)

The above excerpt indicates that what constitutes 'culture' may not be agreed on by all members of the society. Cultures are contested, and cultural systems overlap; exogenous forces that range from technology, religions, colonialism, and economic interdependencies may influence cultures. Moreover, culture is not static, it changes and evolves over time. Tamale argues that the value–assessment that is often made of cultures and cultural practices is misplaced, given that all cultures have aspects that are positive and others that disempower. Tamale argues that "the tendency is to commence from the premise that views culture as being hostile to women, an antithesis to their rights". She further contends that "researchers and theorists speak of rights as if they are culture-less at best, at worst, born of a superior culture" (Tamale, 2014: 20). Sharing the same sentiment, Wanyeki (2003) argues that mainstream feminist scholarship both within and outside Africa views culture in negative terms and it is considered a stumbling block to legal reform. However, even though Tamale agrees that some of the claims are unfounded, she pushes to the fore the idea that such beliefs have the effect of obscuring the fact that in some instances culture may hold as a tool for emancipation. Alluding to sexual rights, she writes "In fact, culture is a double-edged sword that can be wielded creatively and resourcefully to enhance women's access to sexual justice" (Tamale, 2014: 20).

The important question that arises from the above discussion is whose meanings and understandings will then dominate the discourse on gender and culture. My study pushes to the fore the voices of the marginalised, thereby generating knowledge from that front. It utilises both meanings of culture – culture as a system of symbols and meanings, and culture as a practice. I derive meanings from the practices of the particular group of people under scrutiny.

The lived experiences of women in this study offer an insight into the cultural beliefs and practices of a community and as a researcher and analyst meanings from those actions emerge and help us to understand and explain the phenomenon under study. This conceptualisation is cognizant of the fact that in the practice of culture there are different forces at play that include power relations, contradictions, and change (Sewell, 1999: 44).

In South African discourse, culture is often used as a descriptor of an essentialised blackness, in turn incorporating the concepts of custom, tradition and customary law. Legal historians and sociolegal scholars such as Martin Chanock and Mnisi Weeks have contributed to dismantling of the western oriented constructions of black "custom" and "customary law" that are found in the so called official customary law (Chanock, 1991, 1985; Weeks, 2010, 2017). These scholars argue for a shift from the static, outdated and largely distorted conceptions of African customs and laws to a more locally negotiated living customary law which is understood as the norms that regulate people's daily lives which usually contradict the views of outsiders. Their works challenge the theory of culturalism which conceives of culture as unchanging, as an organic whole and inherent (Volpp, 2000; Mitchell, 1995). Culturalism is generally applied to marginalised populations, particularly, the black and other non – white underprivileged communities (ibid).

Although culture has been widely used as a concept, it remains difficult to define and remains a contested terrain. Cultural anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1924) defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and other habits acquired by man as a member of society", in other words, culture is "the complete social heritage of a society" which means "everything that one as a member of a certain society must acquire as knowledge, norms and capabilities (cited in Nyamnjoh,

1999: 18). When conceived in such narrow terms, culture forms a protective crown over customs, laws, and ideologies. Sally Engle Merry critiques this understanding as one that views culture as "a reified thing, as bounded and static" (Merry, 2003: 58). Human behaviour and expression of identity, even within black communities, is infinitely messy. Sometimes there is unity and sameness in certain aspects and in some there is diversity and division, something which this thesis demonstrates in the understanding and practice of ukuthwala. What this understanding of culture does is that it dictates what behaviours are acceptable in a particular society while castigating and punishing non – compliance and it creates hierarchies of being. In this sense, culture is incredibly powerful and dangerous. Geographer, Mitchel, defines culture as an abstraction that is made real by its application", a "structuring imposition." (Mitchel 1995: 108). Mitchel further emphasises the dangerousness of culture in that it "creates partial yet globalizing truths," often to the detriment of the powerless in a society (Mitchel, 1995: 107-109).

Raymond Williams writes of culture as "the signifying system through which … a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored" (Williams, 1981: 13). He also offerd a definition of the theory of culture as "the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life (Williams, 1961: 63-64)". Stuart Hall defines culture as "lived practices, or practical ideologies which enable a society, group, or class to experience, define, interpret, and make sense of the conditions of existence" (Hall, 1982: 7). John Frow more specifically describes culture as "the whole range of practices and representations through which a social group's reality (or realities) is constructed and maintained" (Frow, 1995: 3).

From the above definitions, culture is a universal phenomenon that forms the basis for human life. Glassie (1995) warns against abandoning the concept of culture because of the

fluidity of its definitions. Rather, he calls for us to think of culture as a "consistent whole" "within which deviant versions are shaped by the rich or poor, children or old folks, women, or men" (Glassie, 1995: 399). In patriarchal society, culture functions as a way through which gendered norms and expectations are normalised and reproduced.

2.19. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that this study is anchored on the ukuthwalwa as the overarching conceptual framework from which a number of concepts emerge and in relation to which particular concepts are mobilised. Concepts such as ukuthwalwa effects, patriarchy, culture, cultural violence, patriarchal violence, power and subjectivity, bodies and embodiment, agency, shifting vulnerabilities, suffering and pain, and everyday practices were employed to think with, against and beyond the experiences of ukuthwalwa. To operationalize the concept of ukuthwalwa as it cuts across the analysis of this study, the emphasis is placed on the lived experiences of thwalwa'ed women as they try and make sense of their lives. Valuable insights are drawn mainly from Pumla Gqola who pushes for an approach to the study of the lives of African women that focuses on the mundane and unspectacular events in their everyday lives to create knowledge. As such, the feminist framing of my research stimulates the asking of questions that centre on women's subjectivities. It provokes one to go beyond the surface of dominant questions, theories, scholarship on women and policy efforts to identify what happens at the convergence of the practice of ukuthwala and the lives and subjectivities of African women in South Africa. It encourages one to ask whose voice is dominant in ukuthwalwa discourses and if this has been thwarting or enabling of the emancipation of women. The feminist paradigm brings with it difficult challenges and responsibilities, for undertaking a feminist project requires an understanding of the multiplicity and multi-dimensional accounts of women's lives, and the influence of forces around them. Based on the

example set by Gqola, my research pays attention to how patriarchy and the violence of patriarchy reconfigures women's lives in the production of particular subjectivities.

CHAPTER 3:

Methodological Reflections

3.1. Introducing the Methodology and Theoretical Orientation

"Kutheni uzikhathaza ngathi? singabahlolokazi nje. Kukho abafazi abakufuna kakhulu, abo abathwelweyo thetha nabo". (Why bother about us? We are just widows. There are women that need you the most, those who were thwalwa'ed, talk to them). These sentiments were uttered by one of my informants, a Xhosa woman when I was conducting my fieldwork on widowhood for my master's degree studies[15]. This woman felt that studying widows was a waste. She felt that there are women who are exposed to worse situations that needed attention – the thwalwa'ed women. She believed that she was lucky to have escaped ukuthwalwa in the Eastern Cape and found love in Johannesburg. However, she was worried about other women who probably would never experience what she experienced. It is at that point that I began to conceive of the idea of studying women and ukuthwala.

Initially, there were two certainties, firstly, that the thesis must concern ukuthwala and that it must focus on women. I looked at the literature on ukuthwala and noted that women's lived experiences of ukuthwala were not featured. To my frustration, those who tried to incorporate women were mostly concerned with ukuthwala as a sensational act rather than understanding the practice from the experiencing subject. The scholarship indicated that

[15]My master's degree which I attained in 2015 at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg was on the lived experiences of widowhood in a poor socio – economic locality in Johannesburg. Ndlovu, T. (2015). Silent Victims or Agents of Change? An Exploration of The Lived Experiences of African Widows Confronted with the Practice of Customary Law of Succession and Inheritance in South Africa, Masters thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

thwalwa'ed women are hidden and not much is known about them. Coupled with my limited feminist orientation, studying thwalwa'ed women became critical. My initial motivation was to get their stories out and I first framed this as 'giving them a voice', which I now understand was coming from a naïve understanding of what a PhD project can do. However, I remained determined to at least highlight women's experiences of ukuthwalwa as compared to the mainstream understandings of ukuthwala as a practice and a concept that have usually worked towards the erasure of women from the production of knowledge on ukuthwala.

With these motivations in mind, my thesis begins to address the deficiency of research on ukuthwalwa by exploring women's lives after ukuthwalwa. Using a narrative inquiry method, the study unearths how ukuthwala is a cultural practice deeply embedded in the deployment of patriarchal violence which then creates a thwalwa'ed subject that embodies pain and suffering. It is in the telling of stories that the women gave insight to their subjectivities. I detail how thwalwa'ed women negotiate the everyday pressures of ukuthwalwa and carve fissures where they find some relief and breathe through their wounds. My research question asks: How have women engaged, appropriated, and negotiated the ukuthwalwa cultural practice? This is an open-ended research question informed by four sub-questions that help us understand and explore the ukuthwala versus ukuthwala themes and the location of women within the nexus. My analyses are underpinned by feminist theories that call into attention the hidden transcripts of women's lives as they have the potential to disrupt official accounts of especially black and women's lives.

3.2. Ethnographic Feminist Framework

The point in this thesis is not to tell what ukuthwala is or what the women's experiences are, rather it is to respectfully listen to what the ukuthwala practice says about her experiences. The point here is to delve deeper into women's lived experiences and to see the concealed

meanings of women's lived experiences often concealed by conventional ways of viewing the world. Therefore, this study deviates from the traditional approach of looking at ukuthwala through a male centric and narrowed lens. Instead, I intend to bring out the usually obscured information of what it means to be thwalwa'ed. I employ the qualitative research methodology of feminist ethnography to capture how this unfolds.

The feminist project encourages us to look at women's immediate world and decipher what certain societal practices and occurrences say about women's lives. The primary objective of feminism is to work towards fostering a more gender equal society. Therefore, the scholarship on women must work on transmitting understandings of women's lives through rich descriptions and uncovering the meanings behind silences that are part of their lived experiences (Gqola, 2007 and Motsemme, 2004). Feminist ethnographic scholarship is marked by its emphasis on the "centrality of women's experiences" (Roseneil, 1993: 178) as well as the number of critical calls to incorporate feminist politics in the research process. The crucial issues and concerns raised of and by feminist ethnographies include firstly issues to do with power, objectivity, reflexivity, and polyvocality. Secondly, feminists are concerned about the relationship between the researcher and the researched, especially when it pertains to the construction of the 'Other'. This scholarship takes seriously problems with the traditional ethnographic scholarship's long history of studying "them" (Stacey 1988 and Strathern,1987) which, it is argued, is more of an objectifying creation of the other, which involves looking at interviews, summarising another's life and placing it within a context (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991).

To counter this objectification of the 'Other', a few researchers have discussed the concept of dialogic methods (cf. Sawyer and Lund, 2012; Callaway, 1992, Roseneil, 1993). Callaway (1992) calls for a shift from observational and empirical methods to communicative

and constitutive approaches. This can be understood in terms of a change from visual metaphors such as seeing and viewing to metaphors expressing a voice (listening and understanding). The voice – centred approach advances that women have the power to speak of and about their lives, making the research process a dialogue between the researcher and the researched. In this case, the researcher and the researched are both assumed to be individuals who reflect on their experiences and who can communicate those experiences (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991), a premise which this study heavily relies on.

Feminist ethnographies have challenged the sacredness of academic writing, introducing new modes of writing about women which has blurred the boundaries of politics and poetics in writing in the social sciences. Secondly, they have gone beyond the political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of women's lives to include the existential and the embodied. Finally, feminist ethnographies have consistently explored the usually overlooked aspects of everyday life rather than the spectacular events and experiences of women. And in placing emphasis on the everyday life we can analyse the continuing challenges and uncertainties of women's lives as well as witness how routinised violence, for example, becomes part of other routines in everyday life. Focusing on the everyday experiences also helps us to understand the intimate details of their existence as well as how the local interactions are negotiated. Consequently, this scholarship introduces new conceptual categories and themes which have enriched our ideas on women, gender systems, violence, and the politics of family structure.

The telling of lived experiences that I embark on in this study is an attempt to examine the experiences of individuals within intersecting oppressions. The premise for this perspective lies in that the potential for social change hinges on understanding the multidimensionality of

oppression. Therefore, drawing on intersectionality, the study attempts to capture the multiple and individual interactions and experiences related to the common phenomenon of ukuthwala. I consider intersectionality and narrative inquiry as means of accessing and representing lived experience as a counter to dominant and discriminatory discourses. The concept of intersectionality has invited a remarkable degree of theoretical and methodological engagement amongst feminist scholars around the globe. First used by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989, the concept was used to recognise the ways in which women experienced multi-layered oppressions and experienced life in different ways (McCall, 2005:1771). Davis 2008 describes intersectionality as

> the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (Davis, 2008: 68).

To capture the multidimensionality and the complexity of women's experiences, the study blends ethnographic and narrative inquiry methodologies. Narrative inquiry "provides a theoretical and practical framework for (re) interpreting lived experience" (Shields, 2005: 179). According to Caine, Estefan & Canadian (2013), narrative inquiry is "an inquest into the puzzles around people's experiences" (Caine, Estefan & Canadian (2013: 576). An ethnographic approach allows a researcher to immerse oneself in the lives of informants and participants gaining valuable insights into their experiences and everyday lives (Neuman, 1994). Ethnography allows for a description of a culture and understanding another way of life from the native point of view (Berg, 1995: 86, Neuman, 1994: 333). An ethnographic study is defined as a set of research tools principally concerned with exploring participants' understanding of their social milieu and symbolic world (Denzin, 1970 in Emond 2005: 124).

3.3. The Interviews

3.3.1. Narrative Inquiry

My primary interest was in the experience of ukuthwalwa and to grasp the meanings attached to the fractured lives of these women. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) describe narrative inquiry as a methodology that underscores "a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 479). They further state that narrative inquiry is "the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience." (p.479). The narrative inquiry approach developed by Clanadinin, and Connelly allowed me to tap into the 'secret and sacred stories' of the women and some men. It took me on a journey of (re) visiting and (re) constructing stories from my participants' pasts across time into the present - to who they were becoming. It allowed for intertwining the 'why, what, and how' life questions through the explorations of the women's lived experiences. It was important for my study to consider place, temporality, and sociality within the life stories and within the experiences of the participants (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013: 577) because "each story told and lived is situated and understood within a larger cultural, social, familial, and institutional narrative" (ibid.). As described by Prosser (2007) in relation to the appropriate methodologies and methods on investigating "visible but hidden cultures", my narrative inquiry into the experiences of women allowed for what were silent and unspeakable stories to be shared and made visible, while also accepting that some of the stories will never be told. While that may be the case, Neuman highlights that some people may tell their stories through the lens created for them by others what he refers to as "attending to words of others rather than their own words" (Neumann, 1997 : 107). I was therefore cognisant of the fact that some women's stories were regurgitating the words that were scripted for them by the custodians of

ukuthwala. That was evident in many of the initial stories and explanations that I got from the women. However, as I built the relations and continued observations, I was able to get their own understandings which were different from the prescribed narratives of their lives. This also opened ethical issues and obligations in that I had to be mindful of my words as they might encourage or shift attention in new and unsettling ways.

Overall, I conducted 35 life story narrative interviews with thwalwa'ed women. These stories were not told in a linear fashion, but contained points of incomprehension, ruptures, and inconsistencies. This did not bother me because the goal was to gain an understanding of how they remembered, made sense of and chose to represent their lives. Rather, those inconsistencies and ruptures were a confirmation of how their lives were disrupted and punctuated by the practice of ukuthwala. Additionally, the point was not to get the right number of participants. Rather, I chose the participants on the basis of their having experience with the phenomenon of ukuthwala and the ability to talk about it from their perspective. The findings in this study are not, then, meant to solve the problem that ukuthwala brings or is; instead they intend to clarify the lived meanings of being thwalwa'ed. This does not mean that the findings do not contribute to improving the human condition, but the findings help primarily to illuminate the perplexing nature of the lived experiences of women in ukuthwala unions.

By inquiring into the life stories of women or their life histories, I I understood that the stories could be "told from the midst" (Clandinin, 2006: 49) and sometimes in reverse chronology or in no particular order. Ellis (1999) states, "Memory doesn't work in a linear way, nor does life…" (Ellis, 1999 : 675). In that same vein, the women's stories were not told in a linear way, their stories came as flashbacks, as flashes of fragments of their lives, some were disrupted just like their own lives, and some were blocked and could not be verbalised

(these complicated their thoughts and feelings about their experiences of ukuthwalwa). I came to understand that people's experiences are continuously interactive, people's lives are composed and recomposed depending on their relations with others (Caine, Estefan and Clandinin, 2013: 576). Their stories, their lives are threaded together around relationships, extended families, and community life. Narrative inquiry in this case allowed the possibility for understanding how the social and the personal are intertwined over their lives. The stories that I was told were stories that were lived, re-lived, told, and retold.

Narrative research in itself is not a linear and straight forward undertaking. Fine (1994), argues that such research should be "messy, designed to rupture the textual laminations within which others have been sealed by social scientists, to review the complicity of researchers in the construction and distancing of Others, and to identify transgressive possibilities inside qualitative texts" (Fine, 1994: 71). I was also aware that inquiry into the experiences that compose a life exists within a broader society. Therefore, the women's stories would not be sufficient. I therefore employed a broader ethnographic methodology that combined different approaches, which allowed for a wider spectrum of research methods. Given the sensitivity of the area of study and the difficult field site, a multi-sited ethnography allowed me to better capture a range of diversity and complexity that structured the field also constantly reflecting on my positionality.

3.3.2. Design and Sample

The study took a textured approach in trying to understand the lives of these bodies caught up in states of fear and uncertainty. It tried to understand the technologies that allow this practice to continue. To this end, the main areas of investigation involved conducting formal interviews with two traditional authorities, seven men, and 35 thwalwa'ed women and

informal conversations with many other ordinary (unthwalwa'ed) women. Because this is a very sensitive and controversial issue to pursue, special care was taken to have a methodologically and ethically well controlled design. Initially, it was very difficult to gain access to the women. I had to go through the traditional authorities who were very protective of their subjects and sceptical of how the information would be used. I had to reassure the traditional leaders that I was there to learn about the marriage practices and not to get information for the media or the courts. When that was established, another struggle was to get access to the thwalwa'ed women. It was easy for other members of the community to point them out. Traditional leaders were also instrumental in identifying my potential respondents. However, due to the sensitivity of the topic, I had to tread carefully, gain their trust, and establish friendships with them before asking them about their lives. That strategy worked because they became curious and wanted to talk. I had to structure some interviews in conversational in style. Such an approach allowed me to get as much information as I could. There were particular women that after initially building rapport and gaining their confidence, I went back to them to hear more of their stories and to fill some gaps in their narratives. All in all, the empirical material on which this thesis is based consists of 44 recorded interviews, 35 of those were with thwalwa'ed women. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to about 2hrs and 30 minutes.

I also formed relationships with key informants to get a better understanding of the place and to get access to women with the life experiences of ukuthwalwa. I made multiple visits to their homesteads, met with some of them at the shops, drinking places, and walked to different spaces having some casual conversations. I met with some who called themselves cultural experts and some who were community leaders and took it on themselves to teach me of their ways of life. I met community leaders, activists, writers, retired teachers who gave me

some analysis of how they understood the practice of ukuthwala. I also met and spent time with a psychiatrist who shared information on the mental state of thwalwa'ed women. I talked to a few men who had thwala'ed women before, who explained the process of ukuthwala, and their thinking on the practice.

3.3.2. Participant Observation.

In the study I also took a close and textured approach in trying to understand the ways in which individuals live through pain and suffering. I employed the use of another key ethnographic technique - observation. This required attending and participating in social events as well as some of the everyday life activities that included taking part in the beer brewing gatherings, hanging around taverns, public eating places, visiting some in their homes, spending time helping with chores, attending funerals and weddings. Activities such as these allowed for the refinement of my understanding of ukuthwala at a conceptual level as I was able to adopt the perspective of the women themselves. Observation allowed for the dynamics of power, agency, and politics to be theorised from below. According to Watson (2010), observation allows the researcher to get involved with people thereby relating "the words spoken, and the practices observed or experienced to the overall cultural framework within which they occurred" (Watson, 2010 : 205). This approach has the capability to offer insights into the gaps/ cracks of everyday lived experience, its complexities and challenging dichotomies and powerful discourses. In other words, being there and observing the patterns of everyday life allowed me to tap into the overall cultural framework from within which these women lived their lives. Observations proved to be a useful supplement to interviews. I also spoke with other women beyond the targeted group and traditional leaders, and I was able to converse with men who had once participated in the abduction process and had married their

wives through ukuthwala. I also maintained correspondence with some of the respondents over Whatsapp.

3.4. Researcher Positionality: Negotiating Entry and Dilemmas of Fieldwork

3.4.1. Reflections on Positionality

"Are you going to teach our women about marriage"? The Chief of the village where I conducted my fieldwork asked. His question was but one of many similar questions that many men in the area asked. Not that I did not expect such kinds of questions from men because of the subject of my research, but this question threw me off balance for a little while. The chief was my first point of entry, and this was informed by the widely held belief that chiefs are the custodians of culture in traditional societies. Also, I had to ask for permission from traditional authorities to conduct my fieldwork in the area.

Reflecting on my positioning and interactions with the research participants was vital for this study. Qualitative and feminist methodologies also encourage reflexivity on the part of researchers (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011). As researchers "w(e) cannot step outside of our intersubjective involvement with the lifeworld and into some mythical, all-knowing, and neutral standpoint… By our very being in the world, we are already morally implicated." (Angen, 2000: 383). When I began the research, I was aware that I am a staunch feminist, who has been passionate about issues that concern women, someone who is extremely sensitive to women's experiences and has been exposed to most of the injustices that black woman and girls face from a very young age. It is this background that motivated me to research and write this thesis. I was also aware of my identity as a black feminist woman and how that would influence how I decode the field data. While I was aware that my own assumptions can be challenged, my position as a PhD student and woman who was privileged in many ways, I

could impose my biases on the women I was interviewing, becoming dominant over research participants. I kept these truths as reminders to be always reflexive of my positionality while delicately negotiating entry into the field and in my interpretation of data.

I conducted a 7-month long period of ethnographic fieldwork from July 2018 to January 2019. I also went back in between June and July 2021 for some follow up interviews. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I conducted my fieldwork in the Engcobo rural municipality in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The rural part of Engcobo still subscribes fiercely to traditional authority and retains some of the revered traditional practices including ukuthwala. During the conversation with the chief, I got a sense that ukuthwala is still a practice that is traditionally protected. In defence of ukuthwala, the chief told me that he married his wife through ukuthwala when she was thirteen years old, and he emphasised that he was different from other men because he allowed her to go back to school and to work. The chief's revelation did not only confirm my understanding of Engcobo as a place in which ukuthwala constituted the tradition of the area but most importantly invited me to proceed with caution in negotiating my study of the complex issue. In addition, the chief alerted me to the challenges brought by the landmark case of Jezile vs the State. He said that the case saw a lot of journalists flooding the area and a roll out of state funded workshops against ukuthwala. He indicated that this brought constant fear, insecurity, shame, and embarrassment for those who still practised ukuthwala or who were married through the custom, hence people always felt like they lived in constant glare of researchers, the media, the state, and organisations.

The chiefs' revelations and my reflections on his (initial) question constituted my initial phase of being mindful of my positionality and how to handle my relationship as a researcher with the researched. So, getting insider status, which is critical in conducting this kind of

research, was complicated and became a hurdle and a challenge to clear on my first visit. But as I negotiated entry and faced some challenges, I repositioned my outsider status in ways that allowed me to shift my analytic gaze to view 'ukuthwala' without judging and sincerely reflecting on how my presence affected the research participants' perceptions of self and others/ 'outsiders' as I negotiated trust to the best of my ability. Complicating my research was the fact that conversations with strangers about people's marriages are rare and usually held in private. The issues on ukuthwala marriage custom are private, intimate and often 'criminal'. The dilemmas of fieldwork and issues of power and the complexity of my research were demonstrated from my first interview on the 30th of July 2018.

My experience of Engcobo was that it is a social space where people exist between domination and survival where negotiation of these two positions is a way of life. The chief referred me to his neighbour to start my interviews because there were two women there. I went straight to the compound. As I approached the gate, the patriarch of this compound was seated closer to the gate as if guarding jealously who comes in and who goes out of his compound. I approached him with extreme caution because obtaining an interview at this point solely rested on his judgement and understanding of who I was and the purpose of my visit. After introducing myself and answering several questions from him, I was allowed to go inside and talk to the women. In the kitchen was his wife (she introduced herself as Mam' UJoyce) and their makoti[16]. Unbeknown to me was that his son had seen me get into his home. As I sat to introduce myself, he came in and sat opposite me and intimidatingly started interjecting with points of clarity and or/ corrections on what he thought I was not explaining well. His interjections continued as his mother was explaining how she was abducted and how much pain she felt during and after her abduction. The son would grab every opportunity to explain

[16] Makoti means bride, or daughter-in-law.

to me that all of this was “part of our culture” and that this was an important point that I must learn from this interview. When she explained how she cried, the pain of it all, the subsequent years of pain before she eventually accepted her fate, the son would occasionally interrupt and explain that as a woman you have to be strong and strength is marked by enduring hardships and he occasionally reminded his mother that she must not forget that she was thwalwa’ed by a man of integrity, who loved and provided for her. At this point, the mother would tone down on the hurt and talk about how her husband used to bring her chocolates from Cape Town and how she was thankful that he gave her beautiful children. The son’s interjections elevated this participant’s story to one of importance as it sharply indexed to me the multiple layers of patriarchy at work in this community.

The young man, obviously irritated by the conversation, turned to address me, and commented on how I clearly seemed not to understand the “African culture”. He commented on my dressing, especially how a piece of my hair was hanging out of the beret I was wearing, and also how I was showing too much of my forehead, explaining that a woman my age (34 at the time) must cover her forehead almost close to the eyebrows. When I left the place I was staying at, I thought I had pretty much over-covered myself, in a very long dress, long - sleeved big jacket and flat tennis shoes and a beret to cover my head, but to him that that was not good enough. After he was done giving his description of how a proper married woman should dress and handle herself, he quickly went on to give me advice on how to ask my questions, which people to talk to and how to approach them. He seemed to have a problem with everything about me. He questioned the validity of my student card, my studentship, my womanhood, my blackness, my profession, and my interviewing skills among other issues. He wanted to correct me; correct everything I was saying. This was the first of many painful interviews. During this

interview, I went through stages of hurt, denial, anger, frustration, acceptance, back to anger and eventually acceptance of what I initially thought was a doomed piece of fieldwork.

The set up and setting of this interview also highlighted the symbolic relations in that society. The symbolic representation was playing out when the son was playing the literal guardian of 'culture'. The son wielded more power to keep the woman (the mother) in check. Additionally, men are visible not only in the physical space but also in the cultural space. Generally, I observed that men were generally more visible than women, men were everywhere, and they occupied public space and had control over space. Women tended to be invisible in the private, public, and symbolic spaces. I felt that for me and other women, there were large echoes of silences behind the trauma imposed by that social space. In this case, Mam Joyce has no voice, no power to define or give meaning to all things cultural. Hence, during this interview, several questions came to mind. I started asking, "Who owns Mam Joyce's story or her experiences?" and "Who has the right to speak about these experiences? This interview showed me that she is not the owner of her life history and the experiences thereof. In a highly patriarchal society such as South Africa, who owns women's stories, their experiences or their bodies and lives? My initial thoughts are that ukuthwala is but one example of contested customs all playing out on women's bodies. Women and girls are the property of their brothers, fathers, husbands, and extended family male members. Even the negotiations before and after ukuthwala are exclusively male and women are neither informed nor involved. Therefore, in this regard, I argue that women are more like objects/ sites of struggle and contestations over culture. This thesis highlights that contestation over culture and traditions are played out on women's bodies, the contestations are highly gendered, and women's bodies are sites of contestations. The custom of ukuthwala is a contested and sensitive custom, the claims for its continuation rely heavily on the argument that it is the "Xhosa culture", it is the

"Xhosa traditional way" of getting married". The story serves as a precursor of what I was to experience in the field.

I used the interview and the son's comment on my dressing to enter the world of women who were thwalwa'ed or living in this area. I was also able to lift my analytic gaze from this individual narrative and experience to examine themes that were emerging across different stories. And the issue of the positioning of women and being stripped of the ownership of their stories and bodies appeared to me as pivotal to the broader story of ukuthwalwa. This interview, among the many interviews I conducted, reminded me of my position as a woman and how I had to experience the field both as an outsider and an insider in a setting where women are supposed to occupy a certain position. Occupying the position of an 'insider-outsider' meant that I occupied the position of being a married woman but from a background and circumstances relatively different from theirs. However, my outsider position allowed for an analytic lens that taps into the rich complexities of their world, something that would have been difficult if I was an insider and emotionally entangled in their lives. The insider position also allowed me to establish rapport quickly with women and to be able to tap into the otherwise hidden lives and experiences of these women. They connected with me at a level that I had not anticipated. On the same note, my presence in the field disrupted what the society deemed as normal. In particular, the comment on my dressing highlighted that in that space as a woman I did not and could not own my dressing or dress code. Dressing is an integral part of control, in this instance it is supposed to produce docile/ passive bodies of women, I argue. A different kind of dressing is taken as resistance or simply not understanding the African culture. Because of my dressing, I could not fit in the boxes or positions that a typical woman could be placed. Therefore, the need to classify, categorise or capture and put me in my place was of paramount importance, as I shall demonstrate later. While I was there, I befriended a young, married

woman, she would occasionally accompany me to the field. Interestingly, she would take off her makoti attire and dress differently, she would put on high heels and tight skirts. Her mother-in-law would occasionally ask "are you going to work or to look for boyfriends?" The problem was that the daughter-in-law took off the marker on her body that she is married, always signified by the way she dressed. This work will also consider how material forms such as dressing engender intersubjective relations with the other members of the family and society at large.

3.4.2. "Fear as a way of life"

Of the several trips to Engcobo, in none of the trips would I feel safe. I lived among and interacted with the Xhosa people in an unnerving space such that I existed between fear and uncertainty. My own experiences of fear allowed me to understand, to a small degree, the situation of the people who lived there permanently. In my most vulnerable time, I comforted myself with the knowledge that I was free to leave at any time, I had a plane ticket back to my comfort zone in Johannesburg. But that came with an overwhelming sense of pity for the women who lived between fear and domination, where fear was a way of life. Fear joined me to the people and yet separated me from them as well. It became apparent to me that I had to be careful in responding to marriage proposals from men and responding to questions on whether I am married or not. Lest I offend or become a target, I had to learn fast on how to interact with men - in essence, how to be docile.

The 8th of August 2018 was a typical day. I woke up early in the morning and set out to my field. The day was going well. I interviewed one woman (Mhlekazi). Just before I entered her homestead, there was a group of men seated outside a kraal and as soon as I parked outside and exited the car, I could hear them making comments about my appearance and how I would

make a ‘fine’ wife. Some cautioned that the women who drive cars are generally not ideal ‘wife material’, with some saying they are too expensive, and they couldn’t afford me. Listening to this conversation, though not unexpected nor new in this space, disturbed me. I quickly entered the homestead. Thankfully Mhlekazi was alone. I say thankfully because it was rare that I would find and talk to a woman alone. I asked her why so many men were in the kraal, she explained that there was a funeral in that homestead and as per their culture, men assemble in the kraal, drink, and eat from there for several days. I had an interesting conversation with her, but at the back of my mind I dreaded what awaited me outside. Almost two hours later, the inevitable had to happen. As I emerged from the hut that I had an interview in, a man I assumed to be in his forties came running, calling me to stop. Gripped with fear, I increased my pace and at some instances took a few leaps to my car in what seemed like an eternity. Just as the man came closer, I reached my car door, opened, and jumped in. He came, obviously irritated at my ignoring his calls. I tried to explain that I was not aware that he was calling me. He quickly jumped into the business of the day, telling me that he wants to marry me, that he has a lot of cattle and sheep, and he can definitely afford me. Saying this while trying effortlessly to open my car, I could feel that the reality of being thwalwa’ed was imminent. “You think I cannot afford you? Let’s go to my home, I have a big homestead and I have enough sheep and cattle, I can afford you”., he snorted as he tried to force himself into the car. All this while Mhlekazi was *shouting “mshiye, ngumndwendwe wami wase Gauteng”* (Leave her alone, she is my visitor from Gauteng). Unfortunately, she could not come to where I had parked because as a *makoti* (daughter in-law) she was not allowed to be at that place because it is where there were “amanxiwa” (the ruins), that is, a sacred place reserved for only family members because it is where the ancestors reside. Luckily, he grudgingly accepted that he cannot have me as his wife and told me to come back and see him on my next visit.

This episode is but one of several incidents of near abductions I faced. Fear became a way of life while I was there. I lived with a constant sense of threat. I asked myself questions about how people understand and experience ukuthwala and the violence it presents, and what is at stake for those who live in a chronic state of fear. What does survival mean in a seemingly intractable situation? This thesis is a study of how the violence of ukuthwala is intricately linked to survival. I look at the violence of ukuthwala, from the massive assault to microscopic humiliation in the constitution of subjects. In doing so, I examine the insecurities that permeate the lives of individual women wrecked by worries of physical and emotional survival and fear. The stories I relate are the individual experiences of the women I talked to, yet they are also social and collective accounts by virtue of the omnipresence of violence, its threat and related fear. Although initially the focus of my work was not explicitly the violence of ukuthwala, I came to understand that its manifestations and effects were essential for comprehending the context in which the women were trying to survive. Fear became a metanarrative of my research and experiences. Fear and discipline cannot be divorced. Discipline of the female body is a constant presence in this place. For example, women are supposed to walk in certain directions, not allowed to encroach into certain spaces. The expected norm is that women are passive beings. For the men described above and many others that I met and talked to, a woman driving a car meant that she was more assertive and more liberal than what was expected of women living in the area. My presence in the space was disrupting the norm, and so offending some men. I had to be careful not to overly offend, lest I find myself made to leave. In that way, my status would always shift from an insider in that I am a black woman who may face the same predicaments that my informants felt, to an outsider to the men because I was seen as not conforming and therefore needing to be shown how to be. They wanted to ‘teach me a lesson’. I represented all that was wrong with women, that which needed to be corrected, and it was only through marriage to a man that I could redefine and remodel myself into a

submissive / docile subject. In this setting, what was wrong for these men was that I was challenging their authority, and it gave me a snapshot of what lay ahead for me. Ukuthwala is a way of correcting, reminding women / me of my position and if one resists, there is discipline and punishment. As I explain in the subsequent chapters, one has to internalise the ideal of womanhood and then externalise it through the enactment of being makoti (by obeying the dress code, accepting what spaces to enter and not, the food you are allowed to eat, birthing children, hardworking etc). In that space, women like myself, who drive cars, challenge authority and as such invite attempts to be controlled by being brought under the authority of a man.

3.4.3. 'Buying myself a husband'

As the fieldwork progressed, the fear, humiliation and threats intensified. I felt unsafe and, at times, that my life was in imminent danger. I would drive into a neighbourhood and once I saw a group of men, I would immediately feel unsafe, and I would turn around. I realised at the initial stages of my research that the greatest problem was that I was seen as a single woman, and I had to get myself a husband for the research to be completed. The event that hastened this decision happened on the 8th of November 2018. I had made it a habit that I would park a slight distance from the place where I would be conducting interviews and then walk down so as not to attract attention to myself. I conducted interviews from around 9am until 1pm because after 1pm the women would be preparing for the return of school children from school. After what I thought was a successful day without any incidents ended horribly. As I walked back to the car, I could tell that there were four men around my car. Given my experience with men in the area, I quickly realised that life was to become hectic. I was very scared. As I walked towards the car, I was thinking of what options I had in such a situation. My plan was to be humble, apologetic and perform innocence to the best of my capabilities.

When I got to the car, I was ambushed with questions on what my business in the area was. I tried to explain that I am a student doing research and that became a problem as I was labelled a liar because students "do not have cars". One of them said I was probably a journalist, one suggested that I could be a private investigator. Sensing that the conversation was getting out of hand, I thought of an escape plan, and lied that it was my husband who had.bought me a car and the conversation quickly diverted to what kind of a husband, why would he allow a woman to go do this kind of work alone, how many children I have and if I was really a real makoti who is able to cook on the fire. Again, my 'womanhood' was put under scrutiny. After what seemed like forever, one of them who seemed to be understanding me gave me what I considered valuable advice; he said *"Ukuba ufuna ukusinda apha, ixesha elizayo uza kuletha indoda yakho"* (If you want to survive here, next time bring your husband). My encounters in the field had long suggested that I should get a male accomplice so that I do not become "available" to the men looking for a bride in the area. I took the 'advice' and hired a young man to accompany me into the field.

Crucial to this study is an understanding of the agency that the women possess. It explores the creative ways in which some of the women have constructed alternative forms of negotiating their fear, desperation, and humiliation, exhibiting immense resilience in the face of adversity. In the study I also try to understand the ways individuals live and deal with suffering manifest in various uncertainties including physical abuse, seclusion, failed attempts to flee among other things and their coping strategies. Central to this study is the survival tactics of thwalwa'ed women, during and in the aftermath of ukuthwala and the ways in which fear and humiliation, as well as 'culture' and community configure their lives. As I carried out my fieldwork and became more aware of their everyday lives, I saw that to understand the choices they were making necessitated an exploration of how violence has marked their everyday lives,

not only in the memories of being thwalwa'ed, but in the violence of everyday life. These reflections inspire the approach I take in the thesis- which is to examine the texture of everyday life, focusing on the silent, invisible, and inchoate aspects of indigent people's lives as a way of opening ways in which we understand how suffering is lived with and how people's everyday lives determine what is important for them and what is at stake in making life.

3.5. Telling the Stories: The Thwalwa'ed Women

Because of the time and rapport that I established with them, I came to know a few of my informants very well. All reference to their real identities has been concealed to protect them in line with the ethics guidelines of the University. However, I hope that they will acquire significance and meaning in the body of the thesis. Although thirty women generously shared their experiences with me over the course of the fieldwork, but it is the stories of Noplatana, Mam'Joyce, Nonhle, Woyisiwe, Nomusa, Ntabombu, Nomaswazi, Vuyiswa, Nomsisi, Sindiswa, Celiwa Adeline and Nobomi that have given shape to much of this thesis.

The stories represent an attempt to grapple with the memories of ukuthwalwa and the enduring effects it has on people's lives. They show how people struggle with how their lives have been shaped, distorted and in some instances destroyed by the brutality of the practice. There is immense pain evident in how the storytellers recall humiliations great and small. The recollections reflected in this thesis show that it may be the small everyday humiliations that caused the greatest harm. They could not refuse to be thwalwa'ed, they could not insist on choosing the people that they loved as their life partners, they could not even insist on contraceptive tablets to avoid having children in these unions. Even if they wanted to escape, they could not because they were guarded. They simply had no control over their lives.

The narration of their lives was messy, their life stories start from the point where everything goes awry – the ukuthwalwa moment, and then followed by what became of them and their lives which is contrary to what they envisioned. Their socio-cultural context reflects narratives of shattered dreams, they had different aspirations that exist outside her current self. They have different understandings of the self which exists in their minds, the kind of reality that exists now is a fantasy and it is always informed by reminiscing on what could have been.

Why tell the stories now? Were they ever given a platform to tell their stories? Writers tend to treat ukuthwala as event, as if there is a beginning and an end. The reality is far more complex, the women's experiences in this thesis show that the practice is lived in the everyday lives of the women involved. The physical abuse may have ended, the guarding may have ended, children may be born out of the union. People are still coping with and trying to make sense of the pain in the aftermath of the actual ukuthwala practice. For the people who participated in this project, being able to tell their stories contributed to some form of healing. These stories illustrate that very often the trauma is profound so that some people may appear stuck, unable to move forward, unable to get beyond the pain and suffering.

The universal thread running through most of the stories is one of pain and loss. Even though it may be articulated in many words, each story is unique in the way it describes the experience of pain and loss. Most of the women in this thesis describe pain as a way of life. For them life is divided into a before and an after. The women recall times when life was good, enjoying their youth, etc.

Then there is the after.

The pain of the after when they were forcibly abducted. In these stories, they recall a time when they were children and life was somewhat normal, while others tell of a fearful childhood, dreading what was to come as soon as they are considered adults. Other stories express a loss of identity and others express a sense of betrayal. However, everyone experienced a loss of innocence. That is followed by a recall of perpetual emotional and physical stress that still haunts them. The stories are never told in a neat chronological order, there are pauses and disruptions at the different stages of their lives.

What we see in the stories from Engcobo is the 'postponed' legacy of ukuthwala violence. The cycle of hurt and bitterness needs to be broken. It is hoped that telling these stories may help to do that by making visible the lingering pain.

3.5.1. Mam' Joyce

Mam' Joyce was the first woman I interviewed. At 54 years of age, she had been married since she was 16 years of age (or younger than that as her recollection of her age at that time was a bit messy). My observation of her what that she was a very introverted woman - on my first meeting with her, she was too shy to talk to me and she requested the assistance and presence of her son and daughter-in-law. Her ukuthwala event did not involve physical abduction, rather she says she was tricked into marriage where she was taken from school to Cape Town and subsequently introduced to a man who was to be her husband. She quickly realised that there was no way out, she could not even ask anyone (not even her parents) about what was happening to her.

3.5.2. Noplatana

One important detail about Noplatana was that she staunchly described herself as belonging to the Thembu tribal grouping. That's how she wanted to be known and that was the

first thing she told me about herself before even telling me her name. Noplatana was 26 years old at the time of our first meeting in 2018. She got married when she was 16 years old. She has been married for 10 years. Noplatana displayed massive frustration over ukuthwalwa, saying that it must not apply to people like her and the younger generation. She had dropped out of music school after she was thwalwa'ed. I met her again in 2021, Noplatana had left her marriage, gone back to school and she still had no children.

3.5.3 Woyisiwe

Woyisiwe was thwalwa'ed when she was 17 years old. At 83, she recalled the pain and trauma of meeting her husband for the first time, a year after she was thwalwa'ed. She bore 9 children from the marriage. Woyisiwe did not have any fond memories of her husband or her marriage. She narrated a life of abandonment, pain, and suffering, saying that even years after the death of her husband she has not found peace, and memories of her life experiences still haunt her. She had physical and emotional scars that constantly reminded her of how she was repeatedly beaten and raped whenever her husband came home (which was usually once a year during the December holidays). She narrated that she does not know what love is or feels like or what it feels like to be loved. Woyisiwe has a permanent limp when she is walking because she was once hit so hard and injured badly and later, she was left legally blind from beatings. She discovered that her husband also did not know her, it was his brothers that identified her at a wedding and orchestrated a plan to thwala her for their brother who was considered too old at thirty-three years old to be unmarried at the time. She discovered that she did not like the husband and the feeling was mutual. Naively, she thought that two years would be enough to accept her situation ("*imeko yakhe")* as she had been repeatedly told to "give it time". But as she shared, "it was difficult, I was miserable" and "*ukukhanya akuzange kufike"* (the light never came). Seeing that she was taking forever to get used to her new situation, her in-laws

took her to a traditional healer to ‘cleanse her heart’ so that she could accept her prescribed self. She never accepted, she said she developed anger problems and always blamed herself for what happened to her. Woyisiwe had dreams to go to nursing school, but, like many other women, after ukuthwalwa she could no longer have dreams of her own. She had to discard her old self and carve a new one which embodied pain and suffering. Her new life was characterised by experiences and feelings of abandonment, poverty, hatred, fear, and shame. She explained how she could not go back home because she was not welcome there, how she was told to forget about going to school and she felt no one cared, she said that she felt dead.

3.5.4. Nomusa

I met Nomusa rather fortuitously. Nomusa was an 18-year-old girl who had been married for two years. At the time of the interview, Nomusa was hidden in her community. Only a few people in the neighbourhood knew of her existence and those who did, did not know why she was staying in that homestead and under what circumstances. This prompted people to gossip and spread rumours that she was thwalwa’ed and was imprisoned by the family. Nomusa was very sceptical and untrusting. It took her a while to agree to talk to me, and only after she was convinced that I am a university student who did not present any threat, could I be trusted. She was very fearful of what might happen to her if word got out that she was talking to strangers. Nevertheless, she wanted her story to be told.

3.5.5. Ntabomvu

I met Ntabomvu in 2021 when I visited Engcobo for some follow up interviews. Ntabomvu was born in 1964 in Engcobo, she was the second born and the eldest girl. She got married through ukuthwalwa in 1981 when she was 16 years old. Ntabomvu came across as an introverted woman, fearful and very shy. Her testimony of ukuthwalwa indicated anger and disappointment at her family and the entire community for allowing the abuse to go

unchallenged. She had suicidal thoughts at some point and emphasised that it took her ten years to 'accept' her husband and the marriage and she had her first child after the ten years. Knowing that her life was doomed much earlier than the time she was thwalwa'ed, Ntabomvu said she saw no point in continuing with school, hence she dropped out of school at standard four (grade 6). She was raised by strict parents according to her description of her upbringing and as a girl child she had to "know her place". She explained how growing up she was constantly reminded that as a girl, she would have to marry, and the family would get a lot of cows from the man that would marry her. Ntabomvu had different thoughts about how she wanted her life to go but she could not go against the path that was already mapped out for her. She thought that her destiny was what her parents wanted for her. Like many girls before and after her, she lived with the fear of what would happen to her 'when the time comes', the fear of who will marry her, what the person would look like, if he would be loving or abusive, if he would be older or her age mate. This fear, she explained, consumed her entire childhood. The anxiety increased when she reached puberty, she would have sleepless nights wondering if the next day is the day. All the horror stories of ukuthwalwa every time she would be alone, she explained, came alive in those few years before the day finally arrived.

3.5.6. Nomaswazi

Nomaswazi was a 58-year-old widow. She occasionally described her husband as a "not peaceful" man as he would consistently beat her during the time they were married. She had a typical ukuthwalwa moment where she was abducted at 13 years of age by an older man. She is one of the women that managed to gain her voice during the course of their marriage and challenge their husbands. However, like many women in this thesis, she endured suffering and pain even after trying to disrupt the structures that caused her pain.

3.5.7. Vuyiswa

In one of my last field visits, I met Vuyiswa, a forty-three-year-old woman who was thwalwa'ed by a much older man when she was 16 years old. Vuyiswa had a dream of continuing with school, finishing her studies, and getting a 'proper' job in Cape Town, imaginably working at a hospital. All her plans crushed when she was thwalwa'ed at seventeen. She never accepted her fate and she resisted badly, even going through episodes of depression. That made her behave in ways that were not 'acceptable', disrespecting her husband and his family. She even entertained the idea of committing suicide. She always envied those who were married in 'love' or relocated to big cities. At the time when I met her, she was staying in the small town of Engcobo and working. She could not bear the idea of going back home - by deserting her husband, she was labelled a prostitute and a cruel woman who wanted to kill her old husband.

3.5.8. Nomsisi

Nomsisi is one of the women who was living in abject poverty. She was friends with one of the women I was interacting with and she was curious to talk to me. At 31, she had three children and was married to a much older and frail looking man. Nomsisi was one of the few women that would insist that we talk in the presence of her husband. She exhibited some form of power and control over her husband. I later discovered that she had endured a lot of abuse from the husband over the years. Her family had abandoned her and she found herself trapped in the marriage and she bitterly blamed herself for allowing ukuthwalwa to happen to her. She learnt 'hardness' as a survival mechanism and that included some unconventional attitudes towards her husband.

3.5.9. Sindiswa

Sindiswa was born in 1940, she lives in a homestead that she said was built by her husband. It was, by local standards, much better than her peers. I first became acquainted with Sindiswa through her friend, Woyisiwe. I had interviewed Woyisiwe during one of my first visits to Engcobo and had other subsequent visits to her home where we would talk about life in general, her friends, the economy, her history, among other things. I met some of her friends and some of her children. She would always talk about Sindiswa, who was a childhood friend, and her neighbor who later became her in-law after her daughter married Woyisiwe's son. She spoke highly of Sindiswa's life and accomplishments. In her understanding, her friend Sindiswa's ukuthwalwa story was 'a success story' because she believed that unlike herself who felt dead inside, Sindiswa had a better life because her husband was not as abusive as hers and she did not live a life of poverty. As much as Sindiswa knew that she was the envy of her peers and played along sometimes, after several meetings with her, she expressed that she felt like she was 'rubbish'.

3.5.10. Nonhle

Nonhle is the woman who saved me from a near ukuthwalwa incident. She became more of my protector and took her time to educate me about the behaviour of men in Engcobo and how I should respond to them. I met Nonhle by chance, during one of my field visits in early November of 2018. I was visiting one of the women who was Nonhle's neighbour and somehow bumped into her. I explain the encounter in detail in Chapter 6. Nonhle was 45 when I met her, she was in her second marriage and had four children. Her first marriage was through ukuthwalwa and her second was to someone she loved and of her choice. The events in between these two marriages make part of the material used to weave together this project.

3.5.11. Celiwa

Celiwa was thirteen when she was thwalwa'ed, or rather as she put it, "actually sold for cattle". Celiwa was not sure if she was in her late fifties or early sixties. She had an eventful life that included ukuthwalwa, escaping to Cape Town, hiding pregnancies, remarrying, widowhood and returning to Engcobo. She blamed ukuthwalwa for her misfortunes and felt that if she had not gone through the trauma of ukuthwalwa her life would have taken a different trajectory. While it was not easy for her to open up to me about her life, when she eventually did, she shared valuable information that contributed to the knowledge that this thesis shares about thwalwa'ed women.

3.5.12. Adeline

Adeline was one of the old women who became my mentors while I was conducting fieldwork. Adeline was a staunch believer in ancestral powers and had quite a story to tell. Having been thwalwa'ed at a young age, Adeline narrated a long life of suffering at the hands of her husband and her in-laws. Although she tried to regain control of her life, she believed that ukuthwalwa cast a dark cloud over her entire life. Decades after exiting the marriage, she still felt the sting of ukuthwalwa and believed that it contributed to her misfortunes.

3.5.13. Nobomi

Nobomi was perhaps one of the most interesting of my respondents. Her witty demeanour and welcoming smile, in contrast with her life story, intrigued me. Nobomi should have been around 70 years old, even though according to her account she was 56 years old. Nobomi said she was thwalwa'ed when she was 15 years old, emphasising that she was a baby and she did not know anything about marriage, or what she was expected to do when it

happened. She joked one day that she had never even seen an adult penis before she was thwalwa'ed. She was probably one of my most open respondents as she left no details out in her description of her life and took it upon herself to educate me about ukuthwalwa and the life of a woman in her community in general. Behind her seemingly happy conduct, she told of the horrors of living a thwalwa'ed life. Nobomi passed away a year after our first meeting in October 2019.

3.6. The Men Who Thwala

3.6.1. Fezeka

It was difficult to talk to men, partly because I was fearful of men and partly because they were not willing to share the secrets of their culture. Apart from the chief and my 'field husband', Fezeka was the only man who was willing to talk to me. I got used to Fezeka through his mother, sisters, and nieces whom I spent a lot of my time with. His family became my family away from home and I would call him *'malume' (*uncle). His initial objective was to explain their culture to me so that "I can inform those who misconstrue it in the papers". While playing this role, with time Fezeka opened up to me and started telling me the "secrets of his life". I detail his story in Chapter 4. Fezeka was 60 years old at the time when I met him, and he had spent most of his adult life working in Pretoria. He was HIV positive and living on a disability grant. He had a small garden in his backyard where he cultivated vegetables to supplement his diet. He was staying with his mother and his nephews and nieces. He married a woman through ukuthwala once and he did not have children, something which haunts him until today.

3.7. Concluding note

In this chapter I reflected on the feminist approach to ethnographic research to capture how ukuthwalwa effects are felt and experienced by thwalwa'ed women. The material for this

thesis predominantly relies on the thwalwa'ed women's accounts of their experiences in order to study how they narratively construct their social worlds and their positions within them. It is a difficult task to give an ethnographic description of ukuthwala nor is it possible to give visual images of the practice because of its invisibility and secretive operations. It is in the element of these complexities that a feminist ethnographic methodological approach proved to be ideal for my study. It made it possible to immerse myself in the field and engage extensively with my respondents and to tap into the hidden meanings and practices of ukuthwala and the thwalwa'ed. It is an approach that also allowed me to become an embodied subject within the research process and it permitted me to learn from the informants- particularly decoding the meanings from what they were doing Additionally, it allowed me to embrace the lived and embodied experience as a site from which I can also theorise. This means that I had to accept that I would unearth experiences that were coloured by contradiction and ambiguity, which left me struggling with unsettling accounts that I detail in this thesis. I also interviewed (through the semi structured method) other people beyond thwalwa'ed women and in my analysis put them in dialogue with the women's narratives and with my reflections from my positionality as the vulnerable observer.

CHAPTER 4

"Ukuthwala is a Custom of Darkness": Dissecting the Continuities, Discontinuities, and the Technologies of Ukuthwala.1

4.1. Introduction

> The routinisation of terror is what fuels its power. Such routinisation allows people to live in a chronic state of fear behind a facade of normalcy, even while terror permeates and shreds the social fabric (Green, 1999: 60).

What Green is referring to in this quote are the effects of the invisible violence of fear and intimidation on the women she studied. In her book, *Fear as a Way of Life*, Green details the lives of Mayan widows in rural Guatemala as characterised by a chronic state of fear. The Mayan widows, she argues, have created some form of normalcy while negotiating what she calls the "violence of everyday life". In that context this is a combination of political violence and repression and the long-term systematic violence connected with class, gender inequalities and ethnic oppression. She argues that the routinisation of fear creates an individual whose life experiences "are best described as swinging widely between controlled hysteria and tacit acquiescence" (Green, 1999: 59). Similarly, the narratives in this chapter and throughout this thesis illustrate the tragic and the everyday, which is a combination of patriarchal violence meted through the recurring nightmare of ukuthwala and its technologies of power and control. The paradoxes and contradictions of ukuthwala that will be discussed in this chapter bring into sharp focus how ukuthwala works through the terror it makes routine and normal in the everyday lives of the community of Engcobo. This chapter partly hinges on the following questions - In what ways is the custom of ukuthwala defended? Who defends it and why?

This chapter gives a finely grained analysis of the custom, going beyond the spectacle of its contemporary imaginings. It attempts to disentangle the very idea of ukuthwala as a

'romantic' approach to marriage among the rural Xhosa speaking people. Reflecting on the ukuthwalwa, one of the women I often spoke to, Noplatana, remarked "it is everywhere, everyone feels it". She was referring to the everydayness of the terror of ukuthwala. In this chapter I repeatedly return to how patriarchy provisionally creates the feminine and the thwalwa'ed through the violence on ukuthwala. I discuss the technologies through which ukuthwala operates by demonstrating that this practice thrives through the deployment of the machinery of patriarchal violence thwalwa'ed subjects. This machinery includes the physical, social, cultural, and ideological aspects of violence and violations. I discuss how imprisonment, stigmatisation, mystification and sacralisation of the practice, physical and sexual violence which includes assaults, insults, and rape function as technologies through which the thwalwa'ed subject is constituted. I argue that through the deployment of these technologies, the practice of ukuthwala produces a tragic subject. In this thesis, I take the tragic subject as a subject constructed through the deployment of patriarchal violence - a subject that embodies pain and suffering. This subject is forced to acknowledge a new self, constructed through violence.

The tragic subject is examined before, during and after the moment of ukuthwala. I examine the production of a thwalwa'ed woman, the project where the interpersonal dynamic of violence is one in which men, through ukuthwala, systematically terrorise women. I contend that the normalisation of violence against thwalwa'ed women is a consequence of the ways in which the state of manhood is conceived of in Engcobo. In this place, being a man rests on the systematic violation of the female body. Femininity on the other hand rests on how violable a woman is and to what extent she can endure it. The stories and narratives presented here expose how ukuthwala as a cultural custom normalises violence against women within their everyday intimate, private and public lives. I contend that the normalisation of patriarchal violence against women in this community is an important mechanism for the survival and continuation

of the ukuthwala practice. As such, I argue that the so-called observation of culture and traditions produces and reproduces patriarchy through the sanctioning of violence at the level of the everyday and at the level of how subjects are made through gendered norms and expectations.

Through the different stories of these women, I examine how power dynamics play out to significantly alter their lives and how women become subjected to patriarchal terror. I argue that these women are suffering together in silence. Their stories recount the contours of various historical trajectories in their lives that they wouldn't normally reveal because the legitimate options they have are obedience, gratitude, and silence - the internalisation of patriarchal terror. The stories I relate below are individual stories, yet they are also social and shared accounts by virtue of their omnipresence (cf. Gqola, 2015,2021). I demonstrate how through association, thwalwa'ed women are re-terrorised every time another girl is thwalwa'ed. The memory of the trauma is re-lived through such reminders and rumours of new events of ukuthwala throughout their lifetimes. In that light, I argue that many of the women do in fact carry their experiences individually, on their own, and what is shared in fact is their experiences. They cannot come together to share their experiences as a collective. What is, rather, collective, seems to be the production of the technologies that silence them or that make them accept their situations or that limit their choices or that allow their situations to exist in the communities from which they come. The histories of suffering from patriarchal violence constitute a shared struggle that connects innumerable women who are victims of patriarchal violence. What makes them persevere in some instances is the knowledge that they share the experiences with innumerable other women. Contrary to the idea of collective trauma that Erikson (1976: 164) defines as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality". Thwalwa'ed women's life stories indicated that the experience of the trauma of ukuthwala is shared, their stories have common intersections,

they go through similar processes of producing a thwalwa'ed subject, the technologies used are the same. Contrary to Erickson's theory, these give them a sense of togetherness separately because of the similar/shared experiences. Shared trauma works slowly into the awareness of those who suffer from it, and while it does not have the quality of unexpectedness that normally comes with trauma, it is a form of shock all the same. Since then, this definition has been used to describe the trauma experienced in wars and other unforeseen disasters. The narratives here highlight how shared silences are dismissed when we talk of collective trauma, how the hidden and rarely verbalised traumas are considered to be individual and private.

4.2. The Technologies of Ukuthwala: Ukuthwala and the Legitimation of Patriarchal Violence

The techniques and modalities of ukuthwala are usually brutal, and socially and culturally acceptable. Ukuthwala is generally defined by precise and calculated executions and grounded in the certainty of success. For the victims, the unpredictability and the difficulty of life is guaranteed. In this section I offer a closer examination of the insidious and pervasive effects and mechanisms of violence and terror, underscoring how they operate at the level of lived experience. I highlight how ukuthwala thrives through its invisibility, I explore the silences and secrets behind the practice through the lives of these women. What remains hidden even today are the representations and the operations of ukuthwala terror: the secrets that go beyond the radar of many including the government institutions and the media, the innumerable clandestine cases of ukuthwala related suicide and other terrors, the suffering of its victims and the half secrets about who was thwalwa'ed, by whom and when.

4.2.1. "It is an underground practice now": the visibility and invisibility of ukuthwala

> People no longer follow traditions, now this custom is said to be bad, it is an underground practice now. It is abuse now….it is not ok now. It is an old practice, it was a Xhosa custom, but things have changed now. …. now they use it to abuse women. (Interview, young man, 31 July 2018)

> We practise ukuthwala here, we are not going to shy away from it, but it is no longer allowed. What the government says is that people have to agree, the two of them, the girl and the boy have to agree. …. There are places where it is still common. But in ukuthwala cases, most of the time, the boy does not have to talk to the girl. The government no longer allows ukuthwala, we also do not encourage it because some people take these young girls from schools and do not take them back to school. (Interview, traditional leader, 31 July 2018)

The young man and the traditional leader seem to insinuate that the practice has changed in shape and form. While it is indisputable that the shifts in South Africa's economic, political, and social landscape have uniquely shaped the contemporary character of ukuthwala (Karimakwenda, 2018), this practice has not ceased, nor has the violence that defines it. While the young man is mourning the corruption of the practice, the traditional leader is lamenting the fact that the government has since made moves to criminalise some aspects of the practice. The traditional leader is not against the practice per se, he is against people taking girls out of school and not sending them back. He bragged of marrying a thirteen-year-old girl and subsequently sending her back to school. In as much as the young man is not advocating for its abolition, he has had a different socialisation around the practice. Growing up in a constitutional South Africa that upholds gender equality and women's rights (at least in public discourse), the young man thinks the abuse is a new thing. Writing on ukuthwala and discourses on gender-based violence, Smit (2017) highlights that while ukuthwala violence is embedded in the local discourses of hegemonic patriarchy, the changing national discourses on ukuthwala that hinge on issues around human rights and gender equality have undoubtedly led to the

changing perceptions on ukuthwala, similar to the sentiments uttered by the young man. These changing discourses, however, coupled with the government's stance on customs like ukuthwala that are in contradiction with gender equality and human rights provisions have resulted in efforts by those practising ukuthwala to engage in more hidden ways of continuing with the practice.

Here, I emphasise that ukuthwala operates as an underground practice that is nevertheless known, accepted, and practised in the communities. It operates under the radar of the state but not to the members of the community. In the community it is felt, heard, and seen ubiquitously. While conducting fieldwork I became aware that ukuthwala is both visible and invisible. There are instances where ukuthwala is made invisible to those who do not approve of it as I explain later in the story of Nomusa who was taken from a village where ukuthwala was not generally approved to another and hidden there. As such, ukuthwala thrives through both visibility and invisibility.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork, it became clear that I would not get the opportunity to connect with newly thwalwa'ed women because they are closely guarded and surveilled. The criminalisation of some aspects of ukuthwala resulted in secrets contained by silences around the practice. Communities live in fear of impending jail time for some if such cases are reported. As a result, the chief and other members of the communities explained that most ukuthwala marriages are now done in secrecy. Some commonly refer to it as an 'underground practice'. I also learnt that there are divisions in communities around the practice. In some villages there is a stigma attached to the families that practise ukuthwala, and those who are opposed to its practice refer to those who still practise it as 'amaqaba' (the uncivilised). As a result of these controversies and fears, access to the recent cases of ukuthwala was virtually impossible. I resigned myself to the fact that I would get women who had attained their freedom either by accepting their fate and /or feigned acceptance and who have left such

kinds of unions. I discovered that I would not find any women who had accepted their fate in the ways I had imagined. I spoke to women who had been married for over 40 years and had never recovered from their experiences of ukuthwala. Instead, the women in these stories carry their horror, pain and suffering in their everyday lives. Nomusa's story illustrates how patriarchal violence thrives through silences and secrecy - invisibility. Nomusa's experiences of physical displacement, hiding, silence and secrecy create a painful tapestry that reveals how suffering and endurance embody what it means to be a thwalwa'ed woman.

4.2.2. Nomusa's Story: Silence and Secrecy, Passages Through Darkness

> I mustn't be talking to you. I am just here. I don't know what may happen, but they are hiding me here. I was not thwala'ed here. I am not from this place (Conversation, 8 November 2018).

When I first sat with Nomusa, she exhibited immense fear and at that point I knew that she was breaking the fundamental rules of a woman in her position. Women like Nomusa live under constant surveillance. I found her at her safe space - she would occasionally assist one of my key informants – a former primary school teacher, a self-proclaimed expert on the Xhosa culture, an older woman in the community who was a book writer and would give talks at cultural events. When I met this informant, she was bed ridden because of advanced arthritis. As a respected member of the society, it was much easier for her to convince Nomusa to talk to me. We were seated in the old woman's kitchen, and she was washing dishes. Nomusa looked directly at me, keen to explain her situation, she continued holding back her tears:

> I did not want all this. They took me from my parents' place and brought me here. They told me that I am married now. There was nothing I could do, my aunt told me that it's ok, I must stay, she told me that I must not tell people. This is a family thing, listening to many people will spoil my life…. They said it was good for me, I was sixteen. Well, you know, I do not have parents, so, you know how it is, you know you don't have people, you don't have anyone… you know, you can, you go through a lot. That kind of upbringing, but sometimes it's not bad, you can survive that. Many people have. But I don't think I can, I don't think I will. How does one go back from this? Heee how? I am just here, I am hidden here, this is not my home, I come from

> (mentions a different far away village). I don't want to be here; I can put it like that you see… I don't even know if he loves me or what. So, I don't know. (Conversation, 8 November 2018)

Nomusa explained that she was taken through ukuthwala from her village and was taken to her husband's aunt's place because in her village ukuthwala is no longer encouraged. She explained that a lot of people have been arrested for engaging in ukuthwala and its related activities. As a result, to avoid that, she was taken to where she was. She explains that she was not allowed to talk to a lot of people and to explain what happened to her and why she was there. My conversations with her were very short, she withheld a lot of information, she was living in a state of fear. At the beginning of the interview, she asked how I got there. I would usually drive and then park at a distance from the homes that I would be visiting. She trusted the old woman, but she was still sceptical of me. I visited them four times during my fieldwork and when we developed that trust she would throw in a few details about her life, randomly in most cases:

> This ukuthwala thing is not for young people, it is for old people, not us. Us, the youth, have to do the city wedding. Why do they hide it? You see, people do not even talk about this anymore. But they do it in secret, you see no one wants to accept… I told you that I had no parents, didn't I? So, I dropped out of school in Grade 7, I never went to Grade 8, my friends are in Grade 12 now. I am not allowed to talk to them, they say I cannot talk to unmarried women anymore…. I don't know what will happen. I miss them. I miss them a lot. I don't have friends; I am alone but there are people who love me. I come here to help makhulu (Grandmother) here. She is good to me. (Conversation, 8 November 2018)

Nomusa's sentiments on the practice not being for younger people speak to how the tensions over ukuthwala relate to the past, to custom, to tradition and to culture. Additionally, the fact that married women/ girls cannot talk to their unmarried friends, is reflective of how custom entrenches silence or makes her silencing acceptable. Her tone and demeanour were those of someone whose confidence has been undermined by the routinisation of fear, the confidence even to interpret her own life experiences, her own world. South African feminist

researchers such as Gqola (2021, 2015, 2007) and Dosekun (2013) have argued that experiences of fear can constrain women's daily activities and behaviours. I realised that there are silences about what happened or was happening to her that I could not break. I had to understand and respect that. Sometimes we would be inside the house, and just be silent, no sound, nothing. Silence. Writing her story is difficult, because of the difficulty of putting fear and silence into words.

My encounter with Nomusa highlighted that fear, secrets, hiding, imprisonment and surveillance are some of the mechanisms that sanction the perpetuation of ukuthwala as a practice. These are socially approved instruments that enable and sustain ukuthwala. Nomusa was afraid of the unknown, of what will happen to her if she violates the instructions from her aunt, husband, in-laws, and other family members. As such, for Nomusa social fear became "the permanent and muffled undertone of life" (Corradi, Weiss Fagan and Garretón, 1992:2). The normalisation of the patriarchal violence of ukuthwala is shrouded in silence. It is, as Tuck and Ree (2013: 642) write, "an ongoing horror made invisible by its persistence". These technologies aimed for total domination and subjugation of the woman by strategically enforcing silence and systematically emboldening ukuthwala and its perpetrators.

In all the conversations, Nomusa was afraid of talking about the family that she was staying with and her husband. She was freer to talk about her aunt and how she grew up. It is striking how Nomusa accepted her lack of choices in life not because she does not have parents but as a result of her acceptance that to be a good wife she had to maintain subordinate positions to her husband and the society at large as a result of socialisation and cultural norms. There is a lot of preparation as they grow up, the stories and pranks about prospective husbands, the rumours, the expected attitudes, and behaviours when one is married, and the normalisation of marital violence. This grooms them to be complicit in their domination. I argue that at the time of ukuthwala these women were already terrorised.

4.3. How Does One Become Socialised to Terror?

The women's narratives expose the toxicity of the patriarchal ideals of masculinity and femininity thereby impelling us to grapple with the complicated ways in which both men and women are entangled within the grip of patriarchy. This section speaks to the idea of the centrality of fear in the construction of patriarchal violence and the sustenance of ukuthwala.

4.3.1. Ntabomvu's Story: The Invisible Violence of Fear and Intimidation

Like many girls before and after her, Ntabomvu lived with the fear of what would happen to her "when the time comes", the fear of who will marry her, what the person would look like, if he would be loving or abusive, and if he would be older or her age mate. This fear, she explained, consumed her entire childhood. The anxiety increased when she reached puberty when she would have sleepless nights wondering if the next day is "the day". All the horror stories of ukuthwala every time she would be alone, she explained, came alive in those few years before the day finally arrived. Ntabomvu got married through ukuthwala in 1981 when she was 16 years old. When I asked her to give me an account of what happened, she recounted,

> *ay kubuhlungu ngoba utshata nomntu ongamaziyo kwaye ngaphezulu kwalonto awuxelelwa. Ndabona umalume esiza endlini umama notata bengekho kodwa bayazi ukuba I am to be married. ukufika kwakhe ndindedwa kunye nomhlobo wam kwaye wathi ufuna ukundithumela emntwini kodwa sahamba kunye ke ndicinga ukuba sizohlukana kwenye indawo apha endleleni kuba ndandimazi lomntu wayendithuma kuye. Ukufika kwethu kwindawo ethile ibingabantu abasemva kwethu emva koko umalume uthi yima "Ndifuna ukuthetha naba bantu beza ngakuthi", ndiye ndalinda emva koko xa abo bantu besondela uthi uzakuhamba naba bantu wena. bazakutshata ngoku. Yoooh! Ndaqala ukukhala, ke aba bantu bandithatha. Andibazi, ndifike apha ndahlala kwaye bendinyamezele ngoba bendisazi ukuba ndibaleka ndibuyele ekhaya abazali bam bazakundibetha ngoba bayazi ukuba ndithathelwe umtshato. Ndandibonile kwabo babehambe phambi kwam ukuba bazobethwa njani xa bebaleka ikhaya labo lomtshato. Ke bendisazi uhlobo lomntu alulo utata wam ndazixelela ukuba ndizohlala apha ndinyamezele ngoba andifuni kubethwa. Ukufika kwam apha bandibonisa umyeni wam.*

> Ay, it's painful because you are being wed to a stranger and on top of that you are not told. I saw my uncle coming to the house. My mother and father were not around, but they knew that I was to be wed. When he came, I was alone with a friend of mine, and he said he wanted to send me to someone, but we went together so I am thinking we are going to part somewhere along the way because I knew the person he was sending me to. When we reached a certain place there were people behind us and then my uncle said wait "I want to talk to these people coming our way". So I waited and then when those people got closer, he said, ``You will be going with these people, you are going to be married now". Yoooh! I started crying. So these people took me with them. I don't know them. I got here, I stayed, and I was patient because I knew if I ran back home my parents would beat me because they know I have been taken for marriage. I had seen from those who had gone before me how they would get beaten up when they had run away from their marital home. So, I knew the type of person that my father is, so I told myself I would stay here and be patient because I do not want to get beaten up. When I got here, they showed me my husband. (Interview, Ntabomvu, 2 June 2021)

Ntabomvu explained that in as much as she was shocked on the actual day when she was thwalwa'ed, she knew it was coming. She was socialised to understand that her place in life was to get married, have children, and take care of her household. Her initial responses to ukuthwala were not relief, rather the pain and the baggage of ukuthwalwa started. She explained that even though at first, she was relieved that her husband was not as bad as she had imagined, he was much older than her. Her husband was born in 1955 and he was 26 when he thwala'ed her. Like all the women interviewed for this thesis, she explained that they were complete strangers, how she was afraid of him and how she wished he would be gentler to her. That did not happen,

> Thatshisiwe: so, the first time you saw your husband, how did you feel?
> Ntabomvu: not good, it was not good. No, he's not ugly (she cackles), he was not ugly, just the fact that he was a stranger to me, and I was young at the time.
> Thatshisiwe: And how did that make you feel?
> Ntabomvu: You don't feel good about that, no you don't. For me it took a long time for me to get used to him.
> Thatshisiwe: How many years or months?
> Ntabomvu: You see that thing that someone takes you in December, in January they leave to come back again in December, or in Easter, so you see it's not easy getting used to someone in such a situation. I only started getting used to him when we had our own home and 10 years had already passed. (Interview, Ntabomvu, 2 June 2021).

Ntabomvu felt lucky that her husband was not often around. She managed to navigate life in his absence. However, his presence was a difficult and unwelcome experience:

> Ay, it was not easy getting used to him, no it was not. It was good when he was not around, you would be happy and laughing here at his home. But when he's around or that month when he says he's coming you have anxiety. You start thinking of the things that he does to you when he is home, you start thinking of being forced to be a wife to someone and do all the wifely things (she pauses). Mhhhh it was not nice. It was a difficult life. You know (she continued) men are cruel. He would leave for Gauteng, not even write a letter or anything. You just have to wait and work. There was a lot of work, as umakoti you do all the work. Everyone knows that Gauteng changes men, even the loyal ones. We all knew that. But once you are chosen, you are chosen. Some would get letters, some of us just had to wait. (Interview, Ntabomvu, 2 June 2021).

Ntabomvu further reiterated that what kept her going was the respect that she was supposed to have for her husband. She emphasised that on occasions when she felt anger and hatred for him, she still had to respect him because he was a man and if she did not do that, she knew that he was going to beat, or punish her and his and her family. She shared that she felt that her "image and dignity in the community would be tarnished as that of a wayward woman and that is not nice". Ntabomvu had many regrets and unpleasant happenings that emanated from ukuthwalwa. One of the most painful for her was the abandonment by her family, *"Akukho mntu undikhumbulayo phaya, ndifike apha ndahlala apha ukusukela"* (No one still remembers me there, I got here and stayed here since). Ntabomvu grieved over how bad her husband treated her. Like all the other women, it started with rape. In her case, she felt that the physical assaults were not as bad as what happened to other women because she managed to "play it safe". She avoided confrontations and had to feign acceptance of the marriage and the husband to avoid problems. However, she claimed that ukuthwalwa emotionally destroyed her as he did not respect her as his wife, he never really talked to her about things that were happening, he stayed aloof and treated her like a stranger. She recounted the trauma of the first 10 years of her marriage as *"ibuhlungu kwaye inganyamezeleki"* (agonising and unbearable). When I asked her to explain in detail, Ntabomvu said:

> I would say you do not just give up on yourself so easily, but you tell yourself that this is where it ends. I am someone's wife now, but then there is something that says if he decides to let me go, I would go.

She gave an account of a difficult life where she feared her husband, she feared his family, the community and most crucially her father. Additionally, she gave an account of how her sister-in-law who had been married through ukuthwala initiated her into what I call toxic strength.

> I stayed with his brother and his brother's wife. She was also married in the same way, so we were the same. So, she would tell me that, no you will be okay, things would get better. Everyone told me that marriage requires endurance *"emshatweni kuyanyamezelwa"* I would stay and see if it really does get better. No, it's not easy to be thwalwa'ed no (laughs). It's hard when you think about the day it happened or that particular month, that year, the first 10 years, no it's not good. But in time when you've given in you do manage to talk about it, because we even tell our children about it. (Interview, Ntabomvu, 2 June 2021)

And when asked how she survived and why she managed to stay in the marriage, she responded:

> It all depends really on the people because if you are someone who would always take everything to heart, then you would not manage because sometimes, someone they would just shout at you just to provoke you, because sometimes if you show them, they are successful at scaring you then they may end up even beating you up. I just had to be silent, I had to be careful not to offend anyone. I was afraid to be beaten, my father beat me a lot when I was young, I swore never to make people beat me. He beat me sometimes especially when he was drunk, but not too much. By the time he died we were getting along really well. When things get better you just stay and you almost call the shots whatever it is that you want done with your home you tell him and he does it, but during the first days you could even use poison.

Ntabomvu's story highlights the culturally and socially enforced dominance of men over women and girls sanctioned through ukuthwala. This socialises women to the trauma of ukuthwala and erases the scale and magnitude of violence on women. Ukuthwala gives men the right to control and intimidate, exposing women to chaotic and traumatic experiences and destroying their lives. "Through advice by the extended family including other women, and the standards to which women are held in their respective communities, women enter marriages

with the expectations that they are not equal to their husbands and are instead indebted to and owned by them and the wider family." In her narration, it is evident that she understood herself and her body as a product and object that is at the disposal of men.

As a woman who was thwalwa'ed and lobolwa'ed[17], Ntabomvu had to conform to societal standards of such a woman. She had to be submissive to the husband. Her future and aspirations should be aligned to those of her husband's. She could not have control over anything. She explained that at some point she was taken to a traditional healer to exorcise her of the demons of disrespect, stubbornness, insulting the ancestors and having future aspirations as a thwalwa'ed woman. Ntabomvu, like all women in this thesis, had to learn to stay in her marriage. The family and the community at large play a significant role in pressing thwalwa'ed women to stay in abusive marriages. This has also been found in other studies such as that conducted by Karikamwenda (2018). Moreover, in most instances the families retort that they received lobola so the woman should stay in her marriage no matter how horrible it is.

Frequently, the payment of lobola plays an influential role in how women and men perceive their positions in marriage. For Ntabomvu, eight cattle were paid for her lobola. As such she did not dream of leaving or even publicly questioning her treatment:

> …leaving? Noooo *(emphasis)* Ahh why would I leave? They paid lobola for me with eight cows, so I had to stay and be obedient and do what they wanted.

Studies on lobola have highlighted the relationships between the payment of lobola and men's unrestricted powers (cf. Togarasei and Chitando, 2021). Togarasei & Chitando contend that the practice of lobola mostly privileges men, giving them dominance over women. Furthermore it renders women powerless through their commodification. Nkosi (2011), in her study of black students' perception of lobola in gender power relationships in South Africa,

[17] A woman whom lobola was paid for.

also concluded that lobola is a "gendered construct" that works to sustain men's privileged status, while stripping women of their human rights and dignity in most instances.

Of significance in Ntabomvu's story is the stark reality of the invisible violence of patriarchy. The terror does not begin at the point of ukuthwala, the terror begins at birth. The late Zimbabwean novelist and academic, Yvonne Vera, wrote about how bodies are trained over time to enact patterns of fear and ownership. In her novel, *Butterfly Burning,* Vera illustrates that fear works to discipline and punish the body and mind, preparing it for oppressive control. In this novel there is a scene of the group lynching of several men by the Rhodesian colonial masters where several men were hung on trees and left on display. For Vera, this act is a public instillation of fear and threat to the safety and life of those who witness. Thus, Vera teaches us that fear understands the public performance of power and terror. In this instance, Ntabomvu was explicitly exposed to the amplified performance of the violence of patriarchy not through the performances of the practice of ukuthwala only but also through rumours and horror stories of ukuthwala and what happens to those who resist. Through these rumours and stories of ukuthwala, she internalised the immediacy of the danger of ukuthwala. Furthermore, the violence of ukuthwala was displayed to her through the lives of other women within and outside her family whom she watched through the struggles of the everyday. This invisible violence shaped how she lived with and naturalised the idea and possibility of ukuthwala and suffering. Her life demonstrates how the ukuthwala practice can lead to a loss of selfhood and for some eventual suicide. In the next section, I detail Vuyiswa's story, who like Ntabomvu, underscores the crucial role of patriarchal violence in the production of a controllable thwalwa'ed woman. Vuyiswa's account shows the dilemmas as well as the difficulties that thwalwa'ed women faced in trying to comprehend their situations and exist within constrained situations.

4.3.2. Vuyiswa's Story: the Production of a 'Controllable' Woman

In preparation for one of my field visits in June of 2021, I had a prior arrangement to meet with Vuyiswa. Vuyiswa was forty-three-years old. She was thwalwa'ed by a much older man when she was sixteen years old. In our earlier conversations Vuyiswa had briefed me of her life and had agreed that we would sit for a while and have deeper conversations. I noted that in our conversations she kept repeating that "I will prepare for it (the interview), I have to prepare myself". I knew that ukuthwalwa is a difficult subject to talk about but for Vuyiswa it seemed she had to take some time to emotionally prepare for the interview. I gave her the space to prepare. We arranged our interview for a Friday afternoon. I called on Friday morning to remind her that I will be making my way to her. She politely explained to me that ever since we started talking about a possible meeting where she will be talking about her experiences of ukuthwala, she had been having a hard time. She explained that it shocked her because she thought she had "buried" everything. She was having nightmares; she had been reliving the day she was thwalwa'ed and the subsequent hard times. Vuyiswa said that she constantly replays the trauma of ukuthwala and her "life has not been good", that she thought she could move on from the pain and the memories, but she never did. As such she declined the interview. She said, *"ukuthetha ngale nto kuzakundenza umsindo, kuyakundibulalisa abantu andifuni ukwenza okubi kubantu abenze le nto kum. Uyaqonda?"* ("… talking about this will make me mad, it will make me kill people. I don't want to do harm to people who did this to me. Do you understand?"). Of course, I understood. I had been talking to people like her since 2018. She was not the first woman to express such. She promised that she would call me and give me an interview over the phone.

I eventually sat down with Vuyiswa in June of 2021. At the time she was working at a government office as a cleaner, a job that she expressed intense dislike for. Like all the other

women, when narrating her life, Vuyiswa spoke of a difficult life after ukuthwala, a life where she could not make any decisions concerning her life. Vuyiswa had a dream of continuing with school, finishing her studies, and getting a 'proper' job in Cape Town, possibly working at a hospital. All her plans were crushed when she was thwalwa'ed at seventeen. After she was thwalwa'ed, Vuyiswa explained that she was suicidal, she hated everyone for allowing an old man who was into his third marriage to thwala her. Vuyiswa's husband had thwala'ed twice before and his wives had died. The most recent one had died while giving birth. He remained with children and had to quickly thwala someone to take care of him and his children from the previous wives. That meant that for Vuyiswa her own dreams had to be put on hold and she had to take on the responsibility of a wife and a mother.

When we eventually met to talk in person, Vuyiswa expressed that her husband and his family tried to break her. "There is nothing that they didn't do to me", she said. She narrated physical abuse, episodes where she did not have food or clothes because she was seen as a rebellious woman who did not love her husband the way she was expected to. She wanted school, she wanted a better life, she wanted independence in a community where those were not options for her as a thwalwa'ed woman. She rebelled and went to the town to look for employment opportunities. Her moving to town created bigger problems with the husband and his family. She was labelled a prostitute and a witch who deserted her husband and his children and was accused of trying to kill her husband. At the time of the interview, she was in a bad space. She was being accused of betraying the family, prostituting in town and neglecting her ailing husband. She was quite emotional and insisted that all she wanted was to make a life for herself and her children and that her husband was now too old to fend for them. Throughout the conversation I had with her, she occasionally reiterated that *"Lo mtshato ukuchitha ngaphakathi" (*This marriage destroys you from the inside).

Her behaviour resulted in more intense forms of punishment/control that included excessive physical beatings that would often end with hospitalisation, family meetings that would normally include verbal abuse, insults, threats, and intimidation, and cleansing rituals that included painful processes. She described that one of the cleansing rituals included her having to be bathed by male members of the family. She had to strip naked on several occasions in front of people and be exorcised of stubbornness. Almost similar experiences were shared by other women whose stories I detail in chapter six.

After this experience, Vuyiswa felt that she had to act or be what they wanted, she had to control her behaviour and to act 'properly'. From that point she resigned herself to the fact that she can never be who or what she wanted to be. Vuyiswa had to be 'controllable' for her to escape the wrath of her husband and his family. When I asked her what her family's take on the ordeal that she was going through was, she responded by saying that they did not have a say in anything because she was now the other family's property. They paid lobola, therefore they could not interfere in the affairs of the family that had paid lobola. Once when she complained to her mother about the treatment that she got from her husband, her mother responded by saying, "*angithi uyabona sihleli aph' emzini hamba ke nawe uyohlal' emzin' wakho"* (Isn't it that, you see that we are still here in our marital homes, married, you have to go back and stay there in your marital home.

After that Vuyiswa decided to be 'an acceptable woman'. She did everything to appear controllable and behave within the prescribed norms and standards of a married woman. That meant giving up on her dreams of going to school, staying in her marriage and taking her duties as a wife seriously. Thus, she worked on becoming a 'good' wife, she tried not to hate her husband and accept him. She was told that "…*bonke abantu basetyhini bayadlula koko kodwa abanye ababonisi indlela abaziva ngayo kwabanye abantu" (*… all women go through that but some don't show what they feel to other people). She was told that going through the rituals

would make her a better woman, a woman that loves her husband and accepts her situation. She waited for that feeling of gratitude, patience, and love and it never came. As her husband grew older, she says the hatred for him grew stronger and to uncontrollable levels. Afraid to "end up killing him", she decided to come up with something of an escape plan, though temporary. She decided to convince 'the elders' that her family was suffering, and that she needed to go to the town to look for employment and she promised to continue to take care of the husband. They were not convinced but she moved anyway because "I was either going to prison or I was dying of hunger".

For Vuyiswa, the suffering created by ukuthwala has persisted and continued to flourish and proliferate throughout her adult life and the violence of her everyday life adds to her pain and anguish. She positions herself at the centre of the suffering and the violence of the everyday keeps her in that position, leaving her struggling with whether to resign or continue fighting. Her life demonstrates how a rigid script for thwalwa'ed women's lives operates to inhibit women's autonomy as well as to suffocate their dreams. After she was thwalwa'ed, her dreams were discarded, and she had to live within a script already designed for women like her. She was living a punctuated and altered life seemingly beyond her control. The physical moment of ukuthwala ended her life. Her story is saturated with examples of her diminishment in the face of male privilege and unyielding traditional practices. She gave up on the hopes of exiting the marriage, at some point she resigned herself to the fact that tradition has ended her life. Even at the time of the interview, she was not completely out of the marriage. Outrightly exiting the marriage seemed to be a move that would attract family and community scorn with further punishment and the worst-case scenario of ostracization. This resonates with Karikamwenda's (2018) findings in her brief analysis of the effects of ukuthwala on women that showed that many women stay in their marriages in spite of what would ordinarily be considered to be

unbearable conditions as rebelling against the marriage would "ascribe them an unsettled and difficult status within the community" (p.173). This thesis also demonstrates how when a young woman or a girl exits her marriage, they can no longer fit into their communities. As she is no longer a virgin, she can no longer interact with virgins and her agemates, she can no longer go to school nor participate in social festivities. Even in old age, if one leaves their marriage they are scorned by the society, stereotyped as witches and prostitutes. Karikamwenda (2018) also argues that after ukuthwala, once one carries the status of *umfazi*[18] there is no going back. This thesis finds that women find themselves trapped in a cycle of ukuthwalwa induced trauma. In all our conversations, there was nothing that pointed to Vuyiswa owning her thoughts and actions. She always worried about how her actions would be translated to mean disrespect to her husband, his family, her family, the ancestors, and her community. She was 'surveilled' and she also 'self-surveilled'. However, anger and discontent brewed underneath the façade of a good wife. She felt disappointed by her parents because they failed to protect her, and she felt that her dreams were permanently deferred.

4.3.2. Nomsisi's Story: the Making of a 'Hardened' Subject

"Omama bathi angithi uyabona sihleli aph' emzini hamba ke nawe uyohlal' emzin' wakho." (Our mothers say you can see we're still here in our marriages so go and stay in your marriage). This excerpt endorses the common rhetoric of *ukunyamezel*a (literally translated as endurance or to persevere or tolerate burdens). *Nyamezela* is integral to the mechanisms used to socialise thwalwa'ed girls, later women to trauma. It is a process whereby women are encouraged to accept the aggressions they are experiencing or employ avoidance strategies. *Ukunyamezela* encourages women to cope with gendered aggression or the everyday or the subtle and everyday verbal, behavioural, cultural, and social expressions of oppression. In the

[18] Common reference to Southern African an African married woman.

case of the thwalwa'ed, *ukunyamezela* is used to encourage women to stay in unbearable marriages with toxic partners.

I met Nomsisi in late October of 2018. She was friends with one of the young women I used to interact with. I noted that she was always with her three children, either doing laundry or other chores in her compound. I had never seen her husband, so I had assumed that he was working in Gauteng or Cape Town as the few working men in the area did. I would greet her every time I passed her compound and somehow, I got close enough to her to start talking to her about my project. When I finally sat down to talk about her life, the husband was in the room. He was old and frail compared to her 31-year-old, bubbly self. I was a bit uncomfortable with his presence in the room, but she assured me that he is not a threat. She seemed to completely disregard his presence, which was something unusual. I started the conversation by asking her to tell me a bit about who Nomsisi was:

> My name is Nomsisi, I am my grandmother's child, I was raised by my grandmother. I would see my mother maybe once every three or four years. One day, my grandmother and other relatives left for Gauteng, and I was later told that my mother had died, her boyfriend killed her…. After that my grandmother was strict with me because she was afraid that if I did what I wanted I would also die like my mother…I never missed my mother, you see I didn't know her … I don't even remember her face very well now. But I think the stories that I heard about her disturbed me. I was not a happy child, yes, my grandmother did things for me (becoming emotional), but that was when I was young. My life has not been good, I have suffered a lot in my life, as you can see here, do you think this is life? This is not life. (Interview, Nomsisi, 31 October 2018)

At that moment, I shifted my gaze to the husband, obviously shocked at her bluntness. She said, *"Don't worry, he knows, I tell him these things, he knows, I do not hide anything".* I shifted back my attention to her and she said:

> Okay let me start from the beginning for you, let me tell you everything. You see, when I say life is bad for me, I mean it is bad *(looking around and hand motioning for me to look around the homestead).*

Looking around I could tell why she was emphasising the poverty that she was in. She shared a one-roomed hut with her three children, one boy and two girls. The hut had two beds, one that I assumed was an old double bed and one that was a single bed. She explained to me that she sleeps with the children in the bigger bed and her husband uses the other bed. In one corner were a few pots, plates, an old wooden box (which she explained was their wardrobe) and a big dish, which I assumed was their bathroom. There was nothing much in the hut. There was one more house, something that resembled a modern design in the compound, which was dilapidated and had no roof or doors. She later explained that her husband built that house a long time ago and used to use it with his late wife, but it is old now and they can't use it anymore. She explains that her husband stopped working long before he married her. He had other older children, but they didn't come home anymore. She explained that they now have their own lives.

> You see, I did not even choose the man I wanted to marry. I was just ambushed on my way from the shops. Two men approached me and started to talk to me. As I was talking to them one of them grabbed me from behind and before I knew it these men were dragging me and beating me… I knew what was happening, I knew I was being thwalwa'ed and to be honest, I thought it was my boyfriend who had promised to marry me and had gone to Gauteng to look for a job. I thought it was him until I realised that we were taking a different direction, but I still thought it was him, he was back for me…I was 21 years old, and I was ready to get married. I did not do well at school you see, so I wanted someone that would take care of me. Then came this *(pointing to the husband, who was dozing off at the time*). He just picked me up, (pause) I was just picked up, that is how I got married. I was sad, (*pause, getting emotional*) I was angry, angry that my boyfriend never came back for me and even if he wanted to, he would not do it after this … I ran away several times, but he would come and fetch me, and my grandmother and uncles would say 'go back'. He paid a cow at first. I did not want to marry an old man. I complained to my grandmother, and she said, 'Old men are better, they take good care of you. The young ones cheat and beat'. But this man beat me, yooo, he was quick to anger. I mean how can you force someone to love you, you cannot force love…. He didn't talk to me because he knew that I would run away. This thing (ukuthwala) has some cowardice in it, you are taken by surprise. Why can't he come and talk to you Yeeee why? They know you will run away. I thought of killing myself. I know of people who killed themselves because they did not want to marry the people that thwalwa'ed them. Now thinking about it, I was dull, very dull. Imagine someone beating you because they want to marry you. You know, when he realised that I wanted to commit suicide he gave me a rope and told me to go and kill myself if I wanted to. When he realised that I could not kill myself he continued beating me. He

would even give me bus fare and tell me to go home, knowing very well that my grandmother and uncles will send me back. He gave them seven cattle? Yes, I am here on seven cattle (she raises seven fingers). They will say to me, 'Go to your marital home, you are a married woman. Young men have no cattle to marry you, stop thinking about them'. I was dull, those days I was very dull. I realised that I had nowhere to go. At the end of it all, I didn't know where to go, I became very afraid of running away because every time I ran away, he would beat me up for some days. It took me two years to accept him. They say most people take a year, but for me it took two years because I didn't want to be married in that way. I didn't even know him. There were some women that would encourage me to stay and take time to get used to my husband. The first two years were very difficult for me, and I had to work very hard in this home and I didn't even know anyone, he was cruel to me … ah now I'm not afraid of him. Look at him, he is sick now, he can't beat me…. Heee this is the man, look at him, he is much much older than me. After I fell pregnant, I realised that there is nothing I can do. I prefer to love the person first and then marry the person. Ukuthwala is not right, you are forced to marry. This one is difficult; you do not live a good life. Some girls were lucky to be thwalwa'ed by people they love, you know people that they have met before. Their age mates. You see those ones are happy, they respect each other. A person that does not know you will not respect you, not at all. I started wearing these long dresses and skirts. I would fall sometimes when I tried to walk. I was not used to them. When I go home, I do not dress like this, I remove these and dress in nice clothes… (*she laughs and emphasises that she hates the clothing*). As I speak, one person died in this village. We will be burying him on Saturday. He thwalwa'ed a girl recently from a village up there (pointing) and she put poison in his food. He is dead now[19]. Some girls are clever, they either report to the police or get you arrested. I was dull, but I didn't want to disappoint my grandmother… I didn't want to end like her, but I feel it's the same. I am suffering here. My uncles and my grandmother got cattle, what did I get? Heee, what did I get? Nothing. Some people use poison, but I would never do that though, but sometimes you are forced to do such things. An aunt's daughter got married through this ukuthwala and had four children, she left, left even the children, went back home. *Umyeni wasweleka, yena akazange aye apho ukuyokuphosa ilitye* (The husband died, she did not even go there to throw a stone) (an act of respecting the dead through putting a stone on the grave). She is working now; she has her own things. (Interview, Nomsisi, 31 October 2018)

I recount Nomsisi's story in some detail to show not only how central ukuthwalwa is in facilitating women's loss of control of their lives but also to highlight the extreme mechanisms used to socialise thwalwa'ed women to accept terror. After ukuthwala, Nomsisi's story demonstrates that her body became a site of violence that reinforced the existing structures of patriarchal violence. Firstly, as per norm, Nomsisi was physically assaulted, secondly, her life choices were altered for her, "They will say to me, 'Go to your marital home, you are a married

[19] I expand on this story in chapter six, where I talk at length about women's responses and resistance to ukuthwalwa violence.

woman. Young men have no cattle to marry you, stop thinking about them". She was instructed to stop thinking about marrying whoever she wanted and accept her new situation. Thirdly, she was exposed to physical labour as another mechanism of subduing her to accepting the terror of ukuthwala. Fourthly, she was expected to change who she was, starting with the outside appearance in terms of clothing to the way she thinks about herself and her marriage. Lastly, as previously explained, rape and pregnancy are powerful tools that patriarchy uses through ukuthwala to violate these women "After I fell pregnant, I realised that there is nothing I can do". Even with suicidal ideation ("I thought of killing myself"), her fate was sealed for her. She either had to die or harden and continue with her marriage.

Nomsisi's life story demonstrates how she was aggressively initiated to accept trauma. As a result a hardened woman was constructed. She was put in a precarious position and was continuously told to "*nyamezela"* and to *"qina"* (to be strong). Both these concepts relate to the idea of being hard or hardened. To be hard or strong meant that Nomsisi had no other alternative. Nomsisi toyed with the idea of poisoning her husband but that was too extreme for her. She also entertained running away several times and committing suicide, but these proved not to be viable solutions. One could argue that women like Nomsisi display resilience, the concept of resilience defined as the ability to survive hardships (Scoones, 1998:7) or the ability to resist adversity (Walsh, 1996). However, the problem with calling all thwalwa'ed women resilient is that it denotes a positive and desirable state of being. On the contrary, hardness is not entirely advantageous. It allows the affected person to find adversity acceptable and may obstruct that person in their attempts to escape or adopt corrective options (Matinga 2008). Especially in livelihood studies, resilience is often used to refer to responses to shocks to a system that are looked at in an optimistic way, taking resilience as a positive asset. However, in this context I discuss hardness as a socially constructed phenomenon that encourages and

allows thwalwa'ed women to cope with traumatic everyday experiences by accepting and finding ways to live with and in conditions that they do not consider to be good for them. This is contrary to resilience which employs strategies such as ignoring the problem, normalising the problems without solving them and attributing positive meaning to adverse experiences. With hardness, there is no change possible. Nomsisi developed hardiness because she had no means available to her of becoming anything other than what she was expected to be. Her becoming other than what she was was a threat to a system that put her in that position. The consequences of challenging the expected are often disastrous as demonstrated throughout this thesis. Moreover, rather than ukuthwala being a once off traumatic event, for most women including Nomsisi, ukuthwalwa becomes their lives.

The patriarchal order expects Nomsisi to stay in her marriage, to accept her new imposed position in society. Her body, emotions, and life in the everyday is violated and crushed into accepting what the patriarchal order offered her. She had to demonstrate acceptance of ukuthwala through submission and compliance with the prescribed behaviours for thwalwa'ed women. She had to desist from running away, having suicidal thoughts, and showing distaste of the new life. As explained in the previous chapter, her socio-cultural belief system is very traditional and patriarchal, women are considered inferior to men and their natural roles and responsibilities are in the service of men. As a highly patriarchal society, men are revered beings. Even I, as a university student and a researcher in this context, displayed this. I became very uncomfortable when she denigrated her husband. She noted this and had to assure me when this happened, that her husband was not a threat to us. My position here couldn't insulate me from the fear of violence that would befall me if I had not played into the patriarchal structures. On the contrary, it put me on a collision course with patriarchal violence. I explained in the previous chapter that I was a threat to the order. I had to make myself appear

to fit into the cultural expectations of womanhood. Given how clear the threat of patriarchal violence is and its enormity and the imminent threat, it took a certain form of training and understanding from Nomsisi to act the way she did. Her actions suggest that a man is a threat only if he can inflict pain and violence. At this point, Nomsisi assumes some form of control and superiority over him because of his physical inability to harm her. Nomsisi felt violated by her husband, her entire life disrupted, and had lost a sense of self. She lived in a prescribed self to which she had no contribution in defining, she felt like she was living in a different kind of self, a separate bubble contrary to her expectations of her life and what it should have been. The impairment of the husband brings out the other kind of self in her, she expresses herself more, she is not afraid to communicate herself and think of possibilities. Nomsisi, Vuyiswa and other women in this chapter and the subsequent chapters find themselves struggling with the reality and the imagined possible self. For Nomsisi, her husband's inability to inflict violence on her and others around him is an opportunity to invoke the other self, the repressed, suppressed self.

Thus, the birth of a hardened self, the hardened subject manifests through Nomsisi's embodiment of the antifeminine qualities. *Ukunyamezela* is supposed to create a particular kind of feminine that is acceptable in Engcobo. Femininity is measured in how one positively accepts trauma, normalises trauma and lives with the trauma. The hardening of Nomsisi played out differently. Instead of producing an acceptable feminine subject it produced a hardened antifeminine one. Through Nomsisi's story I trace the tension between being passive and defiant, while she has internalised the patriarchal/ societal expectations on femininity, as well as oppression that comes with those models, rather than being docile as expected she hardened without attributing a positive experience to ukuthwalwa.

Instead of showing excitement and appreciation to her husband for 'choosing' her as a wife as expected of her, Nomsisi exhibited the opposite, she was bitter, she was terrified, she

felt terrorised, and finagled into the marriage. Her desires of possibly poisoning her husband or even the expression of celebrating those who have done it run contrary to the ideals of femininity that encourage docilely accepting terror and suffering[20].

> Nothing. Some people use poison, but I would never do that though, but sometimes you are forced to do such things. An aunt's daughter got married through this ukuthwala and had four children, she left, left even the children, went back home. *Umyeni wasweleka, yena akazange aye apho ukuyokuphosa ilitye* (The husband died, she did not even go there to throw a stone) (an act of respecting the dead through putting a stone on the grave). She is working now; she has her own things. (Interview, Nomsisi, 31 October 2018)

Additionally, she displayed some form of socially unexpected behaviour towards her husband. Instead of being respectful, she was avenging the cruelty that she endured from her husband. In my conversations with her she would often refer to her husband as an 'it', or 'this thing':

> Then came this *(pointing to the husband, who was dozing off at the time*). He just picked me up, (pause) I was just picked up, that is how I got married.

For Nomsisi to refer to her husband in such terms is unusual and unheard of. A woman in that context must always display the utmost respect for her husband. Nomsisi's anti-feminine possibilities run contrary to the physical and emotional infantilization that the routinisation of the trauma of ukuthwala typically evokes.

4.4. Spirituality as a mechanism of terror.

In this section, I demonstrate how attitudes towards tradition, customs, ideas of the past come into play in how the practice of ukuthwala is made acceptable or unacceptable. I argue that there are contestations within these communities about the practice in relation to how an

[20] I elaborate on embodied suffering in chapter 5.

idea of being a good and acceptable person emerges in relation to culture, tradition, custom and spirituality.

4.4.1. Fezeka's Story: 'The Ancestors are Watching Us'

Throughout my fieldwork I would often ask community members why ukuthwala is still being practised. I was particularly interested in finding out how people understood the existence and the continuation of the practice. While everyone I talked to knew that the practice was unpopular mainly because of the "propagandistic and sensationalist nature" of some of the popular publications (Smit, 2017: 6) and the numerous workshops by the state agencies and NGOs that usually discourage the communities from practising it, women would have mixed feelings on the relevance of the practice currently, especially non- thwalwa'ed women. Most of my male informants saw the practice as an indomitable cultural custom, one that marked their identity as the Xhosa. The striking thread that links most of the responses is that ukuthwala is integral to the production and socialisation of 'acceptable' men and women in this imagined Xhosa community.

To be acceptable in those communities that practise ukuthwala you must adhere to ukuthwala as an instruction and or an act of obeying the ancestors. Moreover, as I demonstrate in this section, this extends to how masculinity and femininity are constructed through these beliefs and ways of relating to the ancestors. Through Fezeka's story I highlight how ukuthwala thrives through patterns of violent masculinity and the cyclical nature of violence. Fezeka, as a man, had the 'right' to thwala a woman and imprison her in his hut as a way of obeying the ancestors. Fezeka and other men believed that by virtue of being male you are closer to the ancestors, you can communicate with the ancestors, and you have access to the ancestors and women must respect the instructions from the ancestors and act accordingly. For a woman to

be accepted and to have dignity in the society they cannot contradict the will of the ancestors. Gqola's (2007) work points to how the intersections of violent and toxic masculinities and limiting notions of femininity contribute to the normalisation of violence on women. I argue here that these ideas feed into the patriarchal violence that becomes the main mechanism that propels the practice of ukuthwala.

Fezeka would occasionally sit in on my conversations with his mother, as if to ensure that his mother was representing 'his culture' well. One day when his mother was explaining the process and preparations that happen before and after ukuthwala, he exclaimed *"Nantso ke indlela yoobawo!"* ("This is the way of our ancestors!"). This got me curious because I had heard it before, especially from men, several times before. When I eventually sat with him on a separate occasion, I tried to find out what that meant. I asked him why they are still holding on to the practice of ukuthwala even though there have been many efforts to stop it (ranging from early missionary work, government and NGO efforts, numerous arrests of those unfortunate enough to be arrested and the recent court rulings that have threatened the very core of the practice). He valiantly responded "…you see, the ancestors are watching us." He explained, "*Ookhokho bethu babekwenza, baqala, asinako ukulahla inkcubeko yethu kunye nezithethe zethu, asinakubaphoxa ngoluhlobo!* ("Our forefathers used to do it, they started it, we cannot throw our culture and traditions away, we cannot disappoint them like that!"). This statement highlighted to me the enduring contestations over tradition, the past, culture, and history and how ukuthwala thrives through the reproduction of particular beliefs and practices through them. Invoking these, positions ukuthwala as an acceptable practice and those practicing it to be good and acceptable people who uphold the agenda of the ancestors, who uphold the culture of amaXhosa and the 'real' amaXhosa as it were. Contestations over the practice are taken as a destruction of the very essence of 'Xhosaness' and those who do

challenge are told that they will face the wrath of the ancestors or suffer the consequences as I explain in detail in Chapter 6. Invoking history and spirituality when explaining the existence of ukuthwala was a common response, especially amongst male participants. Gradually it emerged that inasmuch as some people (men and women) generally accepted the practice as part of their history and that it must be protected, it is men who have stronger views on the continuation of the practice.

Throughout the Engcobo area, lurid tales of 'those women' who defy ukuthwala and end up in the cities as 'prostitutes' or as single women without anyone willing to marry them, are commonplace. Such stories were repeated with strong emphasis from most men that I talked to. I heard many of them over the course of my fieldwork.

Fezeka married his wife through ukuthwala in the late 1980s. He is one of the men who had their thwalwa'ed wives run away from them.

> I thwala'ed my wife, my parents didn't even know, I just took her and put her in my room. She didn't want but I told her that you are not going anywhere. I told her that you are now my wife, period! She then asked me what her parents are going to say because she is at school. *Ndamshifter* (moved) her from here and sent her to stay with my mother's sister. They started looking for her and school kids told them that they last saw her with me. Her family came home looking for her and I told them that yes, she is with me. I then paid one cow yesithwalo[21] / yesidelelo (for disrespecting the family). I then furthermore paid six more cows. We were married in 1980 and had a fallout and we separated in 1983. (He displayed displeasure in explaining why and how his wife left). I never had children because of her. People respect me because they know I was married at some point…. As a woman or man, you see, if you never married people disrespect you. You don't have dignity… (Interview, Fezeka, 03 August 2018)

Fezeka went on to explain that his wife's defiance brought a lot of bad luck, not only to herself but to him as well. He said "…this woman angered the ancestors because she was introduced to the ancestors and ran away, do you understand?" He lamented that because of

[21] As part of lobola, if a woman is thwalwa'ed, one extra cow is paid for that, it is called "inkomo yesithwalo".

her actions he did not have children, he was fired from the only job he ever had in Pretoria some fifteen years ago and had contracted HIV and is now on antiretroviral drugs. He further went on to explain that his condition requires that he gets good nutrition but because he is not working that is not even a possibility. He believed that because of his wife's leaving, his life had been significantly altered. As mentioned in Chapter 3, at the time of the interview, Fezeka was 60 years old and was living on a disability grant, he had a small garden in his backyard where he cultivated vegetables to supplement his diet. All that he was able to see himself as and all that he had been able to become, he attributed to his wife's leaving. Like most thwalwa'ed women, Fezeka was also living in the shadow of ukuthwala, but as a man. There was an understanding of the self which only existed in his mind. His kind of reality is always informed by what could have been if things had gone according to plan. Furthermore, as a man whose manhood was measured by his ability to successfully thwala a woman and reproduce, his failure to do so was a blow to his masculinity. However, the mere fact that he once thwala'ed a woman was enough to grant him some form of dignity. Fezeka's testimony:

> I just took her and put her in my room. She didn't want but I told her that you are not going anywhere. I told her that you are now my wife, period! There was nothing she could do, was there? There was nothing, she was my wife and that's it! *(With emphasis)*. (Interview, Fezeka, 03 August 2018)

This underlines that as a man, he was socialised into a community where violent interaction is at the core. Women like Fezeka's wife and all other women discussed in this thesis were ensnared in the claws of violence and patriarchy as evidenced by the violence they have endured and the violence that continues to define their existence. The struggle to dismantle patriarchal violence, which I detail in Chapter 6, is directly linked to the constant presence of violence in these men and women's lives. And it is the silences around the connections that link ukuthwala and violence that have ensured violence as an ever-present experience in thwalwa'ed women's lives. It is the absence of transparency around its

technologies and its main targets that continue to trouble. In other words, ukuthwala allows for violence that targets women's bodies, but the violence is invisibilized. As such, thwalwa'ed women continue to live within the constrictions of patriarchal violence. Silence becomes a scourge that is hidden under the epithet of preserving culture and traditions when refusal to be silent or resistance is often seen as the destruction of culture and traditions. The problem with this concept of preserving culture and traditions is that it helps to mask the repressiveness of ukuthwala.

Fezeka's testimony was not an isolated phenomenon. There are many people who shared the same sentiments. I met Adeline Ncudwana who narrated her ordeal after exiting an ukuthwala marriage. Adeline was thwalwa'ed in the 1950s after her parents' death. After her parents died, she explains that it was a confusing time because her brother wanted to inherit everything, and he chased her and her siblings out of their family home. Adeline and her siblings then went to stay with their elder sister who was married at the time. She was in standard six. Shortly after they arrived at her sister's place, she was thwalwa'ed and as someone whose socialisation and cultural experiences taught her that she was supposed to get married in order to have a good life she thought that it came at a good time because she was going to have a place to stay and also be able to take care of her younger siblings. That is not what happened. She tells of untold abuse at the hands of her in-laws and that after getting married the husband went ahead and "married another woman in the modern nice way" and left her in the rural areas. She often questioned herself why she was thwalwa'ed in the first place and she concluded that her husband just needed someone to take care of his parents while he was working in Gauteng. His parents forced him to thwala someone for those purposes and to fulfil his obligations as a man in the community in this way. According to her "he had tested city women" and she stood no chance. She was then forced to leave the marriage and as a result, she "lived a life of bad luck after bad luck". This is how she remembers the events:

> He was those kinds of man that don't pay lobola… He never paid lobola…. wooo mtakwethu, when I met this man I was in standard 6 in the 50s (1950s). He never paid lobola, I was at school at the time. It was a confusing time because our parents had just died and my brother wanted to inherit everything, so he had sent us away. I never remarried, that thing put a bad spell on me. I went on to have many other children without anyone wanting to marry me…. I never married, I never …. Mhhhhhhhh (silence, shakes her head). This kind of marriage is alright for men. But it's alright, my husband was not sending money to me. I worked very hard; I had a hard life. I worked on people's farms, tilling the land for sugar. Do you understand? I was stranded. Sometimes I would work for tea bags, three or four tea bags. At that time, you are a young Makoti, '*uthe nqenqelele iqhiye emnyama*' (dramatising the wearing of a black doek, a signature mark for a new thwalwa'ed bride) do you understand, in the rural areas… I would walk for an hour to fetch water. I worked very hard, I was always tired, it was difficult, children nowadays are civilised. In our days, as a makoti, you had to make sure that there is dinner in this household, it's your duty as a makoti. My husband left for Johannesburg shortly after I got pregnant and never returned. I waited for eight years…. I would go to church, we used to get letters through the white man at church. I would watch other women getting money from their husbands from Gauteng, but week after week, year after year, there was nothing for me. (Interview, Adeline, 1 August 2018)

Adeline went on intermittently during the interview to narrate how badly her leaving her marriage affected her life. She explains that the men that she had children with when she moved to Gauteng were with her for economic reasons:

> I never remarried, I would have relationships, but no marriage. The men just wanted me for my money, yooo they just ate my money and no marriage (she laughs). …. yoooo men, I am done. You see, even if you meet a nice man here, don't be fooled, they are all useless. (Interview, Adeline, 1 August 2018)

Her anger towards her husband stems from the fact that he pushed her away, in the process angering the ancestors and ruining her life. The ultimate demonstration of her anger is evident in her recalling that when her former husband died, she did not mourn for him. She explains that she was introduced to the ancestors and for eight years she was part of the family. When she left and went to Gauteng, the ancestors still considered her their *makoti* (daughter in-law) and as a result, she was not able to get married or even get a "good man". She explains that this dark cloud followed her. Adeline attributes all her misfortunes to the anger of the ancestors:

> You know this thing follows you. I am lucky that I managed to build this home (using hand gestures to emphasise her point). Something happened to me, something bad. You see, I live on provident fund from my last employment. My sister used all my money. Because I didn't have an ID (Identity document) I used her ID and address to work and register for work. When I retired, they sent my money to her, and she never told me. Isn't I was from the rural areas, she was a teacher, a crook who ate people's monies. I left without money. The money that I have now, is for long service. I even worked for Indians. Heee I almost forgot, you see I am an ANC activist, but with bad luck things do not always go well. In 1990, when Zulus and Xhosas were fighting, I was caught in the crossfire, I almost died, I spent two months in the hospital and even in 1976, I was caught in the crossfire again. (Interview, Adeline, 1 August 2018)

On one of the days when I had visited Adeline, she at last responded to my unconscious, perhaps inquisitive gaze because she had a limp when she walked, and I was often curious to know what exactly happened.

> This is a recent thing, I never used to be like this. The things that we go through in life, my daughter, especially when you are old and alone, people no longer respect. It is my brother's son who did this to me (pointing at her foot). He came here asking for money, I refused to give him money, I refused, and he picked an iron bar and started beating me with it…. When you have bad luck, things just happen to you. (Conversation, Adeline, 2 November 2018).

For her, all the misfortunes are because the ancestors are angry with her. The misfortunes are a punishment of the gods. She recounted that some people had advised her to go to *"abazalwane"* (Pentecostal churches) to get rid of the spell that was cast on her. She was skeptical of doing so because of her belief that God and the ancestors were somehow connected.

The stories of Fezeka and Adeline are pivotal in demonstrating how ukuthwala employs the beliefs in ancestral spirits as a mechanism to discipline the thwalwa'ed women into acceptance, obedience, and silence. Throughout my fieldwork, I noted that there was a strong honour and reverence to ancestors across the population that my study covered. The general belief was that ancestors can be "benevolent and malevolent at the same time" as (Mulambuzi, 1997:8) accurately put it. Mulambuzi further explains that in African traditional societies the authority and power of the 'dead' (the ancestors) is far greater than that of the living and while

they are revered and remembered with affection on one hand, on the other, they are feared (Mulambuzi 1997). Hammond - Tooke writes,

> The fact of the matter is that the ancestors are capricious, jealous, and easily offended, and their wrath is an important explanation for misfortune (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:331).

Consequently, Adeline and Fezeka attributed all their misfortunes after the ukuthwala incidents to the wrath of the ancestors. To appease the ancestors, Adeline desired to be both a good wife and a decent woman. She feared both the wrath of the ancestors as well as the retaliation of the patriarchal violence that consisted of societal shunning and stigma which are part of the consequences of leaving one's marriage. Even when she wanted to leave the marriage, it was the unrelenting hauntings of the ancestors that kept her in her marriage despite the 8 years that her husband had deserted her. Unlike Fezeka's wife, Adeline adheres to the performances of obedience, in-spite of the immense suffering that she went through, she demonstrates internalisation of what Pumla Gqola (2007) calls 'the cult of femininity' and the patriarchal violence. These, according to Gqola require a woman "not just to perform femininity, rather they are required to internalise the laws of patriarchy". Her story demonstrates that:

> The power of the ancestors to punish the living encourages attempts to keep them satisfied by adhering to the customs and traditions of which the ancestors are the guardians; by ensuring that harmony prevails, right relationships are maintained, that respect and service to the authorities is observed, and that anger, jealousy and hatred are not harboured. (Mulambuzi, 1997: 8)

Fezeka's narrative of his experiences is that of a life that was ravaged by the anger of the ancestors. He believed that he played a hand in exacerbating the wrath of the ancestors by failing to keep his wife whether by force or coercion as other men did. As the patriarch, he had the authority to use whatever means to keep his wife 'in her place' but he failed and as a result, he was severely punished. Fezeka's narrative recounts the common practice of imprisoning thwalwa'ed women. Fezeka is the custodian of patriarchal violence as he facilitated the

deployment of patriarchal violence on his wife through imprisonment, force and traumatisation that aimed to ultimately create a docile and submissive subject. This illustrated how patriarchal violence according to Farmer (2004) inspires the victimisation of the most vulnerable in society.

These stories confirm my earlier argument that ukuthwala operates and thrives through instilling fear and trauma in its subjects. It evokes what Harris (2017:147) calls "spirit - induced anxiety" which is anxiety that may be associated with spiritual concerns. Fezeka and Adeline's beliefs about the role of the ancestors in ukuthwala and their misfortunes evoked anxieties about their lives, past, present and the future. These anxieties, I argue in the next chapter, allowed for a life of lived and embodied pain and suffering because of the effects of ukuthwalwa, and in Fezeka's case, a failed attempt of ukuthwala.

These two cases highlight that the mysticism around ukuthwala is one of the mechanisms used to ensure the continuation of the practice. The connection with the ancestors through marriage made the custom to be understood as a sacred custom. It becomes the practice of the gods, making ukuthwala a practice beyond the realm of state control and regulation, hence it cannot be questioned, and it cannot be stopped by external powers. In addition, for those like Fezeka, who strongly believe that ukuthwala is a way of honouring the ancestors ("the ancestors are watching"), it is their duty to continue with the traditions of the ancestors. If you defy the ancestors, then you are left on your own. These are the meanings attached to ukuthwala - that culture is beyond the physical realm, it is something that has to do with the gods, it is sacred. You need consent and acceptance from the gods. This ancestral surveillance mechanism is used as a technology to silence and further perpetuate the practice and suffering

of these women. In the next section I advance that the secrecy, silences, and mysticism of ukuthwala finds expression through the physical act of the violent ukuthwala rape.

4.4.2. Rape as an Act of Power and Control

During the analysis and writing of this thesis, I struggled to find the words to describe the experiences of women with regard to the sexual assault that they were describing. I was confronted with the inadequacy of language to capture and convey their experiences in ways that accurately represent their feelings on the issue. My struggle parallels the thwalwa'ed women's dilemma who would normally say "he forced me to sleep with him or I was forced to sleep with him, something like what you call rape nowadays". I could not look on the bright side of being raped. Ultimately, it was this struggle that compelled me to write on rape as a patriarchal tool, the power of the lack of language for it and the issues around consent. Investigating the pervasiveness and the normalisation of rape in South Africa, Gqola (2015) notes that South African men have traditionally resorted to rape as a tool to maintain unequal power relations. Here, I argue that for thwalwa'ed women, rape is not extraordinary, countless women carry the physical and imperceptible scars of sexual abuse as they live their everyday lives.

In one conversation I had with a group of thwalwa'ed women, the women spoke about their recollection of forced sex after they were thwalwa'ed:

> Woman 1: When you are thwalwa'ed you must sleep with that man, it's like that. You can't say you don't want to.
> Woman 2: It's what you youngsters call rape when they sleep with the man that thwalwa'ed them.
> Woman 1: Especially that it's usually a man that you do not know and do not love.
> Woman 3: Yes, it was rape, it is rape. The thing is that you will be afraid of this man and your parents. Even if you think of running away from this home and these

people that you don't know you then think of where will I go? What will my parents say? But yes, it was rape, even then it was rape.

Thatshisiwe: So, you could not refuse?

Woman 4: You can't say no, he will report you.

Woman 2: Someone can even return you home and that is bad.

Thatshisiwe: How so?

Woman 1: Ahh you just must do it, you can't go back home, you are already someone's wife.

Woman 2: Whether you like it or not.

[Focus group, Four women, 06 August 2018]

This conversation graphically encapsulates the key point here that violence, including sexual violence, was an integral part of making a woman into a wife. To understand the persistence of sexual violence, which is associated with ukuthwala, Thornberry (2019; 2011) sought to unpack consent in the context of rape in the Eastern Cape and concludes that cultural perceptions of consent and marriage have allowed violence to be utilised and endorsed, especially in ukuthwala cases. Thornberry sheds light on the expected ideals of subservience on the part of wives and its relationship to marital rape:

> Men claimed the right to use force to command their wives' obedience, including the fulfilment of sexual duties – although…this right was substantially limited in practice by women's ability to seek refuge with their natal families…Women were expected to assent to their husbands' demands for sex; the concept of marital rape would not have made sense to residents of precolonial Xhosaland, nor did it form part of the ideas about custom that circulated in the early colonial era. (Thornberry, 2011: 63)

In the conversations that I had with women above it is the woman's family who consent on the woman's behalf; hence they are always afraid to go back because the violence that happens to her has already been consented to on her behalf. As such these women do not and did not explicitly voice consent and in instances where they do, they risk being beaten or publicly humiliated. Thornberry's extensive research on sexual violence highlights that issues of marriage, sex and coercion are still applicable in Eastern Cape. Thornberry highlighted husband's privileges and the power that men generally wielded over women. In this society, a

proper marriage involves a relationship where the husband dominates the wife and has the right to discipline and demand by force what he needs from his wife and custom protects him.

Throughout this chapter and thesis, thwalwa'ed women stories often allude to rape as a fundamental aspect to ukuthwala. I argue here that rape is an important part of the social architecture that sustains ukuthwala because in all ukuthwala cases, the marriage is cemented through forced sexual activity on the first day of ukuthwala and the same method is used to tame the woman into submission and into subsequent pregnancy which purportedly marks the success of ukuthwala marriage. Ukuthwala rape is done in secrecy. In some cases, there will be those who witness the ancestors in action. I introduce Nomaswazi in chapter 3, I present snippets of my conversations with her as they give us some insight into how this phenomenon may unfold:

> I was abducted from the river where we were taking a bath, it's painful to think of it…. I was kicking and screaming … those men were cruel, they choked me so that I stop making noise, I almost stopped breathing. When I got to this man's home I was guarded because they were afraid that I would run away. I was forced to agree against my will… I refused to sleep with him (sex), and he told me that if I continue acting that way, he will call his brothers to come and hold me down. I did not want to be embarrassed; he told his mother that I am refusing to sleep with him, and his mother told me that as his wife I had to do it. …It was not easy but after 3 months I was used to it. They stopped guarding me. I was pregnant then. (Interview, Nomaswazi, 31 July 2018)

Many of the women I talked to were threatened with the possibility that people would be called in to assist the husband to forcefully have sexual intercourse with them. Fezeka also attested to this as he had helped some of his friends do it over the years. This kind of rape is different from the kind of rape that we know as it involves close family, friends or acquaintances to the man who orchestrated the ukuthwala of a woman. They assist and take the act of rape as a command from the ancestors. As such rape is a socially approved project, taken as an expression of culture where women's bodies are the sites of this kind of expression. In trying to understand ukuthwala- related violence, Smit (2017) describes these collective acts

of male coercion and violence as "gang-styled masculinity", where men collectively engage in sexual violence to keep women within certain boundaries and categories. This gang – style masculinity emerges strongly in how the ukuthwala process is carried out with men ganging up on the woman, beating her up in some instances, assisting the others in holding the woman down to assist in the forceful consummation of the marriage. I had the opportunity of speaking to men that have participated in the ukuthwala process where violent patriarchy and gang style masculinity converged to significantly alter the lives of women caught at the intersections. One of them I call 'the tavern guy' happily shared his views and conquests that he had helped a lot of his friends to thwala women and in the processes involved. When I asked him about the process, he was quick to comment on the terminology that he felt was misused to describe ukuthwala:

> In the old days, it was not kidnapping; you cannot say my mother was kidnapped, no no, it was not kidnap in those days. The way it was practised in the old days was different, now they call it kidnap. Even when you sleep with the girl, it was not called rape, it was a way of showing that she is your wife and if she accepts and allows you to sleep with her, then it shows that she has accepted the marriage. (Interview, tavern guy, 30 August 2018)

Such sentiments were common, and they diminish the culpability of the perpetrators of ukuthwala and minimise the harm that is done on the victim. The condoning of these practices is heightened by the normalisation of violence which girls and boys are socialised into. As Vogelman and Eagle (1991) portrayed this South African phenomenon:

> In multiple ways the ideology constructed around heterosexuality, marriage, and the family acts to conceal and mystify violence and abuse against women. Such gender ideology is absorbed at every point of socialisation from birth onward, making its exposure a radical and complex process. (1991:218)

Thus, many girls and women are initiated into sex through violence (Wood, Maforah, and Jewkes, 1996: 4-5). Ukuthwala rape transcends the individuals involved and it is concealed through a web of obstructions, silences and secrets that work against its exposure and destruction.

4.4.3. Silences on rape through language and or the lack of it.

> It took me a very long time, I mean, I was very young, I was 17. When he would say he's coming from Cape Town the only thing I had in mind was sleeping with him, because it's like rape, it's exactly like rape there's no difference at all, because you will sleep with someone even though you do not want, you see. So, when he'll say he's coming I would run away. So, they will come fetch you and your people will also tell you to go back. It took me two years for me to get used to him. He would be gone from January to December. When he's due to come back I would run away. (Ntabomvu , Interview, 2 June 2021)

As previously mentioned, thwalwa'ed women find it difficult to speak about rape in the everyday language, they borrow terms from the language to express what they are trying to describe. Many would often say "he did to me what you would call rape", or "as you call it rape", or "I think now it's called rape", or "I would say its rape but he is my husband now and I can't say he raped me". Borrowing from what other people said about it meant that they would express themselves in the third person, their subjectivities detached from expressing themselves. This allows for people within and outside ukuthwala to remain blind to the unfettered violence of ukuthwalwa, and, instead, the invisibility of the violence of rape trivialises it, the lack of language for the rape invalidating the severity of the act.

As such, I argue that if language is a cultural expression, then the absence of a language to express and discuss experiences such as rape translates to some sort of cultural denial or erasure of those experiences. The inadequacy of words to capture or communicate the experiences of rape implicitly denotes that their experiences are incommunicable, therefore cannot be spoken of. This ultimately obliterates that experience and silences its victim. The women's narratives therefore indicate that the failure of language to allow them to capture their experiences effectively denies them the opportunity to construct the meanings of their own experiences. That is why they settle on describing their experiences as forced sex and that coding deemphasises the brutality of the act. In her 2013 article 'Today it would be called rape: a historical and contextual examination of forced marriage and violence in the Eastern Cape',

Nyasha Karimakwenda documents that many of the current views about the violence of ukuthwala are misconceptions that mask the longevity of the violence of ukuthwala including the ukuthwala rape.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that ukuthwala marriage is an institution in which forms of patriarchal violence are allowed to prevail, but mostly remain invisible. This chapter begins to capture the innumerable technologies that ukuthwala employs in the terrorisation of thwalwa'ed women.

I demonstrate that thwalwa'ed women become socialised to accept terror through fear and intimidation, that results in their own deferred dreams, and the production of controllable women and the hardened subject. I underscore how thwalwa'ed women are individually carrying enormous levels of trauma, their lives steeped in violence that they are made to accept over time through the mobilisation of culture and tradition as unquestionable. The result is that such patriarchal violence is hidden as women (as well as men) conform to the expectations of the community to be accepted as men and women. Women are conditioned to maintain subordinate positions to their husbands and to accept ukuthwala and the violence that constitutes and maintains it as symbols of femininity and womanhood. This socialisation and cultural norms further prevent women's ability to conceive of their experiences as violence.

The stories so far have offered us various windows into how violence, silence, and invisibility work through the ambit of 'preserving culture'. I argue that the silences and secrets embolden the practising of ukuthwala as they are sustained by and sustain traditions and cultural beliefs and practices that members of the community accept through their socialisation into life as men and women. As such, the secrets of ukuthwala become burdens that are carried in silence, the wounds are carried in isolation. Nomusa and Fezeka's stories allow us to

understand that patriarchal domination is contingent on the deployment of violence against women. Furthermore, I draw attention to ancestral blackmail and rape as expressions of patriarchal violence, that are enabled by fear.

CHAPTER 5

"… loo mini ihleli kum" (That day is still in me). The Making of a Thwalwa'ed Subject: Lived and Embodied Suffering.

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I continue to draw on the lived experiences of ukuthwalwa to argue that beyond ukuthwala as an event, ukuthwalwa becomes an embodied experience. The lived experiences of ukuthwalwa, I argue, become something that Colin Dayan describes as "residues of terror" that do not disappear "but through the terms of law, survive and always find new bodies to inhabit, new persons to target…" (Dayan, 2011: xiii). My analysis of these "residues of terror" involves situating women's bodies at the centre of their experiences of ukuthwalwa and how they make sense of those experiences. The stories here tell of women haunted by the terrors of ukuthwala who harbour the kinds of feelings that Shabot (2016) and Motsemme (2011) describe as "lived and embodied suffering" in their analyses of how violence is experienced by women. Writing on how obstetric violence is lived and experienced by white middle class women, Shabot explained that many victims of this practice experienced feelings of embodied suffering that included embodied oppression, the diminishment of self, and physical and emotional infantilization" (Shabot, 2016: 3). In Motsemme's analysis of black women's experiences of township life in South Africa, she argues that the quality of life in the townships results in the embodiment of the pain of poverty and unemployment among other social ills. The idea of lived and embodied suffering of women where they experience a loss of the self, oppression, and emotional damage relates to how thwalwa'ed women experienced ukuthwalwa. As I demonstrate in this chapter, they reported feelings of loss of self, self-esteem, purpose, and feelings of social death. They suffered from anxiety, self-hatred, isolation, suicidal ideations, and embodied stress. In telling these women's stories, in this section I

highlight that ukuthwalwa is an embodied human experience. It is seen in its lived, context specific manifestations, as a phenomenon with meaning(s) for those living through it.

5.2. Bodies and Embodiment

In this chapter, I turn to the concept of embodiment in an attempt to understand the relationship between culture and the human body as ukuthwala is a practice that is acted out on women's bodies. I argue that women are identified as women in the first instance through their bodies that become the site of their control and subordination. The identities that are assigned to them are determined by collective cultural meanings and in most cases, women are excluded in the production and deployment of these meanings. In Engcobo there is a particular idea of the body that brings together the biological, the political, and the social in the production of the experience of the practice of ukuthwala. The point here is to link embodiment to concrete lived experience, taking into full consideration how conditions of embodiment are also systematically organised by patterns of domination and subordination.

5.3. Punctuated Lives

Years after ukuthwalwa, thwalwa'ed women shared with me their experiences of psychological, and physiological pain. Through the narratives in this chapter, I show how thwalwa'ed women's lives and bodies allow us to map the ongoing horror of ukuthwala. Commonsensical understandings of violence often assume that it will leave a 'physical' imprint on the body (Gqola, 2015: 29). Here, I argue that the thwalwa'ed women's bodies bear witness to the violence perpetrated against them and the effects are sedimented into their bodies through memories and feelings. They felt betrayed by their families, abandoned by their husbands, and had to learn to support themselves and their children with minimal resources. These experiences were not easily shared with me. And I noted that instead of representing their own

experiences as they live through them, they spoke about them according to the scripted versions of their lives and the experiences that they had to perform. They would exhibit happiness and even talk of how fulfilled their lives are. However, these masks of these performances would wear thin as I continued interacting with them and after careful examination.

5.3.1. Nobomi's Story: "… loo mini ihleli kum"

One woman, a (56-year-old by her account), Nobomi[22], who was thwalwa'ed when she was 15 years old, was probably the first to openly debunk the myth to me. When I met her, her husband had died and several decades had passed since she was thwalwa'ed. However, describing her life after she was thwalwa'ed, she emphasised that one cannot ever get over ukuthwalwa. She said "*... loo mini ihleli kum*" (…that day is still in me). For Nobomi to say that "that day is still in me" speaks to the idea of the body as an archive of trauma, the trauma of ukuthwalwa as lived and embodied, thus, it cannot be erased, escaped, or forgotten. In what follows I explore ways in which thwalwa'ed women understand and ascribe meaning to their experiences at the level of both bodily and emotional strain. I argue that for many, the body is not experienced as an accessory to the self, but it is experienced as "a site of subjectivity", "the very fabric of self", what Merleau-Ponty described as "being in the world" (Diprose, 1995). Nobomi's sentiments further demonstrate that ukuthwalwa alters women's experiences of life as well as their experiences of self. For many women, this has meant coming to terms with a new self, a self constructed through experiences of trauma and violence.

I had interesting conversations with Nobomi. Nobomi was not sure what age she was, and she indicated that she may be 56 years old. However, looking closely at her stories of when she was married, how old she was, and when her husband died, I would put her age at around

[22] I discuss more of Nobomi's experiences later in this chapter.

seventy. For Nobomi, chronological age seemed trivial. She could not keep track of the passing of time. While other people measure their age chronologically through the number of years lived, Nobomi's life was punctuated by when she was thwalwa'ed. From then, her life has been determined by the events of ukuthwala and its effects. Nobomi and other thwalwa'ed women live through the clock of pain and suffering, and their memories were shaped by breaks, discontinuities, and ruptures such that they remember and recount their lives in relation to a before and after the act of ukuthwala on their bodies. Nobomi's story helps us to rethink notions of the self in time and how relationships to time play a role in the constitution of the thwalwa'ed as subjects in different ways.

Nobomi assumed the role of educating me about the travails of 'marriage'. Interestingly in our conversations, she indicated that women, especially thwalwa'ed women, endure pain three times in their lives, through ukuthwalwa (here she detailed the beating, the rape, the pain of living with someone that you do not love or even like), the pain of trying to accept your new self after ukuthwala, and the pain of abandonment by your spouse and family. Nobomi was quite convinced that thwalwa'ed women experienced *"iintlungu ezongezelelweyo ezihlala ixesha elide"* ("extra long-lasting pain"). She continued to declare that the pain of the ukuthwala event has echoed throughout her entire life "… loo mini ihleli kum" *(that day abides in me).* Nobomi's narrative was characterised by several bouts of nervous laughter and tempestuousness.

> *Ingxaki esinayo yeyokuba amadoda aphila ubomi obulula, ayabonwabela ubomi bawo. Ngelixa abafazi bephila ubomi obunzima*. (The problem we have is that men live an easy life, they enjoy their lives while women live difficult lives). (She said this while focusing intensely on me, her facial expressions displaying intense anger). I was afraid of my husband, he was a 'skelm'[23]. I dream about him even today. Mmhhh, that man, he did things to me (silence)… Nowadays you call it, this thing, 'abuse', yah abuse. He did all those evil things to me. I went through it all. But some women are lucky, they marry for love, this one, heee love, we do not know what that is. That is why they do things to us. … even when he died, I did not want a man near me. Can you believe,

[23] "Skelm" is an Afrikaans word directly translated as a thief or a villain, often used in Xhosa to refer to a very cruel person.

> someone just picks you up, takes you to his home to leave you there and he goes to look for beautiful women *ahhhh nxaa mani*. (Interview, Nobomi, 31 October 2018)

Nobomi exemplifies Martin Heidegger's (2008) idea of "thrownness", the idea that individual bodies are "thrown into a particular world, place, history, and existence without their choosing" (Martin Heidegger, 2008). Her life presents how her individual body was thrown into the social and cultural realm of the ukuthwala custom without her consent. This had catastrophic consequences for her life as she lived a life of constant attempts at negotiation, existing in fear and pain.

For Nobomi, it was normal for women's lives to be shaped by women's ability to experience pain at the physical level, that is, pain that is inflicted on the body and internalised as part of their social/ cultural existence. In instances where they failed to 'accept' and internalise pain as part of their lives, some women were forced to undertake a traditional cleansing of anger and pain after their husbands and their families realised that the pain and anger still linger and show no signs of dissipating. Woyisiwe, for example, talked of the fact that after almost two years of marriage, her husband and in-laws realised that she had not healed and accepted her fate, and took her to a traditional healer to "expel the evil spirits in her heart and make her love her husband". She shared that after this, "my face looked calm while I was dying inside". This demonstrated an understanding that the ukuthwala pain is not just limited to the physicality of the body, but it can be experienced as a profoundly embodied socio - cultural pain. In short, the physical and emotional wounds of ukuthwalwa are felt both at the level of the social as well as deep emotive violations which have an embodied effect.

5.3.2. Calm While Dying Inside: Woyisiwe's Story

After Woyisiwe's sentiments of being "…calm while dying inside", I was at a loss in trying to understand what it means to feel dead inside. Later I came to understand that

Woyisiwe was representing the confusion, sadness, numbness, and the failure to process emotions like happiness and sadness through her body. Feeling dead inside meant that she felt she had no purpose and saw no end in sight for her troubles and it caused a very detached approach to everyday life. Her life was characterised by a chronic feeling of emptiness. Although her voice was silenced by the hostility of ukuthwala's machinery of patriarchal violence and its silencing mechanisms, her body spoke poignantly of emptiness, sadness, and the trauma of years of domination.

Woyisiwe recalled the time that she met her husband for the first time, a year after she was thwalwa'ed. She discovered that her husband also did not know her, it was his brothers that identified her at a wedding and orchestrated a plan to thwala her for their brother who was considered too old at thirty-three years old to be unmarried at the time. She brutally discovered that she does not like the husband and the feeling was mutual. They fought on that day when he tried to rape her and she woke up with embarrassing sores on her because of the confrontation, something which was embarrassing to the in-laws as it was a tell-tale sign of what happened during their first night. She spent two years trying to accept her situation but as she says, "it was difficult, and she was miserable". Seeing that she was losing weight and crying often, her in-laws took her to a traditional healer to 'cleanse her heart' so that she can accept her prescribed self. She said that she never accepted this and developed anger problems and always blamed herself for what happened to her.

Woyisiwe had dreams to go to nursing school, but, like many other women, after ukuthwalwa she could no longer have dreams of her own. She had to discard her old self and carve a new one which embodied pain and suffering. Her new life was characterised by experiences and feelings of abandonment, poverty, hatred, fear, and shame. She explained how she could not go back home because she was not welcome there, how she was told to forget about going to school and how this left her feeling that no one cared. She felt dead. After her

husband died, looking for another man was not an option, as I explain in the next chapter, as this would not only be a disgrace, but it comes with horrible consequences.

This is a woman who has lived her entire life regretting what happened to her and wishing she could wish it away, but she cannot. She has blamed herself for not standing up for herself, but she knows that her choices were constrained. She harbours immense rage at herself and her late husband for "utshabalalisa ubomi bam" ("destroying her life") and her failure to do something about it. She hates the life she has lived and the life she continues to live in the present. She tells of a difficult life, a life characterised by abandonment, brokenness, poverty, feelings of regret, anger, sadness, servitude, the trauma of the ukuthwalwa memory, feelings of embodied oppression and shame. What angers her the most is the knowledge that she could have escaped and gone to the city, but she believes that she was "*ebesisidenge" ("*stupid") all her life. When she talks about how much of a fool she was, tears well up in her eyes. She haphazardly goes through her life story; she painfully goes over how she only met her husband after a year of marriage. She only knew him through a photograph that was shown to her after marriage. She had hoped that he would be a good man. However, her hopes were dashed when she physically met him when this man started to rape and beat her up every time he came home (which was at most once a year), his abuse leaving its mark - indelibly so. She narrates how the abuse continued until her husband suffered from a stroke a few years ago and how the marriage left her devastated – "*Umtshato wandishiya ndixhelekile ngaphakathi"* ("The marriage left me devastated inside").

As these women tried to explain their pain, they spoke about feeling like they were watching their lives slowly deteriorate. Their recollections of their lives were often articulated through memories of painful events associated with ukuthwalwa that included physical violence, emotional violence, violated freedom and a punctuated lifecycle. To negotiate some

normalcy, violence in general was lived through as part of their lives. All the thwalwa'ed women that I spoke to describe being constantly beaten up during the course of their lives, more especially the first few of years after marriage. I have highlighted in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter that part of the architecture of ukuthwala is the beating to submission that happens from the point one is thwalwa'ed to the point of 'acceptance'. Woyisiwe casually told me that:

> … this type of marriage is difficult, you must be beaten you know (she laughs), you have to be beaten, if you are not beaten up then you are not thwalwa'ed, that is not a proper ukuthwala. Ask any woman who was married through this, they know *ukubethwa* (thorough beating). Isn't, I told you my story. I know what a proper beating is (she chuckles). But you know what, we can't complain. All women getting beaten up. No woman would say she has never been beaten; they will be lying. … Maybe you educated ones, we don't know, maybe, but we hear that you also get beatings (she laughs out loud). (Interview, Woyisiwe, 5 August 2018)

In this way, Woyisiwe confidently situated her feelings and experiences within what she considered to be the normal lives of women. It is through tapping into the scripted understanding of what thwalwa'ed women should be and what they should feel that Woyisiwe frames her understanding of the self. The script informs her newly constructed self in such a manner that the new self normalises patriarchal violence and plays into the whole script that positions the man as aggressive and the woman as docile. Even the way in which she narrates her life shows that over the years she learnt of a particular way of talking about her life and understanding her experiences which departs from her core self-definition as a woman struggling with the effects of ukuthwalwa.

When contemplating the normalcy of their ukuthwala experiences, Woyisiwe and other women often wondered if ukuthwalwa affected their lives, what I call here a 'punctuated life'[24].

[24] By punctuated life, I refer to the abrupt disruption of their lives as they knew it or as they had envisioned it. I explain in previous chapters how these women felt like their lives literally ended the day they were thwalwa'ed, the feeling of their innocence being brutally taken away from them. From the day they were thwalwa'ed, they lived their lives through and with reference to ukuthwalwa.

In the interviews, noted events included ukuthwala itself, years of recovery and, for some, a lifetime of recovery, a residual period, first intercourse (in most cases in the form of a rape), and the events of pregnancy, delivery, and widowhood. In their narratives, they indicated that life events can even echo or reinvent feelings of the ukuthwala event, and these are influential shapers of women's lived lives and how they relate to their bodies, their subjectivities formed through this. Sindiswa, whose story I detail in the next section, referred to herself and her body as "rubbish". Her body had become a repository of the effects of ukuthwalwa.

5.3.3. "I didn't want to be this rubbish": Sindiswa's Story

Sindiswa's homestead was opulent by local standards. She had a big house with four bedrooms, a lounge, and a kitchen with exquisite furnishings. When I first interviewed Sindiswa, she gave me the popular narrative about her that she was lucky compared to other women. She detailed how she had lived a beautiful, fulfilling life, how her husband loved her, that she bore 10 children and how her husband built her a big house that was the envy of many. After several visits when I would meet her and her friend Woyisiwe, they would casually tease each other about the miseries that they had been through over the years. I was careful not to intrude too quickly, I would listen attentively for pointers for my questioning to change. At some point I felt comfortable enough to ask Sindiswa to share her life story with me and when we sat down, her story became darker.

> I was thwalwa'ed the Xhosa way. I was just grabbed on my way to fetch water. It just happened. I was at school doing standard six. I never fought this thing, I just stayed here. I knew that I was never going to win this. I didn't even know where I was going, why else wouldn't I cry, I knew life was going to be difficult. I knew at that very moment that life was going to be difficult. I was guarded and had no chance of being on my own. I was closed in a hut for one full week. You just saw cows coming and you are not even told anything when your lobola is paid. Life was difficult, I wasn't happy. There was a lot of gossip, bad things that I didn't like that my new family was engaged in. I was just patient and stayed because this man said he loved me, but his family was not good. It was not nice. He then left me for Gauteng, I was left alone. Ahh, who will listen to you? You are not even a human being, you are just damaged. When he saw that I was pregnant and my life was done, he left for Gauteng. I heard

> that he had other women there. I ended up loving him, I had no choice. It wasn't nice, it was painful. There is nothing left for me there, I am pregnant here, and there is nothing I can do. I dropped out of school to get married. Once married I was not allowed to go to school. When he left for Gauteng, he couldn't even build a house. It was only when he came back to work here as a forest guard. If I were to go back to 1957, I don't even know what type of marriage I would choose. My husband loved women; I was afraid that he would marry someone else. It was a painful life. He killed my children's future by lacking focus. I just focused on my children, nothing else. I don't know what love is or what it feels like, I never loved any man. I married when I was very young. I am not like you; you talk about love. I don't know if I can love anyone. (Interview, Sindiswa, 31 July 2018)

Sindiswa's earlier conduct and the way in which she had talked about her life prior to this interview confused me. The contradictory understandings of her life experiences meant that there was something that I was missing. I had to have a deeper understanding of the nexus between lived experience and its representation both to self and to others in the context of norms and expectations determined by the dominant culture of the community in which one resides. What Sindiswa's story and those of many other thwalwa'ed women highlighted was the conflict between what they experienced and how they are supposed to make sense of it and talk about it. Sindiswa was living, seeing how she was seen by others as less than a person - "you are not even a human being, you are just damaged". She questioned her being in the world. She felt that there is no self outside ukuthwalwa and her scripted self was not sustainable. She could not carve out a new existence, she felt that her "life was done". Sindiswa had lived a life of seclusion and secrecy, she displayed the demeanour of a happily married woman and her home aided her to present a different version and idea of herself to the public She could hide who she is and how she feels. Sindiswa's general presentation was that of a strong, grateful, and happy woman. Contrarily, the more I got to know her it became obvious that her public persona sharply contrasted with her private distress.

The above excerpt demonstrates clearly that ukuthwalwa paralyses one. Sindiswa and many other women expressed a sense of resignation:

> I never fought this thing, I just stayed here. I knew that I was never going to win this. I didn't even know where I was going, why else wouldn't I cry, I knew life was going to be difficult. I knew at that very moment that life was going to be difficult. I was guarded and had no chance of being on my own …. When he saw that I was pregnant, and my life was done… I ended up loving him, I had no choice. (Interview, Sindiswa, 31 July 2018)

Like many others, she had little expectation that her suffering would stop. Important to note though is that this sense of resignation did not necessarily translate into passiveness. As I explain in the next chapter, thwalwa'ed women engage in myriad ways to negotiate and reappropriate the violence of ukuthwalwa.

Sindiswa's narrative would alternate between gratitude for her late husband as he gave her a status above her peers through his material wealth and a sense of disappointment in him. Sindiswa confided in me that she would have occasional desires to run away and leave her husband. However, she would be held back by those feelings of pity for her husband as well as the conflict between appreciation and the anger she had towards her husband. Now with her husband late, she had suffered a blow to her economic fortunes. With her health deteriorating, and reminiscing through her life history, she was willing to share the not so good aspects of her current situation with me.

> I didn't want to be this rubbish, I never wanted to be rubbish in my life. I don't even want my daughters to be the rubbish of men. I wanted to be an important person, but what's the point? Do you see how beautiful you are, you can't be beaten and abused like us. (Interview, Sindiswa, 31 July 2018).

I witnessed the many occasions where she would shake her head and become teary when telling her life story. Reference to being 'rubbish' meant that Sindiswa had feelings of worthlessness, of being waste, filth or being useless. These were triggered by her position as an ukuthwala subject, inhabiting a thwalwa'ed body that is defined by certain customs and

beliefs that produce expectations of thwalwa'ed bodies that include toxic notions of femininity (explained in depth in Chapter 4) that often left her feeling like "rubbish".

Additionally, Sindiswa exhibited what Seligman (2010: 297) calls a "disruption of self" where "suffering has the potential to undermine the coherence of lived selves and create the experience of internal conflict, disjuncture, or fragmentation". In Sindiswa's case, these breaks in the experience of self were a source of suffering because they were unpleasant and unanticipated, and they undermined or disrupted the fundamental coherence of self. The difficulty with the experiences of a disrupted self is that, as in the case of Sindiswa, culture fails to acknowledge the suffering caused and to recognise that its operations are disruptive. As such, those affected remain in a permanent state of disruption. In the next section, I return to Vuyiswa's story, detailed in Chapter 4, who like Nobomi, Sindiswa and Woyisiwe embodied the pain and suffering of the violence of ukuthwala.

5.3.4. "This marriage destroys you from the inside": Vuyiswa's Story

While Vuyiswa's story underscored the critical role in the production of a controllable woman as discussed in the previous chapter, it is also important in understanding the idea of the body as an archive of trauma where women embody the destruction of ukuthwalwa. Vuyiswa gives a lived and embodied account of ukuthwalwa as she relates the story of her life and how the marriage destroyed her. Vuyiswa highlights how her body serves as the site where the horrors of ukuthwala come to life and take effect. Questions of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of thwalwa'ed women involve bodily control and coercion. Vuyiswa's story exposes that "the body possesses a moral imperative of a compelling nature, capable of disclosing powerful truths about the human condition" (Graham, 1998:254). Graham centres his argument on the "ethics of the body", arguing that "all ethics of the body ought to take the body as its fundamental point of departure" because he argues that "only bodies

suffer". Vuyiswa's description of her feelings of destruction from the inside goes beyond the physical body to reveal an emotional and spiritual breakdown where her very sense of being is broken.

When I met her, Vuyiswa was a very angry and broken woman. As explained previously in my discussion of how I met Vuyiswa, she wanted to emotionally prepare for the interview as she had "buried" everything. She had to unearth the experience from somewhere inside her. She was having nightmares; she had been reliving the day she was thwalwa'ed and the subsequent hard times. Vuyiswa said that she constantly replays the trauma of ukuthwala and her "life has not been good", that she thought she could move on from the pain and the memories, but she never did. As such she declined the interview, saying *"ukuthetha ngale nto kuzakundenza umsindo, kuyakundibulalisa abantu andifuni ukwenza okubi kubantu abenze le nto kum. Uyaqonda?"* ("… talking about this will make me mad, it will make me kill people. I don't want to do harm to people who did this to me. Do you understand?").

When I eventually sat down to talk to her, she narrated that the years after she was thwalwa'ed were painful, she felt like there was nowhere to go and she was trapped. The hatred for her husband grew to unprecedented levels because of the physical abuse that she went through at the hands of her husband. After the birth of her second child, Vuyiswa sunk into depression. The knowledge that her life was over was too much to bear. She said she started behaving "uncontrollably", she could not listen to her husband or anyone else. She wanted, then, to kill herself so that all the pain and embarrassment would be over. Some of her friends who were not thwalwa'ed were either married to people they loved or relocated to big cities for work. She expressed that she felt dirty and had no will to live or follow any instructions

that were given to her. Throughout the conversation I had with her, she reiterated that *"Lo mtshato ukuchitha ngaphakathi" ("*This marriage destroys you from the inside").

This reference to how ukuthwalwa destroys one from the inside encapsulates the lived and embodied experience of ukuthwalwa. The strong feeling of being "destroyed inside" gives explanations to the level of pain and suffering that is embodied by these women as well as how her life is continuously shaped by the everyday marginalisation and oppression of thwalwa'ed women. Vuyiswa gives an image of a body that has been destroyed inside to emphasise the emptiness that she feels because of the injustices of ukuthwala. Her expressions highlight the ways in which the body becomes a site of memory. Hewitt reminds us that the past is after all remembered bodily - "the body cannot forget where it has been" (2009: 269).

Woyisiwe, Sindiswa and Vuyiswa's lives also indicate that they perceived their lives as having reached some form of social death. They have accepted the notion that their selves are destroyed, and they use their bodies as metaphors to demonstrate the level of destruction that they feel. They knew themselves as once alive, but they think of themselves as dead people walking. Kalish (1966, 1968) defines social death as when individuals going through some traumatic circumstances accept the notion that they are "as good as dead" (1968: 254). Kalish further divides social death into self-perceived and other perceived where the self-perceived social death occurs when the individual accepts that they are dead socially and other perceived relates to when people who once knew someone as 'alive' now think of them as socially dead. Mulkay (1993) points out that it is possible for people to perceive themselves dead in some instances and alive in others (1993:33). Therefore, in as much as these women considered themselves dead because of the feelings of embodying pain and suffering, it was increasingly common at times for them to negotiate their perceived state of social death. Within those feelings of social dying, they create spaces wherein they try to bring themselves back to life. I

take their reminiscing about their imagined selves as a way of negotiating the feelings of social death. I demonstrate in the next chapter how they awaken from the slumber of social death and use different strategies to reclaim their lives.

5.4. A Finger in the Wound: Embodiment of Pain and Suffering[25]

Here I focus on the scars left not only on the ruined bodies of thwalwa'ed women but also on the sociocultural landscapes where ukuthwala has taken place. Suicide, the trauma of rape, regret, the mourning of their previous lives and even mourning the lives that they are currently living.

> "…if it were not for him, I would have worked as a nurse and I would be getting pension like other women of my age, the grant is not enough, I am suffering". (Interview, Sindiswa, 31 July 2018)

This is a narrative that one rarely hears. To lift the curtain on the darkness of ukuthwala, I will describe how although these women found ways of existing through ukuthwalwa, the memories, the fear and the insecurity were enduring. The reverberations of ukuthwala were felt throughout the society and had effects that had real consequences for a lot of women. For Sindiswa and Woyisiwe, ukuthwala resulted in repeated abandonment, poverty, and "a state of chronic uncertainty" (Quesada, 1998: 56). These two women embody the difficulties, and deprivations that ukuthwalwa brings to a woman throughout her lifespan. Many other women that I talked to have been negatively affected by ukuthwala and its aftereffects, and their comprehensions of ukuthwala have been for the most part informed by the experience of physical and emotional suffering.

[25] Title adopted from Scheper - Hughes (2019)'s article titled "A finger in the Wound: On Pain, Scars, and Suffering".

I became a regular visitor to her place and her friend's place. I noted that although Sindiswa was often a jovial and loud individual, this demeanour alternated with one that was quieter and more sombre. It occurred to me that Sindiswa's life, like many women's lives, was characterised by chronic distress, emotional, physical, and social. One of the ways in which she expressed her suffering was through transferring the shame of ukuthwala to a more humorous self while she would have occasional bouts of nervous rage. She displayed what Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1989) and Scheper – Hughes (1998:185) call nervios, which is a sign of embodied stress. Woyisiwe and Sindiswa had come to represent, through their bodies, the anguish that ukuthwala had bestowed on them and as such they embodied the abhorrence of ukuthwala. Sindiswa's sentiments that "you are not even a human being; you are just damaged" and "I didn't want to be rubbish" powerfully communicate this. There were also times that they did not attribute their experiences of pain and suffering directly to ukuthwala but rather they linked it to the state of being a woman in that context. The fact that they were thwalwa'ed was seen as part of the more general experience of inhabiting the body of a woman.

The symptoms of embodied stress were common in women that were thwalwa'ed. Sindiswa's neighbour, a clinical psychologist stationed at a local hospital, explained this to me. After several conversations with her I realised that she kept unofficial tabs on the mental health of her neighbours and friends. Through these interactions, I became increasingly certain that Sindiswa's mood swings, periods of low spirits and bouts of anger strongly indicated nervios. She would occasionally complain about certain individuals, her late husband, the current grant system, and the failure of the South African government and shout at her children and grandchildren.

Nobomi, Woyisiwe, Sindiswa and other women in this thesis lost ownership of their lives when they were thwalwa'ed, their bodies becoming social and cultural commodities over

which they have no control. Nobomi's frustrations illustrate that pain became the window through which she defined her life. In other conversations with Woyisiwe, she emphasised a kind of dying inside where her life was punctuated, dreams shattered, and she was forced to accept what is left of her life:

> …the day I was thwalwa'ed was a sad day for me, I told you that I was beaten and what happened after that. But I thought maybe my husband was going to love me, so I prayed that they (*in-laws*) would allow me to go to school. But, ahhh, that was just a dream. In a marriage you do not do what you want. They said I am a woman now. I was just a young girl and very playful…. (Informal conversation with Woyisiwe, 3 November 2018).

Woyisiwe's initial anxieties stemmed from the realisation that her life was undergoing some significant altering. Through ukuthwalwa, Woyiswe and other women's lives are reconfigured, and altered. They must learn how to function effectively in an unfamiliar environment, reroute their hopes and dreams, and reimagine themselves in the world. In this way, their narratives present their lives as entwined in cultural legitimation, embodied suffering, and patriarchal violence. Woyisiwe's story indicates that the initial feelings of loss and pain that ukuthwalwa brought would always be present in their navigation of life, entrenched in their ideas of self and in their interactions with others. Additionally, Woyisiwe indicated that initially, she thought that life would improve and "get back to normal". However, as the years progressed, she came to realise that her expectations of normalcy were just abstractions, unrealistic thoughts and that she was transitioning into her 'new normal', which was a tapestry of pain and suffering. Her narrative demonstrates that ukuthwala introduced feelings that tormented her throughout her life. She lamented that every time she heard of a young girl being thwalwa'ed, her own memories of the day she was thwalwa'ed return to her. She re-lives the day as if it is happening to her all over again. She is haunted by the experience, feeling the pain over and over again.

> Ndiyalila ngentombazana encinci ethunjwa kule mihla (*I cry for the young girl who gets thwalwa'ed nowadays).* I cry that she will face the same problems I have faced

> over the years. All the pain comes back, I feel it. I cry for those girls. I cry all the time. This life is not easy. (Interview, Woyisiwe, 5 August 2018)

Woyisiwe shared how she re-lived her pain each time she spoke about ukuthwala or heard about a girl being thwalwa'ed - "Ndiziva iintlungu kwakhona" ("I feel the pain again"). This is the kind of pain that Scheper - Hughes says feels like putting a "finger in the wound".

5.5. Embodied Abandonment as a Deep Emotional Wound

Many of the women that I spoke to indicated that shortly after they were thwalwa'ed, their husbands left them with their in-laws and went to the city. In the worst-case scenarios, the husbands never returned for them. These women share almost similar experiences to Adeline Mlanjana's experiences that I give in the previous chapter. Adeline was thwalwa'ed by her husband and he left her with his parents who guarded and control every aspect of her life. She lived a life of servitude and endured abuse at the hands of her in-laws. She explained that her husband married another woman in Johannesburg who was a sangoma. In her opinion, she could not fight a sangoma as that would bring bad luck to her. Adeline explained:

> He left me in the rural areas, years came and went and there was no sign of him. I waited and waited, and he never came. You know, when someone thwalas you, you want to believe that maybe they like you. But no (with emphasis, shaking her head), not that man. That man did me bad, he was cruel. He took me because he wanted a slave for his parents (silence). He really hurt me. I lived a painful life because of that man... (mhhhh) things were bad. You would never understand. You know I could spend the whole day telling you what those people did to me, that man yoooo. (Interview, Adeline, November 2018)

There were also cases that I heard of women who committed suicide after their husbands left them in the rural areas when they found out that they were married in the city. For some in the community these are the stories of women who failed in their marriages, in other words they were 'not women enough'. In the stories of others, especially thwalwa'ed women, an empathetic perspective shaped their recollections. These came from women who

had considered suicide themselves at some point. They would tell the stories with real emotion, and they would emphasise the need to understand the stories, what happened and why they happened. Adeline told me a story about a friend:

> She committed suicide when she was married. The husband was rich, and he was a tycoon. He was working in Cape Town, and he forgot about her. They had five children together and she was suffering here alone. Imagine when your husband is rich and you are suffering, you always hear stories that people see him in Cape Town, but he never comes. It is painful. You feel like rubbish, you start thinking of getting out but how do you do it? Heeee? It is not easy, people don't take you seriously, and they do not understand the pain. What do you do? You just kill yourself. You see, *mna* (I), am strong, I thought of doing it when I was younger, but I didn't do it. This life that we live, mhhhhhh, it is difficult. (Conversation with Adeline, September 2018)

Adeline echoes Sindiswa's feelings of rubbishness. For them, ukuthwalwa is an open wound that ensures that feelings of loss, abandonment, broken promises, and disruption are constant in their lives, determining how they relate to themselves and to others. They also speak of the experience of loneliness, exposing the ways in which the societal institutions that claim to work in their interests (such as the family), in fact, do not provide the kinds of support that they desire, reinforcing the uncertainty that ukuthwalwa brought to their lives. In interviews conducted with many other women, a profound sense of loneliness and abandonment was expressed. According to a psychiatrist and a community member who worked at a local hospital, thwalwa'ed women lack adequate social support systems and as such they exhibit prolonged reactions to ukuthwala and its aftershocks. These, she emphasised, include chronic sadness, lack of trust, aggressive behaviour, angry outbursts, and emotional detachment among other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. (Conversation, psychiatrist, 8 November 2018)

Psychologists, Kheswa and Hoho, found that young thwalwa'ed women live in conditions of violence and instability and often exhibit behaviours that are psychopathological, that, they also argue, are socially produced (Kheswa & Hoho, 2014). They explain, "The

traumatised girl may develop neurotic trends, develop mood disorders, act impulsively, have low self-esteem and a dependency syndrome" (Kheswa and Hoho 2014: 2810). They further explain that:

> Because of abuse these youth experience inferiority complexes and succumb to the orders which may come from the in-laws, quasi-husbands, and senior wives. In this regard, the abducted girl may end up having a submissive personality, experience shame when opposing her suitor especially when opting for safe sex (Kheswa and Hoho, 2014: 2810).

Sindiswa and Woyisiwe's lives cannot not be explained as a result of personal maladjustments, rather they are a part of a social problem that these women live in the midst of. As much as they are able to withstand the daily challenges, they must contend with the weight of ukuthwalwa. They have internalised and routinised the trauma of ukuthwala, and this poses existential problems. In the face of the conditions that ukuthwalwa brings scarcity, lack of affection, depletion of self, the options available to these women are very limited (Kheswa & Hoho, 2014). They are left with choosing between resisting (and risking punishment) or giving in.

Prior to ukuthwalwa, these women, then young girls, often thought of it as a distant reality, often joking about imagining a potential husband as lacking a limb, an eye, or being old or frail. However, once thwalwa'ed all these jokes come alive, and the trauma begins, reverberating throughout their lives. Ukuthwalwa becomes the locus of their suffering, and they start imagining what their lives could have been like if they had not been thwalwa'ed. They start reflecting on their beauty, imagining what their lives could have been like "if only they had gone to the city". In the words of one of them, "I would be wearing stilettos". They imagine how they would be having their own money, and possibly even husbands they loved. But they are constantly returned to how pain has redefined their lives and how their lives have had to undergo some readjusting in order to acquire, exhibit and sustain the imposed identities

of being thwalwa'ed. Femininity for them takes a different form from what they imagined and however the stories in this thesis highlight the embodiment of that femininity is a key challenge because it is synonymous to embodying pain and suffering. The control on their femininity takes a brutal form such that they remain as vessels of pain and suffering

5.6. Conclusion

The previous chapter focused on the different mechanisms through which ukuthwala is reproduced as a practice. This chapter answered the questions, 'What, then, is the final product of the technologies? And, what becomes of the women's experiences?'. It introduced the idea of the residues of ukuthwala induced terror, focusing on the body as their repository and the site of their resurfacing in the lives of the affected women. In the previous chapter, I argued that technologies are meant to sustain ukuthwala and sanction ukuthwala as an acceptable practice. Here, instead of centering on ukuthwala, I shifted my focus to ukuthwalwa where the subject becomes the centre of analysis. This chapter has demonstrated that thwalwa'ed women's experiences of ukuthwalwa are enduring, playing a central role in how they imagine themselves in the world. It explored how ukuthwalwa is the 'main shock' in these women's lives followed by successive aftershocks that in most cases last for a lifetime. I argued that these aftershocks manifest as lived and embodied pain and suffering. I suggested that to some extent this lived and embodied suffering of thwalwa'ed women can be seen as a form of social death. The narratives presented here demonstrated how ukuthwalwa resulted in an embodied sense of the loss of life. Furthermore, these repeated experiences of pain and suffering have meant that women's mobilisation of their agency continues to be compromised, resulting in the creation of docile subjects. The capacity to live up to the ideal of womanhood further

complicates their lives as they strive to live to expected feminine standards that further subjugates them.

The stories here demonstrate how thwala'ed women's lives and bodies allow us to map the ongoing horror of ukuthwalwa. I showed that thwalwa'ed women's existence is controlled by the patriarchal imaginations of what femininity entails, of what they can and cannot do as women. However, as I explain in Chapter 6, in instances where they do not conform to their prescribed femininity, violence then appears to be necessary to train them and make them 'feminine' again.

I demonstrated how thwalwa'ed women's selves were constituted through the pain and suffering that they experienced. Their bodies became the sites at which the different effects of ukuthwalwa became real. Their bodies became archives of trauma, this exhibited in their fractured personalities that alternate between pleasantness and anger. In the next chapter I try to understand this struggle with the self by examining their responses to the things that worked to disrupt their lives.

CHAPTER 6

Leaving Without Escaping: Of 'Shifting vulnerabilities', Calculated Conformity, and Patriarchal Rip-Offs.

6.1. Introduction

"Did you ever think of running away?" I asked several women who were married through ukuthwala.

"Intoni? ubaleke uyephi? Andinakuyenza loo nto. Utata ebefuna iinkomo" (What, run to where? I could not do that. My father wanted cattle.) Most of them would respond in similar ways.

"So, what did you do?" "I did many things" replied Nonhle with a playful giggle.

What exactly did you do? Nonhle met my probing with a burst of laughter.

"I made him believe he was not a real man" she giggled. "But" she added, "it was hard, (pause) it was painful" (with emphasis).

"What did you do?" I prodded.

"Masithi akasoze andilibale" (she giggled, but with a serious face). *Uyabona, indoda yokwenene yindoda ekwaziyo ukumitha umfazi wayo. Ndimkhanyele oko. Into ayenze kum ibingalunganga, uyayiqonda? Bendi ngumntwana (pause), ndimsulwa, ndingumKristu ozelwe ngokutsha, bendiyimvumi ecaweni kwaye bendihlala ndiphethe ibhayibhile.Umhedeni wayisusa kum loo nto... Uyayazi into endiyenzileyo, ndazenza ngathi ndiyagula ndacela ukuya eklinikhi, ndahamba nentombazana encinci eyayindigadile. Uyabona iikliniki ziindawo eziphucukileyo, ndavunyelwa ukuba ndiye kugqirha ndedwa. Ndicinga ukuba ndandikhangeleka njengomntu ogula kakhulu; malunga neeveki ezimbini emva kokuba ndaxhwilwa kwaye ndandibethwa phantse kwiintsuku ezininzi. Ndadlwengulwa nga lonke ixesha nguloohedeni. Ndiyintombazana yecawe, kwaye ndandinomsindo omkhulu wokuba indoda engaphucukanga njengaye ingayenza loo nto kum (*getting emotional*). Ohhh ok, mandikuxelele into endiyenzileyo, ndacela iipilisi zefamily planning uyaqonda* (with a slight grin on her face). *Ndanikwa iipilisi iinyanga ezintathu; Ndiye kwindlu yangasese ndaginya iipilisi ezintlanu kwakanye (she whispered). Bendingafuni ukukhulelwa olo hlanga. Ndazisela ezo pilisi iminyaka esibhozo, eight years (*she raised eight fingers with emphasis*) ndade ndabaleka. Ndizifihlile, akukho namnye owakhe wabona iipilisi zam, ukuba ukhona umntu owazibonileyo, yayizakuba sisiphelo sam eso. Ndakuxelela, kwakunzima, ndahlupheka kule eight years".*

[Let's just say he will never forget me" (she giggled, but with a solemn face). You see, a real man is a man that is able to impregnate his wife. I did not give him that. What he did to me was wrong, do you understand? I was a child (pause), an innocent child, a

> born-again Christian, I was a singer at church, and I always carried a bible. That heathen took that away from me…. You know what I did, I pretended to be sick and asked to go to the clinic, I went with the little girl that was guarding me. You see clinics are civilized places, I was allowed to go see the doctor alone. I think I was looking like a very sick person; it was about two weeks after I was thwalwa'ed and I was beaten for most of the days. That heathen had raped me all the time. I was a church girl, and I was very angry that an uncivilized man like him would do that to me (getting emotional). Ohhh ok, let me tell you what I did, I asked for family planning pills (with a slight grin on her face). I was given pills for three months; I went to the toilet, and I swallowed five tablets one time (she whispered). I did not want to be pregnant for that heathen. I took those pills for eight years (raising eight fingers in the air with emphasis) until I ran away. I hid them; no one ever saw my pills, if anyone had seen them that was going to be the end of me. I told you, it was difficult, I suffered in those eight years. (Conversation, Nonhle, 19 November 2018)

This conversation reveals the precarious positions in which women find themselves after ukuthwala and some of the ways in which they try to negotiate their existence within a system that aims to subjugate them. The excerpt above reveals how ukuthwala disrupts women's lives, but more importantly how women then use societal ideals of masculinity against the patriarchal system - "You see, a real man is a man that is able to impregnate his wife. I did not give him that". By feigning infertility, Nonhle found fissures or cracks within which to breathe even if it was momentary. In the previous chapter I highlighted how these women's bodies remain archives of trauma and exhibits of the tremors of ukuthwala. However, Nonhle's account above opens a window through which a bigger story can be told about strategies of surviving, negotiating, and resisting the normalised technology of male dominance - the ukuthwala custom.

In the previous chapter, I explored how ukuthwala and its enduring violence has shaped the lived and embodied pain and suffering for thwalwa'ed women. In this chapter I shift my emphasis from exploring the suffering to highlighting fragments of how resistance plays out in the everyday lives of women. Realising that women are not silent victims, here I delve into the individual and collective behaviours that disrupt relations of superiority and inferiority

established through domination and reconstituted through ukuthwala and the experience of it. In the account above, the act of impregnating a woman that functions to keep the thwalwa'ed woman 'in her place' comes to be seen as a potential way through which to escape subjugation. Nonhle recognises how her difference (determined by biology) that usually works to subjugate her can be mobilised by her to prevent this. By taking birth control pills secretly, she reclaims control and ownership of her body. She understands that she is able to prevent her husband from attaining one of the key attributes of "a real man", that is, to produce children by mobilising her own power that she recognises lies in her body. In this way she denies him the possibility of being 'a real man'.

It is not my intention here to romanticise the experience of resistance amongst thwala'ed women through presenting an idea of all-powerful, always resisting black women in Africa. Instead, I want to guard against perpetuating stereotypes of women in Africa triumphantly resisting domination while at the same time recognising the complexity of the responses of women to the experience of ukuthwala. Therefore, taking an approach which closely monitors everyday strategies for survival, I discuss the women's constrained agency through the conceptual lens of "shifting vulnerabilities" (Nyuke, 2021, 2013), which I understand as describing a "shifting and relational condition" (Grotti, Malakasis, Quagliariello et al, 2018: 2) to their everyday pressures. Nyuke's conceptualisation of shifting vulnerabilities rests on the argument that vulnerability and resilience are not fixed but rather they are shifting characteristics based on the context in which the concerned people live. Nyuke cautions against the use of resilience alone as he contends that it does not fully capture how individual actors absorb, mitigate, and avert internal and external stressors. Resilience on the other hand shifts attention from individual actors, households, and communities to complex social systems which people organise themselves in a specific social structure (Resilience Alliance, 2007). I

employ the use of shifting vulnerabilities to capture the ways in which thwalwa'ed women exercise agency within a myriad of societal constraints that work to inhibit their efforts at resistance. I take the concept of 'shifting' as both a descriptive and an action concept where women shift their own vulnerabilities i.e., what usually makes them open to harm or abuse or manipulation and use them to achieve some form of emancipation. In as much as Nonhle's story[26] can be regarded as one of a small victory, in her eight years of resistance, the violation of her body did not stop. The rape, emotional and physical abuse continued. While the contraceptive pills provided her with some respite, the burden of being thwalwa'ed endured. The small victory lay firstly in her being able to gain some control over her body and through that a sense of her self.

I highlight how thwalwa'ed women shift their vulnerabilities as they express flashes of resilience, strengths, and endurance. Simply put, the picture that emerges is of a woman who is carrying a heavy load, but as she carries it, she shifts it from the left hand to the right or from balancing it on her head to her hands and even carrying it on her back. The load remains a burden which they cannot put away but is part of them, the shifting just eases pressure from the point where it is exerting excessive pain. This means that the load remains present as women learn to negotiate how to move it at different times and in different spaces for some momentary relief and small 'victories. In this way, I argue, women constantly grapple with vulnerabilities that are always present. The chapter presents an argument that emphasises that thwalwa'ed women's resistance does not take the form of organised, large-scale forms of resistance, but depends on the daily low-key forms of strategies that Scott (1986) explores in his studies of peasant resistance.

[26] I elaborate Nonhle's story further later in this chapter.

In what follows I detail Nonhle's life as one example of a thwalwa'ed woman's attempt to wrest control over her life in a manner that empowered her in some ways without her escaping her situation overall. Through Nonhle's story I present that the practice of ukuthwala creates what Foucault (1977) calls a 'docile body'. I do not claim here that the docile body does not have agency, rather, I argue that the docile bodies created through ukuthwala including Nonhle's have the agency, but that the exercise of this agency is constrained by those who thwala them and the societal expectations of a thwalwa'ed woman. The technologies of ukuthwala mould the thwalwa'ed body to fit into the image or characteristics that they want it to be. In his later works, Foucault (1988) introduced the concept of subjectivation (or subjectification). A process of subjectivation, he puts forward, is one in which there is always the possibility for those bodies on whom power is exercised to resist in ways that change their positions in relation to it. The docile bodies that I present in this chapter engaged in strategic decisions, new practices of self and formed new kinds of relations to the forces been enacted on them. With this Foucauldian position outlined, this chapter then focuses on the practices that women engage in to counter their subjection. It concludes that, instead of being passive victims of ukuthwala, thwalwa'ed women engage in a myriad small act of resistance, negotiation or accommodation. In other words, the power relations that constitute ukuthwala can be perceived, in Foucault's own terms, as being contested, including acts on the part of those considered to be powerless that are creative, 'enabling' and positive.

As such, Nonhle's story demonstrates her creativity in that she exercised agency by taking control of her body and refusing its total domination through acting against reproducing. Nonhle also resists the complete domination of her subjectivity by removing her self from the marriage. She remained physically in the marriage for eight years, but she had created a different self for the eight years that she stayed in the marriage. Her hidden 'real' self is the

one that allowed her to be defiant and work towards reclaiming Nonhle again as I explain later in this chapter. I relate her story in some detail as there are different aspects of it that point to small moments (in addition to her main act of defiance) that illustrate how she relates to her world by finding ways to sometimes prevent the expected from happening.

6.2. In pursuit of self: Calculated conformity and cautious resistance

6.2.1. Nonhle's story

I met Nonhle by chance, during one of my field visits in early November of 2018 when I was visiting a woman who was Nonhle's neighbour. There was some activity, with a lot of men hanging around and some drinking beer (in groups of about five to seven). As I approached Nonhle's neighbour's homestead, the attention of the men turned to me. I found myself trying to fix my head scarf and my skirt to avoid any form of offence to the men. At that point I was confused as to whether to proceed to the house or leave the place immediately. One of the men started calling me to come to them. As he noticed that I was not moving, he left the group and ran towards me. I froze - running away would be rude and staying there would be a mistake. I quickly turned around and I started walking towards my hired vehicle as fast as I could. The man started running towards me, shouting "*Nkosazana"* (Princess). No matter how fast I moved, it was as if I was doing nothing. He got to me as I was trying to open my car door. As I tried to open the car door, this man began saying a lot to me - that I am his type, that he wants to marry me, he has a big homestead and many cattle and can even buy me another car. I was trying to respond, but my voice was not coming out. I was shaking. I was desperate to get into the car. I felt small, like I was shrinking, and I couldn't breathe.

Nonhle heard the commotion and came out of her homestead, shouting out the man's name (a name I still cannot recall). I remember Nonhle begging him to stop, telling him that I

was her visitor, a relative who had come from far. I did not know Nonhle; I had never seen her before. The man went on to tell her that he wanted to marry me, and he was ready to take me to his home. Nonhle responded by saying that I already had someone who would marry me soon. While the discussion was going on, I was in panic mode as he had identified me as a potential bride, and he could thwala me if he wanted to. I wanted to leave. But before leaving I had to demonstrate my relative/ visitor status. Nonhle realised this, not me. She invited me into her home "ukulahla le ndoda ephambeneyo" ("to throw this crazy man off"), she later said to me. I was paralysed with fear, and she could tell that. She assured me that she was going to protect me until I left but warned that I must be careful because *"...baninzi amadoda aphambeneyo apha kule lali"* ("there are many crazy men here in this village").

I was moved by her protectiveness, but what I noted during the confusion was that she was very respectful to the man. She was almost begging him to back off as he was insisting that she is disrespecting him by saying that I already have someone who has promised to marry me. But he insisted that he also had enough cattle to pay lobola and he loved women with dreadlocks. The level of perceived ownership he already had over me scared me - I could be his wife if he wanted, especially given that he had cattle to pay lobola. I had no voice or opinion over the matter.

When I went into Nonhle's homestead, she explained that she was busy as her neighbours had *"umkhapho*[27]*",* a ceremony that had lasted the whole weekend and people were still at the homestead. Nonhle and the other women were helping with cooking and seeing to

[27] The "umkhapho" (to accompany) ritual is performed as a way of accompanying the spirit of the dead to their forefathers. For this particular one they had slaughtered a big cow because the deceased was an important patriarch in the village and the entire village was invited. I observed that such ceremonies would normally start on Thursday and continue until Tuesday the next week. Nonhle said there is still a lot of meat left, so people will not leave until the meat and beer dry out.

the needs of the attendees. I had to sit in her hut while she explained the behaviour of men in the area, and I explained the purpose of my visit to the area. She assured me that I was safe with her, and that we could have tea while "buying time" after which she would accompany me back to my car. We started talking about ukuthwala and ukuthwalwa in general and she expressed the view that men like the men we just saw are the "cruel and stupid ones who thwala women to abuse them", just like her ex-husband who had destroyed her life. I grabbed the opportunity and asked her to tell me what had happened to her to make her say this.

She then narrated that she had had a normal childhood in which she had loving parents and grandparents who in her own words "had accepted civilization" unlike most members of her community. She grew up in a Christian household, where obedience and prayer were highly encouraged and practised. She prided herself on being a 'church girl' - *"Ndandimhle ndizelwe ngokutsha. Bendingala mantombazana akrelekrele anxibe izihlangu eziphakamileyo" ("*I was beautiful and born again. I was those smart girls who wore high heels to church"). Nonhle was about fourteen years old when potential suitors first approached her. In her naivety, coupled with the Christian teachings, she thought she would be able to choose her husband and lead "a Christian and civilized life". Nonhle recalled how beautiful she felt when boys would follow her on her way to church, to the shops and to school and how she at first didn't really take any of them seriously. At some point, though, soon after she turned 15, she noticed one boy who was almost the same age as her. She said she noticed that boy (Mmeli) because of the respect that he had shown to her and her friends and because she thought that he came from a respected family. Nonhle decided to choose him as a friend, to get to know him and she was excited at the possibility that the relationship could grow into something permanent, "a marriage perhaps", she said. After she had somewhat accepted Mmeli as a potential suitor, she would run off when others tried to approach her, she also would avoid meeting with Mmeli and did not want people to know that she was close to him. At some point, she explained that she did

not even know if Mmeli understood that he was “the chosen one”. She said that as young women and church girls they were not supposed to speak publicly to men. As time progressed, Nonhle started warming up to the idea of talking to Mmeli, and they would meet briefly and chat every now and then.

One day, she recalled, she was sent to the shops, and she was hoping to see Mmeli again, even from a distance when she was approached by an older man (in his mid to late thirties) who she always saw hanging around the shops. The man tried to touch her, and she shrugged him off, after which he said, “*Uzakuba ngumfazi wam nokuba uyathanda ungathandi”* (“You will be my wife whether you like it or not”). She responded by childishly declaring that she will never marry him and ran back home. She says she never really recognised him or took his threat seriously, and she didn’t see him again until a few months later. Some three months after the encounter, Nonhle turned fifteen years old. Her sister had been thwalwa’ed a few months before and she was left anxious, sad, and lonely. Her sister being thwalwa’ed had signalled to Nonhle that being ‘church girls’ did not keep them safe from ukuthwala. She remembers being very anxious and miserable on the days succeeding her sister’s abduction and having thoughts of running away to a place where they do not thwala. For Nonhle, all the protection that she thought she had was stripped away when her parents, ‘the church people’, ‘the civilized’, allowed her sister to be thwalwa’ed. Her fears quickly turned into despair and panic set in when she thought of the incident at the shops.

However, as days progressed, she started relaxing and thought it was just a threat, until about five months later when she too was abducted on her way from church. She recalled how she felt that her life had ended. At the point when she was thwalwa’ed, she says she was so scared, and she had no time to think and make sense of what was happening to her. When she

arrived at the home of the person who had abducted her later that evening, she realised that it was the drunk man from the shops. At that time, she decided that she was going to escape. She recalled how even when the man was raping her later that night as part of the ritual of ukuthwala, her only preoccupation was how she would escape, something which preoccupied her for the next eight years.

From the time Nonhle arrived at her in-law's place, she started devising an escape plan. As per the ukuthwala custom, a girl is closely guarded by one of the family members. A young girl was always assigned to guard Nonhle. Temporarily, she felt hopeless, and she started panicking that she would fall pregnant before her planned exit. She retold how she would check her breasts every morning for pregnancy. She explained how she did not know what the signs of pregnancy were, so she was in a perpetual state of panic and fear. One day, two weeks after she was thwalwa'ed, she devised a plan to pretend that she was gravely sick to the extent that she would be allowed to visit the local clinic.

She detailed how she would rehearse how she would cry and curl up as someone in excruciating pain. She went between episodes of despair where she thought no one would believe her to episodes of utter panic where she was hysterical. She was, however, bold enough to continue with her plan unlike most other women that I talked to. She successfully faked an illness and after being given numerous traditional medications and herbs she was eventually allowed to go to the local clinic, of course accompanied by her guard. When she arrived at the clinic and it was her turn, she was relieved that the guard was asked to step out of the room, and she quickly told the doctor she wants an injection to stop pregnancy ("*Ndifuna inaliti yokumisa ukukhulelwa*"). She laughed as she narrated that she did not even know what she was supposed to say. All she knew was that she did not want to be pregnant, so the doctor assumed

that she was pregnant, did some tests and to her relief she was not pregnant yet. She was given family planning tablets which she held onto and kept secret for eight years.

She explained with pride that she managed to survive the brutal treatment from her husband and in-laws and still held onto the hope that one day she would be allowed to go back home for good. She said that what kept her going was this hope that she would go back home and resume her life from where it had stopped. "*Ndandihlala ndicinga ukuba ndiza kubuyela ekhaya ndiphinde ndiqhubeke nobomi bam ukusuka apho buphele khona". (*I always thought that I would return home and move on with my life from where it ended).

Nonhle explained how she was abducted as she was coming home from church, how life for her ended at that moment and how she hated her husband with all she had *("Bendimcaphukela ngayo yonke into endinayo, uyaqonda?").* She recalled how her husband was an abusive drunkard, and she described her marriage as hell (*isihogo)* where her husband and mother-in-law were the devils. Nonhle made a vow to herself that no matter how difficult life gets, she will never have a child in that household because that ensured her permanency in that family. She preferred to be called *(idlolokazi)*[28] than have a child with the man who destroyed her life.

After a successful few years of faking infertility and after years of being labelled "a witch that ate other people's children, a prostitute that cannot have children, and a spirit wife" among the many insults, Nonhle started to be daring. She thought that defiance coupled with infertility would be her ticket out of the marriage, but she was wrong and was about to find out. She told of how she stopped being afraid of her husband and her mother in-law and started

[28] A derogatory term given to a woman who has no children or is unable to have children.

defying their authority. She recalled an incident where she was tasked with erecting a new mud hut in the homestead – to which she responded by saying that she is not their slave and explicitly stated that she will not do it. This angered her mother-in-law and husband. A witchdoctor was called to exorcise the demons thought to be inside her, and she was forced to perform various rituals that she considered to be degrading and "inhumane". She recalled how part of her "treatment" was for her husband to rape her while performing rituals believed to chase away "spiritual husbands" that had supposedly possessed her. In other words, she was supposed to be raped into submission.

When that did not work the first time, the rituals became a frequent occurrence. One of the incidents she remembered was when she fought with her husband, verbalising everything that she did not like about him, and reminding him that she had told him six years earlier when they met that she was not going to be his wife. The fight escalated to physical assault, and for the first time, when she was hit, she hit back. She shared that it "felt good" to hit back.

> "*Xa endibetha, ndamqhwaba, heee ntombazana ndaziva kamnandi" ("*When he slapped me, I slapped him, heee girl it felt good") (excitedly demonstrating how she slapped him).

In the fight, Nonhle threatened to leave and reiterated her hatred of the marriage. A family meeting was convened to which her parents were invited after being informed of her behaviour. Nonhle had expected this (as this had always been the practice where her behaviour was concerned) and that she would be rebuked by her parents. However, this time around she was hopeful that she would be returned to her parents. As per custom, she was not allowed to attend the meeting and to her immense disappointment, instead of the expected discharge from the family, she was told that her conduct had pushed her husband to consider marrying another wife and that she would be welcoming a sister wife to help her with childbearing – something which she had failed at. She told of how that was the final indignity that pushed her to take

matters into her own hands. *"...ndazixelela ukuba ixesha lifikile, kufuneka ndime ngoku. Kungenjalo ndiza kuba lapha ngonaphakade ngonaphakade (with emphasis)"* ("... I told myself the time had come, I had to stand up now. Otherwise, I will be here forever and forever"). Nonhle could not stand the humiliation of being present when the second wife arrived. She had to go. So, she packed her bags and left, she went back home. For eight years Nonhle's life was punctuated. The life that she had imagined for herself came to a fullstop. She had to live according to values, beliefs and expectations of her that went against her "Christian values" and dreams of a "church girl". The kind of relationship she had imagined she would be in with her "chosen one" was violently substituted by one with a man she had dismissed with contempt on her first encounter with him. And when the response to her hidden act of defiance is met with her being regarded as a failure by the expectations prescribed for a woman by 'culture' and asked to accept a sister wife, she decides to act in defiance openly. Her secret act of resistance might have worked to see herself as gaining some control over her situation, but it did not change how she could be in public. For the first time in eight years, she said she tried "to be Nonhle again", but a lot had gone wrong in all those years - *"Ndizamile ukuba nguNonhle kwakhona kodwa kuninzi okungahambanga kakuhle kuyo yonke loo minyaka*"). It is significant to note that in her own words spoken in Xhosa, the phrase "nguNonhle kwakhona" directly translated means "that Nonhle was present". She tried to make it such that Nonhle was present. As she spoke of the audacity, she had to question her parents, she also shared that she had grown to be numb to pain. In those eight years, then, we could understand her as saying, Nonhle was not present. It was a different self that stood in for the Nonhle she knew she was. Her ability to survive the experience relied on her seeing herself as not present even though her body was. Her acts of defiance helped her to be present to herself again. She could be Nonhle. But this was not easy because she nevertheless carried the experiences of those years in which

“a lot had gone wrong”. She was made to be someone else, someone other than herself. This, she comes to understand and later speaks of as abuse.

When Nonhle went back home, she insisted that she had been abused and that her family should claim compensation for this from her husband and his family. Her parents instead scolded her for failing to have a child and dismissed her request as ridiculous. In fact, they informed her that it was the other family that was supposed to claim their lobola back. However, her militancy and her self proclaimed “audacity to call my family to order” (“*ukuzithemba kwam ukujongana nosapho lwam”*) as she repeatedly put it, empowered her sister to claim abuse as well and leave her marriage.

At the time of the interview, Nonhle was 45. She had remarried someone she said she “loved and of my choice” and had four children. She narrated how her ukuthwalwa years left her broken, and how she is still considered a failure by some members of her community because she disrespected the will of the ancestors. She disrupted ukuthwala in her small way and that is something that could not go unnoticed. Concluding our interview on that day, Nonhle shared with me a more recent event that had infuriated and embarrassed her. The fight with her ex - husband never ended, in fact three weeks prior to my interview with her she had fought with him at the shops when he accused her of being “a crook whose family took his cattle for nothing”. A fight ensued and they had to be separated by bystanders. She was happy at the fact that she could stand up to him in public and fight him, saying at the end:

> *Andinamatyala kuye. Akaphumelelanga. Uyindoda esisidenge. Ndonwabile ngoku. Ndinomntu endimthandayo. Ndinabantwana bam ngoku* (I don't owe him anything. *He failed.* He is a stupid man. I am happy now. I have someone I love. I have my children now). (Interview, Nonhle, 19 November 2018; my emphasis).

Nonhle's account demonstrates that even when thwalwa'ed women resist, it is temporary, they remain vulnerable to societal violence one way or another. Their resistance shifts their vulnerabilities; however, they permanently embody the vulnerability that comes with being a thwalwa'ed woman. Nonhle defied her prescribed social role, primarily that of reproduction, a move that had severe consequences. But this defiance had to be hidden. What she intended was to present on the surface what looked like conformity and accommodation. However, this didn't have the effect she intended it to have in as much as Nonhle did not verbally divulge the information of how she managed to subvert ukuthwala the society couldn't handle a woman who didn't or couldn't have children or who was showing signs of defiance in whatever form. It became obvious to people that she had resisted by the fact that after exiting the marriage she married and had four children with her current husband. As such, she was seen as having "cheated culture" and therefore not worth any form of respect. She would always be a reminder of how culture was cheated. Although she had managed to challenge the existing orders, she continued to be seen and treated according to the expectations of the culture dominant in her community which included treatment as a failure to perform as a woman and as a thwalwa'ed woman.

However, Nonhle was also able to survive her everyday trauma in different ways. Perhaps most significant to reflect on is her ability to retain a sense of self by 'removing' Nonhle from the situation (as described above) and seeing herself as better than her husband. The fact that she was happy for the public opportunity to denounce her first husband is also significant as it reflects that she does not measure herself by the values, beliefs, and norms of the dominant culture. While her actions did not produce any major shifts in the practices and beliefs of her family and community, they were significant in allowing her to see, imagine and relate to herself and others differently. Although she would always carry the scars of

ukuthwalwa, she would also always know that she had tried to change how she lived within that experience, eventually choosing to leave and make a different life for herself. The way in which Nonhle came to my rescue (that led to our first meeting) also illustrates how she has a deep sense of the expectations and vulnerabilities that all women face in her community because of the gendered inequalities that its culture upholds. And she was able to find ways to rescue and protect me from what she immediately recognised as a threat and danger for me, a stranger in the community and to her, as a woman who needed her help. She understood my vulnerability well and the danger that my self was exposed to and the repercussions of that loss or harm to the self. Instead of openly rebuking the man who posed a danger to me, she worked within the accepted norms and prescribed forms of behaviour determined by culture to make sure that I was safe. Additionally, while I was panicking, she was very calm in the face of threat. Nonhle's moments of 'victory' could be described as "an archive kept within human limits" (Assman, 2008:105). This archive "is one where trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (Caruth, 1996:58). This is evident in the fact that Nonhle used her trauma of ukuthwala to navigate the potential total loss of self or total subjection by reshaping her seemingly docile body into an active agent of change. By refusing to get pregnant even after going through beatings and insults she regains control over her body and she sees her self differently, achieving some form of victory.

Celiwa is someone else who employed a similar strategy to Nonhle's, although with a different angle to it.

6.2.2. Celiwa's story

Celiwa was in her late fifties or early sixties[29] when I first met her in August 2018. When I sat down to interview, she was not very forthcoming with the kind of information I was looking for. An hour into the interview I was convinced that I was wasting my time. She seemed to be giving me a lecture on how ukuthwala was "our culture". I was so accustomed to this phrase that I knew that if a person uses it, I am not going to learn much about their lives as those who were thwalwa'ed and those who thwala. As expected from this group of people, Celiwa was very general in what she shared with me and seemed somewhat uninterested. Until asked the question *"So, what do these girls normally do if they do not want to be married?"* To my surprise her demeanour changed. She looked up and said *"Wethu[30], aakufanelekanga ukuba wenze nto. Kodwa ndenze into"* (With a mischievous grin). (Shame, you are not supposed to do anything. But I did something). She went on to ask me for reassurance that her identity will remain anonymous, to which I gladly agreed. I discovered that she had told only a few people about her life before because there are some aspects of her life that she considered too embarrassing.

Celiwa was thirteen when she was thwalwa'ed, or rather as she put it "actually sold for cattle". Like many of the other women I talked to, she felt trapped, and she dreamt of escaping. She understood that after being thwalwa'ed even if she escaped, she would still be considered 'damaged goods".

> Hayi (Emphasis for never), I was not going to stay there. You see having a child with that monster meant that now I was going to stay there forever. … hayi I

[29] She was wary of telling me her age, I later got to understand that she felt she looked much older than her age.
[30] *'Wethu'* is a communicative and interactive function word in IsiXhosa, which means a number of things, it can mean, no matter either what, or you or shame, or refers to good colleagues and friends. In this case, it was used to mean "shame".

> wasn't going to do that. … he was very cruel, he used to beat me up and treated me like a slave… I never told them that I am pregnant, I acted normal so that they do not suspect that I am pregnant. (Interview, Celiwa, 9 August 2018)

Celiwa played calm, she acted as if she was happy, but her in-laws were not to be easily fooled. Her husband complained that she was not showing any love and she was taking too long to adapt to her new life and family. She was then taken to traditional healers for an *'ukuphoselwa'*[31] healing where she was given traditional medication and made to undergo a ritual to 'love' her husband and his family as well as accept her new life as a 'makoti'. Celiwa recounted how she panicked when she heard that because she did not want to be trapped into accepting the marriage and how determined she was of escaping from that point:

> I am lucky, you know, I played it safe, I didn't want to show them that I don't love him…. This thing is robbery, why do they force you to love someone. ... *[uyaphoselwa],* so that you accept to stay there…. (chuckles) When *[uphoselwe]* you tend to love the whole family, everyone. You even refuse to leave when told to and you are given some medication to love your husband. You even love their dogs (she laughs) I escaped all that because I didn't take the medication, I hid it and threw it away… I was young but I was clever… (She laughs) *(*Interview, Celiwa, 9 August 2018)

At thirteen, Celiwa says she was proud of her way of thinking, she believed that she was forced to grow up very fast and within a few months she had made up her mind to realise her dream that had always been to go to Cape Town[32]. There was a major complication though – she had just missed her period. She disclosed that she wished the pregnancy would go away:

> *"Ndinqwenela ukuba ukukhulelwa kunganyamalala. Ndandimncinci kwaye ndacinga ukuba xa nditsiba ndinyuke izakuhamba".* (I wished the pregnancy could disappear. I was young and I thought that if I jumped up and down it would go away*).* (Interview, Celiwa, 9 August 2018)

[31] Most women expressed fear of 'fake' love that this ritual is supposed to make a person feel. They wanted to feel genuine love. They wanted control over their feelings.

[32] I noted that almost all the women and men that I talked to during the course of my fieldwork considered Cape town as the place to go when you want to escape poverty and for women, both poverty and ukuthwalwa.

It never went away, she had to act. She then orchestrated a plan of how she would get money to go to Cape town. She proudly narrated how she became "a mafia":

> *"Ndaba yi Mafia, hee ezinye izinto esizenzayo (laughing nervously). Mtakwethu, ndandimncinci kwaye kwakufuneka ndenze into (moving nervously). Ndibalinde baya ku mlindelo. Ndithathe imali ndabaleka ndaya endleleni ndiyofuna itransport eya eMthatha.... Jonga, bandishiye naloo Tsotsi*[33] *ukuba bandigade. Uye wandishiya wayokuzibandakanya nabo kuba bekukho utywala. Ubesisdenge, wandibuza ukuba andizukuhamba na ndathi andizukuhamba"* (I became a Mafia, hee some things that we do. Mtakwethu, I was young, and I had to do something. I waited for them to go for a night vigil. Look, they left me with that tsotsi to guard me. He left me to go join them because there was alcohol. He was stupid, he asked me if I was not going to leave, and I said I will not. I took the money and ran to the road to get transport to Mthatha. (Interview, Celiwa, 9 August 2018)

Celiwa escaped and went to Cape Town when she was three months pregnant. She hid the pregnancy from everyone else. She said she knew that if she had told them that she is pregnant, she would forever be trapped. She even faked menstruating once a month for the two months that she was not. In spite of life in Cape town being extremely difficult (a story best left to be told on its own elsewhere[34]), she lived there for seventeen years, remarried and had four more children before returning home after the death of her husband. The father of her first child and even her family did not know for seventeen years that she had a child from him. It is a story that she does not want to retell, it is an embarrassment for her. She ended our conversation that by stating:

> *"Ukuba uyabaleka, akukho mntu uya kuze akutshate", bandixelele, ndiphi ngoku? Ndisabalekile. Bangathini ngoku, heee bangathini? Akukho nto! Kodwa, yoo ndiye ndaphila ubomi obunzima.* "If you run, no one will ever marry you", they told me. Where am I now? I still ran. What can they do to me now, heee what can they do? Nothing! (Clapping hands in defiance) But yoo I have lived a difficult life *(with emphasis).* (Interview, Celiwa, 9 August 2018)

[33] Like Nonhle, she has a derogatory name for her husband; she referred to her as "Tsotsi" which means a young urban criminal. She termed him this because he had spent a lot of time in Gauteng. She believed that he lost his morals in Gauteng.

[34] Upon arrival in Cape Town Celiwa became homeless for several years. She had her first two children while living in the streets. When she eventually got employed, it was by a white family as a domestic worker. She narrated a life of abuse at the hands of her employers. Even her marriage was not what she had envisaged, it was a difficult marriage where they lived very poor lives which she claimed robbed her of happiness. However, amid all that she maintained that she was grateful for having left her ukuthwala marriage.

It was not difficult to see the arduous life that Celiwa was living at that time. She had two tiny rondavels that she shared with eleven other people. She survived on state grants and had no other form of income. Celiwa was the poorest of the women that I met, and she emphasised that her life had never been easy and that she had resigned herself to dying in that state. Celiwa was a perfect example of a woman who still lived with the scars of ukuthwalwa. She explained, as most other women did, that she "does not know what love feels like". Her marriage in Cape town was one of convenience, she was struggling with a baby, and she wanted someone to take care of her and her baby. However, she did not regret leaving and she found satisfaction in the fact that she had left her first husband, got revenge, and cheated the system. Even some of the cattle that were paid to her father as part of her lobola were returned as part of custom. Her relations with her family were irrevocably damaged as a result. However, she doesn't count everything as losses, her success was of depriving her husband the satisfaction of total control over her. From that momentary victory, relief is what she holds on to. But she reiterated that she was embarrassed to talk about it because "*Abantu abayi kundijonga kakuhle"* ("People will not look at me right").

Like Nonhle, Celiwa saw that she could retain some power in a seemingly hopeless situation through her body. Although she was not able to prevent her pregnancy, she was able to hide it from others and she did this with the knowledge that having a baby would disempower her further. She chose, then, to escape. Although she faced a different kind of hardship as a very young single mother without any family or community support in a completely new environment, she chose this over the kind of control her husband and his family could exert over her if she had stayed. Like Nonhle, Celiwa also retained a sense of self that allowed her to escape. Significantly, she also saw and related to her husband as "a monster" in whose eyes and through whose actions she was made "a slave". She, like Nonhle, does not accept that their

position of subservience and subjugation as part of the unquestionable duties and roles of women as determined by their culture. Nonhle and Celiwa's stories point to Foucault's idea of how people can disrupt power relations and subvert the expected passive subjection to exercise their power to act in the process of subjectivation. Ukuthwala, I argue, is similar to what Foucault (1977:25) refers to as a "system of subjection". These stories demonstrate that the primary 'system of subjection' was pregnancy where women had to conform to that expected custom. However, by refusing to conform, these women refused total subjection of the self and managed to unmake that imposed subjecthood.

It is also, however, significant that Celiwa hides much of herself and her life from others as she thinks that her choices and actions will be looked down on. Although she is proud to tell those she trusts of her ability to prevent her husband from having "total control" over her, she chooses not to make any of this public. She is aware of how she, as a woman, is measured and seen in her culture and community and acts to ensure that her image is acceptable to it.

At the centre of both Nonhle and Celiwa's stories is the experience and knowledge of their bodies as women, and of how women's bodies are made to function through the dominant culture in their communities to sustain patriarchal relations. Significantly, though, it is this that sits at the centre of their attempts to resist their own subjugation. In her pioneering book, ***The Second Sex,*** Simone de Beauvoir claims that female reproduction is a central mechanism in patriarchal oppression. She says:

> The fundamental part that from the beginning of history doomed woman to domestic work and prevented her taking part in the shaping of the world was her enslavement to the generative function. (de Beauvoir, 1953:117)

de Beauvoir maintains that women's reproductive capacities are used against women to alienate or 'Other' them. She argues that women are alienated from having control in

deciding their own life trajectories and from taking part in shaping society through confining them to the role of reproduction, their biological capacity to produce children functioning to mark their difference and this difference being used to subordinate and confine them to particular roles in society that are inferior to those of men and that uphold patriarchy. This was clearly the case amongst the women I spoke to, starkly represented in the stories of Nonhle and Celiwa. Almost all women spoke of pregnancy as a point of no return, that is, the moment at which a thwalwa'ed woman can no longer dream of the possibility of escape. Although falling pregnant would mean their being seen and celebrated as attaining full womanhood, they saw this as cementing their positions as "slaves". The stories of Nonhle and Celiwa are significant as they offer us two experiences through which to consider the possibilities of resistance for thwalwa'ed women in their complexity. They both understand how their bodies become the central means of control over them by others, in particular men, and how falling pregnant traps them for life, ensuring that they continue to endure the violence and other forms of suffering that characterise their everyday experiences. They recognise, however, that their bodies belong to them and that they can find ways to take control over their bodies (even if it is in hidden forms) that, in turn, allow them to exert some form of control over their lives or at least a sense of self that is empowering.

These women's actions are akin to what Scott (1985) calls the "weapons of the weak". Scott argues that instead of engaging in spectacular displays of resistance, the vulnerable rather engage in "hidden forms of resistance" which take the shape of everyday forms of resistance which are very small in scale. Certainly, thwalwa'ed women would find large scale collective action inherently difficult owing to the privacy of the struggles that they go through. Drawing on Foucault's works, subjectivity can be created through "technologies of the self" that are the practices through which individuals inhabit subject positions and transform existing subjectivities (Foucault, 19988a, Foucault, *et al*. 1988). For Foucault, these practices include

diary confessions and therapy etc. However, the stories of these thwalwa'ed women show that they also engage in those activities that seek to transform ukuthwala subjectivities by engaging in small and personalised activities like taking contraceptives, hiding how they feel among other acts to give another narrative of who they are. This resistance to what is imposed on them counters existing dominant norms and constitutes new subjectivities.

Although Celiwa's exit strategy was not as dramatic as Nonhle's or as efficacious the women share a commonality, which is their ability to circumvent their reproductive capacities which are tied to their dignity and the very sense of womanhood. Their stories give lived and embodied accounts of the basic elements of resistance, as they relate stories about their ukuthwalwa lives. Moreover, these two cases are classic examples of Scott (990)'s assertion that "Confrontations between the powerless and the powerful are laden with deception--the powerless feign deference and the powerful subtly assert their mastery". These women were aware of the consequences that awaited them if they were to overtly subvert power, instead they engaged in acts that could be hidden but still held the possibility for their own emancipation or ability to take control of aspects of their lives.

It was not just Nonhle and Celiwa who mobilised their bodies and, in particular, their expected reproductive roles, to push back against their subordination and subjugation through ukuthwala. Noplatana (a 26-year-old), who we met first in Chapter 1, shared how she felt the pressure that came from her in-laws wanting her to have a child, and their increasing impatience with her for not falling pregnant after ten years of being thwalwa'ed. Initially she came across to me as someone who desperately wanted a child and could not have one until she revealed something different to me one day when she asked me for a lift to the local clinic. Out of worry, I asked her if she is sick and sternly, if not defensively, she said:

"I want to collect birth control pills". I responded that I thought she wanted to have a baby and her response was *"In life you have to be clever, I am still organising my things, I want to go back to school".* After a short pause, she snapped "…*What happens to us? It is not ok to live like this".* (Conversation, Celiwa, 9 August 2018)

It became apparent to me that Noplatana was deceiving both her husband and his family. She had plans for herself that did not include having children, being a mother or conforming to any other expectations of her place in society as a thwalwa'ed woman. She presented herself to the world as a good wife, conforming to all the expectations that came with it while resisting from within. Noplatana played into the hegemonic conceptions of identity, what Judith Butler calls "performativity". Through Noplatana's actions I show the relationship between subjectivation and the performative and argue that the performative is integral to the process of subjection, in who the subject is or might be subjectivated as.

6.2.3. Noplatana's story

At the end of the last section the story of twenty-six-year-old Noplatana was introduced. In spite of giving the outward appearance that she was trying to fall pregnant, she was secretly taking birth control pills to ensure that she had the opportunity to return to school. Her full story provides more complexity to the understanding of resistance. Noplatana expected that ukuthwala will enable her to be with the man of her choice. While that did not play out the way she expected it to she started to devise strategies of how to negotiate ukuthwala and what will allow her to live according to her desires. However, these had to be performed within the accepted norms and expectations of her as a woman:

> Marriage is important for every woman, if you want people to take you seriously, then you must marry. You see, ukuthwala is a painful marriage custom, but it is custom, you can't change it…. Our forefathers used to do it, they started it. (Interview, Noplatana, 29 October 2018)

Earlier she had explained

> "You see how difficult it is? It is very difficult and confusing". There is pressure to get married if you are a woman, especially when you reach twenty something. People judge you if you are not married and if you do not have children… you become a proper woman when you have a child. My sister has signs of depression because she is worried that at 30, she is not married and does not have children. (Interview, Noplatana, 31 July 2018)

Even though Noplatana was conforming to these expectations, she understood that it was violent. She was conflicted over how she should be as a woman which included getting married and having children-what she calls a "proper" woman and what she wants for herself as a young person and what she wanted for her husband and herself. She wanted a relationship that existed outside the pressures of ukuthwala. She did not want to be forced to stay with her in-laws as well as the pressure to perform as a thwalwa'ed woman. When I met her, she had been sent to her husband 'to catch the pregnancy':

> Aren't they are expecting me to get pregnant, how do I get pregnant when I am not staying with my husband? I came here to catch a pregnancy. *(*Interview, Noplatana, 31 July 2018)

I questioned, what do you mean? She responded:

> I mean I came here get a baby. Once I fall pregnant, I will go back…. You know '*emzini'* (at the in-laws') you work hard; you work from sunrise to sunset. Ahhh, I must rest… do not get me wrong, my mother in-law is a nice person. (Interview, Noplatana, 31 July 2018)

Conflicted again, she explained with pride how ukuthwala was her entry point into womanhood, how she was told that "you are a woman now" and she was given a new name and instructed on how she was going to dress from that point onwards. At the same time, she expressed that:

> Marriage has a lot of challenges, even if you are ok, families are too involved as if you are married to the whole family… Marriage is nice, but it is bad, you know you cannot be free. (Interview, Noplatana, 29 October 2018)

After the initial interview with Noplatana, I met her several times and one of the times she asked for a lift to the local clinic, she explained that she was going there to take birth control tablets. I was confused, I enquired about the 'pregnancy that she had come to catch', after a rather long and winding, somewhat cheeky response she said, *"In life you have to be clever, I am still organising my things, I want to go back to school"*[35]. She later explained how her husband dropped out of a civil engineering course because of lack of funds and that she dropped out of college because custom did not allow her to continue working after marriage. Out of frustration, she retorted:

> ".... if the custom does not allow you to work and then what happens to us? It is not ok to live like this". Heee do you think its ok? Tell me my educated friend. (Conversation, Noplatana, 18 August 2018).

After several conversations with Noplatana I was convinced that she was deceiving both her husband and his family. While the constraints of power remained evident in her life, Noplatana wrestled with defining and asserting a self that operated as if conforming while subverting the expected. Her self-conscious practices and her involvement in her own constitution are what (Foucault 1988b:51) calls the "practices of liberations" which are at the same time constrained by "practices of subjection". These constituted the hard labour that she refers to, the expectations of 'catching a pregnancy', and the overbearing attitudes of her in-laws. This is more clearly stated by Foucault in "An Aesthetic of Existence" when he says:

> the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, or liberty, as in Antiquity, on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment (Foucault, 1988b: 51).

Noplatana's story indicates that she acted within the limits of her subjection. The technologies of subjection were still dominant in her life. Considering the Foucauldian accounts of

[35] Noplatana went back to school in 2019 and subsequently divorced in 2020.

subjection, Butler (1997) suggests that despite the force of these technologies, the subject acts with intent and agency. According to Butler, the agentic subject performs certain acts but still within the limits of domination, creating a performatively constituted subject. Butler suggests these performances involve "decontextualizing and recontextualizing ... terms through radical acts of public misappro- priation such that the conventional relation between [interpellation and meaning] might become tenuous and even broken over time" (Butler, 1997: 100).

Through such practices, Butler insists that the prevailing meanings attached to some discourses can be unsettled, silenced, or even reinscribed by subjects who are themselves subjectivated. Noplatana had unconventional plans for her future that did not include childbearing, rearing and other societal expectations that she found oppressive. On the surface, Noplatana's perception of ukuthwala and marriage seem to emphasise adaptation to conventional norms for marriage and minimise efforts at resistance. She subscribes to conventional understandings of marriage on the outside while resisting from within. In this society, there is a widespread agreement that ukuthwala assists women to get married, however, this does not mean that women do not recognise that ukuthwala may be detrimental to many.

Celiwa, Nonhle, Noplatana and other women in this society find themselves seemingly trapped in and by the roles they are forced into through ukuthwala, an act that is designed to subordinate and subjugate them through violence, a violence that is enduring and that seemingly takes away any agency from them, leaving them with no sense of control over their lives and a diminished sense of self. However, from these stories we see a capacity to resist, even if on a small scale or hidden. We see how these women are able to see themselves differently from how they are seen by others, and how they find ways of taking control over aspects of their lives, primarily by mobilising their bodies and their ability to perform or not perform according to the expectations of them determined by culture. Some find ways to

escape. Nonhle and Celiwa, for example, remarried according to their own choosing. Being able to act out of choice they are able to determine how they relate to themselves as women, sometimes outside of and against the roles assigned to them by culture, custom and tradition. For example, Celiwa describes her ukuthwala moment as “being sold for cattle " and contrasts this with her choice to marry her second husband, saying that this happened “without anyone selling me”. By rejecting her first husband and denying him the knowledge of his son, Celiwa asserted her own power through those aspects of her life that she was in control of. Although this did not take on the system of patriarchy and its institutions in their entirety, they do reflect a critical sense that these women have of the worlds they are expected to be in and how they are expected to be in them. And, more importantly, they illustrate how these women subvert aspects of these worlds and their cultural expectations through small acts in the everyday, acts that require them to perform their roles as women in particular ways, but at the same time, open up possibilities for them to resist what is imposed on them through playing these roles in ways that allow them to be different (even if it is only visible to themselves). Bourdieu states that “sexual relations are constructed through the fundamental principle of division between the active male and the passive female”, (Bourdieu, 2001: 21). Celiwa wittingly played into the prescribed ideas of female passivity while planning to subvert the system and regain control. Janice Boddy’s work on a Sudanese women’s cult that uses “Islamic idioms and spirit mediums” eloquently captures how women carved out their own healing space dominated by men. Boddy (1989) shows how they observed that these women created their own Zar cult which was understood as a space for their own discourse and “a medium for the cultivation of women’s consciousness” (1989:345). She argued that to be a woman possessed by the Zar healing medium and spirit served “as a kind of counter hegemonic process … a feminine response to hegemonic praxis, that ultimately escapes neither its categories nor its constraints” (Boddy, 1989:7). She concluded the that these women “use perhaps consciously perhaps

strategically, what we in the west might prefer to consider instruments of their oppression as a means to assert their value...” (1989:345). By so doing they resist their domination or at least reduce its impact. For my argument here, what is relevant is the location of agency outside explicit feminist conceptions of agency. It is the instances where women seem to affirm what will usually appear as “instruments of their own oppression” and this is where agency may be located. Mahmood (2001) states that this agency “is understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles whether individual or collective”(Mahmood, 2001:206).

As such, Noplatana, Nonhle and Celiwa used, perhaps strategically the technologies of their oppression to insist on their value, thereby resisting the impact of domination on their bodies and their selves. Therefore, as part of exercising agency, these women had to shift their vulnerabilities depending on the type of societal constraint they were confronted with. Within their states of vulnerability and their dominated agency they manage to carve spaces and cracks within which to get relief. They understood that they occupy weaker positions and with that realisation they used those understandings about their selves to operate within the idea of a “good wife” or someone who understands culture and her position within it. By pretending to be sick, by faking infertility, dressing as thwalwa’ed, faking respect for their husbands and acting in love, among other performances were working within systems of subjection where they were considered as weak, and they played with those weaknesses to claim some form power and some part of themselves.

For these and other women in this thesis, the pain, suffering and violence that they experience do not neatly align with the idea that perpetrator and victim exist in polar opposition to each other as fixed identities. Gilson, in his work on rethinking vulnerabilities in feminist discourse argues that the notion of the ‘victim’ is “predicated on a reductively negative sense

of vulnerability because it connotes "powerlessness, weakness, and susceptibility to exploitation" (Gilson, 2016:79).

These women demonstrated that in as much as they embodied the vulnerability that comes with ukuthwalwa, they cannot be regarded as true victims – the ones who are naïve, innocent, defenceless, and passive – rather they are capable, knowing, and active agents operating under severely constrained systems of domination. They defy the ideals of womanhood, they do not fit into the "good woman" / pleasing woman" stereotype (Phillips, 2000: 38).

6.3. Conclusion

This chapter has reaffirmed the central argument of the thesis that the wound of ukuthwala is always fresh for thwalwa'ed women. The thwalwa'ed subject is continuously dominated and the technologies of subjection work tirelessly to ensure that they produce a docile body. I present here that while the systems of subjection that I discuss as technologies of ukuthwala in the preceding chapters systematically produce a thwalwa'ed subject, the thwalwa'ed subject is not a passive docile subject of ukuthwala. Even though thwalwa'ed women are dominated by those who thwala them as well as societal expectations they exercise agency within that subjection. The women in this chapter engaged in strategic decisions to reclaim power and the subjectivities that the ukuthwala practice stripped them of. I utilise Michel Foucault's idea of the systems of subjection and the production of a docile body, Butler's notion of performativity and Scott's concepts of everyday forms of resistance to argue that women engage and perform a myriad acts of resistance within their dominated agency to subvert their domination. With the new practices of the self and new kinds of relations to their domination carved through a shifting of their vulnerabilities, thwalwa'ed women manage to resist what is imposed on them

as they counter dominant norms and constitute new subjectivities. I argue that through everyday small acts of resistance, these women constructively recreate themselves.

I was aware that thwalwa'ed women's demographic characteristics were important i.e., the different religious backgrounds, level of education, family backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions among other possible avenues that one might want to pinpoint. While these had some form of influence on the kinds of choices and strategies that these women adopted and on the shaping of their worldviews, this research found that the domineering effect of ukuthwala anaesthetized the importance of these demographics in negotiating ukuthwala in particular. The dominant agency of ukuthwala tended to obscure and subdue these worldviews and the different orientations as they were dominated by the systems of subjection that ukuthwala utilises. I argue that with ukuthwala, the systems of subjection operated the same for the different categories of women.

CHAPTER 7

Punctuated lives: the unmaking and making of a thwalwa'ed subject.

7.1. Introduction

When I started the task of conducting empirical research on ukuthwala, I thought I knew what I was looking for and had a good sense of what I may find. My gaze was primarily focused on young and recently thwalwa'ed women because of the assumption that they recently experienced ukuthwala and hence they would give a better appreciation of what ukuthwala means for them. The older women would be more of a backup, and my questions to them were more oriented towards giving the historical background of ukuthwala as a practice rather than ukuthwalwa as experienced. I held the preconception that the older women had probably healed from the experience. I had bought into the common narrative that ukuthwala is a painful event in women's lives, but they heal within a short space of time because of the assumptions that I got from the readings on ukuthwala and from random conversations with some men and women. Even my initial conversations with thwalwa'ed women themselves, it appeared as if they had healed and moved on from the experience. It was only after I immersed myself in the field that I became aware that my preconceptions were naïve. I noted that instead of understanding their own experiences as they live through them, women across different age groups, understood their experiences as per the prescribed societal script whereby a woman is thwalwa'ed and expected to heal within a year or two or after getting pregnant. Such prescribed societal scripts were inscribed in the narratives of the women, and it was only through careful observations and spending extended time with them that some cracks started showing in the performed script of their experiences. I noted that in most instances, their stories were retold with some uneasiness and hesitancy. As a researcher, what I learnt as I continued is to do away

with what one thinks they know and open oneself to learning new things, understanding the phenomena under investigation better and seeing your research participants on their terms and in all their complexity. It was through openness to the lifeworlds of these women and spending more time with them that I was introduced to the idea of ukuthwalwa as opposed to ukuthwala. This changed my whole perspective on how these women chose to have their narratives represented. They shifted ownership of the practice of ukuthwala to position themselves as storytellers of their subjectivities through their use of the word ukuthwalwa.

As I dedicated myself to getting to reconfigure my thinking around my research participants, their environment and rethink what I thought my own feminist orientation and prior research on women would unearth, I began to appreciate the hidden meanings attached to some actions and transcripts that I had. The thwalwa'ed women had been silenced even within feminist literature and discourse. The silenced woman and the technology of silencing became my subject. I grew more open to understanding these as I conducted my research, I learnt to ask my participants questions relating to their deep and hidden experiences, meanings they attached to those experiences as well as how those experiences came about. The focus of my questions became about what happens to a woman after she is thwalwa'ed, what makes her accept and stay in the marriage, why ukuthwala is still being practised and what factors make it hard for women to exit these marriages. Given these concerns, I inquired further on how it felt to be thwalwa'ed and how women make sense of these feelings.

In this thesis I contribute to the feminist scholarship on African women by using carefully chosen methodological processes that allowed me to zone in on women and a collection of their narratives as subjects and main participants of the study. I do answer the call to foreground research that concerns women within the experiences and voices of women. By

engaging the voices and experiences that are often overlooked by conventional approaches, this work contributes to fundamental shifts in how we write about women in Africa contributing to the displacement of official conceptual frameworks. In addition, the thesis contributes to broader debates on the intersections of women, culture, and violence. The key questions that this thesis sought to address was how is the practice of ukuthwala custom perceived and experienced by women in Engcobo, the ways through which it is sustained and what is the impact of dominant ideas on women's experiences of ukuthwala?

The narrative inquiry method adopted for this thesis challenges the way women, their ways of life and their experiences have been represented and conceptualised theoretically within the social sciences. Ukuthwala, its customs and practices have very often been analysed as exceptional events where women experiencing them are included in the discussions, paradoxically through their exclusion. Informed early missionary works on ukuthwala, and media reported sensationalist reports on the practice, most studies perceive the practice as a scandalous once off event without a deeper understanding of its effects on those experiencing it. Consequently, the everyday experience of the practice is marginalised for the spectacular sensationalised few stories which happen to find way to courts and media houses.

As such, the primary preoccupation of this study has been to have thwala'ed women's voices as the primary representations of how they understand, explain and experience ukuthwalwa. Yet by necessity this work encompasses something more. Its central paradox has been the ways in which women's lives, culture and traditions and patriarchal violence intersect. An exploration of the complexities of the lived lives of thwalwa'ed women – their consciousness, experiences, feelings and processes and the multiplicity of practices within which the violence and terror of ukuthwala operated reveals the ways in which women

responded to the multiple facets of violence. However, the story that I tell in this thesis does not have a neat conclusion. In fact, their strategies for subverting the effects of ukuthwalwa on their lives are marred by the limited options available and weighed down by the consequences of opposing patriarchy and as such their problems are not easily resolvable, either theoretically or practically. The aim of this work has been to begin thinking about foregrounding women's voices in the production of knowledge on issues of culture, violence, suffering and resistance. As a political project, my ambition has been to give the reader a sense of experiences of thwalwa'ed women, their being-in-the-world that is fragmented in both senses of the word - "disjointed" and "broken" with the intention that knowledge on this will and may contribute to strategies on how to confront patriarchy and open possibilities for political engagement with patriarchy and social justice.

In Chapters 4, 5 as well as Chapter 6, I demonstrated how thwalwa'ed women's lives are punctuated at the time of abduction through a violent disruption of a self and a making of another self. I show the mechanisms that are used to create thwalwa'ed subjects who I argue are tragic subjects. I highlight how the creation of a thwalwa'ed subject is a slow and painful process and I demonstrate how women become objects in the so called preserving of culture - objects at men's disposal, an extension of men's property and that in the process, women's humanness is removed. Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 bring to light how patriarchal violence is the overarching mechanism in the production of a controllable, subdued, and docile thwalwa'ed subject. I argue that ukuthwala operates through the brutality of patriarchal violence and routinisation of terror in subjugating women and in inducting them to the prescribed notions of femininity. Additionally, that being thwalwa'ed constituted a form of hardship in that the women had to contend with societal pressures. These included the encumbrances of subscribing to toxic femininity ideals among other constraints.

7.2. Navigating the Socio-Spatial Landscape of Thwalwa'ed Subjects

I considered Engcobo a space where the "Female Fear Factory" (Gqola, 2021) manufactures and distributes fear. The fear operates as a reminder that women do not have and cannot have control over their lives and their bodies. The fluency of fear is something that I had to come to terms and contend with very early while conducting field work. The fear connected me to the women, while disconnecting me from men and that affected the ways in which I conducted the research, negotiated access and analysed the data. Conducting fieldwork where women are considered objects at the disposal of men, I was thrown into a place where I felt I was both a potential object of pleasure as well as a depository of pain. This to me reflected the modes and forms of living of thwalwa'ed women and how fear configured their lives as much as it did to mine while I was there, as well as how they negotiated such a volatile space in their everyday lives. In a broader perspective, the study therefore illuminates the varied technologies of the ukuthwala, not to offer a conclusive and definitive mapping of those, but to show the ways in which ukuthwala expresses itself on the lives of women. My experience pushed me to consider the ways in which ukuthwalwa and the fear of it reminds women that they are powerless and weak, something which I felt as well. The ways in which fear kept me under self-surveillance became a lesson and a reminder of my own position but more so of my research participants' difficulties in exercising any form of power and a reclamation of their lives and agency.

Inasmuch as I was doing fieldwork and a researcher in Engcobo, I found myself spending more time negotiating the dangerous space that the field had turned out to be. Part of my negotiation of this dangerous research field became one of my strongest approaches as I was more dependent on the same women who were experiencing fear and suffering in their everyday lives. I had to choose my research informants carefully, ensuring that I spend as much

time as I could with them. That enabled me to spend more time in the spaces where they found more comfort to share their stories and which in turn became both my spaces of invisibility and being out of sight from the men who felt so entitled to my body. Awareness of positionality could not be emphasised further in my case as it was very much necessary for my negotiating the field. Bringing in a male field research assistant was also a way of negotiating the field in which I had to subject myself to an imposing male figure to render myself under check and domination as was expected in my research field. I had to enact a certain kind of femininity that would not cause further disruptions after my problematic encounter with men who attempted to make my experience unpleasant.

My position as a black woman in a space such as Engcobo warmed up my informants toward me and in situations where they had to come to my aid they pointed out how they find ways of negotiating even the most difficult situations. That does not mean that they succeeded all the time, but such glimpses of negotiating were only availed through my presence in the field and the observations and experiences that resulted from my positionality.

7.3. "A Custom of Darkness": the technologies, practices, and operations of ukuthwala

In this thesis, I show that ukuthwala is more than just a scandalous once off event in a woman's life. In Chapter 4, I illustrate how ukuthwala is indeed a "custom of darkness" that causes immense suffering, pain, and hardship in the lives of women who find themselves embroiled in the wrath of the practice. I critically explore the role of patriarchy and patriarchal violence in deploying terror on women, demonstrating its brutality exercised through the 'façade' of practicing culture, obeying the ancestors, and doing 'what is right'. I also demonstrate how the construction of women as the Other – the thwalable - becomes an

important stage in the creation of permissible forms of violence on them and how those feed into the impossibility of them completely leaving or escaping the practice. I show that ukuthwala is sustained through the public performance of ukuthwala violence, socialising women to normalise its technologies such that it is not recognised for what it is, instilling shame in those who resist, and constantly reminding women that nothing belongs to them, not even their bodies through rape, and other assaults on the female body. I discuss how being socialised as female or feminine makes women safe to be subjected to ukuthwalwa and the subject that is created from that process is fluent in toxic femininity which then keeps thwalwa'ed women in check as well as able to police themselves.

I also examine the production and survival of ukuthwala, one of the major projects of cultural preservation in South Africa that is founded on and maintained through the desecration of the feminine. This practice, I argue, thrives through the normalisation of violence against women in everyday life within the intimate and private. I contend that the normalisation of patriarchal violence against the thwala'ed women is an important technology in the persistence of ukuthwala and it maintains the practice by inducing terror, thereby keeping women in check. I portray the brutality of patriarchy and how culture works to normalise certain events, practices, and customs as though they are not constructed, portraying them as natural, spiritually given and inevitable in order to uphold patriarchal relations. The thwalwa'ed women's narratives poke holes into this smokescreen of inevitability by exposing the misrepresentations at the heart of the interlocking technologies of ukuthwala.

7.4. Bodies as Sites of Struggle: The Unhealed Wounds

The thesis has also shown that ukuthwalwa is an embodied human experience. In Chapter 5, I show that the ukuthwalwa experience is seen in its lived, context specific

manifestation as an experience with meaning(s) for those living through it. I examine the residues of patriarchal terror on thwalwa'ed women. I show this in my telling of a paradigmatic narrative that depicts suffering and the residues of ukuthwala that centres the deployment of patriarchal violence. The chapter speaks to the idea of the thwalwa'ed body as an archive of trauma. I argue that the trauma of ukuthwalwa is lived and embodied, as such it cannot be erased, escaped, or forgotten. Ukuthwalwa imposes a shift both in one's experiences of the self and those of "being in the world" (Diprose, 1995). For many women, I contend, this has meant coming to accept a new self, a self that is contrary to what they had envisaged. Thwalwa'ed women's narratives indicated that the women struggle with a conflicted self – the real versus an imagined self. I argue that women's accounts of ukuthwalwa reveal that thwalwa'ed women have had to contend with lived and embodied pain which comes from the prolonged experiences of abject poverty, physical abuse, stigma, abandonment, taming the body to docility, caging, fear, feelings of regret, anger, sadness, subjugation. These, I argue, thrive through social controls like lobola, stigma, silencing, expected dress codes and patriarchal violence among others. I associate what happens to thwalwa'ed women's lives to aftershocks of an earthquake, with the ukuthwala moment being like an earthquake that erupts and disrupts lives in the moment with its effects reverberating throughout one's life. The narratives in this thesis tell a story about the sudden and unexpected ending of lives, the construction of new meanings of lives, the push and pull of thwalwa'ed women's identities, the seismic emotional toll that ukuthwalwa brings, and the courage it takes to pull through.

7.5. Is There a Way Out? Finding Relief, Escaping or Leaving

Tragically, as I emphasise in Chapter 6, women's existence under patriarchy is controlled by the patriarchal imaginations of what femininity entails, of what they can and cannot do as women. In instances where they do not conform to the myth of their prescribed

femininity, violence then appears to be necessary to domesticate them and make them 'feminine' again. I demonstrate that women's options at leaving or escaping are limited. I do not romanticise some of their attempts at resistance as victory, however I maintain that they matter because they illuminate something about the lives of thwalwa'ed women and at other times strategies for dismantling patriarchy. I present that interrupting patriarchy comes with its consequences, confirming, as Gqola argues, that to do so is tantamount to committing suicide. She says,

> "Patriarchy is murderous. Interrupting patriarchy comes at a cost. However, patriarchy is always murderous even when we comply" (Gqola, 2021: 39).

However, while I show that domination has remained a central facet of thwalwa'ed women's lives, I argue that thwalwa'ed women have refashioned their domination in ways that allowed them to endure ukuthwalwa. In this darkness, I argue that thwalwa'ed women understand, analyse, and develop ways to deal with the threats, fear, and experience of ukuthwala. They are not just bodies and metaphors, not just victims or survivors and their bodies are not just battlegrounds. Instead, thwalwa'ed women make different choices whether they escaped, survived, or endured.

In the same vein, throughout the thesis and particularly in Chapter 6, I have shown the resourcefulness of some of the women through the ways in which they negotiate the everyday and manage to carve out their spheres of influence amid constrained possibilities. The main point of Chapter 6 is to show, without romanticising the lives of thwalwa'ed women, that despite the fact their everyday lives are fraught with hardship, tensions, and misery, they exercise their agency and engage in acts that can sometimes be characterised as resistance in complicated, messy, and ambiguous ways. Through the concept of shifting vulnerabilities I demonstrate how thwalwa'ed women manipulate the technologies of ukuthwalwa that are

meant to harm them to claim some form of control over their lives and at least make an attempt at the unmaking of a thwalwa'ed subject.

While shifting their vulnerabilities and using many other strategies to mitigate the constant traumas and pain and suffering, questions emerge on what sustains these women's lives through the ukuthwalwa ordeal? How such agency is even possible within a very structured and constrained positionality in their homesteads and society at large. How does a thwalwa'ed subject continue to live while feeling dead inside?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics clearance Certificate

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Ndlovu

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H18/03/20**
PROJECT TITLE	Marriage of confusion? An ethnographic study of the practice of 'Ukuthwala' in South Africa as experienced by Black Women
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss T Ndlovu
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Social Sciences/
DATE CONSIDERED	16 March 2018
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved The applicant must not mention the institution or implicate them in any way (directly or indirectly)
EXPIRY DATE	04 October 2021

DATE 05 October 2018 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor P Naidoo

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

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 to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

Signature Date 10/ /2018

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES