

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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Non-Traditional Masculinities: ulwaluko and Xhosa transgender woman

‘GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN’

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# Declaration

I declare that this Masters research is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise. This research is submitted towards the degree of Masters in Development Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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Asanda Madosi

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# 1. Introduction

‘Leliphi eli’nxeba nithetha ngalo?’ asks Phumelele Nkomozake, transgender activist and blogger in her titular blog post. A Xhosa transgender woman, she asks ‘which wound is it, you are speaking about?’ Through this question, Phumelele Nkomozake accounts for her experiences and establishes her positionality on the controversy and debates that gripped South Africa upon the release of the film *Inxeba*.

*Inxeba*, directed by John Trengove and starring Nakhane, Bongile Mantsai, and Niza Jay, tells the story of a queer Xhosa city boy sent by his father to the mountain in his village to go through the rite of passage (isiko loLwaluko) from boyhood to manhood. Based on Thando Mqolozana’s 2009 debut novel ‘A man who is not a man’ the gripping narrative sparked a popular debate on who is entitled to tell the stories of ulwaluko (initiation), a common cultural practice amongst amaXhosa considered shrouded in secrecy (Wanner, 2018).

Kwa Xhosa when a boy has come of age yo lwaluko, it usually time marked by celebrations, excitement, and fear of the unknown. The decision to take a ‘boy’ to initiation school is usually in consultation with the family and, members of the community, who select ikhankatha (nurse and teacher) and incibi (traditional surgeon) for the initiate. Historically age was not a factor as initiates undertook the rite of passage whenever they decided to identify themselves as a Xhosa adult. Ulwaluko historically lasted between three months to one year (Paterson, 1777-9), with the initial month dedicated to healing the wound and the rest of the time learning about Xhosa culture, clan and history (as to know where you’ve come from), moral teachings of Ubuntu and codes of conduct as a Xhosa adult.

The sensation of the movie, sparking a national conversation on the role and expectation of heteronormativity within the rite of passage, was considered controversial as it centered on tradition and sexuality in the mountain, depicting a homosexual love story between the caregivers of the initiates.

Nkomozake (2017) elaborates on her experiences as “ I have gone through this ritual, it is sacred and it only belongs to the Xhosa people, and people who have gone to the mountain, and the Xhosa families, no one else... Sexualities are very important and it is very much important to speak about homosexuality, and other queer sexualities in this ritual, for it is very heteronormative. Indeed, hyper masculinity does exist in this space, and it is oppressive for other bodies, especially the

people who do not subscribe to this binary. I did not when I participated in this ritual. I too felt excluded, as a trans womxn”.

In South Africa, popular representations of the “transgender” have long centered on terms, narratives, and categories that originated elsewhere, often in the North. For instance,

‘Your Body Is A Battleground’, Barbara Kruger’s iconic pro-choice slogan and the rallying cry for the 1989 Women’s March on Washington, found new resonance in a Mail & Guardian piece by Moshibudi Ratlebjane (22 July 2016) on the struggles transgendered South Africans face in rural areas. The newspaper piece included the story of Malwande (Wandy) Onceya, a transwoman in East London who, at the age of 18, had gone through ulwaluko, a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood practiced by Xhosa speaking people.

Like Wandy,

Transgender women the world over have varied experiences that are structured by the lived experiences of their identity and the contexts in which such identities unfold. Yet their identities as Transgender subjects are mediated by powerful taxonomies that have their origins in the Global North. Such conceptualizations of gender and sexuality tend to homogenize and essentialize Transgender African subjects; identities. In this thesis, I set out to explore the ontological politics that shape how Transgender African women answer questions about who – and indeed, what – they are. These answers are part of a longer history of western representations of difference among colonized people since the 1500s, which ‘forget’ the diverse experiences and identities of African subjects compared to those afforded individuality and uniqueness (Halberstam, 2012). Even today, Mainstream (neoliberal capitalist) western American feminists have dominated the discourses about Transgender well outside the context of Anglo-America, attaining a hegemonic position on transgender issues and scholarship (Smith, 2017). This influences who writes about and researches transgender issues,, who is a legitimate and listened to research informant,s and how they understand their own gender identity. In this thesis, I challenge the hegemony of western epistemologies of Transgender, both ‘provincializing’ Transgender as a category with a specific origin story within the culture of the Global North and asking about the lived experience of those who content with this concept in Africa and their struggles to appropriate Transgender as a liberatory idea.

In doing so, this thesis answers Katrina Roen’s call in ‘Transgender Theory and Embodiment’ for work on Transgender life that resists what they call “transgender ethnocentrism” and Bibi Bakare-

Yusuf appeal to the construction of an "embodied gender difference that is grounded in the complex realities of African women's everyday experiences," rather than over-simplification of African gender by western sources (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003). Specifically, this thesis aims to question and understand gender as an Africa-specific 'becoming' (Ahmed, 2006).

My thinking of Sara Ahmed's "becoming" is through the lenses of Danai Mupotsa in her paper 'Being/Becoming an Undutiful Daughter' (2017), as "awareness of the cartographies or relations of power that one participates in... referencing Bakare-Yusuf (2003) becoming a woman as thinking about the body as situation... the relation between being/becoming woman requires retention of the body as the site of difference, a strategic site of complex, multiple and shifting consciousness" (2017, 53). I draw on Ahmed's becoming to depart from the construction and maintenance of essentialist transgender identities, instead documenting and analyzing particular notions of what becoming trans means in South Africa for Xhosa transgender women. Unlike western sources, I strive to interpret social, traditional, and cultural customs through the framing of Bakare-Yusuf (2003) "as unfinished projects that are continuously being transformed by cultural actors" (1), which have gone to have significant influences on kwa Xhosa ne isiXhosa nama siko wama Xhosa, that have played a pivotal part in the construction of identities amongst Xhosa people. Xhosa transgender women have an ongoing negotiation and relation with their tradition including performances of rites and rituals. Though navigating and negotiating Xhosa cultural spaces is through the performance of one's gender which has been 'underpinned' by one's born biological sex, Xhosa transgender women, are reorienting the fixedness and temporality of gender even as they defy western-centric notions of what Transgender is and what it does.

Informing this research is the growing need to develop African transgender scholarship that speaks of the nuances and varied experiences of African genders and sexualities. The research will focus on ulwaluko, a rite of passage many Xhosa transgender woman might have been confronted with as a possibility of having been born male. The significance and importance of ulwaluko amongst Xhosa identifying people are undeniable as it has been in practice for over a thousand years that has gone to be associated with aspects of Xhosa tradition and culture (Mfecane, 2016). As much of the extant scholarly literature on Transgender subjectivity emphasizes identity and social construction, my thesis attends to the embodied materiality of Transgender subject-hood and 'becoming' Transgender, disrupting nature/culture binaries that differentiate a social identity from embodied gender practice.

A transgender embodiment in Xhosa traditional spaces of customs disrupts hegemonic understandings of gender dualism or the binaries of masculinity and femininity, amongst Xhosa people. How transgender operates in traditional spaces also contributes to a too often western, urban oriented transgender, queer, feminist and masculinity studies literature. This rupture or nonconformity in the embodiment of spaces by transgender women influences and queers heteronormative and hyper-masculine spaces such as ubuhlanti (kraal). In the successful completion of ulwaluko, a rite which influences one's conceptions of becoming in Xhosa tradition or custom a man, gaining respect, visibility and personhood privileging heteronormative gender hierarchies, cultural markers and gender performance is seemingly denying amongst many issues of transgender Xhosa woman.

The lived experiences of transgender women are complex and varied, especially when culture organizes the understanding of gender through binary lenses and informs the lives we live in. As discussed thus far, within trans-scholarship and framing for this thesis, the role of the body challenges some of the prevailing thinking and framing of gender. In Xhosa tradition, there is a strong emphasis to reproduce hetero-patriarchy and gender norms. After conducting interviews with a Transgender subject and attempting a phenomenological approach to this thesis' research, there was a need to shift beyond the parameters that I had sought out to understand the lived experiences of my subject. I needed to move my research to spaces where my subject was is comfortable, that is a Trans safe place. In doing so, I aimed to; engage with not only her but the way she relates to the world she helps assemble.

In the report that follows, my aim is to look at ulwaluko in more detail. I ask, what constitutes the rite of passage and how does it affect transgender women? As ulwaluko is meant to produce or confer statuses upon those who become men through it, so in turn, we can argue that it reproduces heteronormative gender binaries and patriarchal hierarchies. My discussion of ulwaluko is broken into two sections: first the emergence of heteropatriarchal hierarchy and how it divides and organizes masculinities amongst Xhosa people (performative nature of manhood). I attend to how such hierarchical practice results in the social ostracism faced by broader LGBTIQ+. Secondly, I focus on Xhosa transgender women's experiences of ulwaluko taken from one-one interviews with Wandy for a period of 6 months, and a three subject focus group with Wandy, Mama Afrika and an Anonymous subject.

For many who are LGBTIQ+, coming to understand intrinsically and unequivocally one's identity and biography comes through a process of relating to a complicated history and culture which is constantly under negotiated. My aim here is to try to understand Trans\* African identities in

order to unpack and contextualize without universalizing western hegemonic ideologies and perceptions have come to dominate the way we have come to construct, think and relate to our bodies often citing cultural (African) understanding of the body as oppressive to social constructions of identity.

As my rationale, was to move away from transgender single stories, this informed the methods I would use to frame my research and inform field work. The themes that emerged out of the interviews on lived experiences are further discussed in my reflections on my data findings.

Violence, representation, feminist solidarities, family and institutionalism are some of the challenges that confront transgender realities in the Eastern Cape. The question of social acceptance remains a prevailing challenge.

## **1.2 Language, Identity and Health**

“Transgender transforms as it travels, taking on meaning in relation to bodies, national homes, institutional frameworks and imaginaries. Transgender has become a globally applicable term. Historically emerging in the Global North, it is predicated on movement. As an analytical category it encompasses concepts such as borders, imaginaries, and ‘home/s’. It is at once about an individual’s physical body and the lived experience of the everyday, while also addressing theoretical issues of interpellation and categorisation within the social body. It is, at its heart, presented as infinitely malleable and yet at times, paradoxically, functions as a term that carries a distinctive kind of analytical and ideological fixity. As a term, it is also a site of travel, accruing baggage and meaning through its traversing of countries, cultures and varied sexual institutional frameworks” (Camma, 2016, 19)

*Wandy: Its not easy, its difficult in terms of identification because as I said before man I was identifying myself as gay for a long time and lonto leyo yandi worrisha ukuthi there are people out there that don't know identity zaba and indaba yalama gama its difficult for us because you will find out that ukuthi lama gama akhona and then you fall under lo category but bha bizwa ngama gama amakhulu. Academic words, you know. It is more difficult, difficult for us to identify yourself even if you identify yourself uqonde ey' I'm not sure ukuthi ndiyi lento ngoku, uyabona*

*Asanda: So, what is it that makes it more difficult? I think that is what I am trying to understand. Is it because the words are academic (Wandy interjects ‘Mmmmm-agreeing’) beyond the academic aspect of it is there anything else in terms of umm*



*general language that is being used around trans, do you find it accessible for people? (Wandy Interjects 'Not at all') what makes it inaccessible?*

*Wandy: Because of okoQala, let me say... you're a miss and you go to the clinic and I am introducing myself; I'm Wandy, I'm from Quigney, I am a transgender I want to access hormones then you are going to ask me what is that? What are a trans woman and I have to now explain what is a trans and its more difficult ukuthi ke enga understand-i ungayi cacisa kanjani coz nam andiyazi bha yintoni itrans ngesi Xhosa, andiyazi nam? It is difficult, it's very, very difficult. Silence... mmm's from both of us*

*Asanda: Ndi'funa siyi thete lento (silence for a long time) masike siyolule lento utrans but you can't communicate, masithi uye eclinic and funeke uzi explainile njeba ngekho ngesi Xhosa, how does that make you feel?*

*Wandy: Not only for iclinic, everywhere I go. For example, I have a challenge of I.D. book yam, you know. Even if I check-in airport then my appearance nge yomfazi and then bha bona apha imale as if ndenza ifraud, uyabona lanto. So I have to explain ukuthi I am a trans, I'm like this and that and that and then kengoku abazi even this word trans. It is more difficult for people*

*Asanda: Do you feel like there is a constant sense of coming out, that you have to do more, as a trans woman? Everyday*

*Wandy: Education, education, education, education....*

*Wandy: For me, it is very very important. Though, you don't know where to go or where to start sometimes ukuthi if kunoba nje hlambi izinto, zinga much easier. Xa kunoti izinto zenzeke ngoku hlobo because if it was easy into yoba une access to change I.D. yakho, uya understanda it takes more than 3 years to change I.D. uyabona and lanto kengoku that period of 3 years ufacana ne zinto each and every single day*

*Asanda: What are some of these challenges that you are facing in terms of your I.D.*

*Wandy: Like, anywhere I go even if its bank, I am using ( real bank names omitting: refer as Bank A) and also ( real bank names omitting: refer as Bank B) but at-least Capitec they know me now at-least I can scan my finger it is easy. Then Standard*

*bank I have to, ukuthi kufonwe and they say can you wait for Mam but kwi I.D. kuthiwe Sir, uyabona. So funeke kufonelwe, I assume ukuthi bha fonela koma Pretoria, uyabona to confirm ukuthi lomtu lona is it a real I.D. yakhe nyan nyan, kengoku lomntu ondancedayo funeke ucacise bhuti okanye sisi mani I'm like this and that and that. Then ke noku, lanto for me, it makes me feel like a less of a woman because why should I explain myself to everyone, everybody and each and everywhere I go. Because ngoku, to be like a trans, it's something like HIV status for me. Each and everyday ngoku funeke uzichaze eleke udibana nah lomntu "Hi Asanda, unjani I'm HIV positive' then boom all of a sudden, why funeka mna ndizi cacise ebantwini, do you get what I'm saying (Asanda mmmm) it is difficult.*

*Asanda: Okay, Wow that is so powerful... (Wandy 'mmmm') it is so interesting, initially, my first research was looking at this, lento yhe I.D. that you are talking about and how it is a ... I find it very wrong, personally Ummm I think it is very unfair for a trans woman and I think one of the questions I had for that, how do you feel when you have to pull out your I.D. and be explaining who you are?*

*Wandy: Kubu hlungu, kakhulu. I am not going to lie to you, you feel embarrassed. It seems like everybody, as a result of ndake nada striptswa ngenye igamu eairport eO.R. Tambo ndandi suka eBotswana, so nda ndiye kwenye iconference then nda striptswa kandi buya back kona. Ya ngathi kengoku ndenza izinto ze'fraud ne ntoni ntoni because of ne passport izinto dam zithi male mos, although appearance yam ingu female. So, I was so embarrassed as a result I told myself that let me not take this serious because I think, it a first step that I need to teach people or make or change the world one day kuzoba ngcono. At-least omnye umntu angayi experience, the experience I had before, you know.*

In the extract above, Wandy is telling me one of the biggest challenges, that she faces as a transgender woman in South Africa is the issue about changing one's identity documentation to match their gender identity. We discuss at length legislation 'No.49 of 2003: Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act, 2003', which was discussed in the literature review. As the Department of Home Affairs, legally is the only institutional department that holds the responsibility to administer this law to grant the change in gender identity, she informs me it is not easy to get it approved.

Not only is the issue; the comprehensive documentation needed from therapist and medical professionals, that trans people need to present for their cases to be heard, it is also too

expensive, and they cannot afford it. Furthermore, the unrealistic high costs for transgender women outside metropolis in the country, limits their access. A detailed account on the medical fees and issues on access can be found in the literature review. Often taking years to be able to secure the required documentation to change their gender on I.D. often they are faced with in-house gatekeepers whom are officers or administrators within the Department of Home Affairs, that have never heard of a transgender woman and do not know of process or protocol one has to follow do in order to change their identification due to a lack of training.

Often there are faced with stigma and discrimination by the administrators, whom in the Eastern Cape in not knowing what the word is in English ask them to translate or tell them in isiXhosa. This presents another hurdle for the transgender women in the Eastern Cape as the language that is widely spoken in the province, which does not have a word for Transgender.

As discussed in the legal issue in the literature review, queer legal scholar Pierre de Vos just to re-iterate argues that South Africa's legal frame reproduces expected heteronormativity for queer people in the country. Gender identities that are outside the dual gender norms face a far greater challenge in finding acceptance within the law. Even with one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, it remains biased towards certain individuals.

Wandy recounts an experience she had at OR Tambo International Airport: The pulling out of the I.D. is something that is inherently complicated as it comes with explanations on why ones gender expression/outlook/ appearance, presentation and or performance is mismatched with their I.D. the case of being stripped or humiliated by officers at OR Tambo because of the I.D. is something that she tells me she can never forget. The other problem that comes with this is that a lot of the officers that are meant to be handling these cases are ill-equipped and insensitive to handle many of the cases with some of the officers not even knowing what transgender is.

This becomes increasingly difficult as one has to use the English language in a dominantly Xhosa speaking populous to explain their gender. There is a disconnection when this happens as the transgender woman is often asked to explain their gender in vernacular language in this case isiXhosa where there is no definitive word for it. She tells that she has faced similar discrimination at her local banks and clinics: There are widespread issues of stigma directed towards transgender woman from health practitioners especially

nurses. Transgender woman because of their vulnerability to health concerns due to, at times the line of work that they are doing (sex work) or access to hormonal replacement therapy (HRT) they often need to go for routine checkups. They have had instances when access to such necessities like health-screenings or fetching medication HRP was too traumatic due to the abuse and inhumane treatment by nurses. This detrimental form of violence she had experienced along with other members of the transgender community at the hands of nurse-led many of them to leave and no longer seek medical help. It came to the attention of S.H.E. that there is widespread discrimination by health practitioners in the East London region that put many lives at risk, as a result of this the organization trained many of their workers to be counsellors and advocates for their community to make up for this shortfall.

### **1.3 Work & Education**

What line of work is accessible for a transgender woman in East London? Are there opportunities made available to them? In every interview that I have had with the transwoman in East London, the issue of education and work have been intricately tied together. There is a linear understanding of the opportunities that one is afforded when they have an education and exceptions of lines of work that are open to one. Interview subjects faced various challenges and forms of discrimination when they were in school, especially high school ranging from torments from teachers and school principles - : there was a legal case of educators discriminating against these students- transgender woman in South Africa have been failed by both their government and educators whom consequently have become gatekeepers for ones future. The issue here arises when the educators have also failed to make use of various and nuanced education tools such as Life Orientation that can be used as a teaching tool on other gender expressions that exist in South Africa. They are singled out in their schools for being different and consequently been discouraged and bullied by both teachers and pupils alike. Environments that are supposed to support and facilitate the wellbeing of pupils has been tough for many LGBTIQ+ students.

## **1.4 Aims and objectives of the research**

My research aims were to find correlations in experiences that the women had and how the rite of passage has impacted their lives. How do we come to think of non-western transgender identities? What are and how do we negotiate culture in African transgender realities? These questions open up my thinking and intention in this report. The aim of this research is to:

- Broaden understandings of ulwaluko as it relates to LGBTIQ2S+ Xhosa bodies;
- Understanding ethnicity-based social and gendered identities;
- Construction of transgender identities in South Africa.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

With gender and cultural identity pitted against one another, what battles/challenges/unique lived experience does one face as a Xhosa transgender woman, especially if one has completed initiation from manhood?

- What affects does the rite of passage on a transgender woman?
- How are transgender women challenging conventional, hegemonic and toxic masculinities within Xhosa culture?
- How do Xhosa transgender woman come to accept themselves as both cultural bodies (through ulwaluko) and as perceived western bodies/identities as social products of both traditionalism and westernization?
- How does language organize marginalized populations?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 What is transgender scholarship and where does it appear?**

Transgender scholarship often concerned with legal and medical issues concerning transgender people, the increased violations in both public and private spaces informs much of the literature that has been developed. Scholarly work has overlooked the importance of socio-cultural importance and value amongst transgender people in South Africa. Much of the work has not looked at the everyday lives of transgender people and how they navigate society, rather the work has focused on producing structural arguments on the infringement of rights, the development of bio-medical technology limiting the scope and breadth of work on trans people. While scholarship produced by institutions, researchers, non-governmental organizations has largely focused on queer politics in the public sphere, this research will focus on the private sphere in order to determine how the politics of self, influences the public sphere and vice-versa . Medical scholarship on trans has focused on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, access to financing and problematic medical terminology.

### **2.2 Transgender and Law**

The emergence of feminist and queer legal scholarship; has challenged the narrow interpretation and construction of gender in law and advocated for legal changes, that include the idea that gender is socially constructed and not aligned with binary understandings of sex.

The appeal to broaden the laws as to not only protect but recognize human rights of persons that fall outside the gender binary distinction which includes transgender (transsexual), intersexed and gender-non-conforming persons some of whom it continues to marginalize and discriminate against. In South Africa legislation 'No.49 of 2003: Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act, 2003' has dominated much of the scholarship that has been produced about transgender realities. As such trans South African scholarship has been relational to the confines of subject and state/law.

Former South African Constitutional Judge Justice Albie Sachs has long advanced the argument that “law is an institution of heteronormative power”, reiterated jurisprudence has been esteemed by Naude and de Vos is the only judge who has seriously "considered the question of legal empowerment and/or emancipation of sexual minorities" in the

country (Naude & de Vos, 2010). The development of law has largely been within the confines of heteronormativity; binary and focused on pervasive hierarchical constructs of sexual desires, practices, and identities which underpin our understanding of the law (Naude & de Vos, 2010).

While the former South African Constitutional Judge Justice Albie Sachs has long advanced the argument that “law is an institution of heteronormative power”, Naude & de Vos (2010), cite Judge Sachs as being the only judge who has seriously “considered the question of legal empowerment and/or emancipation of sexual minorities” in the country.

Feminist legal theories are broadly concerned with notions of identity politics and binary sexual identities in law. The primary concern for legal feminists is to broaden legal perspectives on ‘sex’ (biological and focused on genitalia) as to include sociological understandings of the construction of gender (Naude & de Vos, 2010). Whilst propagating feminist essentialism and equality by arguing for a legal approach as to allow men and women the freedom to choose pursuits and interests of their respective sexes it remained exclusionary to experiences of marginalized groups in the LGBTIQ+ community (transgender persons) and women of colour (Gordon, 2009).

Whilst accepting some of the critiques made by legal feminist scholars, queer legal scholarship advances the argument by contributing key questions on sexual identities challenging the essentialist nature of legal feminist arguments and therefore lack of intersectionality in law. Arguing, fixed notions of sexuality, gender, and identity ‘are always culturally and socially constructed’ and the law should protect marginalized groups within the LGBTIQ+ spectrum (Naude & de Vos, 2010). Gordon (2009) notes, queer legal theorists advocate for the recognition of these marginalized groups, especially the transgender community as the law has been reluctant to acknowledge trans discrimination as an actionable form of discrimination, in part, because they subscribe to the dominant view of sexual identity as fixed predetermined trait that exists outside a given person’s will or capability to do anything to influence or change it (Gordon, 2009).

## **2.4 Medical and technological**

Medical practitioners have been performing gender reaffirming surgeries for the past 50 years. Requiring procedures such as gender reassignment therapy (gender alignment or gender affirming changes or interventions) refers to a number of endocrine and surgical

interventions to enable physical feminisation or masculinisation to facilitate transition (Wilson, Marais, de Villers, Addinall, & Campbell, 2014).

The steady increase in the number of clients throughout the world and trained practitioners has steadily increased over time as technological breakthroughs in medicine have eased the risks involved in performing these surgeries (Bateman, 2011). The medical terminology of transgendered terms has nonetheless seen the same progress. Reductive diagnostic classification of transgender bodies is still strongly linked and associated with problematic terminology ranging from gender identity disorder to gender dysphoria (GD) classifying transgender people as having a mental disorder (strong associations to psychoanalytic) (Wilson, Marais, de Villers, Addinall, & Campbell, 2014). The persistence of archaic terminology used in the medical field still esteems "mental health professionals have acted as gatekeepers to transition services for transgender people. This is problematic for those who do not otherwise have a mental disorder or desire mental health treatment or do not have access to this resource. In South Africa, the lack of adequately trained mental health professionals creates an additional barrier to both access and quality of care" (Wilson, Marais, de Villers, Addinall, & Campbell, 2014).

The high costs of gender reaffirming surgeries affect both patients and hospitals as there is limited funding available and resources used to perform the surgeries with the current waiting period for gender re-affirming surgeries spanning over 25 years. Indicated earlier, with only three public hospitals and a handful of doctors able to perform the surgeries. Resources for operating gender-affirming surgeries within the constraints of public hospitals are usually limited to a handful, roughly 3 per year and with increased demand for surgeries through referrals coming from mostly Trans NGO's like Gender Dynamix. Demand for these surgeries far outstrips supply, often frustrating patients whom at times have to wait approximately 15-20 years for surgical time (Bateman, 2011). As these services are offered in state-run hospitals, the government makes provisions for those on the list to pay far less than the private hospitals. As the state subsidies, much of these cost to the 'benefit' of the patient depending on the income scale, costs incurred by the patient can cost as little as R75, if there are able to wait for surgical time (Bateman, 2011). Alternatively, patients can choose to pay the cost from private hospitals which can run as high as R250 000 according to the 2011 figure which includes the completed transition approximately 6 years later (Msimango, 2015). When it comes to medical aids and affordability, it has been reported there has only ever been one case of a medical aid making provisions to pay for gender reaffirming surgery. For many medical aids, they are



still at odds with covering their beneficiaries as they consider gender reaffirming surgery to be cosmetic even though medical practitioners doing the surgeries have maintained a 'quality of life issue' (Bateman, 2011). "The barriers to obtaining transition-related services, as well as stigma and discrimination, have resulted in some transgender people, out of desperation, exposing themselves to significant harm, including HIV infection, in seeking non-conventional treatments" (Wilson, Marais, de Villers, Addinall, & Campbell, 2014).

In Morgan et al seminal work on "Transgender Life Stories From South Africa", for many who have been able to receive gender re-affirming surgery there has been an indication of a racial divide mostly afforded to white transgender people who are able to make use of medical tourism and source surgical options outside of the country in places like Thailand and Brazil where surgery is cheaper, as evidenced in Leo's (date) story: "A boy in my dreams and imagination" (Morgan, Marais, & Wellbeloved, 2009).

## **2.5 Academic scholarship**

Feminist theory addresses the cultural-historical context and biological premises of gender as well as the issues of sexism and the intersectionality of multiple forms of oppression. Epistemologies on transgender literature mostly appear in leading western academic journals on gender, health, sexuality, law by researchers in institutions, research by non-governmental organizations, essayists, and activists. This has perpetuated biased and narrow inclusions of Africa transgender within larger debates and resulted in African transpeople being depicted as a homogenized group void of diverse identities and experiences. The tendency is to explore debates around high rights violations, the depiction of homogenized transgender identities erasing diversity amongst African transpeople.

Susan Stryker leading transgender scholar and trans-historian, transgender reader and rights develops transgender pedagogies as to how best to write about transgender issues. Recognizing the limited voices of colour in scholarly work and a greater call to decolonize transgender identities. Journals such as Transgender Studies Quarterly published by Duke University aim to give greater resources and visibility to a range of diverse issues and conversations affecting transgender people of colours.

## **2.6 African Gender and Sexuality scholarship**

Sylvia Tamale a Ugandan legal scholar edited a provocative reader “African Sexualities” which she explores and develops with leading African feminists’ ways in which African sexualities should be researched and written about. Tired of the pitfalls of singular and homogenous writings and stories coming from the west, the reader emphasizes the importance of Africans writing about their own gender relation and experiences instead of relying on knowledge that has been developed from the west (Tamale, 2011). Sexuality written from lived experiences of Africans takes into account the different spaces, textures, cultures, and ethnicities that make African sexuality so diverse and rich rather than homogenized. African Sexualities (2011) argues for non-heteronormative sexualities when considering gender sexuality.

Research in queer African studies with special editions in journals such as *Agenda*, *GLQ*, Duke’s *Transgender Quarterly* and *Queer African Reader* have engaged the complex narratives of African gender experiences. The works by some of the foremost thinkers on African gender literature have emphasized the need to step away from homogenate research of gender and engage with how nuances, textures and contexts of genders exist within the continent. Informing my research is a foregrounding by African scholars significance of culture in the construction and understanding of gender. How then do we start to understand African genders outside the socially constructed binaries that are accepted?

Trans identifying people are often considered ‘western, un-African’ or a ‘shame or embarrassment’ to their family, community or tribal group. Often victims of oppression, social ostracism, and violence amongst many social injustices they face daily due to the precarious social disposition they occupy as marginalized bodies and identity. Yet, despite cultural oppression, many still identify with their tribal identity. How then does culture or tribalism affect black transgender identities? Xhosa transgender women construct their identities in often hostile and violent conditions as cultural practices such as ulwaluko, Successful completion of ulwaluko serves as a cornerstone in Xhosa culture for male born bodies as it affords one cultural privilege such as ancestral acceptance, recognition as Xhosa adult, ownership of property, right to marriage, teachings of cultural beliefs, clan history, moral and cultural value system of Ubuntu just to name a few (Ratele, 2013). Ulwaluko (as hegemonic Xhosa masculinity identity) confronts transgender women to accept a lifetime relation to their masculinity and male privileges they experience and

received socially before transitioning. Although identifying as a woman, particular cultural practices one might need/want to undertake to necessitate, masculine/male gender performances, much of which might be oppressive within itself for a transgender woman.

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's biography *Black Bull, ancestors and me: My life as a lesbian Sangoma* (2008). (Stobie, 2011) helps me think through the negotiation of culture and sexuality through the masculine and feminine embodiment of space. His biography at the time written from the perspective of a queer sangoma reiterated some of the theoretical prepositions made by Kopano Ratele and Xavier Livermon who lead my thinking on traditional communities and usable tradition elaborated on in the next section.

## **2.7 uLwaluko: as theory and practice of non-western masculinity**

Sakhumzi Mfecane (2016) argues that traditional theorizing and understanding of masculinity has emerged out of a Western dialogue between feminists, queer theorists and masculinity scholars in academia, thus often resulting in non-western theories of masculinity being overshadowed. Overshadowing non-western theories of masculinity. In finding alternative understandings of masculinity, Mfecane (2016) asks 'what makes a man within a culture'? In theorizing about Xhosa masculinity, the cultural tradition of ulwaluko as a rite of passage from 'boyhood to manhood' (Mfecane, 2016) embodies (physically, culturally and spiritually) the development and acceptance of masculinity positing it once completed as a marker of becoming a 'man' or determinant of one's manhood amongst amaXhosa whom are predominantly found in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Much like other cultural traditions that undertake rites of passages which find universal understand as defined by anthropologists Victor Turner and Van Gennepe:

"Rites de passage accompany every change of place, state, social position and age...all rites of transition are makes by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation. First phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions; during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the part or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated"(Turner, 1964)

Similar to the symbolism and ritual of ulwaluko is part and parcel of a universal understanding of rites of passage. ulwaluko is not a static rite of passage but ever changing due to internal and external influences on not only the people who practice it but the culture within itself. "Its historical role as a rite of passage must be acknowledged in order to understand the current meaning of the process (gender identity as geopolitical cultural performance. To define isiko is to include other words such as umthetho (law, statute, decree rule) and isithethe (a common practice) hence isiko lokwaluka should be understood in the broader Xhosa socio-cultural context" (Ntombana, 2011). Regardless of the origins of the rite of passage amongst Bantu people, central to it are the three stages of separation (going to the mountain), transition (circumcision-umkwetha-ulwaluko) and re-joining the society as an initiate (umgidi-ikrwala) (Ntombana, 2011).

The rite of passage within itself does not stand outside socio-political and historical influences such as colonialism and apartheid but has continuously adopted itself to reflect the times in which the Xhosa people are living. In light of arguments such as: long as there are Xhosa people, ulwaluko will always be practiced hence it would seem illogical to assume transgender (LGBTIQ+) Xhosa people do not undergo this rite of passage.

Tapiwa Magodyo, Michelle Andipatin and Kyle Jackson (2016) argue for those do not conform to the accepted gender constructs within Xhosa communities are often subjected to forms of punishment within their given societies through both physical manifestations and language. In terms of the physical manifestation, punishment for non-conformity accords initiates with the status of decision-makers of family matters, property owners, performers of rituals in society and families (Magodyo et al, 2016). This asserts dominance, maintains conformity and subjugates rival masculinities. The scholars further argue this creates gender hierarchies in which men position themselves in relation to one another and in relation to hegemonic standards of gender (Coles, 2009) (Magodyo et al, 2016).

Rival masculinities as defined by queer embodiments according to Kopano Ratele (date), are "disquieting challenges queer Africans pose for masculine traditionalism in that they represent the fact that 'we' can be 'us' and 'them' at once, a precursor to the usable tradition that forces us to rethink traditionalism to include present realities that move beyond cultural staticism". Queer Africans disturb the traditionalist sexual and gender order because they are both part of normative, traditionally acceptable families, part of 'traditional communities', as well as having part of their lives disavowed. This sense of

multiple belonging that they embody, which is now demanding to be recognized, may be one of the things most disconcerts traditionalism” (Ratele, 2013, 152).

Livermon (2015) engages us with his critique of tradition as interpretive to be static in South Africa, acknowledging queer Africans as embodying usable tradition, which he defines as “the role of the queer body in negotiating traditional constructs an escape from the way black communities constantly reproduce themselves in static, fixed ways that eviscerate queers from any contribution or standing to the community”. As traditions are not in the past, they constitute a present and possible future that make them available for reworking. Usable traditions as reference the contingent and complex lives that contemporary black South Africans experience and serve as a necessary space of reconstitution that reveals African custom and culture to be in a state of being rather than already accomplished fact (Livermon, 2015). These useable traditions function to revise, contest and reconstitute the ways in which African bodies are understood. Despite the homophobic and heterosexist denunciations of traditional leaders, community members, and political figures black queers and their supporters make use of tradition to situate their queerness in African cultural contexts. Black queer South African cultural labour reveals tradition to be a set of living practices testing and pushing the limits of black cultural subjectivity (Livermon, 2015).

This premise and understanding of the rites of passage, informed the starting point of the interview I had with the representative from the House of Traditional leaders in the Eastern Cape the intention of the interview was to ascertain:

- How the House of Traditional Leaders, as the governing body that develops policies around tradition in the province, understand and interpret the practice of ulwaluko;
- How is it that as a governing body that develops policies around the tradition in the province, they also understand ulwaluko: there are aspects of the culture that have evolved to be where it is, the question I start to have is what is that makes someone a man within the Xhosa culture? And what is that notion of becoming a man?

For instance, Aplom, a representative of the House of Traditional Leaders made the following statement during our discussions:

Well, okay the first point would be traditional initiation, someone refers to it as a rite of passage from being a boy to a man. It’s not really about the removal of the foreskin, okay! But many have reduced it to that. That is why we would jealously say that this is not circumcision but an initiation. In our view, those are two different things. Now, during

initiation, ukankata and the elders, those are the people are supposed to visit the initiate and begin to teach, share some knowledge that this boy is to be graduating to kuso. Those people are supposed to guide and say... Now that uzoba yindoda these are the things that are expected of you. As you come out, you are going to be someone new, someone that is going to respect, earn dignity, provide, someone that is going to take of his own family. Those are the important things with regard to ubudoda... A man is not supposed to be disrespectful, that is what manhood is about from our view. Obviously, we live in changing times, you just shared with me something that I did not know about 9-year-olds graduating in the time period.

During ulwaluko, a liminal stage and transitory period for the Xhosa males marked by circumcision as to differentiate and hierarchize Xhosa forms of masculinity amongst males for thousands of years with some scholars tracing the tradition (of circumcision) as far back as when Nguni's/Bantu migrated from Egypt to the southern parts of African and how they have changed, adopted and altered the tradition in accordance with their specific tribal affiliations (Ntombana, 2011). Has been a patrilineal tradition amongst Xhosa time-immemorial.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Gender Social Re-Affirmation**

The theoretical framing of the research orientates towards an understanding of social gender re-affirmation and begins with the question of how one becomes a particular gender? If we are to accept the basic sociological premise about gender as socially constructed with repeated performance and action both can be simplified as social actions that mark one's gender. Perceptions of specific performances that are done including ways of being, representing and enacting such performances limit notions of gender fluidity and re-enforce aspects of hetero-socialization.

Particular rites of passage that are done and the performativeness required beyond that are something that marks social gender affirmation: markers of visibility include biology and/or performance, legal documentation: identity document (I.D) / social security which indicates biology. Performance rests outside of this and it's the powerful social tool that is mostly used. Social performance of gender can render invisible biology or genitalia warranting social acceptance based on gender. This is affirming for a transgender woman who will not be able to have gender reaffirming surgery. As such the extent of the social gender affirmation can be extended to cultural practices that are gendered, although there is constant negotiation with visible and invisible (movement through spaces impacts this).

The acceptance of transgender is social, but they live on the margins of acceptance, it has made the culturally precarious: does the social determine the cultural or is the action from the society that influences the culture. It is not presence alone that queers' space but the performance/actions that can queer it

Who affirms your gender and how? The role of the family

The theoretical framework looks at how someone's gender is externally affirmed. As is the case with a person that is transgender in South Africa, they have a long waiting list (25 years) for them to receive gender reaffirming surgery. Immediately this draws on the conversation on who gets to have re-affirming surgery in South Africa? With the underlying premise being a class and financial divide (Morgan, Marais, & Wellbeloved, 2009). Although they are able for some to access hormonal replacement therapy, it is the case that for many transgender women they will not be able to have the surgery

anytime soon. So, the reality that they face, is they are in the foreseeable future transgender woman that are pre-op.

This theoretical framework emerges out of the social actions and the performative aspect or nature of gender expression. When a person has self-affirmed a particular gender, it is the case that the change in which they identify with is something that is seen and interacted by the rest of society. It is the case that in low-income communities where the people are fully aware that the person ascribes to an othered gender (socially through interaction and action, one's gender is validated by their interaction with the rest of society) they will be seen and referred to by the gender that they express. Although societies are small or usually perceived as backwards, the acceptance being with the family and how they refer to the person, this is an extension of affirmation of a gender. To affirm one's gender does not necessitate a fuller understanding of the complexity of the gender spectrum that one identifies with.

The family through their interaction and even before the case of one that is to transition, they are told that they need to live in the opposite gender before they can commit to the surgery that they want. Eg: live as a female for a year etc, since a lot of the transgender woman whom identify as such and do not have access to particular things such a psycho-gender-analysis (therapy) because of a lack of facilities, they none-the-less live out their lives in the gender that they would be. But the case of the affirmation that arrives when one has lived in a particular body is the recognition of the gender expression by the rest of the community or society that they live in. In a village, after a while, people will start to refer to you a woman because of the gendered performance, action, expression and aesthetic which is embodied. It is here that their gender starts to become socially affirmed.

To take this point further, we begin to think about the pointers that one takes whether it is from family, role modelling that they embrace in their becoming. Its social gender expressions and behaviours that they see that have emerged out of social action 'you learn to become a woman by seeing other women around you and taking those strides for you'. Gender expressions are social within themselves and it is through the social performance of gender that largely determines the role of it.



### **3.2 Turning Around as Trans Subjectivity**

Take the case of Butler's concept of turning around, when someone is being catcalled by another person there is a tendency in the 'catcalling' to instantly affirm one's gender as they are moving through particular spaces. Some cases it is that one's gender is socially affirmed based on perception "I am perceiving a beautiful woman that is walking down the street and I want to take her out on a date".

This strikes a chord, as one of the research informants took me with her shopping for new hair. As she ferociously walks towards the shop assistant, she knows exactly what she wants, the effect and control she has over her image and how she is to be perceived and desired by others: tired of her 20-inch weave, that is loosely tied and swept to the side. Her presence is commanding, the aura is radiant and magnetic as eyes follow us silently, quietly in awe. There is no mistaking, this is a woman that knows who she is. Whilst searching for a soft dread she asks her friend and I rhetorically which colour she should choose? "Ndi'funa ublonde mani, into eza ndenza qhaf qhaf!" (I want blonde hair, something that will make me luminance alluring) Whilst the friend objected to her colour choice as something that would draw attention on her, she quickly interjects and silences them to say blonde looks good on me: I use them and them as a non-binary pronoun to refer to the friend. It was interesting that they weren't identified by their friends as transgender and left during the focus group which was open to transgender women. This stood out for me because I read their story in 'I am, therefore, We Are' by Kris Lyseggen and Herb Schreier (2017) which identified them as transgender. The topic of the book was raised in during the focus group, were the women expressed their disconcert with being misunderstood, interpreted and represented by foreign researchers who weren't able to fully translate what they were saying. The issue of language and being an object of research came up, with some unequivocally stating I shouldn't read it, whilst others dismissed it. In attempts to inquire more about the book and understand the groups' sentiments around it, I was quickly told to leave it and I'm being granted these interviews because I'm a student and my research is for marks and educational purposes.

Anonymous explains the importance of the hair not only as an expression of her femininity and existence but as an outward expression of her boldness to live as she affirmed gender. Iris Marion Young (1977) in her seminal paper 'Throwing Like A Girl' argues: "Feminine bodily existence is also self-referred to the extent that a woman is uncertain of her body capacities and does not feel that its motions are entirely under her

control. She must divide her attention between the task to be performed and the body which must be coaxed and manipulated into performing it... the basic fact of the woman's social existence as the object of the gaze of another is a major source of her bodily self-reference (Young, 1977,148). Returning to Judith Butler (1988) in her compelling essay on phenomenology and Feminist Theory extends Merleau-Ponty's (1962) by adding to her analysis the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1949) whom concludes that woman is a 'historical situation" to argue: "the body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation. For the gendered body, phenomenology means both that which constitutes meaning and that through which meaning is performed or enacted. But to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman', to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler, 1988, 522).

Outside of the normal forms of violence that already exist when one is being catcalled that preclude this, the moment that the person turns around and they become the subject of the person two things have already happened, externally and socially the person who is being called by their gender is externally affirmed eg: female, when the person takes a closer look at whom they have identified it becomes the case that they go to find out the female whom they have called is transgender, this has happened in the case of transgender sex-workers: when the client thinks that they are buying the services from a woman: affirmation of gender publicly.

The private sphere tends to complicate and brings into question whether the person who had either called or seeks particular services is aware of it or not: start to think of Rene Descartes and his meditations on philosophy and how senses can fool one into thinking of something that might not be fully the case... So here what begins to happen is a positive and negative affirmation that takes place in the public sphere and by society.

Negative Social Gender Re-affirmation: my thinking here develops from the positive identification of the gender, it's simple and passing meaning usually it is not within further inquiry or investigation. When they do so, it becomes the case that they find themselves at odd almost with a fleeting moment of hesitation that implies the acknowledgement of gender and with this, the notion of violence comes the centre of things. At this particular point, as one has become subject based on their gender performance and expression, the

affirmation is negotiated outside of them. The instance of transphobia, corrective rape or even homophobia starts to emerge.

As such, in the instances of gender being externally perceived and validated one has to interrogate whether they are not being fooled by their senses which they need to learn not to trust, it is this disillusionment that brings to emphasis the violence-matrix that transgender identities find themselves subject to. Although the onus is not on the trans being but rather the one who relied on their senses to make particular conclusions and presumptions 'you are lying etc' it is with this that the negative aspect of gender affirmation comes in: susceptible to varied forms of violence. In short, transphobia and expression of such, do not deny the existence of the transgender body but rather it negatively affirms the body or gender.

One of the key findings to this emerges for Xhosa transwoman queer subjectivities and social peculiarity that places their bodies as a battleground between their cultural and legal bodies further exacerbated by socio-political interrelations of race, class and gender as they construct their identities.

### **3.3 Towards a theoretical framing**

This theoretical framing helps challenge existing conventional knowledge on transgender identities and masculinity studies whilst addressing the much-needed research on the "complex interplay between race, ethnicity, culture and transgender phenomenon" according to transgender historian Susan Stryker (2008) (Richardson & Meyer, 2011).

Julie L. Nagoshi and Stephan/ie Brzuzy (2010) develop a theoretical orientation about transgender people underpinned by their lived realities. For Nagoshi and Brzuzy, they conceptualize and problematize feminist trans perspectives whilst tracing the history of transgender theory. Distinguishing between transgenderism and transsexuality, with the latter being individuals who have had sexual reaffirming surgeries, transitioning and hormone treatments whilst the former doesn't necessitate medicalization of gender both of which inform transgender theory through individualized lived experiences (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

At the core of Transgender Theory is an intersectional approach that "suggests that the lived experiences of individuals, including their negotiations of multiple intersectional identities, may empower them without confining them to any particular identity category" (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) (Monro, 2000). This is echoed in dialogue with/in my

methodology through Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology allowing us to 'think through spatiality of sexuality, gender and race' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2) and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf who emphasizes "African feminism requires a theoretical account of embodied gender differences that is grounded in the complex realities of African women's everyday experiences... existential phenomenology meets many of the requirements for a theoretical exploration into African female existence" (2003).

The significance of lived experiences of gender as both theory and practice brings into question the notion and sense of becoming transgender within different societies, some of which have strong relations to cultural practices. In her work on transgender theory and embodiment, Katrina Roen warns against ethnocentrism and possibly the orthodoxy of language as a limiting factor in understanding diversity of transgender identities and lived experiences reiterating the value of traditional cultures and significance of geopolitical realities (Roen, 2002) (Koyama, 2001). Roen identifies a political hierarchy that is imposed on transgender people needing to confirm or taken on a positions 'both/neither' which describes those who chose not to identify with gendered categories or 'either/or' which reinforce gender heteronormativity of either man or a woman failing to recognize diversity and silencing of transgender identities. Inhibiting hierarchies for Xhosa transgender women are not only political but equally cultural, especially in cultural spaces, contexts, and performances of rites including ulwaluko (Roen, 2002). "There was thus a need for a theory of gender identity that would incorporate both a fluid self-embodiment and a self-construction of identity that would dynamically interact with this embodiment in the context of social expectations and lived experiences" (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) that delimit visibility of the transgender individual whilst allowing them to self-define (Magubane, 2014) (Collins, 1986).

As already established in this theoretical framework, the need to broaden transgender theory as to include and explore forces shaping individuals gendered identity within the African context lies at the individual's relation to their ethnicity and cultural embeddedness. These cultural experiences that inform one's 'becoming' enables us to understand transgender ethnicities and embodiment thereof. In Africa, culture is often perceived as an obstacle to women's liberation and recognition of LGBTIQ+ people yet Tsanga (2011) and Hill-Collins (1986) remind us of the importance of understanding the nature of hierarchies and discrimination as part of an interlocking nature of oppression. As such relations to cultural expectations and phenomena such as ulwaluko becomes inescapable and pivotal when considering the experiences of Xhosa transgender women,

whom in the process of the interview had reflected on their previous identification as that of gay men (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016).

Reflection whilst transcribing she points to a cut on her lip, from a physical altercation she had with her boyfriend. The scar is pretty visible and the last time I had met Wandy, a few months prior to this follow-up interview she had no physical markers of abuse or violence... Reflecting and overhearing the conversations Wandy was having with her friends in the car, whilst I was driving them from to fetch Mama Afrika: Interviews having taken place earlier today: 24/01/18 it became apparent from what she was saying with her friends, Wandy is a violent person or prone to violence. I am not sure whether it is from her defending herself or she likes fighting. I was rather confused at her reactions to the statements her friends were making about her being violent. As for Wandy, throughout the interviews and interaction has been honest, diplomatic, highly professional, composed and dignified.

The research situates itself at intersecting points in feminism, transgender, masculinity and queer scholarship. Drawing on such diverse scholarship to inform key concepts in the theoretical framework such as space, gender embodiment, tradition and becoming I began to look into exploring the relations between trans lived experiences and phenomenology, philosophy of beginning. How do we come to understand the body as it relates to the gendered experiences that we have? It is hard to comprehend talking let alone researching on ulwaluko without thinking about the body as an instrument for a world that is to unfold throughout the rite of passage. What does the body know before language comes? Is twofold in how it relates or situates tradition and gender. As such my methodological approach and thinking draws works by existential phenomenologists such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1956), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) to locate the body as both object and subject. The primary concern in the is not only to understand ulwaluko but to also emphasizes the notion within Xhosa tradition of the body belonging to self, family and community. Pointedly, rites of passages such as ulwaluko are informed by familial relations and hetero-patrilineal traditions were the body is used as a marker of Xhosa culture through circumcision before meaning and language are attributed thereafter to it. It is through the body, that knowledge, teachings during the rite of passage are passed down. I rely on the works of leading feminists' scholars such as Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, Sarah Ahmed, Judith Butler, Iris Marion Young and Henry S. Rubin interpret the works of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre whom all asks Simone de Beauvoir's question, who is women? Thus, my reading of

phenomenology builds on my previous discussions of Ratele and Livermon in the literature review.

## **4. Methods and techniques**

### **4.1 Qualitative methodology**

The nature of the research on the lived experiences of transgender women required a qualitative methodology that considered people's subjective experiences as "the essence of what is real for them, making sense of people's experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us, and making use of research techniques to collect and analyze information" (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006, p. 271), (Ashwal, 2017). As the research focuses on the lived experience, I depart from tradition developmental methods that would focus the research through prisms of government institutions, non-governmental organizations that work within the community. To a more participatory method that would give voice to the transgender women in the way it shapes and informs the direction of the research whilst not removing the researcher (Dlakavu, 2017) (Collins, 2000) (Mupotsa, 2007).

Early on in the research process, I contacted the organization S.H.E, the only organization in the Eastern Cape that focuses on the rights of transgender people and visibility within the communities as a starting point to find the people I was research. Through varied discussion with the organizations it was established the role of non-governmental organizations, government and other institutions tended to focus their research on transgender women and initiation from a public health perspective.

Whilst in the initial interviewing process, foregrounding the research into initiation in the Eastern Cape, I had approached the House of Traditional Leaders- a government department located in Bhisho, Eastern Cape, the provincial capital that oversees the initiation practice and protocol in the Eastern Cape. Whilst interviewing a representative (Aplom) from House of Traditional Leaders whom simply asked when I prefaced my research and why I was there: 'why would someone who identifies as a woman go there? It is not a place for a woman'. Aplom alluding that trans identity is modern and confusing, something which the House of Traditional Leaders cannot accept...I digress to reflect on my interview with Aplom which informed my methodological approach: The role of queer and transgender bodies in heteronormative spaces- individuation of varied trans lived experiences, there was an immediate denial of subjective experiences of initiation (Livermon, 2015). How do you deny a people that exist? How do you erase a queer body knowingly in the face of another? No class I took in the social sciences taught me how to

deal with an interview subject that word by word takes away ‘your’ humanity or dignity. All those methods classes, theories fly out the window: instant amnesia in the face of it.

His reasoning was uncomfortable, the interview was uncomfortable, upsetting, heated as he was erasing queer bodies in general. It became a fight for my own visibility as undertones of homophobia marred in skewed political correctness ended up being the main point of contention. Purporting an insider-outsider framing and establishing a standpoint to which informed by research (Collins, 2000). His frustration of other ways of being and thinking that were not conforming to the values of every building we were doing our interviews. He kept referring to his childhood friend that was different and quiet, said nothing when he was being mocked or abused... I kept thinking of my supervisor and whether she would be disappointed if I walked out? My scholarship funding this research. Completing my MA? How do you begin to explain you are traumatized by research you wanted to do, I fought for this topic? I wanted to learn something but what am I learning as a researcher when my dignity and being erased by subjects that hold importance to it. How do you go back when you have passed the point of no return with your research? The Eastern Cape is a geo-patrical, hypermasculine and inherently fertile land for toxic masculinity that is nourished by this very institution I cannot escape in this research.

My initial contact with the interview subjects was through an organization called Social, Health & Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa, also known as S.H.E in East London. It is the only organization in the Eastern Cape that helps transgender women in the region. As my research subjects were niche, as they needed to be Xhosa and have been through the rite of passage, it was evident to be able to find subjects whom would fit this criterion the research needed to be in the Eastern Cape (Lehohla, 2014). As someone that is familiar with the region myself, coming from there and having similar experiences of some of the women who would be interviewed, access and points of relation on the subject that I was undertaking were fairly easy. Noting whilst I was able to connect with the subjects- conducting interviews in the subjects’ mother tongue, the value perspective in informing the research was imperative. As such, my role as the research established an outsider-within perspective (Collins, 2000). I was able to clearly phonetically communicate with my subjects, as we shared the same or similar tonality of isiXhosa. This also as a result of similar age range ‘Gen-Z/Millennial Xhosas’ ” and our similar conditions. The tone of isiXhosa of my mother’s generation and my generation are different and this is why I struggled to accurately write out the isiXhosa diction correctly. There is a distinct difference in how I was comfortably express Xhosa



phonetics in my method techniques. However, I was limited in the written isiXhosa linguistics as highlighted in this report.

In search of these answers, my research took me to East London where I encountered my first interview subjects: Xhosa transgender women who have gone through *ulwaluko*. Interview subjects included Wandy, whose story in the *Mail & Guardian* (2016) sparked my interest in the topic. I also met with a focus group comprised of Wandy, Mama Afrika and a subject who wished to remain Anonymous. This was carried out over a period of six months. Before entering the field, it was important for me to locate the research in the Eastern Cape, where the majority of the populous is Xhosa and are familiar with the rite of passage which is widely practiced. It was important for the subjects to come from the Xhosa preferable Eastern Cape, which is considered the home of amaXhosa. Phenomenology provides a framework for making sense of lived realities of Xhosa transgender women living in the Eastern Cape, with its emphasis on the body as a point of view on the world, phenomenology accommodates a trans wariness that bodies significantly shape the experience of the world. Phenomenology assumes the necessity of being a body in order for the world to exist for oneself (Rubin, 1998).

As Xhosa transgender women, my interview subjects were all assigned male at birth. For them there was a strong likelihood of the conversation and contemplation about rites of passage from the subject self-identify, affirm and express themselves as women. Using newspaper, the *Mail and Guardian* to identify subjects in attempts to familiarize and locate research in contemporary conversations, I came across Social, Health & Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa (S.H.E) the only organization in the province advancing the rights of transgender women. As the general attitudes in the Eastern Cape about queer bodies are perceived as disruptive to traditions, knowing from my own the stigmas associated with queer bodies, experiences and lives that shape one's realities and movement through space (Ratele, 2013).

The importance of a phenomenological approach that we uncover the affective experience of the queer in a community whose belonging both at home and community is resisted. Transgender individuals in South Africa are still greatly misunderstood (please see discussion on the law in Literature Review). Upon my arrival at S.H.E., it was refreshing to be conversing openly about the research in isiXhosa, yet equally awkwardly needing to speak English when referring to transgender people and going back to isiXhosa when my gender identity and sexual orientation was referenced. Discussion on my research was from point of introducing myself was in isiXhosa, there was an instant familiarity, ease

and access I was afforded by the subjects who felt comfortable at expressing cultural nuances at ease of not being misunderstood due to no phonetical barriers.

Engaging, developing and producing this knowledge through intersecting methods of data collection ranging from primary sources as subjects biographies, letters, photographs, videos I took with subjects and semi-structured conversational interviews as to put in perspective the everyday practices and clearer understanding of gender performativity of Xhosa Trans people, the world and experiences to which their gender identity emerges was located on discussions around the body.

## **4.2 Outside Insider within**

Collins (2000) identifies the outsider-within perspective as a powerful sociological methodology that can uncover buried knowledges. My initial thoughts going into the field was almost an expectation - possibly a projection of my own experiences with the rite of passage that I had thought would not only speak to the literature that I had looked at but echo findings that I had expected. Although I was aware there might be varied experiences of initiation amongst transgender women, only one of the subjects that I had interviewed had gone through the rite of passage. The other subject had found the rite of passage to be contrary to their identity and thus had not gone through it. Disappointed, that I had only one subject that had gone through the rite of passage, I was open to finding out more about the experiences of transgender woman that have to live in the Eastern Cape. During my time with the interview subject, who was very open to engaging with the topic especially for students wanting to learn more about and whom they found they could speak freely as there weren't linguistical phonetical barriers that they allowed us to have a deeper conversation and similar points of relation as Xhosa LGBTIQ.

Language and representation were some of the problems that were underpinning a lot of the hardships that were experienced by a transgender woman, as is the case that there is no word that exists in their home language and dominant language in the region. Many people in the whom they encounter on a daily basis whether it is at the bank, clinic or at home have not come across the term transgender and do not understand their gender expression, often being asked 'what do you call it ngesi Xhosa? Yintoni leyo?" Translating to what is that is a continuous disconnect with the society that they live in as constantly needing to use language either than their mother tongue to find full expression. Subjects spoke of the constant need to educate others on who they are and what It entails, to be transgender. Representation and the question of what makes one a woman? Was something

that the subjects constantly had to negotiate with themselves both internally and externally. Often the negotiation of gender was along cultural lines and means of expressions.

Conversations that emerged during the interviews evoked in part French existential phenomenology Jean-Paul Sartre's emphasis in his seminal work 'Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology' (1956). Considered to be one of Sartre (1956) best contributions to phenomenology, as the study of consciousness as intentionally allowing the world to exist through an awareness of what it is; arguing an awareness of self through the eyes of others, an externalized hyperawareness per se, interpreted in this paper as upon the body as our means of existence in the world (Rubin, 1988). Primarily discussions with trans subjects and representatives from House of traditional leaders on ulwaluko strongly relied on Sartre's 'body-for-others' this is the body as object, the body that is touched and marked as instrument for cultural rites of passages as site of rituals and customs, belonging and on expected reproduction of heteronormativity amongst amaXhosa (Rubin, 1998). The argument of the body being for others relies on the role of the family in Xhosa transgender women's going through ulwaluko often alienating the subject. Significance of this and discussed further in the section on liminality and ulwaluko, we begin to understand the alienated body, as Rubin reads Sartre to mean: 'this is when the I is coerced into taking the viewpoint of the Other on its own body, when the body as a point of view is grasped as a second-level body, as the body-for-others: be it culture or family (Rubin, 1998, 267). "alienated... is vividly and constantly conscious of his body not as it is for him but as it is for the Other. This constant uneasiness, which is the apprehension of my body's alienation as irremediable... these are nothing but horrified metaphysical apprehension of the existence of my body for the Others" (Rubin, 1998, 267).

There is a certain level of ease and forthcoming during the interview processes that is a result of my own personal biography which serves as a point of relation. As an isiXhosa, gay person; having gone through ulwaluko, which is usually a sensitive topic in the Eastern Cape. I am afforded a certain level of access by the subjects. There is an expected level of understanding and need not to over-explain their experiences or relations to Xhosa traditions, for the subjects my sexual orientation signals points of relations as 'deviants' amongst amaXhosa who do not ascribe to reproduce heteronormativity (Ahmed, 2006) of our culture. Immediately as a researcher, I am perceived and ascribed by trans subjects as 'us' given status of shared solidarity, one who is also alienated intricately understanding

the body-for-others due to my own experiences as a queer person who has gone through the rite of passage. My presence and biography have an effective impression on the subjects in how they engage and relate to me during interviews, as I am welcomed into their homes like an old friend during the focus group to which Anonymous informed me, she is more comfortable conducting it in her house.

The setting is more comfortable, fluid and at easy as family members and friends come to greet. As we drive through her neighborhood on our way to fetch Mama Afrika, from their place of work, she directs me to local hangout spots, houses where her other trans friends live all within relative walking distance of each other. When I ask about trans inclusion and safety in Duncan Village, a township in East London where I am to find my subjects there is a subtle distancing factor, a reminder of my outsider status not only as a researcher, but someone that doesn't live eLokshini and not being able to fully relate or comprehend. My understanding of phenomenology as a method and use as a framework develops out of the work of Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's (2000) interpretation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) work. In this I wrestle with the body as object-subject, thinking through its ontological relations to ulwaluko and gender (Bakare-Yusuf, 2000).

Bakare-Yusuf (2000), argues for Merleau-Ponty (1962) the subject and object fold into each other through lived experiences. The body, therefore, acts as the ground of being a subject and being positioned as an object, of my having relations with others and as that which bring existence into being (Bakare-Yusuf, 2000, 50). The situated body, like the world, is a process that continuously unfolds and reveals itself anew in relation to other bodies, new situations, new roles. This means that the body in motion and the knowledge it bears is always shifting and indeterminate. Movements in the world affect our state of being and the way we commune with the world (Bakare-Yusuf, 2000) (Mupotsa, 2017).

As I was of similar age to subjects, power relations dynamics tended to take a different form, education. As noted in Bibi Bakare- Yusuf work on African Phenomenology which was my primary methodological approach the role of seniority kwamaXhosa is used as an organizing tool that prescribes listening and power is given relative. The significance of listening whilst conducting feminist research interviews around phenomenology was in-effect a tool that could have easily resulted in challenges with the subjects as a result of cultural nuances. Pointedly it was education, personal biography that facilitated power-dynamics instead of seniority with the subjects which impacted the candor during interviews with the subjects. Admittedly, whilst interview a representative from the House

of Traditional leaders' eBhisho, the subject made it evident during interviews that education is the reason why he is listening and not dismissing my research.

Interactions during interviews with subjects lent to memories and experiences that lay forgone lingering the present in the world that had unfolded. At times reading the body, whilst observing subjects reflect on questions was interesting in the way to effect was presenting itself during the interviews. Emotions being objects of our experiences, they are the forms of our experience and the fundamental way in which we orient ourselves within it. It is with this background of the expressive, emotional body that we can begin to understand the relation between conditions of embodiment and freedom (Bakare-Yusuf, 2000). For Merleau-Ponty (1962), whenever the body takes up the work it necessarily transforms it. To being, the body's emplacement in a world means that the world exists as 'always', 'already constituted' (Bakare-Yusuf, 2000, 61). That is, the world we are located has already been marked out by others, it already impedes with values, traces and significance that precede our occupation. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology shows that the world's origin is constituted and re-constituted through each event of the embodied agency.

Interviewing in Xhosa required heavy reliance on tone as a tool to gauge responses. The tone in Xhosa dialect is incredibly important and very present, as language is gender neutral usually tone is usually an indicator of gender along with a particular choice of words. As the language within itself is highly descriptive, selection of words and use generally infer gender. To illustrate this, take the word 'umhle' which means both beautiful and handsome, depending on who is saying it delineates along heteronormative gender expectation of the person who is being referred. For a 'man' to use this word when speaking of or describing another, it would be rather odd, disruptive and disorientate gender norms to a point it would immediately evoke queerness (although woman can use it to describe each other without a queer effect) (Ahmed, 2006; Ratele, 2013; Magodyo et al, 2016 ). Queer bodies are disoriented and have removed themselves consciously from heteronormativity and abandoned the familiarity of the spaces that have informed much of their identity and relation with. Understanding the nuances of the sexed, gendered and racialized body as it navigates, understands, defines and is redefined by the spaces in which it inhabits often both rural and urban space the relationality of body and space in becoming a Trans opened this research to be shaped by the experiences of the people.

Although there are social constructions with regard to what makes a woman kwaXhosa that included its own rites of passages such as intonjane, the practice is uncommon in

recent times. Thus I come to understand woman as existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir whom in the *Second Sex* (1949) one becomes a woman through situated experiences that Bakare-Yusuf elaborates to articulate complex ways that move towards understanding African gendered experiences that do not assume fixed positions (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, 6) (Butler, 1988) (Ahmed, 2006). As our language is gender neutral it becomes highly dependent on notions of performativity as a social-gendered differentiator. Barring access and use of particular words that emerged and are used to recognize those who have gone through the male rite of passage which genders and differentiates. It has no use outside particular spaces and social contexts that people find themselves in, it became interesting that culturally transgender woman forcibly queer and distort our thinking of the most 'sacred' rite in Xhosa, arriving at this through my engagement and reflection of Xavier Livermon's (2015) notion of 'usable traditions' elaborated on in the literature review.

Whereas Ahmed (2006), explores and thinks through queer effects and orientation from objects, in isiXhosa to achieve queer effects doesn't necessitate material orientations but the use of language. I elaborate on the significance of language and *ukuhlonipha*, a special dialect is only known by those who have gone through the Xhosa rite of passage of *ulwaluko*. *Ukuhlonipha* is used by initiates during the liminal stage and when referring to particular experiences in the bush by those initiated, it is only when one the language test socially that the body and circumcision marker affirm without question or doubt one has gone through the rite of passage. Invariably this challenges Butler's when she argues: "Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy, this has been dominant perception on *ulwaluko* as transgender bodies challenge gender duality imposed by the tradition (Butler, 1988, 14). Gender is what is put on, invariably under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds" (Butler, 1988, 531).

#### **4.3 Phenomenology: Method and technique**

"Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2). This methodological approach extends and embodies the theoretical framework which informs this report such as *ulwaluko*,

transgenderism and the geo-body politics of self-identifying and 'becoming' for transgender people. As the theories advocate the importance and significance of transgender intersectionality in the embodiment of theory. Local realities amongst Xhosa transgender bodies are constantly orientating and disorientating through movement in rural and urban spaces, bodies constantly in transition and relations influencing and responding to time.

Existential phenomenology offers a valuable methodology because it does not assume a metaphysical framework within which all subsequent operations must take place. In other words, it begins by avoiding the assumption of a subject and an object and by addressing itself to the nature and meaning of the phenomenon to be studied. These include cultural patterning, biological factors, historical forces, aesthetic patterns, ethical considerations, biographical details and all other perspectives that impinge on the nature of the phenomenon in the context of existence. That being said, the primary entry point for phenomenological analysis is always lived experiences. Existential phenomenology, therefore, does not begin with conclusions about women's experiences and identities. Rather, it is concerned with what each culture and historical context makes of the biological body, and what this body makes of the cultural and historical context in turn (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003)

This approach allows various means to which research can be conducted, visibility achieved giving a voice to the many that have been silenced and written about. The ability to engage with research participant further open qualitative research instruments, the ability to use in-depth interviews and interrogate problematic issues in both public and private spheres. "A phenomenological method can return legitimacy to the pieces of knowledge generated by the experiencing I. Method has the added benefit of theorizing these essences as they unfold from the perspective of the I. Phenomenology is methodologically descriptive and legitimates the knowledge of the subject while pointing out the critical possibilities that result from the subject's negotiation with the world" (Rubin, 1998, 267). Broadening representation and diversifying epistemologies, acknowledgement of the researchers' positionality amongst research participants allows creative means such as conversation as research (Garfinkel, 1967).

Bakare-Yusuf (2000) argues, although the world is already constituted, it has no value or significance of itself until it is incorporated into the body of the present. It is at this point that the 'subject' of tradition may become an 'agent' of change, both personally and in

terms of the tradition itself (Livermon, 2015; Ratele, 2013). Invariably this links to the previous discussion on usable traditions and how queer South Africans are reconstituting tradition away from being static, challenging the notion of gender duality within the tradition and insertion of subjectivity of individual experiences in these spaces (Livermon, 2015). "Gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notion of essential sex, true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed. A trans person, however, can do more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity" (Butler, 1988, 528). Whilst I discuss this at length in my theoretical framework under social gender re-affirmation it is worth noting.

What phenomenology does, is challenging the construct of gender duality by shifting our thinking to including a more fluid understanding of the construct away from fixed or static perspectives. There are openness and awareness of the researcher, they are present and active with the subjects in ways that commune and demand exchanges, shifts, learning and unlearning. Consciousness-raising on both subject and researcher as the presences of both bodies as subject-object co-existing from moment to moment, space and time are reconstituting the world which is to unfold. Re-orientated by the nuances, complexities and locales that cannot be determined outside of the specific context of a cultural-historical horizon (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003).

As Bakare-Yusuf (2003), concludes: A phenomenologically-inspired account begins by asking: What is the lived experience of having a particular kind of body? How does bodily being affect and shape the kind of experience we can have? Why are bodily beings of women and men used to demarcate social difference? Withstanding all of the questions that she asks and points to like the advantages of phenomenology when doing feminist work, I found that these very same questions are present for both subject and researcher and used interchangeably. The researcher doesn't stand outside the narrative of the subject rather inhabits and comes out. The subject, gauges-reads you to locate and situate who you are, the level of access they will give you. There's a humanization that takes place during the process, whether it is looking for points reference, whether it is to find out if one is being listened beyond research and what they say matters? Social position and relation inform engagement. In effect Ahmed (2006) when she thinks through queer phenomenology to involve orientations toward queer, a way to inhabit the world that gives



'support' to those whose lives and loves to make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place. My experience of it is the demand for effective understanding that simply states vocal or not, you are human-complex situated realities and that informs the support she speaks of.

Phenomenological approach this research used allowed reactive and fluid conversations to take place. Entering the field with theoretical framings and reliance, at every point, theoretical assumptions were either being disproved or proved. It was this approach that allowed the research to be led by the experiences of the subjects. As only half of my subjects fit the intended people I had wanted to interview, it became apparent narratives emerging out of the interviews led to a snowball to include not only subject who have gone through the rite of passage but also those that haven't. This enriched and broadened my research findings to include other experiences on the topic and the lived experiences of Xhosa transgender woman living in the Eastern Cape (EC). The themes that emerged discussed in data findings, were mostly led by informed by subjects who I never intended to interview as part of this research. It gave me more depth perspective and understanding of the lives of marginalized populates in the EC. Further, as only one subject fit my criteria it allowed a broader understanding of her daily reality and narrative account during the interviews, more insight.

## **5. uLwaluko and Transgender women: Rite of passage**

### **5.1 Rite of Passage**

Kwa Xhosa when a boy has come of age to ayokwaluko, its usually times marked by celebrations, excitement and fear of the unknown. The decision to take a 'boy' to initiation school is usually in consultation with the family, members of the community as to select ikhankatha (nurse and teacher) and ingcibi (traditional surgeon) and the initiate. Historically age was not a factor as initiates undertook the rite of passage a sign of maturity with intentions of identifying as a Xhosa adult within the community.

Ulwaluko historically lasted between three months to one year (Paterson, 1777-9), with the initial month dedicated to healing the wound and the rest of the time learning about Xhosa culture, clan and history (as to know where you've come from), moral teachings of Ubuntu and codes of conduct as a Xhosa adult. Recently, the rite of passage has been subject to moral degeneration with amakrwala and abakwetha involved in crimes such as rape, substance abuse and fatalities. Before going through the rite of passage both the initiate and family prepared for this occasion with cultural rituals.

Chief amongst such rituals is imbeleko. Ramphele (2002), Hall (2017) and Mkhize (2012) elaborate “this is an important rite of passage where the family or clan gathers at the homestead and a goat is ritually slaughtered in the family’s kraal, then cooked and eaten by all – the child receiving a piece of unsalted meat to suck on. An elder from the community formally introduces the child to the family. Usually conducted in infancy or early childhood, imbeleko can also be done later in adolescence but must be completed before a boy is initiated” (Hall, 2017, 209). The significance of imbeleko amongst Xhosa informs the view of the human as life phases to be an ancestor. “The human person/personality is not a “completed” system (already at three to five years of age); the human being, as such, is perpetually “in the making” (Mkhize, 2012, 77).

The question of imbeleko in the Xhosa tradition is important as it goes beyond binary gender norms, this observed during the interviews: The importance of imbeleko, is emphasized by Anonymous, a transgender woman in her late 20s working on transgender issues in East London. Who did not go through the rite of passage herself (see her

reasoning in section ulwaluko: Xhosa Transgender Masculinities) but after the passing of both her parents, she assumed the role of breadwinner and sent her brother?

*Anonymous: "Hayi kaloku, waye funa yena. So sasi ne worry, when time goes... sava kwa kukho into, sizam kupha but had to postpone... iba painful into yohamba kommtana, aye ucinge lento ayihambeleyo uzo kwazi umelana nayo? Okanye uza buya okanye akazo buya? ... (I ask umgidi weya njani?) Waqala ngolwesi hlanu waphela ngeCawa wayemkhulu. Sasi wise inkomo. (I ask how long was he in the bush for? And whether eLibode) It was 3 weeks, hayiwo lukela apha (East London: Duncan Village). Izinto ezi fana naye mbelekho sizenzela eLibode but since yayinto ezi weak, ezi fana nho lwaluko saqonda masizenzela apha. Ngoba lontana waziwa more apha than pha.*

*Asanda: Why do you think uLwaluko is weak?*

*Anonymous: Ndiyi bona ingena nto yomsebenzi ulwaluko. Imbelekho yam, andi nho yenza eloxion.*

As different Xhosa clans have different and nuanced approaches to ulwaluko, depending on the initiate's clan name the practice thereof and particular teachings they undertake are dependent on their clan although much of the rite is universal amongst the Xhosa people. It's the clan and/or family's prerogative to decide whether the pre-initiation ceremonies will be public knowledge or not but it's customary for umgidi to be public as to affirm the initiates success.

Marking the beginning of ulwaluko, inkwenkwe is separated from the rest of society to be initiated. Usually, the night before they are to embark on their new journey to manhood, he is joined by his peers (some of whom might be fellow initiates on their own journey to manhood) for umguyo as a farewell to his childhood and his boyish ways (Ntombana, 2011). Whilst the to-be-initiate is psychologically preparing himself for the unknown journey into manhood not knowing what to expect or what is to be done during that time, as ulwaluko is generally shrouded in secrecy.

Abafana; a young man prepares ibhoma for umgeno kwenkwenkwe where the initiate temporarily lodges during ulwaluko lakhe. Ibhoma lomkhwetha is usually located away from the village or community and is to become a sacred place where the boy is initiated, this is the separation in the rite of passage. The to-be-initiate is usually led by ikhankatha lakhe and other men from the community who have gone before him. As with all rites of passages, the initiate at this stage is physically separated from his family and community to undertake isiko lokwaluka, customary rite initiation. Ntombana (2011) in his paper

emphasizes the need to declare ulwaluko as isiko. As to understand ulwaluko in a broader Xhosa socio-cultural context, I concur with Ntombana. "To define isiko is to include other words such as umthetho (law, stature, decree rule) and isithethe (a common practice) to better describe the initiation process with strong social and religious implications. To understand the meaning of the practice is to understand the meaning of isiko (custom)" (Ntombana, 2011, p. 633).

"Ndiyi ndoda"! Proclamations of manhood signaling his bravery and resilience to pain after ingcibi has performed the traditional circumcision (ukudlanga) (Ntombana, 2011). With initiate now circumcised the transitional or liminal stage of ulwaluko comprises much of the healing process and the moral teachings by ikhankatha. Customarily umkhwetha covers his body in ingceke (white clay as not to be seen, ingceke is thought to be purifying and serves as protection) (Vivian, 2008) during this time as he receives cultural teachings, moral values to be an upstanding person in society and the nation, other oral histories of the Xhosa people including isiko lokwaluka and why it is practised by amaXhosa.

These teachings are conducted in ukuhlonipha, a distinct Xhosa linguistic dialect for initiates taught and spoken during ulwaluko as to distinguish from those who haven't taken the rite of passage. It is during this time that the initiate grapples with his personhood and is taught endurance of pain whilst in the bush, in preparation of what is to come during one's manhood. Great importance is placed on the relation between ikhankatha and umkhwetha as teacher-pupil, nurse-patient in ensuring the successful completion of the initiation process. As the initiate heals during the liminal stage ukojiswa (cultural ceremony for the initiate) usually takes place in the second week of the initiate in the mountain as to mark the healing stage (Ntombana, 2011) and end of a critical time for the new initiate.

Post-ukojiswa and the remaining time in the mountain are dedicated to the moral teachings for umkhwetha by ikhankatha, elder members of the village or community that go visit the initiate and members of the family. It is during this time that Xhosa manhood and masculinity is shaped out of the lessons and lived experiences in the mountain. It is not expected that the initiate will learn everything on what it means to be a Xhosa man in the bush as most of these lessons, codes of conduct are expected to be learnt by ikrwala.

After several weeks or months in the mountain, the initiate is prepared to rejoin society to mark the final stage and success of ulwaluko. It is a tradition that the initiate burns and

destroys ibhoma alongside all the material objects that he was using during his period in the mountain on the day he 'graduates'. The burning symbolizes the ending of the liminal stage as it is believed the new initiate is on his way to attain manhood, he has now become a man. Several traditional ceremonies are performed to mark umphomo (coming out of the mountain). These include the pivotal role played by umthambisi womkwetha (anointer of the initiate) (Ntombana, 2011, p. 91) who uses a special butter to anoint the new initiate from head to toe. Xhosas believe umthabisi should be carefully chosen by the family and the community as whilst he is anointing the new initiate, he is "imparting himself to the new man" (Ntombana, 2011, p. 91). Through such explicit performance, there is repeated transferal, projections of energy, masculinity and patrilineal gender performativity that is to inform one's manhood.

During umgidi the celebrations of the new initiate rejoining society as ikrwala, uyaýalwa kwekrwala by elder men and women in the community serves as another important part of the initiation. It is these words that the new initiate receives from the elders on how he ought to be as a Xhosa man who is now welcomed and recognized by his community and ancestors needs to live by, the significance of this is to inform the hetero-patriarchy performative nature of gender. The moral and value teachings imparted on ikrwala marks the beginning as he rises in status as a Xhosa. It is expected that the new initiate would have let go of his boyish ways and has learnt important life lessons that he is to carry with him for the rest of his life. Importance on self-reliance, good morals, support and protection of family and community, independence, respect is just a few of the numerous teachings one is taught.

As a man, ikrwala is expected to contribute to the homestead, help during traditional ceremonies and is allowed to take on a wife and family of his own. In Xhosa culture, a male who has not through ulwaluko cannot be expected to get married as he is not recognized as a man in the culture and community. Behaviour that is deemed contrary to upholding such high heteronormative standards is unacceptable and that of inkwenkwe (or a boy). It is considered an insult to one's manhood/personhood if they are referred to as exhibiting behavioral patterns or attributes that are inconsistent with heteronormative gender performances. I spoke with Anonymous about varied gender performances by transwoman in traditional ceremonies and the following transcribed out of our conversation:

*Asanda: How was it like to send your child/brother to the bush (child, it is considered here as a term of endearment for the responsibility she has taken since the passing of both her*

parents)? I can image as a parent or even an elder sibling when ubrother wakho has to go through that moment, there are a lot of emotions, awuyazi kuza qubeka ntoni? How was it like to go through that? Walk me through kawu semcimbini? Wenza ntoni? Kubanjani?

*Anonymous: "Ekhaya, most of ezizinto zihandlishwa ndim. I am responsible (I ask her in what ways?) for instance from the start but ndiye ndibekelwe into. Masithi ndibhe sekitchen because of ndi good kwi catering. Andigeni ubhlanti because of ndi ngu mntu ongu mama. Kutshiwo nase khaya, awuno kwazi ungena ebuhlanti".*

*Asanda: Kwimicimbi kwenzeka njani? What is your movement in those spaces? What is it like? From the moment you have arrived there kuba njani?*

*Anonymous: Kuba right, akwibi khona. As for instance kulo nyaka uphelileyo endisando kolusa ubrother wam. Since, umama wam esando sweleka. So woluswa ndim. Ya decida ifamily izaba ndim izibazalo. Ndim oza kwenza yonke lanto, oza nxiba lamibaco... and all the stuff as umama wom ntana.*

The discussion with Anonymous raised intervening points on the role of usable traditions and queer black subjectivities in traditional spaces and contexts (Livermon, 2015). The context in which Anonymous gender as a transwoman is negotiated and navigated in a traditional space evokes Livermon (2015) analysis of the individual's insertion in traditional spaces, as means of rethinking of gendered binaries and exclusions based on queerness. "The interchangeable nature of these terms also presents a space of flexibility through which they contest restrictive definitions of African culture and tradition and with it provide a space for the reimagination of African customary law. Indeed, black queers argue for the expansion of voices with respect to the delineation of African customary law and hence understandings of African culture and tradition".

This forces a reimagining and rethinking beyond binary performative heteronormativity in culture. An underlying factor with Anonymous are her family dynamics including financial power within the family. As the primary breadwinner and caretaker in her family, the significance of her financial status circumnavigated subjectivity allowing for a primary role. In this particular context, Anonymous was accepted in traditional spaces such as initiation that are perceived to be exclusionary (Qambeka, 2017).

## 6. Hierarchy in Xhosa masculinity and Transgender women

What does it mean to think about ulwaluko and the experience of women who have been through it? As a traditional rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, transgender women complicate and disrupt the heteronormativity of the tradition through subjective individualism of their experiences (Livermon, 2015). As ulwaluko establishes the status of manhood that reproduces binary gender hierarchies through heteronormativity for male-borns the case that boys go there to enter the status of manhood. In this sense it is a homosocial space and ritual – so transgender women who have been through the process present us with an interesting case that begs important questions about sex, gender and how its used as an organizing tradition. This warranted further research into how this identity at odds with its culture specifically Xhosa fundamentally shifts our thinking of tradition, heteropatriarchy, homosociality as its rite of passage undertaken each year by thousands of young boys who are to be initiated and recognized.

The Xhosa initiation practice creates peculiarity of hierarchy in manhood; there is a clear distinction between inkwenkwe (boy), ikrwala (graduate or new man), umfana (young man), indoda (fully-fledged man) and utata (father or matured man) and ixhego (old man). These are not only status groups, but each group has roles, responsibilities and duties attached to them. In case of one not living in according to the roles and duties of the status, they lose such respect in the society (Ntombana, 2011, p. 79)

### 6.1 Hierarchies of masculinity

Arguably masculinity hierarchies are organized alongside patrilineal expectations with the circumcised man on top, further differentiated by whether a person is recognized as ikrwala, umfana, indoda, utata and ixhego this is largely based on the years since the person has been initiated with ikrwala and umfana being fairly young initiates. As lived experiences and time move a person along the hierarchy of ubudoda, their roles and responsibilities change with the status that is bestowed upon them and fulfilment of expected heterosexual-gender performances. Manhood or masculinity is, therefore, a lifetime journey for a person with the different roles and responsibilities passed down from generation time immemorial, repeated gender performances (Butler, 1991).

The importance of the different statuses is related to differing roles performed not only in the household or community but when doing traditional ceremonies like uxelwa (slaughtering) or ukubuyisa (a traditional ceremony for a deceased male to bring them back as an ancestor). Slaughtering for traditional ceremonies are done by males in the family and usually a responsibility bestowed on the firstborn male of the household. Astutely, repeated performances of particular gender norms are defining amongst amaXhosa. As language is gender neutral, it is through these repeated performances that indicate one's gender role and expectation. We are gendered by what we do or performances over time (Butler, 1991), deviation from such performances often results in social ostracism. Performances especially queered gender performance that is considered devious and disruptive to upholding social hierarchy is an indication of social stigmata, especially for the family that remains largely communal and dependent on societal acceptance: 'umntu, ngumntu nga bantu'- which can also be interpreted as sense one's personhood being validated by others. The individual exists in a community with others.

At the bottom of the hierarchy of Xhosa masculinity are the uncircumcised adult male and medically circumcised male. Reasons for both can range from personal choice to justifiable medical reasons (whether its penile injuries or problems related) to seek out western medical intervention or circumcisions. As both have not gone through the process of ulwaluko, people that have chosen 'other' are often ostracized, oppressed and belittled by those who have gone through ulwaluko claiming they are not real men and should not have the same cultural and social status as people that have gone to the mountain. In traditional ceremonies, these adults are treated the same as inkwenkwe and their participation is subjected to menial tasks; they seat separately from amadoda and do not have the same privileges regardless of age, the significance of performance cannot be overlooked. Mfecane (2016) argues it is this model based on circumcision status that widely differs from western models of masculinity. Mfecane (2016) acknowledging issues around dominance and oppression as it relates to hierarchies within Xhosa masculinities, argues male sexuality does not necessitate a person's status within Xhosa culture and unlike western models of masculinity, Xhosa queer bodies can have the same privileges and status as a cisgender Xhosa based on whether they have gone through ulwaluko. The accounted experiences from interviews of Xhosa transgender woman who have gone through this process fundamentally challenges this rhetoric.

Admittedly, Mfecane (2016) is right to a greater extent and I accept much of the theory of indoda especially the inherent hierarchies that exists within Xhosa manhood as a symbol



of cultural and social status but I digress from him and argue his contribution to the theory is limited as it overtly simplifies the status of Xhosa queer people in the socially constructed hierarchy of Xhosa masculinity: I acknowledge the problematic aspect of relating hierarchies, power and masculinities amongst Xhosa people as a social construct that is silencing and erasing. Ubudoda as a theory and 'practice' although it recognizes manhood outside sexual orientation, ulwaluko has been used as a correcting mechanism of homosexuality by Xhosa people in recent decades believing that a male initiate can go to the bush as LGBTIQ+ but will be positioned and recognized as ikrwala, as a heteronormative cisgendered Xhosa male as only 'real man' can withstand the rite of passage- the fundamentals of this report topic already challenges this simplified understanding, to take matter further a report I was privy to during my interviews and meetings at S.H.E, a transgender organization in East London made the following observation:

“As women who are socialized in a heteronormative culture, transgender women (heterosexual identifying) that have gone through ulwaluko are to find themselves attracted to other male initiates, if we are to examine their attraction in the bush, it would be incorrectly interpreted as homosexual and dismissed as such” (van der Merwe, Graves and Nduna, 2018, 11)

This passage is riveting not only does it make rethink the rite of passage and spaces as homosocial but inherently queer. The presence of a heterosexual transgender woman fundamentally ruptures and proposes notions of fluidity in becoming a man. Manhood, which is expected to be heteronormative amongst Xhosa emerges out of a queered and/or socially 'deviant' spaces. It is the sexual orientation that organizes and creates hierarchies in Xhosa manhood as anyone orientation through repeated performances an attain status of manhood. The following is a transcript taken from a focus group discussing the above-mentioned quote:

*Asanda: my understanding of the above-mentioned statement: when a transgender woman fall's in-love esuthweni it is a normal heterosexual love that is taking place. My understanding of the place is a homosocial environment with only males. The presence of a woman that comes into that space immediately changes its space. What does the presence of a woman in the space even mean for it and how does it change that space? Especially if space is more geared towards heterosexual males or gay males? What I understand from the paragraph, is for a person that would be witnessing the two people embrace, they*

would deem it as homosexual since acts of heterosexuality are deemed unacceptable esuthwini. What do you think of the statement above and what it means?

Wandy: For me, its true and since we are trans, and when we see a penis one can imagine... Ohhh what can I do with that? I want to get that one....

Anonymous: So wena, thetha ngabantu base hlatini, ilulungelo bha mna mandithi ndiyoko luka mna, kuko le ndoda njeba si kwesi space, tina sinobona bha singa lalana, uzama ukutsho ?

Asanda: Well not exactly that

Anonymous: Kum mna for my understanding, I thought ukuba it's a myth bubu xoki. Kaloku, kawu senza icircumcision kubakho iprotocols ezibekwayo. Andazi nto mna ngolwaluko but ka seku ncokolwa indlebe zithe nta, na'sezi tyini mos izinto sezi cazwa sezi veswa. Awuwaseli amanzi, okwesibini anditi incanca ibuhlungu ngoba ibleed'e too much. I think mna ba andino yenza lonto ndizi beka kweyona risk inkulu. Bha ibi ndim, masithi ndo lukile masithi sispace sethu singa lalana, njeba esithi uMalwande (Wandy) tina kasi boni ncanca uye abatywe asibona nani, yena lihlobo la ke. Ka ebona umthondo ka ecama, yhuuu ngaske ndim fumane lam thondo, asifanani mna andino yenza ingandi beka eriskini kakulu

Mama Afrika: Hayi, nam ndivumelana na lento uyaziyo. Ewe kandiye ... ngoba kawu phaya ehlatini uyayazi bha yintoni lena owu'yeleyo, ibuhlungu awu cingi bah mandi funa lomntu uphaya. Uza funa ukuva ezinye inthlungu kawu phaya

Anonymous: there is no lube there, there is no condom and anal, awusayi toilet for intsuku ezithile after uyenze circumcision. irisk inkulu

Asanda: Do you think for the woman that has been through ulwaluko, presence yabo changes landawo because kukho lento esiXhoseni that woman are not allowed there but we can't deny the fact that there are Xhosa transgender woman, eyonanto endi funa ukuyazi, does the presence of the transwoman make it queerer?

Mama Afrika: ithi kaloku lento ba kuko intombazana phaya, abakwetha bam fune. Ithi lonto bazi buyisela emva. inkanda ayipholi

*Asanda: ndiyayi bona lento yoyi sexualize lento but mna endifuna ukubona with just them being there ithini? Because of kuko le myth or a constant denial of transgender woman that have gone to ehlatini. What I want to understand, why is it that izispace ezinjeyana have a denial of the existence of Xhosa transgender woman, that decides to go through it? Does that not change the way we think about indawu enjeyana*

*Anonymous: ithi kaloku lento, xa sesi thetha thing kwezi space zethu, ngoba siyayi velela kasi kwezi space zethu. Bha mna ndigathi bha ndiyi ntombi ndi pinde okanye kuvakale ukuba ndolukile, ithetha ukuthini lonto? ithi impendulo ko gxa bethu: singabanye sisa xomekeke kwaba zali bethu so we have to follow rules and conditions zalapha endlini and abanye basa supportwa ngabazali babo, abanye basahlala under shelter yaba zali babo so its a matter of must to go and do icircumcision. Uthi ke noku umbuzo wethu, siyayi vuma umntu uxomekeke emzalini wakhe, akekho umntu onga xomeke pantsi kom zali wakhe*

This assumption and myth of ulwaluko as corrective has resulted in countless abuses (emotional and physical) that LGBTIQ+ initiates had/have to endure during ulwaluko. As many initiates are forced by their families to go through the rite of passage as to 'rid the shame they have put the family as trans or LGBTIQ identifying', they feel inherently disconnected to the rite of passage. The role and influence the family has over the decision of someone going is of grave concern, a transgender woman does not belong in that space as it is against everything they stand for: the point of contention that is raised is in societal expectation of a woman, what would be said by people if they are to hear that a woman has gone through initiation? Culturally it is unheard of and this should be the case for transgender women.

Unfortunately, as raised by Anonymous, who tells me the perception when they discuss this amongst themselves in trans spaces, many are dependent on their families who force them to go through this with expectation when they come back from the bush they would have changed, their trans identity nexus dependent upon the individual's relation with their families. Empathizing with those who have faced this traumatic experience due to their family pressure, it is common to find a transgender woman who have gone through ulwaluko not out of their own volition.

As Anonymous and Mama Afrika, discuss in great detail the presence of the transgender woman and the space invariably antagonistic towards the transgender identity, have both

chosen not to go through ulwaluko, as Anonymous says how could she have explained it to her partner, he will start to see me as a man. She warns, for those who have gone, whilst in the liminal stage it would be dangerous for them and their healing if they are to engage in sexual relations as one would be putting their health at risk. Whilst Mama Afrika and Anonymous argue about the risks involved for a hetero-transwoman in the bush, Wandy whom have gone through the rite of passage explains the difficulty of not being aroused or tempted into engaging with sexual acts whilst you are still there including manipulation that one faces.

It is unclear in literature and/or oral history as to when ulwaluko started to be considered a place to 'cure homosexuality' as African perceptions on homosexuality/LGBTIQ+ have been largely influenced by colonialism and the spread of Christianity by missionaries (Livermon, 2015). Ulwaluko has been subject to many social changes and influences including continued perceptions of LGBTIQ+, although outwardly ubudoda is considered not to be influenced by LGBTIQ+, I argue it is this very subject and its own socio-political hierarchies that exist within the community that seem to find a place within hierarchies of Xhosa masculinities. How so?

Hierarchies are not uniquely found in masculinities but exist in other socially constructed identities including those of the LGBTIQ+ although nuanced, such hierarchies exist amongst hetero-normative and effeminate gay men, with the former considered more socially acceptable than the latter. These nuanced hierarchies extend to other identities including Trans\*those that have gone through gender reaffirming surgery and not. Implicit in the social relations amongst of Xhosa people especially in traditional ceremonies), that these hierarchies (socio-sexual masculine hierarchies amongst Xhosa people play out the most with hetero-normative hegemonic masculinities being on top or dominant.

## **6.2 (Re)Theorize ubudoda**

To (re)theorize ubudoda is exploring the multiple socially constructed hierarchies that exist within it that remain oppressive. Both languages, ukuhlonipha – taught during ulwaluko and cultural bodily marker physical circumcision by ingcibi are used interchangeably to validate ubudoda. Other external validations of ubudoda include having osaluka 'peer initiates' and umgidi warrants ulwaluko as a social fact that cannot be denied even though one might not choose to ascribe to. For Xhosa people, who have gone to ulwaluko you carry ubudoda bakho with you for the rest of your life you cannot undo going to ulwaluko- its either you've done it or not. Inherently, what this means for Xhosa

transwoman who have undergone ulwaluko, is simply a part of their gender identity will always be tied to ubudoda. Although one might not identify as a man, culturally your masculinity will always be a part of your gender identity.

Hierarchies of Xhosa masculinity (ubudoda) needs to be viewed in a wider sociological context as to include the different social positions of amadoda it is not homogenized as much as the literature infers rather it comprises problematically so of the circumcised cisgendered male: hegemonic, dominant and oppressive identity at the top; hetero-normative circumcised homosexual male, simply straight acting or 'passing' male; effeminate homosexual male; circumcised transwoman (non-surgically affirmed); circumcised transwoman (surgically reaffirmed previously with male anatomy at time of circumcision) all the above listed thus far would have undertaken ulwaluko and are recognized as indoda based on the successful completion of the rite of passage. As ulwaluko cannot merely be reduced to circumcision as a cultural bodily marker but inclusive of all the teachings non-physical aspects of isiko lolwaluko about 'manhood', personhood and adult behavioral codes and conduct of a Xhosa person recognition and acceptance by the community as to partake in cultural and traditional ceremonies, recognized by ones' ancestors, ubudoda intrinsically manifests itself and thus becomes part of a person's life.

Although this informed much of my research question I went in with, it was not the case that emerged out of the interviews I did with Wandy and Mama Afrika, heterosexual transgender women who have gone through initiation that repeatedly informed me, it made no difference that they went through the process as they are still socially ostracized and do not have any of the presumed male privileges that would have been expected. They are still considered as deviants within rural communities and find themselves subject varied forms of abuses.

*Asanda: When we think of ulwaluko, there is a form of respect that is gained when someone has gone. Is it the same for a trans woman? Do they also gain respect or is there a loss? Or is it inconsequential for a trans woman? How is it like as a trans woman that had decided for yourself to go through ulwaluko? And feel like you have lost that sense of respect that you were supposed to have gained after?*

*Wandy: Uye ungayi fumani irespect, awuyi fumani sowu yile. Because oko qala, they have that mentality once uyo lwaluka uzabuya utshintshile uzabuya ungu bhuti, it doesn't make*

*any difference waluka okanye ungaluki, that is the first weak point yabo ke ngoku. Mistake yabo leyo... Of which it doesn't go like that. Bane expectations kakulu ezininzi...*

*Asanda: and then Wandy, I think speaking candidly because both of us are LGBTI people that have gone through ulwaluko is it the culture? Is it the people that are practising it or do you find both to be antagonistic towards you?*

*Wandy: Both! Both my darling and it is a trauma Yhoo! its a trauma! I have never been that traumatized in my life. Uyabona leyana indawo andiyi kraleli kancinci... and yazi once waze woluka andiyazi noba ndim na, ukwenza sometimes uzi feele less of a woman. Nyani Nyani, ndim lona ndiyenzile lento but ndiyi ntombazana nje? Ndiyenze ka njani lento, uku bone lanto uzi doubte?! Yhuuuuuu! Ha Ah! Mna shem omnye umtana andinokuthi mabaye andi bha lahlekisi tuu.*

*Wandy: Even kawo lukile, abafana see you as inkwenkwe because of inxiba iziskirt, uhlala naba fazi. You are not man enough for them nakuso lukile. Uyabona, it does not make any difference.*

*Wandy elaborates: As an effeminate identifying gay male at the time, she went through ulwaluko, as she came to the term transgender after she went and during her initial introduction to S.H.E. her family and village were surprised that she would exercise her agency and go through the rite of passage. She found herself constantly subject to abuses, forms of trauma and violence. Her unpleasant experience that she wouldn't take back, didn't make the difference she had expected. She continued to face stigma and rejection from her community. For her, she concludes there is no value gained by going there as a transwoman.*

To this emerges for Xhosa transwoman a double consciousness and social peculiarity that places their bodies as a battleground between their cultural and legal bodies further exacerbated by socio-political interrelations of race, class and gender as their construct their identities. It should be noted, although this is highly problematic, controversial, and oppressive and silencing these are the social realities faced by Xhosa LGBTIQ+ people. I find it troubling and painful having to depict my observations on how Xhosa LGBTIQ+ people are seen and expected to navigate this oppressive social reality.

Much of the moral degradation and shame brought upon by amakrwala that elders continuously complain about is rooted in the oppressive nature of how gender colonial norms affected Xhosa people and has remained largely unchanged continued in the construction of the black body – internal and external influences on ulwaluko. The distinction drawn in the above-mentioned Xhosa hierarchy of indoda amongst transwoman

is unfortunately based (reduced to) whether the person still has the cultural bodily marker of ulwaluko (circumcised penis by ingcibi) of which might be a continuously repressive and violent reminder of their gender identity being misaligned with biological sex.

The bottom of the Xhosa masculine hierarchy is comprised of the equally same social status of uncircumcised adult males and medically circumcised males. I am inclined at this point to explore the challenges to hegemonic masculinity Xhosa transman pose and where they would be placed in the hierarchy I recognize and acknowledge this is problematic. As Xhosa transman will exhibit all the moral and behaviors of any adult circumcised man, just like Xhosa adults who have not gone through ulwaluko or medically circumcised but do not have the cultural bodily marker or have learnt inhlonipho nor lived experiences of ulwaluko would be placed amongst or together with uncircumcised adult males and medically circumcised males and viewed as their equal in traditional ceremonies.

The roles and responsibilities of a transman and performance of their gender would be within a cultural space be the same as uncircumcised adult males and medically circumcised males. In some light, this might be deemed a progressive contribution to ubudoda but if I am to be self-critical, this view nonetheless perpetuates a hegemonic understanding and acceptance of ubudoda theoretically and unsupported by real-life experiences. Question to Anonymous: I wanted to know some of your thoughts on ulwaluko? What it means to a transgender woman

*"Kwi ndawu esihlala kuzo, mosi uya kula nabanya abantwana. You can't run away from it. Most njeba ukula nabanye abantwana, most abantu okula nabo they know your gender. So lanto iza spreada to anyone mostly ka ungumntu ongu mfana funeke wolukila. Litsho isiko la kwa Xhosa. But mna as iTranswoman andiyi boni iright, they way andi feela khona. As apha endlini, njebe ukulendlu, I've got iboyfriend endi hlala nayo, it been 4 years now sihlala soba bini. Ndi xecele koba, mna ndiya phuma, ndiya koluka ivhe mna ndiya kwaluka, what kind of a woman endiyiyo. Iza feelisha njani yona? Mna ndi zazi feelisha njani kandi gazi fake myself? Ndizi philisa ubomi I suppose andibi phili? Andi tsho ezinye itranswoman kazizi feelisha maziyo koluka, mazi ngoluki but for me, uya understanda andino kolunga. Into endiyi jongileyo mna, ndi jonga isurgery " - Annonymous*

The rite of passage of ulwaluko is intricately linked to performative understanding and expectation of gender roles. It limits expressions of fluidity and perpetuates a heteronormative expectation of gender role and performance. Tradition delaminates

expected gender performances of being especially in highly traditional communities often reproducing gender dualism. Anonymous in this passage reflects on the conversation of ulwaluko being something that she has grown up being keenly aware of...growing up born-male there was expectation from the Xhosa speaking community that she lived in that following tradition and going through the rite of passage was a way of life. Recounting growing up, everyone knows what your gender is and the traditions and customs that come with the gender asserting kwaXhosa boys need to go through the rite of passage. Although recognizing its traditional significance, she fails to see why it should be the case for people that identify as a transgender woman as it doesn't match with her gender identity. "As a woman living with my boyfriend, how would he see me if I am to go through ulwaluko something that is meant for boys/man? What kind of a woman would he think I am? The rite of passage would be disingenuous, faking myself as the world that would unfold would tie me to a status of traditional Xhosa manhood. The only thing I am looking forward to is gender re-affirming surgery".

As she notes, although she feels this way about the rite of passage, she does not feel as though her remarks should be generalized for all transgender woman as they should be given an option as to whether they want to go through the rite of passage. For some, it might be something that they want but for her, it does not make sense as part of her gender. There are key things that are raised by Anonymous and how ulwaluko affects the lives of transgender women. She notes there is an underlying perception from her partner, where she would not be a full woman. The traditional marker on the body by ulwaluko continuously infers a status of manhood that a transgender woman that has gone through the rite of passage will have, it might be difficult in the relationships she is to have as it might necessitate justifications as for why one had to go through this. The notion of being seen as less of a woman is something that a Xhosa transgender woman constantly has to negotiate. As discussed, and placing it in context of the above extract, in her case and experience as long as her body does not bare the rite of passage, she can be recognized by her gender expression without traditional conflict.

### **6.3 Violence and domestic abuse**

*Wandy: Mna I don't see any difference kule woman osecam kwam ne woman endim. Ingathi ndizi bizela more violence kandizi bizi transgender. Like for instance kwi case yam ne boyfriend yam, there is a part kathi iboyfriend yam ngoku sixabanayo ya ngenelwa yifamily yakhe. Lanto*



*ke ngoku, ihlale a huge gap singa kwazi ulungisa izinto zethu. They didn't know I'm a trans and yet lotto yabenze ke ngoku bha freake out bamnike ke ngoku ichoice if ufuna uhlala kule relationship funeke uzazi you don't belong to this family. If you are going to quit this relationship uza funeke uhambe out of East London. Eligama lithi transgender, ha! Liyali biza iviolence. ndi sitsho nje ndi ne experience yalo lonto.*

*Asanda: if you don't mind, what kind of violence does the word transgender bring about?*

*Wandy: For instance, lento yale family ye boyfriend yam. Before they knew I was transgender ibinga ndazi, bebendi respect'ile kakhulu bendi thanda. Bothi to find out ukuthi andiyiyo lento bebe cinga fana ndiyiyo bandi capukela kakhulu. Kabendi bona haske bandi bethe okanye enze nantoni nah afuna ukuyenza*

*Wandy: Ndifuna uku correcta kulento yo kwamkela, in the case yam nho boyfriend wam uyakwazi undi manipulata. Athi, Wandy what's the point of using a condom, it is not like you are going to get pregnant, you know. Not knowing that he is putting your life at risk and nawe ubomi bake ebu ncipheni.*

Transgender people are subject to many forms of violence. In my interviews with Wandy who has been subject to systematic forms of violence explains and extends arguments made by Beth Richie in her seminal work 'Arrested Justice: Black Women and Violence... who argues woman find themselves in a "violence matrix, the tangled web of structural disadvantages, institutionalized racism, gender domination, class exploitation, hetero-patriarchy and other forms of oppression that locks the systematic abuse of black women in place (2012:128)". For Wandy, violence arises from the use of language one needs to identify themselves as transgender.

As she explains to me in the interview, the moment she has to call herself transgender she is calling upon violence that she has to live with, the term itself is inherently violent as she constantly needs to live in fear of violence imposed upon her. Her accounts of the constant threat that raised with her boyfriend and his family, the line of work she does is a daily nightmare. As a Xhosa transgender woman that is living in a society that knows very little about transgender identities, she has found herself a victim of intimacy manipulations that have festered partner domestic violence which has put her life at risk. Manipulation by a partner of years, for instance, to not use condoms, as he told him 'what is the point, it's not like you will get pregnant' under the guise of trust in their relationship has exposed her to HIV/AIDS. Her reluctance to find herself being truly accepted by a partner(s) is something that she constantly is negotiating as most she elaborates on male

partners using transgender women to fulfil their own needs. Intimate partner relations have caused her to endure horrors in her relationship as she explains to me:

*Wandy: He was abusive, He was abusive, he was abusive and kula abuse yakhe I didn't know, ukuthi he was abusing me. Coz I've got a belief, ndandine belief that when a man beats me it makes me feel more like a real woman. Do you know? And once andibethe (stutter and quiver in her voice) nge mpama andi bethe nge nqindi undi faka (stutter and quiver in her voice) endleleni. Uyayi'bona lanto? So, not knowing that he is abusing me and also, he is building ianger (inaudible) it's like that*

The extent of violence that she had endured in her relationship as she explains in the above extract from the interview influenced the way she thought of her womanhood and what makes her a woman. To be a woman, one needs to allow her partner to slap or punch them as any resistance to the would mean she is less of a woman. The effect of manipulation and repeatedly seeing forms of violence expressed by a man towards woman resulted in the years of abuse in her relationship. For Wandy, her acceptance as a transgender woman has meant that she has encountered violence at every corner. From the violent traumatic experience of going through initiation in a very unwelcoming space to an abusive relationship. Her gender identity and living true to herself has come at a violent cost. Coming to her transgender identity after having gone through the process of ulwaluko has possibly resulted in psychological traumas of the experience that were suppressed.

During the time of the rite of passage, she was identifying as an effeminate gay man to this, I start to think about Lauraune Vivian's (2008) work on traumas of initiation amongst Xhosa-speaking men following circumcision. Vivian concludes in her research for some Xhosa speaking men, the rite of passage ulwaluko exhibits psychosocial stressors such as trauma, problems with support groups, cultural dissonance and violence. "Initiates, it appears, face more psychosocial and environmental stressors that they did in the past, with cultural dissonance often being a problem for them. Further arguing in a manner that relates to Wandy, changes in social relationships have affected gender relations and the construction of gender described roles. Formerly, taboos in circumcision regulated the initiates interaction with females as an essential part of a rite of passage that has long socialized gender relations with the culture. The complexities of this, especially the presence of the transgender woman going through the rite of passage relates the previous section discussion on Xhosa hierarchy and transgender women" (Vivian, 2008, 36). The trauma of a woman forced to confront culture, it's the level of trauma that is has caused

that I was not ready for, its systematic violence. Although I had initially thought that people who had chosen to go through ulwaluko would have been treated differently they faced stigma from the rejection of male gender performance. They are stigmatized and discriminated often in dehumanizing by hetero-patriarchy.

Not only did she have to endure the traumas of violence from her boyfriend but also his family whom when they found out that she was a transgender woman threatened her life and relationship. The family felt humiliated and stigmatized by the possibility of their son dating a transgender woman. The moment the family found out she was trans, they started treating her differently branding her a liar for deceiving them about her 'true-self'. The rejection by the partners family not only extended to Wandy but their own son, whom they forced to stop the relationship with her and leave East London as they do not want to be associated with this. At the time of this, all happening, Wandy and her partner had adopted a child who was abandoned by a fellow pleasure executive (sex worker) in East London.

*Wandy: Ya, he was very supportive at the time we were together. Ahhh, let me start here, we've got 3 years, we were dating for 3 years. We have a baby you; he is 1 year 8 months, but we broke up last year October (inaudible) by the time I was quitting with my work. I found out he is cheating. I knew that he was cheating, I didn't have a problem with that. But I know that for the mere fact that he is cheating, he is respecting me but the day we broke up... Ohh it was the day, Anda fumana lento*

## 7. Conclusion

The question of transgressing queer and trans subjectivities in traditional spaces has been one of the grounding questions that has been throughout the research. Drawing in the works of Livermon (2015) conception of usable traditions, how then does this reflect on the lived experiences of transgender peoples. In various spaces, expressions and forms of violent hyper-masculinities enforced on marginalised queer bodies, erasing and silencing continues to hover over the lives of many.

I entered this research as an insider-outsider, with suppositions on the outcomes and expectation of the experiences of ulwaluko - a rite of passage with social expectation on the impact it will have. As such with research, prior convictions on the outcomes were quickly thrown out, needing to uncover more from subjects lived experiences through a phenomenological intervention the extent to which there continues to be misalignments between the tradition and individual. Whereas Livermon (2015) asserts the use of usable traditions for queered bodies with regard to initiation, the degree to which one's subjectivity can hold beneficial outcomes was not immediately. The lived experiences of transgender women are complex especially when tradition organizes the understanding of gender through binary lenses and informs the lives, we live in. As discuss thus far, within trans-scholarship and framing for this report, the role of the body challenges some of the prevailing thinking and framing of gender. In Xhosa tradition there is a strong emphasis to reproduce hetero-patriarchy and gender norms. Emerging from interviews and phenomenological approach, there was a need to shift beyond the parameters that I had sought out to understand the lived experiences of my subject I needed to move the research to spaces that she is comfortable with or simply trans safe place engaging with not only her but they she relates the world that has unfolded for her.

When it comes to ulwaluko the role of the family is imperative as many transgender women have been forced to go through the traumatic experiences because they have been forced by their families. The family has been one of the first places where there is constant discrimination on the identity which has used Xhosa tradition as a 'corrective mechanism' for transgender identities.

Usually there is constant expectation from a family that when a LGBTIQ+ member goes through the rite of passage that they will come out changed person ending this presumed 'childlike behavior' that they might have. As pointed out in the methodology section, the family has been instrumental the notion of having a body-for-other. As discussed through

the lenses of Jean-Paul Sartre, in Xhosa tradition the body belongs to both the self and the community. The extension and the existence of the body in how they world starts to unfold for Xhosa transgender is one of belonging to the family unit and need to reproduce and expanded through gendered dualism. When it comes to rites of passages such as ulwaluko where one is to learn about their clan names and history, it is through the family that social status as amaXhosa achieved.

Although one might have non-confirmative gender identification whose performance will be that of another gender even through repeated performance of such or queer often disorientation towards the queer if we are to think through Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology it doesn't necessitate forms of freedom. The remains an expectation and pressure for othered gender expression/identity and social orientation to be changed during ulwaluko'. There are high levels of disappointment and rejection when they are faced with the reality: ulwaluko does not make one a man neither does the experience of going through a gendered rite of passage equate that consequently this has led to ostracism.

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