“Umona usuka esweni”- Narratives of Umona in Eskhawini & KwaMashu, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

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Lastly, to myself. We did it Nothando and I hope you are proud of yourself.

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Introduction: The Long Story

Growing up in Empangeni, KwaZulu-Natal, I was immersed in contradictions that shaped my understanding of identity and human behaviour. As a young girl, I experienced the complexity of being both privileged and insecure, being seen as "Black yet too White," and as someone familiar with my Zulu heritage, but not fully confident in speaking it. These tensions between identities rooted in my social and cultural surroundings, raised important questions about human relationships surrounding me. In particular, I thought about those relationships that involved envy and competition. In my daily life, I often heard the word umona. It was used in various contexts by my family, in the community, and even during church services. The phrases “Wena unomona” (You are envious) and “Ngeke ungene ezulwini unumona” (You won’t enter heaven with envy) became common expressions in our interactions. These phrases not only highlighted the presence of envy but also stressed its destructive potential.

One particular experience made me reflect more deeply on umona. I came across a TikTok video showing a man picking up his blacked out Maybach GLS600, worth R5.5 million, from a luxury car dealership in Sandton (Pharoah Auto), Johannesburg. The car dealership has received viral attention before for its grand celebration whenever customers come to purchase and receive a car. The celebrations include staff dancing, amapiano, fireworks and flashing lights. In this video, the man appeared in full Gucci attire, prompting many viewers to react with suspicion. A few comments from those that had viewed the video, were written as accusations towards the man buying the car. Certain comments spoke about possible tax evasion, tender money and some comments said that the HAWKS (crime investigation unit) should be called. One comment stood out to me: “Why is it that whenever Black people see other Black people succeed, it has to be criminal?” This comment captured a social reality that was familiar to me. A reality that reflected the complexities of envy within South African

society, where wealth is often viewed with suspicion, especially when achieved by Black individuals.

The more I reflected on this, the more I realized that umona was not just an individual emotion, but one that had far-reaching social consequences. It was not just about one person feeling envious of another's success, but about how envy in one person could spark or express broader societal tensions. It was about the perception that wealth or success in a community, particularly when not shared equally, leads to resentment and division. This realization motivated me to explore umona as not just an individual emotion, but as a socially embedded force within communities, one that requires attention and understanding.

The choice of KwaMashu and Eskhawini as the focus of this study was deliberate, rooted in their unique socio-economic dynamics. Both towns are characterized by a predominant working-class population, yet they also feature pockets of wealth, particularly among a small number of individuals who have achieved significant financial success. This creates socio-economic sites that are particularly fertile for the emergence of umona. In these communities, the presence of wealth among a few individuals, especially in areas where the majority of the population faces economic hardship, can spark jealousy and resentment. Wealth becomes both a source of admiration and a trigger for social friction. This dynamic makes the tension between the disadvantaged and the wealthy more noticeable. It fosters an environment where umona can manifest in different forms, ranging from subtle gossip and social exclusion to outright accusations of witchcraft or ill-wishing. In this context, the impact of umona is not only personal but communal, as individuals navigate complex relationships shaped by economic disparities. By focusing on KwaMashu and Richards Bay, this study aims to explore how umona operates in such socio-economically divided environments. These towns provide a great picture for understanding the larger social forces at play in South Africa. Where economic inequality often breeds feelings of injustice, unfairness, and ultimately, umona.

I chose to focus on community leaders because of the unique position they occupy within their communities. These individuals: counsellors, social workers, church leaders, and traditional healers, are not only trusted figures but also key mediators of social conflict. They hear firsthand accounts of personal and communal complaints, and they are often called upon to intervene when tensions arise. As individuals deeply rooted in the social material of their communities, community leaders have a better understanding of the dynamics at play when

umona emerges but they are not necessarily personally implicated. Community leaders are therefore particularly well-placed to reflect on the complexities of umona. They are often involved in resolving disputes, offering counsel, and helping individuals navigate interpersonal and communal conflicts. Their role allows them to witness how umona manifests in a variety of forms. This ranges from personal resentment to collective tensions, and they have the authority to mediate these conflicts through both formal and informal means. Because of their involvement in the social and cultural fabric, community leaders provide invaluable insights into how umona impacts not just individuals, but the broader community as well. Moreover, community leaders have the experience necessary to identify patterns of umona and understand the underlying causes. They are in direct contact with those affected by jealousy and envy. This allows them to offer practical solutions to ease the harm caused by umona in their communities. By focusing on these leaders, this research seeks to uncover how they approach the resolution of conflicts related to umona and the strategies they employ to restore social harmony.

This thesis examines umona as a socially rooted force that shapes relationships, fuels conflict, and influences religious and communal life. Umona comes from social proximity, manifesting among close family members, friends, and community members. It is driven by economic disparities, personal achievements, and unfulfilled aspirations, making it a defining factor in the ways people relate to one another. Scholars have argued that jealousy in African contexts is often entangled with social obligations, power struggles, and spiritual anxieties, making it a crucial site of inquiry for understanding broader community dynamics.

Within religious spaces, umona operates in complex and often contradictory ways. While churches deny the presence of jealousy and witchcraft within their walls, Christian ideals themselves provide a foundation for umona to take root. Through narratives from religious and community leaders, this study demonstrates how umona is not an external threat but rather an internal dynamic that shapes church relations, accusations, and spiritual struggles.

Research Question:

This research sought to answer the question: **How do community leaders in KwaMashu and Eskhawini understand, narrate, and respond to conflicts of umona within their communities?** To address this, I used ethnographic methods including: in-depth interviews, discourse analysis, spatial observation, and participant observation. These methods allowed for an exploration of how umona is articulated and negotiated in everyday life. In particular

spaces where tensions around social mobility, religious identity, and traditional beliefs intersect.

My findings suggest that while umona can be deeply disruptive, it is not beyond social management. Community leaders, including pastors, social workers, and traditional healers, actively intervene in conflicts of umona through collective dialogue, spiritual rituals, and localized mechanisms of resolution. Their interventions reveal the ways in which umona is simultaneously feared and normalized, acknowledged yet unspoken, and ultimately woven into the fabric of everyday life. By framing umona as a social phenomenon rather than an individual psychological state, this thesis contributes to anthropological debates on emotion, spirituality, and conflict resolution in South Africa.

Theoretical Framework:

This research draws heavily from the theoretical work of excellent scholars whose writings provide critical insight into the nature of umona as a social phenomenon. Nkabinde (1982) emphasizes that umona is not merely an individual emotion, but a social force that deeply impacts both the individual and the community. He suggests that umona is a destructive force that can break down relationships and hinder personal and collective progress. This perspective is crucial for understanding the far-reaching effects of umona on social cohesion and community dynamics. Shange (1982) similarly explores umona in terms of jealousy and envy, noting that these emotions arise when an individual perceives the success or happiness of another as a threat. This jealousy can lead to feelings of inadequacy or resentment, fuelling negative social behaviours that harm relationships and undermine trust within communities. Mkhize (2022) extends these concepts by framing umona as a complex emotion that reflects a darker aspect of human nature. He argues that umona hinders personal growth and social harmony, yet it is not inherently malicious. Rather, it represents a part of human nature that requires acknowledgment and resolution. This view aligns with the broader anthropological understanding of umona as an emotion that not only disrupts individual lives but also affects the functioning of social systems.

Foster et al. (1972) highlights envy's destructive power, arguing that it is a pervasive emotion that can fracture social cohesion. This aligns with Karl Marx's claim that desires are socially produced, meaning that umona is shaped by inequalities and access to resources. As Ben-Ze'ev (1990) suggests, envy is fuelled by a sense of exclusion, reinforcing the idea that umona is not just about wanting what others have but also about feeling alienated from

success. This exclusion is not material as it extends to social capital, recognition, and even spiritual well-being. Charness and Grosskopf (2000) argue that individuals naturally compare themselves to others, and these comparisons shape identity and self-worth. Within this framework, umona emerges as a response to injustices, where individuals measure their social positions against others and experience resentment when they fall short. Foster et al. (1972) further emphasize that umona is especially prevalent in working-class contexts, where scarcity worsens social tensions. This scarcity-driven resentment manifests in interpersonal relationships, fuelling conflicts within families, churches, and communities.

Jean and John Comaroff's (1991) *Of Revelation and Revolution* argue that missionaries were social actors shaped by capitalism, occupying a contradictory class position as a "dominated fraction of a dominant class" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, 59). Their civilizing mission sought to instil European notions of morality, literacy, and property ownership, reinforcing colonial hierarchies. Christianity's dominance in South Africa today is rooted in this colonial entanglement, shaping religious identity and coexisting with African Traditional Beliefs (ATBs). Makhoathi (2021) describes conversion as a complex compromise between traditional spiritual values and Christian doctrine. This often leading to cultural and spiritual displacement. While converts were expected to reject ancestral traditions, many secretly continued them, creating a hybrid religion where there is a mix of both. Baloyi (2014) emphasizes that fears of witchcraft persist among South African Christians, leading some to seek traditional spiritual protection despite church teachings. Many churches dismiss witchcraft as superstition, failing to address its deep cultural significance, which alienates believers and drives them toward alternative spiritual practices (Baloyi 2014, 7). This tension reveals a contradiction: churches preach spiritual certainty but lack tools to address lived fears and anxieties.

Accusations of umona are not merely about envy but claims about moral standing, often surfacing where success is morally ambiguous (Hughes et al., 2019). Such accusations shift blame and reshape relationships. Mijić (2021) highlights how victimhood narratives serve strategic purposes such as asserting moral innocence, deflecting criticism, or gaining support. Similarly, Hughes et al. (2019) shows how jealousy and resentment are deeply social, tied to power, inequality, and intimacy, particularly in churches where ideals of unity clash with real tensions. Geschiere (2013) emphasizes that suspicion arises in close relationships due to fragile trust, especially in spaces where spiritual and social hierarchies intersect. Comaroff & Comaroff (1991) argue that community ties are unstable, making jealousy not just an emotion

but a moral accusation with social consequences. Schieman et al. (2017) suggest that spiritual beliefs can either soothe envy or amplify competition, especially in Pentecostal spaces where blessings may provoke distrust. Ultimately, accusations of umona reveal anxieties about social positioning, legitimacy, and trust. Rather than coming from outside, umona emerges within church ideals, shaping relationships and community cohesion.

The above works helped me to frame umona from a South African perspective as scholars like Nkabinde (1982), Shange (1982), and Mkhize (2022) helped me understand that umona is a social force that affects the individual and community alike. Their work highlights umona's ability to fracture relationships and disrupt social cohesion, especially in contexts where inequality and scarcity are noticeable. These perspectives helped me see umona not just as jealousy or envy but as a force that is deeply embedded within social relations, particularly in communities surrounded by competition and disparity. I then also drew on (see Chapter 1 for more detail) the literature on emotion more generally to clarify that umona isn't just something steeped in difference, but can be understood as something innately human. This body of literature stressed that emotions like envy, jealousy, and resentment are not secluded to specific cultures or communities but are part of the human experience. The work by Ben-Ze'ev (1990) and Schieman et al. (2017) helped emphasize how envy and jealousy are universally experienced emotions. They are deeply tied to social comparisons, feelings of inadequacy, and competition. These insights allowed me to situate umona as an emotion that transcends specific cultural contexts, even as it takes a unique form within South Africa's society.

Guided by my fieldwork, I tried to further understand how umona is implicated in witchcraft. While it is often seen in opposition to Christianity, there is also a close entanglement between the two. As I will show in Chapter 2, umona actually thrives in Church spaces. The literature on Christianity in Africa, such as those by the Comaroffs (1991), helped me understand how the spread of Christianity in South Africa has been intertwined with colonialism, and how Christian standards often exist in tension with African traditional beliefs. The mix of spiritual practices, as discussed by Makhoathi (2021), and the persistence of witchcraft beliefs among Christian communities, as emphasized by Baloyi (2014), showed how umona circulates within these spaces, both as a force that weakens and shapes community cohesion.

Finally, I engaged with works on the effects and resolutions of umona and how collective resolution practices can address it, as explored in Chapter 3. This literature highlighted the

importance of discourse, intervention, and communal strategies in managing umona. Thus, ensuring that it does not continue to disrupt social order and relationships. Scholars like Hughes et al. (2019) shed light on how accusations of umona are not just personal grievances but also reflect larger social dynamics. Where power, inequality, and trust are constantly at play. This body of work was crucial in helping me understand how umona can be addressed through collective, community-centered practices that aim to restore balance and harmony.

The theory chapter significantly influenced how I approached my research question by providing a foundation for understanding umona not just as an individual emotion but as a communal phenomenon. This offers a lens through which to analyse the dynamics of umona in my research context. As I began to explore the narratives of community leaders, it became clear that umona had profound implications for social cohesion and conflict resolution within the community. The theory helped me to conceptualize umona as not just an isolated emotion but a force that shapes social structures and relationships. The theoretical insights guided my interviews and data collection process. This ensured that I framed my research within the broader anthropological context. The challenges I faced in the research process were also shaped by these theoretical insights. As I struggled to recruit participants, particularly given issues of mobility and unavailability of some key figures, I realized that some participants would be weary of coming out with stories that could potentially harm the valued confidentiality surrounding the stories they shared. The theory helped me place myself within these challenges and sharpen my focus on the significance of umona in shaping both the community's dynamics and the research process itself.

The theory chapter also played a key role in shaping my methodology, in terms of the tools I chose to gather data such as storytelling, discourse analysis, and spatial observation. By examining these methods through the lens of umona, I was able to deepen my understanding of how community leaders interpret and address conflicts stemming from this phenomenon. While framing my arguments and linking theory to the research question proved to be difficult, the theory provided a solid foundation for understanding the complexity of umona. It enabled me to situate my findings within a broader anthropological conversation, despite the challenges I faced in adjusting more psychological literature to an anthropological framework. The honesty of participants was essential to this process, as it allowed for a open exploration of umona in ways that would not have been possible if they had been unwilling to confront their own complicity in the communal dynamics of jealousy and envy.

Methodology:

My research took place in the communities of Eskhawini and KwaMashu, two areas that I am warmly familiar with. This is not just in terms of their geography but also in the rhythms of daily life and the social dynamics that shape them. These communities are spaces of both resilience and tension, where economic struggles, religious commitments, and traditional beliefs intersect in complex ways. It was within this setting that I conducted my fieldwork, which spanned the month of June. Though a month may seem brief, the process of arranging, conducting, and reflecting on my interviews required careful navigation, adaptability, and persistence.

Each of my interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the depth of conversation and the willingness of participants to share their experiences. Gaining access to community leaders, however, proved to be one of my biggest challenges. Their schedules were demanding, and securing a fixed time for an interview often felt like a negotiation. Meetings were postponed, rescheduled, or cancelled altogether. To overcome this, I leaned on familial connections to introduce me to potential participants and help build a sense of trust. In total, I interviewed 12 individuals: two pastors, a pastor's wife, three social workers, a Nduna, a sangoma, and four councillors. While each voice contributed valuable insight, my primary participants included Pastor Hlengwa and Pastor Mseleku, a pastors wife (Mchunu), social workers Gumede and Mthembu, the Nduna, and a councillor named Brian.

This study was conducted in KwaMashu township (eThekwini Municipality, north of Durban) and Esikhawini township (uMhlathuze Municipality, near Richards Bay). During the course of writing, terms like "Empangeni," "KwaMashu," "Esikhawini," and "Richards Bay" have appeared interchangeably in my draft; from now, I consistently refer to KwaMashu township and Esikhawini township. Both townships display a striking duality: widespread economic precarity alongside pockets of visible wealth such as newly built homes, luxury vehicles, and middle-class consumption. This is embedded in a broader terrain of poverty and unemployment. These spatially focused signs of prosperity often generate visibility-based tensions that amplify umona, as differences in income or lifestyle become focal points for comparison and moral judgment. This social contrast aligns with themes articulated in Mark Hunter's *Love in the Time of AIDS* (2010). Based in his ethnography in Mandeni (KwaZulu-

Natal), Hunter argues that intimate economies defined by exchange, mobility, and emergent inequality produce social dynamics where jealousy, suspicion, and aspiration are felt strongly. For Hunter, the close proximity of rich and poor, combined with declining marriage rates and growing familiarity in mobility and work, intensifies social competition and emotional complexity in everyday life. Hunter (2010) writes, “The close proximity of rich and poor, rather than poverty per se, has fuelled the pandemic.” Although he studies HIV risk and intimate exchange, I draw on Hunter’s broader theoretical claim that inequality experienced in everyday interaction and visibility contributes to relational tensions like *umona*.

Structural Inequality, Mobility, and Class Formation

Hunter (2010) situates these dynamics within the legacy of the apartheid labour-reserve system, noting how rural–urban migration, labour, and low marriage stats have reshaped intimate life in Mandeni. This structural background is relevant to KwaMashu and Esikhawini, where many residents migrate daily for work and formal marriage is no longer the pathway to household formation. These transformations foster class aspiration, where the ability to access better schools, housing, or vehicles becomes central to identity and emotional livelihood. Hunter (2010) further elaborates how class-based mobility, especially access to reputable schooling or commuting to central Durban, shapes intergenerational expectations and tensions, even when many residents remain economically marginal

Such mobility and accessibility are evident in both townships as some family’s access transport or private schooling to enter Durban’s middle-class opportunities, while others are excluded by cost or network limitations. These are factors that intensify feelings of envy, perceived failure, or social stagnation. By grounding differences in wealth and mobility, Hunter’s framework helps explain how solidarity is fragile in spaces marked by inequality. Residents may exhibit communal gestures or shared faith identities, but these often sit alongside moralised judgments about who is "too visible" or who lacks restraint in displaying wealth. In KwaMashu and Esikhawini, umona frequently emerges in response to these contradictions: someone driving a new car, attending a private school, or building a flashy home may provoke suspicion or resentment. The tension between aspiration and modesty, collective belonging and individual display, reflects a broader moral economy that Hunter describes in Mandeni, and one that resonates strongly in my field sites

Beyond the logistical hurdles, my research was made more difficult by personal challenges. Just two weeks before I was set to travel to KwaZulu-Natal, I was involved in a car accident. Though I was fortunate to escape serious injury, my mobility was affected, making travelling between interview sites particularly difficult. In many instances, I had to rely on the availability of others to transport me, which added another layer of uncertainty to my schedule. There were moments when I worried that this limitation would prevent me from meeting key participants or fully immersing myself in the research process. However, these challenges also forced me to be patient, flexible, and creative in how I conducted my fieldwork. Language, too, presented occasional barriers. As a Zulu speaker, I felt confident in my ability to communicate, but I quickly realized that my ability was not at the same level as my participants. Many of them spoke with a fluency and richness that surpassed my own. There were moments when I struggled to grasp certain phrases or cultural nuances in their speech. To navigate this, I adjusted my approach by simplifying my English questions when needed and asking participants to elaborate on terms I did not fully understand. At times, I relied on examples and storytelling as tools for clarity. I encouraged my interviewees to explain concepts in ways that were more understandable for me. When it came to transcribing, I sought assistance in translating particular complex Zulu expressions, understanding that some words carried meanings that could not be directly translated into English. Instead of striving for accuracy in translation, I embraced the idea of capturing the essence of what was being conveyed. I recognized that language is about meaning more than the words.

Despite these obstacles, my fieldwork was a deeply rewarding experience. Each interview provided a window into the lived realities of umona. It was revealing not only its disruptive power but also the ways in which communities attempt to navigate and manage it. The stories my participants shared were raw, and at times deeply personal. Conducting this research reinforced for me the importance of patience, adaptability, and a willingness. I had to embrace the unexpected qualities that shaped the way I engaged with both my participants and the themes of my study. I used the following methods:

Storytelling/Interviews

Interviews were conducted with community leaders. These leaders, who hold pivotal roles in addressing local conflicts, were asked to share their insights and experiences regarding umona. These interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and preserve the nuances of

the participants' responses. The data from these interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify key themes and patterns regarding umona.

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews enabled me to gather detailed personal narratives and interpretations from community leaders. Spradley (1979) describes ethnographic interviewing as a means of learning how people view their world, using both everyday and cultural questions to uncover meaning. “The ethnographic interview is a special kind of speech event that uses both ordinary and ethnographic questions to uncover the meanings people assign to their experiences.” (Spradley 1979, 55). Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the participant's willingness to engage. These conversations allowed me to explore the emotional, moral, and practical dimensions of umona, particularly how leaders mediate the jealousy and suspicion they observe within their communities.

Discourse Analysis

To complement face-to-face interviews, I conducted a discourse analysis of public discussions about umona on social media platforms, particularly Facebook and TikTok. Discourse analysis treats language as a social practice that both reflects and shapes power, relationships, and identity (Fairclough, 1992). I examined online posts, videos, and comments where people expressed views on success, jealousy, and visibility in their communities. These digital spaces provided insight into how *umona* is moralised, denied, or embraced in public narratives that are often in relation to wealth, gender, or religious belonging.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a foundational anthropological method that involves immersing oneself in the social lives of others. Malinowski (1922) and DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) describe it as a process of both observing and participating to understand cultural meanings from within. “Participant observation is the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities.” (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 1). During my fieldwork, I attended church services, prayer meetings, social gatherings, and community forums. This allowed me to witness the relational dynamics of envy. How success is displayed or hidden, how rumours circulate, and how leaders manage tension in public and semi-private settings.

Spatial Observation

As an extension of participant observation, spatial observation focuses on how physical and social spaces are used and experienced. In community events, churches, or homes, the spatial arrangement of bodies, gestures, and silences often reveals unspoken dynamics of power, suspicion, or avoidance. Following Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003), I treated space as a site where umona may be both visible and invisible, expressed in looks, distance, or exclusion.

Chapter Outline:

My first chapter titled, Uqala Esweni, examines the complexity of umona, highlighting its varied manifestations within close social relationships. Through ethnographic accounts, it is shown how umona often arises from those who are closest to us. Such as family members, friends, or colleagues. The chapter delves into how umona is not just an isolated emotional experience but a communal force that operates within intimate networks, shaping and sometimes disrupting social cohesion.

The second chapter, Umoya womona, focus shifts to church spaces, where the presence of umona and witchcraft is often denied. The chapter argues that umona finds fertile ground within Christian ideals, enabling witchcraft to manifest not from the outside, but from within the church itself. By exploring church leaders' views and practices, the chapter reveals how umona can be masked under religious righteousness. As well as how it operates in the hidden corners of Christian spaces, leading to conflicts and spiritual disturbances.

The final chapter, Akugcini lana focuses on the social aspect of umona, positioning it as a force rooted within the community. Through collective practices, such as community dialogue, intervention strategies, and conflict resolution techniques, umona can be managed and prevented. The chapter explores how local leaders, such as social workers, traditional healers, and church leaders, facilitate the social negotiation of umona, using communal wisdom and intervention strategies to address the destructive potential of this emotion.

Ethics:

Conducting research on umona required careful ethical consideration. The nature of my study meant that I was engaging with themes of jealousy, suspicion, and social conflict, all of which have real consequences for individuals and communities. Because umona is often tied

to accusations of witchcraft, it was essential to approach my research with caution, ensuring that my work did not reinforce harmful narratives or put my participants at risk.

One of my primary ethical concerns was participant safety, particularly given the ways in which accusations of umona can escalate into social alienation and reputational. I made the decision to work with community leaders rather than individuals who had been accused of having umona or those who believed themselves to be victims of it. Interviewing those directly implicated in umona accusations could have heightened tensions within the community and risked exposing participants to further scrutiny. Community leaders, however, were well-positioned to provide insights into the broader social dynamics of umona. I also had to consider my own security as a researcher. Conducting interviews in spaces where umona accusations hold serious social weight meant that I had to be mindful of how my presence was perceived. As an outsider to a certain degree, I had to navigate potential suspicions about my intentions and ensure that my research did not disrupt existing relationships. I managed this by relying on trusted people, such as family members to introduce me to participants and vouch for my research aims. These relationships helped build trust and reassured participants that my work was not meant to expose or harm anyone but rather to understand the social processes at play.

Another ethical challenge I grappled with was the question of representation. On one hand, I was deeply conscious of the risk of making this “too much” of an African story. A narrative that could be misinterpreted as reinforcing stereotypes about jealousy, suspicion, and conflict in African communities. On the other hand, I was committed to telling an African story. One that captured the lived realities of umona as a social force, rather than reducing it to an individual emotion. Doing so meant being careful with my framing, ensuring that my work emphasized the various aspects of umona rather than reinforcing negative narratives. It also meant depending on the voices of my participants, allowing them to shape the way umona is understood within their own contexts.

Finally, I took steps to ensure informed consent and confidentiality throughout my research. Before each interview, I explained the purpose of my study, how the data would be used, and the measures I was taking to protect participants' identities. Given the sensitivity of the topic, I allowed participants to choose how much they wished to disclose. I remained mindful of the emotional weight that discussions of umona could carry. Where necessary, I anonymized certain details to prevent identification. By approaching my research with these ethical

considerations in mind, I aimed to conduct a study that was both responsible and respectful. Ensuring that I engaged with umona in a meaningful way without straining the very tensions it sought to explore.

Uqala Esweni - It Starts In The Eye

Esikhawini has been known in the Zululand District of KZN, to be a lively town filled with quite a few spots one would look forward to coming across during the weekend. Township living is unique and not to be confused with the quiet life of the suburbs. The coloured red, blue and yellow hair salons on the side of the street as I entered town, were busy with hairdressers separating the thick Ultra Braid hair fibre in Colour 2. As the combs sliced through the customers' afros, parting the hair for the next line of braids, the ladies sat cross legged, with their one arm propped up and hand separating the fibre for the hairdresser. Across the four-way intersection to the right, the taxi rank is at its peak of busyness. The Minister of Transport or rather the Taxi Manager screamed at people to fill up the one taxi written “Majakhatha”, right above its wind screen. People jotted from taxi to taxi asking for the final destination of each vehicle. About ten minutes away from Eskhawinis centre lies the Department of Social Work. A light brown brick building with security guards asking for names, IDs, times and purposes of the visit. I made my way into the building, and picked up my pace to meet Mrs Welisa Mngoma and Mr Gumbi. Mrs Mngoma is quite the shy character as she pulls out her calculator to figure out how old she is after I asked for her age. She is a soft-spoken woman with a slight smile who greeted me eagerly, indulging me in stories of memories she had working with my mother in 2014. Mr Gumbi is dressed in a formal white shirt, blue jeans and pointed formal shoes known as Kickmaboboza in slang Zulu. He started to practice as a social worker in 2003, so he was quite confident and was leading the conversation of how long both employees had been in the department.

I was intrigued about the kinds of cases the pair had encountered where they had seen umona involved. Gumede described to me a case of a man who was reported through ChildLine and described as “notorious” for abusing his three children. Gumede went to investigate the situation and travelled to the home of the man reported. Upon his arrival, so he recounts, he discovered the man was living in peace with the children and he explained the report to the father. The father in turn explained that his eldest son had left home without permission and once the son had come back, the father physically disciplined the child. The son also

explained to Gumede that he was okay and had no issues with his father, but had seen his mistake and accepted the consequences. The social worker proceeded to interview the person who laid the case, to question their accusation of child abuse that they claimed the father had been doing. It appeared, so Gumede told me, in that interview that the sister of the deceased mother of the children (their aunt) had laid the case. The case revealed that the aunt of the children wanted to take the children away from their father due to the families comfortable living situation. The children and father lived in a beautiful home. The father would receive life insurance payout due to his deceased wife. According to Gumede the purpose of the aunt's case was to take the kids in hopes of herself receiving the life insurance payout. Gumede described this as a clear case of umona opposed to a case of abuse and neglect as presented by the aunt.

The story reveals a familial relationship between a father and his children that is threatened by an extended family member, that being the children's aunt. This familial relationship is one where the aunt that interacts with the relatives and bears witness to the lavish lifestyle and household they reside in, funded by her deceased sister's life insurance. The financial assistance given to take care of the aunt's nephews and provide them with their needs is what she was seeking in order to attain her own comfortable living. Gumede explained that as the aunt spoke in the interview, she did not include a proper indication that she will provide for her sister's offspring the way the father is capable of doing. She also, Gumede said, falsely accused her brother-in-law, with the purpose of stripping him of his children and financial assistance. "It was umona. She had umona that the father was going to get money from his wife's death, so she would take the children so she could get money," he summed it up. According to Gumede, the aunt revealed umona towards the livelihood of her own family members with the intention of achieving personal wealth. This case takes us to the argument of this chapter that social inequalities within various social and close relationships cause umona. When people interact with one another, they are able to witness the differences in livelihood and this is often the beginnings of the emergence of umona in a person. The argument of the chapter is that umona is not an inherently African emotion, but instead a universal human sentiment that is experienced and expressed in diverse manners.

In my quest to find out what umona is, I drew on the literature of emotions. What I found here is that it was actually the literature on envy which comes closest to what Gumede talked about. In this literature, like in Gumedes rendering of an episode of umona, material differences and how and why they come to matter take a central position. This is despite the

fact that most of my interlocutors when I asked them to translate or when I spoke to them in English would use the word jealousy. This is to say that umona can be understood through works which assume a certain universality of human emotions across a variety of contexts.

The following discussion of literature then also aims to clarify the concept of envy. Its purpose is to provide a clearer understanding of umona through the definition of envy. I will examine the sociological and economic factors that contribute to the emergence of envy/umona within individuals and society. These insights are then put in relation to a deeper exploration of umona's significance within the Zulu culture. The insights gathered from individual interviews will build upon the literary framework, offering a richer understanding of umona's complexities. The participants I will be engaging with in this chapter are Mthembu (social worker), Nduna, Brian (councillor), and pastors Hlengwa and Mselekhu. Furthermore, this literature review will provide a clearer lens by investigating the underlying dynamics of umona both as a general human emotion and as something situated in a specific context of the African world. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of umona's roots and implications.

Foster's et al. (1972) *'The Anatomy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic Behaviour'* aims to develop a definition of envy. They argue that envy is an innate human phenomenon that is present in every society. For Foster et al. (1972) envy is an emotion that is a dangerous as well as a destructive force, simmering with aggression and violence. This is the kind of destruction that not only ruins the person who holds the intensity of the feeling but the kind that consumes societies. "Yet envy is with us all the time; it surrounds us, and penetrates to our innermost being" so Foster et al. (1972,165) claim. This removes the possibility of ever living a life without feelings of envy. Envy is ingrained in human nature, making it an inescapable phenomenon. The philosopher Ben-Ze'ev (1990,489) clarifies envy further by describing it as "the emotional attitude of wishing to have what someone else has and which is important for the subject's self-definition". When a person envies another, it is thus seen as a form of wishful thinking. However, rather than 'thinking', 'craving' better suits the term. Envy is a craving for possessions that others hold, which hold more significance than the envious person's own self. The luminary philosopher Karl Marx stresses the societal origin of emotions. He argues that "our desires and pleasures spring from society; we measure them, therefore, by society and not by the objects, which serve for their satisfaction" (Marx, 1849, 163). As human beings we are born having liking and distaste towards certain things such as tastes, objects and sounds. This is to say that we do have our own personal preferences as

children, yet as we develop in our respective communities so do our likes and dislikes. What we witness shapes us and as Marx says, specifically our desires are shaped by what we encounter. In modern society, a trend can begin with one individual and as others see what this individual possesses, they will try to attain it. Whether successful in attaining or unable to do so, the trend is created by a desire to acquire what is longed for by a number of other individuals who want or already have the possession. This desire though comes with a comparatively inferior position (Ben-Ze'ev, 1990). It becomes a threat towards the individual who has not obtained the item being sought, resulting in a discomfort within their social standing (Ben-Ze'ev, 1990, 490). This leads to a belief that their situation is unjustifiable as they should have the ability to acquire what others possess. In this process the object becomes more important than the envious individual's self. Foster et al (1972, 167) use the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines envy as a feeling of ill-will towards the superior individual who is in happiness, success and has a good reputation. The emotion that is envy is not only caused by material possessions but with the addition of any positive happenings in another's life. This positions the feeling of envy that everyone has innately and yet socially provoked. While the authors provide a comprehensive analysis of envy within a broader social context, it is crucial to further examine and specify the interpersonal relationships in which envy arises. By doing so, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics and social interactions that foster envy.

Charness and Grosskopf (2001, 302) argue that "people generally choose to maximise the material payoffs to others, even when they are greater than their own." Comparative nature between people seems to be a natural happening that exists in societies. Interactions prove to not only be based on forming social cohesion but also a way for people to view themselves as well as others. It seems that what creates a person is not who they are in society but what they are and what they have. This perspective suggests that an individual's sense of identity and self-worth is not solely defined by their social status, roles or relationships within society. Rather, it is the possessions, qualities and characteristics they embody that shape their understanding of themselves. What one has such as material possessions, and what one is such as their personality traits, becomes the fundamental determinants of their identity. According to Ben-Ze'ev (1990), envy is closely tied to feelings of inequality and it is characterized by a sense of exclusivity. Envy arises when individuals perceive that others possess something they desire but are excluded from having. When people compare each other's lives there will always be a difference that can be noted. Whether the difference is

large or small within the comparison, it will provide a sense of exclusivity. In the case of envy this exclusion is a social limitation that singles out either an individual or a group (Ben-Ze'ev, 1990, 493). For envy to occur in a person they must feel inferior to another. An envious individual does not concern themselves with a lack of material or emotional contents, but rather a lack of position in their society. Yet, Foster et al (1972) argue that a shortage of resources especially in working class society creates envious behaviour. The emphasis on the working class is placed here due to the financial restraints they experience. Those who have fewer capabilities to attain resources feel resentment towards those that can easily access resources (Foster et al, 1972, 168). There are multiple sources that can cause envy. Social capital such as connections and social networks are one example. Foster et al (1972) write that a person who has good access to food, health, clothing and shelter will be envied due to them having abundant and easier access to these resources.

What has been observed from the literature is:

The literature helps clarify that umona is not just a Zulu version of envy. It is a culturally and socially embedded phenomenon that combines emotional, moral, and structural elements. It is shaped by material inequality, social comparison, and interpersonal dynamics, but it is also marked by a specific cultural logic that sees success not only as desirable but as potentially threatening to others. This review lays the groundwork for further understanding how umona operates in everyday life, and how it impacts relationships and community well-being.

To find out more I asked my interlocutors what they think Umona is:

The community leaders I interviewed demonstrated a nuanced understanding of umona. They were able to recognize its multifaceted nature and the various emotions and values embedded within it. When asked to define umona, the leaders initially translated it as jealousy yet they had a more nuanced understanding of what umona is too. Their insights resonate with existing literature on emotion, particularly in acknowledging that such feelings are shaped by broader social contexts. However, the interviews are also adding to the literature in some very important ways, namely through highlighting that it is those closest to us that develop umona towards us. They also emphasize that umona thrives in environments where inequality, comparison, and unmet aspirations exist.

Mthembu's warm smile and gentle demeanour conveyed a depth of wisdom and compassion gathered over years of serving others. As an experienced social worker in private practice, she has dedicated her life to healing and growth. She is trusted as a person providing

sanctuary for those seeking solace. Her expertise span over child and adult therapy, substance abuse counselling, and support for survivors of domestic violence. Additionally, she offers employee wellness programs, promoting healthier workplaces. Yet, Mthembu's gifts extend far beyond the realm of traditional therapy. She is also spiritually gifted. She mentioned possessing a profound psychic intuition that guides her work through receiving and interpreting dreams and visions. This unique blend of clinical expertise and spiritual insight has drawn clients seeking more than just relief – they come to her for soulful guidance and transformation. Mthembu takes a second and looks up to the sky, with her eyes dancing glancing side to side. She sighs deeply and her shoulders drop as she answers:

> Umona is a term, I believe by the dictionary is resentment. It is inclusive of admiration that also has to be jealousy perpetrated. It is not a beautiful admiration like anyone who is a secret admirer or a mentor. It is hate- based perpetrated.

Mthembu emphasizes that umona is more than just simple resentment or admiration. It is a complex emotion that blends admiration with jealousy, but in a harmful and hostile way. Unlike positive admiration, such as that from a mentor or a respectful observer, umona is admiration tainted by envy and ill-intent. It is not motivated by appreciation or goodwill but by a deep-seated resentment and desire to see others fail. At its core, umona, as Mthembu describes it, is a form of hate-driven jealousy that paints as admiration but is ultimately destructive in nature.

Manyoni who will be named in this research as Nduna, is a 63-year-old gentleman who takes pride in maintaining himself, and his role in the community is just as impressive. He is one of eight sub-leaders under the leadership of the Zulu King, otherwise known as a Nduna. He is responsible for overseeing Macekane, a rural working-class area in Kwa-Zulu Natal. He mentioned that his main objective is to ensure the people in his area live in harmony, are satisfied, and at peace. Whenever conflicts arise, the Nduna steps in to offer guidance, helping resolve issues and restore balance to the community. The decision to become a Nduna was fuelled by his father who was a Nduna too. He feels that today people are unruly as opposed to those of older generations. Manyoni hopes to retire soon and seek other opportunities. After taking a quick call, the Nduna smiles nervously and apologizes for the disturbance. His head tilts at an angle and he blinks a couple times, then says:

> Kuthiwa umona, jealousy uqala lapho esweni Amehlo bese etshela inhliziyo, inhliziyo bese iyafisa.

[It is said jealousy starts in the eye. The eyes then tell the heart, then the heart wishes.]

The initial translation of definitions provided by Mthembu and Manyoni provide a foundation for further exploration, revealing that umona encompasses various emotions and actions beyond jealousy. Specifically, participants described umona as involving resentment, admiration, and harmful desires. The first participant Mthembu characterized umona as "bad admiration," while the second participant Manyoni highlighted its intuitive and embodied nature, explaining that jealousy begins in the eyes and then influences the heart. Mutually, these perspectives illustrate that umona is a complex, embodied emotion that combines cognitive, emotional, and physical components. It is marked by intense feelings of resentment and admiration, which can manifest physically, starting with visual cues that ultimately drive desires. It is connected to the senses and the organs of the body. In this context, umona's multifaceted nature becomes apparent, encompassing not only jealousy but also a range of interconnected emotions and physical embodied sensations.

At the heart of umona lies a profound sense of envy, where individuals crave the possessions, qualities, or circumstances of others. Brian, is a dedicated 27-year-old councillor serving the KwaMashu ward in Durban. Despite his youth, Brian has taken on a significant role, ensuring the voices of his community are heard and their needs are addressed. His primary responsibility involves facilitating community meetings, where residents share concerns impacting their livelihood, such as water and sanitation issues. As a mediator, Brian skilfully navigates tensions between the community and municipality, working tirelessly to resolve conflicts and promote constructive dialogue. His leadership provides a critical link between the people and local government, fostering collaboration and driving positive change.

> Umona ukufisa into yomunye umuntu ukuthi kube eyakho. Even though you have your own things. But the biggest thing that stems from umona ukufisa nokuhalela into yomunye umuntu..
>
> [Umona is wishing for someone else’s possession to be yours. Even though you have your own things. But the biggest thing that stems from umona it is desiring and craving another person’s belongings.]

This description highlights that umona is not simply about lacking possessions, but rather about a deep craving for what someone else specifically has, even when one already possesses their own things. It is the intense desire for another person's belongings, driven not by need but by comparison and greed. Umona is rooted in dissatisfaction, not with one's own

possessions, but with the fact that others have something perceived as better or more desirable. This shows that umona is less about material lack and more about the emotional discomfort of seeing others succeed or having more. The Nduna adds onto this by saying:

> .If kunomuntu uthola indlela ukuthi ebenayo, kunomuntu ongeneliswa. Angeke size sifane ngoba mina ngithole okunela amandla ami, then ngifisa le eyakho.
>
> [If a person finds a way to get the same possession, they may still not be satisfied. We won't be the same since I will get something that matches my standard of living, but I will still desire what you have.]

At its core, umona involves a profound desire for what others possess. Notably, both participants highlighted this greedy aspect of umona. The first participant Brian emphasized the desire to seize someone else's position, stating that "the biggest thing that stems from umona is desiring and craving another person's belongings." This perspective highlights the zero-sum mentality inherent in umona. This kind of thinking means that a person's gain is seen as a loss for another person. The Nduna added a distinction to this concept, pointing out that even when individuals acquire something they desire, they remain unsatisfied if others possess something similar or better. As he noted, "they will get something they have the ability to afford, but they will still desire what you have." Umona is also characterized by a physical trait. Originating from the eye, where one's actions and behaviours are observed by those closest to them. This then travels to the heart where umona develops and breeds. Collectively, these insights illustrate that umona fuels an unquenchable longing for what others have, driven by a deep-seated sense of dissatisfaction and envy. This relentless desire can never be fully satisfied, as the focus continually shifts to acquiring what others possess.

Ultimately, umona's destructive power stems from its ability to entwine an individual's self-worth with the possession of another. This toxic dynamic anchors one's sense of identity and value to the coveted item, rendering it a crucial component of their self-perception. Pastor Hlengwa, an honoured and dedicated servant of the Lord, has transitioned from active ministry to a well-deserved retirement. Following a distinguished career spanning over four decades, he concluded his lifelong service to the United Congregation of Christ South Africa (UCCSA) in 2023. Although retired, Pastor Hlengwa's passion for biblical studies remains unwavering. He devotes his time to intense personal research, delving deeply into the lives and teachings of the prophets. In particular Micah, whose message resonates profoundly with

him. From 1981 until his retirement, Pastor Hlengwa faithfully served the Eskhawini community, guiding his spirited members with wisdom, compassion, and commitment.

> Ngizithola senginomuntu engiphikisana naye Lento ibi-positive kimi, ngithandana ukuphumelela Ngithanda izinto ezinhle, ngithanda izinto zenzeke kimi. Kodwa kuqhamuke wena usungedlula.
>
> [I find myself having conflict with someone. This thing was positive to me, I like to succeed. I like beautiful things; I like when they happen to me. Then you come along and surpass me. It happens that I wasn't angry with you but there was something I valued for myself, now its shifting from me and coming to you.]

Umona's sneaky nature extends beyond desiring others' possessions; it also harms an individual's self-worth by tying it to unattainable goals. This dynamic creates a narrative where one's value is measured by the possessions or successes they cannot attain. More so, this phenomenon raises an environment of competition and resentment. As Hlengwa openly shared, he often finds himself wishing for a transformative opportunity, something that will propel him toward success and is cherished. However, when someone else achieves this goal first, the desire can turn into envy. This distressing insight highlights the fragile nature of self-worth in umona's grip. The constant comparison and sense of inadequacy can lead individuals to measure their self-value against others' accomplishments, perpetuating a cycle of dissatisfaction and discontent.

While the literature defines envy as a destructive and universal emotion (Foster et al., 1972), the community leaders add cultural and emotional depth to this understanding of umona. Mthembu's description of umona as "hate-based admiration" highlights how it differs from neutral envy. It carries ill-intent beneath the surface of admiration, adding a relational and harmful dimension often missing in academic definitions. Nduna's metaphor, "jealousy starts in the eye, then tells the heart," emphasizes the bodily and sensual aspect of the emotional process behind umona. Aligning with Ben-Ze'ev's (1990) view that envy begins with perception and leads to longing. When people within your social circle physically see you with possessions they would want, it is internalized for them and penetrates their hearts where umona will breed. Brian's observation that umona is desiring what others have despite having your own supports the idea that envy stems from comparison, not lack. This challenges Foster's emphasis on material scarcity by showing that umona can arise even in abundance. My interviewees also show that envy is not relieved by obtaining the same things.

As Nduna states, even matching someone else's possession doesn't remove the craving. This echoes Ben-Ze'ev's (reference) argument that envy is about status and social meaning, not just objects. Hlengwa adds that umona can be triggered by feeling overshadowed, even without hostility. This reflects Marx's idea that our desires are shaped by others, showing how umona is rooted in social positioning and emotional identity.

In sum, participant insights enrich the literature by showing that umona is more than just envy; it is embodied and visceral. Umona is a powerful and intense physical and emotional response.

Social inequalities and Social relationships

This section delves deeper into the complexities of umona. Having explored the definition of umona – including its association with jealousy, dissatisfaction with one's life, and the prioritization of desired possessions over self-worth – we now turn our attention to the individuals who exhibit these traits. Firstly, we examine the social relationships of individuals prone to umona, analysing the participants' insights to better understand the interpersonal dynamics at play. This inquiry seeks to illuminate how umona manifests in social interactions and its impact on relationships. After, this chapter will investigate the material triggers of umona, exploring the specific possessions or circumstances that spark envy. This section will also discuss the effects of umona on individuals and their relationships, shedding light on the consequences of this destructive emotion. By dissecting the social and material aspects of umona, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon. Mthembu contributes to this by saying:

Mainly it's people that you trust, people that you know, people that know you. It can be varying from family to friends, from colleagues to associates. Even people that go to church. You know, you trust their demeanour and religiously, but those traits are reflective of umona.

Mthembu highlights that umona often stems from those within one's close social circles. People you know, trust, and interact with regularly, such as family, friends, colleagues, and even fellow church members. She emphasizes that umona is not limited to distant outsiders but can be hidden behind familiar, trustworthy, and even religious appearances. This points to the deceptive and subtle nature of umona, showing that it can exist beneath the surface of

relationships that seem safe and supportive on the outside. The Nduna speaks on these close relations, saying:

> Ufisa leyanto kaMama wakho, ekamakelwane, noma eyomngani wakho
>
> [You wish for the thing your mom has; your neighbour has or even what your friend has.]

Nduna emphasizes that umona can arise in everyday, close relationships directed towards people as close as one's mother, neighbour, or friend. This highlights how umona is not reserved for distant judgements but often emerges from familiar, personal environments. It reflects how deeply embedded umona is in ordinary face to face social life, where desire and comparison occur even among those we are emotionally connected to. Brian follows up with this familial connection adding:

> Nangaphakathi emndenini ukhona phela Umona knowns no limit. neLecturer yakho iyakhumonela ngoba ibona wena ubamba izinto ngespeed. So, umona knows no limit.
>
> [Even within the family it's there. Even your lecturer can have umona because they see that you catch onto work quickly]

Brian points out that umona is not restricted by age, role, or relationship as it can exist even within the family or professional spaces. He highlights that even authoritative figures like lecturers may experience umona when they perceive someone excelling or progressing quickly. This emphasizes how umona can stem from feelings of threatened status or comparison, regardless of social hierarchy or closeness in relationship.

Social and intimate relationships form the backbone of community cohesion in society. However, umona eats away at these bonds, often festering among those closest to us. Notably, participants highlighted that umona frequently emerges among trusted individuals and familiar surroundings. Mthembu emphasized that colleagues and associates from work can harbour umona, while Nduna pointed to neighbours and friends as potential sources. Brian wisely observed that umona knows no boundaries, infiltrating even sacred spaces like families and educational institutions, where individuals should feel supported and encouraged.

Furthermore, participants identified visual cues and material triggers as key catalysts for umona. Specifically, witnessing others' possessions or successes can foster feelings of inadequacy and inequality. Pastor Mselekhu's journey is a testament to faith and purpose. Trading in his former career for a higher calling, he answered the divine command to become a full-time leader of the church. Embracing his role as a "servant of God," he considers the Almighty his Employer and the church his sacred workspace. Since 2014, Pastor Mselekhu has dedicated himself to spreading love, hope, and guidance. Today, he leads the Eskhawini branch of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) with compassion and wisdom.

Behind his warm smile and relaxed demeanour lies a passionate heart for ministry. Approachable and genuine, Pastor Mselekhu has cultivated a community where laughter and tears are welcomed equally. His bubbly personality disarms even the most guarded hearts, inviting all to experience the joy of faith.

> Talent of umuntu izodala umona kwabanye abantu. Let's say if abantu bonke kade befuna umsebenze, once wena wawuthola and oncono, you become an enemy to those people.
>
> [A person's talent can lead to umona from others. Let’s say if a group of people all looked for work and you got a job and a good one, you become an enemy to those people.]

This statement from Mselekhu highlights how umona can be triggered by personal success or talent, especially when it sets someone apart from a group. Even something positive like getting a good job, can provoke feelings of resentment from others who feel left behind. It suggests that umona is also about achievement and progress that disrupts a groups equality or shared struggle. Success becomes a source of social tension, turning admiration into hostility. Brian contributes as he speaks further:

> Uyangonela ngoba mhlamphe abantu bayangithanda. Hayi ngoba nginemoto. You have jealousy because I communicate well or I respect myself. There is a reason as to why they love me and you have umona.
>
> [You have umona on me because people like me. Not because I have a car. You have jealousy because I communicate well or I respect myself. There is a reason as to why they love me and you have umona.]

This statement by Brian illustrates that umona is not always rooted in material wealth, but can stem from personal qualities such as confidence, communication skills, self-respect, or social likability. Brian emphasizes that people may envy intangible traits that attract admiration or love from others. In this way, umona extends beyond possessions—it targets a person's character, presence, or the positive attention they receive. This highlights the emotional and psychological depth of umona, where envy is directed at who a person is, not just what they have. Mthembu slightly shifted in her chair, took a moment then spoke:

> Financial struggles, financial imbalance and economic struggles. When we grow up we aspire to be something, Some will achieve and some won't achieve. The minute you have something they do not have and feel entitled to, then you might witness umona.

Mthembu emphasizes that umona is deeply connected to financial struggles and economic inequality. As individuals grow up with similar aspirations, not everyone is able to achieve the same level of success. When one person obtains something that others feel they also deserve, but have not attained it can trigger umona. This highlights how umona emerges from perceived unfairness or unmet expectations within unequal social and economic conditions, where success is viewed not just as achievement, but as a disruption of shared aspirations.

The collective insights from Mselekhu, Brian, and Mthembu deepen our understanding of umona by illustrating how it is fundamentally embedded in social relationships and driven by perceptions of inequality and disrupted group cohesion. Mselekhu emphasizes that umona can arise when one person's success or talent sets them apart from a shared struggle. Here, success does not inspire celebration but becomes a source of resentment, precisely because it disrupts an assumed collective trajectory. Brian extends this view by highlighting that people may envy not what someone has, but who they are and how others respond to them, making umona a deeply psychological and relational phenomenon. Social admiration itself can be a trigger for envy, where being liked or respected becomes a source of tension among peers. Mthembu further underscores the structural roots of umona, pointing to economic imbalance and unfulfilled aspirations. When individuals grow up with similar hopes but face vastly different outcomes, the success of one can ignite envy in others who feel equally deserving. Umona, is a reflection of broader socioeconomic frustrations and a perceived loss of shared identity or solidarity. Together, these perspectives show that umona emerges not only from material inequality but also from emotional and symbolic disruptions in social cohesion.

Achievement whether in form of success, status, or personal attributes, creates discomfort within close relationships and shared communities.

In conclusion, the narratives and reflections shared by participants reveal that umona is far more than a simple case of jealousy. It is a deeply layered, culturally embedded emotion that arises from within intimate social spaces. While it may initially be translated as envy or resentment, umona encompasses a complex relationship of admiration, dissatisfaction, insecurity, and ill-intent, often rooted in social and economic disparities. This aligns with Foster et al.'s (1972) argument that envy is an innate human phenomenon, simmering with aggression and capable of consuming both individuals and societies. Participants' descriptions of umona echo Foster's claim that envy is ever-present, inseparable from human existence, and often destructive. However, what emerges from my fieldwork is that umona is not only an individual emotion but a relational and communal experience that is deeply tied to proximity and familiarity.

As community leaders like Mthembu, Nduna, Brian, Hlengwa, and Mselekhu demonstrate, umona is not a fleeting emotion but a persistent one, shaping interpersonal dynamics in subtle and sometimes destructive ways. Ben-Ze'ev's (1990) perspective that envy is a craving for what another possesses, which becomes more important than the envious person's self, is vividly reflected in the participants' accounts. Mthembu's description of umona as "hate-based admiration" illustrates how desire for another's success, qualities, or possessions can turn into resentment. This is strengthened by the philosopher Karl Marx's argument that our desires and pleasures are shaped by the societies in which we live. Participants revealed that umona thrives in environments where inequality, comparison, and unmet aspirations exist. In these spaces, success is often viewed not as an individual achievement but as a disruption of a collective trajectory.

Moreover, while Foster et al. (1972) argue that scarcity and limited access to resources create envious behaviour, my participants demonstrated that umona is not only about material lack. It is also about social displacement and the perception of being left behind. Brian's insight that umona is not just about the car one drives or the house one owns, but also about intangible qualities such as confidence and social recognition, reinforces Ben-Ze'ev's (1999) statement that envy is fuelled by feelings of inferiority. This suggests that umona is not merely an economic or material response but also a psychological and relational force that disrupts social cohesion.

Ultimately, umona destroys the very fabric of social cohesion because it arises from those we expect to support us. As Mthembu emphasized, it is “mainly the people that you trust” who harbor umona. The betrayal of closeness transforms what could have been admiration into hostility. Foster et al.’s (1972) claim that envy exists universally is important, but what my study adds is the understanding that in the South African context, umona is not just an innate feeling. It is a social and moral force that shapes relationships and community structures. It manifests through proximity, where those closest to us are often the ones who pose the greatest threat. These findings suggest that umona should be understood not only as a personal emotional response but also as a reflection of broader social structures. These being inequality, competition, fractured solidarity, and shifting identities within communities. It is within these relational spaces between the seen and the felt, between proximity and resentment, that umona grows. It is there, in the gaze of those who know us best, that we find the most powerful and painful expressions of this emotion.

Umoya Womona- Spirit of Umona

There is a story that has stayed with me over the years, as I had read it from a Bible study night at home. It stayed with me partly because of its moral clarity, but more so because of the unresolved tensions it speaks to. It is the story of Andy and Johnny. On the surface, it’s a story about humility and the Christian ethic of celebrating others’ success. But beneath the surface, it reveals the subtle yet persistent presence of umona, even within the spiritual spaces that claim to leave no room for it. The story goes as follows: Andy, a young pastor, had launched a new site for his father’s church that quickly exploded in size and popularity. Thousands flocked to it every Sunday so many, that people had to be turned away and directed to other churches nearby. Just down the street, Pastor Johnny Crist’s much smaller Vineyard Church struggled to gather a crowd. Each week, Johnny found himself stuck in the traffic caused by Andy’s booming church. It was a visual and material reminder of the disparity between their ministries. Yet one day, Johnny surprised Andy with a call not to express frustration or envy, but to offer encouragement. He told Andy that every Sunday, while caught in traffic, he prayed for him: “God, just use him today.” Instead of feeling resentment, Johnny would look over at the crowds pouring into Andy’s church and say, “Sick ‘em, Andy!” Later, Johnny even invited Andy to preach at his church’s dedication service, and asked him to fill in during a mission trip. These were gestures that showed a great deal of

generosity and humility. But what makes the story powerful is not just Johnny's grace as it is about Andy's confession. Andy admitted that had their roles been reversed, he likely would have felt jealous and dismissive. He imagines himself driving by Johnny's church thinking, "They probably don't preach the Gospel. You can't preach the Gospel and get that kind of crowd." In other words, Andy projected onto Johnny the very jealousy that lived quietly within himself. He assumed Johnny must be envious—because that's how he would have felt.

This confession reveals something deeper: even within a framework that theologically denies the legitimacy of umona, the emotion continues to thrive. Christianity teaches that there is no space for jealousy in the life of the believer. Pastors preach against it. And yet, it is lurking in the comparisons, the imagined rivalries, the subtle dismissals, and the deep insecurity masked as theological critique. It does not exist in silence; it often shapes how ministers view one another, how churches relate, how sermons are judged, how success is measured. Sometimes, as participants in this study have warned, it goes even further and exists within various spaces. As Mthembu voices in the previous chapter, "even people that go to church. You know, you trust their demeanour and religiously, but those traits are reflective of umona.". This raises the pressing question: How does an emotion that is apparently incompatible with Christian teaching find such a powerful position in church spaces? Why does umona not only persist, but sometimes intensifies within contexts that emphasize love, grace, and mutual celebration? The argument of this chapter is that church spaces often deny the presence of umona or witchcraft within themselves. Yet umona can take root precisely within the performance of the close knit Christian community, as well as effect the idea that we as people are all equal before God. In this way, the presence of umona allows witchcraft to enter the church, not from outside, but from within.

These are the key points this chapter explores. The story of Andy and Johnny offers a story about the emotional contradictions rooted in religious life. It shows that umona often resides not in the actions of others, but in the hidden crevices of our own hearts. It challenges us to consider how status anxiety, spiritual competition, and the performative nature of ministry open up space for umona to flourish, even under the guise of holiness. Most importantly, it reminds us that the struggle against umona is not just a matter of moral teaching; but it is about confronting the deeper structures of comparison, recognition, and self-worth that shape social and spiritual life.

Both pastors I interviewed are from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), a denomination officially established in 1967, though its origins trace back to the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the late 18th century (UCCSA, 2010). The LMS, founded in 1795, introduced a non-denominational missionary ethos shaped by Reformed theology, Congregational society, and a strong commitment to biblical authority. These early missionaries laid the foundation for what would become the Congregational tradition in Southern Africa—one that emphasized both evangelical mission and social justice. In the 19th century, American missionaries further expanded this tradition, contributing to the growth and distinct character of local Congregational churches (UCCSA, 2010). The UCCSA is deeply rooted in the global Congregationalist tradition, where each local church is a gathered community of believers, united by covenant and the central affirmation that "Jesus is Lord." This structure allows each congregation to exercise autonomy in governing its own affairs, while remaining connected to a larger denominational body. Churches within the UCCSA have the freedom to shape their practices, leadership structures, and community engagement, yet they remain accountable to a shared theological and missional vision (UCCSA, 2010).

Theologically, the UCCSA positions itself within the broader Reformed tradition, which informs its emphasis on personal faith, collective discipleship, and strong ethical commitments to justice, equality, and human dignity. From its inception, the church has viewed itself as not only a spiritual community but also a social institution responsible for advancing the broader public good. This theological vision became especially significant during the apartheid era, when the UCCSA was among the first churches to publicly denounce the apartheid system. In 1978, the church formally voted to support the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism, a decision that led to the departure of some white congregations but solidified the UCCSA's commitment to political justice and theological integrity (UCCSA, 2010). In the following years, the church continued to be involved in activism and theological movements that called for a prophetic and contextually engaged Christianity in opposition to state-sanctioned oppression.

UCCSA churches are characterized by a strong emphasis on preaching, congregational participation, and spiritual accountability. Practices such as testimony, prayer, scripture reading, and leadership play an influential role in shaping Christian identity within these churches. Additionally, the UCCSA has historically invested in theological education and leadership development, ensuring that its congregations remain both theologically grounded

and socially engaged (UCCSA, 2010). The church's unique blend of Congregational autonomy and denominational unity, its deep commitment to social justice, and its embeddedness in both global and local theological traditions make it a significant reference point for understanding contemporary Christian life in the region. The history and theological positioning of the UCCSA provide crucial insight into the role of Christianity in South Africa, particularly in how it intersected with African conversions from traditional belief systems. Understanding these dynamics is essential to contextualizing the perspectives of the pastors I interviewed, as well as the broader relationship between Christianity and social structures within the communities I studied.

Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (1991) provides a foundational anthropological analysis of the missionary encounter between British evangelical movements and African societies, particularly the southern Tswana. Their work challenges dominant narratives of mission Christianity by revealing the deep ideological, cultural, and material forces that shaped religious expansion in colonial contexts. The Comaroffs (1991) trace the origins of British mission societies to the late 1600s and early 1700s, situating them within the broader Protestant expansion (Comaroff 1991, 49). However, the early 19th century, between 1810 and 1850, marked the first wave of nonconformist missionaries among the southern Tswana, coinciding with Britain's public discourse on religious reform, moral upliftment, and global Christian responsibility (Comaroff 1991, 53). A key argument in their analysis is the critique of one-dimensional portrayals of missionaries as mere spiritual agents of colonialism (Comaroff 1991, 54). Instead, they argue that missionaries were products of their specific class positions and moral economies, embodying contradictions within British imperialism. As part of the "dominated fraction of a dominant class," they were socially marginal in Britain yet central to colonial expansion (Comaroff, 1991, 59). Their missionary work reflected a commitment to self-improvement, a value tied to industrial capitalism. Conversion was not solely a spiritual endeavour but also a demonstration of European moral and material superiority. This ideology linked private property with moral success, poverty with personal failure, and education with self-realization (Comaroff, 1991, 60). The missionaries' emphasis on literacy, particularly through the Bible, reflects Protestant notions of a "religion of the book." Literacy was seen as a transformative tool, spiritually and socially. As the Comaroffs note, missionaries believed that by teaching Africans to read, they would guide them toward self-improvement, salvation, and ultimately, submission to British authority (Comaroffs,

1991, 63-64). Through education and domestic reform, missionaries sought to impose new moral values and social hierarchies within indigenous societies. The Comaroffs further highlight how Methodism and nonconformist movements both promoted capitalist values and normalized inequality, encouraging the poor to accept their conditions while framing missionary work as a divine calling to bring justice to Africa (Comaroff, 1991, 67). The concept of the "kingdom of God" was projected onto foreign lands, aligning spiritual persuasion with imperial expansion (Comaroff, 1991, 78). In this way, the London Missionary Society and similar organizations were not only religious institutions but also vehicles for colonial ambition, advancing a "spiritual empire" intertwined with imperial interests.

At the heart of this civilising mission was the belief that the Africans could be morally and socially transformed by engaging them in arguments whose terms were already set by the missionaries (Comaroffs, 1991, 199). The goal was to embed the mission at the core of the indigenous social structure, operating not just through church services but through the transformation of everyday life. The project of "civilising" was thus not only religious but also deeply cultural and intimate. Missionary practice eventually extended into the realm of naming and identity, with converts being given Christian names at baptism as a symbolic act of cultural and spiritual transformation. These interventions were framed as bringing truth and civilisation to African societies, but the Comaroffs observe that African responses were far more complex. Many did not see Christian truth as displacing indigenous knowledge systems, but rather as coexisting with them (Comaroffs, 1991, 225). This selective integration of Christian and traditional beliefs became a point of disagreement, as missionaries consistently condemned it and insisted on exclusivity. Over time, however, colonised people became increasingly familiar with the internal logic of colonial Christianity, developing diverse strategies of accommodation, resistance, and reinterpretation. Far from being passive recipients, Africans engaged critically with missionary teachings, changing them to suit their own cultural frameworks and social needs. In sum, the Comaroffs' analysis illuminates how mission Christianity in South Africa was deeply entangled with capitalist ideology, imperial ambition, and cultural domination. Yet it also underscores the agency of African communities, who negotiated these forces in complex and creative ways. Their work remains essential for understanding the historical entanglements of Christianity, power, and culture in southern Africa.

The historical entanglement of Christianity with colonialism, as illustrated by the Comaroffs (1991), laid the ideological and cultural groundwork for the enduring dominance of Christianity in South Africa. What began as a civilising mission has since become deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life and identity for many South Africans. Today, the history of these missionary encounters continues to shape the religious landscape of the country. This is reflected in the current demographic realities of South Africa, where Christianity remains the dominant religious affiliation, even as other belief systems persist alongside it.

South Africa, a country known for its rich cultural diversity, is home to a wide range of religious affiliations. According to Stats SA (2022, 24), the majority of South Africans identify as Christian, making up 85.3% of the population.
The report provides a breakdown of the religious affiliations in South Africa:
- Christians: 85.3%
- Non-religious: 2.9%
- Traditional African religious: 7.8%
- Islam: 1.6%
- Hindu: 1.1%
This breakdown highlights the significant presence of Christianity in South Africa, while also acknowledging the diversity of other religious affiliations.

Although statistics show that Christianity is the dominant religion in South Africa, making up 85.3% of the population (Stats SA, 2022), these numbers obscure the deeper spiritual and cultural dynamics underlying religious identity in the country. Christianity's strong presence is not simply the result of devotion. However, it is the outcome of a historical process of cultural and spiritual negotiation that began during colonization and continues today. At the heart of this process lies the complex relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Beliefs (ATBs), which is a relationship marked by tension, blending, and continual contestation.

One of the central elements in this religious landscape is the experience of conversion. Not merely as a change of faith, but as a profound shift in identity and worldview. Makhoathi (2021) argues that conversion, especially from African Traditional Religion to Christianity, entails a redefinition of the self and a movement toward a new point of spiritual authority. The author asserts that such a transition signifies "a new reference point of one's identity,"

where the individual is no longer rooted in ancestral beliefs but in Christian principle (Makhoathi, 2021, 2). This shift, however, is not experienced as a clean discontinuity. Rather, it is a range of negotiation between the spiritual values inherited from one's culture and the theological values introduced by Christianity. This dual commitment, or at least spiritual uncertainty, often results in what Makhoathi (2021, 3) describes as a "cultural and spiritual dislocation." Converts may be celebrated within Christian communities for abandoning "heathen" practices, but simultaneously alienated from their familial and cultural roots. The Christian conversion process, as described by Makhoathi (2021), was often accompanied by a vilification of African spiritual systems. It cast ancestral traditions as backward, demonic, or uncivilized. Such framing led many African converts to feel that they had to reject not just a religion, but their entire heritage, in order to be accepted within Christian spaces.

Yet this process was not universally embraced, nor was it complete. In many instances, African Traditional Beliefs continued to coexist beneath the surface of Christian practice, creating a form of religious hybridity that persists today. Rather than fully abandoning traditional beliefs, many believers reinterpreted or quietly continued them alongside Christian teachings. Makhoathi (2021, 7) notes that some converts, in an attempt to reconcile their faith and heritage, engaged in secret practices of African Traditional Religion. Examples of this being ancestral rituals, even while actively participating in Christian worship. This highlights an important disconnection between theological belief and lived religious experience. Where many believers construct personalized spiritual practices in the face of institutional expectations.

This tension becomes even more pronounced when examined through the lens of spiritual fear and the belief in witchcraft. As Baloyi (2014) observes, many South African Christians continue to be deeply influenced by traditional notions of spiritual vulnerability. In particular fears of witchcraft, curses, and malicious spiritual forces. Baloyi (2014, 4) emphasizes that this fear remains so potent that even devoted Christians sometimes seek assistance from traditional healers or witch doctors. This is despite theological teachings that condemn such practices. He describes this phenomenon as producing “double-minded Christians,” who straddle two belief systems in search of both salvation and protection (Baloyi, 2014). This reality is not merely theological but also psychological and social. For many believers, Christianity does not offer adequate tools or rituals to address the specific kinds of fears and misfortunes traditionally dealt with in African spiritual systems. Therefore, people turn to traditional practices out of a sense of cultural familiarity and spiritual necessity, rather than

rebellion against church teachings. Baloyi (2014, 7) argues that mainline churches, particularly those rooted in Western theological frameworks, have historically dismissed witchcraft as mere superstition, failing to grasp its deep cultural and psychological significance in black South African communities. This theological gap has not only alienated church members but contributed to the decline in membership in some traditional denominations, as people search for spiritual solutions elsewhere. The failure of churches to engage African spiritual realities has created a vacuum that traditional religious systems willingly fill. For many believers, the question is not whether they are Christian or African, but how to navigate both worlds authentically, without betraying either. The attempt to coordinate Christianity with ATBs is often met with criticism from within Christian institutions, yet it reflects a lived spirituality that defies stiff doctrinal boundaries. However, this pluralism has not yet fully translated into religious inclusivity or theological dialogue. Tensions between Christian doctrine and African spiritual practices remain, especially when the latter are viewed through a moralizing or colonial lens. Makhoathi (2021, 8) argues that Christianity's claim to special truth continues to cast ATBs as inferior or even dangerous, perpetuating a cycle of cultural and spiritual rejection. At the same time, African Christians continue to grapple with questions of cultural integrity and spiritual belonging.

Ultimately, the South African religious landscape is best understood not through binaries, but through a spectrum of belief and identity. Conversion is rarely final or absolute; rather, it is an ongoing process of negotiation between heritage and doctrine, self and community, culture and theology. The persistence of African spiritual values within Christian contexts is not a sign of confusion or compromise, but rather a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and complexity of African religiosity in the face of colonial and missionary histories. If Christian institutions are to remain relevant and responsive, they must engage seriously with these lived realities and begin to develop inclusive theological frameworks that honour both Christian faith and African cultural identity.

The literature discussed helps us understand how Christian spaces in South Africa are not immune to the undercurrents of traditional belief systems. Instead, they are deeply shaped by them even when they deny this influence. Makhoathi (2021) shows that the process of conversion to Christianity did not fully replace African traditional beliefs, but often layered over them. This unresolved tension produces spaces where emotions such as umona, competition, and spiritual insecurity continue to circulate within Christian life. Similarly, Baloyi (2014) reveals how Christians, despite their professed faith, often remain entangled in

fears of spiritual attack and envy. This points to a deep contradiction within Christian spaces: while churches preach moral certainty and spiritual purity, they often fail to provide language or tools to deal with spiritual anxieties. These unresolved tensions create conditions where umona is not an external invasion but an internal presence. Which is nurtured through unspoken rivalries and spiritual comparison. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) further help illuminate how Christian institutions were never neutral spaces but deeply entangled with ideological and moral hierarchies born from colonial capitalism. Their analysis shows how missionary Christianity, with its emphasis on self-improvement, moral status, and personal success, created a social context. One in which individual ambition and moral competition could easily translate into suspicion, envy, and spiritual rivalry. These are the very elements through which umona gains traction. In this way, the literature reveals a paradox. While Christian institutions often position umona as external to their spiritual and moral order, they simultaneously create the very social and theological conditions that allow it to take root and thrive within church spaces.

Umona within the church

This literature reveals how Christian spaces are shaped by deep hints of social and spiritual tension. These tensions are often rooted in unresolved predicaments between African traditional beliefs and Christian ideals. The tensions do not simply remain theoretical or theological; they manifest in the lived, everyday experiences of church members. In the following ethnographic section, I explore how umona becomes an active presence within church life. Through intimate accounts and communal stories, it becomes clear that umona is not an external threat to Christian practice but a force that emerges precisely within it. It is shaping how people relate to one another, perform faith, and navigate belonging. Mselekhu had a distant look in his eyes as he recalled a story from his church:

> There used to be a lady in the church who would make amascones and biscuits for tea and all. And washo wathi “bazalwani sengicela ukuyeka, because I’ve got enemies within the church now”. She was getting questions of “who do you think you are?” And we encouraged it so she could attend in peace.
>
> [There used to be a lady in the church who would make scones and biscuits for tea and all. And she said ‘church members I would like to stop, because I’ve got enemies within the church now’. She was getting questions of “who do you think you are?” And we encouraged it so she could attend in peace]

The account shared by Mselekhu shows this dynamic vividly. The woman's decision to withdraw from serving in the church kitchen was not prompted by theological disagreement or overt conflict. Instead, by subtle, spiritualised social pressure and the sense that others harboured envy toward her. Her comment, “I’ve got enemies within the church now,” reflects how umona operates not through explicit confrontation. Instead it works through quiet suspicion, side comments, and communal undercurrents of spiritual competition. Her experience speaks to the emotional quality of church life. This is an experience where acts of generosity or visibility can unintentionally provoke discomfort or jealousy, and where spiritual belonging is continuously negotiated through unspoken tensions. In this way, umona becomes a lens through which we understand how envy, rivalry, and suspicion shape even the most mundane aspects of religious life from baking scones to leading prayer. Mselekhu sat hunched with a serious look on his face as he explained:

> Let me put it on a Christian perspective, jealousy is sin. It is not accepted, acceptable to a person that is a Christian. It is where la umuntu efika ekutheni alwe nawo umona. But ujealosy wona wonke umuntu onawo, that element of umona. Kuba ukuthi ke la enkonzweni sizebenza against izinto uNkulunkulu engahabisani nazo including umona.
>
> [Let me put it on a Christian perspective, jealousy is sin. It is not accepted, acceptable to a person that is a Christian. It is where a person comes to a point they must fight against umona. But everyone has umona, the element of umona. It becomes a thing where here at church we work against the things that God does not like/work with including umona]

This reflection is deeply revealing of the moral complexity surrounding umona within church spaces. Mselekhu’s framing captures a dominant contradiction: umona is explicitly named as sin, something that a Christian must reject. However, it is acknowledged as an inherent part of human nature, something “everyone has.” In this sense, the church is not positioned as a space free from umona. It is rather as a space where umona is ever-present and in need of constant management and moral work. What emerges here is the idea that umona does not come from outside the church. It is instead something already embedded within it, residing in the everyday relationships between congregants. Mselekhu’s statement supports the chapter’s argument. While Christian doctrine may attempt to deny or distance itself from umona, the emotion lives inside the church’s moral structure. It reshapes how people relate to one

another, perform piety, and navigate belonging. Hlengwa smiled and lightly chucked then said:

> Kwafika enqondweni yami ukuthi uNkulunkulu uthi "I am a jealous God". And it was quite strange ukuthi uNkulunkulu athi unguNkulunkulu onomuna. Kusho ukuthi there should be a positive side emoneni, if God is a jealous God. uNkulunulu usho ukuthi unezinto zakhe, zakhe yedwa angazimisele ukuzisharisha inoma ubani omunye umuntu.
>
> [It came to my mind when God said "I am a jealous God". And it was quite strange that God would say he is a God with umona. That means there is a positive side to umona, if God is a jealous God. God means that there are things that are his alone that he would never share with anyone else.]

Hlengwa's reflection on the phrase "I am a jealous God" points to a deep theological insight. When God describes Himself as jealous, it challenges the conservative understanding of jealousy (umona) as something inherently negative or harmful. In the context of Christianity, this statement invites a reconsideration of umona, as a complex emotion that can carry both positive and negative connotations. If God's jealousy reflects a divine desire for exclusive relationship, protection, and holiness, then umona can be understood as guarding sacred spaces or preserving what is sacred. This suggests that jealousy, rather than always being associated with sin or witchcraft, can also function in a positive, protective sense. One that is reinforcing the importance of boundaries, relationships, and "rightful ownership" within the faith. Hlengwa's interpretation, therefore, opens up a possibility that the concept of umona could also be a force that operates within the spiritual realm for the care of divine instruction and holiness. He shared his thoughts further saying:

> Indlela umphakathi izinto abazenza ngayo, "bekukhona bani oseParalamente, esontweni lethu beukhona umongameli" engashiyanga lutho esontweni. Useless things. Ngisho ukutho omunye umona yenziwa yithi ngokuwakha amavalues, useless values actually
>
> [The way the community does things, "there was someone from Parliament, at church we had a minister", and they did not leave anything at that church. Useless things. I am saying that some umona is created by us by creating values, useless values actually.]

Hlengwa's statement reflects a critical perspective on how societal and communal values are often constructed, particularly within church spaces. The reference to the presence of a Parliament member and a church minister who "did not leave anything at that church" points to the ways in which certain individuals or figures might enter religious or community spaces. This is because their own agendas or values that may not align with the authentic purposes of the church. In this context, Hlengwa is suggesting that umona can arise from the creation of what he refers to as "useless values". These are values that are not necessarily rooted in spiritual truth but are imposed through external influences or internal desires for status, recognition, or control. These "useless values" can fuel competition, envy, and relational tension within the church. Contributing to umona not as an external force, but as something actively generated by individuals and their value systems. Thus, umona emerges in spaces where such 'inauthentic' values are given superiority, leading to a distortion of the original purpose of the church or community. Hlengwas demenour changed into one of seriousness as he continued his point:

> Abantu abase sontweni they feel offended mabehleli emuva emcwabeni, kwi-programme fanele kubonakale ukuthi bakhona. And mayengabizwanga ucabanga ukuthi akahlonishwanga
>
> [The people from church they feel offended when they are sitting at the back at a funeral. On the programme they have to be put down that they are there. And if they were not called, they think they are not respected.]

Hlengwa's statement reveals how social hierarchies and recognition within church spaces extend beyond spiritual matters and into communal events like funerals. Seating arrangements and formal acknowledgment in the program are symbolic markers of respect, status, and belonging within the church community. When church members are placed at the back or excluded from the program, they interpret it as an indication that their presence and contributions are undervalued. This lack of recognition can create tensions, as it challenges their social and spiritual standing within the congregation. The concern over positioning reflects struggles of visibility, authority, and respect in religious and community life. This is where being overlooked is not just an administrative oversight but a meaningful exclusion that can fuel resentment and perceptions of umona. Mselekhu spoke with passion as he said:

I have to do this, uNkulunkulu blessed me and I feel to do such thing for my church. And I won't because o-reaction that will come from these jealousy people, I will be affected too. I want to do good but end up bad, and I end up hurt by my good doing.

Mselekhu's statement speaks to the tension between the desire to contribute positively to the church and the fear of the negative reactions from others within the community. He highlights a genuine spiritual impulse to give back and serve, stemming from a sense of divine blessing and responsibility. However, Mselekhu is also aware of the potential for umona from others in the church. The fear of the "o-reaction" (the negative reaction) and the resulting harm suggests a deep awareness of the emotional and relational risks involved. Particularly, in acts of kindness or generosity in spaces where jealousy is prevalent. Despite the intention to do good, Mselekhu recognizes that acts of kindness might lead to personal harm or hurt due to the envy of others. This illustrates the contradiction of umona: it can turn even well-meaning actions into sources of pain. It can show you how deeply umona influences relationships within church spaces, potentially turning positive deeds into burdens for the one offering them.

This section delves into the complex interplay of umona within church spaces, illustrating how it is deeply embedded in the lived experiences of church members. Through ethnographic accounts, it becomes clear that umona does not simply exist as a theological issue but is a universal force that shapes daily life and social dynamics. Church members like Mselekhu and Hlengwa reveal how jealousy operates subtly within the church. It is often hidden beneath the surface of spiritual practices and communal relationships. Acts of kindness, generosity, or visibility in the church can unintentionally provoke envy and discomfort. An example of this is illustrated in the case of the woman withdrawing from baking scones. Furthermore, umona is framed as both an inherent part of human nature and a sin to be resisted within Christian teachings. This opposition reflects a moral contradiction within church spaces, where umona is both condemned and recognized as an inevitable part of human interaction. Hlengwa's reflection on God's jealousy introduces a nuanced understanding of umona, suggesting that it can have a protective, sacred function rather than always being associated with harm. Lastly, the creation of "useless values," as described by Hlengwa, shows how umona can emerge from the burden of external or inauthentic standards. These standards are contributing to social tensions within the church. Ultimately, this section highlights that umona is not an external threat to Christian practice, but an

internal force that shapes the emotional, relational, and spiritual life of the church. Therefore, influencing how people relate to one another, perform faith, and negotiate belonging.

Witchcraft in the church

In many instances, church members may not directly attribute their discomfort or perceived ill fortune to witchcraft, but rather to umona. This can lead to a kind of spiritual competition where individuals, either consciously or unconsciously, use umona as a tool for influence, power, or control. As jealousy escalates, it creates an atmosphere in which witchcraft, often associated with the desire to manipulate, control, or harm others, may appear as a response to these unresolved emotional and spiritual tensions. Witchcraft, within this context, is not necessarily an external force that enters the church from outside but something that arises within from the very dynamics of envy and rivalry. In fact, umona and witchcraft might be seen as two sides of the same coin. While one operates through emotional and personal implication, the other operates through obvious actions, often with the intent to undermine or harm. Both are deeply intertwined with power structures, spiritual authority, and the desire for control over one's destiny in a community. As such, understanding witchcraft in the church requires an exploration of how umona raises and fosters environments in which accusations of witchcraft are common. Where the boundaries between spiritual life and personal rivalry are blurred.

Mrs. Mchunu, a pastor's wife with 18 years of dedicated service alongside her husband at their church in Stanger, exudes warmth and wit as she shares her insightful thoughts on the intricate relationships between witchcraft, Christianity, and umona. Her infectious laughter and candid demeanour create a sense of comfort, allowing for a deeper exploration of these complex and often misunderstood topics.

> The Bible says we create with our mouths. And somebody who has umona they will even go to the extent of speaking. When you are speaking ill, I am not happy with how they are progressive, how they are getting on with their lives, I don't want to see them flourishing. That already is bewitching. That is bewitching for me. That is why I connect umona to witchcraft.
>
> It does add in witchcraft, because in the event that one is not able to get their act of umona, at the level of words, that is when people start getting into these ugly acts. Of desiring death, desiring instability, desiring mayhem for others, so their lives will be chaotic.

As we transition from the church's perspective on umona to Mrs. Mchunu's account, a critical connection emerges between umona and witchcraft. Mrs. Mchunu anchors her insight in biblical scripture, emphasizing that "we create with our mouths" (Proverbs 18:21). This creative power, she notes, can be used for both good and evil. When individuals utter malicious desires, wishing harm, death, or instability upon others, they not only manifest umona but also engage in a form of witchcraft. This thoughtful observation illuminates the sinister path by which umona can morph into witchcraft. In this context, the church's denial of umona and witchcraft within its ranks appears increasingly complex. While church members, like everyone else, inevitably experience umona, this emotion can, if left unchecked, degenerate into witchcraft. The boundaries between umona and witchcraft become increasingly blurred, and the church's stance on these issues begins to seem more ambiguous. Mrs. Mchunu's testimony serves as a poignant reminder that the lines between positive and negative emotions, as well as between umona and witchcraft, are often dangerously thin.

In conclusion, this chapter highlights a significant paradox within Christian spaces. While they present themselves as communities of faith where social differences should not matter, the lived reality of church life often contradicts this. The findings show that the church's emphasis on moral purity, equality before God, and spiritual fellowship creates an environment where, instead of fostering unity, competition and rivalry thrive. This dynamic is fuelled by the close-knit nature of church communities, which resemble familial relationships, as discussed in Chapter 1. These relationships, while promoting solidarity, also create fertile ground for comparison, envy, and the pursuit of personal agendas, which are often masked as expressions of faith or spiritual commitment. The church community, as illustrated by participants such as Pastor Mselekhu and Hlengwa, becomes a site where individuals actively seek favours from leaders or attempt to gain spiritual prominence. This is done by performing more faith, displaying public acts of devotion, and leveraging their position within the community for personal gain. This use of the church community to attend to individual agendas demonstrates that the idea of equality before God is often undermined by social competition and spiritual insecurities. The findings indicate that, rather than erasing social difference, the church's structure actually amplifies these disparities through its hierarchical and competitive practices.

The close-knit bonds formed within these spaces encourage constant comparison, where success in faith or material wealth becomes a measure of spiritual worth. In this way, umona

is not an external force invading the church but an internal presence, nurtured by the very relational structure that churches sell as a model of spiritual equality. Moreover, the findings highlight how individuals use the church as a platform to pursue their personal agendas, provides the foundation for witchcraft to emerge. As participants like Mrs. Mchunu suggest, unchecked umona, which festers in these competitive environments, can turn into witchcraft. This aligns with the argument that witchcraft does not enter the church from the outside but grows from within, nurtured by the social dynamics of rivalry and comparison that dominate church life.

In contrast to the literature, which often positions umona as an external invasion on Christian beliefs (Makhoathi 2021, Baloyi 2014), this research demonstrates that the tensions between spiritual equality and social comparison are embedded within the church's structure. These findings suggest that the church, while advocating for unity and equality, perpetuates the conditions for spiritual competition and jealousy to thrive. The church thus becomes a host of the broader societal tensions discussed in Chapter 1, where familial relationships and close social bonds are sites of competition. Ultimately, this chapter challenges the notion that Christian communities in South Africa are immune to the very dynamics of umona and witchcraft they claim to reject. By failing to address the deep-seated rivalries and the use of the community for personal gain, the church not only perpetuates these tensions but becomes a breeding ground for the very forces it attempts to deny.

Akugcini Lana- It Does Not End Here

As I entered KwaMashu, the grey sky seemed to mirror the township's tumultuous past. A gentle drizzle cast a melancholic mood, and the 1 pm traffic added to the sense of gloom. The only sound was the pattern of rain against my windshield and the occasional blare of a train in the distance. Taxis zoomed up and down the streets, competing for passengers headed to town or other areas. I noticed that people opted for the train as a more affordable alternative, despite its reputation for being unsafe. As I drove through the streets, I was struck by the densely packed shacks, seemingly stacked on top of each other. This stark landscape reflected the harsh realities of KwaMashu's history, shaped by the Apartheid government's forced removals of black people from urban areas to townships in the 1950s. Despite the challenges, the community's resilience was evident. Children laughed and played soccer with their neighbours, dodging cars and running around with icy treats to beat the heat. Young men

gathered in groups, chatting and looking around, while I remained vigilant, mindful of my cousin's warning about the township's high crime rates. The scars of the past were still visible, particularly the devastating impact of the Zuma protests during Covid-19, which led to looting and the destruction of the local shopping centre. However, as I passed the newly built centre, I saw people walking in and out, a testament to the community's determination to rebuild and thrive. I parked my car on the side of the road, taking in the sights and sounds of KwaMashu. Despite its complexities and challenges, the township exuded a sense of hope and resilience, a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is always a chance for renewal and growth. I locked my car and double checked pulling at the doors. The stroll towards a quaint yellow house I met with some anxiety but I reassured myself that all would be fine. Once I reached the black sharp gate of the home, the Nduna, appeared with a grin that almost couldn't be seen as his beard covered it. He ushered me into his home as his wife offered me my drink and snack of choice. As I spoke to the Nduna about his stories of umona he mentioned one that had caught my attention.

A child went to her next-door neighbour's house to have her hair braided, as the neighbour was known for doing hair. Upon returning home, the child told her mother that the person who had done her hair (the neighbour) had accused her, the mother, of being a witch and claimed that she had performed witchcraft on them. In a state of anger, the mother stormed over to the Nduna to lodge a complaint, shouting about the accusation. When the Nduna asked her if she had ever practiced witchcraft, the mother heatedly denied it. The Nduna, with calmness, advised the mother not to be so distressed, suggesting that if she was innocent, there was no need to take such accusations seriously. He stated that since the child had made the accusation, it could not be treated as a serious matter. "A child speaks things they don't understand," he said. He then suggested that the issue should be resolved within the family and that the mother should discuss it with her neighbour directly. The Nduna, however, also believed that the situation had deeper roots, as the two neighbours had not been on good terms for some time. If they had a cordial relationship, he argued, this issue could have been cleared up without escalating.

This story highlights how easily accusations of witchcraft emerge and the lasting impact they have on community relationships. The child's claim was not based on a full understanding of events but rather an interpretation, shaped by underlying tensions between the families. In this case, umona appears to be a driving force, creating an atmosphere where suspicion can

flourish. The mother's reaction further shows how umona disrupts relationships, altering existing tensions into open conflict.

The Nduna's response provides an important perspective on how communities manage such conflicts. While he suggests that direct communication between neighbours could resolve the issue, he also acknowledges that once suspicion takes root, it can spread beyond the individuals involved. His decision to de-escalate the situation by keeping it within private discussion rather than bringing it before the community reflects a strategy of containment. However, his observation that unresolved issues deepen existing fractures suggests that umona, when left unaddressed, can continue to shape relationships in more sinister ways. This reflects a key theme of the chapter. While accusations are often made in moments of heightened emotion, the challenge lies in managing the long-term social effects they generate.

This chapter argues that umona is a socially rooted force. Specifically, one that according to community leaders, can be managed and even prevented through collective practices of resolution and dialogue. Rather than framing umona as an individual moral failing, this chapter emphasizes how it moves through shared social structures such as kinship, neighbourly ties, and local leadership. The consequences of umona are rarely individual; they are felt collectively. Drawing on ethnographic accounts, the chapter demonstrates that community leaders view umona not only as a destabilizing force but also as a relational challenge. It is one that requires intervention before it escalates into more serious accusations or conflict. In this way, the chapter highlights both the ways in which suspicion travels through social networks and the community-driven efforts to contain its spread. These are efforts that persist even in contexts of pre-existing tensions or fractured trust. This chapter draws on anthropological literature to better understand the dynamics of umona as it manifests in church spaces and broader community life. This review centres on social tensions, moral ambiguity, and the social life of accusation. Concepts such as moral judgment, trust, closeness, and suspicion are central to understanding how umona becomes not only emotionally charged but socially significant. The literature serves to amplify and deepen the analysis of how umona arises within intimate relationships and takes on moral meaning.

Research on jealousy and envy has often treated these emotions as internal states. Yet anthropological scholarship invites a shift in focus toward their social effects and moral framing. Scholars such as Hughes et al. (2019) argue, emotions like resentment and envy

often surface in contexts where success is morally ambiguous, and where prosperity is admired but also suspected. In such moments, individuals may accuse others of harbouring umona, not simply to explain discomfort, but to signal moral disapproval or social threat. The accusation itself becomes a social tool, capable of changing relationships and shifting blame.

This perspective is further developed in the work of Ana Mijić (2021), whose research on self-victimization and collective blame in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina reveals how moral positioning can be used strategically. Individuals often portray themselves as targets of envy or spiritual attack in order to assert moral innocence, deflect criticism, or garner social support. Mijić (2021) shows how claims of victimhood can become a form of moral capital, which is directly relevant to contexts where umona is not simply used to describe emotions but to reposition oneself within fragile social hierarchies. This insight aligns with Hughes et al. (2019), who emphasize how jealousy, resentment, and suspicion can operate as deeply social forces. These emotions are often entangled with power, closeness, and inequality, which end up producing moral tension within spaces that are supposed to represent harmony or care. Far from being fleeting or irrational, such emotions reflect deeper anxieties about fairness, reciprocity, and belonging.

These dynamics become particularly pronounced in church spaces, where ideals of unity and love are stated, yet congregants still find themselves in competitive, unequal, or morally fraught relationships. The notion that closeness breeds suspicion is a powerful insight that emerges across this literature. Accusations of envy or spiritual attack rarely occur between strangers. They are most often directed at those who are intimately known, such as family members, friends, neighbours, or fellow believers. This mirrors what Peter Geschiere (2013) has described in his work on witchcraft and politics: the contradiction that the most intimate relationships are also the most suspect. In his earlier work, Geschiere (1997) explores how witchcraft accusations often emerge in kinship or communal ties precisely because those relationships are marked by expectations of trust, reciprocity, and loyalty. These expectations are fragile and easily unsettled.

Building on this, Geschiere (2013) emphasizes how trust becomes a risky attainment in contexts where individuals are both materially interdependent and morally unsure towards one another. He argues that trust is not a given, but a fragile process of ongoing negotiation, especially in environments where the moral and spiritual intersect. In such settings, accusations of umona reflect not just interpersonal tensions, but a deeper crisis of moral

certainty. The church, while framed as a space of spiritual refuge, is not immune to these dynamics. In fact, as Geschiere (2013) suggests, such spaces can become amplifiers of mistrust precisely because they are supposed to be holy and morally clear, yet are still deeply embedded in social hierarchies, spiritual competition, and social closeness.

The notion of uncertain socialness is central here. As anthropologists have long observed (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991), relationships in close-knit communities often waver between care and competition, support and suspicion. Umona arises not merely because people are envious, but because social ties themselves are unstable terrains, full of mixed emotions and overlapping expectations. It is within this moral uncertainty that jealousy becomes dangerous, not as a feeling alone, but as a form of accusation, a social weapon, or an expression of mistrust. Mijić's (2021) work on collective narratives adds another layer to this understanding. She demonstrates how communities can construct shared victimhood narratives that shape how emotions like jealousy are perceived and organized. Within such frameworks, individuals may see themselves as targets of others' envy, not necessarily because they are successful, but because of the broader social climate creating competition, criticism, and fragile recognition.

Schieman et al. (2017) offer a different angle, emphasizing the role of spiritual beliefs in justifying envy and reinforcing self-worth. Their work suggests that belief in a kind, supportive God can substitute resilience and reduce the emotional sting of social comparison. However, when spiritual hierarchies become sites of competition, as they do in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, even spiritual success can provoke suspicion. The notion of blessings can blur into notions of unfair advantage, and those seen as spiritually elevated may also become targets of jealousy or distrust.

Taken together, this literature reveals that accusations of umona are about social positioning, moral vulnerability, and the fragility of trust in intimate spaces. Accusations are not just reactions to inequality, but expressions of deeper anxieties about relational obligation, recognition, and legitimacy. They emerge within kinship, community, and congregation, especially where the promise of unity often collides with the pressures of social and spiritual competition. These anthropological insights serve to illuminate how umona is not an external threat but something embedded in social structures and moral negotiations. By understanding umona as a force that circulates through relationships, moral talk, and accusations, this

chapter demonstrates how it both fractures and reshapes the very bonds that hold communities together.

Accusations

While umona is widely acknowledged as a force that can fracture relationships and destabilize communities, it also invites analysis of how it is identified, named, and attributed in everyday interactions. One of the most universal aspects of this dynamic is the tendency toward accusation, where the presence of umona is suspected. These accusations carry significant weight, often leading to exclusion, reputational harm, and the weakening of social bonds. What emerges from everyday situations is that people frequently interpret subtle social gestures, such as compliments, expressions of interest, or acts of generosity, as potentially carrying hidden motives. In these moments, uncertainty around another person's intentions can give rise to suspicion—especially in contexts where prior tensions or inequalities are already present. The perception that someone's kindness masks envy or harm speaks to a broader social atmosphere marked by caution and guardedness. Rather than being reducible to misreadings or psychological projections, this phenomenon reflects a wider culture of vigilance that shapes how people relate to one another. It reveals the fine-grained social work that goes into managing closeness, status differences, and vulnerability within communities. Accusations of umona are not simply about identifying emotional states in others. They are part of how people navigate uncertain relationships and regulate social closeness in environments where trust is not taken for granted. Mthembu, the social worker/ sangoma, responded in an animated voice:

> "Oh nawe you have lemoto," that's somebody's statement. You are already indirectly telling me that I'm non-deserving of that car. "Oh iyakhu fanela uyithengephi?", it's an admiration but, "Ah mina I would choose red, not yellow." – Mrs. Mthembu ["Oh you also have this car?", that's somebody's statement. You are already indirectly telling me that I am not deserving of that car. "Oh this suits you, where did you buy it?", it's an admiration but, "ah I would choose red not yellow."]

The suspicion associated with umona often rises through seemingly casual interactions. As Mrs. Mthembu described, people might inspect a price tag or comment on the brand of clothing. These remarks may appear complimentary, but they often carry a second layer a form of subtle inquiry that feels like social probing rather than pure admiration. Such interactions are often understood not as innocent curiosity but as part of what Mrs. Mthembu

called “the small talk that comes with research.” This kind of talk becomes part of a broader social judgment where appearances are scrutinized, and success is carefully monitored. In this way, umona is not only about emotion, but it is a social practice that travels through observation, commentary, and everyday conversation.

Mthiyane's eyes darted around the room, his fingers fidgeting with restless energy. At 33, he had already established himself as a dedicated councillor in Mhathuze, employed by the ANC to serve the needs of his ward. His work is a delicate balancing act, navigating the complexities of service delivery in areas that are both rural and township. As he listened intently to my words, his alert demeanour commanded attention. Though he avoided direct eye contact, his focus was unmistakable, his fingers weaving an intricate pattern as he absorbed every detail. It was clear that Mthiyane was a man deeply invested in his work, driven by a sense of responsibility to his community and a passion for creating positive change.

> “They create a competition amongst themselves, it’s one-sided. Each and every time you do something, they are disgusted. You bought a weave, they are disgusted. When you’ve bought a 12-inch (wig), they buy a 32-inch (wig), and they want you to see that they bought a 32-inch. It’s part of umona.”
> [They create a competition amongst themselves, it’s one-sided. Each and every time you do something they are disgusted. You bought a weave, they are disgusted. When you’ve bought a 12-inch (wig), they buy a 32-inch (wig), and they want you to see that they bought a 32-inch. It’s part of umona.]

As Mthiyane put it, umona can manifest through one-sided competition. Here, comparison becomes a social performance, not just a private feeling. The competition isn’t openly acknowledged, but it’s deeply felt. It reflects how umona can take shape through displays of status not just silent envy, but visible gestures meant to unsettle or assert dominance in everyday life. This reinforces the argument that umona thrives not only in private emotions but in the social dynamics of comparison and competition, which are often displayed outwardly. The Nduna, who intervenes whenever his community has problems, suddenly lifted his body up and exclaimed:

> “Ngisho ngungathiwa siabangani, mawufika nento angikwazi ukuyincoma. ‘Hawu usunelaptop oe, kodwa yimbi kuncono engabe yilenhlobo ethile.’ Kodwa manje uthole ukuthi i-laptop yena akanayo. ‘Wenze ikhanda oe, kodwa kuncono engabe

> ufake u-colour othile.' So uba iowo muntu loyo engabe uyancoma kodwa yonke into oyenzayo uyayigxeka. Akasakwazi ukuncoma into enhle."
> [Even if we were friends, when you come with something, I can't compliment you. "Hawu you have a laptop now, friend, but it's ugly; it would have been better if it was a different type." But now you find out that they don't even have a laptop. "You did your hair, friend, but it would have been better if you had a certain color." So they become that person who should be complimenting, but everything you do, they judge. They don't know how to compliment something nice.]

As Nduna noted, umona often emerges in moments where praise is expected but instead turns into subtle judgment. What appears as casual banter reveals deeper discomfort with another's success. Compliments are withheld or twisted, reflecting how umona often hides behind familiarity, creating tension even in close relationships.

The examples shared by Mrs. Mthembu, Mthiyane, and Nduna highlight how accusations of umona often appear indirectly through subtle social cues. Mrs. Mthembu's example of remarks like "Oh, you also have this car?" or "I would choose red, not yellow" reveals how compliments can be veiled accusations, where admiration quickly turns into critique. As Geschiere (2013) suggests, suspicion thrives in environments of fragile trust, and such interactions, while seemingly innocent, can serve as veiled forms of accusation. Similarly, Mthiyane's description of one-sided competition, such as someone outdoing you with a more extravagant purchase and making sure you notice, shows how comparison becomes an indirect accusation, where envy is performed through acts of display. Nduna further shows how judgments about others' possessions, like a laptop or hairstyle, often replace genuine compliments. These performative judgments expose how people who cannot offer praise instead critique in ways that reflect envy. These ethnographic accounts contribute to the literature by showing that accusations of umona are not always direct but are part of socially embedded performances. They circulate through everyday interactions, where small remarks and comparisons carry the weight of suspicion. Reinforcing Geschiere's (2013) point that such accusations often arise from within relationships, rather than outside of them.

The Resolution of Umona:

While accusations of umona may unfold through subtle remarks, comparisons, and displays of disguised envy, communities also recognize that such tensions cannot be left unchecked.

As the previous section illustrates, umona is not simply a private feeling but a social disruption that moves through everyday encounters. Yet, just as suspicion spreads through social networks, so too do efforts to contain it. In the face of growing mistrust, communities engage in various practices aimed at restoring balance and reaffirming social cohesion. Rather than letting umona escalate into isolation or conflict, local actors often turn to collective forms of resolution. These include dialogue, mediation, and informal interventions, which reflect an understanding that envy is not only a moral issue but a shared social concern. It is through these practices of resolution that communities actively manage umona.

Aya's warm smile and gentle laughter put me at ease as we spoke about her journey as a traditional healer. Currently unemployed and searching for a new opportunity, Aya's passion for her craft was undeniable. With two years of experience under her belt, she chuckled knowingly when I asked about her experiences. "It's been a whole lot," she said, her eyes sparkling with a deep understanding. As a traditional healer, Aya's work was not just about helping others but also about cultivating self-awareness. She believed that this journey had taught her invaluable lessons about herself, both spiritually and physically. Her initiation had marked the beginning of a lifelong path of discovery, and she had been constantly learning and growing ever since. Aya described herself as living in two worlds, navigating the complexities of traditional healing within a modern context. Her words hinted at a profound sense of purpose, a deep connection to her ancestors and the natural world. As we spoke, it became clear that Aya's journey as a traditional healer was not just a profession, but a way of life.

> "We normally go to waters, we pray, there is fasting involved. It depends on that person as well, not the same process is used on everybody, it’s different according to the situation and on the circumstances of that person."

This statement reflects how umona can be addressed in a way that acknowledges both individual circumstances and communal support. The use of water, prayer, and fasting highlights the spiritual and ritualistic dimensions of resolution. By emphasizing that different processes are used for different people, Aya points to the importance of context and personalized attention in managing umona. This approach builds positive relationships because it fosters a sense of care and sensitivity, ensuring that people are not treated with a one-size-fits-all mentality. It encourages understanding and compassion, rather than judgment, and creates space for individuals to feel seen and supported in their specific

challenges. It also reinforces community cohesion through shared spiritual practices that are meant to heal, restore, and reconnect individuals, ultimately strengthening relational ties. The warm spirited Mthembu whose purpose and passion is to assist people through her job as a social worker, encourages for people to have compassion. She enjoys ensuring people's needs are met in every aspect which is why she accepted her gift as a sangoma with open arms.

> "Counselling, therapy, helping them come across, adjust to issues. Helping to eventually accept and help them to eventually cope with the situation. Some people won't see the need until counselling and therapy points them to the real issue."

Mrs. Mthembu's statement highlights how counselling and therapy can serve as key tools in resolving umona by helping individuals confront underlying issues. Her mention of helping people adjust to challenges and eventually accept and cope with situations points to the role of guidance and support in addressing emotional and relational tensions. This approach builds positive relationships by creating a safe space for individuals to explore their feelings and motivations, fostering understanding and emotional growth. It acknowledges that not everyone recognizes the impact of umona on their lives immediately, but through counselling and therapy, individuals can be guided to reflect on their actions and resolve conflicts in a constructive manner. This process not only helps in the healing of personal wounds but also promotes healthier, more compassionate interactions within the community, as individuals learn to navigate their emotions and relationships with greater empathy and resilience. The Nduna's job is to serve his community, as his father did, with pride. He takes his job seriously and although he is ready to retire, he has done his duty in ensuring his community is at peace and their space is maintained well. He calmly responds with a voice full of wisdom:

> "Ngihlezi ngibiza i-community ibe nomhlangano. Izinto ezinjalo siyazi khuluma emhlanganweni. Siyeluleka ngosuku nosuku."
> [I always call the community and we have a meeting. We talk about things like that at the meeting. We advise from day-to-day.]

Nduna's statement reflects the importance of communal dialogue and collective intervention in addressing umona. By calling the community together and holding meetings, he emphasizes the role of shared wisdom and collective advice in resolving relational issues. This approach highlights the power of community-led conflict resolution, where individuals can speak openly about tensions and misunderstandings, fostering mutual understanding and reconciliation. Such gatherings build positive relationships by creating an environment where

transparency and accountability are encouraged. They offer a space for individuals to express concerns and receive support, reducing the likelihood of tensions escalating. The communal nature of these meetings also reinforces social cohesion, as people come together not only to address conflicts but also to strengthen their bonds through shared resolution practices. This process ensures that the community, rather than relying solely on individual efforts, works collaboratively to manage and prevent the destructive effects of umona. Beyond being a pastors wife, Mrs Mchunu's joyful spirit makes her an individual church members feel safe opening up to. Her abilities to speak with kindness and meet people with empathy make her the best individual to sit with and to share your troubles with. Mrs Mchunu's undivided devotion to the Lord makes her speak with grace as she says:

> "Umona exists in everyone's mind and heart, but it calls for one's ability to be in self-control. Right now, you are entertaining an ugly spirit, an ugly attitude. Get rid of that attitude, take it off your mind. For example, if I see someone who is doing so well, maybe in a business I would have wanted to pursue. I need to recall my mind and applaud the person."
>
> As a believer, I have to be content in who I am and what my God can do. At given times, I may not have all that I desire to have but I am content in who He is as a provider for me.

Mrs. Mchunu's statements highlight the internal process of managing umona by emphasizing self-control and contentment. The first part highlights the necessity of overcoming the negative emotional response to others' successes, suggesting that umona is not only a mental but also a spiritual issue. By advising individuals to "get rid of that attitude" and "take it off your mind," she points to the importance of actively resisting jealousy and transforming the way one perceives others' achievements. This act of acknowledging and applauding others' success rather than harbouring resentment offers a constructive path toward defusing umona before it escalates into destructive behaviour. The second statement reflects a spiritual dimension of resolution, advocating for contentment in one's own life circumstances. Mrs. Mchunu's perspective suggests that spiritual beliefs play a critical role in counteracting umona. By aligning oneself with faith and trust in a higher power, individuals can manage feelings of jealousy by focusing on gratitude and what they already have, rather than what they lack. This helps promote a mindset of acceptance and peace, which can weaken the grip of umona and foster positive relations with others. Together, these statements illustrate that

umona can be mitigated through both personal discipline and spiritual grounding, creating a healthier, more harmonious community dynamic. Brian, the young councillor from Durban, takes himself very seriously especially when it comes to his work. He manages his ward and ensures that service delivery is kept to a high standard. He said with conviction:

> "Wonke umuntu unayo i-jealousy, envy, hatred and all that. Kuya ngawe uwumuntu ukuthi uzikhuze. Mawumuntu mele uzikhuze. Kuqala ngokuba satisfied, ukujabulela onakho. Yabona lento okuthiwa i-gratitude, contentment."
> [Everyone has jealousy, envy, hatred and all that. It goes with you as a person to stop yourself. If you are a person, you have to stop yourself. It starts with being satisfied, being happy with what you have. You see that thing that's called gratitude, contentment.]

Brian's statement reinforces the idea that umona is a universal emotion, but one that requires individual responsibility to manage. He highlights that everyone experiences feelings of jealousy, envy, and even hatred at some point, yet it is the personal choice to control these feelings that ultimately matters. Brian emphasizes that managing umona begins with cultivating satisfaction and happiness with one's own circumstances, which is closely tied to gratitude and contentment. This perspective suggests that individuals hold the power to overcome negative emotions by consciously choosing to focus on what they have rather than what they lack. By fostering a mindset of gratitude, people can prevent umona from taking root and negatively impacting their relationships. This connects well with the broader theme that umona is not just a personal struggle but a relational one that requires conscious effort and self-regulation to prevent its destructive consequences.

This chapter has explored the ways in which umona is recognized, addressed, and resolved within communities, highlighting the collective interventions that counteract the potential social crumbling caused by jealousy and suspicion. Through ethnographic accounts, we have seen how community leaders, traditional healers, and religious figures work to mitigate the consequences of umona through spiritual rituals, counselling, and public dialogue. These findings challenge dominant academic perspectives that often frame umona as an individualized, internal emotion or a moral failure. Instead, the ethnography presented here reveals that umona is fundamentally relational, shaped by social structures, and managed through communal mechanisms.

The literature on umona tends to emphasize self-control and personal development to overcome jealousy. While these perspectives acknowledge umona as a disruptive force, they do not fully account for the social embeddedness of the emotion or the ways in which communities actively work to contain its effects. Scholars such as Peter Geschiere (1997) have shown how jealousy and suspicion are deeply tied to broader structures of power, witchcraft discourses, and social comparison in African contexts. Similarly, Mijić (2015) emphasizes the role of spiritual and communal practices in managing emotions linked to social competition. Thus further supporting the argument that umona is not merely an internal struggle but a phenomenon that requires collective intervention. Hughes (2012) also highlights how moral economies within religious spaces influence the navigation of envy and spiritual rivalry, aligning with the ethnographic findings presented here. The findings from this chapter contrasts with individualistic views. This is by illustrating how umona is publicly acknowledged and collectively managed, rather than being left as a private burden for individuals to resolve on their own. Community meetings, spiritual interventions, and therapeutic practices appear as key mechanisms for addressing umona in ways that reaffirm social bonds rather than leaving them in ruins

Building on the arguments of the previous chapters, this chapter has further demonstrated that umona is not an external threat imposed upon communities but an emotion that arises within close social relationships. Chapter 1 established that umona is an inevitable part of social life, particularly among those in close proximity where economic and social disparities heighten feelings of envy and competition. Chapter 2 then extended this argument into the church space, revealing that umona is both denied and yet actively present within religious communities, shaping spiritual rivalries and perceptions of witchcraft. This chapter has built on these foundations by showing that communities do not submissively accept the disruptive potential of umona. Instead they engage in structured interventions to restore balance and prevent its escalation into conflict or exclusion.

Ultimately, this chapter has highlighted the necessity of understanding umona not simply as an emotion but as a social force that both disrupts and reinforces communal ties. The strategies are used to address umona through recognition that envy is not merely an internal struggle but a shared social concern. This challenges views that treat umona as a problem of individual morality or self-discipline. Instead it situates it within broader processes of social cohesion, negotiation, and conflict resolution. As we move toward the conclusion of this paper, it becomes clear that umona is not just a reflection of interpersonal envy. However it is

a window into the larger structures of inequality, competition, and solidarity that shape everyday life in South African communities.

Conclusion

This research has examined umona as a socially embedded force that operates within intimate relationships and community structures. The study has demonstrated that umona is not merely an individual emotional experience but a collective phenomenon that is deeply entangled with issues of morality, trust, accusation, and resolution. Through the integration of ethnographic data and anthropological literature, this research has argued that umona plays a crucial role in shaping social relations, particularly in South African Christian communities.

This thesis argued that umona is not merely an individual emotion but a socially rooted and structurally reinforced force that shapes relationships, community dynamics, and spiritual beliefs. It manifests within close social ties, is reinforced by religious spaces, and can be actively managed through collective interventions.

Chapter 1: This chapter laid the foundation for understanding umona by exploring how participants defined and experienced it in their daily lives. The ethnographic material revealed that umona is not a simple case of jealousy but a complex emotion that blends admiration with resentment, often accompanied by ill-intent. Mthembu described umona as "hate-based admiration," while Nduna emphasized its embodied nature, explaining that "jealousy starts in the eye, then tells the heart." These insights challenge psychological definitions of envy as a passive or internalized feeling, positioning umona as an active and relational force. The chapter also demonstrated that umona is most prevalent in close social relationships among family members, friends, colleagues, and even fellow church members. Participants such as Brian and Hlengwa illustrated that umona operates within a framework of perceived fairness, where one person's success is seen as a threat to another's social standing. This aligns with anthropological discussions on envy as a form of moral commentary rather than a private emotion. Furthermore, the emphasis on relational proximity highlights how umona thrives not among strangers but within trusted circles, where relationships are already charged with expectations of reciprocity and fairness.

Chapter 2: It explored the entanglement between umona, witchcraft, and Christian practice. The central argument was that Christian spaces often deny the presence of umona and

witchcraft within themselves, yet umona can take root within Christian ideals, allowing witchcraft to emerge from within rather than from an external force. Ethnographic accounts illustrated how church members interpret success, misfortune, and spiritual authority through the lens of umona, leading to accusations of witchcraft. Mrs. Mchunu articulated this connection by arguing that words alone can bewitch: "The Bible says we create with our mouths. And somebody who has umona, they will even go to the extent of speaking. That is why I connect umona to witchcraft." Her insight highlights how accusations do not merely reflect envy but also serve as moral interventions within Christian communities. The literature by Geschiere (2013) and Comaroff & Comaroff (1991) supported this analysis by demonstrating how accusations of spiritual wrongdoing often emerge within close-knit, morally uncertain environments. This chapter also demonstrated that church leaders like Pastor Mselekhu and Hlengwa recognize umona as a universal issue. However, they frame it within religious discourse, positioning it as a sin that must be overcome through faith. Yet, the very act of denying umona in church spaces allows it to thrive in the shadows, fostering an environment where accusations of witchcraft can flourish. This contradiction demonstrates that the church, becomes a space where envy festers in veiled ways, often surfacing in spiritualized accusations.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 examined how accusations of umona circulate and how communities attempt to resolve the tensions that arise from them. This chapter argued that while umona has the potential to fracture communities, various social strategies exist to contain and counteract its effects. Participants described everyday forms of umona, such as passive-aggressive remarks, hidden competition, and performative admiration. Mrs. Mthembu illustrated this with examples of indirect statements that signal resentment: "Oh, you also have this car?" or "Oh, it seems you have taste." These subtle accusations reveal how umona is embedded in social interactions and does not always manifest as overt hostility. The ethnographic material also demonstrated that accusations of umona are not always valid but can be used as a form of social positioning. Despite its troublesome potential, participants also described ways in which umona can be managed and resolved. Aya emphasized the role of prayer, fasting, and spiritual cleansing, while Mrs. Mthembu highlighted the importance of therapy and counselling in helping individuals confront their feelings of envy. The Nduna emphasized the communal nature of resolution, describing how community meetings serve as spaces for addressing tensions before they escalate. Brian and Mrs. Mchunu framed contentment and self-discipline as crucial in overcoming umona, suggesting that jealousy can

be controlled through self-awareness and gratitude. These resolution strategies demonstrate that umona is not an inevitable force of destruction but a negotiable aspect of social life. Scholars such as Geschiere (1997), Hughes (2006), and Mijić (2021) have highlighted how jealousy and suspicion are tied to structures of power, witchcraft discourses, and social competition. This chapter's findings show that umona is publicly acknowledged and collectively managed rather than being left as an individual burden.

Anthropological Contributions of This Study

This research contributes to anthropological discussions on jealousy, morality, and social cohesion in several key ways:

1. **Umona as a Social and Moral Force**: This study positions umona as a relational force that shapes community life. It demonstrates that umona is not just a destructive emotion but also a means of negotiating moral worth, success, and social order.
2. **Accusations as Moral Explanation**: The research builds on anthropological literature on accusations by showing how claims of umona function as moral statements. Accusations of jealousy or witchcraft are not just expressions of envy but strategic interferences in social hierarchies.
3. **The Role of Religion in Managing Umona**: This study extends existing research on religion and jealousy by illustrating how Christian spaces, despite their preaching of unity and love, become sites where umona thrives.
4. **Resolution as a Community Process**: While much anthropological work focuses on the disruptive effects of jealousy, this research highlights how communities actively work to mitigate umona's impact.

Final Thoughts

Ultimately, this research challenges the assumption that umona is an individual moral failing or an uncontrollable social force. Instead, it argues that umona is deeply woven into the fabric of social life. Shaping how people relate to one another, make moral claims, and navigate social inequalities. By situating umona within church spaces and broader community dynamics, this study reveals how envy is both a threat to and a product of intimacy, trust, and social proximity. In sum, this research has provided a nuanced, ethnographically grounded understanding of umona, demonstrating its role as both a disruptive and a structuring force that can also be resolved in South African communities.

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Anthropology Ethics Committee

Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Clearance Certificate

Protocol Number: ANTH2024/04/09

Project Title: “Umuntu omyama akafuni umuntu omyama aye phambili” – Narratives of Jealousy in KwaMashu, eThekwini

Investigator’s Name: Ms Nothando Mdlalose (2172213)

Department: Anthropology

Date Reviewed: 19 April 2024

Decision of Committee: Approved Unconditionally

Risk Level: Low Risk

Date of Approval: 21 May 2024

Expiry Date: 22 May 2025

Issue Date of Certificate: 23 May 2024

Chairperson: _____

Professor Julia Hornberger

CC supervisor: Professor Julia Hornberger

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

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

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I 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.

_____N.P. Mdlalose_____ __27 March 2024_____