

https://dspace.org/

"Its like nyaope is pointing a gun at you, telling you 'go there..." :morality and the use of nyaope amongst the youth in Soweto

Peete, John Keketso

2019
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29388

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Chapter 3

Nyaope the drug and nyaope the body

> Nyaope is worse. It is a killer. I do not know how to describe it. It is not drugs – Male resident of Valleydale

> There are those [pauses] do I look like a person who smokes nyaope? – Khaya

Introduction

'Nyaope' is a term that is used to refer to specific type of a drug in South Africa, but in Valleydale, the word is extendedly used to refer to a specific type of body too. The two are related. The first is used to refer to a drug, and the second, a body that is known or identified to use this drug. As a drug, in Valleydale, there is a lot of uncertainty amongst the people who use it and the public about the composition of nyaope. In response, on one hand, the users draw on their own personal experiences to make sense of what nyaope might be actually made up of, and like the public, they also make use of rumours in the media and public discourse to make the drug less mysterious. On the other, the public make reference of the effect nyaope has on the body of people who use, together with their behaviour, to it further draw their own conclusions of what 'nyaope' might be. Considering that people known or physically identified to use the drug are popularly referred to as 'nyaope' in Valleydale, I argue that, given the mystery behind nyaope, the drug together with bodies of people who are identified to use it have come to inform each other. I substantiate the statement by showing how the public uses the bodies of people who use the drug to make sense of nyaope, and therefore how the users have come to embody it. Additionally I indicate how the rumours about nyaope simultaneously influence how people who use it are perceived, thus, treated in the community. Altogether, I identify what the people see through bodily appearance and behaviour of the users and the rumours about nyaope as what creates both to be perceived as a threat in society, which need to the eliminated, thus the moral panic towards nyaope use.

The phenomenological experiences of using nyaope: The individual body

The potency evoked by nyaope when it is smoked or used is one of the common reasons behind my participants' initial use of nyaope. Within the youth of Valleydale, there exist a discourse that a nyaope 'high', which is referred as *pikara*, is unmatched by the 'high' of other drugs, including alcohol and cannabis. This is a message that is spread by peers whom have tried nyaope before, to most often those who have not. Hence, most of the youth I met during the course of my 2017 and 2018 fieldwork were introduced to nyaope by their friends and decided to try it for first time out of curiosity to experience *pikara*. The same applies to Thabo, Boy, Khaya and Kgeleke.

Chasing a nyaope high: *Pikara*

About just over a year ago, Boy told me about his experience of using nyaope for the first time, which was in 2008, the year that he lost his job. Due to boredom, "sitting at home and doing nothing", he decided to visit a friend, whom he found at his room with other individuals, smoking nyaope:

> My friend asked me whether I want to have a puff and I said no. But eventually I decided to give it a try. After a couple of puffs I started to feel dizzy, I continued to have a couple of puffs thinking that I will feel better. In 10 to 15 minutes, I got high and a few minutes later I started to vomit...It [nyaope] smelled bad, it still does... It leaves a bad taste in the mouth, it is just that I am used to it now (Peete, 2018).

Boy's first experience of smoking nyaope was not that pleasant physically. Nevertheless, thereafter, he continued to use nyaope due to its psychoactive effect of *pikara*. He constantly sought for *pikara*, which he described as feeling equable to being at the top of the world, because of a sense of relaxation and calm it induces, which offered him an escape from the reality that he is unemployed. Similar to Boy, all of my participants continued to chase after *pikara* after their first 'taste' of nyaope. Throughout the period I have spent amongst a group of youth who publically smoke nyaope at Valleydale, I have witnessed many of them being in a state of *pikara*. They mostly look like people who are sleeping whilst standing, struggling to keep their bodies stable, their eyes open and their mouths closed.

Running away from nyaope withdrawals: *Down*

As enjoyable the psychoactive effects of nyaope were described to me as being by my participants, the motivation behind their use of nyaope has however since changed across their more than ten-year long period of nyaope use. Similarly, Khaya, Boy, and Thabo mentioned that they no longer use nyaope for *pikara*, but to rather stop or save themselves from experiencing its withdrawal symptoms that resulted from their constant intake of the drug. The local terminology they use to refer to these is *down.* The term *down* does express how one feels when the withdrawals are encountered.

The nyaope withdrawals can exhibit themselves in different fashions from one individual to the next, such as in a form and a combination of having teary eyes, yawning randomly, having irregular temperature, vomiting, loss of appetite, painful joints, stomach cramps; difficulties sleeping at night. Consensually however, the phase of encountering these withdrawals or *down* is described as a state filled with pain, discomfort and suffering. Reflecting on his own experience of *down* Boy explained:

> I sweat a lot...I yawn hummm [imitating a yawn], tears come out... joints [touching his elbow] become sore. It feels like you are being stubbed with needles from the inside... on your joints... Sometimes I feel like I could insert my hand underneath my skin and scrub myself, but it is impossible...[sometimes] The back becomes so sore as if I have been sitting in a bad position for a long time and the spinal cord became disjointed and I feel like re-joining it again

Boy additionally mentioned that he would at times feel these pains on his joints, at night, which consequentially made it difficult for him to sleep. Like Boy, the rest of my interlocutors, and other people I met who are dependent on nyaope, experienced such withdrawals symptoms after they stayed away from using nyaope for a couple of hours. As a result, using nyaope regularly in a day has turned into a need for them, as this does prevent and stop the withdrawals. This was made evident by what I was told by one of my participants from prior research, Sizwe:

> I usually smoke nyaope three times, in the morning, the afternoon and night. When I have not smoked nyaope at night I struggle to sleep...my spinal cord bends to the point where someone must

> stretch my back for me to be able to catch some sleep. But I will only sleep for 30 minutes or an hour after that (Peete, 2018).

Boy tried to explain to me the level of necessity that constantly smoking nyaope every day is to a person whose body has become dependent to the drug in order to feel and function 'normally'. He told me that when the body becomes dependent on nyaope, almost every bodily activity has to be bought with a smoke of nyaope: from appetite in the morning, having an active body during the day, to sleep at night. To Boy, it remains a mystery why nyaope has the contrasting effects of *pikara* and *down* when it has and it has not been smoked after some time.

Making sense of *pikara* and *down*

The mystery around the composition of nyaope and rumours in the streets about what nyaope is adds to the everyday uncertainly of the drug (Finnstrom, 2008: 168), about what causes it to have the effects it has on the body, in bringing pleasure and so much pain in the form of *pikara* and *down*, respectively. Some of the individuals who use nyaope whom I met and conversed with mentioned that they are unsure what makes nyaope evoke the high it does. Others speculated that the ingredient that probably causes *pikara* is heroin and in some cases, the sexual potency pill Viagra was unconvincingly mentioned. There seems to be a sense of uncertainly about what causes *down* too. However, Boy tried to make sense of the severity of the stomach cramps by stating that the rat poison that is rumoured to be included in the manufacturing of nyaope probably causes them, because: "What we feel here [touching his stomach with a bitter facial expression] it is like poisoning".

An etic point of view of nyaope: Making use of the users' bodies

In Valleydale, the community uses certain bodily appearances to identify and label people who use nyaope, as 'nyaope'. A body that appears to be damaged, dirty and unhygienic is commonly distinguished and assumed to be of a person who uses nyaope, as these characteristics are consensually noted to be the consequential result of becoming addicted to the drug. Thus, the attributes have become a marker or "social skin" (Turner, in Mascia-Lees, 2011: 106) or stigma (see Goffman, 1963: 1) of people who use the drug in the Township. Boy shared some insights that clarify where such classification comes from. He told me that when people start to use nyaope,

many end up neglecting themselves and as the result, start to be "dirty" and "smelly". He added that this makes people who use the drug to be collectively assumed and identified as being dirty and smelly. Furthermore, Khaya once told me that he is regularly referred to as a person who uses nyaope by people, through calling him 'nyaope' whenever he is at public spaces such as Valleydale shopping centre, where he hustles as a car guard. He also identified a dirty bodily appearance to be one of the reasons behind being labelled as 'nyaope':

> Keketso: What do you think makes people to identify you as a 'nyaope' even though they probably have not seen you smoke nyaope?
>
> Khaya: There are those [pauses] do I look like a person who smokes nyaope?
>
> Keketso: [afraid of judging or insulting Khaya] No
>
> Khaya: There are those who do not bath, who sleep in the streets
>
> Keketso: Oh, so it is about appearance?
>
> Khaya: Yes.

Khaya then elaborated by saying that immediately when a person appears to be dirty or is sleeping in the streets, that person is automatically labelled as a 'nyaope', even when that person might not even be using the drug.

For the rest of the community of Valleydale who lack the subjective experience of *pikara* and *down,* the body (in appearance and its actions) of people who use nyaope has come to function as a point of reference they use to make the drug less mysterious. The public draws upon the users' bodies to develop their own meanings and conclusions about that the drug is and what it possibly includes. It is like the bodies of the users have come to be the representation of the drug, especially considering that individuals who use nyaope in Valleydale are called 'nyaope' or 'bonyaope' as a collective.

To elaborate, on the 12th of December 2018, I accompanied Boy for his second meeting at the SANCA office at Valleydale for his assessment, after he had asked me

to assist him to access the treatment he needs to quit nyaope. While Boy was inside the office with Richard, a social worker that conducted the assessment, I waited outside. I sat on a steel bench alongside another man who wanted to consult a SANCA official about his cannabis use. The man, who looked to be in his late 30s, told me that he wants to quit cannabis. Unknowing that I was a student at the University of Witwatersrand conducting a research on nyaope use, when he told me about his drug use he stressed that he smokes cannabis only, without mixing it with other drugs, in a sense that expressed that he wanted to distance himself from nyaope[3]. The man then spoke about nyaope. He described nyaope as problematic and dangerous, drawing from the negative impact it has on the people who use it, specifically the youth:

> ...Nyaope is worse. It is a killer. I do not know how to describe it. It is not drugs. Its people do not bath... When the person has started to smoke it, you come across a person now limping [with a face that expresses shock].

The man struggled to understand what nyaope is based on the effects he saw the drug having on the bodies of its users. However, at the same time, it is the impact he noted the drug to have on those who use it that he drew upon to classify the drug as a killer. This is what I mean by saying the bodies of people who use nyaope, of which its composition remains a topic of uncertainty to most, informs people's perceptions of and about nyaope, as much as the rumours about the drug nyaope influence how people who use it are perceived and treated in society, as I will illustrate later on in the chapter.

The individual body as a social body

The attempts of the people in the community to try to socially signify what nyaope is through using the bodies of people who use it as a point of reference shows us that as much as the bodies of the users themselves are individual bodies –which individually live and go through the effects of nyaope –they are however also social bodies (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987). Like any other social bodies, they are available for scrutiny and interpretation by other people in society, apart from themselves. Those bodies that stand out as those of a person who uses nyaope

[3]There are rumours in Valleydale that the cannabis that is available in the streets is sold already been mixed with nyaope.

because of being dirty and smelly, together with their actions, are used as a "natural symbol" to think (ibid) and try to unmask the mystery behind nyaope and therefore to give the drug a socially significant meaning such as it being "a killer". The bodies of people who use nyaope are what Jones refers to by the body as a spectacle, which highlights the relationship between the individual and the social (in Mascia-Lees, 2011: 77).

A moral panic caused by nyaope

The expression by the man I was sitting next to when I accompanied Boy to SANCA's satellite office in Valleydale about the mysteriousness of nyaope – not being a drug but something else – and the havoc it is causing, not only on the individual body but also on youth in Valleydale, indicates the extent of fear and threat that nyaope poses to my community. In fact, the scare that both nyaope use and the people who use the drug, the so-called 'nyaope' or 'bonyaope', have created in the community of Valleydale is an actual reflection of the existing moral panic behind nyaope use. A moral panic refers to:

> ...a condition, episode, person or group of person emerges to be defined as a threat to societal values and interests; [whereby] its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions;... (Cohen, 2011: 1)

Indeed, in Valleydale and in the rest of the country, nyaope use is and has rather relatively recently emerged into a topic of everyday discussion in the media, amongst the people and government officials as a headache, and as a cause of concern which needs to be urgently resolved due to the distraction it is noted to cause in society. I can even say that such a panic towards nyaope use is what attracted me into doing research on the topic in the first place. The speech made by the former president, Jacob Zuma, during the State of a Nation address in 2017 about the 'social ill' that drug use is in the country whilst identifying locations such as KwaMashu and Soshanguve, which are known to have high numbers of nyaope/whoonga users,

indicates how much of a case of a moral panic nyaope use is to the rest of South Africa.

Using nyaope equated to being a criminal

Apart from the damage that nyaope is recognised to have on the individual and collective bodies of youth, central to the reason of the moral panic around nyaope is the crime that people who use it have a reputation of participating in, as a way to finance their drug use. Because of the close association of nyaope use and crime, people who stand out as 'nyaope' have even become to be stereotypically labelled as criminals too. The chats I had with Khaya and Thabo separately as I was trying to understand how people in the community perceive them, indicate this well.

When I asked Khaya about how people in the community of Valleydale look at him and about the kind of treatment he receives from the public while he hustles as a car guard at Valleydale shopping centre, Khaya responded by noting that smoking nyaope has led to him to being accused of being a criminal. He pointed out a number of occasions where he was blamed for theft, including an incidence where he was suspected to have stolen a plasma television. He said he was seen to be behind the crime just because he was identified as using nyaope.

The question that I posed to Thabo was somewhat different from that of Khaya's, but the response I got from him was similar. A month earlier to my informal interview with Khaya, I spoke with Thabo about whether he ever feels as if people in the community have control over him, by influencing the places he chooses to go and not to go to. Thabo said that the people in the community do not control him but rather, they push him away. He continued:

> That is way I avoid spending time at loxion [residential areas] and I spend my time here [at Valleydale shopping centre] because [there] they see me as a thief...you can see by just how some people look at you that they do not like you. I try to stay away from such people.

Indeed, in Valleydale, there are some people, specifically the youth, who use nyaope who commit petty crimes as a way to finance their nyaope use. But it is not all of them.

The influence of nyaope stories and rumours in the media on the perceptions of people who use nyaope

In addition to the stories that circulate in Valleydale about a certain person who is known to use nyaope having stolen some steel or pikitup bins from some households, stories about people who use nyaope and rumours around the composition of the drug in mass media too does influence how people who use nyaope are seen, specifically in generalised terms as criminals. There is a massive number of newspaper articles which can be found, which report about the crimes people who use nyaope commit throughout the country (see Venter & Lotriet, 2017; Luhanga, 2017; Matsena, 2015; Mceachran, 2013). These do have an influence on how people known or identified to the users of nyaope, through some certain physical appearance general perception of being criminals in Valleydale.

Khaya for instance was accused of stealing the plasma TV screen most probably because of rumours in newspapers that say that the powder found inside plasma television screens is used as an ingredient of nyaope (Boshoff, 2014). He most likely appeared to be a possible culprit to the assurers due to his physical appearance but additionally, because of such rumours. In my argument about nyaope the body and nyaope the drug informing each other, I aimed to unveil such an event, of how the two are closely related, whereby the physical actions and appearance of the first, and rumours about the second are used interchangeably to classify the other in Valleydale: whether as a criminal on the one hand; as problematic and as a killer on the other. In broader terms, these classifications signify that there is a need for a remedy for both, further informing the form that the intervention should come in.

People who use nyaope having no place in society

The delinquent and at times immoral behaviour associated with users of nyaope does consequently make them, as individuals and/or as a collective, to be seen by some people in society as having on place in society since they come to represent a threat, which needs to be eliminated. Such elimination might imply them being arrested for their actions or going to spend some time in a drug rehabilitation centre so that they can come back as obedient bodies. However, sometimes it creates discourses that they need to be gotten rid of, for good -- poured with petrol and burnt.

Pouring people with petrol and burning them is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. The activity has the history of being a fashion in which groups of people in the country, whom are associated with the wrongdoing or immoral acts have been done away with or punished. There have been such reported events (Niehaus, 2012: 42-43) about people accused of being and practicing witchcraft for instance-- mostly elderly women (Hamrin-Dahl, 2003: 63) – being hunted, caught and killed by being burnt alive, through the practice of the burning necklace.

The burning necklace involves soaking a tyre with petrol, placing it on the neck of the accused and setting it on fire (Gobodo-Madikizela, 1999: 106-112), while the accused is still alive. Based on the accusations that the victim of the burning necklace would be accused of, from witchcraft to being a sell-out, Hamrin-Dahl states that the burning necklace serves the purpose of eliminating those considered deviants from the community, especially since when burnt, the body of the victim can become unrecognisable (2003: 66). On 18 November 2018, while I was my way back home from the University Witwatersrand east campus, I came across a similar expression, which was directed to nyaope users.

On 18 November 2018 as I commuted with a Rea Vaya bus, I came across an interesting conversation between the bus driver (male) and employee of the bus company (female). Both of them spoke about the nuisance that people who use nyaope are and as a result, how they too should be burnt. The bus we were travelling in passes by what used to be a park but was for the longest time used as a place of residence by homeless people in Johannesburg's Central Business District. Recently, the place was renovated into a park. As the bus passed by this park, the woman started to talk with the driver about the homeless people who once lived there, and told him that they have now relocated elsewhere, not far away from the park. She associated them to be users of nyaope as well. Reflecting own her own experience, the woman then spoke about how users of nyaope can be found everywhere and how troublesome they are:

> At Vosloorus there is a lot of nyaopes. The other one did not notice that I was inside the [outdoor] toilet. I caught him opening the door [of the house]. I said 'hey wena!' [hey you!], [he/she] ran away. We went after [him/her]. Samushaya! [We beat him/her hard]... we should just

> kill [him/her] because [he/she] is going to come back... As soon as [he/she] heals [he/she] is going to come back.

The bus driver seconded the woman, and added that all the people who use nyaope should be just burnt. Although the discussion did not lead to any of the people identified to use nyaope be to burnt, the making of this statement does however symbolise how people who use nyaope are seen as having no place in society, because of the deviancy, delinquency and the threat they pose, which justifies them worth to be killed. Under the South African context where people who use nyaope/whoonga are collectively identified as highly problematic and irritating (Grelotti et.al, 2014: 5), as thieves stealing anything from human ashes from the graves to plasma televisions to bins, the conceptualisation of burning them can imply that by doing so, evil will be eliminated and therefore, society will be purified (Hamrin-Dahl, 2003: 66).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented how nyaope in Valleydale remains a mysterious drug to both its users and the public in terms of what the drug is made up of. As such, under these conditions where there exists so much uncertainty about the composition of nyaope, I have argued that the drug and the bodies of people who use it inform each other to fill that uncertainty. People who use the nyaope come to embody it, whereby the public come to see and know the drug through the effects that the drug has on their bodies. Therefore, from this they come to reach conclusions such as that nyaope is a killer, therefore giving the drug a social meaning or identity. At the same time, on top of their bodily appearance and behaviour, the stories and rumours about nyaope, including those about its composition, can and does influence how people who use it are perceived and treated in the community. I good example is Khaya, who I mentioned that he was probably suspected to be a thief behind the stealing of a plasma TV screen from a store in Valleydale shopping centre next to where he hustles daily because of his appearance as 'nyaope'. However, I have added that he being suspected to be behind the crime might also be due to the rumours in the media that powder from the plasma TV screens is used as an ingredient of nyaope. Altogether, I say what the people see through bodily appearance and behaviour of the users and the rumours about nyaope are what creates a moral panic around nyaope use, whereby both are perceived as a threat in society, which needs to the eliminated. By

referring to these instances as a condition of moral panic I do not however imply that the delinquency that is associated with nyaope and people who use it does not exist or that the reaction towards the issue is an exaggeration (Cohen, 2011: vii). Rather I aim to indicate the extent of a social problem to which nyaope use is taken to be, and it is, in South Africa.

Chapter 4

'Looking out' - The *bomtsubi* of Valleydale

We do not judge one another – Thabo

Introduction

From discussing the impact the drug nyaope has on individual bodies, the moral panic it has caused in society, and how people who use nyaope are perceived, here I offer insiders' perspective of the social life experiences of nyaope use. I show the aspect of communal living amongst the young people who use nyaope and what their daily lives entail. This is particularly in relation to a group of youth who I spent sometime around during the course of my fieldwork, who gather at a public space at Valleydale, referring to themselves, usually on third person basis, as the *bomtsubi*. Here, I discuss what the term '*bomtsubi*' signifies, in contrast to other terms used to call people who use nyaope in Valleydale. As a group, I highlight how the *bomtsubi* have their own moral codes, standards, practices and principles, which are upheld amongst each other. Some of those are about the ways of using nyaope and hustling, which function to define appropriate conduct amongst each other. Others are about supporting and offering care to one another, as *bomtsubi*. The latter moral principles and practices of support and care are important to the social life of the *bomtsubi*, as I identify them as a marker of a key aspect of their lives, which I say is looking *out* for each other. What I argue is that *looking out* for each other is what constitutes the existence of the group of the *bomtsubi*. It is what makes the group to be important and of necessity to the individuals who use nyaope, because it offers them means of surviving harsh circumstances presented by their drug use. I say this is the main reason why the group exists and persistently so, even under the conditions whereby it might be perceived as having no place in the community by the public, due to the delinquent behaviours associated with it. To further understandings of the core value l*ooking out* for each other is and the significant role it plays in the social life of the *bomtsubi* in Valleydale, I bring other ethnographies about drug users in conversation, together with Nyamnjoh's (2015) discussion on 'conviviality'.

***Bomtsubi*: 'The smokers'**

In contrast to the terms that people in the community of Valleydale or in South Africa use to refer to people who use nyaope as a 'nyaope'; 'nyaope boys' or '*amaphara*', the group of young people from Valleydale who use nyaope who I immersed myself with for both of my previous BA Honours in Anthropology and my recent Masters of Arts fieldwork use a particular term to refer to themselves, usually on third-person basis. They call to themselves *bomtsubi*, which means the smokers.

As a group, the *bomtsubi* consist of young people, predominantly males, but also females, from Valleydale who use nyaope. Their ages vary from individuals who are as young as 17 years of age to 36 years or older. The *bomtsubi* usually meet and gather in numbers that can reach over thirty individuals at a place I call here Rebang. Rebang is an informal market place where vendors sell and offer a variety of products and services in this Township, such as fruits and vegetables, steel wools, bar soaps, locks, snacks, cigarettes, live chickens, tailoring and barbering. Recently, in 2017, part of the section of it was converted into a taxi rank, so to meet the increased demand for transportation to both local and Johannesburg destinations brought about by the establishment of Valleydale shopping centre in 2012, just opposite to Rebang. The *bomtsubi* mainly congregate on the market section of Rebang nearby the vendors – around the blue house-like structures they use for their businesses. They usually arrange themselves in sub-groups as they go about chatting with each other and smoking nyaope.

'*Bomtsubi*' differs from the other terms that are generally used by people to refer to nyaope users in that it does not carry with it a negative annotation. Rather, it is invested with empathy. A common understanding the young people I hanged around with who use nyaope share amongst themselves, based on their common use of nyaope, together with struggles and experiences that comes with using the drug, is the basis of their referral and collective identification with others as *bomtsubi*. What the term signifies is therefore such collective association. For instance, when I asked Boy about who the *bomtsubi* are he said "People who gather there are just individuals who come from various places, they are not a gang. What unites us is what we smoke".

The space at Rebang where the *bomtsubi* meet is indeed inclusive, open to anyone who uses nyaope who might want to hang around there. Hence the reason why

sometimes the gathering can be of thirty individuals. Regardless of the *bomtsubi* not being perceived to exist as a "gang", there are certain shared moral codes, practices and principles that exist, which form part of their everyday coexistence and interactions, upheld and performed amongst people who associate themselves with another as *bomtsubi*. These are visible at their spot at Rebang, but they are not restricted here only. If anything, they form part of their everyday lives, identification and engagement with each other.

The moral practices and principles of the *bomtsubi*

As discussed in the introduction, I understand morality here not to be universal but rather what comes to vary from one situation to the other. Throughout the time I have spent amongst the group – based on what I have seen, heard and have been told – I have come to realise that the *bomtsubi* is a group with its own moral practices, which on this regard are the basis of my classification of the group as its own moral circle. The *bomtsubi* have a certain way of consuming nyaope for instance, their own moral economy (Sayer in Whyte & Wiegratz, 2016: 45; Bourgois, 2009) of hustling, and most importantly, their lives are based on the principle of *looking out* for each other, which I will discuss in detail later on in this chapter.

The moral way of consuming nyaope amongst the *bomtsubi*

During my Honours fieldwork in 2017, I was informed about the variety of methods or 'techniques' (Mauss, 1973) of consuming nyaope. *Spiking* – diluting nyaope granules into water, which is then drawn with a syringe and injected into the veins – was one of them. Another method involves placing the powdery nyaope on a tin foil, burning the foil underneath and inhaling the smoke as nyaope burns. I also had a conversation with some of my interlocutors about the famous Bluetooth method, commonly associated with Pretoria townships of Mamelodi and Soshanguwe. Bluetooth involves one person sharing their nyaope-induced blood with another using a syringe, after injecting a dissolved nyaope in their body. However, all these techniques are not highly common and favoured amongst the *bomtsubi*. Some of them, such as *spiking,* are disapproved by the individuals I had spoken to during the course of my Honours fieldwork, because they are considered dangerous. This still remains the case even today, after a period of over a year.

In 2018, during my visit to Khaya at the car park of Valleydale shopping centre where he hustles as a car guard, we had a lengthy conversation about *spiking.* Although Khaya mentioned that this method is actually how heroin is traditionally consumed, which he believes to be the main ingredient of nyaope, he told me about the risk that *spiking* is and the harm it can cause on a person's body:

> It is dangerous… it damages the veins [pointing the veins on his arms that would be damaged]. Those that inject themselves, when the veins on their hands have been damaged, they end up injecting themselves here [on neck] and on these ones here [on veins running along the pelvic bone].

Khaya also informed me that injecting nyaope requires a certain technique, as a person cannot just inject themselves anyhow or anywhere on their hand. He prioritised the importance of penetrating the vein in the process, as missing the vein or injecting a "missed hit" has severe consequences. This includes the hand swelling up, and eventually, rotting, he said.

The perception that Khaya has about injecting nyaope is a common view that exists amongst the *bomtsubi* about this method *of spiking,* spread during chats at Rebang. The level of danger that is associated with *spiking* nyaope has made the technique to be condemned and therefore less likely favoured. The dominant way the *bomtsubi* prefer to use nyaope is through smoking it as a joint, which they call *jumba. Jumba* is assembled through using *materials:* rizla paper, cannabis and tobacco taken from a cigarette. Firstly, the rizla paper is cut into an appropriate length and size. Thereafter the paper is laid open and cannabis is poured onto it, in a linear fashion, covering the length of the paper, followed by tobacco. Lastly, nyaope granules are poured evenly on top. The paper is then rolled up to make a joint -- using saliva from the tongue to make it stick on the ends. Thereafter, the joint is ready to be lit and smoked. *Jumba* might not necessarily be cheaper than the other methods of consuming nyaope, but it is still favoured, mainly because it is considered to be less harmful on the body.

Hustling as a car guard

Khaya is one of many young individuals who uses nyaope and forms part of the group of the *bomtsubi* who hustle at Valleyale shopping centre as car guards. This includes

for instance Thabo and Kgeleke. Khaya's spot is located at the northern region of the shopping centre's car park. It stretches from a butchery store, up until a bed retailer. Kgeleke's is at the opposite end of the car park and Thabo's, in the middle, not far away from the local branch of one of the biggest banks in the country. I have never seen any of them guarding cars anywhere else in the car park but at the particular spots I have mentioned here. I have even become accustomed to finding them on these specific spots whenever I visit Valleydale shopping centre, even for personal reasons.

It was through the conversation I had with Thabo in 2018 that I came to be aware that the *bomtsubi* did not choose the actual spots they hustle at, and that it was the manager of the shopping centre who assigned these spots to them. The conversation provided clarity to me of why I have only seen Thabo and his fellow the *bomtsubi* individually guard cars specifically at certain areas of the car park, and why I have never seen them cross boundaries, so to speak.

I intentionally use the term 'hustling' to refer to the activity of car guarding that the *bomtsubi* conduct at the car park of Valleydale shopping centre because it was referred to be such by Thabo, who clarified car guarding not as a job, but another method of *go phanda* or hustling. Simply put, by this Thabo aimed to communicate that being a car guard is a way of him trying to make some money for oneself, under his circumstance. After spending some time observing Thabo and the other the *bomtsubi* conduct this activity, I came to understand why Thabo described the activity this way.

While the *bomtsubi* spend hours at the car park standing under the hot African summer sun – irregularly from the late hours and the morning up until as late as 8 pm – directing incoming and outgoing cars, it is not guaranteed that the *bomtsubi* will be rewarded in return for every car they guard and assist its driver to park and drive out of the parking spot. The drivers are not obliged to give them money. Rather, when the *bomtsubi* are 'paid' for their efforts, it is only because the drivers do so out of their generosity.

In essence, car guarding is based on constantly approaching as many vehicles as possible one can to assist the drivers with their parking and leaving the parking spot, and sometimes helping drivers carry their goods in their cars, all in a hope that one will get some money in return. Regardless, Khaya sees it as a moral obligation for the

drivers and customers to at least pay him in return for the services he provides to them. This is reflected by what he said to me when he told me about his day-to-day experience of hustling as a car guard: "You help them, [and] they give you nothing".

Indeed, on countless occasions I have seen Khaya and the fellow the *bomtsubi* assist the customers with their parking and get no money in return. When this happens, Khaya and Thabo's faces would be filled with disappointment. However, in some instances, they would move along to the next car almost instantaneously, as if they expected not to get any money in return. On one occasion, I have witnessed a young man who uses nyaope who was not offered money in return after asking for some, because the woman he assisted to load the bags full of goods in the boot of the car noted that he was going to use the money to buy nyaope, which she described as "shit". She said "... I have used it [the money] ... You want to buy that shit [nyaope] of yours...!". Thabo and myself where standing about roughly twenty metres away from them, but we could hear the woman say this, as she spoke in a rather loud voice that also expressed that she was somewhat irritated.

In contrast, I have also seen, although not as often, Khaya, Thabo and the fellow of the *bomtsubi* receive money after they had guarded some cars or had assisted some drivers to move out of a parking space or carry their goods in their vehicles. Such a reward is often received with a gesture of a soft clap of hands and/or words of thanks "Dankie O'lady [Thank you mother]"; "...Dankie Timer [Thank you father]", as an expression of gratitude.

The morality behind guarding cars.

There is a moral principle behind car guarding too, at least amongst the *bomtsubi*. Essentially, one can only direct cars into, and receive money from the drivers who have parked at 'their' spot and not that of the other the *bomtsubi*. Being allocated a part of the car park by an authority figure, the manager of the shopping centre as Thabo told me, validates the principle mentioned. Especially since the allocation is used as a justification to classify the actions of another person as being wrong, if it happens that they try to make money for themselves as car guards at the spot that is not allocated to them or it is not 'theirs'. I have witnessed a number of verbal clashes between the *bomtsubi* because of controversies over ownership of spaces and about who should receive money from the drivers. The comments I have heard from those

who felt like they were wronged includes statements like "You think you are clever..." "...Do not make yourself smart pants at my expense... People who are a clever like you are out there stealing, not guarding cars".

***Looking out* for each other.**

Nyamnjoh mentions that a group is more than just a composite of individual interests, selfishly pursued (2015: 11) as rather groups serve a greater purpose than that. The same can be said about the group of the *bomtsubi*. When Boy told me that the *bomtsubi* who congregate at Rebang cannot be classified as a 'gang' or rather a formal group, because they are just people from various places of Valleydale, brought together by their shared use of the drug, he also mentioned that regardless of this (their individuality) they also *look out* for each other. As an illustration, Boy mentioned that if it happens that another person comes by the *bomtsubi*'s spot at Rebang, accuses one of the individuals to have stolen from them and shows signs of acting violently towards the person accused, he said the *bomtsubi* would probably react by trying to defend the individual who hangs out with them at Rebang. Based on how Boy explained the scenario to me, I would like to emphasise that the *bomtsubi*'s reaction to defend a *mtsubi* – singular for *bomtsubi* -- is not because they think he or she is guilty or not, but simply because they know the person and they hang around together.

The incidence above, described to me by Boy, is the main motivation towards me saying that the social life the *bomtsubi* – especially in the way Boy described them, as individuals united by their common use of nyaope – is based on *looking out* for each other. Ultimately *looking out* for each other is about having each other's' backs in the manner articulated by the scenario. It is about providing protection, support and care each other, especially during critical moments (Das, 2013), which are a common feature in the lives of the *bomtsubi*. The way *looking out* for each other manifests itself in the daily lives of the *bomtsubi* and therefore the value and significance it has to them is probably most best reflected in those instances whereby a *mtsubi* is feeling *down* due to experiencing nyaope withdrawals and is in need of a smoke of nyaope.

When the *mtsubi* starts to feel *down*, having a smoke of a joint of nyaope becomes a priority, since this does offer an instant solution to relieving oneself from the near-death experience that *down* is equated to be (Peete, 2018). Boy emphasised: "...it only takes two puffs, two puffs and all of that [nyaope withdrawals] disappears

immediately". However, regardless of the instant relieve that smoking nyaope offers from the withdrawal symptoms, obtaining the drug is not always easy, mainly because most of the *bomtsubi* are high school dropouts or unemployed, if not both, and they heavily rely on hustling to make money for themselves. This might be through being a car guard, washing taxis, collecting recyclable materials; begging. In some instances, it even involves resolving to petty crime. Reflecting on how much of a struggle obtaining money through hustling, based on his own experience, Boy said "People can refuse to give you a 2 Rand...2 Rand... even a child rejects a 2 Rand". The challenge of accumulating money for nyaope is one that Boy shares with many of the youth who hang around together at Rebang. To Boy it is even a greater challenge because he usually has to smoke a joint of nyaope about five times a day to continuously supress *down*, and a single joint costs about 33 Rand.

In such occasions of struggling to accumulate the total amount of money needed for a joint, the *bomtsubi look out* for each other by engaging in practices of mutual support with one another in the form of "striker" or "compromise". *Striker* and *compromise* are terms the *bomtsubi* use interchangeably to refer to a communal practice of sharing, whereby a particular number of individuals would contribute a certain amount of money they have, combining it with that of others, so to collectively meet the sum needed for a joint of nyaope. *Striker* can include two to as many as more than four individuals. Usually when a person has an interest to *striker,* he or she would go around the spot where the *bomtsubi* congregate shouting "striker...striker"

The engagement in *striker* is mutually beneficial to the *bomtsubi* who practice it. It makes it possible for the individuals to have a smoke of nyaope, and therefore an intake of those vital two puffs they may need when in the state of *down,* under circumstance where as individuals they possibly could have not afforded their own joints. On top of that, under the context where making money for oneself is a hustle, *striker* enables whatever money the *mtsubi* has accumulated, say 30 Rand, to go a long way, and therefore, be in a better financial position to maintain the regular need for a smoke throughout the day, in contrast to if that person was smoking alone.

Another element that reflects how the *bomtsubi look out* for each other, which I witnessed, is the action of giving one another a heads up when one is about to land into trouble or danger. I once saw Thabo, for instance, warn another individual who

hangs around the *bomtsubi* at the Valleydale shopping centre to be careful of how close he gets to a minibus, as the cameras were watching him. Having each other's backs in this way is important because the presence of most people known or assumed to use nyaope (as the car guards in the shopping centre are known or assumed to be) raises suspicions to most people around, since they are noted to be stealers. Khaya and I for instance were once accused by an employee of one of the stores at the shopping centre for wanting to steal sneakers in his car, just because we were standing next to the car. Giving another the *mtsubi* a warning in such occasions can help prevent one from finding themselves in the same situation like Khaya and myself, if not worse.

Further than what I have mentioned I would like to add that *looking out* for each other is also about not judging or snitching on the other person. Since the lives of most, if not all of the *bomtsubi,* are based on hustling, some individuals hustle through committing petty crime to generate money for themselves. Judging, more especially snitching on a person who one might identify as a fellow *mtubi* for stealing is not so much considered a 'right' thing to do. In fact, doing so is frowned upon. Thabo for instance does know of some of the *mtsubi* who hustle through petty crime, and like Boy, he mentioned that if a person amongst the group involves themselves in crime, it is their business and it has nothing to do with him. To justify his choice, Thabo mentioned that snitching on another person amongst the *bomtsubi* is a form of betrayal, which can result in being hated. Adding to that he said... "You will snitch on [him/her] and [he/she] gets beaten up and dies. Thereafter you regret yourself".

The practice of offering support to one another as people who use the same drug to meet the need of, and therefore, to overcome shared challenges, is not a unique phenomenon found amongst the *bomtsubi* only. Other ethnographers have documented a similar behaviour amongst a group of people who use 'illicit' drugs. Bourgois, a respected drug ethnographer, has noted how during his studies of homeless heroin 'addicts' in San Francisco, USA, who call themselves "dope fiends", would engage in activities of communal support (1998: 2323), similarly to how the *bomtsubi* do. The dope fiends, who use heroin by injecting it, engaged in what Bourgois refers to as a complex gift-giving economy (1988:2331). They shared heroin a part of their everyday life, even when the price of the average 'bag' of heroin dropped in 1996, from 20 to 7 US Dollars. Regardless of the former, the sharing continued to

be a vital practice of their everyday lives, because for them, as a marginal community, sharing was a strategy for survival (1988:2332). It minimised the chances of one finding themselves being alone with no one to help when "dopesick" or when suffering from withdrawal symptoms (1988: 2331). Under their circumstances, the sharing amongst the dope fiends served as a protection against the former (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). This commonality does highlight the importance of *looking out* for each other, as 'illicit' drug users, bearing in mind the circumstance one is and maybe in because of their drug use, such as having to hustle every day for money, getting into trouble with the law, and having to battle with painful withdrawal symptoms daily.

Apart from looking at the life of dope fiends as exemplary, Nyamnjoh's definition of conviviality can advance the importance of *looking out* for each other in the everyday lives of the *bomtsubi*, and other groups of people who use similar drugs too. Nyamnjoh has describes the term 'conviviality' to be the articulation of the everyday life in the city based on people accommodating one another, socially, economically and otherwise, as a measure to assure survival (2015: 13). Under the context where their lives and relationships with one another are based on *looking out* for each other: on having each other's' backs – socially and financially – supporting each other, offering protection and care to the other person whom you can relate to as a fellow *mtsubi* – I can say conviviality, as it has been described here, is what *looking out* for each other is essentially about. Accommodating each other, through the fostering social and economic relationships, to assure survival. For these young people who as individuals are brought together by their shared use of the nyaope; the sufferings and challenges that come with this such as being unemployed, experiencing painful withdrawals, having to hustle for money every day, having a reputation of being a criminal, a step away from being accused, beaten up or arrested, conviviality offers a way to get by these. The element of conviviality by *looking out* for each other as the *bomtsubi* do, is possibly what brought and still makes the group to continue to exist.

Conclusion

What has been shared in this chapter details the moral practices and principles that exist within a group of the *bomtsubi,* showing how the group itself is its own moral circle, irrespective that some of its members do not identify the group to be a formal one. The *bomtsubi* have a shared moral way of smoking nyaope. For those who hustle

there as car guards, they have shared understandings about moral conduct within the car park they hustle. The chapter has shown how the lives of the *bomtsubi* revolves around the moral principle of *looking out* for each other, as a measure to offer protection, support and care to one another. This is through engaging in practices such as *striker* and not snitching on another *mtsubi* whom, if they do, might lead one to find themselves in trouble for committing petty crime to obtain money for themselves. By using Nyamnjoh's description of conviviality (2015), I have made the point that *looking out* for each other functions to assure continual, mutual survival through social and economic accommodation, in the everyday lives of the young people who use nyaope, which re coupled by many challenges and struggles that comes with using the drug. I identify this element of forming social ties to assure mutual survival through *looking out* for each other to be the reason why the group of the *bomtsubi* exists and continue to do so, even when the public in Valleydale might see it as having no place in the community.

Chapter 5

Nyaope and personhood: The impact of nyaope on the self

> I respect you, I expect you to respect me – Khaya
>
> When they see you wearing this thing they underestimate you… they call you by names, 'nyaope' – Khaya

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated towards discussing personhood in relation to drug use. It does so by sharing insights from my interlocutors about how they perceive what it means to be a person and how their nyaope use has stripped them this status. Here, I discuss personhood from a phenomenological perspective of embodiment. That is, from the mere fact that as people, we are and we live through our bodies, and our bodies are what locates us in the world (Knibbe, & Versteeg, 2008: 50; Csordas in Mascia-Lees 2011). The approach is motivated by my participants' interpretations of their own personhood as people who use nyaope in which their individual bodies, as a lived experience of the body-self, stood out in their expressions of personhood, as the dominant point of reference that they talked about the self. However, this was not in isolation but in relation to the social status or position they say they occupy and aspire to have, in the *community*, relative to other people or bodies. Their examination and interpretation of the self also had to do with how other people perceive and treat them. Therefore, I identify what Terence Turner refers to as "bodiliness" (cited in Cargonja, 2013: 42) as what can help us understand why my participants noted that their nyaope use damaged their personhood. I discuss this frame of personhood on bodiliness with African thought to make sense of the close relationship between their sense of personhood and bodiliness from this perspective, in relation to the elements they identify which make a 'person'. This is important to do since this research report is theoretically framed on phenomenology, but also because of the general definition I have adopted here about what 'personhood' means.

Personhood: What it means to be a person

Personhood is a difficult and complex term to define. The term has variations in its definitions, characterised by a variety of elements (Klaasen, 2017: 32) mostly because different societies have different ideas and concepts about what it means to be human (Fowler, 2004: 4; Rasmussen, 2008: 32). The notions of personhood for instance, might include beliefs and practices concerning some or all of the following: a soul or spirit, body, mind, emotions, agency, relationships with others, with places, animals or things; illness and well-being (Rasmussen, 2008: 38). However, in its broadest definition, here I refer to personhood as the condition or state of being a person, *as it is understood in any specific context* (my emphases) (Fowler, 2004: 4).

Boy, Khaya, Kgeleke; Thabo and their articulation of personhood.

When Boy, Khaya, Kgeleke and Thabo spoke about and reflected on their own sense of personhood, they predominantly referred to the impact that their nyaope use – which surpasses ten years for all of them – has had on it, consequentially causing them to lose their dignity and value. Their self-reflexive discussions and expressions about personhood strongly had to with how other people received them. That is, how they saw, reacted to and treated them. They reflected on how other people showed no sense of respect towards them, how they called them by names – mainly because, they are known or appear to use nyaope – and how by doing so they degraded and challenged their own status of being a person. They also talked about how their nyaope use hindered their aspirations being somebody (even to someone), through obtaining and occupying certain social statuses and roles in relation to other people.

Being invisible and not being respected

Some of the accounts my participants shared about the impact that using nyaope has to one's selfhood were presented in a form of metaphors, which expressed their bodily and social experience (van Wolputte, 2004: 257). To utter how he feels like he is not valued and respected in his home, Boy for instance once told me that he feels as if he is taken to be a dead body, because people at his home do not take him seriously since he uses nyaope. He also stated that in the community too some people do not "see" him, mainly because they do not show any sense of respect towards him. Boy

said the latter in reference to young boys in his neighbourhood who know that he smokes nyaope, whom, he stressed that probably their eldest brothers might not even be his peer: "These young boys in the streets who do not smoke [nyaope]…They look at me as if I do not exist…they show me no respect…They can even swear at me [by referring to him as] 'marete' [male genitals]". Boy interpreted such instance as proof that he has lost dignity due to nyaope use.

Additionally, Khaya, Thabo and Kgeleke reflections carry the same annotation as Boy's. They too once spoke about how they feel disrespected by some people they encounter in the community, specifically at the shopping centre, where they hustle as car guards. On a Sunday afternoon of 18 November 2018 I heard them talk about this amongst themselves when I visited them at Rebang. They were speaking about how some people at the shopping centre do not reciprocate the respect they show towards them. Kgeleke led the chat. Reflecting on such an experience at the shopping centre, he stressed that: "There is nothing as painful like when a person takes your respect and does it like this" [Kgeleke turned his hand upside down and then down side up]. Thabo and Khaya agreed to what Kgeleke was saying and as the conversation continued amongst the four of us in a semi-circle, Khaya, who had his right arm on my left shoulder, turned his face towards me and said "I respect you, I expect you to respect me".

What the accounts provided here reveal is how being acknowledged and respected by other people is important to my participants' justification of what makes a person, as the lack of either made them feel as if they are not recognised at all, as equally being a person by other people in the community.

Feeling less of a person: Name-calling

The other everyday occurrence that made some of my participants feel as if they are taken to be less of a person is the incidence of being called by names. During one of my regular visits to Khaya at Valleydale shopping centre, we had a conversation about how people in the community of Valleydale perceive and treat him. That is when Khaya told me about how he is constantly subjected all sorts of name-callings on a day-to-day basis, including being called 'nyaope', mainly because of his appearance. He said:

> When they see you wearing this thing [touching a yellow reflective vest he wears every time he is on a duty of guarding cars] they underestimate you... they call you by names, 'nyaope'...'hey you nyaope get out of the way...'

Although Khaya mentioned that he has "got used" to being called by all sorts of names by people in the community, he said what he hates the most is being referred to as "nyaope", as this makes him feel to be degraded into nothing but a powdery substance he smokes. His feeling that people call him names because in their eyes he is just as an animal to them also expresses how he feels to be degraded to be less of a person. Khaya brought this up when I attempted to understand how being called by insulting names makes him feel:

> Keketso: When people call you with all these names, obviously you are also a person...[Khaya interrupted before I could state my question]
>
> Khaya: [Interrupting]...At least you understand, but to them, it is as if I am an animal.

Such dehumanising experiences of being called names that Khaya and others often encounter while hustling as car guards at the shopping centre is one of the main reasons why Boy has chosen not hustle at the shopping centre as a car guard, although he finds the activity to be very profitable. Boy noted that the *bomtsubi* who hustle as car guards at the shopping centre have to deal with regular negative comments on a day to day from some people. He has made the decision not to guard cars because he feels like unlike them, he will be unable to tolerate such treatment, which would make him feel insulted and belittled:

> These boys make a lot of money [in a day] that surpasses the one that is made by people who are employed. I could guard cars too but I cannot deal with the negative comments the way they do, as I do not take them lightly... Some people enjoy making other people feel small. You might try to help a person and they might respond by saying 'I did not ask for your assistance [to carry the bought goods], do not I have my own hands to do this myself?' Such things happen,

> I have seen them happen to those boys...To them you are just a beggar

Bodiliness as the basis of my participants' sense of personhood

Boy's, Khaya's, Thabo's and Kgeleke's nyaope use had that much of an impact on their own sense of personhood because to them the status of being a person is relational and social. It is heavily attached to how other people in the community perceive and treat them, as people who are known to use nyaope or who stand out as such. Therefore, I say they felt to be of less of a human in the community based on how other people around them viewed and treated because ultimately their sense of personhood is grounded on "bodiliness". That is, interpreted and understood according to "animal and cultural aspects of the body..." it goes "...beyond the body as a singular object, [but] its relations with other bodies, its processes of formulation and disintegration and de-objectification, and the construction of subjectivity and of intersubjective relations" (Terence Turner 2011: 117 cited by Cargonja, 2013: 42). Bodiliness is indeed reflected in the metaphors that my participants have used to talk about their sense of personhood such as of feeling to be less of a human because one is treated as corpse for example; perceived to be an animal or because of being called 'nyaope' by other people who their bodies come into contact with theirs in their everyday lives.

The viewpoint of personhood according to African thought: Making sense of Boy's, Khaya's, and Kgeleke's perspective of personhood.

Looking into personhood from an African thought can help us understand why Khaya's, Boy's and Kgeleke's reflections of their own sense of personhood is heavily grounded on bodiliness. That is, on talking about a social status of being a person – interpreting and examining this – based on the relationship with other bodies in the community, as people who use nyaope. The African thought is appropriate to use because the research was conducted in an African country.

The distinction made that unlike Western conceptions of personhood, which tend to lean more towards egocentricism, in the African context, the view of personhood is more socio-centric (Fayemi, 2018: 55) provides answers from the onset, as this implies that in the African setting, personhood is essentially relational and social. It is not

something that an individual can be properly attributed in isolation, as an individual cannot be conceived apart from the community (Hoekema, 2008: 265). Rather, it is the community that defines and creates the person, based on their relations with other individuals (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014: 88-89). Therefore, to be a person is a status that one is given, through being acknowledged as such by others, grounded on one's actions or behaviour. An example of this is the local isiZulu proverb which when translated it means, "A person is a person through other persons" (Hoekema, 2008: 264).

On the characteristics noted by my participants that make a person, respect is featured a lot. Looking into both local languages of Setswana and Sesotho languages, respect also happens to be one of the components that make up the animating force: a shadow or an aura characterising a person. This is what it is referred to as *seriti* in Setswana/Sesotho or *isithunzi* in isiZulu. *Seriti* denotes a person's personality but also respect and dignity (Musana, 2018: 6; Niehaus, 2002: 198). On this note, it can be said that my participants' reflection about how they feel like they are not 'seen' nor reciprocated with respect by others does indicate how their association with nyaope affected their *seriti*, and therefore their social status of being a person. There are some studies that show how respect is central to what it means to be a person in other societies as well, further indicating that when one is perceived as an animal, it means that the individual is not respected to the level of being a person (Beckett, 2017: 38-39).

Conclusion

My participants' nyaope use did negatively affect their sense of personhood, because they saw themselves not being recognised as being equally of a person, based on how other people around them view and treat them, as a result of appearing like or being known to use nyaope. How other people around them view and treat them affected their personhood because this status is relational to them. Being known or identified to be a person who uses nyaope led to people around them to view and treat them in a manner they noted to challenge and degrade their own sense of personhood. If I were to apply Laitinen's (2007) classification of 'persons' here, my participants' close association with nyaope has consequentially made them to be seen to have no moral status, be attributed with an immoral status (Molefe, 2008: 354) and therefore

to become immoral subjects to whom others see not worth respecting. I have argued that my participants' sense of personhood was affected as much by how other people perceive and treat them mainly because their sense of personhood is based on 'bodiliness' (Turner cited in Cargonja, 2013: 42). That is, on the relationship that their individual bodies, as a mode of being in and living in the world, has with other bodies. Looking into my participants' frame of personhood in relation to African ideas about what makes a person does help us to understand why their sense of self was impacted so much by their relationship with other people, as for instance in the African context, the view of personhood is socio-centric, it is both social and relational, whereby being respected by other people is one aspect that signifies the acknowledgement of being a person, and not, implies the opposite.

Chapter 6

Sickness as a moral justification

> It is not that he wants to do what he does. What he smokes is what makes him do it– Boy
>
> If only I could give you my body for 30 minutes – Boy

Introduction

For a person who has not experienced the *down* or the nyaope withdrawals, the word *ho kula* (Sesotho) – being sick – was articulated to me by my participants as a way to explain and bring me at par with what they go through when the withdrawal symptoms manifest themselves on their bodies. Therefore, sickness is used here to refer to the phase where one encounters the nyaope withdrawals or *down* on the body, in a form of severe stomach cramps, painful joints and irregular temperature, to mention a few. The term 'sickness' is favoured over others such as 'illness' for two reasons. Firstly, *ho kula,* which is a phrase my participants used to refer to the withdrawals, can be equivalently translated as sickness in English. Secondly, 'sickness' is a more of an appropriate term to use considering the definition provided by Allan Young of 'sickness' (1982: 270) being characterised by when worrisome biological signs are given a socially recognisable meaning. My participants' reference of nyaope withdrawals as 'sickness' to articulate how unwell and not themselves they feel when they experience the withdrawals carries the same significance of giving those worrisome biological signs a social meaning that other people can relate to.

What I argue here is, by my participants describing the manifestation of the withdrawals as a state of sickness, they search to bring their subjective experience of *down* to the level of comprehension to those who do not know what *down* is, and therefore rather than being judged, to seek for empathy for what they have to go through daily. This is especially the case since some of my participants presented 'being sick' as a moral justification of why they engaged in behaviours that they know within the larger society they are considered to be morally and legally wrong, such as smoking nyaope and stealing. Thus, by equating the withdrawal symptoms with sickness is my participants' way of morally justifying the former actions which they can

be easily find themselves being negatively sanctioned for them, by the public and the State, by being frowned upon or even get prosecuted for.

Nyaope withdrawal symptoms as sickness

Now and again, when I was in the field, my participants would usually present their experience of nyaope withdrawal symptoms to me as a moment of sickness. Mostly they articulated the metaphor to express what happens when one is dependent on nyaope and refrains from smoking it for some time. Anthropologist Allan Young (1982: 270) describes sickness as the process through which worrisome behavioural and biological signs (particularly ones originating in disease) are given socially recognisable meanings, whereby they become turned into symptoms and socially significant outcomes. It is this definition of 'sickness' that can help us understand why my participants describe their experiences of encountering the nyaope withdrawal symptoms as *ho kula* or being sick. Using Young's definition, I say, by doing so, they sought to give the subjective experience – those biological signs of the withdrawals – some social meaning which for a person like myself who does not know how the withdrawals feel like, could be able to relate with them, to essentially deliver a more relatable message that, during the period when the withdrawals exhibit themselves on their bodies in the form of severe stomach cramps, agonising joints, irregular temperature, loss of appetite, vomiting; in ability to sleep, to name a few, one enters the stage of being unwell, becomes unable to function and feels unlike their 'normal' selves.

Suffering from pain of nyaope withdrawals

Central to the articulation of the experience of nyaope withdrawals being a condition sickness is the sense of pain and discomfort the latter bring about on a body that is dependent on nyaope. Such sickness was at times expressed as being powerful enough to overcome the control one has over their body and mind, and to surrender to it, by responding through taking actions one did not want to, almost in a subconscious way, so to free oneself from the sickness, to feel normal again. This is evident in Boy's experiences of failing to quit nyaope by himself and finding himself returning to using it, after a period of abstinence, because of the unbearableness of nyaope withdrawals or *down*.

In his 11-year long nyaope use, there are times where Boy attempted to quit nyaope by himself by restraining himself from smoking it. However, usually he would not go as far as more than two days, mainly because he could not stand the pain of nyaope withdrawals. Especially the acute stomach cramps and the piercing pains on the joints. His articulation of his inability to self-rehabilitate carried with it his fear of the pain of *down,* and of feeling irritatingly sick. Although Boy desperately wanted to quit, because of such suffering, he was unable to self-rehabilitate as he could not withstand *down* for the necessary days he recognised it would take nyaope to get out his body. When such pains manifested themselves on his body after a couple of days, he would eventually find himself under the pains' messy and control.

> I am scared of the pain of down I do not want to lie… I would tell myself that I am no longer using it. But I would manage to do so only for a day. On the second day I would find myself on my way there [to Rebang to buy nyaope]… when the mind has made a decision it is difficult to reverse it, because the body follows the mind. I do not know if it is the mind or the heart.

Boy summarised and explained what happens on his body when he restrained himself from using nyaope as a state of sickness in the following way. He said, on the first day, he would sweat a lot, and then on the second day it is when the painful withdrawals start, in a form of severe stomach cramps and a needle-piercing-like feeling on the joints, which he encountered both during the day and at night. According to him, such pains, which he described as tormenting, would last for about three to four days if he continues not to use nyaope. The same amount of days it takes for nyaope to "leave" the body.

Most of the time Boy would tell me about the withdrawals as a bodily experience he undergone as we were together. Usually he would struggle to describe the pains and discomfort he was in at that time, ending up in resolving to using metaphors and similes to explain them to me. Boy's lack of words to explain the pains of the withdrawals shows how his pains destroy language and how the subjective experience of withdrawals is one that cannot be shared. Nevertheless, sometimes Boy wished that he could share the pains with me through borrowing me his body, so that I can have an idea of what he goes through:

> [Jokingly] If only I could give you my body for 30 minutes…Before that 30 minutes even arrives you would have said 'hai [no] take your body back I have had it with your down [nyaope withdrawals]

Boy believed that if he can overcome the physical withdrawal symptoms of nyaope he will be able to beat the mental cravings of it, because, as he said, it is the withdrawals that makes the mind to end up "wanting this thing". "If I could survive three to four nights, it would be a huge accomplishment", he said. However, this was easier said than done as the 'sickness' would be too much to withstand. Boy found the hold nyaope withdrawals have on him to be rather frustrating, especially as a person who wanted to quit.

The body invaded: losing agency over nyaope withdrawals

When Boy spoke about nyaope and his encounter with the tormenting stomach cramps and painful joints, he spoke about them as if they were representative of some foreign organisms that emerge and take domination over his body. If we are to think of Boy's body as a nation state (Martin, 1990), the disturbing nyaope withdrawals would be the invaders, of which time and again, every day when they emerge, he would have to face and fight against for control over his body, whether he liked it or not, because ultimately he cannot escape his body, even though sometimes he wished to.

At one point Boy even made peace that he possibly cannot quit nyaope all by himself as every day, he finds himself *having* to smoke nyaope, sometimes as much as five times, and in some instances hustling through stealing, to meet the demand for nyaope – so to gain a quick, temporal relieve from feeling 'sick'. Even though these actions are performed by his body, Boy often did not take direct ownership of them. He spoke about them from a perspective of being a result of his loss of agency – a capacity to act consciously and voluntarily (Asad, 2000: 29) – over nyaope and its tormenting withdrawal symptoms. This is expressed by a simile he used to describe moments where he feels totally controlled by nyaope: "It is like nyaope is pointing a gun at you, telling you 'go there…go there'". Jeremy Bentham (cited by Jackson in Mascia-Lees, 2011: 372) mentions that pain has the potential to govern individuals' lives as sovereign power governs the state. This is what the painful withdrawal symptoms do to Boy's body.

For a person who might not have an idea of the effects that nyaope and its withdrawals can have on one's body and struggle to understand such loss of agency over nyaope withdrawals, thus why a person can say they want to quit yet continue to smoke the drug, or even resolve to stealing just to get that drug, I argue that my participants use the metaphor of the experience of the nyaope withdrawals as being a state of sickness, characterised by undergoing pain and suffering, to help people who lack the subjective experience of *down* to understand how they feel at that time, and to provide a moral justification of why they do (or have to do) what they do. Such as why others continue to use nyaope and/or steal for money for nyaope, as it is a case with Boy and some of his friends.

Justifying what is 'inappropriate' through sickness

Boy recognised that using nyaope has held him back in life, hence why he wanted to quit it. But at certain points, Boy realised that the battle of quitting nyaope by himself is just too much for him. He believed that obtaining "methadone" is what he needed to free himself from being held at gunpoint by nyaope:

> If I can get hold of it [methadone], I hear that it helps...But they say that it is not easily accessible...that you will need a doctor's letter to buy it.

That is when Boy asked me to assist him with enrolling into a drug rehabilitation programme with SANCA. Our visits to both SANCA's satellite office in Valleydale, located about six hundred metres away from Rebang, and SANCA's treatment centre in Rockville, Soweto, started there. Therefore, it can be said that, apart from their own personal experiences, the medicalisation of drug use might have some kind of influence in Boy's but also Thabo's description of the phase on experiencing the nyaope withdrawals as a state of sickness, especially considering that the message that the medication methadone helps to treat the withdrawal symptoms is quite common amongst the *bomtsubi*. To admit, I did not know anything about methadone until it was brought into my attention by some individuals while I carried out my fieldwork amongst the *bomtsubi* in 2017.

While Boy was waiting to be part of a rehabilitation programme so to access the medication he noted to be a necessity in successfully quitting nyaope, it meant that he

had to continuously smoke nyaope to supress *down* and to relieve himself from the sickness caused by it, and thus bring his body in a state of normalcy. This is something Boy constantly brought up to me whenever we spoke and used as a justification of why he has to use nyaope regularly throughout the day, even when on the other hand he wanted to stop. The same thing happened on the day Boy and I went to SANCA's satellite office in Valleydale for the first time together.

Smoking nyaope when you 'do not' supposed to

On the 4th of December 2018, Boy and I made an arrangement that we would go to SANCA's satellite office in Valleydale together to enquire about the process of enrolling in the rehabilitation programmes offered by the organisation. He had asked me to fetch him from his home. On the morning of that day, I met with Boy on the streets while I was on my way to his home. We walked together to the office. Along the way, Boy told me that he is not feeling well as he is suffering from "short breath". He said this is because he had not smoked nyaope[4], of which due to his dependency is a ritual he has to do every morning. Boy then asked me if we could pass by Valleyale shopping centre first, which is located opposite Rebang, separated by just a road.

Upon our arrival, Boy went inside a popular clothing store. I waited for him outside as he suggested that I do. After a couple of minutes, he came out with some items with him, which I could not recognise, until we arrived at the taxi rank in Rebang. They were two 50 ml Shield roll-on deodorants, which it appeared that he had stolen. As we arrived at the rank, Boy approached the fewer people that were there to sell the products to them. Eventually after about 30 minutes later, he had managed to sell them. He used the money to *striker* with one other male individual. All this happened while I was watching from a distance, where he said I should wait for him at the taxi rank. After an additional 15 minutes or so, Boy finished smoking, and we then left Rebang for SANCA. On our way to the SANCA office, Boy apologised for the delay "...Can you see the life we are living...I probably would struggle to sustain a job because of such a behaviour. It would make me late for work and to eventually get fired". We arrived at SANCA. After brief introductions, we set alongside a table with

[4] The *bomtsubi* use a Sesotho-Tswana phrase '*go qhaqha*' to refer to the practice of having a first smoke of nyaope of the day, usually in the morning. *Go qhaqha* means to loosen, and it articulates for the *bomtsubi* the act of relieving themselves from the discomfort and pains they would be feeling every morning because of *down*. So for the *bomtsubi* who their bodies are dependent on nyaope, *go qhaqha* is a morning ritual for them (Peete, 2018).

Puleng, a social auxiliary worker. From the onset, Puleng spotted that Boy was high of nyaope. She then asked me why I let Boy smoke nyaope before coming at the office. I told her that he has to, because of the withdrawals. Puleng thereafter stressed to us that SANCA does not allow people to come to them for help for their drug use, while high at that time. After making this clear, Puleng continued to assist Boy. She opened a file for him, with information of his biography and history of drug use; and booked him for an assessment on the 10th of December 2018. Puleng emphasised that Boy should not come being high of nyaope on that day. However, Boy also smoked nyaope on the morning of the 10th, before he went to the office for assessment.

On the day, as we were on our way there, Boy let me know that he had just smoked nyaope. Worryingly he said "…and they said I should come without smoking anything". To justify to me why he did that he told me that "But if I do not smoke, nothing will get in [make sense], I am telling you". Here, Boy notes that although he was told not to smoke nyaope before going to SANCA, as this goes against SANCA's protocols, he *had* to smoke nyaope for his mind to be in the right conscious state. Indeed, when we arrived, Puleng could tell that Boy was high of nyaope:

> Puleng: [With a yelling voice] You have smoked!
>
> Boy: Hai [No]
>
> Puleng: Do not say hai, when you say hai it means that you are saying that I am lying… What is a point of you coming here when you have smoked!

The accounts above indicate the extent to which Boy's use of nyaope is far more complicated than just simply choosing what other people consider to be right over what is wrong. For him the distinction is not always as clear, and most of the time he finds himself conflicted between conforming to what society recognises as righteous over what the situation he is regularly caught up in due to his drug use –such as experiencing *down* – asks for. For him his nyaope use has become a condition of using the drug and sometimes stealing for money for it because he has to, due to the intense withdrawals, and not that he likes to. His situation is similar to that of the poor youth in Ethiopia's capital city Addis Ababa who would steal to get by; even when they

knew that their actions defied God's commandments (Di Nunzio, 2015: 4). Boy provided the same reason of seeking for relieve from feeling sick due to *down* to justify his friends' behaviour of planning to shoplift at some stores at Valleydale shopping centre for money for nyaope.

Committing crime for the 'right' reasons

On the day of the 10th of December 2018, Boy and I had to go to SANCA twice because when we first went there, Richard, who was the social worker responsible for conducting the assessment, had not yet arrived at the office. Puleng gave us an option to either wait for him, or go and come back after few minutes. Boy decided to leave and I accompanied him. But Boy was hesitant to leave at first, afraid that by leaving he will end up at Rebang, smoking nyaope. We did pass by Rebang but we ended up at the shopping centre. During that period however, Boy did not smoke nyaope again.

At the shopping centre we came across two young male individuals who seemed like Boy's friends. We met with them next to an entrance of a popular supermarket. Boy and I spent 20 minutes with them, and during that period, the topic of discussion was shoplifting. One of the young men told us how he was so close from stealing about three items from some store, but pulled out at the last moment after panicking that a certain woman was suspicious of what he was doing. He narrated the incident with a sense of deep regret of why he did not just take the items, convincing himself that the woman probably did not notice him. Thereafter, an attempt to shoplift at one of the stores at the shopping centre was proposed by one of Boy's friends. However, Boy chose to distance himself from the plan. Boy and I met with one of the individuals after they came back. The conversation they had did not last as long. Boy cut it shot by making an excuse that he had to accompany me somewhere, which we had to be in fifteen minutes' time. Just as we departed with the individual, going to SANCA, Boy and I had a conversation about what was happening. Although he noted their actions to be wrong, he empathised with one of the individuals and justified his actions as follows:

> Boy: I wanted to dodge him. I am not in the mood for what they do.
>
> Keketso: Shoplifting?

Boy: Yes. It is not that he wants to do what he does. What he smokes is what makes him do it.

Keketso: He also smokes nyaope?

Boy: Yes. You can see that he has not smoked. He would do anything [for a smoke].

Boy was in a better position to understand what the two young men were going through because of *down* and why they had to steal for money for nyaope than I was. Boy added that he could tell that the young man had not smoked nyaope and he was experiencing the nyaope withdrawals because he had "chicken pox" – goose bumps – on his skin. To Boy, the goose bumps signified that the young man was feeling cold, even though on that summer day, the weather was hot. Having such irregular temperature was one of the aspects of *down* that were mentioned to me by Boy, Puleng, Thabo, and other the *bomtsubi* which I conversed with at Rebang.

On the very day Boy too was noted by one of the *bomtsubi* who hustles as a car guard to have shoplifted. This happened upon our second return from SANCA, after assessment. After his assessment, Boy and I passed by the shopping centre to a supermarket where we met the two men earlier on. Boy instructed me to wait outside for him and he went in with an empty shopping bag. As it was during the holiday session, the entrance which I was standing next to was full of people, some going in and out, others passing by. A few minutes later, Boy came out. He passed by me in a rush without saying a word, as if he did not want me to see him. I managed to spot him amongst the pool of people when he was already few metres away from me. I caught up with him by the car park. As we passed by, one of the *bomtsubi* saw Boy. Seeing that he had some items on his hands wrapped with a shopping bag, he indirectly but with confidence said Boy had stolen them from a shop. He said: "Yeah, people like to do crime thereafter they open cases…J88s". By this, the individual was reciting an incident that happened not so long ago, which Boy told me about earlier, whereby one young man who uses nyaope was beaten up by security guards, after he was caught for shoplifting. After the incident, the individual went to open a case at a local police station against the people who had beaten him.

As we were walking towards the exit of the shopping centre, I asked Boy if indeed he has stolen the items. He rejected this and said that the individual is accusing him of something he did not do, because he bought them. I have witnessed other events where Boy shoplifted. Always he wanted to hide this from me, and where he noted that I was aware of what he has done, he would say that it is not him but the drug that makes him steal, because he needed the money to buy nyaope to smoke, which is something he had to do to relieve himself from being sick from the withdrawals. Under such circumstance my own moral reasons or norms did not matter at all, which is after all what bracketing phenomenology is about. Through looking at Boy's and my other participants' circumstances from their own point of view I came to understand why they described *down* as sickness and why they acted in certain ways which defied the moral norms and the law of society. For them smoking nyaope while one wants to quit and stealing – knowing well that one could end up in jail or beaten up by people – are actions they had to take on those moments where they felt sick, because then such behaviour appeared as the necessary thing to do at that time, to prevent or treat the sickness.

Conclusion

The chapter challenges and disturbs what we know bio-medically as sickness and legally/morally as right or wrong. By doing so, it offers insightful perspectives of looking into the lives and actions of my participants, forcing us to understand their behaviour, which could be easily deemed as immoral or wrong according to societal moral norms and the law, from their own experiences of nyaope use. Their expressions locate us in their lives, and to almost live it through their bodies. To some extent, the chapter therefore offers answers and some understanding to the questions and confusion of why people who use nyaope continue to use it, even when it has negative impacts on their lives and why some break the law through committing crime. Here, sickness is a reason that is provided, articulated as a moral justification. The term 'sickness' is used to refer to the experience of the manifestations of nyaope withdrawals, characterised by pain, suffering and discomfort which altogether makes one to be unwell and to enter a phase of abnormality, causing one to subconsciously go back to smoking nyaope and stealing for money for it, in a desperate attempt to escape the sickness and regain control over one's body and mind. Essentially the purpose of the research is to after

all further the understanding of the life of people who use nyaope from their own point of view, whereby nyaope is taken as a 'moral experience'. The use of sickness as a moral justification forces the general public to do exactly that.