“Most of them, they just want someone to under them:” Gender, Generation, and Personhood among the Xhosa

By Kathleen Rice

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
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Abstract

Drawing on seventeen months of ethnographic fieldwork, this dissertation focuses on gendered and generational conflicts about social reproduction in a rural Xhosa community in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. By exploring locally-contentious topics such as human rights, gender equality, love marriage, bridewealth, bride abduction, and the deployment of sexuality, I make several related arguments about personhood, the deployment of tradition, and the experience of modernity. The forms of personhood, tradition, and modernity that I discuss are all vernacular concepts, and are not overarching analytic tools. Firstly, I show that local people interpret these contests in generational, gendered, and also temporal terms, framing rural life and the will of elders as timeless tradition, in contrast with modern city life, and with the habits and aspirations of youth. The predilections of elders thus bear the moral authority of both imagined history, and ancestral will. Secondly, I show various ways in which experiences of and aspirations about tradition and modernity are themselves deeply gendered, and that these divergent aspirations are sources of considerable interpersonal conflict. Thirdly, I demonstrate
that inequality is intrinsic to the subject positions through which people understand their identity. Accordingly, idioms such as gender equality and (egalitarian) human rights render the meaning of these subject positions unclear. Accordingly, sociality between genders and generations is often characterized by antagonism and uncertainty. Finally, I identify a deep, ironic contradiction at the core of domestic life: worsening economic austerity means that people of all ages and genders are becoming more interdependent. However, this increasing interdependency, which has historically been central to local forms of personhood, is concurrent with the rising prominence of an ideological system which privileges autonomous, independent, choice-oriented forms of personhood as the cornerstone of a worthy self. Thus, South Africa’s economic crisis is also a crisis of meaning about equality, gender, age, sexuality, and spirituality, played out through the messy intimacy of social reproduction and rural domestic life.
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Introduction

The year is 2007, and the sun is shining down on the people gathered at the homestead of elderly Sigcawu, one of the two sub-headmen of Mhlambini village. I am not there, but I know the sun is shining because this meeting would have been postponed otherwise; there is no hut large enough to accommodate the numbers that typically turn up for community meetings, and only for funerals will elders venture out in the rain.

The usual crowd is present for this meeting, as well as a few wrinkled faces that are unfamiliar to me because they will have died in the years between this meeting and my arrival. Some of them are probably looking out over the rolling hills of Mhlambini, tired by whatever long deliberation is taking place today. Maybe they are organizing a “dip meeting” to inoculate cattle. Maybe there is a new development in the ongoing disputes that the people of Mhlambini are having with the Headman. Maybe there has been yet more violence at a local shebeen (informal bar); someone’s son is probably responsible. Perhaps they are trying to figure out who has stayed home or gone to town today. Looking around they will find that this meeting looks like any other: old men are sitting on the grass, many wrapped in thick blankets despite the warm weather; all with caps on their heads and their long sticks in hand. Some younger men may be sitting behind their elders, listening silently. Off to the side at a respectful distance from the men, a somewhat smaller group of middle-aged and elderly women are reclined together on the grass. Nosithele is seated among them, easily identifiable by the many white beads which mark her as a sangoma (spiritual healer).

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1This is a pseudonym, as is the name of nearly every person mentioned in the ethnographic portions of this dissertation. The name of the village and of neighbouring villages are similarly disguised in the interest of privacy.
Nosithele's husband Bhuntsule is also here, sitting near the front of the men's side of the yard. He has recently retired from mine-work and is enjoying the life of a rural village patriarch: he goes fishing most mornings, manages the family's livestock, visits with friends, plans building projects to improve the homestead, and otherwise relaxes and enjoys the leisure that is his expected reward for having achieved the status of an elderly homestead head. For her part, in addition to her work as a sangoma, Nosithele manages the daily actives that are her jurisdiction as a wife, such as cooking, fetching firewood, dunging floors, and cultivating an impressive garden. Each excelling within their own gendered spheres, together Nosithele and Bhuntsule exemplify the gender complementarity that local people articulate as the traditional Xhosa way, and each is accorded respect from their peers for their contribution to this conjugal project. Yet Nosithele is hoping to retire soon too, and her prospects are not looking promising. Although she and Bhuntsule have four full-grown children, Nosithele has no daughter-in-law at home to help her manage the homestead, because neither son is married. There is still hope for the younger son, as he is a labour migrant working on a fruit farm far away in the Western Cape. But her other son is in jail in Mthatha, convicted of carjacking. Both of her daughters, aged 17 and 26, are unmarried mothers and are living at home.

As often happens at community meetings these days, Steven stands up to speak. Several old women prick up their ears and smirk in anticipation. Steven has brought many surprises to the village since he first walked up from the beach five years ago with a plan to open a backpacker lodge in Mhlambini. Many people were initially skeptical, but true to his word the Lodge has created employment for some of the most destitute families in this marginal region. And although there is no road to Mhlambini yet, intrepid visitors - most of them young, most of them white people like Steven- are making the journey to stay at the Fair Trade Certified Lodge which has won many awards for ethical tourism.
“There is a lady who is a masseuse staying at the Lodge right now,” Steven explains in fluent isiXhosa (the Xhosa language). “She has offered to train a young woman in massage therapy, in exchange for free accommodation at the Lodge. Once trained, this girl could run her own business, offering massages to guests.” Most people do not know what “massage” is, and there is some tittering as Steven tries to explain that massage could prove a lucrative business in Mhlambini. Nosithele laughs along with them, but also thinks to herself that a lot of Steven’s most fabulous propositions have turned out better than expected. And her youngest daughter Busi has recently given birth to a baby son, and has dropped out of grade nine to care for him. The child's father, a young man from another village, is not supporting the child and has not even paid damages let alone brought up the topic of bridewealth. Perhaps Busi could earn some money through the Lodge, and support the child herself. Being a young woman Busi is not present at the meeting, but Nosithele volunteers her for the training all the same.

... Four years have passed. The recession has hit budget tourism in South Africa hard, and there are fewer visitors coming from overseas than there used to be. But still, life is good for Busi these days. She is talented in her work, and her massages are in demand at the backpacker Lodge. She is one of the highest income-earners in the village; in a good month she earns far more than her father's old age pension, and her mother and sister's salaries combined. At 21 she is comfortable financially, stylish, and her son Azola is handsome like his mother and is the best-dressed child at the local preschool. Like all unmarried women Busi lives at home, but she has a boyfriend who works as a truck driver far away in Venda, and she has the means to visit him periodically. In fact, she has recently returned from a trip to Venda with beautiful new hair extensions and a stylish new phone.
Something went wrong last night, however. Busi had been drinking beers with some local girlfriends late at night at the backpacker lodge, and she decided to show them a magic trick involving an egg. If the trick had been executed successfully the egg would have remained intact, and she would have put it back in the backpacker lodge kitchen where she got it from. But because she was tipsy Busi fumbled with the egg, and it smashed on the ground. Giggling, Busi and her friends called a dog over to eat the evidence, and carried on with their party.

Last night was fun, but today Busi has a problem. She has a mean hangover, but even worse: somehow the story of the broken egg has gotten out, and a community meeting has been called to discuss what her punishment should be. There is considerable back and forth, but by far the most insistent voice is that of Mzoxolo. Although he is middle-aged rather than elderly, Mzoxolo's opinion carries heavy weight here. He is among the wealthiest men in the village, as evidenced by his enviable obesity. He runs a shop and shebeen, has a large family with his wife, and owns an expansive homestead with multiple huts and many livestock. His elderly mother retired from manual labour long ago; when not out visiting her friends she can often be found reclining in the yard of Mzoxolo's homestead smoking her long pipe, her impassive eyes appraising the village from under her enormous headdress. In short, Mzoxolo's homestead is the picture of the rural umzi (homestead) that is the aspiration of many local men. Mzoxolo is the pinnacle of village success and is well connected, and people want to stay on his good side.

Today Busi is evidently not on his good side, however. Mzoxolo is arguing emphatically that she must be fired for her transgression. Several years ago, he argues, a local woman who worked as a housekeeper at the Lodge was fired for stealing sheets. In both cases Lodge property was taken by people who were not authorized to do so: these are analogous situations, he says, and the consequences should be the same. Steven counters Mzoxolo by arguing that there is a moral difference between dropping an egg by accident, and stealing sheets with the intent of
theft. Someone else points out that Busi's massage is her own business; she does not work for the Lodge, so she cannot be fired at all. Who would do the firing, and on what grounds would they derive their authority to do so? In the end, the moderate voices of Steven and others are to no avail: Busi is not fired, but she is banned from advertising her work at the Lodge, and from using it as a workspace.

To me as an insider-outsider in the community the penance seems overly harsh, especially as Busi can afford to replace the egg many times over and has offered to do so. I state as much to some of my young peers in the community, and am quickly put in my place. “Oh, this is not about the egg at all!” they tell me. “It’s Mzoxolo. Everyone is jealous for jobs at the Lodge, and he's hoping that his daughter Sinelithle will get Busi's job.” “But Busi has had training for her job,” I counter. “It's not like someone else can just start doing massages with no idea how to do it.” “No,” says Xolise, “but the old ones don’t understand. They don't see it that way.” Someone else speaks up: “I agree that this thing with the egg, it’s not about the egg at all. It’s about the old ones not liking girls out at night, drinking beer. But Busi has imali (money), so they can’t stop her.” I, along with several others, nod in agreement. This makes sense. The wayward ways of young people are a constant source of consternation for local elders, and by this point I am aware that these contests play out in indirect ways.

Later that afternoon I am again discussing the incident, this time with another young male friend. I recount the explanations offered to me earlier, and he shakes his head. “I'll tell you what is actually happening,” he says, “Mzoxolo has been trying to get Busi to be his girlfriend, but she is not interested. He likes the younger girls, and he's angry because she doesn't love him. She doesn't need a man like that.”

***
Missing from this account, of course, is an indication of how Mzoxolo would represent any underlying motivations that he may have had in arguing for Busi to be fired. Drawing on the seventeen months of ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out in Mhlambini village, I would venture that any of the explanations offered would be plausible ones. But I doubt that Mzoxolo would articulate his motivations in these terms, and it would not have been acceptable for me to ask him. In some ways this partial omission is typical of much of what follows in this dissertation: by virtue of how age, gender, status, and sociality align in Mhlambini, the daily lives of powerful men were the most dissociated from mine. As such, like many anthropologists my research disproportionately represents the lives of people who are perceived to be more like me, in this case young women and girls (especially unmarried ones) and, secondarily, young men and older women. I see this less as a limitation to my work, however, than as a window of opportunity to contribute a needed perspective to contemporary scholarship, as young women's lives-and especially the lives of young, rural women- are underrepresented in recent South African ethnography.

Beyond demonstrating the fundamentally gendered nature of the research context, I have chosen to open with this vignette for several reasons. Although Busi is in some ways an exceptional village girl, in earning her own income and being inclined to move freely in spaces such as bars, which until recently were the exclusive domain of adult males and the elderly, she embodies the aspirations of a growing number of young women. I have also opened with this vignette because I feel it elucidates links between many aspects of contemporary life in Mhlambini, from the sphere of the family to the level of village politics, and, in the case of the local backpacker lodge, the ways in which this rural village is integrated into global circuits of finance and migration. It touches on the social power of money in a cash economy, and on the ways in which capital facilitates particular social arrangements and precludes others. All of these
dimensions of social life bear heavily on the chapters that follow.

I went into the community aiming to explore the question of what cultural institutions were being mobilized ‘on the ground’ to either challenge or reinforce intergenerational and gendered power, and to examine how this was being accomplished. I intended ‘cultural institutions’ to be interpreted broadly, to encompass practices, beliefs, and claims to power based on particular idioms of value. Simply put, this dissertation speaks to precisely this question. Tradition, I found, was an overarching trope that was frequently deployed or contested in virtually all contexts where gendered and generational relations of authority were at stake.

This introduction and forthcoming chapters will clarify what is meant by tradition in Mhlambini. For now, I stress that while the term has been rightly critiqued in the academic sphere, tradition is considered a powerful social fact by the people whose lives I analyze here (see van der Vliet 1991). It is of central importance to this dissertation because both patriarchy and gerontocracy are considered central pillars of tradition by local people; most men and elders staunchly maintain that women and youth belong “under them,” subject to men’s authority. Indeed, contests on the ground are not over whether patriarchy and gerontocracy are indeed longstanding organizing principles of Xhosa society -everyone agrees that they are- but whether they are still appropriate in the contemporary democratic era. In embracing this as an important social fact in the community, I do not contest the merit of work which questions the analytic purchase of ‘tradition,’ especially in Africa. As I will elaborate below, much of this scholarship deeply informs my work. Thus, when I use ‘tradition’ throughout this dissertation I do so without scare quotes, but unless otherwise stated I employ this term as an emic concept rather than an analytic tool.

On a closely related note, while people speak authoritatively of tradition, are adept at identifying things that are not traditional, and frequently deploy tradition as a means of critiquing
certain practices and ideals, over the course my fieldwork I did not encounter the use of a similarly-encompassing term for what tradition is situated in relation to or juxtaposed against. As such, in this research I have encountered a similar challenge to what Sherry Ortner (1991) has struggled with in her research on social class in the United States of America, namely how does one study and speak of something that is central to social life but is rarely spoken about, and is rather displaced onto other categorizes of difference? While perhaps not displaced, exactly -to me, this comes too close to the suggestion that local realities are misplaced, that local people are failing to perceive the obvious- for people in Mhlambini alternatives to tradition are reflected, realized, and thrown back at them through such tangible manifestations as square houses and trousers on women, as well as such idioms as human rights, companionate monogamy, Christian morality, and formal education. These dimensions of daily life come together to create something akin to what Raymond Williams has referred to as a “structure of feeling,” that is “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” (1977: 132). In discussing this structure of feeling, I retain the heavily-critiqued term 'modernity' because it allows me to contribute succinctly to ongoing conversations in anthropology and related disciplines, with the caveat that the modernity which I describe is likewise vernacular (Knauft 2002).

Throughout this dissertation I demonstrate that the conflicts and negotiations that characterize contemporary life in Mhlambini are related to tensions between different “modalities” (Boddy 1998: 256) of self, identity, and personhood. On one hand, the social relations that people articulate as traditional presume a self that is deeply embedded in relations of kinship and interpersonal dependency that are structured hierarchically along generational and gendered lines. This stands in friction with a more individualistic self that, while likewise socially-embedded, nonetheless evaluates, negotiates, contests, and deploys its interdependencies
through more liberal idioms of equality among autonomous persons. I do not describe a point of transition from a society composed of wholly relational persons towards an asocial society composed of autonomous individuals. As Harri Englund states, relationships are always “intrinsic to human existence rather than (...) something to which pre-social individuals must adjust themselves” (2011: 10, also Lipuma 1998). Moreover, regardless of where they stand in relation to generational and gender hierarchies, and whatever their respective stakes may be in debates about the merit of tradition and interpersonal social power, the people whom I discuss in this dissertation may at times act -and justify their actions- in ways which resonate closely with liberal idioms of autonomy, and in other instances act in ways which appear highly predetermined by their social position in relation to others. Indeed, I will show that what is at stake in gendered and generational contests is less a question of the degree to which a person is positioned in a relationships of interdependence with others, but rather how they are positioned as such, with whom, and on what premises (filial obligation, economic dependence, or romantic attachment, for instance). What I do suggest, however, is that I carried out this fieldwork at a point in time when economic, political, and ideological apparatuses have aligned such that the particular orientations of social relations which are mobilized as traditional are increasingly under strain, and the conceptual tools most prominently available to challenge them are premised on the privileging of autonomy and equality as moral imperatives. The ethnographic goal, therefore, is, as Lipuma states, “to uncover the conditions (...) under which dividual and individual aspects of personhood emerge and are hidden” (1998: 61).

Of course, the meanings of these categories are unstable, and resonate with different people differently. In order to understand how tradition and its alternatives are being mobilized, it is necessary to understand the kind of place that Mhlambini village is.
Mhlambini Village: Background Context

Although anthropologists have recently troubled place-based notions of culture (e.g. Boellstorff 2008; Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1996), ethnography is never completely dissociated from place and I am unaware of any ethnographer who sidesteps all description of their 'field.' Indeed, place is frequently fundamental to the issues which interest us most as anthropologists. And yet, those of us who work in marginalized post-colonial contexts must be cognisant of the ways in which our descriptions may reproduce assumptions and stereotypes about the people who live there, many of whom are vulnerable in ways that we are not (Ferguson 2006; Tsing 1993). Moreover, describing such communities is especially difficult given that the descriptive categories through which we typically derive a sense of place (urban, rural, modern, marginal, isolated, traditional, and so forth) all bear the imprint of colonial systems of categorization and value that are increasingly inadequate in the post-colonial context (Thomas 2002; Fabian 2002 [1983]; Gupta 1998; Ferguson 1992).

That being said, for people in Mhlambini the environment in which they live is fundamentally social, and also haunted by both its future and its past. As will be apparent at various points in this dissertation, visible changes to the village -for instance, the backpacker lodge, square houses, and the road- speak to the ways in which people in Mhlambini experience, evaluate, and communicate both change and stasis in their community. And importantly, such changes speak to different people differently, depending in part on their gender and age. Thus, where one person may take a new square hut as a hopeful manifestation of the refreshingly contemporary character of the village, her elderly neighbour may see it as yet more evidence of the ways in which money is alienating the ancestors. To describe Mhlambini is to contextualize it within a moral geography, as at once a space to inhabit and also a way in which people understand their identity and lifestyle in relation to others (Lambek 2011; De Boeck 2008
(2002); Thomas 2002; Basso 1996; Ferguson 1992; Williams 1973). To borrow from Michael Lambek, describing Mhlambini requires a focus on “acts and practices of habitation” (2011: 206). With this in mind, below I provide some geographical, social, and historical context.

Mhlambini is situated in Bomvanaland, roughly two hundred kilometres north of East London, on the coast of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The warm currents of the Indian Ocean keep the climate mild and sub-tropical; the hilly landscape is green, lush, and humid in summer, and is often baked brown during the dry winter months. Although it is referred to as a village, this designation reflects earlier policies relating to the governance of the region more so than any easily discernable qualities of the village itself (McAllister 1992). During the 1950s, Bomvanaland was divided into Tribal Authorities, Regional Authorities, wards, sub-wards, and villages under the jurisdiction of appointed Chiefs, headmen, and sub-headmen (ibid.). The boundaries between these wards and villages are not entirely arbitrary in that divisions reflected geographical markers (for instance, rivers), and social divisions (for instance, between clans). It is my understanding that Mhlambini comprises two small ‘villages’ under the jurisdiction of two sub-headmen who were designated as such based on clan membership. These two segments of the village are still separated by what was cornfield in the 1990s, and is now uncultivated grazing land. The apex of the local political hierarchy consists of two elderly sub-headmen, who in turn defer to a Headman and a hereditary Chief (who is female), both of whom reside several villages away. Although referred to as a village, Mhlambini has no commercial centre, and is separated from neighbouring villages by rivers (on two sides), a long, steep hill (on one side), and the social boundaries between families who are affiliated with clans that are predominantly present in one village or the other (on one side).

At the time of my fieldwork the village itself comprised approximately 830 people who identify ethnically as Bomvana, a sub-group of the Xhosa who have been distinguished from
neighbouring Xhosa groups for their “fiercely traditional” character (Moodie 1992: 587). Like many communities in South Africa Mhlambini’s population is chronologically young; over half are under fifteen years of age, and the majority were born since the start of non-racial democracy. Similar to much of Sub-Saharan Africa, the youthful character of the village is the result of a combination of high birth rates, and high death rates among adults due to HIV/AIDS.

Most people in Mhlambini are monolingual speakers of a rural dialect of isiXhosa (the Xhosa language), and consider themselves both Bomvana and Xhosa at the same time. These 830 people reside in 114 imizi (singular ‘umzi’), homesteads consisting of clusters of mud-brick huts, often with kraals (pens) for livestock, and gardens for growing subsistence crops.

Figure 3: A typical umzi (homestead), in better condition than some. The two turquoise huts in the top right-hand corner are part of a different umzi.
All people in the village are members of one of fourteen exogamous iziduko (‘clans,’ singular isiduko). Isiduko affiliation is traced patrilineally (women's isiduko affiliation does not change with marriage), and most families live near other members of their isiduko. Most villagers live in large, multi-generational households composed of older married or widowed parents, unmarried sons and daughters, their unmarried daughters' children, ancestral spirits, and in some cases the wives and children of married adult sons who continue to reside with their parents. Many households also include at least one adult member who resides in a more urban area, either as a labour migrant or as an unemployed job-seeker. Living arrangements such as these are characteristic of living arrangements in most low-income rural parts of South Africa (Klassen & Woolard 2008).

While kinship and lineage have long been important in Xhosa society, the large, extended-family households of today differ from those of earlier generations. The ethnographic record emphasizes the importance of independent households organized around a married male head (e.g. Moodie with Ndatshe 1994; Cook 1931); however, households in Mhlambini today are clustered around kin -of either sex and any marital status- with access to cash, either in the form of local employment, remittances from labour migrants, or old age pensions. While the 20th Century was characterized by male labour migration to mines, economic austerity and changing demands of the global labour market mean that male labour migration is rapidly being replaced by circular migration, as young people of both sexes cycle out of the village in pursuit of work, trade, educational opportunities, or to visit family and lovers who reside elsewhere, and then

\[2\] There are a few women who have married into the village from other parts of the Eastern Cape, and who are from clans not otherwise represented in Mhlambini.
return to visit rural-dwelling children and parents, or to seek assistance from family-members who can support them. Further information on household composition, including a demographic table, can be found in the appendix.

All land in Mhlambini is held in communal trust. No one can buy, sell, or own land in a market-capitalist sense, and permission to build must be acquired from village elders via the sub-headmen. However, people are connected to particular land through their continued presence on that land. This presence takes the form of both ancestral spirits and their living descendants, all of whom coexist in ongoing conversation. People who can afford to maintain an independent household usually build in close proximity to kin (see Liebenberg 1994), and typically remain heavily involved in the activities of their parents' home. Bomvana marriages are ideally patrilocal; elder sons are expected to marry first, and to bring a wife into the home. Historically, young married couples were not permitted to move into their own huts until the wife had given birth to several children (see Mager 1999; Hunter 1961 [1936]), and required formal permission to do so from the bride’s mother-in-law. Nowadays, however, there are a few young couples who have built independent imizi before the mother-in-law has given the daughter-in-law permission to leave. Chapter Seven will demonstrate that this is a source of consternation for some elders. When and if they move out, young married couples will likely build in proximity to the groom's parents, as the wife is expected to carry out domestic work for the entire extended family unit. For instance, daughters-in-law spend much time tending the gardens of their mothers-in-law, even if they also maintain their own garden at their husband's umzi. Where people set up independent households at a distance from kin, this physical distancing often marks efforts to establish social distance following interpersonal conflict.

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3This is both the current law in South Africa, as well as local convention.
The rural Xhosa ideal is for daughters to leave their natal umzi by marrying into other families. In practice, however, marriages happen less frequently than in previous generations, and most households in Mhlambini today include unmarried adults of both sexes. In contrast to what is becoming increasingly conventional (although not uncontroversial) in urban areas (see Bank 2011; Hunter 2010; Jones 2009), cohabitation outside of marriage is unacceptable in the village. I am aware of no such households, and was told again and again that cohabitation outside of marriage is impossible unless one moves to town and lives with a partner in secret.

Bomvanaland is situated in the middle of a region colloquially referred to as the Transkei (meaning “across the Kei [river]”). As a regional unit, the Transkei stems from the administrative merging of separate magistrates into the United Transkeian Territories in 1903, a large area which encompassed considerable ethnic diversity (Southall 1982). The Transkei was further solidified through the 1913 Lands Act, a landmark legislation which formally established “Native Reserves” for black South Africans. Through the Land Act the vast majority of land in South Africa was designated for white settlement only, while non-whites were forcibly concentrated onto relatively smaller parcels of land. These reserves were designated for specific ethnic groups; Transkei was one of two reserves designated for the Xhosa. A key development in the proletarianization of black South Africans, the system of land reserves was designed in part to create labour reserves for the migrant labour system which was the backbone of the South African economy, while at the same time keeping women, children, and elders on the land and out of white sight (Wolpe 1972).

From 1948, under the leadership of the infamous National Party, the Native Reserves became cornerstones of the system of racial segregation known as Apartheid (literally, “apartness” in Afrikaans). From the 1950s the Reserves were consolidated, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Transkei in 1976, and making it the first of the so-called
'homelands' or Bantustans (Southall 1982). According to the National Party, these Bantustans were to be self-governing, autonomous states; black South Africans would not be South African citizens at all, but rather citizens of the Bantustan appropriate to their ethnicity. Where Africans were not already living in the appropriate Bantustan, many were forcibly relocated. As the Bantustans were to be independent nations, the National Party made little investment in infrastructure or social services for the millions of people who were legislated to live in Transkei.

In hindsight the Bantustan project was a failure, and the Republic of Transkei, as with the other Bantustans, was reabsorbed into South Africa during the transition to non-racial democracy in the early 1990s. Its official borders no longer exist, yet the impacts of past policy have left a visible mark on the landscape: much of the former Transkei is densely populated, over-grazed, and heavily eroded, and infrastructure is extremely poor relative to areas outside its former boundaries. For example, at the time of my fieldwork Mhlambini had no piped water, electricity, or basic sanitation, and the nearest hospital—several hours drive away—had achieved a notorious and unwanted celebrity for being in worse crisis than any other South African hospital, with one physician, two clinical associates, and a small team of nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists providing care for the 260,000 people in the hospital's catchment area (Malan 2012). The poorly maintained dirt road that used to end in the next village, five kilometres away, was finally extended to Mhlambini only in late 2010, and the nearby village of Imela is still reachable only by a walking trail through the forest.

Mhlambini is thus located in a rural, deeply marginalized part of South Africa. Yet despite being remote, many locals travel a lot and virtually everyone except for very old women and very young children have had some experience of urban areas. Drawing in part on their perceptions of the city, people in Mhlambini tend to draw a sharp juxtaposition between rural villages like theirs and more urban regions, and rarely articulate similarity or continuity across a
perceived urban-rural divide. Moreover, the ways in which people talk about the village and the city suggest that the visible contrasts in material infrastructure are taken as symbolic of fundamental differences in morality and sociality which index differences both between village people and city-dwellers, and between households and individuals at the village level (see Ferguson 2006, 1992; Thomas 2002; Comaroff & Comaroff 1987; Fabian 2002 [1983]; Williams 1973). As I will show, people explain this difference not only in geographical, but also temporal terms. And, importantly, they articulate these differences using the language of tradition.

As Akhil Gupta (1998) reminds us, this conceptual opposition between modernity and tradition is one of colonialism's most powerful legacies. Consequently, it is a pervasive phenomenon in a wide range of postcolonial contexts. As Johannes Fabian has demonstrated, this conceptual opposition is inextricably linked to ideas about culture, time, and industrialization (2002 [1983]). For example, drawing on her fieldwork in Northeastern Brazil, L.A. Rebhun describes an “imagined temporal geography” (1999: 3, see also Fabian 2002 [1983]: 26-27) through which people frame difference between urban and rural regions. She observes that people speak about the city as though it were a nexus of modernity at the centre of a wheel. Communities are imagined to become progressively less modern and more traditional as one ventures further and further outward from the city in any direction. Accordingly, life-ways in isolated areas are assumed to be traditional, and by virtue of being traditional, to be vestigial remnants of an earlier time. Similarly, writing about representations of development in Nepal, Stacy Pigg observes that for many Nepalis, “the ideas of progress that fuel the imagery of development (...) are linked to concepts of the city” (1992: 495, also Williams 1973). Thus, villagers who have spent more time in urban areas, or young wives who reside part-time at their husband's mining compounds are often thought of as more future-oriented and less traditional than elderly women who have never ventured far from the village. Van der Vliet (1991) has
found similar assumptions among urban, married Xhosa couples in townships in Grahamstown,⁴ many of whom deployed tradition as a reference point in the precolonial past, which was believed to persist in rural areas.

Thinking about the village in such terms is evident in the following statement made by 29 year-old Unathi, one of the few non-local residents of the village. He is Xhosa but not Bomvana and grew up some hundred kilometres away, in a larger village located along a major highway. His perspective is valuable given that he has resided in the community for three years as the Community Facilitator, employed by the local grassroots NGO to liaise between the NGO and “the community” and to ensure ongoing communication between them. He is thus in some ways a translator between different silos of knowledge, moving back and forth between an organization focused on community development and the village patriarchs who are at the apex of the local political hierarchy. When I asked Unathi how his home village differs from Mhlambini, he offered the following:

*In my village we are very close to town. So, in my village most people, they are educated. There are nurses, there are police, teachers, soldiers, you know, we’ve got the classes there. The middle-classes. You know, those class things. But here, I found out that this place is more, more backward-like. The cultures that we are no longer using, they are still operating here. So this place is more traditional, and more peaceful. You see, in places like near town, you know, there’s always violence and stuff like that. But here it’s quiet and peaceful. Ya, people are doing their own traditions. They’ve got the strong beliefs. You know, just like grabbing a girl. If you want to marry a girl, you don’t have to talk anything with her. If you want her, you just talk to the

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⁴Grahamstown is a small city in the interior of the Eastern Cape Province. A stronghold of English colonial settlement, it is a university town inhabited almost exclusively by Xhosa people and white South Africans of English descent.
parents, and then you just grab the girl. Even if she doesn’t want you. So that’s some of the differences. We are more educated in my area. Than here. So here, education is not so important. So that’s another difference. And then, you know, we are kind-of abandoning our culture, bit by bit. We are going far away with the culture. But here they are still walking exactly on the culture.

Unathi is an unusually reflective man; I spent a lot of time with him in my role as an NGO volunteer, and he was invariably both keen and adept at commenting on many aspects of village life. A secondary school graduate, he also has far more formal education than most people from Mhlambini. No local person would explicitly frame difference through the lens of social class. Yet while he is unusually articulate, in tying together education, gendered and generational power, and the idea that rural areas are more traditional and thus rooted in the past, his perspective is shared by many people in Mhlambini.

The moral geography that people attach to this topography was especially evident to me through the language that people used to speak about material infrastructure. Younger people would usually employ the word intle (“beautiful”) when describing such things. When a young person would tell me, for instance, that in ten years they want the village to be to be intle or lungile (“nice/good”), I would ask them to describe a nice, beautiful village. Their description invariably emphasized infrastructure such as piped water and electricity, and sometimes features such as shops. Moreover, younger people would often refer to large, square houses with glass windows with metal roofs as being “intle.” I was always perceptive of this because I found the round thatched-roof huts that are considered traditional to be far more attractive than the dark, boxy square houses that are so admired by local young people. Yet although most people wish for greater infrastructure in their community, many people -especially older generations- feel ambivalent about the ways in which “modern” and “urban” influences may transform social
relations in the community. Elders in particular are troubled by the common assumption that “modern” things may lead to a decline in gendered activities such as herding and gardening, as well as the abandonment of gerontocratic and patriarchal tradition. People typically articulate these aspirations through the language of tradition.

Local Tradition

As Raymond Williams reminds us, tradition is far from being an inert relic. Rather, tradition is an active concept, “in practice the most evident expression of (...) dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits (...) an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (1977: 115). This is not to say that tradition is entirely fictitious and arbitrary; drawing on research on indirect rule in Kenya, Peter Pels, for instance, argues convincingly that in post-colonial contexts, traditions and custom are “better understood as a process of ‘pidginization’” (2008 [1996]: 57, more on this later). Nonetheless, appeals to tradition, both as a justification for action (for instance, “wearing skirts is traditional”) and as a subject position (for instance, “I am opposed to women wearing trousers because I am a traditional person”) are thus claims to dominance, to particular relations of power, and particular intentions for the future. Claims to tradition thus draw on a selective past as the justifying premise for future aspirations (Linnekin 1992; Hobsbawm 1983; Keesing & Tonkinson 1982).

Therefore, while people may feel that what is deemed traditional is common-sense or “natural,” tradition is also oftentimes deployed to particular ends.

Despite the partially-fictitious nature of tradition, many people, especially men and elders, are keen to mobilize the idiom of tradition to add moral authority to their claims. But what do they mean by tradition? In the years of democratic transition, Catherine Campbell
conducted an interview-based study of intergenerational conflict with township-dwelling people near Durban. Of her findings, she writes

The notion of 'tradition' was a key reference point in the informants' accounts of intergenerational relationships. In referring to 'tradition' the informants of the older generation recalled an idyllic rural past, where families were economically self-sufficient, lived comfortably off the land, social relations were rigidly ordered and hierarchical, and young people obeyed their elders (1994: 38).

This is a fair description of what older people in Mhlambini idealize as the traditional Xhosa way. As such, tradition, as it is both understood and deployed, is intimately wrapped up in the reproduction of a particular kind of patriarchal household, and with the legitimacy of this household form as the normative ideal within society at large. Gendered and generational contests are above all, therefore, contests about social reproduction. By social reproduction, I mean the production of persons (sexually and socially), the reproduction of households (socially and materially), and the reproduction of society. Where I discuss changes in social reproduction, I refer to transformations in household composition, as well as ideological transformations in idealized forms of family and household. Where I discuss conflicts about social reproduction, I refer to negotiations over how this can be achieved, and in particular over the legitimacy of other arrangements besides those held to be traditional. Broadly, this dissertation is about the gendered and generational politics surrounding the reproduction of lineage, kinship, ideology, and life-way at what Hylton White as termed “the crisis-ridden intersection of kinship and political economy” (2001: 458) that is characteristic of contemporary rural South Africa.

Much has been written about social reproduction in the precolonial era (e.g. Guy 1990; Bozzoli 1983; Meillassoux 1981), how it was starkly transformed under colonialism (e.g. Lee 2005; Mager 1999; Marks & Rathbone 1982; Hunter 1961 [1936]), and how it is continuing to
shift through the political, ideological, and economic changes that have accompanied non-racial democracy (e.g. Hunter 2010; 2009; Makhulu 2010; Bezuidenhout & Fakier 2006; White 2001). Importantly, much of this literature confounds the claims of men and elders that their version of traditional society is indeed timeless, and is only now under threat. Nevertheless, this literature also speaks to the longstanding prominence of patriarchy as a powerful organizing principle of Xhosa society (albeit consolidated in new forms under colonialism, and challenged in new ways in the democratic era). These topics will be elaborated on significantly in forthcoming chapters.

Following from the assumption that patriarchy is a cornerstone of tradition, central to local tradition is the assumption that individuals are not equally entitled to choice and freedom, but that the wills and wants of males and elders should be unquestioningly accommodated by women and youth. As we shall see in forthcoming chapters, in many ways the expectations of some men and elders are in sharp violation of the Constitutional rights to self-determination and bodily integrity that their wives and offspring are entitled to as citizens of the Republic of South Africa. Many men (and many women, especially elders) argue, for instance, that beating wives and forcing marriages are acceptable in some circumstances, and that the authority to do so is traditional and timeless.

Tradition as an *emic* concept - and, indeed, any understanding of personhood, kinship, or authority among the rural Xhosa - would be incomplete without also recognizing the importance of ancestors. The deceased but omnipresent predecessors of those alive today, ancestors are “imagined as the temporal site of true traditions” (White 2001: 465), and remain intimately connected to their living descendants through the process of domestic reproduction. The wellbeing of the lineage depends on the ancestors’ benevolence at the same time that their continued influence depends on the wellbeing of their living kin. As such, the ancestors have a
vested interest in the continuation of patriarchal conjugal households, a domestic arrangement which is increasingly difficult to form and maintain today (see Ashforth 2005: 209-219).

People tell me that their ancestors, although no longer embodied, continue unseen alongside the world of the living, engaging in many of the same activities that they had engaged in during their lifetimes (see also Pato 1990; Berglund 1976; Cook 1934a). Although written in the early part of the 20th Century, P.A.W. Cook's description of the role of ancestors is accurate today. He writes, “At death the ancestors disappear, but they do not cease to assert a powerful influence. More fanciful natives aver that the ancestors go on living in a spirit world following the customs of this world” (1934a: 5). This is what local people would tell me in the community, in some cases pointing out the precise location of their ancestors’ invisible huts.

The power of ancestors is closely related to generational hierarchies, as elders and ancestors share the familiarity of many years’ acquaintance. As such, elders are uniquely positioned to speak on their ancestors’ behalf. Elders thus represent their ancestors at the same time that elders’ gerontocratic authority is predicated in part on this mediator role (Brain 1973; Kopytoff 1971). Because they are closer to the ancestors, the traditional lifestyles and values which older people prefer are understood to reflect the way things were when their ancestors were alive. Ancestors are thought to frown on change, and it is here that tradition becomes a most powerful ally to those invested in gerontocracy and patriarchy. As such, elders can draw on the power of ancestral tradition to justify practices which symbolically reinforce their authority by framing such practices as the predilections of ancestors, and as therefore necessary for the good-fortune of all. Everyday examples of such practices include women covering their hair, wearing skirts rather than trousers, and avoiding certain conventions of speech, allowing elders preferential access to choice food and drink, and respecting gendered spatial boundaries. These
practices are of paramount importance at rituals at which ancestors are honoured, such as funerals and *umgidi* (ritual beer drinks).

Ancestors voice their will primarily through dreams, or by bestowing good-fortune or illness on their descendants (Ashforth 2005). The living communicate with their ancestors through rituals such as beer drinks, funerals, and sacrificial feasts, as well through the mediation of *sangomas* (also Pauw 1975). *Sangomas* are spiritual doctors who are called to their profession by the ancestors, and who are skilled in divining the meaning of dreams and portentous events. There are three *sangomas* in Mhlambini: an elderly woman, a middle-aged woman, and a newly-trained, young woman. Their relationship is cooperative and congenial.

Although powerful, ancestors are not worshipped as deities. Rather, the relationship is one of communion and is sustained particularly through ritual offerings of meat and beer (White 2001; Berglund 1972). As Hylton White writes,

> A yard should not be left to continue too long without the 'smell' of beer or the 'noise' of a feast, for these are sensory indices that prove to the watchful spirits of the dead that the home they have left behind still has honour and standing, making them proud of their heirs and predisposed to performing benevolent acts on their behalf (2001: 461).

Although they are generally kind, unlike supernatural forces within Christian cosmology ancestors are neither pure nor evil. As spirits with human dispositions, they are interdependent with their living kin, and maintaining a healthy interdependency is integral to the well-being of the whole lineage, both living and long dead. Ancestors have the power both to protect their descendants, and cause harm if they are disrespected or displeased (Brain 1973). Yet ancestors are far from omnipotent; they can become troubled, lost, and weak if they are not remembered or are no longer able to identify their homes.
The ongoing importance of ancestors in daily life is quickly apparent in Mhlambini by the sheer frequency of ritual sacrifices and *umgidi* (ritual beer-drinks). Furthermore, looking up at the roofing thatch in many local huts a visitor will see the bones of goats and cows that have been sacrificed in ancestor-related rituals. Many people also make important decisions based on the expressed will of their ancestors. For instance, throughout the duration of my initial fieldwork one of the largest and most ostentatious square houses in the village sat eerily abandoned in a highly desirable location next to the road and river, because the owner had recurring dreams in which his ancestors expressed displeasure that he had left the land where they are buried. He was so troubled by the implications of these dreams that he moved his whole family back across the village to their old, abandoned rondavels on their ancestral land, leaving behind a house that would have been very expensive and labour-intensive to build. I asked several friends why no one else opted to move into the house, and after looking askance, they explained that no one would consider living in a house that ancestors disliked; you would be plagued by frightening dreams, and it could burn down with you inside it. This house stood abandoned for the entire duration of my residence in the community, and when I returned after a year I found that it had been bashed down and reduced to rubble.

**Local Modernity**

As Bruce Knauft remarks, “modern images and institutions become forceful through the very opposition and reciprocal definition of progress or development vis-à-vis notions of tradition” (2002: 25). The reverse is equally true: notions of tradition derive their substance in juxtaposition with symbols and institutions of modernity. Accordingly, men and elders would not have to draw on tradition to bolster the moral force of their claims to authority if there was not a pervasive awareness of the possibility of alternative gendered and generational hierarchies. In
claiming tradition as a value, practice, or subject position, they are orientating themselves as traditional in relation to some other value, practice, or position. What that looks like in Mhlambini requires engagement with the thorny topic of “modernity.”

It is necessary to preface what follows by explaining that much of the ethnographic literature on the Xhosa depicts communities deeply divided in ways which seem discomfiting precursors to the tradition/modernity binary that has preoccupied scholars in the era of globalization. Both the divisive, binary terms in which this categorization has been drawn and the ways in which it has been articulated have strong resonance with the urban/rural, developed/undeveloped distinctions that people articulate in Mhlambini today. It also has deep roots in earlier ethnographic representations of the Xhosa. In the ethnographic and historical record, this division of subject positions has variously been referred to as a distinction between Amaqaba (literally “those who paint/smear themselves”) whose spiritual life involves ancestors, and Christianized Amaggobhoka\(^5\) (“those who have been broken through”) (McAllister 2006; Cook 1934a), between abantu ababomvu (“red people”)\(^6\) and abantu baseskolweni (“school people”) (De Wet 1994; Moodie with Ndashe 1994; Beinart & Bundy 1987; Mayer & Mayer 1980, 1971[1960]), and, less frequently, “conservative” and “progressive” (De Wet 1994; Mayer 1971[1960]). For example, the first chapter of Philip and Iona Mayer's best-known ethnography, Townsmen or Tribesmen? (1971[1960]), opens with the statement “that two dramatically different sets of institutions exist within the Xhosa countryside is not hard to see. One becomes aware of it before a word has been spoken, through the glaring contrasts in dress and personal

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\(^5\) These are the terms used in Mhlambini. English-speakers in Mhlambini translate these terms as ‘traditionalists’ (Amaqaba) and ‘Christians’ (Amaggobhoka), so for ease of reading I use these English terms throughout the dissertation. Note that older sources spell Amaggobhoka in different ways, but I use the spelling that I was given by a local friend who is fluent in English.

\(^6\) The references to paint and to the colour red both refer to ochre clay, with which earlier generations adorned their bodies, and which many women still wear on their faces for decoration and protection from the sun.
appearance” (20). The second paragraph of this chapter continues “the Xhosa think of this division as bisecting their entire population” (ibid.). These ideologies, wrote Mayer, “represented comprehensive patterns of belief, laying down precepts for most aspects of life, including economic behaviour” (Mayer 1980: 2). Repeated and elaborated on extensively in a number of works, these distinctions can be summarized as, on the one hand, traditional people staunchly oriented towards building a rural homestead, honouring ancestors, and steadfastly resisting colonial values and lifestyles, and on the other, missionized, school-educated people who strive in their presentation, lifestyle, and comportment towards “white” standards of respectability.

Although they are often explicit about the Red/School distinction being a fundamental organizing principle of Xhosa society in the Eastern Cape, a close reading of the Mayers' work suggests that they were aware that in reality there is a great deal of fluidity between these subject positions. For example, in Townsmen and Tribesmen they write that in Xhosa societies, it is more accurate to encounter a continuum of

Xhosa who do belong to Churches but still sacrifice in the Xhosa manner, through some who never become full church members but attend services with some

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7The past tense is used here, because, by the 1980s, Philip Mayer felt that this distinction was less rigid than it had been during his initial fieldwork, in the 1950s through 1970s.

8Patrick McAllister, a contemporary anthropologist who is sympathetic to what I will refer to as the Red/School dichotomy, refers to these subject formations as “sub-cultures” (2006: 51). Although he affirms the validity of this distinction as an organizing principle through which to analyze Xhosa communities, he resists the implication that Red people's life-ways are more traditional and timeless than those of school people, rather arguing that both were “born out of the material and socio-political conditions of colonial incorporation” (2006: 51), albeit differently-oriented towards the future. This is an important insight, as it opens up the possibility for more flexibility and fluidity among these subject positions. In his words, “given their common origin in the same historical conditions, and that they were both Xhosa, there was considerable overlap between Red and School in terms of their interests, objectives, and activities, but there were also important differences arising from the different ways in which different groups of Xhosa had been incorporated, differences in exposure to education, missionary influence, wage labour, and so on, which led to different perceptions of the overall situation and thus to the development of different dispositions and practices” (2006: 52).
regularity; and so forth. It is the same with the schooling/no-schooling contrast: along this axis, between the illiterate who is the Red ideal type and the graduate who embodies the highest aspirations of school people, there lies all the range of those who have passed through more or few years of schooling (...) Even in dress there is a kind of continuum from the ochred blanket to the well-fitting lounge suit as normal weekday attire” (Mayer & Mayer 1971 [1960]: 24-25).

They go on to state, for example, that many people will happily be prayed for by Christian neighbours and at the same time consult sangoma and traditional herbalists, and that many Red families will actively aspire to provide at least some of their children with a school education. By my reading, the Mayers emphasized differences between these groups in part because people verbally articulated difference through these categories. In their words, “Xhosa themselves, when asked to explain the Red-School opposition, do so in terms of cultural differentials: Red people do things this way while school people do them that way” (ibid. 21). It seems that while the reality may not have fit seamlessly into the Red/School framework that they meticulously outline in their work, they nonetheless place considerable importance on verbalized representations of social life. This “rhetoric of contrasts” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1987: 201, also De Boeck 2008 [2002]; Thomas 2002; Graeber 1996) is similar to what I encountered during my fieldwork. Especially when people discuss tradition, modernity, and the way in which gender relations, gerontocratic hierarchies, and family life should be organized, people often speak in blunt, divisive terms which better reflect idealized social relations than actual ones. There is often a great deal of flexibility and fluidity between subject positions in practice, but people usually explain social relations as though the subject positions that they discuss are quite rigid and bounded.
Following on the Mayers’ interest in the distinction between Red and School people, most of the scholars who first advanced the notion of this rift in Xhosa society were likewise interested in how urbanization transformed (or did not transform) African communities. Much of the ethnographic work on the Xhosa has focused on urbanization and social change. Indeed, alongside the so-called Copperbelt Studies that came out of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (e.g. Colson & Gluckman 1951; Mitchell 1956), Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape have been among the primary foci of ethnographic studies of urbanization in Africa. Most noteworthy among these are the tellingly-titled *Townsmen or Tribesmen?* (Mayer & Mayer 1971 [1961]), Desmond Reader's *The Black Man's Portion* (1960), Berthold Pauw's *The Second Generation* (1973 [1963]), (these three works constituting the so-called “Xhosa in Town Trilogy”), and more recently, Leslie Bank's excellent ethnography entitled *Home Spaces, Street Styles* (2011).

With the exception of Bank, these works, and others which promote the Red/School distinction, have been heavily critiqued by anthropologists (e.g. Bank 2011, 2002; Kuper 1987; Magubane 1973; Mafeje 1971). The most powerful of these critiques have focused on the ways in which they essentialize and propagate an outdated and problematic tribalism (McAllister 2006; Magubane 1973; Mafeje 1971) as well as the implication that 'Red' 'people are opposed to modernization of any kind (Bank 2011). Moreover, many of the critiques of the Red and School dichotomy have focused on the assumption that urbanized and School Xhosa are merely aping white society (Bank 2011; Magubane 1973), a concern that is reflected in more recent discussions of mimesis and modernity (e.g. Newell 2012; Ferguson 2006; Taussig 1992). In

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9The implications of urbanization and social mobility for Black Africans being of concern for colonial officials, there was a great deal of interest in this sort of work. Ironically, although these scholars have been heavily critiqued on a number of fronts, these earlier anthropologists saw themselves as sided with the communities that they represented through their work, and aimed to show that Africans were capable of assuming colonial standards of respectability, and were also resisting of their subordinate status in the racialized colonial order in creative ways (see Bank 2011).
several works Leslie Bank (2011, 2002) provides a nuanced, measured critique which suggests that the Mayers, at least, admired both Red and School Xhosa, and framed both identities as forms of resistance to white domination. Regardless of the good intentions of these anthropologists, however, and although these works span considerable temporal and topical breadth, they have all made the assumption that urban life differs fundamentally from village living, and that there is much that is unique about the social relations in the village relative to those of the town. Furthermore, although the Mayers tried to show that some people actively strove to retain much of their culture when they migrated to urban areas, the implication was that urban-dwelling Africans can “resist” enculturation, and in so doing, can remain 'traditional' and not modern even in urban settings. Alongside the Copperbelt literature, these works can thus be viewed as precursors to the more contemporary literature on African modernity, much of which takes issue with many of the tribalist presumptions implicit in earlier ethnographies of Xhosa society.

These early works on the Xhosa must therefore be seen in the context of their time, and thus in the context of the modernizing, developmentalist trajectory of the post-World War II era. As James Ferguson summarizes well in *Global Shadows* (2006), in this era of Euro-American optimism the idea of modernity, progress, and development provided a new framework through which to understand inequalities in a world that was becoming increasingly interconnected. In this climate, “inequalities could be read as the result of the fact that some nations were farther along than others on a track to a unitary ‘modernity’” (Ferguson 2006: 177). Within this framework, those lagging behind need only patience and hard work, as they would in time be liberated through economic growth and development, ultimately resulting in secularism.

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10 Philip Mayer explicitly advanced this argument himself in a later publication (see Mayer 1980).
industrialization, human rights, advanced capitalism, bureaucratic states, and liberal democracy on a global scale (Geschiere, Meyer & Pels 2008; Taylor 2001). As Charles Taylor explains, this modernist narrative was presumed to be acultural; in his words modernization was:

an exercise of a general capacity, which was only awaiting its proper conditions to unfold. Under certain conditions human beings will come to see that scientific thinking is valid, that instrumental rationality pays off, that religious beliefs involve unwarranted leaps, that facts and values are separate (2001: 173-174).

Importantly, these changes in society would be accompanied by the abandonment of tradition (whatever that may be), and by improved quality of life for all. According to this model, people like the Red Xhosa could only either resist or accommodate this modernity.

In recent decades social scientists have taken issue with the developmentalist paradigm that underscores modernization theory, a framework which has historically situated Africa as its beastly 'other' (Piot 2010; Geschiere, Meyer & Pels 2008; Knauft 2002; Mbembe 2001). Some scholars, such as James Ferguson, have taken the obvious limitations of the modernist metanarrative for much of Africa as foundation for critiques of the inequality inherent in the neoliberal order (Ferguson 2006; 1999; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; 1993). Other scholars of modernity have been discomfited that despite the limitations of the modernist metanarrative, many people in postcolonial contexts seem keen to adopt the very practices and comportment that are valorized in this model of value and achievement. These scholars have thus questioned what initially appears as uncritical mimicry of Western standards of respectability, thereby troubling the assumption that non-Euro-American people necessarily desire to occupy the same subject position in the first place (e.g. Newell 2012; Gondola 1999). Deeply uncomfortable with the suggestion that colonized people aspire to Euro-American cultural standards, these scholars have tried to suggest that Africans adopting aspects of Western consumer culture are variously
engaged in a practice that is deeply-rooted and traditional (Friedman 1994), or making claims to membership in a global order (Ferguson 2006; Holsten 1999).

Others have critiqued the modernist metanarrative from a different angle, by troubling the myth of timeless and ahistorical precolonial societies. Scholars such as Charles Piot, for example, have problematized the notion of tradition itself, arguing that many aspects of rural African life that are framed as traditional or customary are in fact as modern as urban life insofar as they “were forged during the longer encounter with Europe over the last three hundred years and thus owe their meaning and shape to that encounter as much as anything ‘indigenous’” (Piot 1999:1) a point which is discussed in depth in the South African context by Mahmood Mamdani (1996).11 Similarly, in his lucid Kinshasa, Filip De Boeck discusses both the village africain at the 1930 World Exhibition in Antwerp and the colonial-era urban planning of Kinshasa to show that notions of Africa and tradition are largely fictitious, and thus illustrative of “this fault-line between representation and reality which is so characteristic of the problematic place of ’place’ in the colonial and post-colonial context” (2008 [2002]: 125).

A somewhat different response, most apparent in the large body of literature on modernity and the occult, argues that many beliefs and practices which appear traditional or which violate rationalist systems of reason are manifestations of moral anxieties particular to the contemporary neoliberal moment and are thus highly modern (e.g. Ashforth 2005; Niehaus 2005; Moore & Sanders 2004 [2001]; Sanders 2003; Geschiere 1997; Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Auslander 1993). This literature demonstrates that many of the anxieties articulated through the language of tradition and modernity are in fact anxieties about social change, while

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likewise refuting the often-held assumption that modernity necessarily leads to the annihilation of tradition (Moore & Sanders 2004). This work has also shown that practices which have been considered traditional (or irrational) are neither vestiges of earlier times, nor evidence of re-traditionalization in the postcolonial era. Proponents of this approach to the study of ritual and belief in contemporary Africa have thus called for Africanist scholarship which is grounded “in the present, not the past” (Appiah 1992: 229).

More broadly, critics of modernity have shown that, contrary to the assumption which scaffolds the modernist metanarrative, globalizing flows of capital, migrants, and media are not resulting in social and cultural homogeneity (Ferguson 2006; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1996). Rather than sameness, these scholars point out (with approval if not relief) that we are not left with “numbing uniformity, but rather a dynamic “cut-and-mix” world of surprising borrowings, ironic reinventions, and dazzling resignifications” (Ferguson 2006: 30). Thus, scholars have recently argued in favour of “multiple modernities” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Piot 1999), “alternative modernities” (Knauft 2002; Taylor 2001; Piot 1999; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996) “coeval modernities” (Ivy 1995), and “vernacular modernities” (Knauft 2002).

I contribute to this literature in several ways. Firstly, I take a lead from scholars who have illuminated the ways in which modernities are not only multiple, but are also gendered (Weinbaum et al. 2008; Barlow et al. 2005; Knauf 2002; Rofel 2002; 1999; Wardlow 2002; Hodgson 2001; Felski 1995). As Holly Wardlow notes, “gender is a central axis of difference through which the disjunctures of modernity are engaged, performed, and instantiated” (2002: 147). Forthcoming chapters will analyze how the allure of modernity, the aspirations that it entails, and the conflicts that it induces are experienced in generational terms, but also in fundamentally gendered ways. For example, while romantic love is an important component of
modern relationships in cross-cultural context, in Mhlambini expectations of romantic love differ substantially according to gender. As I will show, young women’s desire for marriage founded on romantic love rather than parental choice is tightly linked to their assumption that gender relations will be more egalitarian in love marriages, and that gendered discipline will accordingly be minimized (see Spronk 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). Yet, while young people of both sexes pit themselves against elders in their support of romantic love as the primary criterion for choosing a spouse, forthcoming chapters will also demonstrate that male privilege—especially the privilege to discipline women—is an entitlement to which most young men are deeply committed. Moreover, through the example of ukuthwala (abduction marriage) I will show that other impetuses for marriage motivate some men to privilege other marriage arrangements over those premised on romantic love.

Tradition in Mhlambini is fundamentally gendered as well, yet I will also show how traditional practices acquire new meaning through the proliferation of institutions such as human rights and companionate monogamy. This will be most prominently demonstrated in Chapter Seven, which focuses on ukuthwala (bride abduction). On the surface, bride abduction exemplifies many of the negative stereotypes about ‘backward’ African tribalism. Yet, as I will show, bride abduction can indeed sustain and reproduce patriarchy, or be used as an instrument of violent gendered oppression. It can also provide a means for young people to deploy ‘tradition’ in order to choose a spouse ‘for love.’

In engaging with tradition and modernity in a marginalized, politicized, and deeply-racialized postcolonial context, I have struggled against reproducing the metanarrative of modernization and progress in the face of young informants who seem at times to both exemplify and actively promote these sorts of assumptions, and who, at least verbally, evaluate their community in relation to modernist ideals. Moreover, especially in my involvement with
younger women I was often forced to grapple with interlocutors who denigrated their own circumstances using the language of “culture” (or worse, race), and who framed the horizons of opportunity available to me in many spheres of life – not only the material and economic spheres, but also the domestic and intimate- to be unambiguously “better” than theirs.12 Such statements must be taken, at least in part, in the context of the profound socio-economic inequalities that characterize South African life. As Ferguson reminds us, although it is tempting for anthropologists to “pluralize without ranking” (2006: 33) diverse ways of living, this is not how most people interpret the world around them, nor is it an accurate assessment of how people evaluate difference. To do so is dishonest, for Ferguson, because it ignores the inescapable reality that harsh material inequalities accompany cultural difference in the contemporary world. In his words, “cultural practices are not just a matter of flow and diffusion of the consumer choices made by individuals. Instead, they index membership in different and unequal social groups, globally as well as locally” (2006: 20). In such context, “the persistence of cultural difference (...) can come to appear as the token not (as it often appears to the anthropologist) of brave cultural resistance, but of social and economic subjugation (where a “traditional African way of life” is simply a polite name for poverty)” (ibid: 20-21). In his words, “the myth of modernization (no less than any other myth) gives form to an understanding of the world, providing a set of categories and premises that continue to shape people's experiences and interpretations of their lives” (1999: 14). As such, while contemporary academics may be wary of the distinctions and binaries that underscore the modernist metanarrative, these categories are

12Although contemporary anthropologists are often wary of bounded notions of culture, encountering such conceptualizations of culture is almost inescapable in South Africa. In part because the segregationist project was premised on the assumption of cultural difference as symbolized through race (see Posel 2004), South Africans are accustomed to talking about culture, and often do so in bounded terms.
nonetheless often embraced by local people 'on the ground,' and have thereby become important - albeit contested - frameworks through which people understand themselves and their relationship to others. As Geschiere, Meyer and Pels state in the introduction to their edited volume *Modernity in Africa*, “the term 'modern' seems to have lost none of its magic – it is just people's ideas of whether or not it can be achieved that have changed” (2008: 1). Accordingly, Knauft suggests that an important challenge for contemporary anthropology is “to critically understand the ways in which people engage images of progress and institutions of development at the same time that they become more (...) unequal, and disempowered” (2002: 5).

My project takes up this challenge. Indeed, a major argument of my dissertation is that while many people in Mhlambini find aspects of modernity alluring, the individualizing discourses that accompany modernity as an “ideology of aspiration” (Knauft 2002:33) serve to obscure the ways that people are rendered more interdependent with deepening poverty. While images of modernity index growing inequalities between individuals and within communities, discourses such as human rights, democracy, love marriage, and Christian morality also promote the primacy of autonomy, independence, and distinction at a time when most people are increasingly curtailed in their ability to achieve these ideals. Although this paradox is not readily apparent to people in their daily lives, this disjuncture between their aspirations and their circumstances destabilizes many of the categories through which they understand status, identity, and *self*, resulting in both individualized suffering and interpersonal strife.

Ideas about tradition, modernity, and personhood manifest themselves in daily life in Mhlambini though the way that people debate, adopt, and navigate various institutions and subject positions in the community. In the following section, I explain the forms that this takes in Mhlambini today.
Local Christianity

The rhetoric of contrasts between tradition and modernity are reflected in subject positions that people draw upon to discuss and think about spirituality and religion. In daily life, people in Mhlambini draw a distinction between Christians (Amagqobhoka) who are the minority, and “traditionalists (Amaqaba),”\textsuperscript{13} whose spiritual life centres on the ancestor cult. Understanding intergenerational and gendered negotiations in the community is impossible without understanding this distinction. Importantly, however, the ideological contests which play out along these lines are pertinent to contests over what is ‘right’ or ‘worthy,’ but have little to do with contested versions of what is ‘real’ or ‘true.’

Understanding the local significance of the distinction between traditionalists and Christians is a challenging endeavour for outsiders. As I have already explained, earlier ethnographic works on the Xhosa rightly identified the distinction between Christians and traditionalists as an important one in colonial and post-colonial Xhosa society (see Cook 1934a; Mayer & Mayer 1971 [1960]; McAllister 2006). However, earlier works have typically framed these distinctions through the lens of belief, where the adoption of Christianity is seen as evidence of modernization and the loss of traditional culture. Where people were found to espouse both Christianity and the cult of ancestors -as many people in Mhlambini do- scholars have been intrigued to find that “the two forms of religious affiliation are seen as being complementary” (Cloete 1992: 12).

\textsuperscript{13}In some works, especially from the 1970s, they are referred to as Babomvu or “Red,” indicating that their spirituality is conceptually linked to their status as Red or School (e.g. De Wet 1974; Pauw 1975). People did not use these terms when I was in Mhlambini, so I do not use them here.
On a superficial level, local people also frame this distinction as a question of belief. Yet expressed ‘belief’ should not be taken as a reflection of what people know to be real. For example, local Christians often claim not to believe in spiritual things which are a part of their daily reality. Guma, for instance, a devoted Christian, told me that she does not believe in bad spirits or muthi (witchcraft), but that she has seen people who are possessed by these spirits, as evidenced by the demonic voices which spoke through their mouths. Moreover, people will often describe very similar occult phenomena regardless of whether they are Christian or traditionalist, but may use different vocabulary. For example, a local traditionalist woman who is renowned for her skill at protecting babies from malevolent forces uses the term umoya mdaka (‘dark/bad spirits’) in speaking of this threat. My research assistant, a young Christian mother, does not ‘believe’ in umoya mdaka but has taken both of her children to this woman for spiritual protection from 'devils.'

As Malcom Ruel (2002 [1982]) suggests, belief is a culturally-specific concept rooted in the intellectual heritage of Abrahamic religious tradition. Believing in ancestors is not analogous to belief in Christian faith at all. As ancestors are best understood as “a stage in the life cycle of the person [rather] than as an altogether different kind of being” (Ashforth 2005: 175), ancestors are real and present for virtually everyone in Mhlambini. It is only in their relationship with the living that the distinction between traditionalists and Christians becomes meaningful. Thus, the important distinction is not of belief, but rather between those who actively engage in the cult of ancestors, and those who actively strive to avoid participation in ancestor-related rituals. Pauw takes up the distinction between cult and belief in his mammoth volume entitled Christianity and Xhosa Tradition, but makes further distinction between what he terms “different levels” of ancestral cult:
(a) the level of belief in the possibility of being affected by the ancestors, in other words, belief in a fundamental dogma of Xhosa tradition concerning the ancestors; (b) the level of acknowledging that they actually have made their influence felt in a person's own life, that is, the level of experience; and (c) the level of the performance of ritual relating to ancestors” (1975: 140, emphasis in original).

As with other social categories, despite the contrasting language that local people typically employ to discuss spirituality in practice there is considerable fluidity between the religious identities that people often articulate as distinctive and bounded. In juxtaposition to traditionalists, and similar to Christian churches elsewhere in Africa (Robbins 2003; Meyer 1998; van Dijk 1992), Christians in Mhlambini profess to reject some aspects of 'traditional' spirituality in relation to ancestors.

Most local Christians are members of the Methodist Church, although a smaller proportion are members of Zionist Churches. The Methodist church has had an influential presence in Transkei since the early days of missionization (Pato 1990; Pretorius 1985; Pauw 1975), and is in many ways comparable to Protestant churches elsewhere in Southern Africa. In contrast, Zionist churches are spiritualist African churches -also referred to in literature as African Independent Churches- that are popular in many parts of South Africa, and have become established in the former-Transkei since the late 1940s (see De Wet 1994; Kruss 1985; specifically on Zionist churches in Transkei, see Pretorius 1985). There is no purpose-built Church in Mhlambini, and no local minister. Christian families take turns hosting services at their homesteads, and will sometimes procure ministers from outside the community.

The people I term traditionalists practice all three 'levels' of the ancestral cult. This does not mean that they find the idea of a supreme creator problematic or strange. Zionist and
Methodist churches take markedly different official stances towards ancestors. Methodists, for their part, are extremely unlikely to engage with ancestors at the level of individual performance, and are more likely than Zionists to verbally deny being influenced by ancestors. Similar to what has been found by earlier scholars (e.g. West 1975), I found that Zionist churches take a relaxed attitude towards the cult of ancestors. Consequently, among Zionist Christians there is enormous range in terms of active engagement with the ancestor cult. When I asked local people about the relationship between ancestors and God, I typically received answers such as “well, Jesus can be like an ancestor,” or “God and the ancestors can do their work at the same time” regardless if they were traditionalist or members of a Zion church. Pauw noted similar statements among Christians in Soweto in the 1970s.

In contrast to traditionalists, the Methodist churches take a more negative attitude towards the cult of ancestors, and in particular take issue with the ritual activities surrounding the ancestral cult (also Pauw 1974). Thus, members of the Methodist churches typically avoid ritual beer drinks, for instance, and usually disavow a relationship with their ancestors if drawn into discussion on the topic. That being said, disavowing the cult of ancestors is not the same as feeling confident that they have no effect on the living (West 1975). As Mathew Engelke notes in a recent publication on Pentecostal Christianity in West Africa, Christians' verbal representations of belief and Christian identity are often “both utopian and ambivalent” (2010: 177), particularly in relation to their orientation towards traditional beliefs and systems of spirituality. As such, he advises being attentive both to what people say they do, and what they are actually doing.

This approach is essential for understanding the relationship between Christianity, ancestors, and gendered and generational contests in Mhlambini, because religious belief is at once a political statement on the nature of conjugal relations, a symbol of idealized gender
relations, and an engagement with the spiritual realm. Consequently, people in Mhlambini tend to talk about these things in ways which reflect how they want to be perceived and conduct their lives more than how they actually behave. The connection between ancestors and gerontocratic patriarchy is such that explicitly embracing or refuting Christianity or ancestors is also to position oneself regarding idealized gender and kinship relations. Accordingly, Christianity is more appealing to some members of the community than others: those with limited social power in a gerontocratic patriarchy, and those for whom kinship obligations are especially burdensome.

In South Africa, Christian churches have long been instrumental in producing and promoting distinctions between traditional practices and values, and modern ones (see Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, 1991). This is particularly so in the realm of affective and emotional life. Speaking specifically of the impact that Christianity and school education have had on intergenerational tensions in Africa, Cole and Thomas write that these institutions:

influenced such tensions with new political dynamics and cultural meanings. Certain intimate and emotional relations were depicted as “civilized” “modern,” and “Western” and contrasted with others deemed “primitive,” “traditional,” and “African” (2009: 16).

In her ethnographic work among the urban, township-dwelling Xhosa in the Eastern Cape, van der Vliet similarly notes that monogamous companionate marriage was considered modern, in contrast to more traditional, and therefore 'backward,' 'uncivilised' or 'unchristian' practices such as polygyny.

Christianity appeals to people who find advantage, for instance, in having personal choice of spouse. This is especially appealing to young women, who in previous generations have often had limited autonomy of choice and for whom expectations of marital fidelity, although relaxed compared to many societies, are nevertheless greater than for men. As will be elaborated on in detail in Chapter Five, many young people, especially women, frame Christian
partnership as more loving, egalitarian, cooperative, and modern than traditional marriage, a distinction which is embraced and promoted by local Christian churches (see Wardlow & Hirsh 2006; Collier 1997, specifically among the Xhosa, see Manona 1980; Hunter 1961 [1936]). Local churches also categorically disapprove of polygamy, and, controversially, promote a single standard of sexual morality for both women and men (see Whooley 1975; Hunter 1933). Local churches also forbid forced marriage, alcohol consumption, and the corporal discipline of wives. Of relevance here, Mayer and Mayer mention in passing that Churches tend to have a disproportionately female membership, and suggest that “Churches provide outlets -in organization, in entrainment, in emotional releases – which, it seems, Xhosa women enjoy all the more because of their subordinate position in the patriarchal Xhosa social structure” (1971 [1960]: 30). Monica Hunter makes a similar observation which links Christianity more explicitly with changing structures of gender power, remarking that

    Christianity also tends to make women more independent, because when, as frequently happens, the wife of a pagan man is converted, she is taught by the missionaries and forced by her convictions to assert herself against her husband in certain questions (...) The backing of her religion (...) gives her courage to demand an independence of judgement and freedom of action which under the old conditions she would never have dreamed of claiming (1933: 274).

Moreover, churches provide community and companionship to women who are otherwise marginalized (Cloete 1992), and women from traditionalist households often become involved in

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14While local Zionist churches forbid polygamy, it is allowed by some African independent churches elsewhere in South Africa, notably the Shembe church.
the Christian community once they are widowed. More generally, similar to what Birgit Meyer has noted among converts to Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, churches offer those with little social power (namely, women and youth) “a new individualist ethics which matches their aspiration to achieve power and esteem irrespective of age and origin” (1998: 320, also Robbins 2003: 225; van Dijk 1992: 173).

As mentioned above, ancestors, and the rituals and divination that accompany ancestral belief, are integral to extended family solidarity (Nel 2007; Berglund 1965). Although no one explicitly stated as much during my fieldwork, a number of scholars have noted that obligations to ancestors and other kin are oftentimes maintained at the expense of individual interests (Nel 2007; Olupona 2001; Calhoun 1980). Moreover, the muted role of ancestors and the focus on personal salvation within Christian cosmology can emancipate Christians from economic obligation to kin (Robbins 2003; Meyer 1998). Thus, discussing impetuses for conversion in Urapmin, Papua New Guinea, Joel Robbins notes that “spirits represent traditional ideas of personal and group possession of property that people now consider an impediment to their hopes for development” (2003: 22). Similarly, on Ghanaian Pentecostals Birgit Meyer remarks that “spiritual liberation [can be] paralleled by a more prosaic liberation in social-economic terms” (Meyer 1998: 334). I do not know whether this is ever a calculated decision on the part of local Christians, although I think it no coincidence that Christian households tend to be among the more affluent in the village.15

15 In this respect, my observations mark a fundamental departure from that of Mayer and Mayer, who clearly state that “It is the Red family who often stand the better chance of achieving economic success, peasant-style; the thriving flocks and the herds, and the hoard of banknotes. ‘Red people,’ said School informants, ‘are rich, they have lots of money hidden away,’ They have money, because they stick to very simple clothing, and do not spend so much on dress as we do” (1971 [1960]: 27). In contrast, the Mayers write that school people are always “hungry for money” (ibid.).
Schooling

At many points throughout this dissertation, people reference formal education to index the degree to which an individual is traditional, or to explain why they themselves hold a particular point of view. There are both ideological and pragmatic reasons for this. Firstly, formal education—usually bound up with missionary agendas—has long been tied to the creation of modern subjects, in South Africa as elsewhere in the colonial world (Ngwane 2001; Comaroff & Comaroff 1997). The distinction between Red and School Xhosa, as discussed above, suggests that education has long stood as a marker of the degree to which Xhosa people are perceived to embrace certain Western conventions and ideals (e.g. vand der Vliet 1991). Specifically among the Bomvana, mission schools have been active since at least the 1880s (Cook 1934a), and early ethnographic work in the region is starkly demonstrative of the degree to which schools aimed to transform ideology. P.A.W. Cook, for instance, carried out his ethnographic work with the clear aim of informing pedagogy: one of his books is entitled The Education of an African Tribe. In an article entitled “The Education of Rural Bantu People” (1934b), published in The Journal of Negro Education, Cook articulates this division between tradition and schooling as follows: “the tribal section, having a firm belief in their own culture and their leaders, the chiefs, are opposed to the work of the schools as well as to innovations of any kind” (98). He similarly reports that formal education undermines generational respect and that educated Bomvana are drawn to European items of consumption. Moreover, he links schooling to individualized self-interest, reporting that “they [school-educated Bomvana] have very little interest in the welfare of the community but a very great deal in their own” (1934b: 22). While Cook's work is in some ways a relic of its times (the Bomvana person whom he discusses is male, for instance), he also alludes to profound ideological differences between the values and ideologies that have accompanied schooling, and traditional Bomvana values. For example, in a stern—if somewhat paternalistic-
critique of mission schools of his day, he writes that “the schools are not preparing the child for the life he is to lead in Bomvanaland but they are rendering him unfit to take his place as a Bomvana,” (1934a: 99) and deplores the “individualistic education which fits him for town life only” (1934a:101).

There are also pragmatic reasons why schooling and formal education are closely related to gendered and generational contests in Mhlambini today, as certain opportunities and experiences are uniquely available to the more educated. As I will explain, these opportunists follow fault lines of gender and generation.

Rough terrain, distance from urban centres, and lack of state investment in regional infrastructure meant that the first school in the village was established only in 1996. This school offers grades R (kindergarten) through grade six. To continue beyond grade six, students must either walk a steep five kilometres to the school in the next village,¹⁶ which continues up to grade eight, or must board further afield. All local students who continue beyond grade eight are boarders, usually with distant family. Board is expensive, and so the few young people who have completed grade nine and beyond are from the more affluent local households. The majority of students drop out of school by grade six. Moreover, the quality of education at the local school is abysmally poor, which motivates some parents to send their children elsewhere. Not only does this further entrench inequalities among between local families, it also gives certain students greater exposure to places that are imagined as more modern. They also encounter more Christians in school, and are exposed to people who are more able to engage in individualistic styles of consumption.

¹⁶Mhlambini village is spread over a large area; it takes me at least forty minutes to walk from end to end. For children who live on the far end of Mhlambini, the school in the next village is more like eight kilometres from home. In winter it is dark by the time students complete the eight kilometre walk home, and to do so they must pass a forest which is known to be haunted. Consequently, many children prefer to stay home.
Furthermore, local people told me that girls outnumber boys at school, and tend to stay in school longer (see Whooley 1975; Hunter 1961 [1936]). This was confirmed through the demographic profiling survey that I conducted in my capacity as an NGO volunteer. I found that among the cohort of people under age forty who have no schooling, roughly two thirds are men. Moreover, males make up only a third of those who have continued beyond the eighth grade. I am not sure why this is the case, although people tell me that boys are needed for herding livestock and that boys are less interested in schooling and are therefore more likely to drop out at a young age. Although few older people have any formal education, there are several older women who are exceptions as they married into the community from villages where schools have been longer-established.

The disproportionate representation of girls and women in school is relevant to this dissertation for a number of reasons. Firstly, along with churches, schools promote particular ideals of morality which challenge patriarchy, setting the stage for gendered conflict played out through competing moral ideologies. Moreover, forthcoming chapters will demonstrate the ways in which schooling and education are understood to be symbolic of particular moral values.

Gender, Age, and Power

As Shanshan Du writes:

In many patriarchal societies, the oppositions between the two sexes are encoded in childhood socialization, highlighted by puberty rites and masculine-versus-

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17 This survey will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Age, sex, and level of formal education were among the demographic indicators that were collected.

18 This argument is offered by both Whooley (1975) and Manona (1980) to explain boys' under-representation in Ciskei schools.
feminine ideals, institutionalized by assigning prestigious social roles and positions exclusively to men, and finalized in the spiritual realm by worshipping only male ancestors (2002: 52).

Although this description is over-general (there are female ancestors, and there are powerful women in and around Mhlambini, although in most contexts their authority is hampered and not enhanced by their gender), this is a fair description of the patriarchy that characterizes village life. Generally speaking, gender difference between men and women is understood to be common-sense, and these differences are naturalized and accorded unequal power.

In Mhlambini, gender differences are reinforced and reproduced through gendered spheres of activity and practice. Most activities in the village are gendered, and there is a clear understanding of what jobs are appropriate for women and men. Although writing in the 1930s, Cook's observations on the gendered nature of work among the Bomvana are current today. He writes,

There is a very strict dichotomy of sex in the sphere of work (...) The work of the two sexes is, as it were, an integral portion of the very nature of their sex -almost a secondary sex characteristic. Thus a woman by performing a woman's work well is more of a woman; the better a man succeeds in the tasks of men, the more manly he becomes (1934a: 14, also Liebenberg 1994; Hunter 1933).

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See Liebenberg (1997; 1994) for an extensive discussion of the gendered division of labour elsewhere in the rural former-Transkei.
Women usually do all the cooking, cleaning, and most of the child-rearing, as well as all the gardening, laundry,\textsuperscript{20} brick-making, dung-collecting and floor-dunging,\textsuperscript{21} beer-brewing, and collecting of shellfish, firewood and water. In short, women are responsible for a disproportionate burden of the manual labour that goes directly into the daily maintenance of an umzi. As I will elaborate in Chapter Four, women's success at maintaining a rural homestead was an integral dimension of the migrant labour system into which Mhlambini has long been integrated (see Cloete 1992). Accordingly, men are responsible for earning a wage through labour migrancy (although many are no longer able to do so due to a shrinking pool of jobs), and when in the village, for house-building, fence-building, fishing, herding and caring for livestock. The thatching of roofs seems to be the principal activity that men and women share, although roofs do not need to be re-thatched very often. As is alluded to by Cook, the work of both genders is valued and respected within their respective spheres, albeit in a hierarchical manner.

The gender hierarchy is reinforced in innumerable ways in the village. For example, women show respect for senior men -primarily their husbands and fathers-in-law- by avoiding eye contact and by avoiding the use of certain words, such as their husband’s name.\textsuperscript{22} Men do not

\textsuperscript{20} Unmarried men and boys do their own laundry, and may be put to work by their mothers helping in the garden. I have never seen a male of any age carry water or firewood, dung a floor, make a mud brick, or brew beer. I have occasionally seen a man cooking, if his wife or mother is not home. I have seen males of all ages caring for their children and siblings, although the primary responsibility for childcare lies with the mother and grandmother.

\textsuperscript{21} Most local homes have cow-dung floors, which must be regularly re-dunged to prevent insects and moles from crawling up through.

\textsuperscript{22} This is a complex practice, and involves avoiding not only using her husband's name, but also avoiding the use of words and syllables which make up her husband's name. For instance, if the husband's name has the word “stone” in it, she should avoid using this word in daily speech (see, for instance, Cook (1934a) and Soga (1932) for extensive discussion and examples of this type of respect through speech). The use of personal names in general is overly-familiar, and it is more respectful to refer to people by kinship terms; one generally addresses one's peers as sisi or bhuti (“sister,” and “brother,” borrowed from Afrikaans), and people younger than oneself as either bhuti, sisi, inkwenkwe, intombi or umntana’am (“brother,” “sister,” “boy,” “girl,” or “my child”). People older than oneself are usually addressed as mama and either tata or ubowo (“mother” and “father” from Afrikaans, ubowo is a more respectful and less familiar term for father). If they are very old they are either addressed as gogo (“granny”), or as makhulu (grandmother, literally “great or big mother”) and tatomkhulu (grandfather, “great or big father”). This form of respect speech will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.
observe similar practices of name avoidance, although they do show respect by avoiding eye contact and by addressing others using respectful terminology. Moreover, at traditional events of any kind (weddings, funerals, beer-drinks and so forth) men will always get the first and best share of food and drink, and will receive more food and drink overall. If there is a shortage of food or drink, young women and children will be the first to go without. Social spaces such as huts, shebeens, and even yards are divided into men's spaces and women's spaces, and the men's spaces will always have more comfortable seating (for instance, benches, beds or beer crates), while women usually sit on the floor, grass mats, or the ground. At events such as weddings and funerals, the men's side will comprise most of the shady space under the tent that the family will have rented for the event, as well as all of the chairs that will be set up in the shade for guests to sit on. Older women will sit on the ground in what remains of the shade, while younger women will usually sit in the hot sun.

Most people in Mhlambini articulate this gender hierarchy as being longstanding tradition, and when they talk about being a traditional person or espousing traditional values, they are referring to gender hierarchy above all else. Whether this tradition is truly longstanding is a moot point. While early ethnographic and missionary accounts suggest a society characterized by sharp patriarchal hierarchy (e.g. Bryant 1965; Schapera 1953; Cook 1934a), there are significant limitations to contemporary knowledge of gender relations in the pre-colonial period (McClendon 2002; Berger 1994; Eldredge 1994; Murray 1981). Moreover, between the early colonial period and the contemporary era of post-colonial democracy have been several centuries of colonial rule, characterized by concerted efforts to integrate Africans

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23 The men’s side of the hut is to the left as one enters, and the women’s side of the hut is on the right. They mirror one another, and conversation takes place across the invisible gender line. Upon entering the hut, guests move to the side appropriate to their gender. A lower status person (for instance, a young person) will be expected to vacate their seat for a higher status person, regardless of whether or not they are a guest. The back of the hut is the place where ancestors are thought to congregate.
into capitalist economies (Carton 2000; Beinart & Bundy 1987; Marks & Atmore 1980; Guy 1979; Marks 1970). Against this backdrop, contemporary gerontocratic patriarchies are rooted in a complex interplay of resistance and accommodation between African patriarchs and colonial administrators, with both sides deploying essentialized and inflexible notions of African tradition to shape African patriarchy in ways which have constrained women and youth (Carton 2000; Mamdani 1996; McKittrick 1996; Jeater 1993; Walker 1990; Chanock 1982). This will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.

As in many rural communities in South Africa, social life in the village is characterized by hierarchies of gender, but also of age. These two categories are so entwined that it is impossible to discuss the status and social power of a given individual in relation to another without discussing their social position as a both aged and gendered subject. Although her approach is overly-structuralist, Alida Liebenberg’s summary of authority in a neighbouring district well-articulates these interlinked power dynamics. She writes:

The authority structure reproduced by individual actors is based on relationships hierarchically ordered through the social division by gender and age. Male authority is a reality in married woman's daily life.24 However, male dominance should not be taken for granted, as dominance is as much a function of seniority as of gender in this society. Furthermore, male authority is often opposed and even neutralised by female power and agency. Men are not always superior to

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24The focus of Leibenberg's ethnographic research was on authority in married women’s lives, hence this emphasis here. Although patriarchal power is exercised most intensely in marriage, it is a reality in the lives of all girls and women in this region.
women in status as age differences also play a role in people's relationships with each other (1997: 350).

The complex interplay between age and gender is the focus of Chapter Three, and will thus be elaborated on substantially in forthcoming pages. For now, it is important to clarify a particular point regarding the relative social power between younger and older women, as this both scaffolds generational contests between them, and also speaks to the stakes the older women have in the re(productive) labour of junior women (this will be particularly significant in Chapter Seven, which focuses on *ukuthwala* [bride abduction]).

In Mhlambini, traditional gender power relations closely resemble what Deniz Kandiyoti has termed “classic patriarchy” (1988: 278)\(^\text{25}\). Gender relations are thus characterized by a patriarchal bargain, that is “the existence of a set of rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated” (286). Although women negotiate from a weaker position in all patriarchies, under conditions of classic patriarchy “the deprivation and hardship [a woman] experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law” (279). Moreover, while men hold disproportionate power, their authority is predicated on the ability to sustain the women of his household. Virtually all mature women in Mhlambini have a deep investment in such traditional rural patriarchy. Yet as Kandiyoti argues, such patriarchal bargains are profoundly destabilized under both capitalism, and conditions of poverty. Gender relations between older and younger women in Mhlambini are thus characterized by traditional gendered hierarchies, but are also troubled by the increasingly fragile claim that elder women have to authority over their juniors.

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\(^{25}\) Kandiyoti herself suggests that Sub-Saharan African patriarchy differs in important ways from the “classic patriarchies” of North Africa, the Middle East, and much of Asia. However, the patriarchy that people in Mhambini consider traditional aligns closely with Kandiyoti’s description of classic patriarchy.
As is typical of classic patriarchies, elder women are accorded great respect by both males and females of all ages. Yet especially in the contemporary era, it is inaccurate to say that women’s social power increases incrementally from girlhood through old age. Rather, differences in social power are nuanced between unmarried girls and young wives. On one hand, married women are accorded respect in Xhosa society. As wives, they are complete adult persons even if they are chronologically young, and they alone can hope to one day enjoy the status of abafazi abadala (‘old women’): the respected matriarchs who enjoy considerable influence and leisure. Yet while adulthood typically corresponds with greater social power and independence in Western society, it is not so in rural Xhosa society. Although young wives enjoy respectable status, their independence is severely curtailed, and they have far less authority and autonomy relative to unmarried daughters (see also Liebenberg 1994, Hunter 1961 [1936]). In most households they are expected to stay close to the umzi except on errands such as collecting water and firewood, and are always expected to be busy with domestic chores. The hardest working person at an umzi will always be a young wife (see Liebenberg 1994; Hunter 1961 [1936]).

In contrast, while most unmarried daughters do a great deal of domestic work for their families, they are quite free to move about as they please. Unmarried daughters often go to town or other villages, sometimes for days at a time, without asking permission of their parents. Unless she is returning to her own people following mistreatment at her husband’s home, a young wife would face severe sanction for leaving the village without permission from her husband and mother-in-law. Unmarried daughters also have more leeway to avoid work, and to delegate work to young wives and children. Visitors to a local umzi will quickly be able to identify who is a wife and who is a daughter not only by their clothing (which is an immediate
give-away given the dress restrictions of married women)\textsuperscript{26} but by their comportment. Daughters will readily greet visitors, and may drop what they are doing to eat, drink, and chat with guests (see Hunter 1961 [1936]). Young wives, however, remain busy in the background, only breaking from their work if instructed to. For instance, during my fieldwork I regularly called on my young unmarried women friends at home, often staying several hours during which we would do little but talk, eat, and play with their children. In sharp contrast, I was only able to speak with my young married acquaintances while helping them garden or fetch firewood (the only activities which gave them privacy from in-laws), or in the context of formal interviews, and then only after we had both requested permission from their mothers-in-law.

Differences in power and authority between daughters and daughters-in-law are especially pronounced if the daughter is substantially older than the young wife in chronological terms (see Liebenberg 1994). This power differential is even more pronounced if the sister-in-law is the older sibling of the wife’s husband. As Monica Hunter notes, “the wives of her younger brother must treat a woman with great respect, calling her ndodakazi (lit. female husband) (…) they must wait on her, and make no complaint” (1961 [1936]: 33). That being said, in my experience of the relationship of young wives and unmarried daughters is usually companionable and cooperative; one often finds a young wife and her sister-in-law washing their households’ laundry together down at the river. Yet as Hunter notes, any assistance provided to a wife by her sister-in-law is an act “of grace” (\textit{ibid}), never obligation.

Moreover, an unmarried sister is not expected to cater to the men in her home the way a young wife is expected to cater to her husband. As such, a daughter-in-law is a particular asset to

\textsuperscript{26}Conventions of dress, and the symbolism of women’s dressed bodies in particular, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.
the women of her homestead, and to her mother-in-law most of all. Consider the following anecdote relayed by Monica Hunter:

Old Umtheto put the case in a nutshell when he called his son’s wife ‘Instimbi’ (the bell), ‘because,’ he said, ‘now that my wife has a daughter-in-law she sits still and calls when she wants anything done, just like a white mistress ringing a bell.’ In light of this the anxiety of mothers to get their sons married is understandable (35-36).

Similarly, during my own fieldwork Phola, a young woman friend of mine with four unmarried brothers, confided to me that she feared being abducted for marriage (see Chapter Seven). As she explained, if she were abducted her widowed mother would almost certainly consent to the union, as in Phola’s words, “my mother is old, and ready to be waited on.” The implication here is that the lobola (bridewealth) that Phola’s prospective husband would pay could in turn be used to facilitate the marriage of one of Phola’s brothers, thereby bringing a daughter-in-law into the household. This daughter-in-law would presumably cater to Phola’s mother with diligence that Phola did not. Incidentally, Phola was indeed abducted several months after I finished my fieldwork, and her mother did consent to the abduction.

This gendered generational hierarchy is increasingly being challenged in the democratic era in ways which have profound bearing on gendered and generational relations in the community. Much of this dissertation speaks to precisely this issue.

**Personhood**

Drawing on a wide range of ethnographic material, anthropologists have long debated whether the autonomous individual is a Western cultural product (e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff 2001; La Fontaine 1985; Mauss 1985; Read 1955). While there has been considerable debate within this literature, difficulties in speaking of individuals, persons, and individuality
 interchangeably have led to an important distinction between the human being as an individual mortal object ('the individual'), the cultural concepts that are attached to that object ('the person'), and “the general moral status accorded individual human beings by virtue of their humanity, which recognizes their autonomy and responsibility for actions” (La Fontaine 1985: 133) ('individualism'). Differentiated in this way, individuals and persons may exist in all societies, but the content of these categories is particular to a given cultural and historical context (Frank 2006). Moreover, the values and meanings attached to the person may differ substantially between societies. For example, as James Ferguson has recently stated in reference to South Africa, “the valuation of individual autonomy and self-sufficiency (...) is cross-culturally far from universal” (2013: 224). Thus, as J. S. La Fontaine argues, “concepts of the person are embedded in the social context” (1985: 138), and can only be understood as such.

The social relations that people in Mhlambini articulate as traditional are exemplary of a relational notion of personhood that has long been recognized as constitutive of personhood in Africa (Ferguson 2013; Nyamnjoh 2002; Comaroff & Comaroff 2001; Englund 1996; Guyer & Belinga 1995; Jackson & Karp 1990; Riesman 1986; La Fontaine 1985). Without going into excessive detail here, I would like to raise two points that arise from this literature which are of particular importance for my argument. Firstly, common to this literature is the assumption of an individual's humanity as a work in progress, that personhood and status are not qualities equally shared among people by virtue of their common humanity, but rather something worked towards and continually constituted over the life-course (Fortes 1987). In such societies full personhood is, in Meniki’s words, “attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one’s stations” (1984: 176). Moreover, as Oyowe notes, “personhood cannot be abstracted from the actual social relationships that constitute the social space in which individuals evolve into persons” (2013:
This is confirmed in the anthropological literature: as Riesman puts it in an exhaustive review of literature on personhood and life cycle in Africa, “the person, in African societies, can be understood in large part as constituted by those relations to which his position in the system is connected” (1986: 100). Thus, achieving full personhood entails being embedded in a community that both confers and realizes one’s status.

I contribute to this conversation by showing how economic, political, and ideological transformations —many of them linked to the global economic system and to global ‘flows’ (Appadurai 1996) of values and norms— are destabilizing the relationship between gender, age, and status. For example, in Chapter Three I show how old age pensions complicate local understandings of the relationship between age and status for women, by rewarding the achievement of a universal chronological milestone rather than the achievement of locally-valued markers of mature status, such as married motherhood. Similarly, I demonstrate that modest growth of economic opportunities now available to some young women alongside a sharp decline in economic opportunities for young men is reconfiguring gendered identities, hierarchies, and dependencies within families. Overall, Chapters Four, Five, and Six speak to the gendered and generational antagonisms that arise in response to economic, political, and ideological change.

Secondly, the relations within which the person is embedded have long been characterized by hierarchical dependencies that are premised on both a very different understanding of value, and on a lesser valuing of autonomy relative to Western individualism. Speaking of African personhood in the precolonial past, Harri Englund writes:

Security in its widest existential sense was achieved through the accumulation of people (see Eldredge 1993; Guyer & Belinga 1995; Guyer 1993). 'Wealth in people' sustained a logic of value that was clearly different from the logic of
accumulation in a capitalist sense (...). Its particular historicity involved a specific form of personhood for which “freedom” lay not in a withdrawal into meaningless and dangerous autonomy but in attachment to a kin group, to a patron, to power’ (Kopytoff & Miers 1977: 17). (...) 'Freedom' was 'belonging’ rather than 'autonomy' (2004: 17)

This is echoed eloquently by James Ferguson, who writes “hierarchical dependence here, as throughout the region, was not a problem or of debility – on the contrary, it was the principal mechanism for achieving social personhood. Without networks of dependence, you were nobody –except maybe a witch” (2013: 226-227).

Critics of human rights have cautioned that rights are Western cultural products, and as such are premised on an individualism that is incompatible with such hierarchical, interdependent forms of personhood. Similar arguments have been made regarding other idioms associated with modernity, such as romantic love, companionate marriage and gender equality. These idioms are indeed framed by many in Mhlambini as counter to Xhosa tradition, and the ethnographic chapters of my dissertation will demonstrate that they are central to gendered and generational contests in the community. However, my main contribution here is to show that while discourses such as human rights, companionate marriage, Christian morality, and gender equality do focus on the individual in novel ways, and while people do deploy them to disentangle themselves from interpersonal obligations, they usually do so with the aim of negotiating new interdependencies more than to achieve autonomy and independence. And as

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27 For an overview of anthropological debates about human rights, see Cowan (2006), Merry (2006), Messer (1993)  
28 For reviews of these debates about the relationship between modernity, individualism, romantic love, gender equality, and companionate marriage, see the Introductions to Hirsch and Wardlow’s Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage (2006), Cole and Thomas’ Love in Africa (2009), and Padilla et al.’s Love and Globalization (2007). For a work that argues for the European heritage of romantic love, see Giddens’ The Transformation of Intimacy (1992). This literature will be reviewed in more detail in Chapter Five.
the chapter on *ukuthwala* (bride abduction) will make most abundantly clear, people in Mhlambini are mobilizing traditional practices in ways which enable them to achieve desired forms of modern personhood.

By drawing on history to suggest possible differences between African personhood and Western individualism, I do not intend to suggest that there was ever a uniquely African person prior to the colonial era, nor that such a person exists in Africa now. By acknowledging that there are culturally-specific dimensions to personhood, it follows that the nature of personhood will change through time. Moreover, there is ample evidence suggesting that ideologies associated with Western individualism have a lively social life in contemporary Africa. For example, while deeply critical of the mainstream rhetoric of human rights, and of its feasibility in much of Africa, both Francis Nyamnjoh (2004) and Harri Englund have persuasively argued that “human rights have gained such widespread currency that they can scarcely be associated with a 'Northern' agenda” (2000: 580). Moreover, as scholars such as Jean and John Comaroff have exhaustively demonstrated, missionaries have actively promoted liberal individualism and rights-centred notions of selfhood in the region since the early colonial era (2001; 1997; 1991, also van der Veer 1996; Fortes 1987).

Yet a high value is still placed on socially-embedded personhood. This is perhaps most apparent in recent research which has analyzed the widespread dictum in many African communities that homosexuality is “un-African.” Similar to contemporary claims that Xhosa tradition is timeless and unchanging, the truth of this claim is undermined by considerable research that demonstrates longstanding acceptance of same-sex sexuality\(^{29}\) in Southern Africa in certain contexts (Epprecht 2009; 1998; Niehaus 2001; Donham 1998; Moodie with Ndatshe

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\(^{29}\)I acknowledge that existing published work on this topic is heavily biased towards discussions of men’s sexuality.
Yet as Mathew Engelke (1999) has pointed out, what is common to the sexual relationships described in this work is that hierarchical gender orientations are maintained, and they are understood to take place alongside rather than in place of marriage, childbearing and the formation of heterosexual households. In a discussion of the politics surrounding the appeal to human rights raised by the organization 'Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe' as justification for their claim to a booth at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, Engelke makes an important observation regarding the objections raised by the Women's League of Zimbabwe. He notes:

> What seems particularly troubling to the Women’s League about the idea of homosexuality is the implication that certain social relationships (primarily marriage and reproduction) would be left unfulfilled. If men marry men and women marry women they are not fully human from this perspective (see Clark, 1996: 236). To say that human rights can be dehumanizing in this context is to express a concern over the integrity of the social fabric, the coherence of the cultural heritage, and the very idea of humanity itself (Engelke 1999: 301).

A similar and compelling observation is made by Lydia Boyd in her recent study of attitudes towards anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda. In her words, the concern is not with sex per se, but rather “that Ugandan discourses surrounding homosexuality are shaped by deep ambivalence over an emergent construction of sex and sexual desire that emphasizes individual autonomy, choice, and agency, and which conflicts with other models for ethical sexual conduct in Uganda” (2013: 698). From this perspective, homosexuality as a category of rights-bearing personhood may arguably be un-African after all. Although homosexuality is not a focus of my work, this research speaks to the dissertation in meaningful ways. As I will show, anxieties about
human rights and autonomous choice for women and youth in Mhlambini reflect precisely these sorts of anxieties about appropriate sexuality. What chaos will ensue if women are given free rein to choose as many partners as they like, or to have children with whomever they wish? Who will maintain the homestead and lineage if young men are free to do as they please? And importantly, do gendered and generational identities have any meaning if people are equal and autonomous? These sorts of anxieties underscore much of the anxiety and conflict that features in forthcoming chapters.

Of course, with the exception of Engelke and Boyd, much of this work is either somewhat dated, or focuses primarily on discussions of the past as a means of making inferences about personhood in the present. Ferguson, for example, relies primarily on historical accounts rather than contemporary ethnography as his primary means of demonstrating that personhood in contemporary South Africa is deeply relational relative to the West. Similarly, while the Comaroffs profess to discuss Tswana personhood during the colonial rather than present era in order to build an argument about the social-historical specificity of 'the autonomous person,' they rely heavily on analysis of the Tswana language as evidence to support the notion of the person as self-constructed over the life-course. Without diminishing the value of linguistic analysis for anthropology, as Bibi Bakare-Yusuf has argued:

Relying on language discourse to articulate a cultural essence (...) fails to understand the nature of power and the ways in which language is inscribed within social practices. This failure is crucial; without allowing for a distinction between meaning and its socio-existential context (...) [such] analysis reduces language to semiotics and representation (2003: 122).
In summary, in examining generational conflict and social change through the lens of personhood, I do not suggest that rural South Africans are especially different, exotic, or strange. I aim to stress only that local people’s sense of their own identity, as well as the actions that they are able to undertake, are deeply and prominently shaped by their relationships with other people. Moreover, widespread unemployment and the absence of a sustainable agricultural economy in the region mean that interdependency -both kin-based and based on sex and intimacy- are necessities of daily survival.

Age, gender, generation, and connection through kinship are key to how these relationships and obligations are understood. In the community, independence and autonomy are less valued personal qualities in comparison to mainstream North American society, and solitude is problematic and strange. Being alone is simply not normal, and openly pursuing self-interested plans is suspect. Moreover, people are deeply concerned about how particular actions would affect people they are connected to, notably kin, and often privilege the needs of these relations over their own welfare. Most people also feel profoundly entitled to be cared for by their kin. Through forthcoming chapters it should become clear that some of the most volatile gendered and generational conflicts in the community today stem from the ways interpersonal obligations –which themselves are constitutive of self to some degree- are being challenged and transformed due to changing economic, social, and political circumstances. For now, I provide several brief ethnographic examples to show the way that socially-embedded personhood is important in the community.

Interpersonal obligation and interdependence are evident, for instance, in how money is used in the community. Although this is being fundamentally transformed in the current economic context, there are deep expectations placed on adult men to satisfy the financial needs
of their kin. Gendered respect and authority is tied to men’s ability to do so. Yet this obligation can preclude certain courses of action that might seem common-sense within the conceptual framework of Western individualism. For example, I recall a conversation between Steven, the founder of the backpacker Lodge, and Dalumzi, a project manager from the local NGO. Although Steven has lived in the community for over a decade and speaks fluent IsiXhosa, he grew up in a middle-class English South African family in Cape Town, and is often confounded by things which strike local people as common-sense. In contrast, Dalumzi was raised locally. He is the eldest son of an influential family in the nearby village of Imela. One of the few local people with a well-paid managerial job, Dalumzi is affluent by local standards. Nevertheless he is always short of money. Steven attributes Dalumzi's money problems to his poor financial management skills, this in turn being an outcome of poor quality education and a lack of positive role-models.

On the day in question, Dalumzi had asked Steven about the system of solar panels that Steven had set up on the rondavel where Steven and his wife reside. Dalumzi has recently been paid an end-of-year bonus, and was considering purchasing a similar apparatus for his own homestead. However, he established that with the cash he had on hand he could afford only the panels, but not other equipment that would be necessary to actually generate usable energy. Indeed, he learned that the panels themselves were only a moderate portion of the expense. It would be some time before he could afford to purchase the whole system.

I listened with interest as Steve tried to convince Dalumzi not to buy the panels by themselves. He urged him to save his money until he could buy the whole system all at once, thereby ensuring that he would have pieces that would be compatible with one another. “What if your panels break? What if they get stolen? What if they are out-of-date by the time you can
afford to buy the rest?” Alternately, suggested Steven, Dalumzi could buy a less expensive system. Dalumzi wanted the best system, however. And he was determined to build it piece by piece, one purchase at a time.

At the time I felt sympathetic towards Steven; I shared his perception that Dalumzi was an impulsive shopper, drawn to gadgets and fashion. Like Steven, I was skeptical that Dalumzi would have the discipline to follow through with his plan, and suspected that he would move on to another project long before he had saved enough money to purchase the whole solar panel system. Yet listening to Dalumzi’s justification for buying the system piece by piece, it did not seem as though he was driven by a simple impulse to consume. Rather, his justification indicated shrewd instrumentalism: only by buying the panels now would he be able to protect the money from being claimed by his family. Adept at oratory, he painted a dramatic hypothetical (and plausible) story involving nieces in need of medical care, sons in need of school uniforms, sisters in need of grocery money, and a wife in need of a new outfit. “Steven! He said, “If I put this money aside now, it will be gone next week! People will ask, and I can't say no! But if I already spent it on solar panels for our home, then they cannot ask it of me!”

Although Steven seemed not to grasp Dalumzi's dilemma, I recall being struck by the realization that for Dalumzi, family obligation meant that it would be impossible to save the money: withholding it for his own ends -even if the panels ultimately benefited the whole family- was impossibly immoral and antisocial. Although he is in many was a traditional village patriarch, his authority does not allow him to legitimately supersede the needs of his family. Interdependencies of this sort are characteristic of daily life for virtually everyone in the village, especially in this time of widespread unemployment.
Furthermore, as will be especially evident in Chapter Seven, which discusses *ukuthwala* (abduction marriage), interdependent and hierarchical kinship relations also severely limit some people’s capacity for autonomous action even where they experience considerable suffering. For example, in a conversation with Guma (the community health worker with whom I spent a great deal of time), she explained the primacy of family by offering the hypothetical case of an uncle who is found to be raping his niece. In Guma’s words, “*It’s different here than it is with your people. People will say that it’s a thing in that family. The girl…most of them won’t go to the police, and the parents won’t go, because it’s a family thing. And the neighbours will act like they don’t know. It has to be like you don’t know. I know it’s hard for you to understand…It’s the family before anyone else, always.*”

The importance of socially-embedded personhood is perhaps exemplified best, however, by attitudes towards a local child who is autistic. Tellingly, while he has another name which was given to him by his family at birth, everyone refers to him by the English word “Alone.” This child is extremely affectionate towards animals (this in itself is somewhat strange to local sensibilities), but engaging with humans makes him deeply anxious. Eye contact unsettles him, he prefers not to be spoken to directly, and he does not like to be touched. From a very young age Alone has eschewed human company, preferring to sleep outside either in the forests or beneath the wind turbine near the backpacker lodge. This is extremely odd behaviour: most people are fearful of the forest, are nervous to be outside in the dark, and prefer the company of friends and family.

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30Over the years, a number of psychologists have stayed at the backpacker lodge as guests, and have examined him with interest. The biomedical consensus seems to be that he is profoundly autistic, which I why I use this term here. I have heard no local ethnomedical description or analysis of his condition, other than that he is “not right in the head,” as exemplified by his aloneness. I have not provided a pseudonym for him, because his name is significant.
I would most often encounter Alone when I was out jogging on the windswept beaches that stretch outwards from the village for kilometres in either direction, far from the close company of other people. Apart from the occasional fisherman or shy teenaged couple seeking privacy, I almost never encountered any local people on these remote beaches. Yet Alone would often be out there, walking briskly with a mysterious sense of purpose, and would rarely acknowledge my presence even if we passed one another at fairly close quarters. I recall in particular sitting with a beer one evening by the fire-pit at the backpacker lodge, watching the last of the sunset over the ocean. As the light vanished over the horizon, I could see the small figure of Alone, far down the beach, walking away from the village towards the dark mass of the forest. “Uyaphi [where is his going?]” I asked one of the local women who cooks at the Lodge. She peered down the beach, and then responded “Yhu! Lo Alone. Andiazi. Akuright, yena. Uzakulala ithlatini!” [Wow, that’s Alone. I don’t know where he is going. He’s not right, that one. He’s going to sleep in the forest!]” Overall, he is thought of as highly strange, “not right” kind of person. And as his name so poignantly clarifies, he is strange because he is Alone.

Notes on Terminology

As mentioned on the first page, in the interest of privacy I have substituted pseudonyms for real names. There are three exceptions: My own name, and the names Alone, and Boy (who will be discussed in Chapter Three). I have retained the names Alone and Boy because the names themselves are significant to the arguments that I make about them. Moreover, it is certainly possible to discuss aloneness and boyhood in isiXhosa, so the fact that they have English names is itself significant, as their English names reflect their unusual status in the community.
Xhosa names having meaning in the Xhosa language, and people choose names based either on the individual’s personal qualities, circumstances relating to their birth or renaming, or hopes and aspirations that the family may have for them. Names are thus useful anthropological data for what they indicate about family circumstances and values.

Despite this incentive for retaining real names, in the interest of privacy I have assigned pseudonyms to nearly everyone. However, it has been impossible for me to choose pseudonyms which retain the meaning of people’s real names without compromising privacy. Even so, the pseudonyms that I have chosen are typical Xhosa names, and as such reflect local values. For example, common themes in naming include love, gifts, home, family, praise, God, waiting, thankfulness, learning, technology, and building. Moreover, where a person’s real name signifies an identity particularly relevant to the dissertation, I have chosen a pseudonym that retains this significance. For example, a name like Noamen (from the Christian prayer “Amen”) indicates that the individual is a Christian, and so I would choose a name with Christian associations as a pseudonym. Where individuals are ethnicities other than Xhosa (for instance English South African, Cape Malay, or Ndebele), I have chosen pseudonyms which are typical of these groups. As for myself, most people called me either Katie (a hard ‘T’ sound at the end of a word is awkward in isiXhosa, and “Kate” is difficult for monolingual isiXhosa speakers to say), intombi (girl), sisi (sister) or, jokingly, Kethiwe (a gender neutral name meaning ‘chosen,’ and also the name of a lust-driven male character on a popular soap opera).

Race, while socially-constructed, is real for virtually everyone in South Africa. Avoiding race terminology would have been too cumbersome, and would have made discussing South African history virtually impossible. Where relevant, I have specified the ethnicity of a given black or white person, and I occasionally use ‘African,’ for instance when discussing African as opposed to white society in the colonial era.
Outline of Chapters

Chapter Two is primarily descriptive. In it I provide information about the village that is essential for understanding the gendered and generational power in the community. Specifically, I describe two related institutions which distinguish Mhlambini from other similar villages in the area: the backpacker lodge and the affiliated grassroots NGO. I explain what these institutions are, how they are run, and how they came to be. Certain people affiliated with the lodge and NGO, myself included, feature in various ethnographic portions of forthcoming chapters. Understanding the relationship between the lodge, the NGO, and the community is thus necessary in order to grasp the assumptions and power relationships at play in these forthcoming ethnographic vignettes. In this chapter I also raise three issues that are important to the wider context of this dissertation. Firstly, I shown how, contrary to other similar institutions in South Africa, the backpacker lodge is not an exclusively middle-class space but rather a mixed space that very poor local people share with more affluent foreign and South African tourists. I also show how interactions between tourists and young locals engender particular ideas about possible lives and alternate orientations of gendered and generational power. Finally, I show how, by attempting as much as possible to interact with the community through local structures of gerontocratic authority, the administration of both the NGO and the Lodge position themselves as aligned with the interests of elders more so than youth. Chapter Two also discusses my research methodologies, as some of the material that I collected in my work as an NGO volunteer became research data. Moreover, most of my co-workers at the NGO were local people, and some of the best research material that I collected was acquired through in collaborating with them on NGO projects.
Chapter Three explores the meaning of age and social status in Mhlambini today. In so doing, I identify incongruence between age as socially achieved, and age as a reflection of chronological ageing. I also show that age and status are experienced in a fundamentally gendered way. In the first section of the chapter I focus on the experiences of young people in relation to longstanding markers of social adulthood, namely marriage, childbearing and management of a homestead for women, and employment, supportive fatherhood, and homestead headship for men. Drawing on a large body of literature, I show how in the current economic and political moment these traditional markers of social adulthood are unattainable for a large proportion of young people. I then juxtapose this disenfranchised majority of the youth with a minority of young women who are able to take advantage of recent economic and social changes to provide for themselves and their families. For these women, I demonstrate that they struggle to balance family obligations with both their own aspirations for modern forms of family and marriage, and with the femininities that these divergent obligations and aspirations entail.

In the second half of the chapter I turn to the 'age problems' experienced by some older women in Mhlambini when their achieved status as elder women does not align with the chronological age required to access government pensions. I show how interactions with state bureaucracy shape the meaning of age and status in Mhlambini in ways which challenge older women’s sense of identity.

Chapter Four provides a historically deep and ethnographically rich discussion of contemporary generational conflicts in Mhlambini. The ethnography that I provide demonstrates that elders’ expectations for youth are oftentimes unattainable for young people, causing frustration for both young and old. I also show that access to capital is a locus of power struggle between generations. In particular, I focus on an alcohol ban that was implemented by village elders, and which limited young people’s drinking habits. Drawing on a longstanding symbolic
association between alcohol consumption and masculine identity, as well as a locally-meaningful symbolic dichotomy between traditional, home-brewed maize beer and industrially-produced bottled beer, I show how patterns of alcohol consumption became symbolic of a masculine generational struggle about status and authority.

In Chapter Five I focus on the gendered politics of sexuality and social reproduction. Through a discussion of contemporary marriage practices and young peoples' attitudes towards various marriage forms, I explore the ways in which certain kinds of intimate relationships - notably companionate monogamy - are implicated with young women's aspirations towards modern personhood and egalitarian gender relations in marriage. I then turn to gendered politics over bridewealth and generational contests over married women's dress to explore contested notions of female sexuality, and to discuss the place of sex and reproduction in contemporary gendered and generational contests.

In Chapter Six I take up the topic of contests over human rights in Mhlambini, exploring the ways in which rights are felt to undermine both gendered identities, and relations of mutual obligation between genders and generations. In so doing, I build on the work of scholars such as Harri Englund and Mikael Karlström, who question the emphasis on parity in human rights discourse, and who suggest that many Africans mobilize rights as obligations between individuals who are both interdependent, and also unequal in social power. In particular, I suggest that in contexts like Mhlambini, where gender inequality is fundamental to how gendered subject positions are understood, the concept of rights as parity is felt by men and elders to threaten not only their authority, but also the entire gender order. Without condoning the violent gendered discipline that this gender hierarchy frequently entails in Mhlambini, I suggest that many people experience human rights as a fundamental threat to gender, and thus to self.
Many over the overarching themes of this dissertation come together in the final chapter, which focuses on the deeply-contested practice of *ukuthwala* (abduction) marriage. Beyond documenting the practice in its contemporary form, in this chapter I explore the various ways in which men and elders deploy this practice, and to what ends. In so doing, I show that the practice may becoming more frequent in the contemporary era, a man who cannot afford bridewealth can attempt through *ukuthwala* to acquire a wife more cheaply, potentially against her will. Yet I also show how contemporary *ukuthwala* is somewhat paradoxical in its implications, as abduction marriage can also be a way in which young people can deploy a traditional practice to fulfil their modern aspiration to marry a spouse of their choosing.
Chapter Two: The Lodge and the NGO

Two affiliated institutions distinguish Mhlambini from most similar coastal villages in the rural Eastern Cape. These are the backpacker Lodge (from here forward, referred to simply as the Lodge), and the affiliated grass-roots NGO. This chapter describes these institutions, and provides some analytic context for their role in the community.

These organizations are important because of the way they affect gendered and generational power relations in the community. In this regard, their role is quite complex. On one hand, both organizations have created many jobs in the village. Although earnest attempts are made to be democratic and equitable in allocating these jobs, this is impossible in practice because not all individuals in Mhlambini are equally able and skilled. And as should now be clear and as will be seen in the following chapters, social life in Mhlambini is neither democratic nor particularly equitable, and many people do not believe that it should be. Furthermore, access to wage labour through employment in these organizations, especially for youth and women, can destabilize the authority that elders and men have held over their juniors. And finally and somewhat paradoxically, both the NGO and the Lodge attempt as much as possible to work through traditional structures of gerontocratic authority. How this works in practice will be explained below. In so doing, they at times undermine, and at other times sustain and reproduce structures of gendered and generational authority.

A discussion of these organizations is also necessary because they are directly related to my immersion in the community, and to the nature of my role in the community throughout the duration of my fieldwork. For that reason, this chapter also provides more discussion of my research methodologies, as some of my research activities grew out of my involvement in these organizations in unanticipated ways. I chose Mhlambini as my research site because the NGO
was looking for an unpaid volunteer to assist with their education program, and the community’s willingness to accept me as a temporary resident was primarily based on the skills that I proposed to offer as a volunteer. Especially in the early months of my fieldwork, most local families thought of me primarily as someone who taught maths and English to their children, as opposed to a university student pursuing a research project. Indeed, although I strove from the beginning to the end of my fieldwork to be transparent about my project and my motivations for being in the community, the lack of formal education of most adults in the village foreclosed the kind of transparency towards which contemporary anthropologists should strive. I found that the best I could do in most cases was explain that I was a student at a university overseas, and at university I had homework just like their school-aged children. I would explain that my homework consisted of a very big project, and that the project was about marriage, men, women, youth, work, and other aspects of life in Mhlambini, and that if I did well with my homework, maybe I could be a teacher at a university someday.

The presence of the NGO and the Lodge also influenced my reception because many other foreigners had come to the village before me. Although I stayed longer in the community than other volunteers have, a white, middle-aged American woman had volunteered with the NGO roughly a year before I arrived, and had also resided in Mhlambini long-term. An educator

31Many local people, including my host family, held the impression that I am from Cape Town. I eventually gave up trying to correct this assumption, given a middle-class white, English upbringing in Cape Town and an urban middle-class Anglo upbringing in Canada are similar enough in the ways that are meaningful to local people in Mhlambini. Moreover, even some people who accepted that I am from overseas interpreted this concept of “overseas” differently than I had intended. One older woman, for instance, said to me “so, you come from overseas” (iphesheya; the isiXhosa word that is translated in English as ‘overseas’ is not a literal translation, and means something closer to “the other side”. Christian hymns, for instance, make frequent reference to 'iphesheya' as a desirable spiritual home). “Yes,” I said. She looked pensive, and then she pointed across the valley to a large house. “You see that house? It used to be a shop. And some years ago a couple came there, they were white like you, but tall, tall! And the woman had light hair. And they were from overseas. And they took my picture. So now my picture is overseas. Have you seen it?” “No,” I said. “Hmm” said my elderly neighbour, “maybe you can keep looking.”
by training, she had assisted with founding the preschool and library, both of which are, as far as I can tell, widely perceived as being of benefit. In addition to this woman, other outsiders – both from overseas and also people from elsewhere in South Africa – had resided in Mhlambini for shorter periods, and had worked in their professional capacities as medics and development workers. Finally, although it was unusual that I stayed as long as I did, foreigners are a regular presence in the community because many of them come to stay at the backpacker lodge, and the more intrepid of them can sometimes be found exploring the village. This meant that upon my arrival in the village, local people almost certainly held preconceptions about me.

Moreover, because of my involvement with the NGO, I arrived in the village already positioned in negotiations surrounding gender and generational power, as the NGO chose me as a volunteer in consultation with village elders at community meetings. As will become clear in forthcoming chapters, these community meetings are a forum where elders, especially elder men, have hugely disproportionate influence, and where young people are acutely marginalized. The NGO carries out all of its work in consultation with this community forum, meaning that for many young people in the community, the NGO can be seen to be aligned with the interests of the older generation. By involving myself in the community through the NGO, I was likely grouped with the NGO’s interests in some respects which are relevant to the gendered and generational contests that are discussed in forthcoming chapters. Finally, it is though a discussion of the Lodge and the NGO that I feel best able to articulate some of the personal politics relevant to my fieldwork experience.

To provide one further disclaimer: experience discussing my fieldwork has demonstrated to me that both scholars and educated laypersons are likely to have some preconceived ideas about what the Lodge and the NGO are like. Depending variously on the age, ethnicity, social
class, and educational background of the individuals in question, as well as prior experience with backpacker Lodges and NGOs in other regions, these preconceptions run the gamut from romanticized ideas about the upliftment of poor Africans, to negative assumptions about the ways in which NGOs may frame local ‘needs,’ the ways in which NGO personnel may be insufficiently knowledgeable about local values and power relations (especially with regards to gender), as well as assumptions about the social class of the people employed in both of these organizations. Indeed, I myself embarked on this project with ambivalent feelings about my affiliation with the NGO. At that point, my training as a fledgling anthropologist had equipped me with a solid foundation in ethnography that is deeply critical of development (e.g. Piot 2010; Li 2007; Ferguson 1990). These works are exemplary, and their critiques are important and apt. I remain critical of the depoliticizing, individualizing politics of empowerment that have underscored many development projects. However, while I am critical of the NGO in some respects, over the course of my fieldwork I struggled to see my biased expectations accurately mirrored in the local model of rural development embraced by both the Lodge and the NGO. Certainly some projects struggled to get off the ground, and I did not always agree with administrative decisions and priorities. But I did not find myself amidst a team of sincere foreign dupes, busy ‘helping’ poor people while wedded to a myopic vision of the ‘problem’ at hand. And I did not find that these organizations, to quote Charles Piot, are engaged in “stopgap charity work [rather than] development that raises the living standard and advances the material life of communities” (2010: 160). Indeed, usually the opposite.
History of the Lodge

The Lodge is the brainchild of Steven, a white South African from Cape Town who is deeply committed to ideals of rural development. Prior to establishing the Lodge, Steve had spent several years travelling around Africa on public transportation, and during that time had developed a plan to open a backpacker lodge in poor rural area. He was motivated by the ideal of fighting poverty through backpacker tourism. Steven worked in the UK for several years to save the money to start this enterprise. When he returned to South Africa in 2002, he began to look for a suitable location and a community that was interested in working with him to implement his plan. In the interest of minimal environmental impact, he wanted to modify an existing structure rather than erect a new building. Knowing from his own personal experience that coastal former-Transkei was both breathtakingly scenic and deeply impoverished, he began his search in this region.

Figure 4: Lodge in the background, with a local umzi in the foreground.

Footnote 32: Most of the information in this section was relayed to me by Steven himself, over many informal conversations that we had over the course of my stay in the community. Given the media attention that the Lodge has received, however, versions of this story can easily be found in articles in various online and print newspapers.
In 2002 Steve began walking north up the coast from the Kei River (there are no roads along the coast), which marked the former boundary of Transkei. After a week or so he reached the sort of place he was looking for: an scenic, remote village nestled between two rivers, large sand dunes and mangrove swamps, long stretches of sandy beach, and an abandoned illegal fishing cottage on the bank of the estuary. The various times I have heard and read this story – including from Mhlambini locals- it always features a dramatic and theatrical description of a much younger Steve walking up from the beach, to the surprise and amusement of the local community. From that point, the details are somewhat vague. I gather that with the support of the community leaders he hired locals to help him renovate the fishing cottage, build additional rondavels and composting toilets, install solar panels for electricity, and build paraffin-powered “showers.” All of these structures are built from traditional mud brick and thatch; to this day the huts all have cow-dung floors like most homes in the village. The agreement was that the community would own forty percent of the Lodge, while Steve would own sixty percent, and that the community would be actively involved in all Lodge-related decision-making. The Lodge officially opened for guests in 2004.

It was Steve's goal to have the Lodge entirely staffed and run by people from the local community within two years of its opening. Cultivating the necessary management skills, however, has taken far longer than Steve had initially anticipated. At the time that the Lodge opened, no one in the community had enough schooling to manage the logistics of running the

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33The cement building was an old cottage that had been built and used by white South Africans on fishing holidays. There are many such structures along the Transkei Coast, all of them built illegally during the Apartheid-era. Most of them were used as holiday homes by white residents of Mthatha, many of whom are now locked in drawn-out legal battles with a government that has slated these structures for demolition. According to Steve, he is the only person in the whole Wild Coast to successfully win such a court case, and was able to do so only because the community are part-owners of the Lodge.
Lodge, and it took a number of years for a few young locals to be trained to a point where they could take on this work.

The Lodge Today

On its website the Lodge is advertised as an eco-friendly backpacker establishment located in one of the beautiful places in South Africa. The website also emphasizes that the community are partners in the Lodge, and are deeply traditional. They proudly advertise a free night's stay to any guest who arrives via public transportation or for any guest who gazes into the night sky for half an hour without seeing a shooting star.

The Lodge now consists of a main building for eating and socializing (the renovated fishing cottage), ten traditional huts for sleeping, five safari tents, and two tent sites. It can accommodate roughly fifty guests, provided every double bed has two people in it and every dorm is full. While the winter (May-August) of 2011 was the quietest the Lodge had ever experienced (this is due largely to the economic crisis), it is often quite busy and is sometimes full to capacity.

Since it first opened the Lodge has collected various prestigious accolades and built a reputation on providing authentic and ethical ethno-tourism for travellers who are willing to venture off the beaten track. For example, the 2012 edition of *Lonely Planet South Africa*, cites a stay at the Lodge as a must-do while in South Africa, but emphasizes that it is a mission to get there. In addition to consistently making their short-list of essential South African tourism activities, *Rough Guide* lists a stay at the Lodge as one of the top 25 ethical tourism experiences in the world. It is one of the first tourism establishments in the world to be Fair Trade Certified,
and has won many awards for ethical tourism and community development, both in South Africa and internationally.

Steve speculates that the Lodge attracts a wider demographic of tourists than any other backpacker lodge in South Africa. Having backpacked all over the country myself a number of times over the past decade and having spent 17 months in Mhlambini, I would concur with his opinion. This is primarily because the kind of ethical ethnotourism experience available in Mhlambini is relatively hard to come by, and cannot be accessed at pricier, less remote and higher end tourism establishments. Those who might wish for more upscale accommodation and services have no option to avail themselves of such facilities in South Africa without forgoing the kind of rural community engagement that the Lodge attempts to offer. Consequently, in addition to more stereotypical budget travellers, the Lodge attracts a significant number of families and older, more affluent tourists. Due to the quiet, remote beauty of the setting, the Lodge also attracts a lot of couples who find this beach-side isolation romantic, and who are interested in avoiding the hedonism that characterizes most of the backpacker lodges along the Eastern Cape coast. Nevertheless, the typical Lodge guest is a young university-educated European (as opposed to North American, Australian or South African) woman, travelling either on her own or in the company of other young, European women. During South African school holidays the demographic is different, as many urban, middle-class South Africans come to Mhlambini on family holidays. The community encourages this by reserving a percentage of Lodge beds for South African as opposed to foreign tourists during the high season, a practice which is unusual for South African backpacker lodges.

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34This coast is famous for having excellent surfing, and attracts a lot of young tourists who either surf, or are drawn to the party scene that often accompanies surf-oriented tourism in South Africa.
As of early 2011, roughly concurrent with my arrival in the community, the Lodge is managed by three local young people, two men and a woman, aged between 24 and 30. These managers schedule bookings, correspond with potential guests via email and phone, coordinate the guest shuttle, coordinate meals, manage stock and coordinate shopping, greet and orient guests, and oversee all aspects of the daily functioning of the Lodge. All three are from families who had the financial means to support them through finishing high school, an accomplishment which is unusual in Mhlambini. Consequently all have lived in town for several years of their schooling. Two of these are senior managers, having completed certifications in hospitality. Their program fees, room and board during this training were paid for by the community, out of their earnings from their share of the Lodge. Both senior managers speak English fluently, while the junior manager is proficient but not fluent. Two of them are unmarried and reside in the village with their extended families, while the third resides in the village with his wife and four children.

As has been the case since it first opened, the Lodge is staffed entirely by local people who are chosen by the community at community meetings. When a new position becomes available (a rare occurrence, as these are coveted jobs and people rarely leave them), a community meeting is held, nominations are solicited, and a new employee is chosen only after drawn-out deliberation and debate.

The cooking, laundry and cleaning is done by local women, all of them in their late 30s or older. It has been the community's policy to reserve these jobs for women who do not have the support of a spouse; one woman is a single mother who has never married, one is divorced from

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35Guests can bring their own food and self-cater, or else purchase up to three meals per day from the Lodge kitchen.
a husband who resides in Mthatha (the nearest city) with his new spouse, and the rest are all widows. Only one of these women has any formal schooling at all, and only one (the divorcée) is marginally literate. None speak more than basic English. During my fieldwork a position opened up for a dessert cook, and I followed the process through which the position was filled. After lengthy debate amongst older people in the community, the job went to my neighbour, a 26 year-old widow who was responsible for the two children she had with her late husband, his four children from his first marriage, and a baby that she recently had with a boyfriend.

*Figure 3: Young local girls hanging out at the Lodge.*
In addition to the managers, cooks, and cleaning staff, the Lodge is also a base for tourism activities. These activities are all run as micro-enterprises, and are owned by the individuals who run them. Guests can sign up for these activities but are under no obligation to do so, and they pay the people who own these businesses directly, in cash. Neither Steven nor the community at large take any cut of their earnings. These activities include fishing, horseback riding, massage, canoeing, the village tour, the woman power tour, the Herbalist tour (where guests get to meet the local traditional doctor), guided hikes, the pancake restaurant, and the Lodge shop, which sells locally-made handicrafts. Most of these activities are run by people who speak little-to-no English, so the experience is quite different from what I have encountered elsewhere in South Africa, where proficiency in English goes alongside greater professionalism.

Steve is still actively involved in the running of the Lodge, but no longer works managerial shifts unless the managers are ill. Rather, he focuses primarily on promotion. In particular, he is working on attracting more tourists from Japan and China, as well as attracting more middle-class Black South African guests.

The Lodge markets itself as being different from other South African tourism establishments, explicitly advertising itself as providing an opportunity for visitors to engage with the local community on their own terms. While to some degree this is a largely effective-marketing strategy, it is also a fairly accurate reflection of the space of the Lodge. As part-owners of the Lodge, the community (meaning village elders) have a large decision-making role in all Lodge-related matters. For instance, as demonstrated in the example of Busi in the introduction, Steve has no authority to hire or fire any staff, but is rather entitled to voice his opinion on the matter at Community Meetings, like any other local resident. The example of Busi's suspension, which was explained in the introduction, is exemplary of Steve's opinion
being over-ridden by elders. This does not mean that all local people and local families have equal say in the running of the Lodge. Rather, the running of the Lodge disproportionately reflects the consensus reached by influential elder men.

The community's ownership of the backpacker Lodge is also reflected in the way that local people use the space. While married local women rarely visit the Lodge unless they are Lodge employees, unmarried young people of both sexes use the Lodge as their own space, and can often be found hanging out in the backpacker Lodge socializing with one another. This is not discouraged, provided the young people are not drunk and aggressive. Given their very limited English language skills, these young people rarely converse with Lodge guests. While most backpacker Lodges are middle-class spaces, the Lodge is unusual in that it is a space that is shared, usually quite amicably, by urban middle-class South African and foreign tourists, and poor rural Black South Africans.

In my experience, most visitors to the community appreciate the integrated and community-oriented nature of the Lodge, and enjoy having an opportunity to witness (although rarely engage with) local life to a degree that is rare in South African tourism establishments. The scenic beauty of the place is also a major draw. A random Google search produced the following reviews by tourists, which go some way to show that many visitors are compelled by the Lodge's unique vision:

*It takes the better part of a day to get there but the effort is SO WORTH IT. It might not be for everyone, and I think that the (very few) negative comments [on this website] come from those who just don't get it. We where [sic] there for 3 nights, I think 4 or 5 would have been better*

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36 Some lodge guests themselves do not speak much English anyway.
especially if we had been there at a warmer time of the year. I love the concept of the community supported project. The community aspect of the lodge was apparent in everything we did from the local boy who tried to help us catch a fish to the woman who pointed us back towards the lodge when we were lost. We were there with my 12 and 14 year old kids, who also considered this one of the high points of our trip to SA [sic] (TravellingNYFamily 2011, American man travelling with family).

The location is spectacular - and very very very remote. The roads were horrible, the potholes on the tarred part of the roads were the worst I've ever seen. It took almost 3 hours to drive from the N2 to the parking lot. Our Audi made it through after a flat tire in the middle of nowhere. Like the negative reviews I agree that the staff are a bit nonchalant, their carefree attitude might appeal to young backpackers. The beds were [sic] comfortable, the food was ok, the paraffin powered showers were fun, the compost toilets were fine (though some soap would have been nice; it seemed that neither guests nor staff ever washed their hands) , the stars at night were great, the Village Tour of the Xhosa village and 'restaurant' was very good and felt very authentic. The ride in the 4x4 shuttle back up to the secure parking was 'an experience.' We felt very safe both at the lodge and in the village; the doors are all unlocked. Overall the experience was fantastic, probably the best two days we have had in South Africa so far, proving that contrary to what our South African friends have said, that the Transkei can be a wonderful place to visit. would highly recommend this place to anyone who wants a great experience and doesn't mind roughing it a bit [sic] (SamuelWest 2010, Swedish man who visited with his family).

Every time I visit [the Lodge], I fall in love with it over and over again. The lodge's surroundings - on a river mouth and right on the Indian Ocean - are simply stunning. But that is not all. What
makes this a truly special place is the way it treats the local community of Mhlambini village and the environment (Mannak 2012, White South African woman in her 20s, from Cape Town).

As these reviews demonstrate, most guests enjoy feeling that there is little segregation between the local community and tourists. This arrangement does not appeal to all visitors, however. Over the course of my stay in the community I spoke with the occasional guest who was, for instance, apprehensive about their safety given the number of evidently low-income young local men who like to hang out at the backpacker Lodge, speaking a language that the tourist do not understand. This was all the more so at weekends, when local young people often congregated at the Lodge to drink beer. Others expressed irritation that many of the common spaces in the Lodge were taken up by local young people sitting around socializing, or groups of local children (usually boys) playing games and looking at magazines. Unless they are really rowdy, the managers do not ask these locals to vacate the Lodge. The following online review (one of very few negative reviews I have found) expresses this point of view:

*We couldn't actually find any seats in the lounge area for a good couple of hours because the lounge filled up completely with locals (not guests) who took over all the seats and proceeded to play noisy games. When we travel we look forward to interacting with locals, but this was a bit too much* (Mtunzini99, 2009. South African man from Durban, who visited with his family).

When guests have complained to Steve, in my observation he always responds by explaining that the Lodge belongs to the local community, and that a sense of their ownership of the space is encouraged.

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37This has changed since the alcohol ban, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.
Impact of the Lodge on the Community

I often asked in formal interviews what people thought of the Lodge, and whether it has brought good or bad things to the community. No one ever said anything negative about the Lodge to me the entire time I was in the community, either in passing or in response to my queries. Everyone was invariably enthusiastic about the Lodge, and friends would point out things like the presence of water tanks and square houses as evidence of the positive change that the Lodge has brought about.

Because they are part-owners of the Lodge and its property, local people are permitted to make use of the Lodge and its facilities. All local residents are allowed to purchase meals, snacks and beverages at the Lodge, and everyone is permitted to use the paraffin and solar-powered showers for a per-use fee of two rand (about twenty cents, at the time of my fieldwork). While locals rarely purchase meals and take showers at the Lodge, I have observed instances where visiting family-members of local families do so, especially if they reside in urban areas and are accustomed to having access to piped water. I recall one instance, for example, where a homestead adjacent to mine hosted a large wedding. All weekend long I watched a stream of teenage girls and young women walk up and down the hill to the Lodge to use the showers and mirrors. Locals also make use of the Lodge solar panels to charge their mobile phones, and some literate younger people connect to the Lodge's satellite wireless internet on their phones, using this wireless signal to maintain a Facebook profile page or to share videos with one another.

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38 All Lodge employees are entitled to free meals while they are working, and I gather that the managers shower for free.
Young people sometimes buy beer from the Lodge bar (run on an honour system), and buy snacks from the tuck shop.

Furthermore, members of the community are also allowed to take advantage of Lodge transportation. The Lodge owns two Landrovers which seat approximately 12 people and are used to shuttle Lodge guests to Mthatha four days per week. Provided it is not full of tourists, locals can ride to and from town in the shuttle for free. This allows locals a degree of mobility that their peers in neighbouring villages do not enjoy, and it also means that local families can stretch their often meagre incomes a bit further by buying groceries in quantity at shops in town. It also means that some entrepreneurial locals can earn some extra money on the side by buying items such as candy, matches, or prepaid mobile phone credit, and then re-selling them in the village in small quantities at a slightly inflated price. Furthermore, the shuttle is often used by members of the community in cases of emergency, for instance to drive a woman in labour or a very sick person to hospital. The Lodge employs two local men as drivers, although in emergency situations the shuttle is driven by anyone with a drivers' license and the skills to manage a large 4x4 on a very rough dirt road. At the time of my fieldwork there were seven people in the village with these skills (myself included), two of whom were local village men.

Although people never explicitly brought up such issues when asked to reflect on the impact of the Lodge, in my observation the Lodge has some less rosy impacts on the community. For one, due to the opportunities and infrastructure that they have enabled, both the Lodge and the NGO have in some ways alienated the community from neighbouring communities, and in particular have caused some conflict between people from Mhlambini and the Headman, who resides several villages away. For instance, the Headman wanted to build a clinic in his home village, and asked all families in his jurisdiction to contribute five rand towards the cost of this. I
was told that people in Mhlambini refused, arguing (fairly, in my opinion) that Mhlambini is so far from his village that it would not make sense for them to venture to the proposed clinic over other, closer clinics. The Headman retaliated that people in Mhlambini are “too proud” because they have “Enkosi Steven” (Chief Steven). I heard many references to Enkosi Steven during my fieldwork. The Headman now causes complications for many people from Mhlambini, for instance by refusing to write letters confirming that young men have reached the legal age to be circumcised in hospital. Instead, he tells them to go get a letter from Enkosi Steven, as Steven is their Headman now.

Furthermore, while concerted and admirable efforts have been made to ensure that the Lodge benefits extend equally to all families in the community, this is not possible in practice. Jealousies can arise over competition for jobs and opportunities, especially when those jobs and opportunities can only be allocated according to skills such as literacy and proficiency in English. Consequently, more affluent families have been able to benefit disproportionately. That being said, many of the women who work as cooks and cleaners would be destitute without their jobs at the Lodge.

The presence of both South African and foreign tourists means that local people are confronted with people of very different lifestyle and means from themselves on a regular basis, and the race and class dimensions of this are evident to everyone. While many of the Lodge guests are young and on a budget, they are all wealthier and better-educated than most local people. Moreover, young female guests in particular enjoy a freedom of mobility, self-

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39 As I discuss in the next chapter, circumcision is an essential ritual element of the transition to manhood for Xhosa people. In response to the number of deaths and botched circumcisions that are reported in the Eastern Cape each year, Eastern Cape hospitals will perform this operation provided the young man can provide proof that he has reached the age of sixteen. Apparently the nearest hospital to Mhlambini will accept a letter from the Headman as proof of age.
determination of lifestyle, and level of consumption that are not attainable for young local women. Observing and interacting with these tourists influences the life trajectories that local young people imagine for themselves, even if these imagined possibilities are not attainable for them. When asked about their hopes and dreams for the future, for instance, a number of my local friends mentioned things such as wanting to “go away and see other countries” and to “go on tours to Cape Town,” despite lacking the means to do so, and in most cases lacking even the knowledge of what exactly “other countries” are, or where they are located in relation to Mhlambini. Finally, some young people also compared themselves to young foreigners and deemed themselves lacking. For instance a male friend explained to me that once a local guy has successfully “hooked-up” with a white tourist, most local girls will lose confidence around him, as they will feel that they are not “good enough for him anymore.” This happened rarely, but was not unheard of.

History of the NGO

Since its inception the Lodge has been actively involved in sustainable development in Mhlambini. In 2007, the NGO was founded as the organizational body under which these development projects were to be implemented. On the NGO website, they explain their rationale and background as follows:

The idea with the [NGO] was that having lived in this community for many years and having worked through all the usual complications involved with development projects in communities like ours, we now had the social infrastructure in place to allow other people to come implement

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40 Most of the information in this section is drawn from the NGO website, from their 2010 and 2011 annual reports, and from my own observations as a volunteer from February 2011 to May 2012.
their brilliant rural development ideas. Many development projects which are conceptually brilliant fail because the innovator underestimated the difficulty in trying new things in very remote, traditional communities. The history of development work in Africa is littered with failed projects that got hijacked by local elites, didn’t take into account local beliefs and customs or were just introduced to the communities in the wrong way. We at the [NGO] have been through all of this and have established a constructive, positive working relationship with our community and thus we can introduce new ideas or projects without having to worry that it [sic] will fail due to some unexpected community dynamic (BI 2012).

They describe their mission as follows:

To be a catalyst for the creation of vibrant and sustainable rural communities.

In partnership with our community, government, NGO’s and other innovative thinkers, the [NGO] aims to achieve our vision through finding synergies between the traditional rural African lifestyle and culture, and external technologies and innovations. These synergies must always seek to enhance the positive aspects of traditional rural life and/or mitigate the problematic aspects in accordance with our values and recognising the fundamental human rights enshrined in our constitution. The [NGO] also aims to be an agent for change by influencing government and corporate policy in an effort to spread our vision more widely.

The NGO is a grassroots organization based solely in the community, and is not a branch of a larger non-profit.

As of 2009 the NGO had expanded substantially from its original roots, continued to expand throughout the duration of my fieldwork, and has continued to grow since I left. Now housed in a purpose-built rondavel on the sub-headman's land, by the time I left the village in June 2012 the NGO employed 22 full-time salaried staff, and a further 100 people under the
government-funded Community Work Program. The CWP is a job-creation program run by the South African government. In simple terms, an organization that has a need for low-skilled workers can get government funds to pay these workers minimum-wage for eight days per month. Based on what I have seen during my fieldwork, these jobs tend to be manual labour jobs. The NGO managed one team of CWP workers in each of the four villages. These teams were put to work doing tasks such as road maintenance, erecting fences around community gardens, and painting community buildings. They also hired the occasional skilled worker under the CWP program, but paid them full-time minimum wage for half-time work. For example, two young women with basic computer skills were hired under the CWP to input data that I collected for the profiling research (discussed below). In addition to the CWP workers managed by the NGO, the local municipality also managed teams of CWP whose job was to pick garbage off the beach, as well as teams to work on rural agriculture projects. Although the low pay is disappointing (I heard much grumbling from CWP workers during my fieldwork), there is nonetheless considerable competition for these jobs. Fifteen of the full-time staff are locals, as well as all of the 100 CWP workers. While the NGO is physically based in Mhlambini, they work in three neighbouring villages as well.

The NGO's projects fall under four Focus Areas. I will touch briefly on each of these.

Education:

One of the NGO's primary mandates is to address rural poverty through seven Education Projects. Perhaps the most ambitious of these is Sinethemba\(^4\) preschool, which is located in Mhlambini. Sinethemba offers high-quality preschool education from 8am to 1pm Monday

\(^4\)This is a pseudonym.
through Friday for approximately 50 local children aged three to six. This opportunity is available to all local children in this age group, and is free of charge provided the family sends someone (invariably a girl or woman, although this is not an NGO requirement) to cook the breakfast (for the children) and lunch (for the children, teachers, and the NGO staff) two days per month. The food is supplied by the NGO. A rota is sent home at the beginning of each month, specifying the days that each family is expected to cook. If they fail to send a cook on their designated days, then the family is charged a fee of 40 rand (about four dollars at the time of my fieldwork). It is extremely rare that families miss their cooking days, as those 40 rand are precious.

The Grade R (kindergarten) class is taught by a certified teacher, who was sourced from Port St Johns. One other teacher is the former nanny of the children of the original NGO director (the family has since relocated to Cape Town). The remaining four teachers are local women in their 20s who were chosen for the role by the community. During my fieldwork five of the six Sinethemba teachers were enrolled in a teacher-training certificate program; the NGO paid for the teachers' enrolment fees, and paid to bring trainers from East London. Two teachers-to-be (five women and one man) from each of the other three villages were also selected and trained. In exchange, the villages themselves had to provide the building(s) (these could be as simple as one or two mud-brick thatch-roof huts, and two pit-toilets). Since I left the field, the NGO has opened preschools in all three of the other villages.

In addition to the preschools, the NGO offers an after-school enrichment program for students in grades one through six at the local primary school. It also offers occasional adult

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42Port St John's is the largest coastal town in the former Transkei, with a population of approximately 5000 people (Census 2001).
education workshops, run out of the community library. The library is another NGO initiative, and is housed at the preschool in a purpose-built mud hut. It is managed by a local woman who is employed as a full-time librarian. Additionally, the NGO offers a scholarship program which raises funds to send promising graduates of Sinethemba preschool to a good boarding school in Mthatha. It also provide materials and build infrastructure for schools in the four villages, some of which do not have desks, chairs, textbooks, or classrooms. Finally, the NGO advocates and campaigns at the municipal, provincial and federal level for better-quality education in rural areas.

From early 2009 through December 2011, the education program was managed by Lillian, Steve's mother. She is the retired headmistress of an elite girls' private school in Cape Town. She stepped down from the position in late 2011, and since I left the field the position has been filled by a Xhosa woman from outside the community.

Health and Nutrition

Since February 2011 the NGO has employed a young woman from the area as their Community Outreach worker. She has a degree in social work, and is in charge of health outreach activities. From February 2012 to February 2013, she was assisted by an American Peace Corps volunteer, who came to the NGO under the CHOP (Community HIV Outreach Program). She organizes monthly Health Days in each of the four villages, focusing on topics

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43She is from Mkatazo, a village an approximately 40 minute drive down the road to Mthatha. She won a bursary to study social work at Walter Sisulu University in Mthatha, and is the only person I have met from the entire district who has a university degree. One of her sisters has followed her lead, and is currently studying law.

44This was the first—and thus far, the only—Peace Corps volunteer that worked at the NGO. He arrived quite unexpectedly a year into my fieldwork. He had originally been based at an NGO elsewhere in the Eastern Cape, and that NGO had folded due to lack of funding. The administrators at Peace Corps South Africa office in Pretoria struggled to find a place for him, and they reached out to the local NGO on the recommendation of several Peace Corps volunteers who had stayed at the backpacker Lodge as guests. The NGO reluctantly agreed to interview him,
such as HIV/AIDS, infant nutrition, and diabetes. She also coordinates visits from the HIV and TB testing and outreach team from the nearest hospital, as well as organizes HIV educational days at the local primary schools. Finally, she does home visits in the four villages, and assists local people in accessing social grants and other government services.

As part of the Nutrition Program, the NGO also employs four local people, two men and two women, as gardeners. These people work full-time cultivating two community gardens, a small one at Sinethemba preschool and a large one at the primary school. These gardens grow vegetables and fruits such as chard, lettuce, carrots, beets, sweet potatoes, bananas, and onions, all of which are used to supplement the children's school lunches at both the pre-school and the primary school. Any surplus is sold very cheaply in the community on a first-come, first-served basis. This small revenue goes back into the NGO's account. The Nutrition program is also overseen by Guma, the Community Health Worker.

Basic Services

This Focus Area aims to improve basic infrastructure in the four villages. Thus far, the focus has been on improving access to clean water, as apart from the composting toilets and the backpacker Lodge there are no sanitation systems in the village. At the time of my fieldwork the nearest source of piped water was 40 kilometres away, and the local springs were contaminated. As of 2010, all local homesteads have at least one large water tank for collecting rainwater, and

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45 High blood pressure and diabetes are significant health issues in these communities due to a diet that is too heavy in refined starches.
46 Now there are only three gardeners. One of the four gardeners was on sick leave for six months during my fieldwork, before passing away in November 2011. They had not hired a new gardener at the time I left.
four boreholes have been drilled. Two of these boreholes produce water suitable for drinking, while the remaining two are too saline due to the proximity of the estuary. The rain tank system is not perfect; several households have not set up their tanks, and a number of families do not have suitable roofs to do so. These rain tanks work best when set up to collect water from corrugated metal roofs rather than thatch roofs. While many people prefer metal roofs due to their associations with affluence and modernity, some people cannot afford the sheet metal. Also, huts with metal roofs are not as warm as thatch-roofed huts, and winter nights can be damp and cold. Moreover, setting up rain guttering on a round hut requires special materials, and most tanks run dry during the dry season. However, as of June 2013 the village has communal water taps installed by the Eastern Cape Government.

Besides the water project, in partnership with the African Health Care Initiative a wind turbine was installed in the village. It usually provides enough electricity to power mobile phones.

**Sustainable Livelihoods**

The Sustainable Livelihoods Focus Area addresses micro-enterprise development and implementation. The largest of these is the Lemongrass Project, which is a cooperative of twelve local women who grow lemongrass in their gardens. This lemongrass is sold to a tea company in Cape Town, or is made into soap and other body products (an artisan soap-maker from Cape Town came and trained the local women, in exchange for free accommodation at the Lodge) by the lemongrass farmers, and is then sold at the Siyakhula shop and to some bed-and-breakfasts throughout the Eastern Cape. Other projects include a chicken-farming business, bee-keeping, a hair salon (this is located in the village farthest from the backpacker Lodge, and is aimed at
locals; the owner specializes in relaxers, cornrows, and synthetic braids), home-stays for tourists, felting, and the various eco-tourism businesses discussed above.

**Impact of the NGO on the Community**

I am not comfortable in speaking extensively on the impact of the NGO's activities on the local community, as I have no experience of the community prior to the founding of the NGO. Certainly the quality of education that the preschoolers receive is very high, the library is an excellent resource, and the programming that the children receive at the After-School Enrichment Program is far superior to what they receive at the local primary school during their regular lessons. Unlike some NGO education programs recently critiqued by anthropologists (e.g. Piot 2010), the NGO does not privilege the education of some children over others (for instance, the education of girls over boys). Local people also tell me that fewer babies die in the community now that there are rain tanks and boreholes, and although many of the micro-enterprises encounter ongoing challenges, people are happy to have the jobs.

Some NGO staff are not native to the village, and have different patterns of consumption and values than most local people. Unlike Lodge guests, however, these people reside in the community for extended periods, and, except for the Peace Corps volunteer and I, all of them are either South African (of various ethnicities, although most are Xhosa) or (Black) Zimbabwean. The ways in which their presence affects local life occasionally feature in various chapters of this dissertation, although not prominently.

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47At the end of the 2010 and 2011 school year, the NGO brings an assessment team from Pretoria to administer standardized tests to the Grade R class. They have scored highly both years.
Although there is much that I admire about the NGO, I have some criticism of the manner in which they go about their work in the community. The first relates to the individualistic approach to empowerment that underscores their projects. As Charles Piot writes,

Much of the emphasis of development today, from microfinance to schooling, is on individual responsibility and initiative (Englund 2006; Bornstein and Redfield, forthcoming) – with the onus on individuals to discipline themselves and manage their own affairs both in school and in their work (Moore 2005; Ong 2006), this contrasts with the commitment to relational dependency that has long been at the center of (...) work and familial cultures (Piot 2010: 161).

Many of the NGO’s projects, especially the microenterprise projects, follow this individual, disciplinary model to some degree. Forthcoming chapters, especially Chapter Six, discuss the ways in which this approach is out of touch with the realities of local life.

My second critique follows somewhat paradoxically from the first: the NGO embraces a logic of rural upliftment that is grounded in individualized, rights-based politics at the same time that it supports gerontocratic authority as much as possible. For instance, it works through local hierarchies of gerontocratic and patriarchal authority, seeking the approval of powerful patriarchs before moving forward with projects, and defers to elders in decisions related to hiring. I do not object to this approach to community engagement per se; it is respectful of local values. Moreover, elders have power and authority in the community such that the NGO would not be able to do its work without the support of elder patriarchs. However, forthcoming chapters will demonstrate that elders sometimes exert their influence in ways which violate the rights-based
framework that the NGO holds dear, sometimes to the detriment of young people, and young women in particular.\textsuperscript{48} NGO staff seem to ignore this moral conundrum.

On a final, related note, the NGO and the Lodge do not engage with local gender politics and actively turn a blind eye to gender violence, which is widespread. This issue will feature again in Chapter Six, which focuses on human rights. It is an important point of division between the perspectives of NGO personnel who originate from outside the community (be they African or from overseas), and locals. Steven has told me that they have tried to broach the issue of gender power in the past, but encountered powerful resistance. Accordingly, they have decided to ignore the topic, as resistance to intrusions into local gender politics -especially gender violence- is so extreme that, in Steven's words, "it totally undoes all the other stuff we do."

The impact of the NGO is likely far beyond the scope of what I have discussed here. The Lodge and the NGO were not, however, the foci of my research. Thus, the NGO, the Lodge, their staff, and their projects feature in forthcoming chapters, but not as subjects of analysis. In forthcoming chapters, readers should be cognisant that the NGO aims to transform the local economy while leaving local hierarchies intact.\textsuperscript{49} Nevertheless, opportunities through the Lodge benefit some local people more than others. This, in turn, modifies gendered and generational hierarchies, as those with access to resources through the NGO and Lodge enjoy greater social power in their families and in the community at large.

Despite these criticisms, I rarely felt conflicted in my role as both NGO volunteer and anthropologist. Indeed, I am proud to have made a small contribution to its cause, especially as

\textsuperscript{48}Previously an anti-Apartheid activist and herself a member of a previously-disadvantaged racial group, the NGO Director has experienced first-hand the emancipatory power of human rights discourse.

\textsuperscript{49}Racial hierarchies are the one exception to this rule: the NGO and the Lodge both actively disavow racial discrimination. Both institutions endorse and promote integration between members of racial groups who were previously segregated from one another through state policy, and who remain largely segregated due to the divisive effects of wealth inequality.
the volunteer work that I engaged in on the NGO’s behalf is no doubt of greater value to local people than this end product of my research activities. Moreover, my skills as a researcher proved to be of use to the NGO, and as a consequence the research methodologies overlapped with my volunteer work in unanticipated ways. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to explaining my research methodologies, both in collaboration with and independent of the NGO.

Methodology

This dissertation is based on fieldwork carried out between February 2011 and May 2012, with a six-week follow-up visit in May-June 2013. During this time I resided in Mhlambini village, engaging in ethnographic fieldwork. My ethnographic data is derived primarily from participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Some of these interviews were carried out by me alone, while for others I employed local research assistants to assist with facilitation and translation. I employed three local young people over the course of my fieldwork, two women and one man. Like most anthropologists, I made regular field-notes, and engaged in innumerable conversations relating to my research topic during the time that I was in the field. Secondarily, I also carried out archival research at various institutions, notably the South African National Library in Cape Town and the Cory Library for Historical Research at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. These facilities were useful for accessing earlier anthropological and missionary writings on the Bomvana, and the Xhosa more generally. Finally, I also had access to unpublished transcripts of interviews carried out with elderly people in the Xhosa Mouth area in the late 1980s. These transcripts were acquired through personal correspondence with Hazel Crampton, who collected them for her own research into the history of one of the local isiduko.
I chose Mhlambini over other villages in the region because I wanted to find a community that was looking for a skill that I could offer. I thought in doing so I would be able to offer something of value to the community and to justify my presence in the community as something other than a researcher. The NGO was looking for a volunteer to help with their education program, specifically someone who was capable of running their after-school enrichment program for grades four through six. The plan was for this program to focus on English language instruction. Criteria for the position included willingness to stay for at least six months without pay, teaching experience, and experience of rural areas with poor infrastructure, ideally in Southern Africa.

I found this position advertised on the NGO’s website in July 2010, and applied for it via email. I explained my background in teaching, my previous experience in South Africa, and my familiarity with the general region where the village is located. I also explained my research project and motivation for wanting to be in the community. I soon heard back from the NGO; they were interested but were reluctant to take me on given that I had never been to Mhlambini before. They had had previous experiences with outsiders -whether South African or foreign- arriving in the community for either professional or volunteer placements, and then leaving after several weeks because they could not cope with the social isolation, cultural differences, and lack of infrastructure. As such, they were skeptical that I would actually stay for a year, as I had proposed. To address this concern, I visited the community for two weeks in early September 2010. During this time, I met with the NGO and other members of the community. At that point, the NGO accepted me as a volunteer.

I arrived in the village to begin my fieldwork in late February 2011. I began volunteering for the NGO shortly after that. For the first five months, I ran an after-school program for grade
5, 6, and 7 at the local primary school. We did a combination of art, reading, English language learning, puzzles and math games, and occasionally sport. I was assisted by Unathi, who became a friend and key informant. Employed by the NGO as the Community Facilitator, his job was to liaise between the community and the NGO. In July 2011 the Community Facilitator and I began training a local woman to run the after-school program. In keeping with the NGO's philosophy, the idea was always to train a local to take over my volunteer position as a part-time paid job. The school year ended in November 2011, and when the new school-year began in early 2012, she ran the program on her own.

Shortly after I arrived at the NGO I was also asked to help with the “Storytelling Project.” Prior to my arrival the NGO and the community had decided that it would be a good idea to video-record life history interviews with village elders, to create a resource for future generations. Unathi was responsible for this project, and had been supplied with a good video camera and digital recorder for these interviews. A documentary filmmaker had also been brought from Johannesburg to train him in using this equipment.

Shortly after I began volunteering for the NGO, the Director mentioned to me that she was disappointed that the Storytelling Project did not seem to be moving forward because Unathi seemed reluctant to actually seek out elders to interview. She asked if I could perhaps assist with this. In discussions with Unathi I established that he was not confident with the project because he did not know what kinds of questions to pose, or how to encourage elderly people to speak about their lives. Given my training as a qualitative researcher, I offered to help. Together we came up with an open-ended interview schedule.

Unathi and I made a good team, despite some logistical challenges. Early in my fieldwork my Xhosa language skills were poor, and the elders' command of English was virtually
nonexistent. Moreover, they speak in an older dialect which is rich in metaphor, and therefore challenging for a learner to understand. That being said, Unathi turned out to be a skilled interviewer, and many older people enjoyed having an excuse to meet the “white girl” in the community. Over the course of several months, we interviewed most village elders, except for those who were too deaf to hear us, those so elderly and frail that they did not have the energy to speak with us, or, in one case, too confused as to understand us. Material from the Story Telling project is included as research data, and features in forthcoming chapters.

**Profiling Research**

After I had been in the village for five months, the NGO Director, Aisha, asked me to meet with her about a project that she hoped I might be able to assist with. She told me that for a long time she had been hoping to find someone who would “profile” the families in Mhlambini. She said that while the NGO relied on census data and feedback from community meetings to inform their goals and activities, they did not know a great deal about the material and social circumstances of all the local families. An economist by training, she said that she did not have a background in research, and lacked both the time and the skills to implement such a study. Aisha hoped that I as a trained researcher might be able to take on this project. I was glad to have an excuse to visit local families, and agreed to take on the Profiling Survey.

In collaboration with Aisha, Steven, the Community Health Worker and the NGO Board of Directors, I developed a questionnaire that included both qualitative and quantitative data. This questionnaire was to be filled out at the household level. The information covered in this questionnaire included the following:

- Basic demographic information on all members of the household (age, level of education, marital status etc.)
• Employment status and/or access to social grants
• Health (health status, access to healthcare, challenges to access etc.)
• Child mortality (number of child deaths, approximate date(s), and perceived cause)
• Material conditions of life (access to clean water, adequate food, sufficient fuel etc.)
• Animal husbandry and agriculture (number and kind of livestock, types and quantities of crops. Challenges to caring for livestock and so forth)
• Difficulties faced as a household, and how they imagine these difficulties could be overcome
• Views on both traditional and governmental leadership, authority, and policing
• Behaviour of elders and youth
• Hopes and/or concerns for the future

In addition to these structured and semi-structured questions, the questionnaire also included a section for recording observations on the homestead and its residents. Information collected in this section included observations on the condition of huts (inside and out), presence or absence of tanks to collect rainwater, presence of and condition of gardens and livestock pens, evidence of stored food and what kinds of food, and on the presence and condition of animals. This section also covered the appearance of people at the homestead (condition of clothing, apparent morale, presence or absence of sores and unhealed wounds, persistent coughs, presence of school-aged children at home during school hours and so forth).

Filling out the full questionnaire took between one and three hours per homestead, depending on household size and the verbosity of the adults in the family. Although no households were obligated to provide this information, none declined to do so. Indeed, most families seemed glad to have the opportunity to articulate their needs. Working three mornings per week, it took seven months to profile all 112 households in the village. For the first three
months Guma and I went homestead-to-homestead together. She would typically pose the questions and fill in the questionnaire form, and would translate for me when I was not able either to understand what a family-member was staying, or I did not have the language skills to express myself. While she asked the questions, I would make observational notes on the family and their living situation. After the interview was finished, we would go through my observational notes together to ensure that she agreed with my observations. After three months the NGO hired Fundumi, a young woman from the next village to work with me two mornings per week. Although the NGO had hoped to hire someone from Mhlambini, they were not able to find anyone with a high-school education and sufficient proficiency in English. By sufficient proficiency, I mean the ability to translate between English and isiXhosa (the Xhosa language) to a degree that was understandable to me and to the people being profiled, and the ability to summarize in written English statements that were made in isiXhosa. With Fundumi I would pose the questions mostly in isiXhosa and fill in the questionnaire in English. She would watch what I wrote, and she would translate for me where necessary.

In late November 2011 I compiled all the quantitative data into tables, analyzed the qualitative data thematically, and wrote a report for the NGO. All personal details were anonymized in this report. This report was presented to one of the NGO’s major Cape Town-based funders over the December holidays. These funders were enthusiastic about the research, and invited Aisha to submit a proposal for further funds should they wish to expand this project. Aisha returned to Mhlambini in early January 2012, and asked me if I would be willing to extend my stay in the community long enough to profile the other three neighbouring villages in which the NGO works. I initially declined, as I feared that it would take several years to do so, and I could not afford to stay that long. Aisha explained that their funders were prepared to pay for
staff, and proposed that I could manage a research team to profile the other three villages. I agreed, provided I could take several weeks leave before starting the new project, to visit archives in the Western Cape.

In February 2012 we hired two data-collectors from each village. Guma and I trained them, and three mornings per week I went out into these villages with them to collect profile data. After several weeks of visiting with me, the data collectors worked without me an additional two days per week. All of the data-collectors were women who had at least grade nine education, and were literate. The intention was not to hire women exclusively. However, we found no literate men. By mid-April 2012 all four villages had been profiled, providing data on roughly 400 rural Bomvana homesteads across four villages. By our count, the largest village by population comprises 864 people, and the smallest 666. A statistician was hired to analyze the quantitative data, and her analysis was submitted to me in June 2012. I analyzed the qualitative data, and submitted a final report to the NGO in August 2012.

Since completing the project, the NGO has used this data in their campaigns to attract government infrastructure and funding for their projects. For the purposes of my research, I draw on the profiling data - especially the qualitative and observational data- throughout the dissertation.

These methodologies inform the following five ethnographic chapters of my dissertation. As an indication of the relationship between my volunteer work and my ethnographic fieldwork, the event that I describe at the beginning of the next chapter, which focuses on the changing meaning of age and status in Mhlambini, took place while Fundumi and I were visiting local homesteads for the profiling research. I might never have known about the homestead that I will presently discuss had I not become involved in the profiling research.
Chapter Three: Age and Status

It is a hot, dry day in September, and Fundumi and I are on the far side of the village visiting homesteads for the profiling research. We are walking along a narrow trail that runs along the crest of the hill that divides Mhlambini from the neighbouring village of Songezi. Fundumi, age 23, grew up in Songezi and knows this part of the village far better than I do. Below us, at some distance from the closest neighbour, is a large house that I had thought was abandoned. Today, however, I notice clothes hanging on a washing line. I point this out to Fundumi, and suggest that we should head down to the homestead given it appears that someone is living there after all.

Fundumi looks down at the homestead, wrinkles her nose, and says “no, we don't have to do that one.” A goal of the profiling research is to include every household in the village, so I insist that if people are living in that homestead, then we must visit. Fundumi shifts her weight and looks visibly uncomfortable. She looks down again at the homestead for a long moment, then shakes her head, turns abruptly and carries on down the trail. I call after her to ask her if she knows who is living at the homestead, and she pretends not to hear me. Again I insist that we go down to the homestead, and this time Fundumi reluctantly turns and follows behind. As we get deeper into the shaded valley, farther from other homesteads, and closer and closer to the large, lonely house, I can see that Fundumi is becoming more and more agitated. Faced with her anxiety, I begin to feel uncertain myself, and I press her for details as to what we might find inside. Fundumi finally bursts out “Its Boy living there! He's not right! Oh God, I hope he isn't home!” Somewhat concerned now, I ask her “There is a boy living here? By himself? What boy? Is he dangerous or something?” Fundumi pauses and responds uncertainly “No...his name is
"Boy, but he's not a boy exactly...no, and not dangerous... he's a person like another person, but not really... he's not a right kind of person...”

With Fundumi fretting next to me I knock on the door, but in the end no one responds and we carry on our way. I am intrigued, however, as to who this boy is and why Fundumi reacted the way she did to the possibility of us finding him at home and interviewing him for the profiling research.

I did finally meet Boy some time later, and I discovered that Fundumi was correct in her assessment that he would be challenging to interview for the profiling research. His cognitive abilities are such that he probably would not have been able to stay focused through an hour of questioning, and he would probably not have grasped the point of the activity in any case. More significantly, however, as I will explain later in this chapter, through learning about Boy I was made especially cognisant of the complex, incongruous relationship between chronological age, social status, and *emic* concepts of ageing. In other words, I came to a better understanding of what it means to be old or young in Mhlambini, and I became more aware of the fluid and increasingly unstable nature of these categories. Exploring the meaning of these categories through a gendered lens is the objective of this chapter. I aim both to articulate what age means in Mhlambini, and to provide essential scaffolding for the discussions of gendered and generational conflict and negotiation that are the focus of forthcoming chapters. Moreover, I also intend to show that in the contemporary economic and political climate, gendered categories of age and status are becoming increasingly unclear.
Becoming an Adult

Most Xhosa will tell you that boys become men though the completion of initiation, which culminates with ritual circumcision (see Kepe 2010; Gwata 2009, Mavundla et al. 2009; Mhlahlo 2009). For Xhosa males, circumcision indexes “a change in personality, manliness (...) identity and male power, constructed over and against boys and women” (Mager 1999: 660). As Vincent notes, “circumcision, it is widely agreed, is for the Xhosa male the only route to the acquisition of manhood and the rights that go along with being communally approved as an adult man” (2008: 441). Like many initiation ceremonies, Xhosa initiation and circumcision “signify[y] not only recognition but authorization” (Fortes 1984: 101, emphasis in original) to assume certain adult roles and responsibilities (Kepe 2010).

Initiation is a ritual event during which boys who are ready to become men reside for a period of weeks in seclusion together in a designated dwelling called ithonto, engaging in ritual activities and learning secret male knowledge under the tutelage of older men (see Gwata 2009; Vincent 2008; Cook 1934a). Great emphasis is placed on keeping this knowledge secret from women and children (Kepe 2010; Mavundla 2009). Being female, I do not know the details of what these boys do and what they learn, although the ethnographic work of scholars such as Mhlahlo (2009), Vincent (2008), Ngwane (2004), and Cook (1934a) provide some information in this regard. At the end of their seclusion these young men are ritually circumcised according to

\[50\] I have seen one group of initiates in the cattle kraal of the homestead where they were being housed for the duration of their initiation. I was encouraged to look over the kraal fence to view them by the community health worker. I was reluctant to do so both because my understanding (derived from having read early ethnographic studies of the Xhosa) was that it would be inauspicious for me to see them, and also because, like most initiates, they were teenagers and wore only white body clay. Given my upbringing, I was reticent to intentionally peek at them. The community health worker interpreted my reluctance as fear, and involved other nearby women in her attempt to assure me that the initiates would not harm me. With an audience of about five enthusiastic women, I peered over the fence. The initiates were sitting around looking bored, and this brief glimpse gave me little insight into the mysteries of Xhosa initiation.
Xhosa custom, at which point they “come down from the mountain,” ancestors are thanked and acknowledged, and the young men are feted by the community through activities symbolically linked to masculinity, notably beer drinking and stick fighting. That these activities are repeated regularly in connection with the initiation of boys into manhood continually reinforces the symbolic connection between these activities and masculine identity. Upon the completion of initiation school, men will be given their new man name by elder men. This name should reflect their personal qualities.

Virtually all boys go through initiation at some point, usually between the ages of 16 and 25 (Mavundla 2009; Gwata 2009; Vincent 2008). Both Christians and traditionalists undergo initiation, although some Christian families will not host celebratory beer-drinking parties. Although most people claim that boys should not assume adult roles such as marriage and fatherhood prior to being initiated, in practice many males are sexually active while still boys, and some become fathers. People are adamant that a boy must volunteer to be initiated when he feels he is ready; his family cannot force him. Yet a boy cannot go through initiation whenever he chooses. His family must also be ready to foot the cost of the rituals and celebratory beer drinks that will accompany his completion of the initiation process. And usually several boys are initiated at the same time, so it will typically happen when several youths are ready to make the transition to manhood together.

Ethnographic evidence documents the importance of initiation for Xhosa men's sense of dignity and identity as men (i.e. Mhlahlo 2009; Gwata 2009). In the context of my own

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51This is a figurative expression these days; during my fieldwork the huts designated for initiates were at family homesteads in the middle of the village. In the past the initiates would be isolated far from their communities, in huts which would then be burned to the ground (Kepe 2010).
fieldwork, the importance of completing initiation school for a male’s sense of manhood was brought home to me with the initiation of Thando, who became a man during my fieldwork. When I began fieldwork Thando was in his late twenties and married with four children, three with his wife and one with a girlfriend. He holds a managerial role at the local backpacker lodge, and financially supports his wife, his girlfriend, and all his children. His circumstances are exceptional in that he married before completing initiation school, was initiated rather late, and is employed and able to support his dependents despite his relatively young age.

These events are linked, because by virtue of being employed Thando was able to pay lobola (bridewealth) for a wife before his parents were ready to pay for him to be initiated. This unusual circumstance speaks to the importance of kin, ancestors, and marriage for both family solidarity and the formation of complete adult persons. To elaborate, Thando's mother had given birth to him when she was very young, and had later married a man who was not Thando's father. This man became Thando's adopted father, and this adopted father raised Thando at his homestead as a step-son. This is an unusual and generous gesture on the adoptive father's part; most women leave children like Thando in their parents’ care when they marry. As such, Thando's younger brother is technically the firstborn son of the homestead, as he is the firstborn son of Thando's adoptive father. Thando’s brother rather than Thando is the one who must continue the lineage, as he is the firstborn in a line of descent linking living members of the family with the ancestors of the umzi. In any case, the brother had wanted to marry some years back, but both the brother and Thando's adopted father were concerned that if the brother married before Thando, it could appear to the community as though Thando's father did not accept Thando as a son. Thando's father thus made the symbolic gesture of offering to give Thando a cow towards his lobola. In this way Thando was in the position of having to marry in order to
properly acknowledge the generosity of his adoptive father, who in turn had a vested interest in the marriage of both his adopted and his firstborn sons.

Prior to completing initiation school Thando rarely wore a hat, always wore jeans, and more often than not sported his favourite yellow and green Bafana Bafana\textsuperscript{52} jersey. In short, he dressed like a fairly stylish local youth. In my experience he was never a particularly outgoing person, but he did like to get boisterous and joke around. Since becoming a man, however, he never wears his sports jerseys, and rarely wears jeans. Rather, he prefers more formal, dapper attire such as dress pants, dark, tweed jackets, and newsboy caps. His entire demeanour is more serious and responsible, as befits a respectable man in the community. It seems clear that although he already had a wife, children, and a job, completing initiation symbolized a significant change in his sense of identity. Clothing is an important marker of status and difference in the community, further highlighting the significance of Thando's change in self-presentation and comportment. The symbolic relationship between clothing, identity and status will be taken up in detail in Chapter Five.

The completion of initiation is virtually universal among men in Mhlambini, and is a necessity for reaching formal adulthood. Yet the man referred to in the introductory vignette of this chapter, Boy, was the one Xhosa man in the village who has not completed initiation, and people I spoke to deemed it unlikely that he would be initiated in the future. Boy died by drowning since my most recent visit to Mhlambini. Tellingly, while he has a Xhosa name that he was given at birth, everyone refers to him by the English word “boy.” I am not sure of Boy’s exact chronological age, but he must been at least in his late 30s when he died. I make this

\textsuperscript{52}Bafana Bafana is the South African national soccer/football team. The team name literally means "young men, young men."
estimate based on his appearance, and on the fact that I know from anecdotes that he was already physiologically mature when construction began on the backpacker lodge in 2002. I do not know what diagnosis a physician or psychologist would have given for his condition (it was not Down's syndrome, and did not present like foetal alcohol syndrome); suffice to say that Boy was described as “not right” by people in the community. He was intellectually simple and seemed unable to interpret and respond appropriately to many social cues, but physiologically there was nothing unusual about him. People told me that Boy was afraid of initiation, which is one reason why he has not become a man. But I have also been told that he has not completed initiation school because the community does not feel that he is a good candidate to fulfil the responsibilities that accompany manhood, namely marriage, household headship, and support of a family.

Boy's situation thus speaks to the relationship between age, achievement, and adult status in the community. Given that he was deemed unfit to fulfil the responsibilities of adulthood, he was kept in a state of perpetual boyhood by being uninitiated. That he was considered a perpetual boy despite his physiological maturity and advanced chronological age demonstrates that “for the Xhosa male adulthood is marked not by one’s age but by his journey to ‘the mountain” (Gwata 2009: 7) to be initiated.53 Moreover, as Fundumi's reaction demonstrates, Boy’s ambiguous status, exemplified by his unusual (but by no means threatening or dangerous) behaviour, is discomfiting for some people. It should be noted that while Fundumi’s reaction may also be a reflection of discrimination against Boy’s disability, in my experience people who are disabled are usually well-integrated into the community. Dangerous working conditions,

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53It should be mentioned that Boy had not expressed a desire to become a man, and his status as a perpetual boy did not seem to be a source of conflict or tension in the community. His family, for instance, seemed to feel that he should remain uninitiated.
widespread poverty, extremely dangerous roads,\textsuperscript{54} and limited access to biomedical healthcare means that disabilities are ubiquitous, and usually do not, in and of themselves, provoke anxiety or avoidance on the part of family and neighbours. Even individuals who in North America would be diagnosed with mental illness are generally well-integrated into the community, due in part to the very different ethnomedical ideas about voices and visions.

While I never saw anyone in the community make fun of Boy for his intellectual limitations or odd habits, I overheard young men teasing other males of similar age for being uncircumcised, and therefore for being “only boys.” For instance, I recall one evening at the backpacker lodge when two young Zulu men were drinking beer and chatting with young men from Mhlambini.\textsuperscript{55} Zulus do not ritually circumcise, and the men from Mhlambini joked that the Zulus should be fetching them beer because they were not circumcised, and are therefore not considered men in a Xhosa community.\textsuperscript{56} Moreover, the significance of circumcision for notions of manhood is exhibited in the opening pages of a recent fictional story set in the village near Mhlambini, where an elderly male protagonist points to the fact that the local teacher -an outsider- is uncircumcised as evidence for why the students did not respect him (see Mda 2000).

Having discussed how boys become men in Mhlambini, and having elucidated how manhood is less a factor of chronological age than it is of having fulfilled certain achievements, I

\textsuperscript{54}South Africa's roads are widely reputed to be among the most dangerous in the world, tied with Nigeria with the world’s highest rate of road accidents (WHO 2013). The portion of the national highway which passes from East London to Mthatha, which one must travel in order to reach Mhlambini from Johannesburg or Cape Town, has three times the rate of road death of any other South African road, making it one of the most dangerous stretches of highway in the world.

\textsuperscript{55}I believe they were hiking guides, leading a group of tourists on a three week long hike from the southern border of KwaZulu-Natal through the former Transkei to East London.

\textsuperscript{56}IsiZulu (the Zulu language) and isiXhosa are mutually intelligible, which is why the young men from Mhlambini were able to converse with the Zulu guests.
turn to a discussion of age and status among girls and women. While virtually all boys become men – at least in the formal, ritualized sense- through initiation, girls in Mhlambini have much more difficulty becoming full women. This is because marriage is the most significant marker of adulthood for them, denoting the point of transition from girl to woman (Liebenberg 1994; Cook 1934a). Upon marriage, females also receive a new, adult name. This name will be chosen by their mother-in-law, and always begins with “No,” meaning “mother of.” The name should reflect the personal qualities that the woman brings to her new family. For instance, Nosabelo means “mother of sharing,” from the verb *ukusabela*, meaning “to share.” A name like NoCawe, meaning “mother of church” indicates that the new wife is a Christian. However, many girls in Mhlambini never marry, meaning that a growing proportion of females remain girls well into physiological maturity. This is a marked change from even two decades ago; I know of only four local women over the age of approximately 35 who have never married, while the majority of young women now remain single into their 30s, and potentially beyond.  

Marriage is discussed at length in Chapter Five, but for the purposes of discussion here, suffice to say it involves the exchange of *lobola* (bridewealth) from the groom’s family to the bride’s, followed by the bride’s relocation to her husband’s familial homestead. While marriage is technically an ongoing process that takes place over several years, during which time the bride ideally produces children and demonstrates her productivity and value in her husband’s homestead, in fact most of my interlocutors were of the opinion that a girl becomes a woman once the initial instalment of bridewealth is paid and she relocates to her new home. Moreover,

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57 The reasons for this are largely economic in the sense that few men can afford bridewealth, and at present no local woman will marry without it. This has been explained in the introduction, and will be taken up again in Chapter Five.
although it is not as crucial a marker of adulthood for men, marriage is still evidently quite an important adult achievement. Unathi, for example, who often says that he would like to marry, articulates well the relationship between marriage, manhood, work, and status: “if you are able to work, and get married, that makes you proud. That makes you a MAN, you know? You see, everyone now is recognizing you as “ya, that man has got a wife!” Even if you are just walking with your wife, you are proud because she is my wife. And when you see the people of that same age with you, they are just running, kicking the ball there, not having wives, you see you’ve achieved something. So you see, it’s an achievement to have a wife!”

Although many young women do not marry, motherhood is a deeply-valued aspect of womanhood, and virtually all young women have children by their mid-20s at the latest (often much earlier). Moreover, as Paul Riesman notes, in societies where kinship and interdependency are integral components of personhood, “in many cases (…) the most significant way of gaining new relations is to have children oneself” (1996: 97). In Mhlambini, an adult woman without children is odd, pitiable, and anti-social. I know of only two women over the age of 25 who do not have children. One of these women, age 26, has told me with both anxiety and sadness that she has been trying for years, but has not managed to conceive. The other woman is childless at 29, and is believed to be infertile.

Young women's motivations for having children are no doubt complex, but I sense that one factor is that motherhood allows them to occupy a social position between girlhood and full, married womanhood, and imparts to them credibility in the adult sphere (Mayer & Mayer 1971; Hunter 1933). Some women friends of mine, for instance, explicitly told me that they had gotten pregnant on purpose, because they were old enough, because they desired a baby, and because “all their friends had children too.” Moreover, the number of young women who have only one
child and the number of women friends of mine who choose highly effective methods of birth control (usually Depo-Provera injections) suggest that many young women in Mhlambini are actively managing their own fertility, and therefore consciously choosing to become mothers regardless of their marital status.

The distinctions between boyhood and manhood, and girlhood and womanhood are significant because of the deeply hierarchical relationship between age, status, power, and respect among the Xhosa. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The (Changing) Meaning of Youth and Adulthood

While anthropologists have long shown interest in age and life stage, studies of youth occupy a modest presence in the anthropological cannon (Bucholtz 2002). It is therefore noteworthy that in recent years there has been a relative proliferation of anthropological work on youth (e.g. Cole & Durham 2008; 2007; Maira & Soep 2004; Skelton & Valentine 1998; Amit-Talai & Wulff 1995). African youth have featured prominently in this large body of research, as demonstrated through, for instance, three edited volumes focused on the social lives of youth in the neoliberal, postcolonial African context (see Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006; Abbink & van Kessels 2005; Honwana & De Boeck 2005), and two edited volumes focused on generation (Alber, van der Geest & Whyte 2008; Weiss 2004). Both the sharp increase in research on youth and the vast spatial, cultural, and socio-economic scope of this recent work suggest that youth

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58For earlier ethnographic work on youth, see Willis 1977; Mead 1964 [1928], 1930. There is comparatively more anthropological work on children, see LeVine (2007) and LeVine and New (2008) for literature reviews.
are a special problematic in contemporary social science, and begs the question of why youth have recently attracted so much attention.

Before exploring the implications of the contemporary focus on youth, it is necessary to review how ‘youth’ are defined. While the term youth is usually taken to mean someone who is chronologically young, scholars have persuasively shown that youth as a category of personhood is often only loosely linked to developmental physiology. Rather, youth are usually quite difficult to define, and what is meant by youth is contextually specific (Cole & Durham 2008; Aguilar 2007; Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006; Durham 2000; Honwana & De Boeck 2005). The complexity of the term is illustrated most clearly by the growing body of evidence which suggests that there is an incongruity between age as a chronological milestone, and age as a status that is achieved, usually through the successful competition of life events (e.g. McKittrick 1996; Burgess 1999; Berry 1985; Fortes 1984). For example, in an illuminating discussion of how the concept of youth was mobilized by elites in revolutionary discourse through the 1960s and 1970s, Thomas Burgess describes youth in revolutionary Zanzibari vernacular as “an identity which describes status as much as age[,] (...) a [political] party youth might be of almost any age, generally male, beyond childhood and before physical exhaustion who usually had not yet become head of a large household” (1999: 33). Jennifer Johnson-Hanks has similarly troubled the notion of youth by questioning the notion of life-stage as a useful theoretical tool. For Johnson-Hanks, the ambiguity of the categories of youth and adulthood-and the dubious value of life-stage models in general- is evident because “vital life events are variable not only in timing and pacing but also-and importantly-in order and synchronization” (2002: 867). Using the life-course of Beti women in Cameroon as an example, she demonstrates that events considered important for the transition from youth to womanhood (childbearing, marriage, leaving school,
undertaking paid employment) occur in virtually any order, and at such widely varying chronological ages that they are of limited meaning in indexing adult status. Instead, suggests Johnson-Hanks, what makes someone a youth or a woman is more evident through the role that she takes on in a given social interaction.

The context-specific nature of youth has led Deborah Durham to suggest that youth can be productively viewed as a social shifter (2004; 2000). Borrowed from linguistics, a shifter is a referential and indexical term that is only meaningful in relational and contextual sense. For example, the terms 'here' and 'there' are only meaningful in context. Thus to call someone a youth is to position them in relation to other emic notions of life stage, and also in relation to particular context-specific qualities such as dependence, rights, abilities and so forth. She employs this concept in her discussion of youth because, in her words, “as people bring the concept of youth to bear on situations, they situate themselves in a social landscape of power, rights, expectations, and relationships -indexing both themselves and the topology of the social landscape” (2000: 116). Durham and Jennifer Cole take up this idea in a recent publication, writing that to take age as an analytic is “to understand age as essentially relational, and fundamentally tied to processes of social reproduction,” and further, that “age mediates the biological and social, providing a powerful symbolic and practical terrain for marking and naturalizing relations of hierarchy and dependency, difference and sameness, as well as patterns of temporality” (Cole & Durham (2008:13-15). This insight is important because it demonstrates that it is impossible to discuss youth without reference to particular relations of power and the kinds of sociality that these relations entail.

This incongruity between age in chronological years and age as achieved status was especially apparent to me during my fieldwork through the terminology that I was expected to
use to address other women. The terminology was contingent on marital status much more than chronological age, and served to reinforce the generational hierarchy articulated above. For example, I was expected to address all married women as “mother,” regardless of the gap between our chronological ages. The mother of my host family, for instance, is only eight years older than I am, but is the married mother of six children. I addressed her as mother at all times. Furthermore, my neighbour in the homestead behind mine was a widow four or five years younger than I am in chronological terms, but was also the mother of two of her own children, as well as five children from her late husband's first marriage. She is thus the head of a large homestead. I addressed her as “mother” while she addressed me as “girl,” and she always interacted with me as a wise, authoritative senior rather than a peer. However, unmarried women well into their thirties addressed me as sister, and vice versa. That being said, ambiguities arose in the case of married mothers half my age, where obvious differences in our respective physiological maturity rendered differences in our respective statuses difficult to establish. While married mothers in their mid-teens are unusual in the village (I know two such women in the village, although young wives are largely housebound, so there are likely more), the cases I know of are quite telling. I addressed these women as sister, while they always seemed uncertain how to interact with me, and they generally tried to avoid addressing me directly. Social etiquette dictates that a lower status person should always initiate greetings with a higher status person (for example, a teenager should initiate greetings with a grandmother and never the other way around), and in keeping with their adult, married status, these young wives never initiated greetings with me when I passed by their homesteads. They would never, however, address me
as “girl,” although once one teenage wife did scold me for staring. A junior would never scold a senior, indicating that this young wife felt her status superseded mine in this case.

Youth in Crisis? The Changing Life-Course

Constance Flanagan writes, “youth embody the collective anxieties of their society and its hopes for the future [thus] the lens of youth is a good vantage point for framing what the future portends because collective decisions of younger generations constitute the future” (2008: 149 also Cole & Durham 2008; Maira & Soep 2005). In the contemporary era of global connection and neoliberal restructuring, anxieties about youth are related to the “the everyday practices of a vigorous capitalism where instability is meant to be normal” (Sennet 1998: 31), and where the future is highly uncertain. In recent years this has regularly been reflected in Euro-American popular media discussions of underemployed youth (e.g. Berman 2014) and, less sympathetically, the “Peter Pan generation” (e.g. Betts 2012), as well as in academic work which examines concerns about the precariousness of even middle-class youth in milieus as varied as China (Anagnost 2008), the United States (Flanagan 2008), Japan (Allison 2013), Britain and Australia (Furlong & Kelly 2005), India (Jeffrey 2010), Niger (Masquelier 2013), North Africa, and the Middle East (Dhillon & Yousef 2009).

Of course, the uncertain futures incumbent in neoliberal capitalism are not evenly distributed among people, as wealth and opportunity are increasingly concentrated by some to the exclusion of others. Thus a major theme which arises from recent work on youth is that

59Avoiding eye contact and looking down, away from, or looking past someone is considered deferential and respectful in the rural Eastern Cape. This posed challenges for me during the early months of my fieldwork, when my language skills were mediocre and I was relying heavily on non-verbal forms of communication.
growing proportions of young people are unproductive, and are mired in a “crisis” of social reproduction. This is particularly prominent in work on African youth—especially African male youth—due to the particular marginality of most Africans within the world economy (see Classen 2013; Mains, Hadley & Tessema 2013, 2007; Masquelier 2013; 2005; Hunter 2010; Vasconcelos 2010; Alber, van der Geest, & Whyte 2008; Cole & Durham 2008; Mbembe 2008 [2001]; Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006; Hansen 2004; Comaroff & Comaroff 2004; Weiss 2008; 2004), as well as the prominent visibility of youth on a continent where they constitute the demographic majority (Vasconcelos 2010). Implicit in this talk of crisis is a common assumption that adulthood should be characterized by social and economic productivity (Jones 2009; Sharp 2002), with the anxiety and crisis stemming from the seeming failure of a growing proportion of young people to assume the status, roles, and responsibilities of productive adulthood. This so-called crisis of adulthood is most acutely felt in the domestic and conjugal spheres of life, meaning it is both experienced and negotiated in a fundamentally gendered and generational manner. Achille Mbembe captures well the nature of these anxieties in the African context:

The relative weakening of the socio-economic status of young men constitutes
in this respect a novel phenomenon. Unemployment levels have risen
significantly for this social category. The passage from adolescence to
adulthood is no longer automatic (...). The social distance between social
seniors and juniors deepens, while the distribution of roles and resources
between generations becomes more complex. Henceforth, for numerous
young men various forms of dependence are prolonged; the only escape is to
migrate or to have themselves recruited as soldiers in military formations.60

60In South Africa, this option manifests itself more in the form of petty crime.
The relations between men and women are being re-defined, as are parental roles. The composition of households has deeply changed (...). Male and female roles within the marriage change also (...), due to increasing irregularity of employment and ever sharper social exclusion. There is an emerging levelling process of existing differences in the status of women and young men (...). Systems of solidarity based on lineage and customary idioms are henceforth combined with mercantile relations with often brutal impact, next to traditional networks of support and clientelism (2008 [2002]: 110).

The quantity of recent ethnographic research on this topic is striking. Most famously, Karen Hansen has documented the frustration of young, educated Zambians who are “stuck in the compound” (2005:3) in a state of “blocked social mobility” (Roth 2008: 64), relegated to a prolonged adolescence due to unemployment, and thus the inability to marry and establish a home. Similarly, Henrick Vigh pessimistically refers to the situation of many young people in Guinea-Bissau as “social death” (2006: 31). Again, focusing on the challenges associated with the expenses of bridewealth, marriage, and generation in Niger, Adeline Masquelier (2005) highlights how, by remaining unmarried, young people are thought to be stuck in a state of idleness, prone to debauchery and indiscipline, thus provoking fear and criticism from their elders. Daniel Mains, Craig Hadley, and Fasil Tessema provide an excellent ethnographic example from Ethiopia, discussing the boredom, stress, and depression experienced by young men whose life goals of work and marriage are derailed by the neoliberal economic
circumstances of contemporary Ethiopia (2013, also Mains 2007, for a Cameroonian example see Jua 2003). Prince similarly discusses the plight of youth in Kenya, stating that

The road to modernity, on which the older generation have journeyed, is (...) unavailable to the village youth - who instead now spend their time “tarmacning” as they call it, a phrase that captures the endless movement back and forth along the pot-holed tarmac roads, between home and town, searching for work (...)

Many of the young people thus feel both disconnected from the optimism of the past and dispossessed of any future, and they express this as being stuck and directionless in the present: “we're just sitting” (...), they say, or “we're just wandering around” (2006: 121).

Lauren Classen has recently discussed virtually identical experiences among rural youth in Malawi who “‘just stay’ a seemingly simple phrase that can literally mean just staying in the village, but simultaneously has a wide range of subtle moral connotations suggesting failure to achieve the markers of modern progress” (2013: 19).

Such an overwhelming body of such evidence lies behind Hanson's important enquiry “what does it mean for the reproduction of the social order if a considerable proportion of young people remain “youth forever”?” (2005: 5).61 This is highly relevant in Mhlambini, as most

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61 Jeremy Jones (2009) has recently taken issue with the assumption of ‘crisis' and stasis that is advanced in much of this literature. Drawing on his research among youth men in Harare, Zimbabwe, he argues that such youth are far from unproductive, and are forging alternative models of adulthood as opposed to failing to achieve it. He highlights a disconnect between the narrative of a ‘normal’ life-course (employment, support of offspring, marriage and so forth) and the more ‘common’ life-course of cohabitation, intention to pay bridewealth, and of cobbling together a living through various informal means. Jones' critiques are apt; however they have greater relevance in areas where arrangements such as cohabitation and involvement in economies are possible. As of yet in Mhlambini, the alternate models of domestic arrangement and subsistence seem to be outside the realm of feasible possibility.
young men cannot afford to marry, support their dependents, and establish independent homesteads. As will become clear in forthcoming chapters, this is discouraging for young and old alike; most elders would like to retire from supporting their grandchildren and adult children, and most young people would like to provide their parents with the opportunity to do so. By not marrying and establishing families, however, young people are on a life-course that local people consider un-traditional.

The conjugal and domestic model that people in Mhlambini articulate as traditional is rooted in the migrant labour system of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Within this model, the expectation is that a man will find employment in a manual labour profession (usually on a mine), will earn the means to pay bridewealth, and will then support his wife and extended family who remain in the rural reserve (Hunter 2010; Moodie with Ndatshe 1994). He is rewarded for his success as a provider with the patriarchal authority of household headship. However, since the transition to non-racial democracy, economic transformation and the industrialization of the South African mining industry have resulted in a sharp decline in manual labour jobs. Fewer and fewer men can afford to marry, or even to support themselves and their children. This has not necessarily led to more egalitarian gender relations in Mhlambini or elsewhere in South Africa, but has opened up new avenues for male authority to be challenged on grounds that young men are not upholding their share of the patriarchal bargain (Hunter 2010; 2007; 2006; 2002; Ashforth 2005; Campbell 1992). Campbell articulates well how economic marginalization is translated into individual failure on the part of the male would-be provider. In her words, these men are trapped by expectations

That they are structurally incapable of fulfilling. Their families make demands on the basis of very real needs, then attribute his inability to meet them to
personal inadequacy. The father feels humiliated and emasculated, given that the notions of provider, household headship and masculinity are closely interlinked in this frame of reference” (1994: 40).

It should be apparent at this stage that this literature on African youth focuses overwhelmingly on young men, as joblessness is presumed to be deeply emasculating for them (Vasconcelos 2010). Thus, the 'crisis' is often framed as a crisis of masculinity. With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Vasconcelos 2010; Masquelier 2005; Utas 2005), women feature in this literature primarily as yardsticks against which young men's marginality is measured (young men are failing to marry them, failing to support their children, and their autonomy is a major cause of male distress), or as victims of male violence. This omission has led Joana Vasconcelos, in a critical review of the presence of women in literature on African youth, to comment:

The use of youth to refer to female elements is relatively recent in the SSA [Sub-Saharan African] context. This novelty is due to a change in researchers’ perspectives -until mid1980s, anthropology, by presenting girls mainly as objects or subjects exploited simultaneously by boys and oppressive elders, reduced women to an atemporal category and rendered youth a component of the male universe”(2010: 15)

As young women’s lives occupy a prominent place in my work, this dissertation speaks to this crisis of social reproduction, but mitigates the absence of women’s experiences, to some degree.

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62 The exception is in the context of sexual and reproductive health, where young women are prominently represented (Vasconcelos 2010).

63 This sort of language features prominently in the vast literature on sexual violence in South Africa.
Thus far, I have attempted to show that notions of age in Mhlambini are functions of having achieved particular social milestones more than reflections of age in a chronological sense, and to explain how economic transformation has transformed life trajectories for many young people in Mhlambini, and across Africa at large. In this next section, I provide four short biographies of younger people from the village, with the aim of elucidating what it is to be a young person at this present moment. In so doing, I show that while economic and social transformations have reduced young people's prospects for achieving socially-valued markers of adulthood, at an individual level people are able to fulfil the gendered roles and expectations to varying degrees. The first is of a young, unmarried and unemployed girl. In being unmarried and uneducated, she is stuck in a state of perpetual girlhood, with few prospects for gaining respect and status. The second is of a young man who has been initiated into manhood but, like many of his peers, has failed to fulfil the accompanying roles of husband, father, and provider that are integral to local idioms of manhood. Both of these young people lack opportunities for social and economic advancement. For most young people in Mhlambini, this sort of limbo existence has largely replaced established paths to adulthood, such as employment and marriage. In reading these biographies one should be mindful of the socioeconomic marginalization of the region, as discussed in the Introduction.

Nomvula

Nomvula is a twenty year old unmarried girl. She was born and raised in Mhlambini, and has never lived anywhere else. She resides with her mother, her one year-old daughter and four younger siblings in a run-down one-room rondavel. Occasionally her father's eldest child – a son by a woman whom he never married- also resides with the family, when he comes back from
looking – so far unsuccessfully- for work in town or on the mines. The family's income consists of her mother's child support grants, Nomvula's child-support grant, her mother's salary for eight days of work per month through the CWP, and income from their second hut, which they rent. This is a meagre income for a family of seven, and the family's poverty is evident in the condition of their threadbare clothing, their close living quarters, and their poorly-maintained homestead.

Nomvula's mother is the first of two wives. She was born and raised in Mhlambini, and had married Nomvula's father through an arranged marriage. Like many women of her generation, Nomvula's mother has no formal schooling and is illiterate. Nomvula's father is a mine-worker, and once he earned enough money to take a second wife, he married a woman of his own choosing. The second wife is from a neighbouring village, is much more attractive and educated than Nomvula's mother, and is greatly favoured by Nomvula's father. The second wife's desirable qualities are summarized in her married name, which translates as “mother of beauty.” Both the second wife and her children are also better provided for than Nomvula’s immediate family, and this is apparent in their stylish clothes, better-maintained homestead, solar panel, furniture, and radio. The differences in these families' respective affluence are apparent to Nomvula, her mother, and her siblings, because the second wife and her five children -Nomvula's half-siblings- live in their three rondavels some two hundred meters away.

Nomvula's father stopped supporting Nomvula's mother and children financially when he married the second wife. According to locals who are critical of polygamy, this sort of non-

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64 The younger wife is stout and curvy, with light golden-brown skin, copper-brown eyes, and a wide gap between her front teeth. All of these qualities are widely considered desirable for both sexes. In contrast, Nomvula’s mother is lean, and is very dark in pigmentation. No doubt a reflection of longstanding racial hierarchies, most local women strive to keep their skin as light as possible.
support is the norm when a man takes a second wife today. Although it is frowned upon, it seems to be widely-tolerated by wives and neighbours alike. According to Nomvula, her father’s non-support coincided with her dropping out of school in 2007, when she was in eighth grade. She says that at that point the family had no money to pay for her school uniform, shoes, and books. Since dropping out of school she spends most of her time at the family's homestead caring for her daughter and younger siblings, and engaging in domestic chores. She is still in a relationship with her daughter's father and often speaks to him on the phone, although she rarely sees him as he lives in Rustenberg.65

I got to know Nomvula fairly well during my fieldwork, as she was my neighbour and I interacted with her almost daily. She has never held a job, and her plans and hopes for the future are vague and pessimistic; she is emphatic that things would be better if she had stayed in school. She says that she does not want to stay in the village, but does not have a concrete idea of where else she would live nor what she would do there, other than “far away” and “in town.” I recall a conversation where, when I asked her about what she wanted in life, she shrugged and told me “ndifuna ukuphuma noko, ndibuye ndimhle” [I want to go away, and come back beautiful]. This highlights the divisive and affective moral geography of the urban-rural divide that I articulated in the Introduction, and so characterizes life in Mhlambini. In my observation, many despondent young people look to the city with hope, as sort of magical space where they could find a job, find true love, and then come back with to Mhlambini with dignity, looking sharp and with the means to support their families.

65Rustenberg is a mining town in Northwest province, near Johannesburg. Historically, many men from Mhlambini and surrounding areas have been employed as mine-workers there, although jobs are fewer than they used to be. Some men from Mhlambini are still employed in Rustenberg, while many others spend time there looking for work, but return disappointed.
Nomvula is wary of married life, as married life is very hard on a woman. In any case, she does not expect her boyfriend to marry her. In being an unemployed, poorly-educated young mother living at her parents' homestead, Nomvula is typical of many girls in Mhlambini.

Bonginkosi

Bonginkosi is the 33 year-old unmarried eldest son of an elderly, respected village patriarch. His mother Nosithele is a similarly well-respected sangoma (traditional spiritual doctor). He has no formal schooling at all, although he has picked up some English from living outside Mhlambini. He divides his time between living with friends and extended family in East London or Mthatha, and living at his family's homestead in the village. When he is in the village, the homestead consists of his parents, two unmarried sisters and their four children, and one of Bonginkosi's children. A brother is a labour migrant on a fruit farm in the Western Cape.

Bonginkosi spends as much time as he can outside the village because he does not get along with his father, who considers Bonginkosi a disappointment. His father had wanted Bonginkosi to follow in his footsteps, either by working in the mines or staying at home and farming the family's ancestral land. Bonginkosi has not managed to find mine-work, however, and is reluctant to farm. He emphasizes repeatedly that farming is “not his gift from God,” but that his father wants him to live the “old way.” Bonginkosi has also fathered a number of children with several different women. He admits to providing these women with sporadic and very limited support, although they do make demands on Bonginkosi's parents and one of the children resides with Bonginkosi's family in Mhlambini. The other children reside with their mothers, either in other villages or in Mthatha. Finally, Bonginkosi had served jail time for his involvement in armed robbery in and around Mthatha. By Bonginkosi’s account, he wants to
support his children but has rarely had the means, and had not wanted to get involved in crime. He claims that he had turned himself in to the police, served jail time, and now wanted to change his ways.

At present, Bonginkosi is unemployed, and spends most of his time meandering around the village or hanging out at the backpacker lodge, practising his English with the backpackers. He is a very stylish dresser, drawn to technology, fashion, and things that he associates with an affluent, urban lifestyle. Where he gets the money to pay for these things is unclear to me. His plans for the future involve “projects,” if only he could get one off the ground. As an example of such projects, his current dream is to open a bar and a gym in the village, although he encounters ongoing challenges both from disapproving elders and in securing the capital to build and stock the bar. He is adamant that he wants to support his children, but that none of the options available to him will allow him to “get rich quick.”

In being physiologically mature - and in Bonginkosi’s case, initiated - but not having achieved the locally-valued markers of adulthood, both Nomvula and Bonginkosi are typical of many young people in and around Mhlambini. The relatively directionless nature of their lives and their lack of access to alternate routes to dignified adulthood - for instance, gainful employment - are also typical of many poorly-educated local youth. Rather, like many of their peers in South Africa and elsewhere, they are caught in a state of prolonged adolescence, with no tangible means of changing their circumstances. Their lives, and those of the many other young people like them in Mhlambini, suggest that much of the Africanist literature on a crisis of adulthood is highly relevant. However, alongside the majority of young people with few prospects and routes to socially-sanctioned adulthood, the gendered meaning of youth and adulthood are also being challenged by a minority of young women who are carving out routes to
adulthood not through marriage, but through employment and independent support of children. While not uncontroversial, these women generally have the support of their families because of the contributions that they make to household subsistence, and because, unlike many of their peers, they are able to bear the expense of raising their children themselves. It will be seen, however, especially from the second example, that in so doing these young women struggle to fulfil local ideals of femininity alongside their role as providers. There are also, of course, a minority of men like Thando (see page 106) who likewise achieve social adulthood through gainful employment and support of their families, but their circumstances do not challenge or modify gendered or generational relations in the same way.

**Nokwindla**

Nokwindla is thirty-one years old and unmarried, and is one of the most educated people born and raised in the village. She is her parents' only child, and they prioritized her education by sending her outside the village to complete her schooling despite the fact that they are not educated themselves. She has not only completed secondary school, but has also completed training in accounts management and is employed as the administrator at the local NGO. Nokwindla resides at her mother's homestead, along with her two daughters, aged eleven and two. Her father lives at a separate homestead with his second, younger wife, with whom he has no children. Unlike Nomvula’s mother and her co-wife, both wives, the father, and Nokwindla seem to have an amicable relationship. My understanding is that, having only fathered one child with his first wife, Nokwindla’s father hoped (unsuccessfully, it seems) to have more children by a second wife. As offspring are important both for companionship and support, and also for
maintaining communion with ancestors, local opinion seems to be that Nokwindla’s father was well-justified in taking a second wife in this case.

Nokwindla is in a relationship with her youngest child's father, who lives in a town several hundred kilometres away. They have been together for a number of years and she visits him during holidays, but does not want to marry him, and would prefer to remain in the village. With her salary from her job at the NGO Nokwindla supports her mother, her father (and, presumably, his second wife), and her two children, and keeps herself dressed in stylish professional attire. She is also building a large two-room square hut at her mother's homestead. She is respected in the community for her professional achievements and for supporting her parents, and appears to have a warm, caring relationship with her mother, who in turn values the support from her only child.

NoClinic

When I began my fieldwork NoClinic was twenty-four years old and unmarried. She has finished secondary school and completed a certificate program in hospitality management, and is now a manager at the local backpacker lodge. Her training was paid for by the backpacker lodge, with the understanding that with hospitality training she would be better equipped to work there. Given the lodge is partially owned by the village and partly by Steven, her training was thus indirectly paid for by both of these parties. I do not think her parents could have funded such training using their own financial resources. As such, she is the only one supporting her family since her father, formerly a mine-worker, became paraplegic in a mining accident. She is the eldest surviving child of her middle-aged parents, and resides at her family's homestead with her parents, her teenage brother and sister, and her late older sister's five year-old son.
I came to know NoClinic quite well over the course of my fieldwork, and was often amazed at how she strove to maintain two very different roles in her daily life: the good, domestic unmarried daughter, and the cosmopolitan lodge manager. At the backpacker lodge she is a capable manager and a stylish dresser, and is well-liked by tourists for her charming, outgoing personality. At her family's homestead, however, she is always dressed very conservatively, complete with face clay and long, dowdy apron, and is usually hard at work doing domestic chores. She is also remarkably demure and soft-spoken; if her father is present (which he usually is, given the difficulty of navigating the village trails in his wheelchair), she rarely raises her eyes or her voice.

Typical of many young women in the community, throughout the duration of my fieldwork NoClinic was adamant that she does not want to marry, and that she prefers her current arrangement of secretly visiting her boyfriend in Cape Town during holidays from her job. Unlike most of her peers, however, she did not have a child, and I got the sense that this was a subject of internal conflict and insecurity for her. She pointedly made it known to me early on that she has raised her sister's son since her sister's death when the child was six months old. During my fieldwork she would often say that she does not need any children because she already has a child, and I overheard her say several times that she would love it if people referred to her as her nephew's mother. However, when I returned to the village for a visit after a year, I found NoClinic on maternity leave from the backpacker lodge. Over the course of the month of my stay in the village, I spent a good bit of time at NoClinic's homestead with her and her newborn son. She told me that the father is her boyfriend who works in Cape Town, and that her boyfriend wants to marry her. When I asked her if she is going to marry him, she threw up her
arms in dismay, saying “Haibo66 Katie, I can't get married! Me, I'm the only one working here, who is going to support my family?! His family is in Mthatha, I would have to go there! Uh-uh, I can't get married. I have to stay here and work for my family.”

Thus far in this chapter I have focused on what it means to be a young person in Mhlambini, and I have explained the routes through which local youth gain status and recognition as adults. In particular, I have shown that although most boys formally become men through initiation, their status as men is insecure and incomplete because most of them are unable to assume the roles of employment, marriage, and supportive fatherhood that accompany adult male status. Similarly, I have shown that most young females are also trapped in a state of limbo because many of them do not marry. Moreover, while most unmarried girls distinguish themselves from younger girls through motherhood, most have few means to support their children other than through government child support grants and, hopefully, the generosity of family members who are employed or collect old age pensions. The future of most young people in the community is thus uncertain and insecure, both in terms of the possibility of their gaining status as they age, and also in the more pragmatic sense of how they will make ends meet.

While many young people are rendered perpetually adolescent through their inability to access capital, it should be apparent from the material that I have discussed that the social power gained by those who do have access to capital allows some young people to achieve status in ways which are disruptive to traditional models of age and achievement. Thando, for instance, was able to pay bridewealth, marry, and support two households prior to being initiated into

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66Haibo is a dramatic exclamation, and can roughly translate as “oh!” “wow!” or “oh my!”
manhood. He is respected for doing so, arguably more so than young men such as Bonginkosi, who, while officially men, are not fulfilling the obligations incumbent on manhood. Of course, the social power of money is not new in this community; as I will explain in detail in the next chapter, the region has long been integrated into capitalist circuits through taxation and labour migration, and young men's access to capital has been disruptive to gerontocratic hierarchies since at least the early 20th Century. For example, young men’s ability to earn cash to pay their own bridewealth has undermined elders’ authority to choose wives for their sons (Hunter 2010; Carton 2000). What is particular to the contemporary era is the low proportion of men that are able to access cash in the first place.

What is even more novel, however, is that some unmarried women are gaining status in the community through employment and independent support of their families and children, and thus through routes that have historically been the purview of males. Indeed, one could even argue that young women such as Nokwindla and NoClinic actively create new forms of adult femininity. Unsurprisingly, these developments have significant bearing on social reproduction in the community, and thus on relations between men and women and between elders and young people. In such circumstances, the relationship between age and status is in flux. I turn now to a different example of how age categories are unstable in the present moment, one that likewise relates to access to capital but that primarily speaks to older people’s lives, namely the incongruity between age based on fixed, inalienable criteria that is the foundation for government policy related to social grants, and emic concepts of old age.

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67Ethnographic evidence suggests that in urban areas, independent women have been supporting their families and wielding considerable influence in these communities since at least the middle of the 20th Century (see, for instance, Banks 2011; Lee 2009). This has, I think, been less commonly the case in rural areas.
Social Grants and “Age Problems”

The South African government variously allocates monthly child support, foster care, and disability grants, as well as old age pensions, to low-income South Africans (see Ferguson 2013; Lund 2008). With the exception of a few non-Xhosa employees of the local NGO, all families in Mhlambini qualify as low-income according to the government's criteria. While all recipients are pleased to receive their grants, government policy-makers might be surprised to learn that for some rural South Africans, this interface with state governance produces gendered anxieties and causes “age problems.”

Grant day is an exciting day in Mhlambini; people look forward to “pay day” weeks in advance. Starting very early in the morning, everyone who receives a grant (and many who do not) begin walking up the road to “ipayini” (“the pay place,” which is in the neighbouring village). On these days the village seems deserted; the only people who stay home are typically those either too old or too young to manage the walk up the steep hill that leads into the next village. In contrast, the pay place is a hive of activity; traders come from Mthatha to sell all manner of wares, from clothing to medicines to produce and chickens. Children almost invariably go home from school early -if they come to school at all- to ensure their share of the treats that their mothers and grandparents might have bought with their grant money.

By eight in the morning an armoured truck arrives, filled with cash and accompanied by guards equipped with bullet-proof vests and large guns. All grant recipients line up near the truck, in order of their status in the gerontocratic hierarchy: old male pensioners first, then old female pensioners, then middle-aged mothers and finally young wives and unmarried women collecting their child support grants. By mid-morning most people have finished their shopping and have turned to socializing: old people sit around in same-sex groups to gossip and smoke,
middle-aged women often head over to one of the local *spaza* (an informal shop that operates out of someone's home) to buy additional groceries, sometimes sitting outside in the sunshine chatting for the rest of the afternoon. Some people head to one of the *shebeens* to spend some of their pension on beer and soft-drinks.

The ability to participate in the consumption and sociality described above is contingent upon access to grant money, and, with the exception of disability grants, this access depends on gender and age. Barring an extremely unusual situation where a young man is the sole legal guardian of children,68 young able-bodied men have no access to grant money. Mothers, whether they are married or not, are entitled to R280 (almost thirty dollars, at the time of my fieldwork) per child. Some men are critical of this, claiming that young unmarried mothers rarely spend their grant money on food and other household expenses, spending it instead on personal indulgences such as hair extensions and alcohol. It is a widespread belief in South Africa that many low-income women have children in order to access social grants69 (see News24 2011; Madikwane, Desmond, Richter, & Udjo 2006). Whether this perception is accurate or not, by providing a (very modest) income to young women, social grants evidently do influence their social power to some degree. For example, as Bank and Qambata (1999) point out in their excellent study of gender, social change, and rural livelihoods elsewhere in the Eastern Cape, the expansion of the social welfare system alongside economic decline has resulted in a shift in

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68There were no such men in Mhlambini at the time of my fieldwork, although one father was trying to get childcare grants for two of his four children. He seemed optimistic that this might be possible because those two children shared his surname rather than their mother's. His wife received grants for the other two children, who share her surname.

69A 2006 review by the Human Sciences Research Council concludes that this belief is unfounded (See Madikwane, Desmond, Richter & Udjo 2006).
income from men to women, as well as from young to old. The data they present suggests that this has resulted in a marked improvement in the circumstances of widowed, single, and abandoned women.

Meanwhile, “age problems” arise due to the government's policy that in order to qualify for an old-age pension grant, one must be in possession of a valid Identity Document (ID) which indicates that the bearer is at least sixty years old. If an individual can successfully demonstrate that they are over 60, they are entitled to R1140 (about 130 dollars at the time of my fieldwork), a substantial sum by local standards and a major source of income for many families (SASSA 2011). Receiving a sizable payment in recognition of one's advanced age resonates with gerontocratic sensibilities; this money can be interpreted as an acknowledgement that one has reached a respectable age, and in privileging the elderly it reinforces the social power of elders. Using sixty years as the defining criteria, however, is bewildering to many.

Firstly, many people over 30 are illiterate and are unable to read the information on their ID. In some cases, the information is blatantly wrong, but they do not learn this until they visit Home Affairs on some personal business. I once saw, for instance, the ID of an eleven year-old local boy whose sex was listed as female. His mother, who had never been to school, had no idea until I alerted her to the mistake. Moreover, most older people do not actually know when they were born, meaning the date on their document is itself the outcome of educated guesswork. I heard many stories of the challenges faced by staff at Home Affairs during the early years of democracy as they tried to estimate the ages of rural former Transkeians who applied for identity

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70In the late 1990s, when Bank and Qambata were conducting their interviews and surveys, women began collecting pensions at age 60, while men began collecting pensions at 65. Given the disproportionate representation of women in the elderly demographic, the gendered disproportionality in access to income was amplified. Nowadays men collect pensions at age 60 as well, thus equalizing access to income among the oldest demographic to some degree.
documents (“do you remember the locust years?” “Do you remember Hitler's war?” “Do you remember the big flood?”). Evidently, Home Affairs personnel often guessed wrong: it seems an unlikely coincidence that almost every elderly person in the village has an ID document that states that they were born in 1937. Moreover, my field notes from the profiling research are replete with accounts of women whose IDs indicate that they should be pensioners, despite being mothers of teenagers, if not young children.

Furthermore, some people openly admitted to me to having lied to the government about their age in order to qualify for some privilege, usually a work permit or grant. Indeed, a very recent government pilot audit aimed at assessing social grant fraud in Elliotdale district (the closest urban municipality to Mhlambini) found that a full third of grants were fraudulent. Typical examples included multiple women collecting child support grants for the same child, and families collecting pensions for family members who were long dead. The following vignette illustrates the sort of deception that old age pensions can facilitate:

Guma (the NGO Wellness Coordinator), Jabulile (the Micro-enterprise Project Manager), Unathi (the Community Facilitator), and I are all working at our desks in the large, one-room round hut that serves as the NGO office. Everyone else is working out of the office today, and it is unusually quiet. Suddenly Guma breaks the silence by asking “Kate...when someone lies to the government so they can get money, is it called fraud?” “I think so...,” I respond uncertainly, “why do you ask?” “Haibo!” She says. “I think I am dealing with another fraud here...”

Guma's responsibilities at the NGO are broad, covering not only community health and wellness activities, but also work that would ideally be the jurisdiction of a social worker, if only a social worker would come this far from town. Thus a large portion of Guma's work day is devoted to helping illiterate locals navigate the maze of paperwork involved in accessing
necessities such as government grants and ID documents, child support from absentee fathers, and pensions from mining companies. I have great sympathy and admiration for the patience with which Guma attempts to assist people who, quite rightly, find these systems complicated and intimidating, especially as people often come to Guma's attention only when they have already attempted and failed to negotiate this bureaucracy on their own.

Today's case is typical in that Guma is trying to help someone who's inexpert attempts to play the system have got them into difficulty, creating additional work for Guma. As she explains to us, she is trying to help a family get an ID document for a newborn. The complication, however, is that the father is unemployed, and the family's only source of income is an old age pension collected by the woman who has just given birth to this baby. Unathi, Jabulile, and I all sit back in our chairs, ruefully shaking our heads. Even I understand the conundrum here. Pensions, ID documents, and child support grants are all processed through the Department of Home Affairs, and Home Affairs personnel are sure to recognize that a sixty-something pensioner could not possibly be a new mother. If this woman shows up at Home Affairs to register her child, she will get an ID and gain access to a child support grant, but will lose her pension. A pension is four times more money than a child support grant. The family would certainly forgo the latter in favour of the former. Yet doing so would also mean that the child would have no ID. This would probably have no immediate impact on his life, but will present serious obstacles when he registers for school, or if he needs to access state medical care.

No one in the office considers for a moment that the woman in question should “come clean” about her fraudulent pension, although all of us know that she is perhaps forty years old and may continue to collect fraudulent pensions for another twenty years. The family's mere survival is dependent on this money. Jabulile and I come up with the same solution almost
simultaneously: is there a teenaged daughter who could pretend to be the mother? Guma shakes her head. “They already tried that. But this baby was born in hospital, so he has a Clinic Card. They need that Clinic Card to get the ID. And look what they did. This is how the problem started in the first place.” Guma passes around the child's Clinic Card, a familiar yellow pamphlet documenting the child's vitals. The information on the card is all filled out by hand, in black pen, by someone with delicate penmanship. It is painfully obvious that someone has inexpertly scratched out the mother's name, and has penned in a new name in its place. The new name is written in blue pen, in the awkward scrawl of someone who can barely write. Guma shakes her head. “I don't know what to do with this one...maybe their best option is to pretend they lost the Clinic Card, and try to get a new one with the teenaged daughter's name...”

I emphasize the pervasiveness of inaccurate and fraudulent pensions not to pass moral judgement on people who benefit from them. Most people who access fraudulent grants are living in desperate circumstances, and are doing their creative best to survive. Rather, I offer these examples in order to underscore the degree to which access to grants can seem arbitrary, dissociated as they often are both from local ideas of age based on status and achievement, and from the facts (of chronological age, of maternity) that they are supposed to represent.

Pension-collecting mothers, such as the woman who Guma attempted to help, contribute to the age problems that plague some middle-aged women in and around Mhlambini. I have taken the term 'age problems' from several such women, who themselves used this term in conversations with me. These problems arise when the numerical age on an individual's ID is incongruent with their sense of their own age in relation to their achieved social status in the community. In particular, there were a number of women – some almost certainly many years shy of sixty – who complained to me that they are older than their ID indicates. These were
invariably women who had married an older man when they were quite young, and who had achieved all the markers of status for a mature woman: grown sons, daughters, and daughters-in-law to take over the work of running the homestead, grandchildren and either widowhood or ongoing conjugal partnership with an elderly man. These women would have completed the ritual which accompanies their transition from childbearing motherhood into venerable elder womanhood, earning, for instance, the authority to sit around smoking a long tobacco pipe while delegating chores to junior members of her household.

*Figure 4: Elder traditionalist woman smoking her tobacco pipe.*
The high status of such women relative to women who have yet to reach these milestones is reinforced regularly through the performance of intergenerational respect (*hlonipha*) that is part of daily living in the village. Given that many women marry and bear children quite young, some women achieve this status by their mid-40s. Watching some of their peers collect old-age pensions – or worse, watching chronologically old, but never married or childless women collect old age pensions while they get nothing – is bewildering and frustrating for women, who are, by local standards, “old.”

While age problems are in some ways particular to the local geographical and temporal context, they also speak to broader issues surrounding the meaning of age in bureaucratic states. In a discussion of age and social structure in small-scale societies, Meyer Fortes reminds us of an incongruity between understanding age and generation as a “combination of conjugal and reproductive relations” (1984: 105), as they have long been understood in Mhlambini, and bureaucratic institutions such as old age pensions. Of keen relevance in the case of women experiencing age problems, Fortes’ suggests that ambiguities arise because “pensions are awarded by the state not on the basis of kinship, family, or generational status but on the basis of the rights and duties of citizenship, that is, of membership in the political community” (1984: 108). As such, age problems illustrate an incompatibility between social status as achieved, and rights-based status based on inalienable, fixed and impersonal criteria (Cheney 2007; Fortes 1984). Moreover, age problems also, to cite Matthew Hull, demonstrate the ways in which bureaucratic artifacts are not merely “neutral purveyors of discourse, but [also] mediators that shape the significance of the linguistic signs inscribed on them” (2012: 13). While the chronological age listed on an ID document may or may not be an accurate reflection of the chronological age of the person that the document represents, the (oftentimes arbitrary, if not
fraudulent) information inscribed on the document enables and forecloses opportunities that have important material and social effects. It also changes what it means to be old, all the more so given the way that access to money can transform an individual’s social power, regardless of their position in a gerontocratic hierarchy.

In this way, ID documents and old age pensions are similar to what Charles Piot has shown with the bureaucracy surrounding “lotto visa culture” (2010: 79) that has sprung up around the American green card lottery in Togo. Not only do the bureaucratic requirements of the visa lottery system create the space for a whole informal economy of brokers and middle-men, it also creates new orientations of kinship relations. This bureaucratic apparatus creates impetus for the formation of new families, because lottery winners are permitted to bring a spouse and children with them but may not be able to foot the cost of the requisite interviews at the American consulate, let alone the cost of plane tickets. As Piot documents, many people attempt to circumvent these obstacles by strategically claiming to be the spouses of individuals with the means to pay for interview fees and plane tickets, procuring (through informal brokers) the necessary paperwork to document these initially-fictitious kinship relations. While the partnerships are fraudulent to the extent that some families are fabricated to meet the requirements of immigration, these families do often immigrate together, and may develop affective ties to one another. Moreover, the documentation that ‘proves’ their relationships may be called upon in further bureaucratic disputes in the United States, for instance in legal disputes surrounding child support. The bureaucracy involved in accessing state pensions in South Africa similarly illustrates the perverse but productive nature of state bureaucracy. While social grants have the analogous effect of creating both a “culture of duplicity and identity fabrication” (Hibou 1999), they simultaneously shape the meaning of age and status on the ground.
Pensions and age problems also are illustrative of the ways in which, as Julie Livingston writes,

Neither biological, nor cultural, nor purely linear models can capture the complexities of the ageing experience; rather, they portray ageing as a complex and dynamic set of negotiated interactions that incorporate both biological and cultural realms, serve varying interests, provoke debates, and link public and private aspects of human experience “(2003: 207, see Lock 1993, Rasmussen 2000, Cohen 1998).

Livingston's research on gender and old age pensions in neighbouring Botswana is also helpful in understanding the ways in which old age pensions complicate the meaning of age in Mhlambini, as she identifies an important contradiction posed by old age pensions in gerontocratic society. While old age pensions can consolidate gerontocratic power, they also present an irony in that by design, old age pensions are intended reflect industrial notions of age-based productivity (2003). Within such systems, older people's status is presumed to be marginal rather than superior relative to the young due to their comparatively limited capacity to be economically productive. That the majority of young people are unproductive in their so-called productive years no doubt renders local understandings of the pension system all the more distant from its official rationale. As such, local understandings of the reasoning behind the social grant system are quite different from the social welfare rationale that underscores old age pensions elsewhere. For instance, especially among women in Mhlambini it seems that old-age pensions are understood not as a program that supports people who are no longer able to earn a living through their own labour, but rather as the point at which one finally begins to earn a salary. Such reasoning may makes ironic sense in a historically gerontocratic society; people expect to wait a
long time to assume a respected, powerful role in the community, and now access to cash is part of this authoritative status.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has not been to make an overarching argument about the nature and meaning of youth and adulthood in Mhlambini. Rather, I have aimed to provide some clarification of the relationship between age and status in order to provide ethnographic and theoretical scaffolding for the forthcoming discussion of gendered and generational conflicts as they are currently manifesting themselves in the community. Several important themes run through this discussion. It should be clear that established relations of gendered, generational hierarchies are being destabilized on several fronts. As the discussion of old age pensions shows, increasing bureaucratization through institutions such as social grants frustrates the notion that elder-hood is achieved not through chronological ageing, but through attainment of certain milestones that are primarily meaningful in the sphere of kinship and reproduction. At the same time, it should be evident that most youth are highly constrained in their ability to achieve status and respectability that accompanies adulthood. Like their peers in many parts of Africa, they are “stuck” in a liminal state. For men in particular, there is often a wide gulf between achieving adult status, and assuming the deeply-valued roles, responsibilities, and status that have accompanied manhood in the past.

Following from this, a crucial point is that the experience of thwarted adulthood is deeply gendered, and this gives rise to gendered conflict. While the circumstances of young men such as Bonginkosi and young women such as Nomvula are similar in the sense that they are economically marginalized, have few opportunities for social advancement, and are thus
dependent on their families for support, there is a fundamental difference in the expectations placed upon them. Young men such as Bonginkosi endure criticism from their parents and women, and my engagement with these men suggests that they experience frustration and anxiety as a result. Young women such as Nomvula, on the other hand, do not experience such reproach. Yet at the same time, as we have seen a growing proportion of young women are supporting themselves and their families independently of young men. Forthcoming chapters will demonstrate that this is a highly volatile state of affairs; as will be seen through various ethnographic discussions in this dissertation, some of the most overt conflicts in Mhlambini arise because men are not prepared to allow women to assert particular kinds of authority even as they themselves are unable to assume the roles through which their dominance has historically been legitimized.

Finally, it seems safe to propose that as an increasing number of girls remain unmarried, and as an increasing number of young men are unable to assume the roles of husband and provider, the relationship between marriage, and the maintenance of a homestead may become increasingly decoupled from expected norms of adult status.
Chapter Four: Generations in Conflict

In a study of child citizenship and development in Uganda, Kristen Cheney (2007) writes that “the social sciences have yet to treat age as a social variable equivalent to others such as gender, class, and ethnicity” (Cheney 2007:15). Yet, as Cheney persuasively argues, in many societies generation even more than gender is often the most significant axis of inequality. This is certainly the case in Mhlambini, and seems to have been for a long time. Early ethnographic writings on the Bomvana emphasize the importance placed on submission to gerontocratic authority. Cook, for instance, writes that “the greatest virtue among the Bomvana is piety or filial obedience. A good son obeys his father without questions and will unhesitatingly perform any behest however it may prejudice his own personal interests” (1934a: 13). Similarly, Philip and Iona Mayer write that “at every stage of life Xhosa culture requires ego to show submission to those even slightly senior, concurrently with dominance over those even slightly junior” (1970: 162). The expectation is that as a person ages they will retire from manual labour, allocating duties to junior members of their household.

This chapter takes up the issue of generational inequality, and the conflicts that ensue when that inequality is contested. I outline the hegemonic hierarchical power structure in Mhlambini, provide historical grounding for this hierarchy as it stands, and discuss the ways that intergenerational relationships have been transformed since the early colonial era. My objective here is less to make an argument about the causes of conflict in Mhlambini per se, but rather to foreground the forthcoming chapters with an ethnography of contemporary intergenerational conflicts that is both historically deep and ethnographically rich. As such, building on the
previous chapter I now explore how the unstable yet prominent hierarchies of age and status articulated in the previous chapter scaffold generational conflicts.

Although contested in ways which will be shown below, gerontocratic authority is a hegemonic force in Mhlambini today, and everyday social etiquette reinforces this hierarchy in various ways. For instance, when passing an older person on a trail the younger person should always move aside for the elder, and should be the first to initiate greeting and enquiries regarding the other person's health. Younger people should also show respect by avoiding eye contact with the older person, speaking softly in their presence, and doing their elder's bidding if asked. At weddings, funerals and other events, older men will be fed before older women, but older women will be fed before younger men. In my experience, a younger man would never take issue with a woman of his mothers' generation getting fed first or receiving a larger portion of traditional beer at a beer-drink ritual (also Cook 1934a). Moreover, a man would very rarely challenge his mother's authority in the household, or interfere with instructions that his mother directs towards his wife. Furthermore, elderly women often transgress gendered spatial and social boundaries that younger women would never dare to challenge, for instance going over to the men's side of the yard during a ritual beer-drink to share a bucket of beer and chat with an elderly male friend, or attending and occasionally voicing their opinions at community meetings. Although they are well-loved, children of both sexes are socially marginalized, are often ordered around on errands, and will always be fed last and fed less.

Recent research suggests that elders across Africa are concerned with a decline in filial piety (Classen 2013; Alber, van der Geest & Whyte 2008; Møller & Sotshongaye 2006, van der Geest 1997). Older people in Mhlambini likewise lament the deterioration of the gerontocracy, and many of them often complain that young people are disrespectful these days. The following
examples are taken from the Profiling Research, and were offered by older people in response to the question “what do you think of the behaviour of young people in this community?”

_Young people have bad behaviour, because no one is ruling them anymore. They rule themselves. The girls don't want to do household chores. My grandson is an example [of a disrespectful youth]: he used to sleep at my home, but now he's not obeying any rules. He does whatever he wants, not whatever anyone else wants (elderly widow)._  

_The young people don't behave well. They do things by their own rules, and they don't obey their parents' rules. They go out at night, they get problems like pregnancy. Then they also fight with each other. Some others, they steal things from people. They also don't care for the livestock. They leave it to the old people to do that (elderly married man)._  

When it comes to basic social etiquette such as avoiding eye contact and respecting spatial boundaries, younger people in Mhlambini do little to challenge gerontocratic authority. Yet elders are right to feel that many younger people are increasingly dismissive of the authority of their elders to dictate young peoples' conduct. As Meredith McKittrick reminds us in a fascinating analysis of generational conflict over property in Namibia, “the age at which senior status can be achieved in a given society holds steady only in circumstances which permit the continued transferal of resources to a younger generation” (1996: 124). This process of resource transfer and a correspondent hierarchy of status have not been stable in South Africa since the colonial era, and have intensified in recent decades. Moreover, it should be clear from both the introduction and the previous chapter that such transfer of resources and status are highly uncertain in Mhlambini today. Indeed, older people are holding onto an authority that is premised in part on the control of resources which are now spread so thin that most young people have
little hope of taking their parents' place. It is against this backdrop of marginalization and generational power struggle that contemporary conflicts are manifest.

Generational conflict is nothing new in Southern Africa, as attested by a rigorous body of literature examining intergenerational struggles for power going back to the early colonial era (e.g. McClendon 2002; Carton 2000; Bank & Qambata 1999; Tetelman 1998; McKittrick 1996; Murray 1981). Indeed, generational conflict looms so large in historic and ethnographic accounts of African social life that historian John Iliffe has remarked that “conflict between male generations [has been] one of the most dynamic and enduring forces in African history” (1995: 95). While much of this literature is beyond the scope of this dissertation, familiarity with the broader arguments advanced by these scholars is essential for understanding the intergenerational conflicts that are its focus, in part because they provide historical context for contemporary contests. Most importantly, however, familiarity with earlier literature on gendered and generational struggles in Southern Africa suggests that while there are dimensions of contemporary conflicts that are unfamiliar, and although elders may bemoan the novelty of unruly youth in the contemporary era, contemporary conflicts are nonetheless the latest contests over a gerontocratic patriarchy that has long been unsteady. Given the scope of this dissertation, in my discussion here I focus disproportionally on the work of scholars who have examined conflicts over power and in the realms of kinship, gender, and domesticity.

Early colonial and ethnographic accounts of Southern African social life suggest “a static tableau of untroubled patriarchy” (Carton 2000: 7) wherein elder men both mobilized and monopolized the productive and reproductive capacities of women and youth to consolidate their power (e.g. Bryant 1929; Schapera 1966 [1947]; Cook 1934a).71 The accuracy of this precolonial

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71 Interestingly, a very early account by Ludwig Alberti, an infantry officer in the Batavian Republic at the Cape, provides a more measured depiction of gender relations among the Xhosa than do later works. He writes “although
patriarchy has been increasingly questioned by more recent scholars (see McClendon 2002; Berger 1994; Eldredge 1994; Murray 1981) who have critiqued this inflexible and timeless patriarchy on multiple fronts. In his study of the impact of labour migration on the family in Lesotho, for instance, Colin Murray reminds us that in discussing family and gender in Southern Africa,

> The past in this sense is a more or less hypothetical base-line, a reconstruction of traditional society which is contingent on our relative ignorance of pre-colonial conditions and which is largely derived from ethnographies conceived within a synchronic and functionalist paradigm. Such reconstruction is therefore undertaken with reluctance and with uneasy awareness that any simple periodization of pre-colonial and colonial society or of pre-capitalist and capitalist social formations can seldom accommodate the complexities with which we have to deal (1981: 100).

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Eldredge (1994) takes issue with the rigidity of the gender hierarchy presumed in these accounts by arguing that women's social position in relation to men should not be understood simply through a framework of inequality, as the pursuit of family security was a primary consideration for women. That being said, many older men in Mhlambini - and in South

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the supremacy of the male generally expresses itself decidedly and clearly, the woman is nevertheless in possession of a certain gentle authority which she exercises over the man, and by means of which she obtains influence and standing. This power is undoubtedly based upon respect. The women are completely excluded from deliberations which deal with the general welfare of the tribe, so that their presence is in fact not tolerated. (...). On the other hand, the influence of the woman in domestic affairs is very conspicuous. She participates in the right of disposal of the common means and not infrequently guides the mind of the man who never disposes of the meanest trifle without having assured himself of her consent” (1968 [1807]: 59). On attitudes of the young towards the elderly, Alberti emphasizes a sense of obligation and respect between young to old.

72 Although Murray's work is largely beyond the scope of this dissertation, his analytic approach to “family” as a subject of enquiry is admirably critical, especially for his time.
Africa generally - nostalgically embrace such an imagined past, drawing on the moral force of this patriarchal fantasy to justify their attempts at retaining authority in the community today.

Contemporary scholars are more confident, however, that the early colonial era was characterized by considerable intergenerational and intergendered conflict. Initially, this owed in large part to the resistance of African communities to colonial efforts to impose capitalist relations through policy and force (Carton 2000; Beinart & Bundy 1987; Marks & Atmore 1980; Guy 1979). Yet scholars have also shown how contemporary gerontocratic patriarchies in South Africa arose out of a complex interplay of resistance and accommodation between African patriarchs and colonial administrators, with both sides deploying essentialized and inflexible notions of African “tradition” to shape African patriarchy in ways which constrained women and youth (Carton 2000; 1998; McKittrick 1996; Jeater 1993; Walker 1990; Chanock 1982).

Referencing Chanock, in her frequently-cited study of gender and the migrant labour system, for instance, Walker writes “the colonial system of customary law was a result 'of a process not only of selective understanding by colonial officials but also of selective presentation of claims by African witnesses who were invariably male elders - chiefs and married men’” (Walker 1990: 182, citing Chanock 1982: 66). On the ensuing gender order and its emphasis on the “traditional” gender relations which men and elders frequently reference, Walker writes “the reinvented ideology of female deference to men that characterized the new 'traditionalism' was reinforced by the assumptions of female inferiority and domesticity that informed gender ideology in white society” (1990: 192).73 In addition to codifying gender hierarchy and difference, customary law and related notions of tradition also reinforced generational hierarchies (McClendon 2002).

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The entrenchment of African communities into capitalist relations was amplified dramatically with the development of diamond mining at Kimberley in the 1860s, the discovery of huge gold deposits in the Rand in the 1886, and the subsequent extension of British imperialism throughout much of Southern Africa (McClendon 2002; Walker 1990). Policies such as the 1913 Land Act severely limited the availability of agricultural land for non-Whites, thus undermining agricultural sustainability and further drawing Africans into capitalist relations. As colonial governance gave way to industrialization and de-agrarianization, generational and gender relations were fundamentally transformed in ways which had powerful implications in the domestic realm (see, for instance, McClendon 2002; Mager 1999; Barnes 1992; Beinart & Bundy 1987; Wilson et al. 1952, specifically on de-agrarianization see in particular Bank & Qambata 1999). On the one hand, access to cash wages afforded some younger men new-found independence from their elders, particularly as they were no longer beholden to their fathers to supply the bridewealth necessary for their marriage (Cockerton 2002; McClendon 2002; Murray 1980, 1977). Colin Murray, for instance, bluntly states that “increased participation in wage labour (...) altered the balance of authority between the senior and the junior generations in favour of the latter” (1977: 79), while Roth, in a discussion of the “inverted intergenerational contract” in capitalist Africa, states that “the possibility to finance their existences independently of their elders (...) allows young people to challenge age and gender hierarchies and thus make the formerly absolute [generational] debt relative and negotiable” (2008: 65, also Cole 2004). Hylton White captures the generational impacts of many of these transformations nicely in the following:

Along with the instability and indignity this [migrant labour] system imposed on African families, it also framed new moral issues concerning the dispositions of
young men. Conquest, dispossession, and proletarianization undermined not just independent agricultural production but the concentrations of cattle wealth too that had subjugated male youth to their fathers and other patrons in precolonial communities. Wages rather than elders were now the primary source from which youth acquired the bridewealth to marry. In part, this served to free them from the burdens of gerontocracy. But is also meant the work of reproducing African households, along with all the relations and identities such domestic realms enfolded, depended now on what they chose to do with the money they earned (2004: 154).

Many earlier scholars saw this era as characterized by a marked decline in young peoples' respect for elder generations (e.g. Carton 2000; Schapera 1966 [1947]), and some scholars have noted significant reshaping of generational relations among the Xhosa concurrent with the increasing proletarianization of the region (e.g. Beinart 1991; Mayer 1978). Certainly the way that young people in Mhlambini reflect on the relationship between respect and money supports this observation; in the words of Unathi, “if you are an old person and you don't have money, and you're asking me for money, it's gonna be hard for me to respect you.”

Labour migration also had a significant but highly complex impact on gender relations (Hunter 2010; Boehm 2006; Mager 1999; Walker 1990; Mayer 1980). On the one hand, labour migration meant that married couples spent much of their time apart, often causing marital strain but also potentially affording rural wives more freedom from their husband's demands (Walker 1990; Murray 1980; 1977, specifically on marital strain and breakdown, see Mayer 1980; Wilson 1975; Schapera 1966 [1947]). Moreover, the prolonged absence of male household heads also
affected intergenerational relationships between women who remained in rural areas. In an analysis of rising bridewealth costs alongside increased labour migration in Lesotho, for instance, Colin Murray has written that “a consequence of oscillating migration is that in many households it is women who assume effective managerial responsibilities. In this capacity their abiding interest is to establish and maintain claims on the labour of the junior generation.” Yet the rural-dwelling wife of a labour migrant was also increasingly dependent on him for financial support, and access to wages became more necessary for survival. As Ann Kelk Mager (1999) documents with respect to the Ciskei, women experienced a sharp decline in social status, as their reproductive capacities became an increasing burden in a cash economy. She attributes a sharp increase in gendered violence and in the abandonment of women and children as key consequences of a decline in the value of women’s fertility. Moreover, as elder men's control over younger men weakened, control of women became the most powerful hold that elder men retained over their juniors (Cockerton 2002; Walker 1990). Thus, as Belinda Bozzoli reminds us, labour migrancy altered but also reproduced existing gender inequalities (Bozzoli 1987). Referring specifically to the Eastern Cape, Zolani Ngwane similarly reminds us that in the Cape, “the resources accruing with modernity – in the form of jobs- provided the very possible conditions of maintaining the lifestyles people associated with tradition” (2004: 169). From the late 1800s through the height of Apartheid, a system was thus consolidated wherein an African man established authority over a rural home through acquiring the financial resources to marry and set up a homestead, and then retained his authority through ongoing financial support of rural kin.

Although on a smaller scale, industrialization also afforded opportunities for some women to escape rural domesticity and unhappy marriages through informal migration to urban
areas (see Worden 2012; Mager 1999; Moodie with Ndatshe 1994; Jeater 1996; Bozzoli & Nkotsoe 1992; Bonner 1990; Walker 1990; Van Onselen 1982; Pauw 1973 [1963]). Accounts suggest that both colonial administrators and rural patriarchs were deeply concerned about female migration, the former that the increased presence of African women in urban areas would bring moral decay,\(^7\) and the latter primary that social reproduction of the rural homestead would be curtailed. Cherryl Walker, for instance, writes that

As the efficacy of internalized social sanctions began to break down, chiefs, fathers and husbands felt compelled to turn to more overt forms of control over women's mobility. In this process they frequently turned to colonial administrators for assistance, to form a curious alliance -an alliance based on very different objectives for the two parties but nevertheless threaded through with a unifying presumption of male power over women” (1990: 180).

In his ethnography of urbanization and identity in East London Leslie Bank writes that single urban women “seemed to provoke fear and anxiety in minds of city officials, who saw these women and their bodies as tempting, but also as a threat to male order, self-discipline and the ability of the state to discipline the city” (2011: 163). Gendered policies limiting the mobility of women through pass laws and changes to Customary Law reflect these anxieties (e.g. Walker 1990; Guy 1982; Chanock 1982).

Interestingly, a number of scholars also point to increased gender antagonism, and at times violence among Africans during this period (e.g. Mager 1999; Beinart 1991; Walker 1990;

\(^7\)This point of view was not, seemingly, restricted to colonial administrators. Even anthropologists such as Schapera and Wilson offered harsh critiques of “town women” during the mid-20th Century (see Schapera 1966 [1947]; Hunter 1961 [1936])
Mayer 1971, Schapera 1966 [1947]). In the early 1970s, for instance, Philip Mayer wrote that “there are signs of a war between the patriarchal aspirations of the men on the one hand and the independent tendencies of their wives, sons, and daughters on the other” (1971: 37). In her detailed social history of the Ciskei (the other Xhosa former-Bantustan, besides Transkei), Ann Kelk Mager notes that

Through the late 1940s and 1950s, the courts repeatedly noted that men adopted the view that they were entitled to rape (...) Sexually violent behaviour can be seen as stemming from men's (and boys') investing in masculinities constructed as power over women. For many sexually violent men manhood was given expression in a context where they felt thwarted in their ability to fulfil masculine ideals. Nor were they a small, pathological fringe. Those who invested in aggressive male identities and brutalized women were often “ordinary men” acting out their sexuality as a relation of dominance over women” (1999: 183-184).

The relationship of male to female and old to young was in great flux.

More recent work on gendered and generational contests in Southern Africa has focused on the ways in which the migrant labour system has slowly disintegrated as a viable option for the maintenance of a rural homestead. With far fewer jobs in the mining industry and no significant industries coming to replace mining as the main employer of the uneducated working class, large-scale unemployment now characterizes most low-income communities, both urban and rural (see Bank 2011; Hunter 2010, 2007). Zolani Ngwane (2004), for instance, has recently discussed conflicts in the village of Cancele, where generational contests between older and younger men are manifesting themselves in contests of the value of school and Xhosa initiation,
given the lack of opportunities for young men to achieve socially-valued manhood in any other way. Meanwhile, with few men to take on the role of provider - not to mention a reluctance on the part of many young women to submit to conjugal control - women are finding new ways of supporting themselves and their children, thus further reframing gender relations. Mark Hunter, for instance, provides ample ethnographic discussion of women who balance multiple concurrent relationships where care, love, and provision of material support are inextricably entwined (Hunter 2010, 2007, 2002), while Leslie Bank discusses women who are “married to the state” (2011: 182-186), relying on social grants rather than husband's salaries to meet their daily needs. Moreover, in a discussion of the changing livelihood strategies of Basotho women in the early 21st Century, Christian Boehm (2006) provides ethnographic evidence to suggest that alongside constricted employment prospects for young men, the women fortunate enough to find jobs are making the most of the social capital that accompanies access to cash. Both the circumstances of such unemployed youth and the role of social grants have been extensively explored in the previous chapter. There may thus be reason to think that this heralds an era where intergenerational conflicts are particularly acute, especially as recent literature on generation suggests that times of economic strife are often characterized by heightened generational tensions (Vigh 2006).

All of this literature is relevant for understanding gendered generational conflicts in Mhlambini, as Mhlambini is a quintessential example of the sort of rural reserve discussed: remote, economically-marginalized, lacking in jobs, governed through traditional structures of

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75More on this in the forthcoming chapter on marriage.
authority, and integrated several generations ago into circuits of migrant labour. I turn now to several ethnographic examples of contemporary intergenerational conflicts.

The Alcohol Ban

In February 2012, after a year of fieldwork, I left the village for several weeks to pursue archival research in Grahamstown and Cape Town. Upon my return to the community I learned of a surprising development: the community (meaning, the village elders through consensus-reaching deliberation at a series of community meetings) had banned the sale and public consumption of alcohol after sunset. This came as a surprise to me, as I had not been aware of any such discussion prior to my departure. This was big news, and I wanted to know why and how this ban had been implemented.

When I initially asked about what had prompted the alcohol ban, the mother of the family I lived with told me that the ban had been implemented as a response to several violent alcohol-related incidents that had taken place in the village in preceding months. Although this could seem like a plausible motivating factor for the ban, there were several reasons why I was skeptical that this was the whole story. It was true that several young people had been killed or injured in alcohol-related altercations over the December holidays, but the last death (by stabbing, in a drunken fight among young men at a local shebeen) had happened several months before, and conversation surrounding the death had fizzled out quickly. To the best of my knowledge no one had even suggested trying to stop the family that ran the shebeen from selling alcohol, and, other than the dead man's mother, no one seemed particularly surprised or concerned when the perpetrators were released from prison after four days on a technicality.76

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76Based on what I have seen and heard, this sort of lax law enforcement is typical.
Rather, overall I was struck by the banality of violence in the community; violent altercations—especially those involving alcohol—were treated as unfortunate but inevitable. Moreover, older men themselves valorized violence that had been a feature of their youth. For instance, when asked to tell their life stories for the Storytelling Project; many older men nostalgically (and independently of one another) brought up an *idhabi* (“battle;” interestingly, a young bilingual local man who was present for one of these stories translated this term as “war of the boys”) that had taken place at some point in the past, during which young men from Mhlambini had been feuding with young men from across the river. I recall, for instance, when one old man enthusiastically pulled up his shirt and showed me the grisly scar that ran diagonally across his back from right shoulder-blade to left hip, which he had apparently got from taking an axe in the back during this long-ago battle. Moreover, ethnographic evidence supports the view that aggressive masculinity has long been an integral part of Xhosa male socialization. In an article on peer socialization among the Xhosa, for instance, Mayer and Mayer describe just such an *idhabi*:

Battles are fairly rare occasions, but boys recall them singly in detail with a mixture of awe and glee. It is not unknown for a boy to be killed, maimed, or permanently crippled in the course of a battle. Such incidents are mentioned with regret but not as any argument against the battles as such (1970: 171).

I was also inclined to suspect that elders had other motives for the ban besides preventing interpersonal violence because of the explicit connection that they often made between young peoples’ alcohol-consumption and what they perceived as a decline in young people's respect for
them. During the profiling research we did not explicitly ask any questions about attitudes towards alcohol or patterns of consumption, yet mature adults and elders frequently brought up young people's drinking as a major problem when we asked questions such as “how do you feel about the behaviour of young people in the community?” or “are you experiencing any difficulties as a household?” Consider the following excerpts from among dozens of statements made by adults and elders regarding young peoples' consumption of alcohol:

_The behaviour of young men and young women has changed. They like alcohol now, which was not the case in the past. I would like to see a law passed that would limit the alcohol consumption of both taxi drivers and youth in a way that is acceptable to the elders of this village (Elderly man)_

_The young ones are not doing well. They're different from when I was young. They have no respect for their parents; young girls fall pregnant at a young age, and young boys drink a lot of alcohol (middle-aged wife and mother)._ 

_Young people today are different from us. They have no respect. They drink alcohol even though they're young (Elderly man)._ 

_Young people don't behave well. They're rude, and they kill each other. The young men are always drunk, which is why they do these things. It wasn't always like this... (Elderly woman)._ 

For many older people, such complaints dovetailed with anxieties about teenage pregnancy, HIV transmission, multiple partnerships (especially in the case of young women), rape, and theft. Of course, alcohol consumption can have indirect yet destructive effects on communities, for instance by syphoning off income that could be used for food, school fees, and other
It might be tempting to assume, therefore, that older people view alcohol consumption as socially destructive in other ways besides being a potential catalyst for physical violence, and that they banned alcohol consumption in hopes of curtailing these destructive effects. I will show that there is some reason to suspect that this is one of the motivations for the ban, yet it cannot be the whole story because the elders did not ban alcohol sale and consumption across the board, but rather only within certain temporal parameters. Everyone young and old was, at least in theory, free to purchase and drink alcohol as they wished during daylight hours.

There are several reasons why the elders would not have banned the sale and consumption of alcohol full-stop, although doing so would probably be the most effective means of limiting the potentially harmful outcomes of excessive drinking. Firstly, alcohol consumption is a central aspect of older peoples' sociality in Mhlambini, with the exception of the Christian minority. Secondly and more importantly, certain patterns of alcohol consumption are closely associated with patriarchal gerontocratic authority (McAllister 2006, Akyeampong 2002, Bryceson 2002; Willis 2002).

The consumption of traditional beer plays an important role in both the social and ceremonial life of traditionalists, and has for a long time (on the significance of beer among the Bomvana see Cook 1934a, 1931; Davies 1927, for Xhosa more generally see McAllister 2006, 2001, 1993, for Southern Africa see Mager 2010; Crush & Ambler 1992). Earlier anthropological studies outline in great detail complex rules of association and status that govern who may drink with whom and how much alcohol hosts are expected to provide to particular guests, as well as many other ritually significant social divisions that have historically been reinforced through drinking practices. Some of this complex ritual practice appears to have been abandoned since the early 20th Century, or else was not apparent to me given that the ritual life of
the Bomvana was not my research focus, and although I attended many *umgidi* (beer-drink rituals) I did not ask as many questions as I might otherwise have done regarding the rules governing modalities of alcohol-consumption.

Rituals, according to Jean and John Comaroff, should not be “reduced to a species of ceremonial action that insulates enchanted, self-reproducing systems from the “real” world” (1993: vxi), but should rather be approached as “a vital element in the processes that make and remake social facts and collective identities” (ibid.). *Umgidi* are important social and ritual events of this sort, where adherence to so-called traditional practices is most strongly enforced, sustained, and reproduced. Traditionalists believe that ancestors are present and partake at these events, thus providing strong impetus to observe and enact gendered and age hierarchies which are framed as traditional. As such, gendered spatial boundaries are observed more strictly than in other social contexts, and most people dress with care in their traditional best. Although I was typically free to dress as I wished in the community, at *umgidi* I was always expected to wear traditional skirts and head-wraps, and was once scolded by a group of older women for neglecting to wear my ankle beads. When I once asked why I had to cover my hair at *umgidi* although I am not married, I was told that I must cover my hair because of the ancestors. In other words, the ancestors prefer covered hair on women, and I ought to accommodate their preference out of respect for both my hosts and their ancestors. In short, *umgidi* were one of the few contexts where local women were pointed and explicit in their expectations for how I should present and conduct myself.

At *umgidi*, alcohol is allocated based on complex rules which reproduce and reinforce hierarchies of gender and age (McAllister 2006, 2001; Davies 1927; Cook 1934a, 1931). According to Bank and Qambata,
Within the matrix of a patriarchal world of male power and authority, the beer drink constituted a critical 'backstage' area where male consensus was forged and male public opinion tested. They were also important forums for the ritualised enactment of generational power and respect” (1999: 115).

Figure 5: Mother and son at an umgidi. Elder men are in the background, while young men sit at a distance, excluded from the festivities.

As such, men generally receive more alcohol than women, and older people receive more alcohol than younger people. Old women will usually be allocated much more alcohol than young men, while unmarried women and young wives rarely attend at all unless the umgidi is being hosted by their family, in which case they will be hard at work filling buckets of traditional beer. Widows of any age frequently attend, and the amount of alcohol that they are allocated seems contingent on chronological age and family size. Drunkenness is warmly tolerated in
older people, but I have seen older men scold young, drunk men at umgidi. Umgidi always take place during the day, and are usually all-day events. The first guests usually begin arriving around 10 am, and activity really picks up by mid-day. By late afternoon people are typically drunk and hungry, and they begin to meander on home.

Besides ritual beer drinks, many older people drink alcohol on any given day, provided they have the means. If one visits one of the local shebeens at a time of the month when there is likely to be cash in the community, one will usually find a group of older people drinking jabulani (a kind of sour, frothy maize beer that is brewed at home) or chibuku (a store-bought version that comes in a one-litre carton) playing with their youngest grandchildren, smoking pipes, and chatting, and it is not unusual to run into inebriated elders of both sexes making their way home in the mid-afternoon sunshine, or to find them napping off a morning's drinking in their yards. This is noteworthy because it illustrates that banning alcohol consumption after dark does not obstruct the alcohol-related sociality that is an integral part of the social lives of older people in the community.

Drinking in shebeens differs from drinking at umgidi in a number of important ways. The ancestors are not actively honoured at shebeens, so respect for gendered and generational spatial boundaries are more relaxed than at umgidi. There is a wide variation among the seven shebeens in the village as to how strictly these boundaries are adhered to by patrons, and this is reflected somewhat in both their material structure and their clientele. Stricter shebeens are considered more traditional, are usually only open during the day, and usually consist of one-room rondavels with dung floors. They will not have a radio or generator-powered sound system, unlike the two least traditional shebeens and the bar at the backpacker lodge. In the more traditional shebeens, the only patrons will be older men and older women. Upon entering one of these shebeens, one
will likely find older men sitting on benches or beer crates along the left-hand wall, with the
eldest nearest to the door. Older women -sometimes with baby grandchildren on their laps- will
mirror the men along the right-hand wall, but will usually be sitting on grass mats on the ground.
The men will be to the left and the women on the right if one is standing in the doorway looking
in. Looking towards the door from the inside, the women are to the left and the men to the right.

Less traditional shebeens are more relaxed. Prior to the ban they typically became even more
relaxed after dark, when younger people (including some unmarried women) were more likely to
attend. Thus, the primary impact of the ban was to curtail younger people's sociality, as they are
more inclined to drink in the evenings, at non-traditional shebeens. Given that young people are
socially and spatially marginalized at umgidi (and because they do not get allocated much beer),
this forum for alcohol-related sociality is less appealing to them. Moreover, those few young
people who have jobs are not able to drink during the day, while older people are retired from
work and have both the leisure time and the pension money to devote to drinking. Given that the
alcohol ban marginalized the young more than the old, I was inclined to suspect that generational
power struggles were at stake.

Ample ethnographic and historical evidence supports my contention that contests over
alcohol consumption reflect longstanding anxieties about generational power and social change
Writing about the Nyakyusa in Tanzania in the mid-20th-Century, for instance, Monica Wilson
located changing patterns of alcohol consumption alongside the rise of migrant labour and the
cash economy as being central to a breakdown of generational authority among the Nyakyusa
(Wilson 1977, 1963). She explicitly references the kinds of sociality engaged in by young male
drinkers as being subversive acts in and of themselves (also Suggs 2001). Quoting an elder, she
writes “young men returning from work have less respect for seniors than formerly. What brings disrespect is beer; formerly the young did not drink beer, but now they come with their own money and buy drink” (1977: 93) On a related note, others have similarly pointed out that the availability of industrially-brewed beer in a wage economy undermines the meanings of patriarchy and gerontocracy that are symbolized through traditional beer consumption (Suggs 2001; Wilson 1963).

Lucky for the anthropologist, it was easy to draw people into conversations about the ban, as it was a source of considerable resentment among young people, especially young men. Talking to young people reaffirmed my suspicion that the ban was indeed related to generational contests. When I asked young men why they thought the elders had banned alcohol, none of them referred to either physical violence or the socially destructive effects of alcohol as a possible motivation. Rather, they emphasized generational antagonisms. Consider the following:

Mbeko (age 26): “It’s these old people in the community. Ja, I think they’re fighting against the ulutsha [youth].”

Thandikhaya (age 27): I think these old ones want to make us sick with stress!

Xolise (age 30): “I think that these old men are fighting with us because we young people drink industrial] beer; you see? And they drink Jabulani. They drink it in the village, and they knock off whatever time they want to knock off. So I think the problem is they have with us is that we’re drinking modern beer, not Jabulani. ”

The observation made by Xolise in particular indicates that the alcohol ban is about far more than curtailing the destructive impacts of alcohol. Rather, it points to the possibility that it is not alcohol, but the type of alcohol, how it is consumed, and what it symbolizes that is a problem. Due to its association with urban areas, I suggest that industrial beer as opposed to traditional
beer is seen as manifesting a shift in patterns of consumption and of values more generally, one that symbolizes for older people a decay of gerontocratic tradition. Moreover, the type of sociality associated with young people's drinking further undermine gerontocratic authority, as it takes place in clandestine informal shebeens where gendered and generational spatial boundaries are relaxed, and where access to drink is allocated according to ability to buy rather than age or gender.

In the introduction to an edited volume on the history, patterns, and significance of alcohol consumption in Africa Bryceson (2002) makes the similar observation that clear, bottled beers are symbolically associated with modernity, and with freedom from “traditional spiritual beliefs” (5). As such, by banning the sale and consumption of alcohol after dark, elders are curtailing a practice through which shifts away from gerontocratic authority are sustained and produced. A similar observation is made by David Suggs (2001) in reference to younger and older men's drinking patterns in bars in Mochudi, Botswana. In explaining why older men tend to frequent bars in the afternoon, and younger men in the evening, he proposes that “older men avoided them because they are iconic of the changes which have stripped them of the control of resources compared to younger white-collar professionals” (248). Perhaps owing to the comparatively greater economic power of the BaKgatla youth discussed in his research, BaKgatla elders are less able to limit young men's consumption of and sociality surrounding alcohol than are the elders in Mhlambini.

Furthermore, alcohol consumption and masculinity are tightly linked in South Africa (Mfecane 2011; Mager 2010; Kaminer & Dixon 1995; Campbell 1992). Scholars have variously claimed that “men consider drinking to be a right ascribed in masculinity even if achieved by adulthood” (Suggs 2001: 242). In an engaging study of the “identity dilemmas” faced by HIV-
positive South African men who are advised to stop drinking for the sake of their treatment, Mfecane writes that drinking “is not a simple matter of material consumption; it is an important arena for men to perform the culturally acclaimed markers of masculinity” (2011: 8). Moreover, in neighbouring Botswana David Suggs has observed that men continue to see alcohol consumption as an important form of earned male privilege, although increasingly attained by earning cash income rather than by achieving a venerable age (2001, 1996). This is insulting and disruptive to the authority of older men, who feel that they have earned their right to masculine status and thus to drinking alcohol in ways which young men have not.

In the case of older men in Mhlambini, while they are poor by South African standards, most have nonetheless achieved many long-held markers of adulthood: they worked long, hard years in mines, married and supported families, and have now reached a venerable age. To their minds, they have earned the right to spend their pensions and leisure time on drinking, and deserve respect from young men. By contrast, due primarily to economic and social circumstances largely beyond their control, most younger men in the village have not managed to achieve these markers of status, and in the current climate it seems that many may never manage to do so (see Hunter 2010; Hunter 2006; Hansen 2005). Like Bonginkosi discussed in the previous chapter, many of them have children whom they lack the means to support, although the mothers of these children may periodically direct financial demands towards their extended families. This non-support further undermines their being viewed as real men (Hunter 2010; Lee 2009; Campbell 1994). Yet performing masculinity though alcohol consumption might be especially appealing to men who have had little success in achieving other socially-valued markers of manhood such as earning a steady wage, and supporting girlfriends and children. For such men, and there are many in and around Mhlambini, the alcohol ban undermines one of their
few avenues for exercising masculine dignity. The ban thus heightens intergenerational conflicts among men.

While the alcohol ban is an interesting example of intergenerational conflict in and of itself, responses to the ban amongst young people -especially young men- are also meaningful in terms of what they imply for the future of intergenerational negotiation in Mhlambini. Shortly after the ban, a number of young men suggested that it is necessary for young people to make their own organization that is analogous to the community meetings for older people. Through this organization they would be able to govern themselves, setting their own consequences for transgressions such as public drunkenness and theft, which currently garner criticism and punishment from the elders. Secondarily, as a collectivity they would be better able to mobilize to challenge the authority of the elders. Other than a local football team there seemed to be no formalized associations composed exclusively of youth.

Interestingly, when I returned again to the community after a year of writing, there was still talk of collective mobilization and association among the youth. While it was mentioned to me again that it was necessary to establish a more cohesive youth organization, young people in Mhlambini had taken some action towards collective mobilization. The event that catalysed this was the creation of eight new jobs through the Coast Care branch of the CWP. As touched upon briefly in Chapter two, the CWP is a government job-creation scheme through which low-income South Africans work eight days per month for minimum wage. The kinds of work that CWP employees engage in vary, and depend in part on whether they are administered through an organization such as the local NGO, or through municipal avenues. Usually they consist of jobs that require no specialized skills or training, such as picking up litter on the beach or filling potholes. I was told by the NGO director that these new opportunities through the CWP came
about because the federal government had decided to expand their program to create more jobs, with the underlying motive of garnering votes for the ANC in the upcoming election.

All local people employed through the CWP, whether the job is administered through the NGO or through municipal bureaucracy, have been chosen at community meetings. As explained in previous chapters, this is the way that all jobs at the NGO and the backpacker lodge have been filled since the inception of both organizations, barring the few positions that require specialized skills. It was explained to me that when the CWP program was developed, it was decided by “the community” that the jobs would go to older people with no support, the reason being that “young people are still young, and their time will come.” The implicit judgement seemed, to me, to be that older people without support had been failed by both their children and the state, while young people ought to be able to support themselves. In a conversation about the impact of money on “respect” in the community, one young woman explicitly referenced the community's hiring policy as evidence that older people are trying to limit young people's access to these jobs so as to limit their authority and independence in the community.

As previously mentioned, the decisions reached and actions taken through the gerontocratic and patriarchal community meeting forum are always referred to as the actions and decisions of “the community,” thereby indexing the marginality of youth and women in many local affairs. It is perhaps also relevant that the administration of both the NGO and the backpacker lodge attempt as much as possible to work through avenues of local authority. When problems arise, for instance, local elders are always informed and mobilized. For example, at one point several female tourists were harassed by a man from a neighbouring village when they went hiking to a secluded beach some few kilometres up the coast. The administration of the backpacker lodge put up a sign in the lodge informing guests of this issue, and explaining that
they were currently working with elders from the neighbouring village to address the situation. I venture that this in part reflects the commitment of Steve and Aisha to respect the local community and at the same time minimize their impact on modifying practices and norms. Yet some younger people in the community evidently feel alienated by the alliance between elders, the NGO, and the backpacker lodge. A young man who was particularly outspoken about the need for youth to collectively mobilize used the example of wanting to know how much money the CWP manager – the NGO's HR manager- receives from the government, pointing out that older people will not be concerned about this sort of thing because they “never went to school.”

When the new job opportunities opened up through the CWP in May of 2013, a community meeting was held to discuss who should fill the positions. Although young people are typically discouraged from actively participating in these meetings, some young people actually toyi-toyied at the community meeting to protest this gerontocratic protectionism. Toyi-toyi is a South African style of protest dance and chant that was popular during anti-colonial and the anti-Apartheid protests. In the democratic era, groups of protesters often toyi-toyi outside of government buildings to express grievances and to protest unpopular policies (Nevitt 2005). To my surprise, most young people whom I spoke to identified a local young woman in her late 20s as the primary mobilizing force behind this protest. It is noteworthy that young men seemed to approve of her doing so, indicating a sense of generational solidarity among the youth concurrent with considerable gendered antagonism among local young people. The ultimate outcome was that the elders agreed to hire some young people in those positions, thus achieving a small victory for the youth in the community

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77Interestingly, this man himself has never been to school either.
Figure 6: CWP employees collecting rubbish on the beach following a severe storm. Newly-hired young people at the front, elders trail behind.

Besides being an interesting ethnographic example of current generational conflicts in Mhlambini, young people's discussion of establishing official youth organizations is especially interesting when read alongside the largely overlooked body of literature on youth organizations in the former Ciskei and Transkei (see Mager 1998; Beinart 1991; Mayer 1972, 1970). In one of several essays in which Philip Mayer describes these organizations, he describes them as

Institutions of rural Xhosa-speaking people which cater especially for youth (boys, young men and unmarried girls), and which the people themselves liken to “schools.” Unlike schools, however, they are run by youth for youth; adults have scarcely anything to do with them (...) The organizations are largely concerned with (...) activities such as dancing, singing, drinking, stick games, sweethearting and boyish fighting. But their significance goes much deeper than this might suggest. The youth are in fact exercising a kind of corporate
autonomy, with responsibility for themselves and each other. Within the framework they are helping to socialise, control and discipline each other, and learning to interpret their sex roles along traditional lines (1972: 1).

Although historical and ethnographic accounts suggest that these organizations flourished within the living memory of some of the older people in Mhlambini, I saw no evidence of such organizations existing today. Moreover, I have found little explanation for why they seem to be defunct. The one exception is the work of Bank and Qambata, whose interviews indicate that in a rural community near East London, these organizations were actively banned in the 1970s by a particularly zealous Christian headman (Bank & Qambata 1999, also Bank 2002). Nor have I found any explanation for why they no longer seem to exist. These organizations appear to have come about as South Africa industrialized, and flourished during the height of Apartheid. Significantly, from the mid-20th Century all authors explain that these organizations became increasingly violent, both towards one another and towards women, with fighting prowess and (often violent) sexual conquest increasingly fused with masculine identity (see Mager 1999; Beinart 1991; Mayer & Mayer 1972a, 1972b). In a fascinating historical analysis of youth organizations in Ciskei and Transkei between 1945 and 1960, historian Ann Mager links the prominence and violence of these organizations to the ample body of literature which analyzes violent masculinity in contemporary South Africa. She writes, “in these texts, African men are represented as emasculated by the structural violence of Apartheid, migrant labour and broken families” (1999: 654), stating that although these texts are not concerned with the literature on age organizations in the former Xhosa homelands, they nonetheless “begin to open up the

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78 A vast body of literature advances an argument along these lines. See, for instance Moffett 2006, Campbell 1992.
complex meanings of being a boy and becoming a man in the Rural Eastern Cape” (ibid). On their apparent profusion during industrialization, she proposes that “the process of gendering male youth was severely disrupted by the absence of economic security in manhood” (ibid: 666). Citing Judith Butler, Mager concludes that the development of violent youth organizations was an avenue for emasculated youth to perform masculinity.

I find this literature informative because it seems that these age organizations arose at a time when intergenerational relationships were being transformed through industrialization, and that they offered young men a forum through which to exercise power over their juniors. It is interesting, therefore, that young men are proposing to re-establish youth organizations in Mhlambini just when intergenerational relationships are again being transformed, this time through the decline of access to wage labour. While this literature on age sets productively informs current contexts, Mager's analysis in particular identifies a key difference between older conflicts and contemporary ones: in the past, fathers apparently defended their son's fighting as natural and age-appropriate. As the following example will demonstrate, intergenerational conflicts may be taking a violent turn in Mhlambini, but so far elders are not naturalizing the aggression expressed by some young men.

**Stabbing an Elder**

In the fall of 2013, some money went missing from a local family-run shop. Suspicion pointed to some teenaged boys in the family, and these boys were summoned to one of the family's huts to discuss the issue. These boys evidently knew that they were in trouble, and upon entering the hut one of them pulled out a knife and stabbed his grandfather in the head. The stabbing was not fatal, the money was recovered, and the boys were forgiven.
I was not present for this violent altercation, and only learned about it second-hand (from a number of sources) and after the fact. I was nonetheless shocked to learn that a young person had actually acted out violently towards an elder, especially seemingly sober. This was not however, the only case of monetary theft that took place in the village during my fieldwork. It seems relevant that in all the incidents of theft that I am aware of, the perpetrators were young men who put a lot of emphasis on stylish self-presentation despite being unemployed. Given that the conflict stemmed from the theft of money, it is safe to assume that this is a particularly violent example of the sort of conflict over resources that has been a focus of this chapter. This event can thus be seen as a manifestation of the violent potential of youth in an era of few prospects and great frustration. Picking up a thread from the previous chapter, much of the literature on contemporary youth in Africa suggests a relationship between a state of stunted adulthood, and ideas of modernity that are linked to material affluence and patterns of consumption (Hansen 2005; Masquelier 2005; Burgess 2002; Cole 2004; Gondola 1999). Cole (2004), for instance, discusses the frustration of many young people in Africa, who struggle with being addressed as consumers who lack the resources to consume. The examples of theft suggest that many of the generational conflicts among men in Mhlambini stem from young men's desire to perform some of the status associated with stylish, cosmopolitan masculinity.

The examples from this chapter focus primarily on conflicts among older and younger men over livelihood, access to resources, and masculine identity and status. The example of the young woman who spearheaded the movement to allocate jobs democratically rather than gerontocratically is perhaps the most notable exception. This is in itself telling of gendered nature of intergenerational conflicts in Mhlambini: there seems to be greater solidarity intergenerationally among women in Mhlambini than among men. Certainly greater
intergenerational solidarity among women is documented in a modest body of ethnographic work on contemporary South Africa, although the bulk of it has focused on urban women rather than rural ones (Lee 2009; Bank & Qambata 1999). I have two thoughts on this. Firstly, I am confident that intergenerational tensions exist among women, and I am also convinced that these tensions are more acute in the current economic and political context. However, these tensions manifest themselves through more indirect avenues, rather than violence and confrontation. As we have already seen in this chapter, violence and masculine identity are tightly linked. The subtle, indirect ways in which tensions between women are manifesting themselves will be more prominent in Chapters six and seven, which focus on rights and on *ukuthwala* (abduction marriage) respectively.

Yet I also reason, as will be particularly exemplified in the forthcoming chapter on rights, the relative lack of overt conflict between women has to do with very differing expectations that older women have for younger women, as opposed to older men for younger men. As Bonginkosi's circumstances exemplify, Bonginkosi's father had hoped that Bonginkosi would follow a similar life trajectory to that which he himself had taken, and he deems Bonginkosi disrespectful and lazy because he has not done so. In contrast, older women criticize their daughters for getting pregnant out of wedlock, but they also emphasize the difference between their lives and those of their daughters. They may hope that their daughters marry, but they also look at their school-going, trouser-wearing daughters and are able to imagine a very different future for them. Moreover, they can look to peers such as NoClinic and Nokwindla's mothers and see that educated, unmarried daughters can be an asset as opposed to a source of financial burden and shame. It is significant, I think, that while almost all the mature women in the village have little-to-no schooling, most local mothers strive to keep their daughters in school as long as
possible.\textsuperscript{79} And finally, and somewhat paradoxically poorly-educated young single mothers like Nomvula face anger and disappointment from parents when they become pregnant outside of marriage. Yet women like Nomvula’s mother can also identify with the experience of being abandoned by a man who failed to support his family, and can thus identify with their daughters to a greater degree.

\textsuperscript{79} See Hunter (2014) for discussion of township-dwelling Zulu mothers’ investment in their children’s education in the 1960s. The mothers he discusses are urban-dwelling, and many were single, so their impetuses for promoting education in their children may be different from those of mothers in Mhlambini. Nevertheless, in both contexts it appears that women have a particular investment in ensuring that their children become educated.
Chapter Five: Contested Femininities

As with other societies where social reproduction is bound up in a bridewealth system, in Mhlambini social institutions related to reproduction are premised on gendered concepts of sexuality that are deeply embedded in kinship. In other words, the institutions through which social reproduction is organized, notably marriage and the various practices and gendered conventions that buttress it, are most coherent when married women's sexuality is conceptualized as encompassed by her kin as opposed to an embodied capacity that women can exercise according to autonomous will (see Wardlow 2006a: 15-19). These institutions -and the power relations that are characteristic of them- are thus vulnerable where sexuality is thought of as an individually possessed erotic capacity. This has moral implications for how sexuality should be deployed and by whom, and frames the contexts in which it is appropriate or inappropriate to do so.

For example, throughout my fieldwork no issue garnered more criticism from elders than the possibility that a daughter might turn to police (or, perhaps, teachers, biomedical healthcare providers, or NGOs) in order to escape an arranged marriage. Not only was this hypothetical scenario considered a most grave form of disrespect, the mere possibility that young women had the option to do so was bewildering to many older people. 'Why should the government own my daughter rather than me?' was a common refrain among elders. Within the conceptual framework of South African constitutional law, forced marriage -and the sex that presumably accompanies it- are considered gross violations of a girl's autonomous right to bodily integrity. Yet few elders conceptualized moral right or sexuality primarily in this way.

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A number of cultural institutions speak to the way in which female sexuality is framed as a resource held by a woman's kinship network. For example, sexuality as socially-embedded is most evident through the seemingly-universal acceptance of the institution of intlawulo yesisu (‘damages’), where a man is expected to pay financial compensation to a girl's family for having impregnated her outside of wedlock (see Whooley 1975; Schapera 1966 [1947]; Wilson et al., 1952). While out-of-wedlock pregnancies are far more frequent than marriages among young people, I was told than in the rare situation where parents might marry after having a child together, the lobola payment would be less because the damages would serve as an initial payment to the wife's lineage for the transfer of her reproductive potential (see also Whitfield 1922).

That women's sexuality is considered a resource owned by her kinship network was also apparent in cases of compensation for rape. For example, Guma and I were once in a neighbouring village visiting a woman whose family had recently received financial compensation from the family of a man who had raped her at knife point. The village sub-headman had ordered the family of the perpetrator to pay the woman’s family compensation on his behalf, as the rapist was by that time in jail for an unrelated crime. As was often the case when confronted by women who had experienced harsh sexual violence, I struggled to reconcile the woman's composure and seeming calm outlook with my own horror at what she had experienced. Guma, who tried on several occasions to explain this cultural logic to me, said “Katie...I know it's strange to you, but in our culture, if they pay your family, you feel better. You can't feel like that, and me, I can't feel like that, because I am educated. But most people around here, it's like that [most people around here feel this way].” Yet again, Guma makes a connection between being educated, and being a more autonomous, independent self.
With this in mind, this chapter takes up the topic of social reproduction as an especially volatile point of gendered and generational conflict in Mhlambini. It will be seen that these are conflicts about sexuality and autonomy, in a context where reproductive personhood is deeply-embedded in relations of gendered and generational hierarchy. For many, these relationships are reinforced by ancestral beliefs which privilege gerontocracy and patriarchy as moral imperatives. Thus, gendered and generational hierarchies are both sustained and produced through institutions and practices which are themselves predicated on a socially-embedded female sexuality. As will be seen in the case of marriage, pressures to conform to these practices are especially acute in certain contexts, at the same time that exercising particular forms of autonomous personhood can be particularly transgressive of the gender and generational order. For example, a girl wearing trousers will be tolerated by most people, but a wife wearing trousers is an appalling affront to husband, in-laws, kin, and ancestors. I demonstrate this through a discussion of three related topics: young women's attitudes towards marriage, debates over the meaning of lobola (bridewealth), and debates over changing conventions of women's dress.

Such intergenerational disjuncture over rights, bodies, and sexuality must be understood both in the context of transformations in emic notions of sexuality over the course of the 20th Century, and much broader anxieties over sex in post-Apartheid South Africa. As we know from Foucault (1978), Western concepts of sex and sexuality are neither natural nor inevitable derivatives of human biology, but are rather “historical objects” (Weeks 1982: 112) which have emerged through the development of modern forms of rationality and governance. More recent scholars have drawn on Foucault's framework, as well as on feminist and queer theory, to show

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that the identities and experiences associated with sex and reproduction are socially-constructed, and are thus variable (Parker, Barbosa & Aggleton 2000; Vance 1990). A key question, then, in any anthropological analysis of sexuality, is the degree to which the categories of one society are applicable in another (Parker, Barbosa & Aggleton 2000). Attentive to these challenges, I take my definition of sexuality from Stacy Pigg and Vincanne Adams, who define it as “mutable and contextually dependent specificities in and through which erotic encounters and reproductive consequences are invested with moral significance” (2005: 4). As with other categories which are prominent throughout this dissertation, such as modernity and tradition, I take sexuality in Mhlambini to be an *emic* concept that has been produced through colonization, globalization, political economy, embodied experience, and local history. Moreover, I recognize that both the historical record and contemporary claims about normative sexuality are themselves selective, and while analytically productive, are nevertheless fragmentary.

In the discussion below I raise three main points that arise from my analysis of contemporary sexuality in Mhlambini, alongside my reading of historical records about sexuality among the Xhosa and their neighbours. Firstly, historical records and my own observations suggest a generally permissive, relaxed, and shame-free attitude towards sexual knowledge and experimentation among young people concurrent with heavy emphasis on discretion as an integral component of intergenerational respect. This is not paradoxical, although it might seem so if one mistakenly associates discretion with shame as opposed to respect. The second is a sharp disjuncture between the ideal of non-reproductive premarital and extramarital sexuality,

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Johnny Steinberg (2013) has recently discussed the relationship between sexual shame and HIV stigma in South Africa. His argument, which is too complex to fully articulate here, is that the stigma of HIV status is bound up in shame over young men's inability to assume socially-valued modalities of manhood. The sex they are having is thus boyish, and immature, and is therefore shameful because they should be having the conjugal, productive sex of 'real' men. I concede that shame and sex are indeed related in this context. Nevertheless, it is not the sex act itself which is shameful, but rather the circumstances in which it is taking place.
and reproductive sexuality as exercised in marriage. The third is an increasing gendered double-standard of sexual morality over the course of the 20th Century alongside a fairly relaxed attitude towards extramarital affairs, again with an emphasis on discretion as a component of respect. I will elaborate on each of these points below. Before doing so, however, I qualify this discussion of sexuality by clarifying some of its limitations.

Firstly, relative to other aspects of South African life, the historical record is particularly selective and limited. As Delius and Glaser note in a historical review of the sexual socialization of youth African youth,

The mainly white and male travellers, officials and missionaries who provide the richest nineteenth century records very rarely recorded anything to do with the sexual lives on the communities they encountered. And when they did their comments were refracted through the profoundly distorting lenses formed by a combination of Victorian prudery, Christian morality and cultural distance (2002: 28).

While the bias of much early work is regrettable, it bears mention that many early works were also made possible through the influence of missionary Christianity. J.H. Soga, for instance, was both a minister and a scholar, while Monica Hunter's deep knowledge of Pondo culture was partially a result of her upbringing as the daughter of missionaries in Pondoland.83 Secondly, this discussion reflects a heavy heterosexual bias. Until recently, there was very little discussion of

83 As an example of how Euro-Christian morality shaped early scholars' impressions of Xhosa sexuality, Soga quotes the Kafir-English Dictionary, defining u-metsho (a kind of non-penetrative outercourse) as "to be sweethearts: to have unclean intercourse of all kinds, externally (sexual)." (Soga: 1932:131), then continues in his own words with "I must just leave it at that, and to a harder pen than mine to enter into unsavoury details" (ibid.). He then continues at length to convince the reader that the practise is sanctioned only by Xhosa with the "lowest moral instincts" (132). He attempts even to refute a Cape Town doctor who suggested to Soga that Xhosa people appear to suffer no ill health from the practice of ukumetsha (the verb meaning 'to metsha,' this in itself suggesting that the practice was widespread enough for a Cape Town doctor to be familiar with the practice), and concludes that "whatever may be said in defence or palliation of this immoral habit, those of us who are working for the spiritual uplift of the Native races in this country, find this form of impurity to be the greatest hindrance to the progress of the Gospel and the true spiritual life of the people" (134).
same-sex sexuality among the Xhosa and their neighbours, so this is partly a reflection of a lack of source material. However, this heterosexual bias also reflects how people in Mhalbmini themselves conceptualize sexuality. As I have touched upon in previous chapters and as I will elaborate here, childbearing and paternity have provided -and continue to provide- the dominant framework through which sexuality is conceptualized in Mhlambini. Where sexuality is conceived of primarily in this way, same-sex sexuality is not necessarily problematic so long as it takes place alongside the formation of conjugal households and the generation of children (Boyd 2013). It seems that South African communities may have long had mechanisms in place to facilitate such arrangements. For example, a gay-identified Black South African man explained to Donald Donham that

> Within the family, the moment they realized you were gay (...) they arranged with another family to whom they explained the whole situation: “Okay, fine, you've got a daughter, we have three sons, this one is gay, and then there are the other two. Your daughter is not married. What if, in public, your daughter marries our gay son, but they are not going to have sex. She will have sex with the younger brother or the elder brother, and by so doing, the family will expand, you know.”

And at the end of the day, even if the next person realizes that I am gay, they wouldn't say anything because I am married (1998: 15).

I do not know if any families in Mhlambini have made such arrangements, although it is certainly possible. Setting up an independent household as a same-sex couple is certainly not acceptable in the village today.

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Despite the limited record of sexual norms and practices in Southern Africa, sexuality - and in particular the sexual socialization of youth - is better documented among the Xhosa than among many Southern African ethnic groups (e.g. Mayer & Mayer 1972a; 1972b; 1970). In the past, as today, unmarried adolescents were expected to avoid any mention or pretence of sexual matters in the presence of their elders as an important component of *hlonipha* (respect behaviour) (Gaitskell 1982; Mayer & Mayer 1970). The Mayers emphasize, however, “this does not indicate guilt or shame about sexuality as such” (1970:75). Indeed, Xhosa children did not grow up sheltered from knowledge of sex and sexuality. Cook remarks, for instance, that “the child hears sex discussed with the greatest freedom by adults, and picks up his ideas from them in an incidental fashion” (Cook: 1934a: 16), while Hunter notes that “children from are from an early age aware of the facts of sex (…) sexual matters are frequently discussed in their presence” (1961 [1936]: 180). Moreover, sexual activity took place in huts where children slept, as communal living arrangements offer limited privacy between parents and their offspring. This is frequently the case today as well.

Although discretion was an important component of respect, young people were presumed to be knowledgeable about sexual matters, and sexual activity was considered an important aspect of normal personhood. As the Mayers note, “sexual gratification is valued positively at all ages. Adolescence is seen as a time when sex should be practised vigorously” (1970:159), and furthermore that “positive expression is expected and encouraged: the youth who ‘has no girl friends’ or the girl who ‘shows no interest’ or ‘does not let herself be fondled’ will be an object of concern or shame to parents and peers” (1972: 115). Celibacy, especially among the young, was at best antisocial and at worst suspect. This is summarized by the Mayers, who noted that
It is (...) bad not to play at all. Both sexes disapprove of a girl 'who is not caressed by males'. She becomes still and her blood does not flow properly.' 'Girls who don't want it are likely to become witches. They are being caressed by impundulu ([witches’] familiars). Similarly, a male who has no sweethearts -an isishumana- is unlikely to enjoy prestige in the youth organization” (1970: 175).

These observations are echoed by Monica Hunter, who wrote that

A boy may be loved by as many as six girls [while] a girl may have twelve or thirteen boys come to her hut every evening. She will send away all but two or three, and then talk to one and send him, and talk to another and send him, and remain with the third (...) it is no disgrace to her to accept several lovers at the same time. The more skulls the better (...) parents are proud that a daughter should have many lovers” (1961 [1936]: 182).

Despite the permissive attitude towards young peoples' sexual experimentation, youth were not afforded free license to indulge their passions at will. Rather, sources unanimously agree that while sexual experimentation was considered a normal part of adolescence, acceptable pre-marital sexuality was non-reproductive sexuality: pregnancy was to be avoided at all cost (e.g. Mayer & Mayer 1972a, 1972b, Hunter 1961 [1936]). This was achieved through a combination of peer group pressure, and a technique known as ukumetsha. Regarding the former, Glaser and Delius note that: communities attempted to negotiate the tricky terrain between acknowledging adolescent sexuality and the risk of pre-marital pregnancy through establishing limited forms of sexual release and effective forms of sexual monitoring and management. Adolescents received some guidance in the contexts of family, kin
group and neighbourhood, but probably the most striking aspect of these strategies was the central role played by peer group organisation and peer pressure” (2002: 31).

These groups were age-segregated and responsible for both instructing young people in sexual matters, and strictly policing the sexual activities of their juniors (Mayer & Mayer 1972a; 1970). The organizational hierarchies, methods, and efficacy of these peer-groups are particularly well-documented for the Xhosa, but are beyond the scope of this dissertation (see Mager 1998; Mayer & Mayer 1990; 1972a, 1972b; 1970).

Logistically, pregnancy was to be avoided through the practice of *ukumetsha* (a verb, meaning 'to metsha'). This was a sexual technique designed to provide excitement and sexual release without vaginal penetration. The term refers particularly to intracrural sex ('thigh sex'), but implies any kind of outercourse or mutual masturbation\(^8^5\) (Hunter 1961 [1936]; Cape of Good Hope 1883). Monica Hunter remarks that to *metsha* was considered a harmless children’s activity, to be given up upon marriage (Hunter 1961 [1936]).

Interviews with village elders suggest that *ukumetsha* was commonly practised in their youth as a means of avoiding pregnancy. They also affirm the continued importance of hiding one's sexual affairs from elders as a component of intergenerational respect. For example, in response to the question “how has the meeting together of girls and young men changed?” *[ukudibana kweentombi nabafana kitshintshe kanjani ngoku?]*, the elderly subheadman responded “it has changed, because in my day we would metsha. It was unheard of for girls to engage in sexual intercourse with boys or men inside dwellings. Now girls are having sex with

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\(^8^5\)I am aware of no sources which make reference to anal penetration, so I do not know whether people applied the term *ukumetsha* to that activity. From my conversations with peers in the village it certainly does not seem to be a mainstream activity in the community today.
boys and men in dwellings. This didn’t happen in my day. We would lie with a girl in the forest, “stealing” her, as it were. The girls of today roam around even after nightfall. You know what I’m talking about. You can be sitting at home, meanwhile there is your sister in another home!”

Similarly, an elderly woman told us that when she and her peers would meet with their boyfriends, “we would go into the forest. I would first wait until the adults had gone to bed, and then I would sneak off and go to him to metsha.”

While young people were given license to experiment without vaginal penetration, marriage marked a fundamental reorientation towards reproductive sexuality for both sexes. This is not to suggest that extramarital sex was forbidden, but rather than married sexuality was expected to result in the continuation of lineage. The actualization of this ideal was a primary impetus for choosing a particular spouse.

The transition from youthful, non-reproductive sexuality to reproductive sexuality in marriage was facilitated by initiation rituals, which were integral to the transition to adulthood for both sexes. Instruction in proper conduct in married life was an important component of these rituals (Vincent 2008; Jewkes & Wood 1998; Koyana 1980). For example, Louise Vincent (2008) reports that where boys were expected to be motivated by fleeting conquests of many women, the instruction that young men received in initiation school placed emphasis on being a wise and judicious father and spouse. Indeed, the transition from boyhood to manhood was expected to be characterized by a fundamentally transformed attitude towards sexuality, one rooted in maintenance of the homestead and appropriate reproduction.\(^86\)

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86 The relationship between circumcision, manhood, and restrained, mature masculine sexuality is raised by Xhosa rapper Wonga in the song “Evil Boy” by South Africa rave-rap group Die Antwoord. In this song, Wonga claims that he refused to be initiated because “his penis is for the girls” (Incana yam yeyamantobi) and that he does not want to be a man because he wants to be an “evil boy 4 life.”
While less is known about girls’ experiences of the transition from girl to woman, it is clear that young married women were expected to focus on childbearing and reproduction of the homestead rather than the pursuit of erotic pleasure. In an unpublished MA thesis entitled *Xhosa Sexual Morality*, for instance, Percy Qayiso writes that “a newly-married woman who might show signs of jealousy for her husband is sometimes reprimanded even by her mother in law telling her ‘you did not come here to run after this man of yours but to look after...the needs of the household and to build the home’” (Qayiso n.d.: 78 in Delius & Glaser: 101).

Emphasis on reproductive sexuality did not preclude extramarital affairs, however, provided they were conducted with discretion. While it has been convincingly argued that labour migration created new opportunities and impetus for extramarital affairs on the part of both husbands and wives (Cloete 1992; Krige 1981), early sources suggest that extramarital affairs were widespread and viewed with equanimity even prior to the advent of widespread labour migration (Delius & Glaser 2004; Soga 1932). And while there has long been a double-standard of sexual morality which privileges men's entitlement to extramarital affairs, Eileen Krige, for instance, notes that the Xhosa have historically had more relaxed attitudes towards extramarital sexuality compared with neighbouring groups such as the Zulu, noting that despite laws which designate adultery as punishable by fine, in practice women were afforded considerable freedom so long as they were discrete (1962 [1937], also Hunter 1961 [1936]).

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87See Delius and Glaser (2004: 92-93) for a discussion of 'Zulu exceptionalism' regarding relaxed attitudes towards extramarital sex for women.

88The work of Virginia van der Vliet suggests that this double-standard is more pronounced among urban and educated Xhosa couples than in rural areas. Her research subjects were all Christian, suggesting a strong influence of Christian morality in shaping ideas towards extramarital sexuality.
The 20th Century: Sexuality in Times of Change

Contemporary attitudes towards sexuality depart from the past in ways which have profound implications for family life in Mhlambini today. As explained in Chapter Four, industrialization and labour migration had the effects of both delaying marriage, and of destabilizing the traditional mechanisms through which elders had controlled the fertility of youth (Carton 2000; Gaitskell 1982). As Gaitskell remarks,

The old ways of compensating for premarital pregnancy were also becoming less effective: holding young men responsible for their illegitimate children proved much more difficult in town as well as in rural areas from which men had a chance to escape to town. The absence of fathers left discipline to mothers, who were customarily expected to be more indulgent (1982: 342).

Moreover, as Natasha Erlank notes in a review of sexual education in South Africa in the early half of the 20th century, “male attempts to redress patriarchal loss of control and threats to masculinity were justified through scapegoating the sexual virtue and character of the young men and women who challenged male status” (2004: 76).

At least as influential, however, were novel, deeply gendered ideas about sexual impulse and purity stemming from Euro-Christian tradition (Gaitskell 1982, see Cape of Good Hope 1883). As this moral framework gained currency across South Africa, the sexual comportment of girls and women was judged and policed in ways that that of males was not. Moreover, Christian disavowal of ukumetsha had the unintended consequence of greatly increasing rates of out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Glaser & Delius 2002). Philip Mayer, for instance, reported in the 1960s that
Ukumetsha [limited intercourse] is out of fashion. It has been condemned by Church teaching as obscene unnatural [sic] and old fashioned, while at the same time young school people themselves have learned to disparage it as old fashioned, dirty and not much fun compared to full intercourse (...) her [a church-going girl’s] choice is then between complete abstinence (as enjoined by the church) and full intercourse without the benefit of contraceptive techniques (1961: 254).

Moreover, Deborah Gaitskell (1982) notes that missionaries deemed it was the mother’s responsibility to educate her daughter in matters of sexuality and moral purity, a position which conflicted with African notions of generational respect. Thus, as Delius and Glaser note, “Christian morality and the pursuit of modernity made a potent cocktail which stigmatised traditional forms of restraint but failed to curb the heightened sexual impulses of pubescent youth” (2002: 36). Of particular relevance for this chapter, a consequence of this social transformation has been increasingly divergent notions of gendered morality (more on this below).

More recently, economic transformations brought about by migrant labour, Apartheid and post-Apartheid state policies, and neoliberal economics have transformed family life for low-income South Africans in ways which have profound implications for gender power and domestic life.89 These have already been discussed in detail in previous chapters. Of particular relevance in a discussion of local sexualities, ever since the democratic transition these

89For an in-depth, historically-grounded discussion of the political economy of intimacy in South Africa, see Hunter’s *Love in the Time of AIDS* (2010).
transformations have been compounded by HIV/AIDS, a topic that I will pick up again later in this chapter.

**Gendered Transformations in Sexual Morality**

The transformations in sexual morality discussed above have a greater impact on girls and women than boys and men. While Hunter reported that in the 1930s girls were permitted - and indeed admired - for having several lovers, by the 1970s the Mayers reported that monogamy was expected of girls, and a girl who was found to have more than one boyfriend risked a beating from her boyfriends and faced severe sanction from her peers. In their words, “a parallel is drawn quite explicitly between the ‘loose girl’ (isifebe) who accepts more than one lover at a time, and the adulterous wife” (Mayer & Mayer 1972a: 112). This divergence in gendered standards of sexual morality has persisted into the contemporary era, and bears heavily on gendered dynamics of relationship life.

The increasingly gendered nature of sexual morality is also evident in the near-disappearance of the practice of intonjane – that is, young women's initiation (see Cloete 1996; Laubscher 1975; Hunter 1961 [1936]). While I am acquainted with only a handful of younger women who went through a form of intonjane in their adolescence, the practice used to be virtually universal for young Xhosa women, and is comparable with male initiation in that it marked a girl's marriageability, and involved a sexual education component. A historically-grounded discussion of intonjane complements a general understanding of Xhosa sexuality, and also indexes profound changes in gendered attitudes towards sexuality and reproduction.

Our knowledge of female initiation is limited by an especially sparse record. This is in large part due to early scholars' biases about the relative importance of male and female domains,
and the inordinate distaste with which missionaries and educators viewed the frank sexual socialization of girls (Erlank 2004). The documentation that exists, however, is fascinating. P.A.W. Cook (1934a) describes girls' initiation as follows: shortly following her first menstruation, a girl was confined to a hut, where she would be concealed behind a curtain for several weeks. She would be let out at night only to urinate, and if she needed to relieve herself during the day she would be heavily swathed in blankets so she would not be seen, and would be guided by an older girl. Parents were barred from the hut, but unmarried couples older than the initiate would come into the hut at night, often in groups, to *metsha*. The purpose of these trysts was to educate the girl in matters of sex (Cook 1934a; Hunter 1961 [1936]).

During his daughter's seclusion the girl's father was expected to provide her with specific foods and cuts of meat, and following her seclusion he was expected to host a beer-drink and feast, and to provide gifts of meat to the women of the *umzi* and their friends (Cook 1934a; Hunter 1961 [1936]). After a month or more of seclusion, the girl would emerge fatter and with lighter skin, having thus been rendered more attractive to prospective suitors (Hunter 1961 [1936]). This description of girls’ initiation is echoed by the Mayers, although they provide less detail on what actually takes place on the other side of the curtain.

Christian morality played a profound rule in the suppression and near abandonment of girls’ initiation. Monica Hunter, for instance notes that that churches have staunchly disavowed girls’ initiation, and that by the 1930s it was not practised by Christians. However, she also writes that by the 1930s roughly half of the *intonjane* held were for women who were already married. She reports that the reason for this was increasingly widespread poverty: many fathers

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90 See, for instance, Cape of Good Hope (1883) for documentation of the fascination and discomfort with which colonial officials and church representatives viewed female initiation as it was practised in the 19th Century.

91 Detailed discussion of the *intonjane* ritual can be found in Hunter's *Reactions to Conquest* p. 165-174.
waited until they had the ikazi (bridewealth cows) in order to cover the cost of the ritual, as they could not afford the beer and meat required otherwise. This in turn shortened the duration—which, likely, the frequency-of intonjane, as husbands and mothers-in-law were reluctant to spare young wives for significant lengths of time. Given that men's initiation continues to be of paramount importance in Xhosa society, I would add that the near disappearance of girls' initiation is a manifestation of a decline Xhosa women's status over the course of the 20th Century, as their reproductive capacities have become an increasing burden in a cash economy as opposed to an invaluable asset in an agricultural one (see Mager 1999).

Today, a greatly-modified version of intonjane is usually performed in Mhlambini if a young, married woman is either experiencing ill-health, or gives birth to weak, sickly, or stillborn children (see Hunter 1981 [1936]: 166). From what I have been told, the woman's suffering is due to her ancestors not being properly acquainted with the woman and her children, or being offended by their descendants' disregard for tradition. They can be appeased, however, if the young mother returns to her natal home for intonjane. In its contemporary form, the ritual involves the woman's seclusion behind a curtain and certain ritual feasts, but does not involve a sexual education component.

As a gateway to adulthood, however, girls' initiation is very rare today. I know of one man in the village—now deceased—who provided the ritual for his daughter, but at the time of my fieldwork she had married outside the village. One young woman friend of mine in her mid-30s also had this ritual performed for her in adolescence. Friends attributed this to her elderly father’s deeply traditional values. She became very shy when her initiation once came up in conversation; she is embarrassed, I think, by her parents' attachment to beliefs and practices that many young people consider backward.
Sexual Socialization of Males

I have already explained in Chapter Three that male initiation is essential for achieving adult status for men, and that instruction in sexual and conjugal etiquette has long been a component of the initiates' training. Recent research suggests that while young men continue to receive instruction in these topics, the meanings that most young men derive from this training have changed substantially.

For example, in their qualitative study of sexuality and violence among young people in Mthatha, Kate Wood’s and Rachel Jewkes' (1998) young male interlocutors reported that in initiation school they were taught that mature men are not driven by fleeting passions, and are thus patient, deliberative, and respectful of peers, elders, and women. Moreover, they note that:

initiates were said to be told that having particularly large number of partners was 'what boys do,' and were encouraged to have one partner and think of marrying her. One boy explained that 'going out with 30 girls is what boys do, though men still have girlfriends...you won't use them for sex, won't chow and then leave them, because you are responsible (1998: 33).

However, Wood and Jewkes observe with dismay that these lessons do little to change most men's behaviour, and note that “circumcision school is short-lived and without follow-up many boys clearly disregard what they learn there” (34). Moreover Louise Vincent notes that contemporary male initiation rituals have been largely decoupled from training in responsible sexuality. Instead, initiation is now viewed by young men as “a permit for sex” (2008: 437). In her interview-based study, she found that young men experienced being uncircumcised as a severe impediment to their success in pursuing women, and that most young men cited sex as “among the most significant resources to which initiation polices access” (ibid: 442). This
change in meaning of initiates' sexual instruction may be due to the fact that in previous
generations manhood actually marked a point where men would marry and establish a patriarchal
home. Today, marriage and support of an independent household is achievable only by a
minority of men. Even so, young men's impression that manhood entitles him to more sex,
perhaps with more partners, certainly supports the argument that men and women are faced with
increasingly divergent frameworks of sexual morality.

HIV/AIDS

No discussion of contemporary sexualities in Mhlambini, or virtually anywhere else in
South Africa, can overlook the impacts of the HIV/AIDS epidemic for gender power, intimacy,
and domestic reproduction. People in Mhlambini are certainly aware of HIV. Free condoms are
available at the backpacker lodge, and there are regular commercials promoting healthy lifestyles
on the radio. Moreover, the NGO hosts HIV/AIDS awareness days in the village at least
annually. At these events the outreach team comes from the nearest hospital to stage educational
skits and demonstrations, to answer questions, and to provide anonymous testing. Attendance at
these events is high among young children and older married people, in part because of the
delicious lunch that the NGO provides. However, in keeping with standards of modesty and
intergenerational respect, unmarried young people and young wives –those most at risk for
contracting HIV- attend in low numbers.

Through exposure to such media, as well as interactions with health care personnel,
people in Mhlambini are becoming increasingly familiar with the biomedical model of sex and
reproduction, and with new categories of risk associated with particular behaviours (Parker,
Barbosa & Aggleton; Pigg & Adams 2005). Conversations that I have had with young women in
Mhlambini suggest that their fears, expectations, and aspirations about sex and relationships are changing through such exposure. For example, many young women were apprehensive about marriage because they felt that it would be inappropriate to use condoms in marriage, but also unrealistic to expect monogamy.

As elsewhere in South Africa, illness and death associated with HIV/AIDS increase dependency ratios in Mhlambini, and compound the struggles of households who already experience profound economic insecurity (see Hosegood et al. 2007). To provide some context, the most recent National Survey indicates a prevalence of 12.2 percent for the Eastern Cape as a whole (Shisana et al. 2014), up from 9 percent in 2008. However, the director of HIV Programme at the nearest hospital estimates a prevalence closer to 20 percent in the hospital’s catchment area (A. Paxton, personal correspondence 2011), and the National Survey indicates a prevalence of between ten and twelve percent for the district in which Mhlambini is located (Shisana et al. 2014). National Survey data also indicates relatively low prevalence among young children and the elderly, and that the prevalence among people of reproductive age is closer to one in three for women, and one in four for men (Shisana et al. 2014). Prevalence is higher among residents of informal settlements, and married people have lower prevalence than unmarried. However, rates of marriage are low among young Africans because marriage is prohibitively expensive (Hunter 2010).

As of 2003, all HIV-positive South Africans are entitled to free antiretroviral (ARV) therapy (Karim & Karim 2011). While many people still lack access to biomedical treatment - in many cases, because they are unaware of their HIV status - the most recent National Survey indicates that the proportion of South Africans receiving ARV therapy has doubled since 2008.

92The district is one of the largest in the province, stretching far south and inland and encompassing some sizable towns, one major city, as well as hundreds of rural villages like Mhlambini.
(Shisana et al. 2014). Improved access to ARV therapy has had a profound impact on mortality rates in Mhlambini; Steve told me that that prior to the scale-up of treatment in the region, there were funerals in Mhlambini every second weekend. While several villagers with AIDS died during my fieldwork, AIDS-related deaths were not a frequent occurrence.93

With a few exceptions, I do not know who is on ARVs in the village. The National Survey indicates that one third of HIV-positive South Africans are on treatment, 94 and that children and women access treatment in substantially higher proportions than men (ibid). In my observation, the majority of people in the village who test are women. This is in keeping with data which indicates that South African women are significantly more likely than men to have tested for HIV in the past, to know their HIV status, and also to believe that they may be at risk of HIV infection in the future (Shisana et al. 2014). At the time of my fieldwork there were thirty widows and only two reported widowers in the village.95 While dangerous roads, working conditions, and lifestyles (for instance, heavy drinking), and violent masculinities all contribute to the high mortality of South African men relative to women (see Hosegood, Anneste & Timæus 2004), the gendered impact of AIDS is almost certainly the most significant factor in women’s apparent longevity relative to men.

93To my memory, during my fieldwork I attended two funerals for people from Mhlambini who had died of AIDS-related illness, and one funeral for a very elderly man who died of unknown cause. A child also drowned in the river, and two young men died in knife-fights. Several babies also died within a few months of birth. Also, several friends of mine became very ill but recovered with treatment.
94This is a somewhat deceptive statistic, as some HIV-positive people may not yet be sufficiently immunocompromised as to meet the requirements for ARV therapy.
95Widowers remarry if they can afford to, while widows seemingly never do. This heavily skewed gender ratio may therefore be due, in part, to the fact that widowed women reported their marital status as such, while remarried widowers reported their status as married. Nevertheless, most married men with much younger wives are not widowers, but rather men who married for the first time later in life. Furthermore, while many households include an elderly widow, only one includes an elderly widower. This suggests that women are indeed outliving men.
Yet despite its widespread prevalence and longstanding impact, HIV is rarely spoken about in the village. However, tuberculosis (TB) is extremely widespread, and active TB\(^{96}\) is frequently interpreted as a sign that the individual is in fact HIV-positive. Given this widespread (and generally well-founded) assumption, it is interesting that people seem comfortable discussing their TB.

That being said, several people who died of AIDS-related illness during my fieldwork had access to ARVs and considerable support through the NGO. The reasons why these people became ill despite access to medication, food, and social support are far beyond the scope of the dissertation, but touch on dependency on alcohol (in one case), as well as occult complications.

While not often spoken about, HIV/AIDS is a source of hardship and a profound concern for many people in the community. Some widows struggled to support their families single-handed, while other families included children of deceased relatives. There was also one deeply-impoverished household composed of four teenage siblings who had outlived all of their immediate family. HIV/AIDS was a factor in most, if not all of these circumstances. Many of these concerns are directly relevant to relationships and social reproduction. As mentioned above, young women, both married and unmarried, often brought up the possibility of contracting HIV from an unfaithful husband or boyfriend as a significant concern. For married women, this was amplified by their lower social power in relation to their husband, and by the widespread assumption that lobola payment rendered condom use unacceptable. Inversely, a significant concern for some people in the village was how condoms would impede pregnancy.\(^{97}\)

\(^{96}\)Nearly everyone in the community, myself included, are infected with TB in its latent form. Latent TB is not contagious, and is unlikely to progress to its active form unless the host is immunocompromised, for instance by HIV or cancer.

\(^{97}\)A regular ad the national radio at the time of my fieldwork was about precisely how HIV-positive couples can work with their doctor to significantly improve their chances of having an HIV-negative child. Indeed, doing so is routine, but it does involve preparation (for instance, the mother starting on ARVs earlier than she might otherwise), and close collaboration with the biomedical health care system.
I recall, for instance, a group of elders of both sexes arguing this point with HIV outreach personnel from the nearest hospital during a condom-use demonstration on HIV Outreach Day.

**Sexuality Today**

Now, as in the past, sexual activity is an important component of normative personhood for people who have reached physiological maturity. Discretion is important, but barring the very old, everyone is assumed to be sexually active. This applies even to people with physical and intellectual disabilities; following the marriage of a man with an obvious intellectual disability, several people explained to me that having a wife would help him to “be more normal, more right in the head.”

The strangeness of being celibate was brought home to me one evening perhaps five months into my fieldwork, when two of my young women friends came to visit me at my home. Their visit was not unusual in and of itself, but I had the sense that they had a purpose for their visit. Unusually serious in demeanour, they sat down side by side opposite me at my table. NoClinic immediately got down to business. “Katie,” she said “it’s not right to be the way you are.” I must have looked as bewildered as I felt, because NoClinic gestured emphatically towards my double bed and added “this big hut, all alone! This big bed, all alone! It’s not right. Uh-uh, this is a problem. Is it because you don’t want a Black man?” Shocked and anxious to defend myself against accusations of prejudice, I tried my best to explain that South African cities were full of appealing English-speaking men of many ethnicities, but that it was difficult for me to even have a meaningful conversation with village men, let alone navigate an unfamiliar courtship context. Being South African, Siphokazi and NoClinic are more

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98 Five months into my fieldwork marked a turning point for me in terms of my language acquisition. My ability to communicate in isiXhosa improved significantly after that point.
comfortable than a white Canadian at discussing racial prejudice in a personal context, and they giggled at my obvious discomfort. But NoClinic quickly turned serious: “We knew that, we were just joking. But seriously, sisi [sister], you must go find a man who is educated, and change it. No one can live like this, it’s not right!”

It was not only Siphokazi and NoClinic who were concerned about my evident celibacy. Even my host mother encouraged me on numerous occasions to spend more time at the Lodge, as she surmised that this would be a place where I might find a suitable man. She carefully explained that if I spent enough time there I might meet a good man, and then I could marry him and live with him in my hut in the village. Eventually convinced of my ineptitude, she suggested that perhaps I ought to speak to Steven about helping me to identify a suitable Lodge guest, and to ask him to approach the suitor on my behalf.

This general attitude of discrete permissiveness extends to having multiple intimate partners. Concurrent intimate relationships are common both for married people and unmarried youth, but there is a marked double-standard in the moral rightness of doing so. While affairs are ubiquitous, it is considered more transgressive for women—especially married women—to have several partners, and it is generally acceptable to beat women if they are caught. The following chapter will provide evidence that some women do confront their partners for having other lovers, but their authority over men is relatively limited and the social sanctions that men face are few. Widowed women, however, enjoy a particular freedom, especially as they often enjoy the privacy and independence of their own homestead (see Delius & Glaser 2004). When I asked about local opinions about my young widowed neighbour, who had given birth to a baby just less than a year after her husband's death, my research assistant shrugged and said “it's bad, but we
can just accept it. It's not good, but it's very normal. She can't always be alone.” In my experience, this comment could speak to attitudes towards having multiple partners in general.

In Mhlambini today, sex continues to be an important component of normal personhood but, as the Mayers note, the mechanisms through which it was controlled have largely fallen away. Most young people in Mhlambini today are quite sexually active, and unlike their grandparents’ generation, that sexuality is expressed through penetrative intercourse. The number of very young mothers in the village is frankly astonishing to me, and I recall the shock of learning that an acquaintance of mine, age 30 at the time, was a grandmother already. Yet owing in large part to HIV/AIDS, sex has taken on new connotations of gendered risk as well.

Marriage and Personhood

Few topics have occupied Africanist anthropologists more than marriage practices; as Radcliffe-Brown states, “for the understanding of any aspect of the social life of an African people -economic, political, or religious- it is essential to have a thorough knowledge of the system of kinship and marriage” (1970 [1950]: 1). The body of anthropological literature on marriage in Southern Africa alone is vast, and to summarize it would far surpasses the scope of this dissertation (e.g. Krige & Comaroff 1981; Wilson 1980; Radcliffe-Brown 1950). Suffice to say that a prominent theme is that marriage practices have long been affairs embedded in kinship relations which are hierarchical and characterized by gender imbalance, serving primarily to create alliances between lineages and communities.

While marriage has certainly long served to establish alliances, the functionalist paradigm which characterized much early African ethnography has left us with an ethnographic record in which the desires, motivations, agency, and individuality of bride and groom are largely absent. Importantly, this literature depicts a sharp juxtaposition between marriage for kin, and marriage
for love. This is exemplified perhaps most famous by Radcliffe-Brown's broad claim that “the African does not think of marriage as a union based on romantic love (...) the marriage is an alliance between the two bodies of kin based on their common interest in the marriage itself and its continuance” (1970 [1950]: 46). Speaking specifically of the Xhosa, Alberti makes similar claims:

The feeling of tender and pure love, based upon respect derived from common accord and moral value, is unknown to the Kaffirs\(^9\); only the necessity for collaboration in domestic life, coupled with the natural urge for propagation, appear to give rise to a union between a young man and a girl, which afterwards in marriage attains a lasting stability through mutual interest (...) matrimonial alliance is agreed upon and concluded, without the consent of the girl being required, who in this matter is simply dependent upon the wish of her parents (Alberti 1968 [1815]).

Anthropologist Eileen Krige is more judicious, yet she too draws a juxtaposition between traditional marriage and romantic love:

Marriage is primarily an affair between groups, involving the two families concerned even more than the individuals. The personal predilections of the couple do not carry nearly the same weight as the good name of the family of the girl, her ability to bear children, work well, and get on amicably with her mother-in-law, for whom she will have to work. The choice of a partner

\(^{9}\)This is an old term for Bantu-speaking South Africans, and is now considered derogatory.
in marriage is thus not surrounded by the romantic conceptions of many Europeans (1962 [1937]: 111).

This perspective is also documented in colonial records, and likely reflects a mixture of the perceptions of colonial agents and selective representations of local custom on the part of powerful Africans (see Carton 2000; Mamdani 1996). Yet here too we find the juxtaposition between romantic love and marriage for kin. Consider the following excerpt the testimony of an affluent Xhosa patriarch from the late 19th Century:

It is a custom of ours for a girl to obey her father; it is not a custom of a day. It has always been our custom and therefore we have not changed it...We train up our children to obedience in order that when they marry they are good and obedient wives. (...) We do not allow a girl to choose a husband for herself, we choose for her. Now the girls are giving us trouble in this respect, and this trouble arises through a thing called love. We parents do not comprehend this at all” (Cape of Good Hope 1883: qtns 1560-1568, qtn 5479).

Moreover, marriage as a lineage rather than individual affair was also reinforced through the colonial institutionalization of Customary Law, where legislation pertaining to marriage and family was premised on the idea that women's sexuality was the jurisdiction of her elder male kin. Isaac Schapera, for instance bluntly notes that unlawful sexual relations were regarded as a wrong against the woman’s father or husband, rather than wrongs against the woman herself” (1953, also Whitfield 1922).

Young people in Mhlambini often draw a distinction between these traditional marriages and love marriage. Such claims require some qualification, however. On one hand, evidence suggests that feelings of romantic love, defined as intense erotic and intimate idealization of
another, is a cross-cultural universal (Jankowiak 2008; 1995; Jankowiak & Fischer 1992; Malinowski 1929). There is thus no reason to think that romantic love itself is novel or foreign to Xhosa society. However, the idea that romantic love is the morally legitimate foundation for lasting, committed partnership is an ideology with a particular socio-historical lineage, and which comes about (in a variety of culturally-specific forms) under the economic and social conditions of modernity (Hart 2007; Yan 2003; Ahearn 2001; Collier 1997; Rebhun 1999).\textsuperscript{100}

For instance, numerous scholars note that wage labour often results in a transfer of wealth from older generations to younger people (especially men). In Southern Africa, this has meant that since industrialization in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, young men have had greater scope to choose their own spouse, as opposed to the spouse that their father might have chosen (Hunter 2010, Carton 2000; Wilson \textit{et al.} 1952). More recently, Ahearn (2001), Hart (2007) and Yan (2003) all document a connection between cellphones and letter-writing and the growing importance of romantic love as both a foundation for marriage, and as a performance of modern personhood. Not only do these media provide opportunities through which to negotiate a particular kind of 'self,' they also afford new forms of intimate privacy. These media certainly facilitate romantic intimacy in Mhlambini, as cellphones -especially text messaging- are a key component of young people’s courtship practices. This affords young people an especially effective form of privacy given that most elders are illiterate.

Other scholars note a connection between the primacy of romantic love and patterns of individualized consumption under capitalism (e.g. Thomas & Cole 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006; Zelizer 2005; Illouz 1997). While technologies such as writing are not uniquely Western cultural products, the connection between consumption, capitalism, and the concept of the

\textsuperscript{100}Although see Lipset (2004) for a discussion of how modern conditions do not necessarily lead to the privileging of romantic love.
autonomous individual have led some scholars, especially Anthony Giddens, to suggest that romantic love is a cultural product of European modernity. For Giddens, this is exemplified by the fact that romantic love is predicated on the cultivation of a more individualized self -a self who has a particular style, particular tastes, a particular constellation of relationships independent of kinship, and, who is most fully realized through a romantic relationship in which each partner recognizes the uniqueness of the other (1992: 14-15). While Giddens emphasizes the European heritage of romantic love thus defined, anthropologists note that in many parts of the world it appears that young people -especially women- frame choosing one's own spouse and marrying for love as important means through which to assert a modern identity (e.g. Thomas & Cole 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006; Hirsch 2003; Burbank 1995; Abu-Lughod 1990).

Ethnographic works from a wide range of societies demonstrate that it is erroneous to consider romantic love a product of European modernity (e.g. Hart 2007; Lipset 2004), especially given the diverse forms and interpretations of romantic partnership that exist in the world (see Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). Such assumptions are certainly too simplistic in the South African case. Of course, South Africans have long been exposed to Western notions of romance through school education and missionary influence (see in particular Thomas 2009, also Thomas & Cole 2009; Hunter 2010;, Hellmann 1935; 1937; Hunter 1961 [1936]; Schapera 1966 [1947]). Much of this education drew on the European religious and literary cannon in promoting companionate monogamy and autonomous choice of spouse. Accordingly, it follows that romantic love as a necessary criterion for marriage was first embraced by educated Christian families. For instance, Monica Wilson reports that by the mid-20th Century marriage for love was taken for granted by

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101See especially Raymond Stone's (1977) discussion of the rise of 'affective individualism.'
educated Africans (1981). Through a content analysis of the black South African newspaper *Bantu World* in the 1930s, Lynn Thomas (2009) similarly demonstrates that the idea that marriage should be based on love was contested, but widely-accepted in middle-class black circles by that time.

However, as articulated most clearly by Mark Hunter, contemporary notions of love have arisen out of much more complex social processes than the mere import of European moral ideology. Rather, contemporary ideals of love and marriage came about through a complex interplay between missionary influence, colonial policy, labour migration, and precolonial conventions of social reproduction. While church and school played pivotal roles, the concurrent appropriation of land, labour migration, and integration into the cash economy meant that control over wealth was increasingly transferred from patriarchs, who had historically paid bridewealth for their sons, towards young men who paid bridewealth with their own earnings. This afforded young men greater independence in their choice of spouse: as they became less beholden to elders to finance their marriages, they became more able to choose a spouse based on her personal qualities (also Carton 2000). However, the migrant labour system meant that conjugal partnership was contingent on the joint cooperation between a rural-dwelling wife, who maintained the homestead and reared children, and a largely-absent man whose wage labour made the maintenance of this rural home possible. This, he argues, gave rise to “provider love,” meaning “a set of material and emotional links that encompass a woman being lobola'd (having bridewealth paid for her) and a marital couple ‘building a home’” (2010: 16). He writes that over the course of the 20th Century romantic love and provider love have come to intersect such

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102Hunter’s argument, which is historically deep, is focused particularly on the historical context of KwaZulu-Natal. Some of the records that he draws upon are specific to colonial Natal.
that the ability to provide materially is tightly linked to feelings of romantic love, a phenomenon that has been widely-documented throughout Africa (Hunter 2010, 2009; Sølbeck 2010; Cole 2009, Thomas & Cole 2009; Smith 2009; Mills & Ssewakiryanga 2006; Samuelsen 2006; Cornwall 2002). This literature provides important background context for the forthcoming discussion of attitudes towards marriage in Mhlambini.

Marriage in Mhlambini

As in other low-income communities in South Africa, marriage in Mhlambini has been profoundly transformed over the past few decades. Young people’s prospects for marriage are very different from what they were when village elders were young. As explained by Mark Hunter (2010), economic transformation and rising unemployment have profoundly undermined men's prospects for paying bridewealth, rendering marriage a disproportionately middle-class practice (also Posel, Rudwick & Casale 2011). Marriage rates in Mhlambini are consequently low among young people, but not as low as in urban townships. Drawing on the demographic survey that I conducted of all households in Mhlambini, of the 345 people between the ages of 15 and 40, seventy-eight (just over one in four) reported being married or widowed (see Appendix). Women are disproportionately represented among this younger married cohort, as there are a number of wives and widows who married older men. The vast majority of the men in this cohort are employed by mines, with an additional few employed through the NGO or

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103 Sixteen people were not included in this statistic, as they were not home when I profiled them, and the family-member whom I spoke to did not know their age.

104 I have included fifteen as the cut-off because there are several very young wives in the community. The youngest married man is in his late teens.

105 In particular, young women marry older men if a man is a labour migrant and his first wife dies prematurely, leaving him with young children to rear. In the early-to-mid 2000s, the severity of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the unavailability of treatment meant that premature deaths were quite frequent. Treatment has become more widely available in recent years.
Lodge. While young people thus constitute a small proportion of the total married couples in the community, this survey demonstrates that some young people do marry. For instance, my host family's 21 year-old daughter married her boyfriend, a mineworker with whom she had a young daughter, shortly after I finished my initial sixteen months of fieldwork. When I returned to the community after a year I found the umzi (homestead) much improved through the investment of bridewealth cash, as well as four new cows and nearly a dozen goats in the family's kraal.

My survey data also suggests that while unemployed men have little hope of marriage and legitimate fatherhood, marriage is a real possibility for some women. Indeed, a primary concern of the young women that I worked with was not that no one would marry them (after all, even if they remained unmarried most of their peers would be unmarried too), but whether their parents would compel them to marry a distasteful husband.  

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106 I cannot conclusively determine why marriage rates are slightly higher in Mhlambini relative to urban townships, although I have several speculations. Firstly, conventions of patrilocality and the powerful role that parental choice plays in marriage negotiations in some families mean that parents have a vested interest in their son’s marriage, and may contribute substantially to the bridewealth even if the son is unemployed. The following chapter provides a detailed ethnographic discussion of an affluent local woman who has actively procured wives for her sons, both of whom are unemployed and widely perceived to be lazy and delinquent. However, it also seems that in a few cases, some families are willing to accept much lower bridewealth payments up-front than they have in the past, meaning some young people can marry with very little money. The R480 procured through the CWP, and help from a grandparent’s pensions could perhaps be enough.
Figure 7: Newly-acquired bridewealth cows in my host family's cattle kraal.

Overall, I found marriage to be a deeply ambivalent prospect for young women. Consider the following statements:
I don't want to have a marriage of my own, because I want to live life what I want. I want to be free. Because if you're married, some husbands, our husbands, they don't allow a wife to do everything. Like if you want to go to have fun at Coffee Bay, some don't want you to go. And if you want to go to town, some they don't allow wives to just explore the world. Now, as mine, I want to live. To be free!

The speaker is a local woman in her early twenties, the eldest child in a relatively poor family. Nevertheless, she has completed 10th grade and is one of the better-educated young women in the community. In this statement she expresses herself using the language of individualized, equality-oriented person. She does not mention kin at all, but rather sharply juxtaposes married life with freedom, characterized by mobility and self-possession, as exemplified through living the life “I want [to have].” Such statements were echoed over and over to me by young, unmarried women in Mhlambini, many of whom were wary of the restrictions that could accompany married life. These statements were often articulated as critiques of icocontrols (a Xhosaization of the English verb “to control,” converted into a Xhosa noun), which these women report to be characteristic of marriage. icocontrols would be exercised first and foremost by the husband and his mother, but also other members of his kinship network (see also Gulbrandsen 2010).

Concerns about control in marriage stem from the gerontocratic hierarchy within the umzi, and are bound up with customs of hlonipha ('respect') (see Finlayson 2002; Soga 1932; Hunter 1961 [1936]). This respect is shown through the avoidance of certain words, and

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107By 'our husbands,' she means Xhosa husbands, as opposed to husbands in 'my' [white, urban, middle-class] culture.
avoiding parts of the hut and umzi associated with men. Moreover, within the gerontocratic and patriarchal social order that is framed as traditional, newly-married wives, called makoti, have very little power in the household. They are expected to carry out the bulk of the hard manual labour that goes into the daily reproduction of the homestead, and are expected to be deferential towards not only to mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband, and his brothers, but also his unmarried sisters. Ample sources document how hard the early years of marriage typically are for rural Xhosa wives (e.g. Liebenberg 1997; Whooley 1975; Hunter 1961 [1936]). However, as she bears children and as her children grow up and marry, a woman's status will grow alongside a decrease in her burden of manual labour. The ideal for an older woman is to reach a stage where she manages the homestead by delegating chores to her juniors. This rise in status is accompanied by greater freedom to move about beyond the umzi, to attend ceremonial events, to transgress gendered spatial boundaries, and to voice her opinion in their family and at community meetings. For instance, middle-aged women explain that they no longer require their husband's permission to visit their natal families or go to town to shop, although in practice many of them will request permission and their husbands are unlikely to refuse. In practice, of course, circumstances are quite variable, and these hierarchies are vulnerable to both direct and indirect forms of contest. Nevertheless, the heavy burden and low social power of young wives in their husbands' homesteads renders marriage an ambivalent prospect for many young unmarried girls.

Concerns over control in marriage complicate the advantages that marriage confers to women, presenting young women with a conundrum. On one hand, marriage is attractive in that wife-hood is a valued feminine role in Xhosa society. It is only through marriage that a woman can achieve a certain kind of respectable adulthood, and, one day, the status and social power of abafazi abadala (literally “old women,” but with a respectful connotation). Moreover, through
marriage she will gain a legitimate claim to ongoing support for herself and her children. Yet marriage also enmeshes her deeply into kinship relations characterized by gendered and generational inequalities, and will in all likelihood curtail many of the personal freedoms that she associates with being a modern person. The “humbleness and submission” required of young wives (Krige 1953: 116) was galling for them. In my experience, young women frame this as a conundrum that is specific to their generation, as “the times have changed,” and prior to marriage they are now 'free' in a way that their mothers never were.108

Yet while most young women are highly critical of married life, most readily concede that some marriages are more appealing than others. To understand young women's feelings about marriage, it is important to understand the various forms of marriage that exist in the community. These are arranged marriages compelled by parents, ukuthwala (abduction marriages), and marriages over which parents exert influence but where young men are given leeway to choose a spouse. Importantly, while people often distinguish between these forms of marriage when speaking in the abstract, this chapter and the next will show that the parameters between different forms of marriage -for instance arranged marriage and marriage by choice- are often blurry in practice. It also provides more impetus to be suspicious of the claims of early scholars on young people's complete lack of autonomy in spousal choice.

Moreover, while records suggest that all these forms of marriage have existed in Xhosa communities for many generations (see Wilson 1981; Whooley 1975; Manona 1980; Wilson et al., 1952; Hunter 1961 [1936]; Soga 1931; Cook 1931), young people frame some marriage

108 See Cole & Thomas (2009), and Stewart (2001) for discussions of how the privileging of individual passions over more relational considerations has long been posited by youth as a novel point of intergenerational distinction in Africa.
forms as being more traditional than others. As with other dimensions of social life, young people of both sexes map these various kinds of marriage onto a temporal moral geography, where traditional forms are associated with the predilections of elders, and are considered 'older,' stifling, and often out-of-date. Others, notably love marriage by mutual choice, are associated with being contemporary. That being said, while young people often articulate a sharp distinction between love marriage and other forms of marriage, the lived reality is not always so clear cut.

Two kinds of marriage are considered the most traditional, and by youth, the most outdated. These are arranged marriage and ukuthwala (abduction marriage), the two forms of marriage in which kin can, at least in theory, broker a marriage without consulting the prospective bride and groom, thereby violating their modern right to autonomous choice. Arranged marriage would be initiated and orchestrated by elders on behalf of their children, whose opinions may or may not be accorded much weight. Ukuthwala is a particularly volatile source of generational conflict, and is the focus of the final chapter of the dissertation. Briefly, in its contemporary form it is a kind of marriage whereby the husband-to-be abducts his bride and forcibly takes her to his homestead with the aim of making her his wife (see Rice 2014; Hunter 1981; Manona 1980; Whooley 1975; Wilson 1961 [1936]). The abduction may take place with or without the consent of the girl's parents, but in all circumstances the parents are then given the choice to either enter into bridewealth negotiations with the suitor, or demand their daughter's return. As I elaborate in the final chapter, the parents' wishes are always respected by the abductors, although the girl's wishes are frequently muffled. Significantly, both ukuthwala marriage and arranged marriage exemplify a notion of marriage as reproductive and socially embedded: the interests of the bride and groom are not necessarily taken into account, while the
interests of elder kin are paramount. As such, they violate the values of autonomous right and free choice that young people consider more modern.

Polygyny is also practised in the community, and is considered a longstanding Xhosa tradition. The ethnographic record suggests that it has long been the preferred form of marriage for affluent and powerful men (see Wilson 1981; Cook 1931; Alberti 1968 [1815]), but was the exception rather than the norm among the wider population. While it is legal in South Africa and is socially acceptable in rural Xhosa society, polygyny has long been on the decline among rural Xhosa, and this conjugal arrangement is the exception in Mhlambini today. At the time of my fieldwork there were only six polygynous families in the village (out of 114 households), and in two of those cases the husband had abandoned the first wife both socially and financially in order to establish a homestead with the second, whom he preferred. Several young men told me that such neglect has become typical when younger men take a second wife, although it is frowned upon. An additional two polygynous unions were comprised of very elderly people, while the fifth example involved two middle-aged widows who have outlived their shared husband, and who reside in separate huts in proximity to one another. The sixth are the parents of Nokwindla, who was mentioned in Chapter Three. Her father took a second wife because he had only succeeded in fathering one child with Nokwindla's mother, and hoped for more children.109

Unlike ukuthwala and some arranged marriages, no one ever explicitly criticized polygyny as old-fashioned. While young people do consider it a traditional form of marriage, young people's critiques of polygyny were somewhat different from those of ukuthwala and

109Nokwindla's father may, of course, have had more complex motivations for taking a second wife. I have no idea, for instance, whether he was already in a romantic or sexual relationship with his second wife prior to their marriage, nor whether Nokwindla's mother encouraged him to marry again.
arranged marriages. The first critique, which I mostly heard from young men, was a pragmatic one: polygyny is prohibitively expensive. Given that accumulating *lobola* for even one woman was unfeasible for most men, the prospect of two was virtually unimaginable. Moreover, supporting two wives and their children would be costly. For example, I discussed polygyny on a number of occasions with a male friend who struggled to satisfy the financial demands of his wife, his long-time girlfriend, and the six children that he had fathered between them. While he had the means to take a second wife, and while his wife was well aware of his second family, he was nonetheless adamant that marrying his girlfriend would make the situation worse not better, as she would then have a better claim to a share of his resources. This, in turn, would further aggravate his wife, who was already strongly opposed to the money spent on the girlfriend and her children. Polygyny is also unattractive to many young people because it is forbidden by local churches, and young women in particular were typically opposed because, in addition to competing with a second wife for the husband's resources, polygyny confounds their ideals of romantic companionate partnership.

Moreover, many young people of both sexes considered polygyny unfeasible because gendered expectations for marital intimacy have changed. Consider the following reflection by Unathi. This statement was made in response to my seeking his perspective on the seemingly pervasive gendered double-standard about having multiple intimate partners, and not about having multiple wives:

*I’m going to go back [in time] again, to what happened in the long days. The olden days, during our grandfathers’ and grandmothers’ time. In that time, my grandfather is married to my grandmother, neh? And then, he is allowed to have another woman outside of marriage. Of which my grandmother knows. They are not fighting! When my grandfather is not sleeping at*
home, my grandmother knows that he is there. With his girlfriend there. You see? There is no fight. There is no fighting here. If there is no sugar in that girlfriend’s house, she comes here to my grandmother’s house and asks for a sugar, or for a maize or something. It was not a fight. So, it comes to this: as a man, you are allowed to have a girlfriend. But your girlfriend must never have a boyfriend. [Kate: And it’s still like that today?]. It’s still like that today, especially in this place. But yhu! The girls don’t like it, you know. They don’t like it, but they know it is happening. Like for example [a mutual friend, who had two girlfriends that I knew of in addition to his wife, and had let me know on numerous occasions that although he was married, he was available]. His wife knows about it. You see, he is allowed to have it! But the modern girls, like the city girls, you can’t do that to them!

In addition to explaining that girls are growing frustrated with the sexual liberties that are more acceptable for men, Unathi’s statement also reproduces yet again the assumption that urban areas are more modern than rural areas, which are in a sense temporally prior to town. No young people of either sex ever suggested to me that they thought polygyny might be a possibility for them.

More common than clear-cut abduction and arranged marriages are marriages where a man is encouraged by his family to marry, but where he is given considerable leeway in choosing a wife. This seems to be the most widespread marriage form today, and had been the experience of most young married men that I got to know during my fieldwork. In these cases, the men

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110It is noteworthy that a number of young husbands emphasized and deplored the amount of pressure that their families had placed on them to marry. While most were happy for their parents' support and content to actively seek out wife if they could afford it, one young man whom I knew quite well flatly refused, and his mother ultimately sought out a wife for him. The mother was widowed, and had received a financial settlement from the mine where her husband had died prematurely in a mining accident. She wanted to use that settlement to pay bridewealth for her son before other kin laid claim to it, and carried through with her plan despite great reluctance on his part.
chose someone with whom they already had an established relationship (and usually children, as in the case of my host family's daughter), and they had discussed the possibility of marriage with their wives prior to formally approaching her family. All these men emphasized that their choices had been constrained by social obligations to kin, however, especially if they had already fathered children outside of marriage. For instance, as the eldest son, Andile had been under great pressure to marry following the death of his father, as his mother “couldn't be left alone at home.” While Andile had been living in Mthatha at that time and had girlfriend in town of whom he was especially fond, in the end he decided to marry a long-time girlfriend from a village near his natal home, with whom he already a child. He explained that although he loved his city girlfriend, he was concerned that she would not adapt to the material and social realities of married village life, and in particular would not be sufficiently hardworking and appropriately submissive to his mother. His concerns are likely an accurate reflection of the personalities of the women involved, but also reiterate once again the idea that people in rural areas are more traditional, and more accommodating of gerontocracy than city-dwellers. Examples like this also suggest that while people may articulate a dichotomy between love marriage and other marriage forms, in practice many marriages come about through a combination of parental involvement and personal choice (see also Hart 2007; De Munck 1998; Duben & Behar 1991).

While in most cases young men are given a (socially-constrained) choice of spouse, young people of both sexes identify a tension between the spouse that young men would choose for themselves, and the wife that their elders would be inclined to choose for them. The distinction they make speaks to a conceptual distinction between marriage and sexuality as primarily reproductive of household and lineage, and sexuality in marriage as a means of personal gratification and fulfilment for the husband. From the many conversations that I
initiated on this topic, it is clear that both young people and older people were in agreement about the kind of girl that elders will choose as a spouse for their sons: hardworking, respectful, quiet, and devoted to her family. This devotion would be demonstrated by her shyness, that she would always be busy with domestic chores, and that she would rarely venture far from her family's homestead except on errands such as fetching water and firewood. She would likely be spotted at an event such as a wedding, where she would stand out only for her industriousness. Young men in particular were keen to point out that the girl's attractiveness and charm would not be considered important by elders, so long as the girl was hale and hardworking (“no matter how ugly! The old ones don't care, so long as she is strong and always working!”). While this shows a potential incompatibility between the priorities of parents and offspring when it comes to preferred wives and daughters-in-law, it also shows that decisions embedded in kinship can reflect individualistic notions of identity. While parents may judge the suitability of a potential-daughter-in-law based on different qualities than their sons might, both sons and parents are evaluating a girl on her personal qualities.

The Allure of Companionate Marriage

The final form of marriage, which is desired by most young women, is companionate marriage founded on romantic love and mutual choice of spouse. I take this term as defined by Holly Wardlow and, Jennifer Hirsch to mean “a marital ideal in which emotional closeness is understood to be both one of the primary measures of success in marriage and a central practice through which the relationship is constituted and reinforced” (2006: 4). As has been found elsewhere, this form of marriage is considered “modern” by young people in many societies (see Classen 2013; Thomas & Cole 2009; Thomas 2009; Padilla et al. 2007; Hirsch & Wardlow
2006; Ahearn 2001), an assumption which, as Unathi's statement exemplifies, enjoys considerable currency in Mhlambini. Yet while companionate marriage is idealized by most young women, I am unaware of any local marriages that were formed because two people loved each other romantically, wanted to formalize their continued companionate commitment to one another through marriage, and decided as a couple to seek their family's support and blessing.\textsuperscript{111} Despite the rarity of marrying purely for love, however, love marriage by mutual choice is the aspiration for most young women.

Although young women are deeply critical of marriage, this should not be taken as evidence that they categorically do not want to marry. While a minority are strongly adamant that they truly wish to avoid marriage at all costs (see also Moore 1994; Van der Vliet 1991; Whooley 1975), in most cases these critiques should be taken as evidence that they are well-aware of the power relations that are likely to characterize a rural village marriage. Indeed, most wish for the status and security that could accompany marriage, provided it is not accompanied by excessive gendered and generational subordination. Importantly, they feel that this can most likely be achieved through a companionate love marriage based on mutual choice of spouse. What this entails is evident from this conversation with Mandisa, a young unmarried mother of two:

Mandisa: I don't want the man that wants to control me. I don't want anyone to control me. It's good to control myself. I need the man who is just equally [a man who will treat me as an equal]. We do things together. I don't want someone to control me. You see, in my village...most of them,

\textsuperscript{111}At the time of my most recent visit, however, there was one well-established young couple who had recently had a child together. While the young man had not initiated bridewealth negotiations (he earns a regular salary, and has the means to do so), and while the young women still lived at her family's homestead, rumour was that they might soon become the first “real” love marriage in the village.
the men, they will control you. The women they want are that ones that they will get a good answer [from]. You know? Like he can say to her 'you can do that, you can do that, but you don't get to do that [I forbid you to do that thing].' Yeah, most of them, they need someone to under him.

Kate: They want power over [a woman]? Is that what you're saying?

Mandisa: Yeah, they like the power. They want someone respecting him. If he says to her to do something, she has to do it. If he says “No!” No is no. If he says “okay, you can do that,” you can do that...But it's better the men that are Christians. Because there are some men, people who believe in ancestors. Those men, they go to the shebeen to drink, and when they're drunk, they come in the house, and they just wake [the wife] up and say “I need my food!” And she has to make the food to give it to him. Even if it's nighttime. Whenever. But the Christians, they are very different. They are cool. They are very cool. If you are a Christian man, you have to wake up early in the morning, and you just help your wife. Even in the yard, around here. You don't have to go to the shebeen, you know? You just stay around here. And if your wife doesn't feel like working, you have to do something like cooking.

Kate: If you were going to get married, what kind of man would you want to marry?

Mandisa: Me? I want the man who doesn't control the wife. I want the man...I want to control The man. To say “No, you don't have to go to the shebeen. You have to sit here with me. If you are going to the shebeen, we can go together and buy one beer, one beer. And then we come in the house and drink the beer in the house.” I want a man that's not just sitting around in the shebeen.
Kate: *Where do you find men like that?*

Mandisa: *I don't know. I don't know. I am looking for [one]. I don't know... Not in the village [I won't find him in the village]... Maybe one day I will find him...*

Mandisa's words are typical of what I found among young women in Mhlambini. They are also telling. On one hand, she articulates yet again a conceptual juxtaposition between the traditional, patriarchal village man and the modern city-dweller: the one who could love her for her personal qualities, enjoy intimate sociality, and treat her with respect is not to be found in the village. Mandisa's reference to drinking beer alone with her ideal man is also meaningful. While young women have long consumed alcohol together in secret (see Liebenberg 1994), young women's consumption of alcohol in public and in mixed company is frowned upon by elders and most men. Busi's ordeal with the egg, which I discussed in the Introduction, is an example of this. Moreover, as the discussion of the alcohol ban has already demonstrated, beer-drinking is an important dimension of masculine sociality. Similar to the significance of smoking together for couples in Papua New Guinea, as documented by Holly Wardlow (2006b), drinking beer alone with one's wife thus symbolizes that he accepts his girlfriend or wife as a respected companion. That he eschews the homosociality of the *shebeen* (or, perhaps, the company of women who may attend the *shebeen*) indicates that the man prefers the company his wife or girlfriend to that of peers and other women. Finally, the fact that they are drinking “one beer, one beer” shows that they are both exercising restraint, possibly saving some of their resources for joint projects such as household maintenance and school fees.

Equally significant is Mandisa's emphasis on the importance of a man who will treat her as a social equal. Similar to what has been documented elsewhere (Hirsch *et al.*, 2010; Thomas & Cole 2009; Spronk 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006), younger women associate romantic love
and companionate partnership with more egalitarian gender relations. In other words, it seems women in the community believe that in a love marriage gender relations will be more equal, their husband will be more helpful, less inclined to excessive drinking and wife-beating, and will be overall kinder than in a relationship not founded on romantic love (see Spronk 2009; Smith 2009).

Such relationships are so few in Mhlambini that I cannot authoritatively speak to whether young women have solid grounds for holding these assumptions. However, limited research from elsewhere suggests that while the conceptual link between romantic love and gender equality is widespread (Thomas & Cole 2009), this assumption often fails to meet women's aspirations in practice (Vincent & Chiwandire 2013; Spronk 2009; Smith 2009). For example, Louise Vincent and Desire Chiwandire recently carried out a qualitative study in an Eastern Cape town to test the assumption that romantic love is accompanied by more egalitarian gender relations among heterosexual couples. By interviewing a random sample of young men who self-identified as being either “in-love” with a woman or having been “in-love” with a woman in the past, they aimed to investigate whether “in their romance narratives, the men (...) interrupted or reversed the preeminent storyline running through harmful masculine scripts, including assumptions about the hierarchical ordering of gender relations with men positioned as dominant” (2013: 13). Their findings suggest that emotional and sexual intimacy, mutual support and respect, and commitment to marriage are not incompatible with gender hierarchy. Indeed, they note that discourses of romantic love provided moral scaffolding to men's claims to privilege, as men's needs continue to feature as preeminent in their narratives, but that these are “refracted through the lens of love and romance, thus emerging as more legitimate because they are constructed as requirements of intimacy” (ibid: 19). Certainly in my experience, Mhlambini women’s growing
expectation of being treated as social equals despite the payment of bridewealth is a subject of deep antagonism for both young men and elders, as the following chapter will show.

As a final note, while young women prioritize partnerships based on romantic love and draw sharp juxtaposition between themselves their elders, I do not intend to suggest that love is new in Mhlambini, nor that the relationships of older people are bereft of affection and care. Nor do I suggest that egalitarian ideology is a necessary precondition for romantic love or companionate partnership. Indeed, ethnographic work from Southern Africa indicates that so-called traditional marriages have been characterized by both segregated spheres of labour, hierarchical gender relations, and profound intimacy (see especially Schapera 1966 [1947], also Cape of Good Hope 1883). Moreover, in Mhlambini I know of a number of mature couples who married someone who had been their boyfriend or girlfriend prior to marriage, suggesting that young people's perceptions of great generational difference in marital practices may be exaggerated.

Furthermore, while most marriages may not have been founded on romantic passion and individualized love, many people reported having grown to care for their spouses over time. And while the emotional lives of older people were largely closed off to me - in particular, I would never have felt comfortable asking an elder man about his feelings for his spouse(s) - I have certainly come across older couples who are clearly spending time together by choice. For instance, one often finds older couples chatting and laughing with one another while working in their gardens, strolling to neighbouring villages together for umgidi (ritual beer drinks), or playing with young grandchildren.
**Lobola**

A great deal has already been said about *lobola* in Southern Africa, as bridewealth has long been a subject of both keen interest for ethnographers (e.g. Hunter 2010; Comaroff 1980; Goody & Tambiah 1973; Radcliffe-Brown 1950), and also a source of major concern, fascination, and intervention for administrators during the colonial era (Hunter 2010; Carton 2000). It is not my intention to expand greatly on understanding of the *meaning* of *lobola*, but rather to draw on this scholarship and on contemporary debates about *lobola* in Mhlambini to articulate the contours of gendered and generational contests over kinship and personhood. Briefly, *lobola* can be understood as the transfer of wealth -historically, this was typically in the form of cows, - from the groom's family to the bride's. While gifts such as housewares typically also pass from the bride's family to the groom's, people in the village always referred specifically to cows or cash\(^\text{112}\) when they spoke of *lobola*. Of particular relevance for kinship, the payment of *lobola* formally transfers children born of that union from the bride's lineage to the husband’s (Chigwedere 1982; Kuper 1982; Jefferys 1951). This can apply even to children who are born to the bride and groom some years prior to the marriage, provided *lobola* is paid after the fact. Moreover, scholars have long been emphatic that a major purpose of *lobola* is to solidify relations between two families (Chigwedere 1982; Shope 2006; Ansel 2001). Chigwedere, for instance, is so adamant on this being the purpose of *lobola* that he asserts that “precisely what you paid and how you paid it was immaterial as long as there was agreement between two parties” (1982:2). On a related note, Soga, a staunch advocate for *lobola*, states that the overarching purpose of bridewealth is the “security and of the status and protection of the

\(^{112}\text{The accurate term for the payment itself is } \text{ikazi.} \)
married woman” (1982: 264). By this he means that the lobola cows are kept by the bride’s natal family as a safe-guard for her good-treatment by her husband's family.

While these socially-embedded dimensions of lobola have stood the test of time, the practice has undergone modification since the early colonial era. The relationship between lobola and colonial administration has been fraught and complex (see Hunter 2010; Carton 2000; Jeater 1993). On one hand, some missionaries and administrators approved of bridewealth as a means of limiting immorality (Jeater 1993; Soga 1931). Moreover, alongside the dispossession of land by colonial settlers, lobola became a tool of colonial capitalism as it provided a ready-made incentive for men to work as labour migrants (Hunter 2010; Schmidt 1991). Most importantly, colonial administration was instrumental in reframing lobola in accordance with ideas of property rights (Schmidt 1991; Jeater 1993). Alongside such imperialist agendas, colonial administrators brought along very different, far more individualistic notions of personhood and commerce. As Barber writes, within the more impersonal and individualized economic system that shaped the worldview of colonists and colonial administrators, “relationships formerly based on sacred values become motivated purely by commercial interest” (1995: 205). From this perspective, bridewealth appeared to be the sale of a woman, and her “ownership” was increasingly seen to pass from father to husband in marriage (Ansell 2001, Jeater 1993). This is in sharp contrast to precolonial notions of wealth, in which wealth itself was founded on and constituted through social relationships (see Ferguson 2013; Barber 1995; Berry 1995, Guyer & Belinga 1995). In such context, exchange of women would produce new wealth of alliance for all parties involved, the lobolaed woman included.

Of course, colonial governance and missionization did not result in a complete “colonization of consciousness” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997); African people did not, therefore,
abandon precolonial meanings of gender and ownership in favour of property and the market.\textsuperscript{113} Moreover, as Hylton White (2013) explains, the dependency of extractive colonial capitalism on Black labour closely resembled precolonial notions of wealth in people in important ways. In short, while capitalism, missionization and colonialism introduced different ideologies and values, the fact that people were extremely valuable to elites remained the same. Drawing on James Ferguson, White suggests that “the major shift in southern African history is not the transition to capitalism, but the much more recent appearance of a mass of unemployed people who are surplus to the requirements of the powerful” (256). Contemporary lobola must be understood as a sort of hybrid.

While it is misguided to view lobola as mere sale and purchase, integration into a capitalist economy has changed the way people think about lobola to some degree. Notably, more recent scholars have noticed a change over the course of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, with lobola negotiations becoming increasingly similar to commercial transactions (Posel, Rudwick & Casale 2011; Shope 2006; Krige 1936). For instance, migrant labour and the growing urbanization of Black South Africans, accompanied by growing reliance on cash wages and by the decline of the rural agrarian lifestyle meant that lobola was increasingly paid out in cash rather than livestock (De Haas 1987; Brandel 1958). The impact of this increasingly monetized understanding of lobola is evident in more recent studies of lobola, notably in the pervasive use of money terminology by both men and women (Ansel 2001; Walker 1992) and parents' growing expectation that they should be financially compensated through lobola for the financial

\textsuperscript{113}Recent work on the role of capital in constituting social relationships in Africa offers profound challenges to the antisocial calculus presumed in earlier sociological theory (e.g. Bolt 2014; Kaler 2006; van der Geest 1997)
investment that they had made in their daughters (Raum & De Jager 1972; Longmore 1959, although see De Haas 1987). However, while this is interpreted as commodification, it can also been rationalized through the logic of socially-embedded personhood, as a girl's education can be a resource owned by her kinship network.

As mentioned above, a consequence of this change in lobola from an inter-lineage payment to a payment from a young man to his future in-laws is the increasing individualization of the process (Ansel 2001; De Haas 1987; Steyn & Rip 1968). As fathers contribute less than they used to, gainfully employed men are now able to exercise more personal choice of marriage partner due to their lack of reliance on elder men in order to pay lobola (Hunter 2010; Carton 2000). In other words, men who can afford to marry now have more leeway relative to previous generations to choose a spouse based on her personal qualities.

**Lobola in Mhlambini**

Attitudes towards lobola must be understood with a socially-embedded conceptualization of female sexuality in mind. Although many women are critical of marriage, attitudes towards lobola were almost unanimously positive in Mhlambini. This speaks to the profound importance that bridewealth plays in young women's sense of dignity and authority in the relationship. A very few women were deeply critical of lobola, as, in their view, it rendered women more vulnerable to mistreatment by husbands. These women emphasized that by having lobola paid, a woman lost the authority to seek assistance in the event of abuse, as well as the right to refuse sex or request a condom. Yet even for these women, lobola was inseparable from legitimate marriage. While one woman told me that she envied me the possibility of marrying without lobola -thereby retaining the right to report an abusive husband or to refuse sex, for instance- for
most of these women the only alternative to *lobola* was to remain unmarried. Importantly, even women who were highly supportive of *lobola* did acknowledge that *lobola* can trap a woman in an abusive relationship, as dissolution of marriage would entail a return of at least some of the *lobola*. As a young woman once explained to me, “Sometimes [the family will] just take that lobola, and maybe it’s not a cow also, but money. And [they] just take that money and buy clothes. So it works like that, lobola. And I don’t think it’s good, because maybe the cow has died. Died. Died! And you? You’re still there. Not died, you know? But you can’t leave now.” In other words, the bride is trapped because her family has already spent the *lobola*, and would be unable to pay it back if she were to leave a distasteful marriage.

Not only does *lobola* trap women with their husbands and legitimize his right to discipline her, it also seems that the amount of *lobola* that has been paid\(^\text{114}\) is understood to correlate with the degree to which a man is entitled to use and discipline his wife. Consider the following ethnographic example, which took place during my fieldwork:

Odwa and Nomthandazo are a young married local couple. Odwa's parents and grandparents have all died, and Nomthandazo, Odwa, and their young daughter live together in three rondavels in the centre of the village. Odwa has no formal education, and is employed as a manual labourer for the NGO. Roughly a year into my fieldwork Odwa and Nomthandazo had a serious dispute. The story circulating in the village was that Odwa had been caught having an affair with a much older widow. Nomthandazo, a very pretty woman less than half the widow's age, was insulted and deeply ashamed that her husband had cheated on her with such an old woman. In retaliation, she took their daughter and returned to her parents' homestead on the other

\(^{114}\)As many anthropologists have noted, marriages in Southern Africa were historically a process rather than a singular event (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001; Murray 1981; Radcliffe-Brown 1951). As the Comaroffs state, “the salient question was not whether or not two people were married, but how much” (2001: 271)
side of the village. Some two weeks later the community health worker and I were visiting Nomthandazo's parents' umzi, and Nomthandazo's mother Nothembele filled us in on the details.

Yes, Nomthandazo had returned home in response to her husband's infidelity, and Odwa had recently come to the umzi to ask forgiveness from Nomthandazo's father, and to request Nomthandazo's return. Nomthandazo's father stated that he would not force his daughter to return against her will, and that Odwa must plead his case with Nomthandazo personally if he hoped to make amends. At Odwa's request Nomthandazo emerged from a hut. Odwa tried to persuade her to come back but Nomthandazo was still angry, and insisted she would stay with her parents. According to Nothembele, Odwa became angry at her refusal, and he hit her.

Nothembele emphasized that this altercation had taken place in broad daylight, in plain view of neighbouring homesteads, and she was emphatic that they would certainly not send Nomthandazo back now, given that Odwa had been violent towards Nomthandazo when he was already in the wrong.

Interestingly, Nothembele continued her story by bringing up bridewealth as a primary reason why Odwa was especially unjustified in striking his wife. According to Nothembele, she and her husband had sympathized with Odwa because he was an orphan, and had accepted a single bridewealth cow from him. She explained that they agreed to such a low lobola only because Odwa and Nomthandazo had a child together already. Yet this low lobola was apparently relevant to the current marital dispute: as Nothembele explained, “how could Odwa possibly feel the authority to strike Nomthandazo, given he had paid so little? Now we will certainly not send her back!”

115 Returning to one's own people as a form of protest at mistreatment in one's marital home has long been a strategy available to Xhosa women (see, Liebenberg 1997; Wilson 1980).
Barring the few women mentioned above, and despite how *lobola* can constrain women's options in the event of conjugal disharmony, most young women were highly supportive of *lobola*. As Mark Hunter has documented in detail in KwaZulu-Natal, most young women viewed it as an acknowledgement of and *constitutive* of their value, and of their husband's commitment to support them and their children. My women friends would typically shake their heads and cluck in pity and disapproval at the idea that if I married, it would not involve *lobola*; I would have no dignity in such a marriage.

While young women's attitudes towards *lobola* confirm recent research from elsewhere in South Africa, I contribute to early work by demonstrating how contemporary ideas about *lobola* are implicated in conflicting notions of sexuality and personhood. For example, while filling up at a petrol station in the nearest city, I came across an article about *lobola* in *True Love*, a South African lifestyle magazine aimed at middle-class and affluent urban Black women. The article, entitled “Desperate or Daring? The Price of Paying your own Lobola,” (Magwaza 2011) contained interviews with various women drawing on personal experience to argue for or against contributing to their own *lobola*. All the women featured in the article were urban-dwelling professionals. The article was a subject of shock and horror when I brought it back from the nearest city and showed it to my girlfriends in the village. Consider the following statement made by Fundumi, when I asked her what she thought of a woman helping to contribute financially to her own *lobola*:

*I feel so sad. I don’t think it’s a good idea to, as Fundumi, pay my own lobola! As my own! [Kate: Why are you sad?] Because I just want to see the value of his love for me. By paying lobola. I just want to know that he really, really loves me. If I pay the lobola for my own, maybe this man does not love me yet. But I just buy him for... [Pause. She is at a loss for words] I just buy him to
love me! I don’t like that. I want to see him by paying for me a lobola. Not me paying a lobola for him!

Within the conceptual framework of socially-embedded sexuality, helping a man to acquire your own lobola is unimaginably degrading. Indeed, the women interviewed in the article, all of whom cohabitated with their husbands independently of in-laws, implicitly rejected the idea that their reproductive capacities (or bodies, or education) were in any way the jurisdiction of their parents. Rather, those who had paid some of their own lobola justified their contributions by wholeheartedly rejecting “old fashioned” ideas about marriage and family, and by reproducing a conceptual dichotomy between modern, urban-dwellers, and rural tradition. One interviewed woman, for instance, is quoted: “my uncles are rural, and my husband and I are your typical modern couple. We had spoken to my mom about it, and had even agreed on a limit upfront because we had a budget. But since she's a single mother, my uncles on my dad's side got involved. That's when thing went pear-shaped” (in Magwaza 2011: 130). Instead, they emphasized their autonomy and the primacy of their loving, conjugal relationship to “the man of my dreams” (ibid: 132), and reflected that their decision to contribute to their own lobola was based on a desire to respect tradition, satisfy parents, and get married sooner.

This perspective was unconvincing to all my woman friends in the village. Rather, as Fundumi’s quote exemplifies, young local women were fixated on the idea that a relationship where a woman contributes to her own lobola could not possibly be legitimate. Holly Wardlow's work on 'passenger women' among the Huli in Papua New Guinea is helpful in understanding the perspective of my women friends. Similar to the Bomvana, bridewealth is central to Huli marriage and reproduction. 'Passenger women' are highly-mobile women who remove themselves from the bridewealth system, often subsisting independently of kin by exchanging
sex for money. Considered deviant, these women are accused of appropriating their sexuality for their own pleasure and benefit by “eating their own vaginas.” As Wardlow explains, passenger women appropriate their own sexuality from their kin partly as an act of resistance, in retaliation for feeling that their sexuality is being increasingly commodified by their kin.

While there is certainly a prominent connection between sex and material provision in Mhlambini, there is no subject position analogous to passenger women. Wardlow's work is helpful, however, in understanding how the relationship between bridewealth and female sexuality makes paying one's own lobola somewhat perverse. As Wardlow explains, by benefiting economically through the deployment of their own sexuality, passenger women are in a sense 'stealing' their sexuality from their families. So if a woman helps pay her own lobola, she is in essence stealing her sexuality from her kin, but also assisting a man to steal it from herself as well!

Women's dress

As Terence Turner (1980) has famously remarked, clothing is a “social skin” that mediates between self and society. Clothing thus serves as “an ever-present semiotic possibility for expressing identity and intention, for asserting the legitimacy of the status quo or subverting it” (Hendrickson 1996: 14-15). Ample literature documents the dressed body as a site of political and ideological contest (e.g. Ivaska 2004; Hay 2004; Bastian 2001; Entwhistle 2000), and as a powerful symbol of national, class, and gendered identity (e.g. Allman 2004; Hansen 2004; Renne 2004; Burman & Turbin 2003; LeBlanc 2000; Hendrickson 1996). As such, through the adoption or rejection of particular fashions, individuals can use their dressed bodies to position themselves in relation to the conventions of their society (LeBlanc 2000).
Analyzing the politics of dress in contemporary South Africa requires not only an understanding of the dressed body as a social skin and vehicle for self, but also an awareness of the ways in which dressed African bodies were a key site of contest and subject formation in what the Comaroffs have termed “conquest by consumption” (1997: 219). While dress served as a site of distinction according to, for instance, age, gender, and social status long before the colonial era (see Mayer 1971; Cook 1931), the role of dress in the joint project of missionization and colonial capitalism meant that Western dress opened up an “experimental language with which to conjure new social identities and senses of self” (235). Importantly, this process was fundamentally gendered both through the imposition of Christian notions of domesticity and gender difference, and also in the fundamentally gendered way in which Africans were integrated into the migrant labour system (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997). As Isaac Schapera (1966 [1947]) noted in the 1940s, ownership of particular kinds of Western clothing marked important distinctions between those (disproportionately male) individuals with experience as labour migrants in urban areas, and their less cosmopolitan counterparts who remained in rural regions. The politics of dress are thus part of the much larger, fundamentally gendered project of producing, negotiating, and contesting ideas of modernity, tradition, urban and rural, through the colonial encounter. The body of literature on Red versus School Xhosa makes abundantly clear the degree to which dressed Xhosa bodies were seen to index either the rejection of Xhosa lifeways and values, or active resistance to particular ideologies that were conceptualized as being in opposition to Xhosa tradition.

In part because of their role in maintaining rural homesteads under labour migration - what the Comaroffs term the “feminization” of the South African countryside- women's dressed bodies in particular are perceived as sites where Xhosa tradition is maintained and reproduced
Despite the onslaught of globalization. It is no coincidence that touristic media frequently promote the prospect of seeing Xhosa women in 'traditional dress' as a key attraction of visiting the rural former-Transkei, as such clothing is framed as evidence that local culture has changed little over the ages. However, it is not only tourists who equate traditional dress with timeless traditional values and life-ways. Such assumptions are shared by many South Africans, including many Xhosa. Thus, women's dress maps onto the temporal moral geography that I have discussed in previous chapters, wherein rural areas are thought of as repositories of timeless African values and practices. Accordingly, women in traditional dress are often perceived as symbolic of and acquiescent to gerontocratic patriarchy.

A consequence of associating traditional dress with Xhosa tradition is that women who adopt more cosmopolitan fashions can easily be read as subversive of the social order. This is particularly so given that the opportunities to access certain kinds of clothing and accessories - as well as media which promote particular fashions - have increased roughly concurrent with the adoption of the new Constitution and Bill of Rights. Thus, while young women's access to items such as trousers and hair extensions may have as much to do with greater opportunities to travel and consume since the end of Apartheid than with human rights and gender equality *per se*, many people draw conceptual links between the adoption of cosmopolitan fashion and the decay of gerontocracy and patriarchy.

**Married Women and Traditional Dress**

In Mhlambini, conventions of dress identify a person according to life stage. For women, the dress restrictions that accompany marriage are the most obvious symbol of women's change in status from girl to woman, and from daughter to wife. Specifically, marriage marks the point
at which women must abandon certain adopted conventions of Western dress –notably trousers and visible hair- in favour of clothes that are considered traditional. Thus, because marriage marks the point at which a woman's reproductive capacity become integrated into her husband's lineage, women's dress symbolizes not only their married status, but also that their sexuality is appropriately socially-embedded. It is also for this reason that dressed female bodies provide one of the most obvious examples of the locally-salient juxtaposition between modernity, tradition, urban, and rural which transcend mere dress, encompassing particular orientations of gender and age relations.

Figure 8: Older traditionalist woman at home on a typical day. Her many strings of ankle beads, two-horned headdress, and absence of brassiere all denote her status as a traditional woman.

Importantly, women's dress is such a significant cultural symbol of identity and value that it is
usually possible for the informed viewer to gauge a woman's marital status, religious and spiritual affiliation, socially-achieved age, and alliance with certain moral values by the clothes she wears.

There are some strict conventions to which all married women must adhere, however, regardless of age or affiliation: all wives and widows must wear long skirts and long aprons, and they must never be bareheaded in public or in front of in-laws. These dress conventions are linked to *hlonipha*, and in particular to respect for ancestors (Whooley 1975; Mayer 1972a). Although it is not a rigid rule, except for on very special occasions most wives and widows wear long skirts made of a durable printed fabric called *shwe-shwe*. *Shwe-shwe* is mandatory for new wives, and is the only fabric that I have seen older women wear (again, except for very special occasions). Thus the only women who wear long skirts of other fabric are younger wives who have given birth to a child or two, and are well-established in their marital homes.

Interestingly, the term *shwe-shwe* translates as something akin to "concubine," a somewhat ironic meaning given the fabric denotes married status. Originally the uniform of German missionaries in the Eastern Cape, *shwe-shwe* was adopted by Xhosa people at some point in the 20th Century. Similar to the dress of Tswana women discussed by the Comaroffs (1997), *shwe-shwe* as 'traditional' Xhosa attire, represents both an accommodation of mission ideology - prior to the adoption of *shwe-shwe*, Xhosa women usually wore blankets, skins, beads, and ochre body clay,\(^{116}\) - as well as an insistence on remaining distinctive from Europeans in

\(^{116}\)Most Xhosa words for items of clothing are borrowed from either English or Afrikaans, alluding to the profound role that colonization has played in conventions of Xhosa dress. For example, trousers are *ibhulukwe* (from "broek," meaning trousers in Afrikaans), and skirts are *isketi* (from skirt). Significantly, the only items of clothing that I know of that are not denoted by borrowed words are items worn by married women: *ijikiza* (the long apron that married women wear over their *shwe-shwe* skirts), and *iqiya* (the head covering).
dress. Today, the fabric is a quintessential marker of Xhosa ethnicity. Although *shwe-shwe* clothing can occasionally be seen on middle-class urban South Africans, (some South African designers have used this fabric to design their couture in recent years, for instance), long *shwe-shwe* skirts with head-coverings mark the wearer as ethnically Xhosa, married, and traditional (and thus, quite likely rural). Except on very special occasions, when they wear heavy embroidered skirts, headdresses, and blankets, most local married women are marked as both Xhosa and married by their *shwe-shwe* skirts.

*Figure 9: Local woman wearing a typical shwe-shwe skirt and apron.*

While no new bride or elder would adopt something other than the traditional skirt and apron, a few young but established wives do wear long skirts that appeal to more cosmopolitan
models of contemporary fashion. In rare cases these are Western-style skirts which would look unremarkable in most cosmopolitan world cities, but more often they appeal to a specifically pan-African fashion sensibility. For example, a few of the most stylish younger wives who have husbands that are employed by mines are starting to wear one-piece *shwe-shwe* dresses with matching headdresses. Although the fabric is considered traditional, the design of these dresses and headdresses resembles the 'boubou' or *complet trois pagnes* styles that are popular in West Africa; to wear these hybrid fashions denotes a more cosmopolitan, less traditional identity.

![Stylish young wife wearing a non-traditional shwe-shwe dress and matching head-wrap, which she bought in Rustenberg.](image)

There are a number of reasons why these newer styles of dress project a modern identity. Firstly, they can only be acquired in town, meaning the wearer has probably spent some time in
urban areas. More importantly for my argument, however, wearing these sorts of clothes suggests that she has a particular kind of relationship with her husband. If she chose the dress herself and bought it with her own money, it means that her husband and his family allow her to work for a wage. Many local men refuse their wives this privilege because they are uncomfortable with their wives moving freely beyond the homestead, or because they find their wife’s financial independence threatening. Young women listed losing the authority to hold a job as a reason for not wanting to marry a typical local man, as well justification for why marrying a less traditional, more urbanized man would be preferable.

If the husband bought the unconventional dress for the wife, however, it likely means that his wife has accompanied him to his place of work. If their husbands are labour migrants, many women see their spouses perhaps twice a year. Yet some younger wives voluntarily visit their husbands at their places of employment, sometimes remaining for weeks or months at a time. The attraction of these visits is the opportunity to travel, spend time in more urban regions, and also enjoy the husband’s company while free from the demands of in-laws. Significantly, several people made it explicitly clear to me that modern relationships require this sort of companionate intimacy. Consider the following statement made to me by Unathi, who grew up closer to town. It is an excerpt from Unathi’s explanation of how marriage differs in the village versus in more urban areas:

*In my village now, the only person you marry is the person you agree with [the person you want to marry for their personal qualities, and vice versa]. You agree that I’m going to marry you. And in my village, if I marry you, I must go to my place of work with you. You must go and stay where I’m working. I don’t just marry you and go and work in Jo’burg, leaving you there with my parents. No! What we normally do, when I get married, when we stay with my*
family, she cooks for the whole family, she cleans the houses. My wife, she must always have a chore that she’s doing. But then then when I’m going [back to my place of work], she comes with me. I hire someone to wash clothes for my mother or my grandmother, to cook for my grandmother, you know, just to do the house chores that were supposed to be done by my wife. Because my wife can’t just stay here in the village, look I’m married here! But when it comes here in this village [Mhlambini], if you marry, you marry for your parents. You leave your wife here with your parents to stay, to go fetch wood, fetch water, cook, and re-dung, and make mud bricks for your home. And you are there, in Jo’burg, working hard under the mines. So you see, I think that’s where maybe you can see the difference, between the way we were growing up and the way they are grown up here. That’s why I’m saying that we are kind-of next to the towns, leaving our culture behind. Ya. Because really, long time ago, when you were marrying, you were marrying for your parents. You see? Your wife, her work is for your parents. Not for you.”

Unathi’s statement has a number of important implications. Firstly, he suggests yet again that contemporary life in Mhlambini is somehow temporally prior to life in urban areas. Without uncritically concurring with the temporal geography that Unathi perceives between marriage in the village and in town, I do suggest that for some younger couples in Mhlambini, convention is inching towards marriage that is organized according to the primacy of the couple rather than the husband's parents. And Unathi's reflection also alludes to why these changing conventions of companionate, married intimacy are a source of consternation to elders: the family does not benefit from the wife's labour while she is away. Absentee daughters-in-law were a source of complaint and consternation for a number of older women that I was acquainted with throughout my fieldwork, some of whom made it clear to me that they had not given their daughters-in-law permission to leave the homestead.
Unathi’s reflection is also interesting in terms of what it implies about the value of labour in marriage. As I have explained elsewhere, prior to the migrant labour system fathers provided the lobola cows for their sons, thereby controlling access to young women’s productive and reproductive labour. With wage labour and the accompanying transfer of economic power from elder patriarchs to younger men, the latter gained considerable autonomy of spousal choice (see Hunter 2010; Carton 2000). However, records also suggest that long after the rise of the migrant labour system wives were still expected to reside with and work for their parents-in-law for the first few years of marriage (Mager 1999; Hunter 1961 [1936]). If bridewealth is central to legitimizing men’s entitlement to a wife’s productive and reproductive labour, then there is something perverse about the expectation that a son should work long years to save enough money to pay lobola, only for his parents to reap benefit from her labour and companionship. Some might argue that the investment that parents made in their son’s upbringing entitles them to his wife’s labour power later in life, yet statements such as Unathi’s suggest that this interpretation is contested. Indeed, Unathi’s explanation suggests that the value of labour may be an important point of intergenerational disagreement, with young men’s claim to their wives’ labour gaining currency alongside the growing prominence of companionate monogamy as a founding premise for marriage.

To return to the topic of young, modern wives, 26 year-old Nophumelelo is a good example of this kind of young married woman. She was born and raised in a relatively affluent household in a nearby village, and is a well-educated woman by local standards. She met her husband, a man from Mhlambini, when she was at secondary school in Idutywa (a town along the national highway, some hour and a half drive from Mhlambini. She boarded with extended family there). Nophumelelo’s husband is some six or seven years older than she is, and is
employed in Rustenberg as a mineworker. Although Nophumelelo explains that she had not wanted to marry, upon returning to the village for school holidays she learned that her father was in the process of negotiating bridewealth with a man whom she barely knew. Horrified at the prospect of an arranged marriage to a relative stranger, she turned to her boyfriend for help. By her account, he convinced her to marry him instead, and subsequently mobilized his family to make a proposal to Nomphumelelo's father.

My impression is that Nophumelelo is considered a good wife by her in-laws and by the wider community. She is hardworking and is respectful of her husband's parents, with whom she resides, and is the mother of two young boys. Yet she has explained to me on numerous occasions that her relationship is not a traditional Xhosa marriage, as it is premised first and foremost on her and her husband's love for one another. While the events leading up to her marriage suggest that her decision to marry was heavily constrained by circumstance, she is quick to emphasize that hers is an example of a love marriage based on mutual choice. Nophumelelo's feelings about her marriage also speak to the interrelatedness of material provision and emotion attachment (see Hunter 2010, 2002). For example, she derives great joy and satisfaction from the material accoutrements such as wardrobes, double bed (with its red velour heart-shaped pillows with the word 'love' embroidered on them), vanity, kitchen cabinets, and dishes that her husband has bought for their three-room square house in the village (her elderly in-laws reside in two thatch-roofed rondavels some few meters away). The pride she takes in these material possessions was made clear to me on a day when, after having spent the morning in her garden helping to harvest sweet potatoes, she requested a photo shoot of her posing with her various items of furniture.
Without violating the mandatory convention of wearing long skirts and covering her hair, Nophumelelo dresses in a way that distinguishes her somewhat from other village wives. She often wears either one-piece shwe-shwe dresses with elaborate matching head-wraps, or skirts sewn in traditional style but made from unusual fabrics. When I have asked her where she gets her fabulous outfits, she says that she bought them on one of her visits to Rustenberg. She visits her husband periodically throughout year, but she does not bring her two sons, aged five and two, because she and her husband like to use these visits to spend time together undisturbed.

Head-wraps and Hair Extensions

The variety of head coverings worn by married versus unmarried women are also indicative of changing notions of sexuality and personhood. While any girl or woman may wear skirts regardless of marital status, it is only married women who cover their hair with iqiya (the
Xhosa word for headdress) or a *doek*.\(^\text{117}\) The important distinctions between Christian and traditionalist beliefs and politics are also apparent from women's *iqiya* (see Whooley 1975). More traditional women wear their *doeks* tied with two peaks that stick out horizontally, somewhat like cow’s horns. At ceremonial events such as weddings and important ritual beer drinks, the traditionalist women put great effort into developing enormous, elaborate peaked *doeks*.

![Older traditionalist women at a ritual, wearing elaborate face clay and some of her better beads.](image)

No unmarried female would cover her hair by choice, except to protect and cover her braids or hair extensions when she sleeps. The head covering is thus the primary symbol of married status among women. This is expressed nicely by Nwabisa, who reflected that “In

\(^\text{117}\) Borrowed from Afrikaans, this word is often used by Xhosa speakers to refer to their head coverings, and is also incorporated into South African English to refer both to the head coverings worn by married Black women, and to bonnets worn by Afrikaner women in previous centuries.
Mthatha, some of them [wives], they wear trousers. And they just say [that they are married] when you ask them. Or you just say to them “oh, you are looking pretty now!” And they will say “it’s because I am married, you see the ring!” Here we don’t use the ring. Yeah, we don’t use the ring here. Here, the ring is the doek.” Nwabisa’s comment also highlights a difference between the lifestyle and self-presentation of married urban and rural women, where some married urban women are not restricted in their dress in the same way that rural women are.

Not only do all younger married women avoid the traditionalist pointed doek, most of them also opt for stretchy black Lycra fabric that can be tied over braids, regardless of whether their marital family are traditionalists or Christians. This is in sharp contrast to older women, who wear their hair closely-cropped under their doeks. I went out of my way to ask about changing conventions of dress in Mhlambini, and asked a number of older women about changes to young women's head coverings. They are usually disparaging of young wives who wear braids and hair extensions under their doeks, pointing this out as wasteful, disrespectful, and vain.

Figure 13: Four young wives at a ceremony. The wife in the foreground is wearing a stretchy Lycra doek over braids.
Older women's criticisms of young wives’ vanity implies a great deal more than curmudgeonly resistance to change. Rather, such critiques reflect anxieties about young wives adorning their bodies in ways which suggest a femininity that is more individualized and sexualized, as opposed to appropriately embedded in kinship (see Wardlow 2006a). Specifically, I suggest that controversies over young wives' stylish clothes and hair extensions are unsettling to elder women in part because, by striving to present themselves more like unmarried girls, they are blurring a distinction between their appropriate role as primarily reproductive -of lineage and homestead,- and as a desirable, sexy woman.

The ethnographic record suggests that it has long been acceptable for unmarried women to beautify and distinguish themselves through their dress. Consider Monica Hunter's writings on amadikazi, a class of unmarried but mature women:

The class of amadikazi (...) is large, and practically every married man has a special friend among them (...). Amadikazi are always noticeable by the number of their ornaments and the elegance of their clothes, presented by their lovers (...). A man buying a skirt for his wife ordered fifteen rows of braiding, and remarked 'That will be plenty, it is only for a wife, not an idikazi.' (...) The position of an idikazi is difficult to estimate justly. Any woman is flattered if you greet her as an idikazi. 'That is the name we like best. 'Amadikazi, as women living at home, have less work to do and greater freedom than wives (Hunter 1961 [1936]: 206-207).

The implication here is that it is acceptable and expected for unmarried women to attract -and advertise- men's favour through flattering dress, but less so for wives given their primarily reproductive and mothering role. Moreover, contemporary conflicts between unmarried girls and
their boyfriends over wearing of trousers (more on this below) suggests that the clothing worn by unmarried girls is considered sexier than the clothing worn by wives. Several girlfriends of mine have complained that their boyfriends threaten to beat them when they wear tight jeans, as their boyfriends accuse them of looking too sexy in front of other men. While wearing trousers is controversial, it is at least acceptable for unmarried girls to wear them.

Older women are critical of sexy wives in part because a favoured young wife is a potential threat to her mother-in-law’s social power. Furthermore, some elders may be concerned about young wives establishing bonds of sexualized, companionate intimacy with their sons because of the implications that this could have for the allocation of resources within the household (see Hirsch & Wardlow 2006; Wardlow 2006a). After all, the young men who can afford to marry are the minority who are gainfully employed. Often, these men support not only wives and children, but also parents (at least until they begin to collect old age pensions), unemployed siblings, and the children of unmarried sisters. I am aware of a number of marriages which were strained for precisely these reasons. For instance, I met Cikizwa, a young woman from a neighbouring village, through my research into ukuthwala marriage. She had been married by abduction to a young man from Mhlambini, and had spent over a year as a new wife at her husband's homestead. By her account she had grown to love her husband, and had enjoyed his company. However, her brief marriage had been plagued by a difficult mother-in-law who felt entitled to exclusive access to her son's wages, and who mistreated Cikizwa out of jealousy. According to Cikizwa, her husband had sometimes given her money directly rather than through his mother, and occasionally brought her gifts. Her mother-in-law had eventually become so incensed that she forced the dissolution of her son's marriage, and banished Cikizwa back to her natal village.
I never met Cikizwa's estranged husband, so I do not know what his feelings for her may have been. It is reasonable to presume, however, that a son who is fond of his young wife will be more likely to privilege her priorities relative to the wants and needs of other family members. Moreover, she will likely expect him to show his love through provision of gifts, and he may enjoy doing so, especially given the complex materiality of love that is characteristic of social life. Of course, close bonds between sons and their wives have no doubt long posed a threat to the social power of elder women. What is particular about such tensions in the contemporary era is (pre-pensioned) mothers' increased dependency on the income of wage-earning sons\textsuperscript{118} alongside the increasingly potent idea that a close, intimate bond between spouses is ideal.

Although her research context is very different from Mhlambini, Lila Abu-Lughod's analysis of generational antagonisms over young Bedouin women's adoption of lingerie offers additional insight into why older women take issue with braids and hair extensions on wives. Her research also speaks to why young wives might be motivated to beautify themselves. Similar to what has happened in Mhlambini, Abu-Lughod writes that as the Bedouin community has become more integrated into wage labour systems, economic power has become more consolidated among young, employed men rather than elders. As noted earlier, in Mhlambini this means that young men with the means to marry are able to exert more influence in choosing a spouse. At the same time, as the cost of children rises in capitalist economies, women's reproductive capacities become a financial burden rather than an invaluable resource. I have already explained in detail in previous chapters how this has contributed to gendered antagonism and to a general decline in the social status of women in South Africa (Mager 1999; Hunter

\textsuperscript{118}While many young men are unemployed, the young men who have wives are almost exclusively the ones that do earn wages.
In such a context, women (indeed, everyone) become increasingly dependent on men with access to money. As Abu-Lughod writes, for such women their well-being and standard of living now depend enormously on the favor of husbands in a world where everything costs money, where they are many more things to buy with it, and where women have almost no independent access to it (...) men's power now importantly includes the power to buy things and to punish and reward women through giving them [things] (1990: 50).

While young wives are not categorically forbidden to work in Mhlambini, many men in Mhlambini actively foster economic dependency in their wives by forbidding them to engage in wage labour. This dependency can be quite precarious for a wife if she falls out of her husband's favor; as we saw with the example of Nomvula's mother and in co-wife from Chapter Three, men with means do abandon spouses -usually spouses chosen by kin for their work ethic and family connections, - in favor of women who are younger, sexier, and more charming. And while people may privately disapprove of these situations, there appear to be few social sanctions against doing so. Whether married or single, a femininity premised on sexual attractiveness rather than a meek and industrious work ethic is increasingly a valuable resource that can be deployed in the interest of personal security.

However, while I do think that wearing hair extensions and stylish clothes are evidence of cultivating more individualized selves, I do not suggest that by wearing stylish clothing or subtly

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119 For example, in an article entitled Effects of Contact on Status of Pondo Women, Monica Hunter writes that with proletarianization has come the expectation that a woman should be dressed by her husband rather than by the much wider network of people who benefited from her bridewealth, thus producing new tensions in the household. In her words, “to the extent to which the man is the sole wage-earner, and the family is living on things bought, not home-produced, contact here lowers the status of women” (1933: 271).

120 Nophumelelo, for instance, works part-time at the NGO doing data-entry and translation work. Her in-laws and her husband both approve of this work as a means of bringing extra income into the household.
sporting braids and hair extensions under their doeks, young women are waging calculated resistance to the appropriation of their sexuality by their husband's kin. After all, these young women are not refusing to marry and bear children, and in most cases they spend much of their day engaging in precisely the domestic chores that their elders expect of them. Nonetheless, the fact that some young wives use their dressed bodies to embody a sexualized femininity is a source of generational conflict because of the potential sexualized married femininity poses to the gerontocratic order.

“We Wear a Skirt Sometimes, but It’s Trousers Now”

The sharpest point of distinction between women of differing ages and statuses is whether or not they wear trousers. While many -although not all- girls and unmarried women regularly wear tight, form-fitting jeans and track pants, no married woman would ever do so. Yet the wearing of trousers is also a sharp point of generational distinction, as it is exclusively young unmarried women who wear trousers. The few older women who have never married wear shwe-shwe skirts and iqiya just like their married age-peers, and are visually indistinguishable from their married age-mates. As such, trousers are an obvious symbol of 'new' values and lifestyles.

\[ \text{121} \text{There is one notable exception: the headmistress of the local primary school. Born and raised in Mhlambini, she is the most affluent and educated Xhosa person in the village. While she is middle-aged and unmarried, she never wears shwe-shwe, nor does she cover her hair (she always wears skirts, however). I have never seen her attend any ritual event (wedding, funeral, umgidi), nor have I ever seen her out and about in the village. She seems to spend most of her time removed from the community, either in her sprawling umzi on a hill at the edge of the village, at school, or in town. All her children attend private boarding school elsewhere. In distancing herself from the community in this way, this woman reproduces notions of difference between town and village, tradition and education. Yet her homestead is visible from almost everywhere in the village, and thus serves a constant reminder of her presence.} \]
Bomvana men adopted trousers long before women did; trousers are considered conventional dress for all men and boys. Because trousers are considered male attire, women wearing trousers can be read as subversive of the gender order. Such gendered symbolism of trousers finds resonance elsewhere in South Africa, and in a range of postcolonial societies (Suriano 2008, Cummings 2007; Bolton 2003). For example, in a discussion of gender violence in South Africa, Mark Hunter (2010: 171) discusses the highly-publicized incident of woman in a Durban township who was stripped and forced to parade the streets naked as punishment for violating a local trouser ban. Although he does not explicitly discuss the rationale behind the ban, he identifies this event as an example of public outcry over the perceived indiscipline of women in the democratic era. The symbolism of the trousers and their implications for gender power are thus easily inferred. Similarly, in a discussion of controversies over women's wearing of 'traosis' (a kind of loose trouser) in Vanuatu, Lissant Bolton offers an analysis which could as easily describe Mhlambini. According to Bolton, men's resistance to traosis is:

as an expression of discomfort at the rapid pace of change in the country since independence, a pace people may find hard to manage. (...) The opposition to traosis has developed over the period when urban-based women's organizations have increasingly advocated women's rights, when women have started to seek election in Parliament, and when some women are achieving employment in government and business at higher levels (...) The opponents of traosis see the wearing of them as a claim to male practice” (2003: 136-137).

Likewise in Mhlambini, women in trousers can attract disapproval and reproach from men who feel threatened by what they perceive as increasing independence on the part of young women. Yet young women also consider wearing trousers to be symbolic of egalitarian gender
relations. For example, while they were critical of married village life, virtually all my women friends felt that I have little excuse not to marry. The fact that I could still wear trousers and have 'nice hair' if I were married was offered as a case-in-point example of why I had far less grounds than they do to be critical of marriage. The underlying assumption was that I would obviously marry an educated, affluent (probably white) urban man who would not begrudge my holding a job and moving about as I pleased. While my girlfriends were certainly aware that 'white people' do not share rural Xhosa conventions about married women's dress, I got the impression that the fact that most white wives wear trousers is understood as a self-evident symbol of a more egalitarian relationship between spouses. The fact that many middle-class Black wives also wear trousers seems to reinforce young women's perception that gender relations are more egalitarian and women are more 'free' in town, and that this freedom and egalitarian ethos is linked to education and affluence. 

Because trousers are both a point of contention and a symbol of appealing gender relations, young women's trousers are both a point of distinction and a point of solidarity among those who aspire to particular lifestyles. It is no consequence that the young women who often wear trousers tend to associate with one another.

122 Because of the way that race and class map onto one another in South Africa, my young women friends equated race and social class in ways that I found awkward. Several young local women friends, for instance, confided that they would like to find a white man because "white people are better" at relationships. Their perception was that white men are less likely to beat their wives, and that white people are more truthful with one another and are less likely to engage in extramarital affairs. While these women certainly understand that the experience of poverty and marginalization contribute to conjugal stress, they often spoke as though race itself -as opposed to the privileges and resources to which white people have disproportionate access- were the key factor in why white couples appear (at least in their opinion) to have more peaceful intimate relationships. Such perceptions likely also draw on a long colonial and missionary legacy which promoted the idea that white people's privileged position in deeply-stratified society reflected their innate goodness and disposition towards virtuous conduct (see Englund 2011: 126).
The young women who usually wear trousers are also the ones who move more freely around the village, who spend time at the backpacker lodge or watching the local (all male) football league compete, and who spend time in *shebeens*. As such, they demonstrate a degree of independence that marks a change from even the relatively recent past, and their lifestyle is viewed as less traditional than that of their peers. Moreover, when I have asked these women about their hopes and aspirations for the future, they are more likely to focus their aspirations towards achieving financial self-reliance, and to cherish grand dreams of employment and success in business. Typically, these women would emphasize in particular their desire to have their own house where they would live with their children, and would list consumer items such as phones and cars as
ideal accoutrements to this modern lifestyle. Obligations to kin often feature in these narratives not as recipients of *lobola*, but as beneficiaries of financial assistance. As Mandisa once told me, “my father, he says that if a man comes to marry me, then I can get married [my father will consent to the marriage]. But no one is coming to marry me. And I tell my parents, if there is something that you suffer to buy, I can buy it for you instead.”

Meanwhile, in my observation, the unmarried young women who wear only skirts are more likely to stick much closer to their family's homestead, and to avoid places such as *shebeens* and the backpacker lodge. Anecdotally, they also seem to be the ones that both men and elders choose as wives. I suspect that this is because they are perceived as more likely to be demure, hardworking, and respectful of the gerontocratic hierarchy. Given tight, stylish clothing can be a useful means of attracting male attention and support, women who avoid trousers are also perceived to be more trustworthy marriage partners. For example, my host family's eldest daughter, who married shortly after my fieldwork, was one of the more home-bound young women in the village. She never frequented a *shebeen* or the backpacker lodge, and rarely wore jeans without a long sarong or towel wrapped around them. On the extremely-rare occasion when I saw her leave the immediate vicinity of the *umzi*, she always wore a dress. I think it is no coincidence that she is one of the few young women to marry in recent years. In contrast, Mandisa has a job as a Fisheries Monitor, drinks beer, wears trousers, and has two sons with different fathers. She resides with them in her own hut which she built herself, on her family's ancestral land. While chatting with Unathi about the kind of women that local men would prefer to marry, I brought her up as an example (“what about someone like Mandisa?”). His response was “Yhu! That one! Aie, no one can marry her now! One child, maybe, like if she has one child but she is working hard, being quiet. But now with two, and also what's she's like [how she
behaves]! Un-uh, no one can marry her. But a man from the outside [outside the village], he can marry her. Because if he can love her, then it doesn't matter. But not in this village. No one here can marry a woman like that...”

Finally, one of the most interesting conversations that I had during my fieldwork affirms that wearing trousers is symbolic of changes to the gender order, and in particular changes to women’s role in society. I was discussing the pros and cons of marriage with Busi, a young local woman who, in her patterns of consumption, leisure and self-presentation exemplifies many of the qualities that locals associate with modern, urban lifestyles. She is one of the few young women who is categorically opposed to both marriage and lobola. During this conversation, she was explaining to me again why village marriages are bad. After explaining why marriage is distasteful, however, she paused for a long moment and then qualified her opinion by clarifying that while marriage is bad today, it was not so in the past. In her words, “when my mom was married, it was old times. Now, it's these times. And it's just changed, the times. Now marriage and lobola are bad, but before, it's not bad.” I asked her to explain how it is different now, and again she paused thoughtfully before replying: “my mom, when she was a girl, when she married [she] just put on a doek, you know? At that time, they were not wearing trousers, they just wore the beads.123 But now, these times are not like that...we wear a skirt sometimes, but its trousers now. It’s a lot of trousers now. But before, it’s not a trouser, you know? Of course Busi is not referring literally to a change in local attire, or at least not exclusively so. Rather, she is saying that in her mother's generation, there was no option but to marry, and to assume a position in a gendered and generational hierarchy in which young wives bear the heaviest burden and have

123Wearing beads is considered traditional attire. At events in honour of ancestors, older people wear their best beads.
little social power. She is saying that in those days, since marriage was the probable future for all women, since a sharply hierarchical gender order was unchallenged by law, and since there was no feasible alternative that would allow a woman to support herself, there was no undue hardship incumbent in putting on long skirts and a doek. Now, however, with a wider scope of opportunity available to women—at least for a fortunate few—marriage may denote a great loss of freedom. This, I think, is what makes marriage “bad” for women today, and why wearing trousers symbolizes this change.

**Conclusion**

In an analysis of fashion and life-course among women in Cote D'Ivoire, Marie-Nathalie LeBlanc explains that clothing choices offer a powerful means through which women can negotiate their identity in a time where “a number of elements of social change have reconfigured women's social roles and status” (2000: 443). Approached from this direction, the debates over women's dress belie forms of subjection that are gaining a powerful social life in Mhlambini, and also speak to many of the broader themes of this dissertation. Thus generational and gendered conflicts over women's dress are one symbol and manifestation of conflicts over individualistic versus socially-embedded notions of personhood, rights and democracy, as well as individually-possessed sexuality versus sexuality that is embedded in networks of kinship which are themselves being transformed through economic and political changes reaching far beyond the community itself. As Abu-Lughod notes, such fashion choices are “part of a world in which kinship ties are attenuated while companionate marriage, marital love based on choice, and romantic love are idealized, making central women's attractiveness and individuality as enhanced and perhaps necessarily marked by differences in adornment” (1990: 50). The following chapter
focuses on another lens through which people in Mhlambini understand and interpret social change: equality and human rights.
Chapter Six: Rights and Equality

Because we have our own rights, you see, as traditional people. Now our rights are being trampled! (Middle-aged man)

I'm against the women. The women are the ones who have a lot of changing things.” (Young man)

Introduction

While somewhat provocative to liberal sensibilities, the two quotes provided above would strike no one in Mhlambini as especially outlandish. With few exceptions, men and elders in particular would identify with a juxtaposition between tradition on the one hand, and liberal notions of rights and freedoms on the other. Moreover, many share the feeling of loss for an increasingly vulnerable way of life, and many would concur that women bear an inordinate responsibility for the suffering and disorder that accompany this change. These statements would thus be provocative in Mhlambini too, in that they reflect deeply-felt concerns and anxieties. And, depending on the speaker and the context, these statements might likely provoke vehement refute from defensive women. In short, they speak to one of the most profound sources of gendered and generational conflict in Mhlambini: those over the moral value of rights and freedom.

In this chapter I take up the topic of human rights in Mhlambini, as no discussion of gendered and generational conflict in the community can escape engaging with what many people experience as a primary source of this conflict. In so doing, I engage with and build upon a body of literature which has exposed the ways that human rights and equality, being premised on liberal idioms of individuality and autonomous personhood, are experienced as destabilizing of social hierarchies which have long formed the foundation for personhood and moral action (Boyd 2013; Oyowe 2013; Englund 2011; 2006; Piot 2010; Nyamnjoh 2004). Thus, in this
chapter I suggest that concerns about human rights reflect concerns over intergenerational and intergendered social relations, and the perception that people are increasingly failing to meet them. In particular, I build on previous South African scholarship that documents profound gendered antagonism to show how in rural areas like Mhlambini, rights are a powerful terrain through which these negotiations are waged (see Decoteau 2013; Hunter 2010; Posel 2005a; Sideris 2004). Finally, in analyzing contemporary discourses about rights and responsibilities, I suggest that the perception that obligations are not being met finds resonance with a recent move on the part of the state to not only promote human rights, but also cultivate civil responsibilities in its citizens. Yet this endeavour is vulnerable to critiques similar to those that have already been levelled at human rights in postcolonial contexts: they address the quintessential moneyed, autonomous, propertied neoliberal subject who can be empowered to act (see Boyd 2013; Englund 2011, 2006; Li 2007; Paley 2001). Ultimately, I suggest that this serves to obscure the ways in which interpersonal obligations are undermined by economic and political forces far beyond the level of the individual, lineage, or even community.

Rights in South Africa: Some Background

Because of the recent history of systemic oppression, human rights are an especially powerful moral force in contemporary South African life. Resistance to Apartheid, both within South Africa and abroad, was largely framed in reference to notions of universal rights to human dignity and equality, with powerful critiques of the former regime aimed at exposing the ways in which it had denied such rights to the majority. At the level of legislation, this has been resolved in post-Apartheid South Africa through a Constitution and Bill of Rights that were designed to address previous inequalities (Davenport & Saunders 2000).
South Africa's Constitution is widely recognized as one of the most liberal-democratic in the world, explicitly stating not only that all people are equal before the law, but also that it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on grounds of “race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language” (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996: 3 (8)). While many of these rights have been welcomed by most South Africans, in the years since democracy it has become increasingly apparent that there is widespread disagreement within civil society about the content and pragmatic implementation of these rights (Posel 2004). For instance, there is a struggle between liberal notions of democracy founded on individual rights, and understandings of democracy that reflect Black nationalist emphases on sovereignty and self-determination of the previously-disadvantaged majority (Johnson & Jacobs 2004). Furthermore, beyond the level of state politics, the notion of universal equality is out of keeping with the moralities and the lived experience of many South Africans, notably in communities where gerontocratic and gendered hierarchies are most deeply important (Posel 2004).

For example, shortly after democracy Barbara Oomen analyzed the South African vigilante organization *Mapogo a Mathamaga* (roughly, “if you are a leopard, I am a tiger”). Rallying with cries such as “where have you seen a criminal with rights?!” this organization aimed to impose “generational and school-based authority” (Ritchken 1995: 368, in Oomen 2004), and to deal with criminals through swift vigilante justice rather than through newly-formed apparatuses of legal administration. As Oomen explains, this organization gained wide support by exercising such authority in communities where police were systematically failing to protect citizens from crime and violence. Oomen argues that *Mapogo* was appealing because it “was essentially offering a morality different from the neo-liberal constitutionalist discourse.
predominant in politics at the time, and as such, appealed to most of the more conservative
elements in rural society: parents, chiefs and business and church leaders” (2004: 154). In place
of the Constitutional law, this organization “spoke for an alternative citizenship, one based on
patriarchal power and privilege that resonated particularly well in an area with (...) a long history
of intergenerational conflict” (155), and resonated most especially with parents whose primary
concern was “that democracy would allow their children to rule them” (160). Similar concerns
are regularly voiced by parents in Mhlambini.

As in many postcolonial contexts, rights in South Africa are also fraught because liberal
claims to universal human equality are confounded by the blatant socio-economic inequalities
which characterize post-Apartheid South Africa (see Englund 2011; Nyamnjoh 2004). This
speaks to a much larger paradox about rights, capital, and autonomy in the neoliberal world. As
Julia Paley writes,

The nature of democracy and the influence citizens could have on policy in the
late twentieth century were shaped not only by national politics, but also by
international economic processes. In public discourse, (...) policymakers and (...) politicans have linked free market economic policy to democracy, seeing them as
twin pillars of freedom around the world. Yet as citizens in places as diverse as
Africa, Latin America, and countries of the former Soviet Union acquired the right
to vote in the 1980s and 1990s, they often had little ability to influence public
policies. By the 1980s and 1990s, these countries' economic frameworks were
largely determined not by citizens but by employees of multinational
corporations, experts within financial institutions, or staff of transnational lending
bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (...) At the very moment when
countries regained democratic political institutions, key decisions about public life and the economy had moved outside the ambit of elections, beyond the reach of the electorate -indeed, beyond the reach of the nation-state (Paley 2001: 4, also Makhulu, Buggenhagen & Jackson 2010)

As Francis Nyamnjoh eloquently observes, proponents of human rights rarely acknowledge the stalemate implicit in the marriage of the rights-bearing autonomous individual to an economic system that renders self-determination unattainable for a growing proportion of humanity. In his words, “a critical look beneath the rhetoric of rights appears to point to the fact that being an individual in the liberal democratic sense of the word is a process and a luxury that few can afford in reality” (2004: 34). Thus, as Johnson and Jacobs explain, “recent debates in South Africa test the capacity of the dominant, international liberal paradigm to be meaningfully implemented or effective in local contexts where vast socio-economic and racial inequalities persist” (2004: 86).

Rights have proven problematic in South Africa for other reasons as well. While the “right to culture” is also guaranteed in the Constitution and Bill of Rights, in practice this right has been difficult to implement and define (see Cowan 2006). On one hand, respect for cultural diversity has been part of the ANC's guiding philosophy for decades, and has been explicitly affirmed in party documents since long before the democratic era (Venter 1995). Moreover, beyond merely outlawing discrimination on grounds of culture, the South African Constitution both explicitly guarantees the right to participate in the cultural life of one's choosing, and also recognizes the legitimacy of traditional legal systems (Comaroff & Comaroff 2005; Himonga & Bosch 2000; Davenport & Saunders 2000). In so doing, policy-makers hoped to sidestep the “rights versus culture” problem (Cowan: 2006: 9), the issue being the “long-term tensions –
moral, ethical, ontological, epistemological, philosophical, and political-” (ibid.) that arise from the apparent juxtaposition of rights as universal, while societies are particular in their social lives and moral scope.

Yet ambiguities have arisen because it was not explicitly stated how both Constitutional, traditional legal systems, and rights to culture would be achieved in practice. Writing shortly after the transition to democracy, legal theorist Christine Venter summarizes this conundrum as follows:

It is unclear just what role will be played by customary law within the new legal system. Their reticence is perhaps understandable, since an emphasis on cultural rights might lead tribal groups (...) to pursue secession. Nonetheless, allowing cultural groups to practice customary law without any limitation makes a mockery of the protection that the Constitution affords women (1995: 4).

Evidence suggests that these conundrums are far from resolved, especially with regards to gender equality. As explained in Chapter Four, African women have historically been legal minors under Customary Law, subject to the authority and discipline of husband or father (see Walker 1982; Seymour 1982). Although this law has now changed, ample evidence suggests that true gender equality in areas governed by Customary Law, such as Mhlambini, is rare in practice. For example, it has been found that, particularly in rural areas, women are often not permitted to represent themselves in traditional courts, and do not, in practice, have access to civil courts (Higgins & Fenrich 2011; Claassens 2009). Moreover, recent developments, notably the Traditional Courts Bill (TCB) empower traditional (usually male) leaders to “unilaterally define the content of custom within ethnically delineated tribal boundaries” (Claassens 2009: 10, also
Mnisi 2010), suggesting that the pendulum may be swinging away from individual human rights and towards “despotic decentralisation” (Mnisi 2010: 4).

Beyond the conundrum of reconciling women’s status under Customary Law with their Constitutionally-sanctioned right to freedom from discrimination on grounds of gender and sex, further complications stem from the fact that the territories overseen by elected officials in rural municipalities overlap with those of traditional authorities whose claim to their position is hereditary rather than democratic (Rangan & Gilmartin 2002; Ntsebeza 2002). These contradictions are resolved in Section 30 of the Constitution, which privileges rights to equality over customary hierarchies in proclaiming that “everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights” (see also Comaroff & Comaroff 2005: 302; Davenport & Saunders 2000: 579). While admirable to the extent that policy-makers have sought to resolve a fundamental contradiction in South African law, rights to culture and traditional legal systems are nonetheless problematic from an anthropological perspective, premised as they are on the presumption that culture is “a unified arrangement of practices and meanings” (Cowan, Dembour & Wilson 2001: 8) that can be freely-chosen or put aside through will. Moreover, some optimistic scholars of South African law have recently argued that Customary Law can function in line with Constitutional law, provided Customary Courts function as discussion forums rather than despotic professional institutions (Himonga 2011; Weeks 2011). These scholars make the argument that culture is not static and is by its very nature inclined towards change, and predicate their support for Customary Courts on the assumption that Customary Law is thus adaptive by nature. In other words, since culture changes over time, Customary Law will necessarily change as well. Yet Customary Law is predicated on the idiom
of tradition and, as I have already explained, people in Mhlambini presume that tradition and culture are synonymous, and that both are longstanding, static, and bounded. The hierarchical gendered relations prescribed by Customary Law are presumed to draw their moral force from the very fact that they are held to be unchanging, and the idea that people could actively modify tradition would strike people as contradictory. Moreover, as I explained in the Introduction, cultural continuity is framed as a fundamental component of keeping ancestors kindly-disposed towards their kin. As such, active modification of tradition could bring illness and misfortune. As such, it is not feasible to suggest that local disputes could be resolved through egalitarian deliberation as a form of Customary Law.

Finally, any discussion of human rights must be attentive to the above-mentioned challenges that arise from translation not just between different systems of knowledge and value, but also between languages. This is relevant in Mhlambini because the Xhosa words used to refer to rights have somewhat different origins and associations as compared to the terms “right” and “rights” in English. The isiXhosa term typically employed is amalungelo, a noun derived from the verb ukulunga, meaning “to be right” in either a pleasing sense (as in, “everything is alright”) or in a morally upstanding sense (as in, “it is right to respect your parents”). It is not the word that would be used to convey being correct about something factual (“you're right, the cows have escaped from their pen”). A practical example of the much wider applicability of this term in isiXhosa is evident in the name Nokhulunga, which is the most popular name for a married woman in the village. While this name could be translated as meaning literally “mother of rights,” local people told me that it means “mother who makes it nice [in the home].” Importantly, a mother who makes it “nice in the home” is not one who ensures equality between all members of the household, herself included, but rather one who fulfils her obligations to
members of the household whose relative social powers are unequal. As with the concept of ‘amalungelo’ more generally, Nokulunga implies a person who is fundamentally socially-oriented.

Moreover, in conversations with young people they often used the term irayithi, a Xhosaization of the English word “right.” The adoption of an English word likely reflects a disjuncture between the concept of amalungelo, with its association with pleasing, socially-oriented moral rightness, and the more ambivalent attitudes towards human rights in the community.

Other scholars have remarked on such difficulties in translating the language of rights into other languages in the Bantu language family, and their observations are also relevant here. Mark Hunter (2010), for instance, offers a very similar discussion of the semantic difficulties of translating “rights” between English and Zulu (the Xhosa and Zulu languages share many similarities, and are mutually intelligible). Similarly, writing about Malawi Harri Englund explains that the Chichewa translation of “rights” is literally “birth freedoms” (2006: 22), and he asserts that confusion arises not from an impossibility of accurate translation, but rather from poor translation. Moreover, Kristen Cheney (2007) reports that many Ugandan parents were unimpressed when, for instance, representatives of the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network employed a word which means 'you are free to do what you want.' Finally, Mikael Karlström’s analysis of language and democracy among the Baganda in Uganda indicates that local understandings of democracy differ significantly from Western notions of democratic rule. In the local language, 'democracy' and 'human rights' are both translated as eddembe ery'obuntu, a composite term which translates more accurately into English as 'civil liberty.' Through a long
discussion of Baganda history and contemporary ethnographic research, Karlström demonstrates that

the qualification of *eddembe* by *obuntu* points away from a sense of intrinsic individual freedoms or rights and toward an understanding of freedom as guaranteed by a rightly-ordered policy, a society where both rulers and subjects conform to standards of civility which are inseparably ethical and political (1996: 490).

Rights conceived in this way would side-step many of the critiques about rights in Mhlambini, as they emphasize the fulfilment of interpersonal obligations between people while likewise acknowledging the unequal power relations between them.

**Rights and Generation**

Contests over rights lie at the heart of the most volatile conflicts between elders and youth. Older people in particular are deeply concerned over what they perceive as a marked decline in young peoples' respect (*imbeko*) for gerontocratic authority, and with the way that rights to equality “induce disunity, double standards, moral decadence, disobedience and insolence by youth against elders” (Nyamnjoh 2004: 36, also Englund 2000: 583). Examples of such disrespect include young men drinking alcohol and becoming violent, young people reporting their parents to police for beating them, and young women turning to police in the event of forced marriage.

In my experience, older people applaud rights to racial equality, and ground their approval in the pragmatics of daily survival: mineworkers are treated better than they were prior to democracy, and social grants are now widely-available. Yet apart from rights to racial
equality, older people considered rights to be young people's affair and were critical and dismissive of them as such. While some older women were readier to weigh in judiciously on the issue of rights than were their elderly male peers, older women in particular lamented that they feel bewildered by rights, and were skeptical of the notion that rights and equality applied to them. What emerged from my conversations with mature villagers was a sense that many of them feel they exist on the outside of a rights-based world. Indeed, the perception that one engages with others as a rights-bearing person is arguably one of the major divisions between old and young.

For example, older people like Nokhumbulele positions older, traditional women outside the orbit of rights. When attempting to discuss rights with Nokhumbulele, she asserted that “abantwana” [children] like my research assistant and I have rights, but traditional women like her do not.124 When my research assistant tried to counter this assertion by arguing that she too was a woman rather than a child (a married mother, she took issue with being positioned as a child rather than with Nokhumbulele's assertion that as an older woman she lacked rights), Nokhumbulele interrupted her by saying “No, I mean things are not the way they used to be. You are not living like we are living. Even you can see that.”

When we asked her whether there is anything good about rights, she was reluctant to voice an opinion, and instead offered the following:

*I won't be able to identify which right is good, as we [women of the older generation] are still living in that former way of life. In everything we're still holding onto that former way of life. I'm*

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124In a study of rural Zulu attitudes about isihlonipho (respect language, to be discussed below), Stephanie Rudwick and Macingo Shange similarly note that among their elderly interlocutors, “the opinion was reiterated many times that gender equality applies to 'city women' and not the rural women” (2009: 70).
saying that they [rights] are good according to the way things are today, but they are not good for us because they bewilder us...

Similarly, in a conversation with the elderly sub-headman he brought up rights in the context of changing gender relations and disorderly social reproduction:

[Nowadays] There's rights, so if there is someone you want to be intimate with, you will just phone the person and say “at such and such a time I want you here.” It's not you [the man]. It's she [the woman] who will be made ready for sex here, not so? [It's the woman who wants sex, and who phones the man]. Those are the things of you young people. It's not the game that people in my day used to play. And we no longer ask any questions, because we can see that the country is messed up. Is it not so that these days it is permitted for a Black person and a white person to marry, and nothing is seen to be wrong with that? It wasn't like that in my day. In my day, if you met a white person and you fell in love with her, you would have made a big mistake. Do you know that if that happens these days, you haven't made a mistake?! What kind of law is that?! It's the current law!\textsuperscript{125}

Statements such as this must be seen in light of much broader concerns about the way that rights provide legitimacy for sexual and reproductive norms which undermine generational obligation and authority. Lydia Boyd's (2013) recent work on rights and same-sex sexuality in Uganda offers a useful comparison. Boyd notes that for many Ugandans there is a fundamental distinction between same-sex sex acts, and the social sanctioning of the “right” to homosexuality.

\textsuperscript{125}This statement was made in my presence but was directed at a young man, hence the gender of the “you” here. An especially reserved elderly patriarch, this sub-headman took little active interest in me and my affairs, and never addressed me directly throughout the entire duration of my fieldwork except on one occasion, when he instructed me to translate a greeting that he addressed to my father. It is probably no accident that this statement was made in the presence of the one young, white female resident of the village, however.
Despite vociferous claims that homosexuality is un-African, Boyd notes with surprise that many people readily acknowledge that same-sex sex acts have long been practised in Uganda, and that these acts in themselves pose no great threat to society. As a pastor explained to Boyd, however, the social sanctioning of homosexuality through rights discourse is a completely different affair: by granting a right to same-sex sexuality, Ugandans would be condoning a new freedom from cultural norms, including obligations to family. In other words, it is not the sex itself that is disruptive of the social order, but rather an implicit rejection of socially-embedded sexuality and thus the rejection of the centrality of kinship and family for moral personhood.

I think that rights are threatening to elders in Mhlambini for similar reasons. Indeed, even the sub-headman's statement should not be taken at face value, as he is well aware that interracial sexuality is not novel in South Africa. Indeed, although local people had limited opportunity to interact with white people until the establishment of the backpacker lodge, the largest clan in the village, called Abelungu (“white people”), proudly claim descent from shipwrecked European sailors. The sub-headman is certainly aware of this. But he is also keenly aware that rights have brought about a fundamental change in the social legitimacy of interracial sex. And while the right to same-sex sexuality was not a pressing public concern for people in Mhlambini at the time of my fieldwork, young people sometimes referred to same-sex

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126 Not to suggest that interracial couples are free from social sanction in contemporary South Africa.
127 It may well be a pressing private concern for some people in the community. My impression is that most people consider same-sex sexuality to be white people's affair, and therefore not of concern for village life. Same-sex couples sometimes visit the community as tourists, and are permitted to book shared accommodations. I am told that one of the women who works at lodge once walked in on two (deeply embarrassed) male tourists having sex together, only to collapse on the ground howling with laughter. Moreover, Steven's brother, who resides in Cape Town, periodically visits the community with his husband. They are warmly welcomed, and are greatly admired for their robust frames and enviable girth. Finally, a year prior to my fieldwork Leanne, a middle-aged American special-education teacher, volunteered for nine months with the education program at the NGO. Her American wife, whom she married in South Africa some years before, stayed with her in the community for several weeks. Leanne told me that the community was surprisingly accepting of her relationship, to the point that she learned that her hut, as the home of a “woman married to a woman” was a special feature on the village tour.
marriage as evidence that people of their generation are truly free to do whatever they wish no matter how perverse or nonsensical, especially in the realm of sex and relationships.

Importantly, however, elders also linked rights and freedom to a decline in generational respect in ways that resonate with Boyd's observations. For example, many elders are critical of overt displays of intimacy between unmarried young people, which they experience as a deplorable affront. These displays of intimacy typically took the form of young people walking down the road together, or of a young man chatting with his girlfriend by the riverside while she washed laundry. Yet I recall being struck over and over that elders never deplored the actual intimacy itself; they assumed that all normal young people have boyfriends and girlfriends. What they took issue with the public nature of it. “In the old days, we would meet in the forest, or meet after our parents were sleeping! If we saw anyone older, day or night we would run and hide! If I was caught, my father or brother could beat me!” I remember an elderly woman saying. That young people paraded their affairs publicly suggests to elders that they embrace a public sanctioning of sexuality outside the constraints of reproduction and family life.

However, most of all elders critiqued rights because they justified young people's failure to meet their obligations to their elders. Over and over during the profiling research I was told of the problems caused by young people's disrespect, in the name of freedom. Here are but a few examples:

“Young women are disrespectful. They 'move up and down' [the road] with men. They like having boyfriends, and they don't respect people. They don't take care of their elderly people anymore” (elderly woman)

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128 As Andreas Sanger (2002) notes regarding his research on old people’s “complaint discourse” in a Cape Town township, there is a certain hopeful performativity to these statements. Because they were made to me (a white anthropologist and NGO volunteer) while I was engaging in NGO business, it is likely that people emphasized their own neglect and suffering in hopes that I would ‘do something’ to alleviate their hardship.
“Young men have no dignity. They are just outside all day, doing what they please. They do nothing to help at home. Then they come home after dark and expect to be fed (middle-aged woman)

“The youth are not the same as the old generation. The girls and young men are lazy, and they are busy with their own things. They do not take care of their families anymore (middle-aged man).

Recent research on the language of elders’ complaints demonstrates that complaint is an important symbolic practice through which they can reinforce social norms (Sanger 2002; Cattell 1999, 1997, Rosenberg 1990). Rosenberg (1990), for instance, reports that elderly !Kung intentionally formulated discourses of neglect in order to emphasize the important of caregiving and sharing as moral imperatives. Moreover, Andreas Sanger found that township-dwelling Xhosa elders offered statements virtually identical to those provided above, offering analogous critiques of unruly youth, neglect of the elderly, and the public displays of affection. His analysis is helpful in understanding the significance of Mhlambini elders’ complaints. He writes,

For older people, to embrace a girl or boy in front of older persons was certain evidence of the young people’s rejection of all moral obligations towards the elderly (…)

Disrespect, defined as divergence of younger people's behaviour from ‘traditional’ cultural behavioural norms, thus involved a threatening (…) and paralysing (…) experience. Disrespect (…) bore witness to the ineffectiveness of social relationships and thus of selves. In view of the aged, it negated both their dignity and personhood (2002: 50, emphasis added).

For people who have grown up in a gerontocratic and interdependent society where status and full personhood are owed to the elderly by virtue of their life experience and
connection with ancestors, disrespect and neglect from youth robs elders of their very
personhood. Furthermore, elders expressed considerable concern not only for their loss of
dignity, but also that this lack of interpersonal care threatened the wellbeing of everyone in the
village. For example, one of the sub-headman once told me that he is afraid people will starve in
the future because they are not farming maize anymore.129 Importantly, he framed this problem as
a lack of interpersonal care. In his words, “[this change] is something that is killing us, that is
going to kill us. All these things that are happening are afflictions. They’re afflictions. But we do
it to ourselves, because we don’t help each other. One can’t do things on one’s own.”

Rights for Women

If rights challenge relations of obligation by destabilizing the authority of elders over
their juniors, rights to gender equality are similarly upsetting to relations of obligation in the
domestic sphere. As Deborah Posel writes,

The transition from Apartheid has politicized the regulation of sexuality in
unexpectedly intense ways. One element of this process has been the
destabilisation of “traditional” versions of manhood, provoking backlashes from
men who feel themselves undermined or emasculated by newly “empowered”

In my experience, the most volatile conflicts between men and women stem from a
widespread perception among men that young women are intentionally abusing their rights at
men’s expense. This is exemplified by an interaction that I once had with Mbeko and Jono, two

129 Many families do grow maize in their gardens, although not on the scale that they did even in the 1990s. No
family in the village could survive entirely off the crops that they are currently cultivating.
men in their mid-to-late 20s. The three of us were grilling fish on my fire pit, and I brought up the topic of women's rights. I had discussed this topic at length with both of them in the past, and was already aware that they had strong feelings on the subject. In keeping with previous conversations, both young men agreed that women often abuse their rights in ways that are damaging to men. I asked them to explain how women are abusing their rights, and how men are harmed through this abuse. Without pause Jono immediately offered the hypothetical example of a woman who has sex with a man, only to discover that he does not have as much money in his wallet as she had previously thought. According to Jono, because she has rights this woman can now go to the police and claim that she was raped. Mbeko concurred that this was a strong example of a woman abusing her rights.

Somewhat skeptical, I asked Jono and Mbeko whether they had personally had an experience like this, and they conceded that they had not. However, Jono offered the following personal anecdote instead: several years back he had a girlfriend who grew tired of him, and pushed him aside. Then she discovered that Jono had been cheating on her. According to Jono, the girlfriend confronted him about his affair, saying terrible things to him in a vicious and unjustified verbal attack. Jono claimed that she explicitly taunted him, stating “nokuba nyenzani, ndiza. Kufownela amapolisa, aza kukubamba!” [Whatever you do [to me], I will phone the police, and they will arrest you!”]. Unable to stomach such disrespect from a woman -especially as she had rejected him, thereby revoking any claim to his loyalty that she might have had, Jono

130Note that this is virtually the same argument made by Men's Rights Edmonton in their highly-controversial “Don't be that girl” campaign. One of their most demonized posters, for instance, features an image of attractive young people drinking cocktails, with the caption “Just because you regret a one-night stand doesn't mean it wasn't consensual. Lying about sexual assault = a crime. Don't be that girl” (see Kozicka 2013). Moreover, the theme of false accusation for rape also features in the case of Moses Sitole, a notable South Africa serial killer and serial rapist who is currently incarcerated. Sitole reportedly claims to have chosen all of his victims because they reminded him of women who had falsely accused him of rape in the past (Grieg 2005). This is a rather extraordinary claim, especially given he is convicted of 38 murders and 40 rapes, and does not plead innocent to any of these convictions.
decided to “sacrifice his life” (risk getting sent to jail) by beating her up. She followed through with her threat to call the police, but they never came.131

Both Jono and Mbeko were in agreement that this was another telling example of the ways that women abuse their rights. In Mbeko's words, this is evidence that “now even the girls, when they want to do anything that they want to say, like terrible things, they say “you can't do anything to me because I can call the police. We have a right.” They can talk what they want to say about amadoda [men], even though amadoda are respected people in our culture.”

Contrary to the perception of Jono, Mbeko, and other men like them, from what I have seen and experienced, young women usually draw on rights to justify cooperative relations between men and women rather than to punish men unduly. And while material provision and intimacy are certainly connected in Mhlambini, as they are elsewhere in South Africa,132 I certainly never personally encountered a woman who deployed human rights in a way that struck me as blatantly instrumental (of men, or of anyone else), nor did any young women claim that rights can be manoeuvred in the devious ways that men like Jono and Mbeko often attribute to them.133 However, over the course of my fieldwork I was frequently struck by the inescapable impression that many young men genuinely feel that their perceptions are accurate; however selective Jono's version of events may have been, I am convinced that he truly felt that he had been deeply wronged. In this way, young men's anxieties over rights to gender equality are similar to the sense of marginalization expressed by enthusiasts of the Men's Right's movement,

131The abysmal track record of local police in actually addressing gender violence in the community makes me sceptical of the accuracy of many people's concerns about young people and women actually phoning the police for protection. Nevertheless, these concerns are analytically significant for what the police symbolize about authority, rights, and the state.
133They do claim that they have a right to police protection in the event of a forced marriage. As we will see in chapter seven, however, women almost never actually act on this right.
where “the anguish, confusion, and pain (...) is real and well-grounded. [Yet] real, here, is not to be confused with true” (Coston & Kimmel: 2013: 373). As such, analyzing men's felt experience of abuse and manipulation by women can productively inform understandings of local gender politics more broadly, which are characterized by considerable antagonism.

Previous chapters have outlined in detail how economic transformations, which have only amplified since democracy, are resulting in widespread unemployment and low rates of marriage among low-income South Africans (see Hunter 2010). I have also explained that this has placed a profound, deeply gendered burden on young people in particular as they struggle to survive and raise children without the means to form socially-valued conjugal households (see Hunter 2006). Moreover, I have explained how a potent legacy of both colonial governance and Apartheid social engineering is the positioning of control over women and children in the patriarchal household as a cornerstone of masculine identity. As many scholars have analyzed, in the current context, where few men are able to achieve this status, assertion of control over women and children has become a volatile point of contest in men's efforts to achieve masculine status (e.g. Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana 2002; Morrell 2001; Wood & Jewkes 2001; Campbell 1992).

Although young men in Mhlambini are not similarly organized and politically-engaged, there are productive similarities between such complaints about rights for women, and recent trends in the Men's Rights movement in the way that men's concerns reflect anxieties about the dismantling of patriarchy through economic and legal transformations. Like Men's Rights activists in the US, young men in Mhlambini “may not currently feel powerful, but they feel entitled to feel powerful” (Coston & Kimmel: 2013: 377). Romit Chowdhury's recent work on Men's Rights groups in India is insightful here. Sympathetic yet critical of the Indian Men's
Rights movement, Chowdhury concedes that rights-based law, notably around gendered domestic violence, has undermined some of men's patriarchal privileges in Indian society. Yet she is intrigued by the fixation of many Men's Rights activists on the poorly-documented phenomenon of women who allegedly abuse the legal system, thereby demonizing innocent men. Citing figures that suggest that the majority of Indian men (and a significant minority of Indian women) feel that wife-beating is morally-justified in some cases, Chowdhury argues that rights-based legislation about gender violence is threatening to many men because of a widespread patriarchal expectation from men that they must punish women for violating the codes of feminine propriety. 'False accusation', then, becomes the linchpin of men's rights' articulation precisely because these men feel that they are being criminalised for actions proper to their gender roles (2014: 44).

This is helpful in understanding experiences such as Jono's, and for understanding gendered antagonism in Mhlambini more generally. Similar to what Chowdhury describes, gender violence is widespread and widely-condoned in Mhlambini. With the exception of some young women (who, in my experience, try to avoid the topic at all costs), most people felt that men are justified in beating women provided the woman misbehaves.\textsuperscript{134} This misbehaviour could include not having food ready when the husband comes home, being negligent about childcare, going out drinking, or cheating on a husband, for example.\textsuperscript{135} Indeed, violent discipline is so

\textsuperscript{134}Beating women without cause is frowned upon, and men who are unduly violent face sanctions in the community. Moreover, women who are unjustly punished are entitled to return to their families, and to appeal to community leaders for support. One single mother in her 30s, for instance, told me that the community had fully supported her leaving her husband, as he was widely-known to regularly spend all his money on alcohol and then come home and beat her and their children regardless of their behaviour. That being said, in my experience many women conceal their experiences of gender violence no matter the cause, and only take action when the violence becomes unbearable. See also Wood and Jewkes (1998: 28).

\textsuperscript{135}In a qualitative study of the contexts of violence in young peoples' sexual relationships in an Mthatha township, Wood and Jewkes (1998) also observe that violent discipline is normalized and widely-condoned as a method of gendered control. They too identify a connection between violent gendered discipline and punishment for moral transgression. In their words, “in most cases violence appears to be a means of enforcing discipline and control
wrapped up in the local gender order - perhaps even in the way that masculinities and femininities are experienced and conceptualized - that one older woman once referred to her husband beating her “when she's guilty” as quintessential evidence that she is a traditional Xhosa woman. Moreover, a conversation with a middle-aged woman indicated that violent discipline is integral to ensuring proper sociality between spouses:

*Because a person who frequently gets beaten shows respect. She's different from a person who never gets touched, because if you never get beaten, you will not fear your husband, see? There will be difference in the way you behave towards your husband. You see, at the homestead I know what my husband wants and doesn't want. But if I am not beaten, I won't know what he doesn't like, you see?*

This statement suggests that not only is violent discipline essential for proper hierarchical respect between spouses, it is also essential for learning about the husband through the process of being trained to understand his tastes and preferences.

Furthermore, the significance of violence for the local gender order is such that Steven once said to me that “gender violence is the one thing you just can't touch in this community. Even the really strong women, they just say “oh, but we women are naughty.” Eventually we [the NGO] just decided not to go there because when we try to address it, it undoes the trust that we've built in the community and jeopardizes all the other work that we do.” Indeed, it almost seems as though violent discipline is a significant dimension of how gendered subject positions are constituted and understood in Mhlambini. As such, it becomes easier to understand why rights are experienced as threatening to the gender order. In such a context, “it becomes possible to understand that for [such] men, the existence of a set of laws which criminalises domestic violence over female partners when they were perceived to have broken certain (usually implicit) rules underlying the relationship or resisted male attempts to enforce these 'roles' or control them” (1998:10).
violence in an overall culture that authorises violence against women as a script of male honour, puts the very meaning of masculinity under pressure” (Chowdhury 2014: 44).

I think the comparison with Men's Rights organizations is apt, but with an important qualifier: the little literature that exists on contemporary Men's Rights movements suggest that its ideology resonates with communities of men who have historically enjoyed race and/or class privilege relative to women and other men. As Coston and Kimmel write of Men's Rights activities in the United States, “they seek to return to an era where the playing field was so decidedly tilted in their favor that they felt they got what they were entitled to” (2013: 380). Men in Mhlambini have enjoyed no such privilege, but this, I argue, only renders their pain more acute. Gendered antagonisms in Mhlambini are, at least in part, about maintaining the limited privilege and authority to which most men feel entitled. Human rights are perceived by many men to be a threat to their privileged status.

Jono and Mbeko's emphasis on the indignity and cultural impropriety of verbal humiliation from women is also significant, given the historical importance of spoken language as a component of gendered and generational respect among the Xhosa. Linguists Stephanie Rudwick and Magcino Shange, for example, document an explicit connection between language use and generational respect among the Zulu. In their words, “older generation isiZulu speakers often speak with regret of an increasing loss of respect among the younger generation” (2006: 475), a sense of loss which is linked to “essentialist notions about a discrepancy between Zulu value systems and the expressive power of the English language” (ibid) at the expense of the more deferential conventions of gendered isiZulu speech. As ample sources document, Xhosa woman have long performed such gendered and generational respect through the proper use of
isihlonipho sabafazi,\textsuperscript{136} “the respect language of women” (Finlayson 2002: 280). A complex system of linguistic substitution and word avoidance, this language involves, for example, avoiding the name of her husband and in-laws, as well as all words with common components to those names.\textsuperscript{137} This respect language is an integral component of the “complex social and linguistic behavioural codex, that requires deferential conduct” (Rudwick & Shange 2009: 68) and “respect through avoidance” (Herbert 1990: 458) known as hlonipha in isiXhosa.\textsuperscript{138} The practice is in decline among youth and city-dwellers, but is still important in many (especially rural) Xhosa, Zulu, and Sotho communities (Finlayson 2002).

The use of gendered speech and behaviour serves to both produce and reproduce gendered identities, sometimes in ways which may limit women's social power. For example, in a nuanced analysis of police interviews of female rape victims, Puleng Hanong Thetela demonstrates that gendered conventions of isihlonipha speech constrain women in ways which reinforce patriarchal hegemony (Thetela 2002). As Thetela notes, the connection between hlonipha and gendered identity crippled women in the courtroom, as “compliance with the explicitness of the language demanded by the legal system undermines her cultural gender identity, which is discursively represented in the hlonipha code” (2002: 184).

Analysis of isihlonipho in the fields of linguistics and gender studies brings up two relevant points, one relating to the relationship between isihlonipha and gender hierarchies, and

\textsuperscript{136}Respect language does not exclusively apply to women, but the conventions of isihlonipho speech apply so disproportionately to women that people think of it as a gendered practice. Examples of male respect speech include isikhweta (initiate language) taught to and used by young men during their seclusion (see Finlayson 1993), and certain versions of isihlonipho that men may use when speaking to their mothers and mothers-in-law, (Finlayson 2002), or when negotiating bridewealth with a prospective bride's family (Rudwick 2013).

\textsuperscript{137}For example, if a woman's husband was named Mandla (‘strength’) and his mother-in-law named Nothaniswa (‘mother of love’), she would have to avoid using the words amandla (‘strength/power’), ukuthando (‘to love’), and all derivatives of these words.

\textsuperscript{138}Ample sources exist which provide documentation and examples of isihlonipho sabafazi; for Xhosa examples, see Finlayson 2002, Herbert 1990; Soga 1932).
the other relating to ideas about the use of isihlonipha and the integrity of traditional culture. Firstly, a number of sources suggest that a key purpose of hlonipa behaviour and isihlonipho language is to index the socially inferior position of girls and women (Fandrych & Yurkivska 2008; Herbert 1990; Dowling 1988), an interpretation which seems to have widespread currency in some rural communities in South Africa (see Rudwick & Shange 2009). Accordingly, scholars have suggested that by rejecting isihlonipha in favour of other modes of speech, young South African women may be asserting claims to more egalitarian gender ideologies (Rudwick 1913; Rudwick & Shange 2006; Rudwick, Shange & Nkomo 2005). Importantly, however, in their study of ideas about hlonipa gender power among rural Zulu, Rudwick and Shange note that many women “virulently” (2009: 70) denied the suggestion that they are marginalized through hlonipa, emphasizing instead that linguistic and behaviour conventions offered them an important means through which they could show respect for others, especially their husband and his kin.

Closely related to these observations regarding the relationship between isihlonipha and gender power is the suggestion by both scholars and their informants that a decline in isihlonipha sabafazi is associated with 'modernization,' (Finlayson 2002), ‘Westernization’ (Rudwick & Shange 2006; Finlayson 2002) 'urbanization,' (Rudwick & Shange 2009), more egalitarian gender relations (Rudwick & Shange 2009), and the loss of culture (Rudwick & Shange 2009, 2006). For example, drawing on key informant interviews, Rudwick and Shange note that many rural Zulu associate the disappearance of respect language with Westernization, and as such are critical of less gendered speech (Rudick & Shange 2006). Shange and Rudwick (2009) also note that the importance of hlonipa is wrapped up in beliefs about ancestors, thereby positioning particular patterns of gendered behaviour and speech in opposition to Christianity. Drawing on
key informant interviews, they further document a connection between *isihlonipha* and a loss of appropriate gendered respect. In their words,

The majority of male participants (...) said that *hlonipa* language was something that women hold responsibility for (...) and the assertion that if a woman did not know how to use basic *isihlonipho* then she was not worthy of being a wife, was expressed several times. (...) Several men who were interviewed said that they would hardly consider marriage to an urban woman. The reason, it was argued, is that rural men would never feel adequately respected by women who are raised in urban homes with 'too much white influence' due to her 'not knowing her place,' which would be a submissive position in the husband's home (2009: 71).

Given this apparent connection between tradition, gender hierarchy, and gendered respect performed through speech, it becomes more apparent why Jono and Mbeko took such vehement issue with young women who reference rights to equality while allegedly speaking to them in a disrespectful way. Indeed, it seems that by exercising their right to verbally humiliate men, a woman is able to question a man's masculinity itself. Similar to my argument about violence, it appears that where deferential comportment, expressed through language, is constitutive of gender, and where equality is perceived to undermine gender hierarchy, it becomes easier to understand why men like Jono and Mbeko take particular issue with women who speak to them in ways that they deem disrespectful.
Rights and Reproduction

Some of the most vociferous critiques of rights for women stem from concerns about the implications for reproduction if women are no longer subject to patriarchal control. Over and over again I heard people explain that many contemporary problems, such as HIV/AIDS and rampant extramarital pregnancy, stem from women having rights to bodily integrity and freedom from corporal discipline. The reasoning here is that women are now dangerously promiscuous because men are no longer legally permitted to physically discipline their wives, daughters, and girlfriends for their sexual indiscretions. People draw sharp juxtaposition between this state of affairs and the past; in Jono's words, “before, it was difficult to get a girl, you know, in the old days. It's no longer difficult to get a girl (...), you see, because a girl will do anyone these days.” Most people specifically linked this with rights, reflecting that this change has occurred “since democracy,” “since voting,” and “since Mandela.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, socially-embedded female sexuality is realized most completely in the bridewealth system. Unsurprisingly, lobola is therefore among the most contested issues between women and men in the context of rights. As explained in the previous chapter, most young women are very much in support of lobola even as they aspire to relationships with family and partners which are less hierarchical and more cooperative. Interpreting lobola as compensation to parents and as evidence of romantic love, rather than as a payment that secures and legitimates male privilege, means that for many young women lobola can sit alongside gender rights (albeit uneasily at times). However, recent research suggests that

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139 While virtually all such critiques involved the implicit assumption that women would be engaging in sexual relations with men, it is women's freedom to unrestricted sexual license that garnered reproach (see Hunter 2010, Chapter Seven).
young men understand gendered privilege to be an important dimension of the bridewealth system (Shope 2006; Ansel 2001; Walker 1992). As such, young women's expectation to be equal and emancipated despite lobola payment strikes many young men as both unreasonable and reprehensible. In keeping with the perception that women abuse their rights at men's expense, the sense I got from young men in the community is that many of them assume young women know that lobola is actually about legitimizing the husband's authority over the wife, yet by deflecting lobola into the realm of love and kinship rather than gendered authority, these women are knowingly trying to have their cake and eat it too. The following excerpt is from but one of many such conversations that I had with Mbeko over the course of my fieldwork:

In the old days, you see, we as the men were leaders in the family. But now we are told that the control in the marriage must be 50/50, and that the wife and the husband must have equal authority, so I as the husband am no longer able to tell my wife, “Do this! Do that!” (...) What I don't like is that it seems to be difficult [seems unreasonable] for the woman to lobola me with R5, 000, and I lobola her with R5, 000, so that it can be 50/50 and we can be equal. But no, I have to lobola her with R10, 000, and then after that she comes to me and tells me that we must be equal! No, it's not right, you see?! The women aren't following our rules as the head of the household. There is just a free-for-all going on now, because we [men and women] are [supposedly] equal now.

Mbeko's complaint was echoed frequently by young men in the community, and it touches upon two related issues which women's rights raised for young men. On the one hand, young men wonder what they are paying for if not gendered privilege. But Mbeko also suggests that by upsetting the conjugal gender hierarchy, proper sociality between women and men becomes unclear. Tellingly, the conversation that this excerpt is taken from flowed quickly from
a discussion of *lobola* into an impasioned critique of young, unmarried women who have several boyfriends concurrently and who become pregnant but do not know which man is the father. The possibility that a man might thus be duped into supporting a child that is not his own progeny was evidently a most heinous and morally corrupt state of affairs. Given the importance of ancestors for the welfare of the lineage, unwittingly raising the “wrong” child could deeply disrupt intergenerational obligations between the living and the dead. This hypothetical scenario was frequently brought up by young men as the ultimate evidence of young women's misbehaviour in the democratic era. If one presumes that scenarios like this arise from women having rights to equality, it is easy to see why men and elders become gravely concerned about what women's rights mean for sociality and social reproduction.

**Rights and Responsibilities**

Beyond discussing the way that human rights are implicated in the gendered and generational antagonism that have been a focus of the dissertation thus far, this chapter has indicated that such tensions are founded in part on a pervasive concern that people are failing to fulfil their obligations to one another. From this and earlier chapters, it should be clear that this is troublesome in part because people are deeply dependent on one another both for daily survival, and for the very constitution of gendered and generational identities. I return to this topic now to discuss a final discourse that featured periodically in the community: the idea that conflicts arise because people are exercising their rights but are ignoring their responsibilities. As I will show, in a strangely paradoxical way these criticisms draw attention to both the interdependence of

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140See also Wood and Jewkes 1998: 21.
people in the community, as well as the limits of liberal notions of human rights in communities like Mhlambini.

In a literal sense, many of the loudest intergenerational criticisms and interpersonal conflicts in the community are indeed about people failing to fulfil their responsibilities to one another. Young wives ignore their responsibilities to their mothers-in-law when they run off to join their husbands in Rustenberg, and teenagers ignore their responsibilities to parents and offspring by getting pregnant without any ability to support the child, thereby offloading the burden onto grandparents whose pensions are already stretched. Young men ignore their responsibilities to girlfriends, their parents, and their own ancestors when they avoid paying damages, leaving the mother's natal family to support the child. And certainly the emphasis that many young people place on rights and freedoms as justification for these actions helps to build a conceptual connection between rights, democracy, and the fraying of interpersonal obligations.

However, a conversation that I had with Fundumi and Sonwabile helped to clarify for me the relationship between rights, responsibilities, and obligations. This conversation took place on a lazy afternoon when Sonwabile, Fundumi, and I were listening to the radio at Sonwabile's mother's umzi. I brought up the topic of rights, and once again Sonwabile echoed what I had already heard from others: that problems arise because people are exercising their rights but ignoring their responsibilities. This time, I asked him to explain what he meant by this. He illustrated by way of example: children have a right to education, and parents have a responsibility to care for their children and to ensure that their child is attending school. Moreover, as condition of their right to education, children likewise have a responsibility to their

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141 His father is deceased.
parents and teachers to do their homework and to attend school regularly. The problem, for Sonwabile, is that children have the right not to be beaten by parents and teachers even if they skip school. This is reprehensible because the teacher is fulfilling their responsibility to the child by teaching them and the parents are fulfilling their responsibility the child by raising them, but because of rights the parents and teacher are not permitted to discipline the child if he or she child fails to exercise their right to education by fulfilling the responsibility to attend school. In other words, because of her rights, the child is ironically able to ignore her responsibilities.

A similar logic is apparent in the above-mentioned argument that women are now unruly precisely because they cannot legally be beaten. By this reasoning, women have a right to freedom and autonomy, but also a responsibility to deploy their sexuality judiciously, in ways which will not result in unplanned pregnancies or infection with HIV. But they cannot be beaten even for indiscretions, which most people view as reprehensible. This, according to Sonwabile, is at the root of gendered and generational antagonisms about human rights. But where does this reasoning about rights and responsibilities come from, and what can this tell us about local 'vernacularization' (Merry 2006) of rights more generally?

With minimal research I learned that in 2011 the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) launched a Bill of Responsibilities to complement the Bill of Rights. This Bill is promoted, for instance, on the radio and in schools. A document entitled “My Rights, and Responsibilities: Rights, Responsibilities and the SAHRC,” (SAHRC, n.d.) which can be downloaded from the SAHRC website, outlines in layperson's terms what the rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights mean. Under the heading “Rights and Responsibilities,” it states somewhat ambiguously,
Because everyone has human rights, we must make sure that we respect other people’s rights. If we want our rights to be respected, we must not do anything that violates another person’s rights. Also, these rights do not replace the laws we already have, and so we must respect these laws as well (SAHRC n.d.: 33).

Interestingly, searching online for “Bill of Responsibilities,” leads first to a Bill of Responsibilities developed in the mid-1980s by the Freedoms Foundation, an American non-partisan, not-for-profit organization whose mission “promotes the ideals and principles of our free society and encourages all Americans to embrace both their rights and the responsibilities and contribute to the common good of society” (Freedoms Foundation 2014). The document itself is steeped in liberal ideology with a distinctly American flavour. It is prefaced by the principle that freedom and responsibility are inseparable, and that the former can only be enjoyed through exercising the latter. With an emphasis on the moral sanctity of law, family, and private property, the document addresses an autonomous individual who is empowered to yet duty-bound to defend the free nation -with force if necessary- while respecting the beliefs of others (Freedoms Foundation 1985).

The SAHRC’s Bill of Responsibilities appears to be modelled on the Bill of Responsibilities of the Freedoms Foundation. While the South African version lacks the emphasis on military might and the duty to defend freedom, it exemplifies similar government impetus in its attempts to “conduct [citizens’] conduct” (Li 2007; Foucault 1988). For example, a supplementary document, entitled “Call to Action” (LeadSA 2011), is intended as a “guide for active, responsible citizenship” (ibid.). It explains succinctly the twelve responsibilities that flow from the twelve rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights. This guide explains that the Right to Life
entails not only the responsibility to refrain from harming other people, but also the
responsibility to

live a healthy life by exercising, eating correctly, not smoking, abusing
alcohol or taking drugs, or engaging in irresponsible behaviour that may result
in my being infected or infecting others with diseases such as HIV and AIDS”
(4).

It also specifies that all South Africans must “recognise that living a good and successful life
involves hard work, and that anything worthwhile only comes with effort” (2).

It is audacious to suggest that people in Mhlambini who consume inadequate nutrition,
abuse alcohol, or become infected with HIV are somehow guilty of moral negligence that
requires only a healthy dose of autonomous willpower to correct. And many people in
Mhlambini would be happy to work, “succeed,” and even acquire property if only there were
jobs. Moreover, some of the responsibilities (not smoking, for instance, or treating children and
women as equals) directly violate practices which are linked to status, and identity in Mhlambini
-indeed, to self. Others are extremely challenging due to economic marginalization (respecting
animals, property, and the environment, for instance), while still others, notably the right to avoid
HIV infection, ignore both political economy, and relations of gender power as they stand. The
Bill of Responsibilities is thus exemplary of the limitations of “the epistemological conception of
the person that underlies rights discourse” (Ross 2003: 163). As Englund remarks, this moneyed,
ascal, market-driven, autonomous subject “runs so much counter anthropological and
sociological evidence on human subjectivity that its interrogation promises to complement
eclecticism with a rare unity of purpose” (2004: 5). As such, human rights and human
responsibilities both reflect the neoliberal tendency to emphasize the individual rather than the state or other institutional body as the central actor in social transformation (Boyd 2013: 700).

I venture that the SAHRC and its relative bureaucratic allies are motivated by a well-founded desire to foster greater civil responsibility in a country heavily burdened by ill-health, theft, and violent crime. Yet framing civil responsibility in such simple and individualist terms serves to obscure the ways in which many people are unable to exercise their responsibilities to one another. The liberal individualism of both rights and responsibilities, so construed, depoliticizes peoples' inability to live according to the Bill of Rights and the Bill of Responsibilities by framing the failure to meet interpersonal obligations as a failure of personal will rather than an outcome of social processes larger than the individual.

I finish this chapter with an important qualifier: I do not raise these critiques to reject human rights out-of-hand. As Francis Nyamnjoh notes, “the current rhetoric of right (...) has gained enough endorsement on the continent not to be simply dismissed as an imposition from the West” (2004: 35). Nevertheless, the meanings of rights and equality are highly contested in many communities. Importantly, much of this disagreement revolves around the way in which rights to equality are conceptualized, deployed, and challenged between actors who are unequal in social power, yet are fundamentally co-dependent. As such, several Africanist scholars have drawn on their research to suggest that rights and democracy might be more usefully conceptualized in Africa and elsewhere if human rights were separated from the concept of equality as parity among autonomous individuals.

For example, in his recent book Harri Englund discusses a Malawian radio show called Nkhani Za,'maboma (News from the Districts). Broadcast on the national radio, this program features stories from all over Malawi that have been submitted by listeners. In his analysis of this
program, Englund notes that many of the stories protested unjust events that had transpired between actors who were highly unequal in social power. Yet as Englund notes, the desire expressed by the public was not for equality as parity between the wronged and the perpetrators of injustice, but rather for the fulfilment of interpersonal obligations between them. As Englund states,

the stories broadcast on *Nkhani Zam'maboma* presumed that claims addressing the wealthy and powerful could be effective precisely where they left difference and hierarchy intact (...) Another way of describing this ethos of equality is by saying that subjects are motivated less by the idea of rights than by the idea of obligations” (2011: 224).

While Englund is particularly concerned about economic inequality in this discussion, his argument nevertheless holds in that he suggests a civil society founded on “presupposed mutually constitutive dependence” (*ibid.*). Key to this notion of equality is the assumption that people are constituted through their relationships between one another, regardless of how unequal these relationships may be.

Going back to the previous discussion of *isihlonipha* and gender, a productive comparison can also be made between Thethela's arguments regarding the ways in which *isihlonipha* undermines women's ability to represent themselves effectively in the courtroom, and the claims of Rudwick and Shange's interviewees, who adamantly maintain that they are not disadvantaged by *hlonipha*. As Thethela notes, “*hlonipha* culture constrains women from engaging fully in the legal process, *in comparison to the kind of freedom enjoyed by male interactants*” (2002: 186, emphasis mine). In contrast the rural Zulu women find *hlonipha* enabling not because it allows them to enjoy the same freedom or status as men, but rather
because it offers them a means through which to respect and engage with people with whom their lives are deeply interdependent. The two positions are not mutually exclusive, but they are premised on fundamentally different notions of equality.

A slightly different, yet complementary angle is taken by Mikael Karlström in an analysis of the concept of democracy as conceptualized among the Buganda in Uganda. Emphasizing a departure from liberal idioms of democracy, Karlström explains that the Buganda conceptualize democracy as “a model of legitimate unitary authority founded on the willingness of power-holders to hear the voices of their subjects” (1996: 488). He notes that democracy conceptualized thus “points away from a sense of freedom as guaranteed by a rightly ordered polity, a society where both rulers and subjects conform to standards of civility which are inseparably ethical and political” (ibid. 490).

These examples are encouraging in that they foreground interpersonal obligation, however the content of those obligations is still open to contest. In raising these examples as productive alternatives I am not suggesting that rights, democracy, and equality so conceptualized would necessarily be better from an ethical or moral angle. Moreover, without significant economic transformation it is difficult to imagine how gendered antagonisms could be ameliorated in Mhlambini, regardless of the formulation of rights and equality that underscore contemporary contests. Nevertheless, a model of rights that foregrounds interdependence would probably be a better reflection of contemporary life as it stands, and would thus be more intelligible at the local level.

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142Karlström notes that while most Buganda were in agreement about the importance of fulfilling interpersonal obligations, older people tended to emphasize the importance of obedience, while young people emphasized interpersonal accountability.
Chapter Seven: *Ukuthwala*

*Ukuthwala* (a verb, literally ‘to carry on the head’) is a form of abduction marriage which takes place in rural communities in South Africa, especially in the Eastern Cape. In Mhlambini, the ongoing debates about *ukuthwala* provide an especially powerful example of the gendered and generational contests that have been the focus of this dissertation. More than any other topic that I have raised, the importance of *ukuthwala* as an issue of great gendered and intergenerational conflict was identified by the local community themselves. Although I had no knowledge of the practice when I began my fieldwork, I quickly found that girls' resistance to *ukuthwala* marriage -or, more accurately, the idea of their resistance more than girls' actual impetus to resist- was the case-in-point example offered by older people of the unruly ways of youth, and when I asked broad questions about generational conflict and disagreement, elders often assumed that I was asking specifically about *ukuthwala*. Elders likewise referenced *ukuthwala* regularly in their critiques of human rights and the abandonment of tradition; the possibility of young women reporting their elders to police in the event of *ukuthwala* was frequently presented to me as the most unambiguous evidence of the reprehensible aspects of freedom and rights. *Ukuthwala* was also a source of great concern for many young women; the possibility of being married in this way was frequently raised by young women when I asked them general questions about 'problems' or 'concerns' in their community.

This chapter will also contribute to conversations about African modernity, as the practice complicates the tradition/modernity dichotomy in important ways. I will show that although the practice is framed as longstanding tradition, as currently practiced *ukuthwala* differs substantially from how it was practiced in the past, and is taking on new meaning in response to contemporary influences, both economic and ideological.
Beyond demonstrating the significance of *ukuthwala* for gendered and generational conflict, I have several objectives in this chapter. Firstly, the incongruity between the misguided assumptions which underscore contemporary law and policy pertaining to *ukuthwala*, the judgemental descriptions of *ukuthwala* that feature in popular media, and the lived experience of people affected by *ukuthwala* provide moral impetus to offer an ethnographic depiction of it as currently practised. Firstly, the experiences of some abducted women are so far removed from those presumed in contemporary policy that I feel driven to represent their experiences as best I can. Moreover, with one notable exception (Kaschula *et al.*, 2013), contemporary discussions of *ukuthwala* demonstrate little sensitivity to how the practice is embedded in social relationships that are complex and affective, nor to the circumstances in which *ukuthwala* might take place. And while media discussions in particular emphasize a tight connection between *ukuthwala* and patriarchal power, the question of why patriarchy is taking this form at this particular point in time is left largely unexplored.

That being said, in presenting a culturally-grounded account of *ukuthwala*, I intend neither to support the practice nor to belittle the experience of girls and women who have suffered as a result of these marriages. The majority of women with whom I spoke described *ukuthwala* marriage as traumatic, and investigating the experiences of abducted women was among the most personally challenging aspects of the fieldwork. The ethnographic portion of this chapter thus serves the purpose of advancing a fuller understanding of *ukuthwala* marriage as a cultural practice, and contributes to larger discussions about the experience, impact and ongoing

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143 This is a widespread and self-evident aspect of abduction marriage virtually everywhere that it is practiced (see Borieva 2012; Werner 2009; 2004; Handrathan 2004). Documenting a connection between tradition and patriarchy is a common exercise in South African popular media, and one that is frequently deployed in contemporary gendered and generational contests.
negotiations around changing structures of gender-power, gerontocratic authority and rights in contemporary South Africa.

My other objective in the chapter is to consider the implications of contemporary ukuthwala from a historically deep and analytically rigorous theoretical angle. I consider my ethnographic material alongside historical accounts of ukuthwala and anthropological analyses of bride capture elsewhere, and consider this material in relation to Mhlambini today. In so doing, I suggest ways in which contemporary ukuthwala may inform current discussions about gender, rights, violence, and generation in an era of economic austerity and great social change.

Before discussing the implications of ukuthwala, it is necessary to explain the practice as it was initially presented to me in the field. I place emphasis here because of the marked incongruity between ukuthwala as documented in historical sources, and some of the abductions that I documented. Briefly put, ukuthwala is a form of abduction marriage, also referred to in some literature as ‘forced marriage.’ In that it entails the violent seizure of a young woman by a group of young men in a patrilineal society where bridewealth is central to the reproduction of kinship, ukuthwala shares many commonalities with marriage by abduction or 'bride capture' as discussed in a modest body of ethnographic literature (Borjeva 2012; Werner 2009; 2004; Handrahan 2004; McLaren 2001; Barnes 1999; Ayers 1974; Bates 1974; Brukman 1974; Conant 1974; Lockwood 1974; Stross 1974).

Ukuthwala is a gendered practice; men can abduct women for the purpose of marriage, but not the other way around. Although forcing a woman to marry against her will is an unambiguous violation of rights to autonomy and bodily integrity as enshrined in the Bill of Rights, the legal context of ukuthwala is actually quite complicated. Under contemporary South African law, ukuthwala marriage is unlawful in all situations where the girl is under eighteen
years of age (the age of legal majority in South Africa), and also in all situations where the girl does not freely consent to the partnership. Drawing on early ethnography and missionary accounts, some sympathetic scholars of law have argued that an adult woman may collude in her own abduction, in which case the marriage is actually staged rather than forced (Mwanbene & J. Sloth-Nielsen 2011; Koyana, & Bekker 2007). Without discounting the possibility of such scenarios, the majority of the cases of ukuthwala marriage that I documented involved girls younger than eighteen, and entailed genuine force.

While virtually absent from contemporary discussions in the social sciences, the practice of ukuthwala features frequently in South African popular media (e.g. Daily Mail Reporter 2012; Mail and Guardian 2011). These articles tend to take a sensationalist approach, focusing on the most grotesque and dehumanizing examples of ukuthwala. For example, the first paragraph of a recent news article explains that “the child is taken into the kidnapper's home, where the horny bastard will make the child his wife and even impregnate her ... the parents are glad to have one less plate to serve” (Makisto 2010). Moreover, most popular media focus on situations where very young girls are forced to marry much older men, and this is typically linked to the highly-publicized myth that sex with a virgin will cure a man of HIV infection (e.g. Lang & Curnow 2012). Thus, popular media tends to reproduce bestial stereotypes about perverse ‘African tradition.’

Recent scholarly work on ukuthwala is also limited, tends either to focus exclusively on the status of ukuthwala marriage in relation to South African law (see Monyane 2013; Mubangizi 2012; Mwambene & Sloth-Neilsen 2011, Bennet 2010; Becker, Rautenbach & Goolam 2006) or on abduction marriage as a violation of human rights (see Monyane 2013; Mubangizi 2012; Wadesango, Rembe & Chabaya 2011; Mfono 2000). The one article which attempts to situate
*ukuthwala* marriage within a socio-cultural framework is both factually and analytically very weak, and ends with the discomforting, elitist, and unsupported statement that "African women who are businesswomen, professors, doctors, lawyers, secretaries, teachers need not be concerned. The thwala custom is about a large number of people who practice a rustic lifestyle (...). For an open-minded observer *thwala* [sic] is indeed a charming, romantic practice" (Koyana & Becker 2007: 143). Common to both popular and most academic discussions of *ukuthwala* marriage is a lack of context; while often rich in anecdotal detail, they fail to take into account the complex social field in which these marriages are taking place.

Beyond these discussions, I am aware of only two recent works which discuss the practice. In one, ethnographer Kate Wood (2006) briefly discusses *ukuthwala* in an article focused on contemporary gang rape in an urban Transkei township. The short discussion of *ukuthwala* that she provides is speculative rather than ethnographic. In a coda to her main argument, Wood wonders whether there might be some deep-rooted 'cultural connection' between contemporary sexual violence in urban areas, and the practice of *ukuthwala*. More interesting is Kaschula et al.'s (2013) analysis of a recent fictional account of *ukuthwala* as depicted in a short story written by Kaschula. This work demonstrates keen awareness of the practice as embedded in social relationships and affective associations, but it is largely focused on the internal narrative of the "bi-cultural" protagonist, who struggles to reconcile her deep sense of attachment to her cultural traditions with her consciousness as a modern woman who desires self-determination. These struggles are compelling, but this approach serves to reproduce the popular dichotomy between modern personhood and tradition, (the first sentence of the

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144 The source of Kaschula's knowledge of *ukuthwala* is unclear.
article, for instance, contains the expression “clash of cultures” [Kaschula et al., 2013: 143]), and the focus on the issue of consent lacks depth. This distinction will become important as I show how ukuthwala is being mobilized in creative ways in response to social pressures which are highly contemporary, and which in some cases confound liberal ideas of consent. Departing from extant literature on ukuthwala marriage, I rely on first-hand ethnographic experience to discuss ukuthwala marriage within a local context where people tell me that “it happens a lot.”

Although I did not set out to pose questions about ukuthwala, once I was made aware of the significance of ukuthwala for gendered and generational relations, I asked around widely for peoples' views on ukuthwala marriage, including in most formal, semi-structured interviews regardless of whether the individual to whom I was speaking had personally been abducted. I also asked around widely for information on abductions that took place while I was living in Mhlambini. Furthermore, I interviewed women who had personal experience of ukuthwala marriage. This chapter draws especially on their accounts. Due to problems with access I did not interview any men who had either successfully acquired a wife in this way, or who had unsuccessfully attempted to do so. Virtually everyone was aware that ukuthwala as practised in Mhlambini is illegal. Thus, the challenges involved in carrying out research with men in this deeply gendered society were compounded by a desire to avoid scrutiny, and were likely further compounded by the assumption that as a white woman who is educated, urban in upbringing, and wealthy by local standards, I would be unlikely to view men who abduct women with a sympathetic eye. I did, however, ask many male friends and acquaintances for their views on this form of marriage. Notably, male research participants were helpful in fleshing out the details of various well-known local ukuthwala marriages, and for offering opinions of the relative merit of ukuthwala in relation to other forms of marriage.
A disproportionate number of the first-hand accounts that I managed to collect were with young women who had been abducted but had returned to their families, usually because their family refused the union. This is because I had much easier access to these women (indeed, a number of them were friends with whom I socialized regularly); unmarried women have much greater freedom of mobility and association in the community relative to young wives, and women who are abducted but return seem to enjoy the same social status as unmarried women provided they have not conceived a child during the time that they were abducted. Along this same line, most women I interviewed who had been abducted and stayed with their new family were mature women who had been abducted some years ago. Overall, I interviewed eight girls and women who had escaped from *ukuthwala* marriages within the past few years, most of whom had returned to their families almost immediately. One of these had been abducted twice, by different men, and three of these women had stayed with the new family for a period of months before returning home. I also interviewed six women who had been abducted and stayed more permanently with the new family, including two teenage wives who are married into the same family. I carried out some interviews on my own, while my local research assistant facilitated others. I was present for all interviews in which my research assistant took part.

Although I am not able to offer concrete numbers of how often *ukuthwala* marriage occurs in the region, I am certain that is it widespread given the number of women I met who had been abducted at some point, and how often people raised the issue in discussions even when I did not ask about it. Locals who had experience with more urban parts of the country were adamant that *ukuthwala* is strictly a rural phenomenon. Indeed, when I asked my friend Thando if marriage works the same way ‘in town’ as in the village, he laughed and, assuming I was talking about *ukuthwala* marriage, said “No, I don’t think so! You can’t just grab the lady in
Mthatha, you have to have the relationship first.” This is supported by research from elsewhere in South Africa, which suggests that it is a rural phenomenon (Kaschula et al., 2013; Nkosi 2009).

_Ukuthwala in the Ethnographic Record_

As I mentioned above, contemporary legalistic discussions of _ukuthwala_ rely on old ethnographic sources as the basis for contemporary law and policy. This is presumably due to the absence of contemporary work on _ukuthwala_. My research will show that the cultural practices described in these works provide an inappropriate foundation for understanding the nature of _ukuthwala_ marriage in the contemporary context. However, despite differences in content and context, these early accounts are insightful in several ways. Firstly, all early accounts suggest that _ukuthwala_ marriage has long been considered an acceptable but somewhat irregular form of marriage. Soga (1932), for instance, does not include _ukuthwala_ in his chapter on marriage practices at all (although he does devote several paragraphs to this practice towards the end of a chapter on bridewealth). Moreover, early sources also suggest that _ukuthwala_ marriages are quick and perfunctory compared to the drawn-out deliberation and ceremony that is characteristic of more formal forms of marriage (see Laubscher 1975; Hunter 1961 [1936]; Cook 1934a; Soga 1932). P.A.W. Cook, for instance, reports that “not infrequently even in these days a young man will seize a girl by force and take her away (...) If the parents are agreeable to the marriage the youth may pay over a few head of cattle and then _ipso facto_ and

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145 This comment was made during a conversation about local marriage practices. I had asked Thando if anything had changed from the way in which marriages used to work, and he said that while some people marry their girlfriend, as he had done, ‘most people’ still get married ‘the old way’ (_ukuthwala_).
without further ceremony the marriage is contracted” (1934a: 83, emphasis added). Writing about the neighbouring Pondo, Monica Hunter writes,

Sometimes, instead of approaching her father, a young man may carry off (ukuthwala), or cause to be carried off by some of this young men friends, the girl he wishes to marry. She is seized when walking abroad, hustled along with much shouting and some blows, and then taken to the groom's kraal (...). The father [of the girl] consults his kinsmen, and if he and they agree that this is a suitable match, men are sent to the groom's home to arrange about ikazi146, the ritual killing marking a marriage is performed and the marriage consummated” (1961 [1936]: 188)

Hunter, who describes ukuthwala marriage in greater detail than other early scholars, explains that in some cases the girl's parents may have already secretly agreed to the marriage and be privy to and supportive of the man's plans for abduction. This was the case for some of the young women whom I interviewed over the course of my research. Hunter also indicates that to be married in this way is not shameful, but neither is it shameful to return to your parents' home in the event that they do not consent to the abduction.147 This also seems to still be the case even today. Finally, Soga writes “very often the parents of a girl who refuses to marry a young man

146Ikazi is the term for the actual cattle which are exchanged.
147This contrasts sharply with abduction marriage in Kazakhstan (Werner 2009; 2004; Handrahan 2004), Kyrgyzstan (Borieva: 2012), and Mexico (Conant 1974), where abducted women are presumed to have lost their virginity, and where the loss of virginity has serious implications for the dignity of the woman and her family. Virginity has some value among the Xhosa, but as I explained in Chapter Five celibacy for physiologically mature persons is considered strange and antisocial. Virtually everyone is sexually-active by their mid-teens, and remaining childless into one's twenties is unusual for women regardless of marital status. Moreover, as I will show later in this chapter, it is assumed that the abductor will not have sex with the abducted girl until her parents have consented to the marriage.
chosen by them for her, privately advise the young man to carry her off by force, not from her home but from some spot a distance off” (1932: 272).

Common to all the early accounts and in sharp contrast to most of the examples that I collected is an assumption by early anthropologists and historians that young women’s resistance to ukuthwala marriage is an act, performed for the sake of appearances. All early scholars assume that young women are usually keen to collude in their own abduction, and are staging mock protest in order to uphold ideals of modesty. Hunter, for instance, explains that “it is seemly that she should make a great show of resistance, even though she is pleased to marry the man who has taken her, and sometimes girls lie down and are dragged along the ground, getting their limbs grazed before they will submit to going with their captor” (1936: 187, emphasis added). Later, however, she refers to several women who committed suicide after being forced to marry against their will, suggesting that she may have been aware that some abduction marriages were indeed forced and unwanted. Cook, who devotes only one paragraph to discussing these marriages, refers to the male abductor as the girl's lover (1934a: 83) J.H. Soga is the only early scholar who openly acknowledges that some marriages are what he terms “real cases of forcible abduction” (1932: 271), even if many cases of apparent abduction are in fact elopements by young couples who want to marry, yet wish to avoid the stigma of brazenly running off together.

_Ukuthwala in Mhlambini Today_

While even relatively recent literature suggests that ukuthwala marriages are in most cases elopement, young women in Mhlambini used the term to refer to genuine abduction. If taken to mean genuine forced abduction, I did not meet a single young woman who was supportive of the practice, or even one who tried to contextualize the issue in a nuanced way. For
example, although NomaIndia, aged 21 had never been abducted herself, when I asked her if there were any problems in the community she said “Oh, there's that thing when you're married! Maybe you're just going to town, or going to the spaza shop and they just take you like that! I think it's not good. “Similarly, Nosapho, a 25 year-old woman who had married a long-time boyfriend said “I don't feel good about ukuthwala. It’s not right. It’s not right. To marry a guy that you've never seen before! It’s not right. But it’s happening, even in these days.” Yet although girls' attitudes to ukuthwala marriage appear quite different from those of the past, in reading early anthropological accounts of the practices I am struck by how similar the actual logistics of the abduction are in the past and the present. The following two descriptions of ukuthwala experiences were recounted to me by research participants:

Nomandla: *They abducted me on the way to the thonto,* \(^{148}\) where I was bringing food for the initiates, at the thonto, next to the pond. They took me and picked me up. I resisted. I said, ‘leave me alone’. So, they dragged me in the road. They then hit me. I went with them then. I arrived there and sat down, and I was crying the whole time, you see? (...) They sent a messenger to my home. Once the messenger had arrived, father phoned. Father said he is leaving me there. I said ‘How?! When I do not love this man?!’ He said he’s leaving me there, and that’s that.

Khayalethu: *One day I was going to school. I was late for grade nine. And then I was there, by that big tree and I saw some men. Three men. And they came at me and said to me ‘Go!’ And me, I asked them ‘Why am I going?’ And they said ‘Just go!!*

\(^{148}\)The *thonto* (‘ithonto’ in isiXhosa) is a lodge in which young men reside during their period of initiation into manhood.
Kate: *Like, go with them?*

Khayalethu: *Yes.*

Kate: *Had you ever seen these men before?*

Khayalethu: *No. I didn’t know any of them. So then I went with them, because they held the sticks. If I said ‘I don’t want to go’, they beat me. So I went with them.*

Examples of young women being forcibly taken by groups of men while they are out walking are typical of the accounts that I collected. Their genuine surprise at being abducted and their stated reluctance to comply are also common to all women I spoke to. Indeed, despite the optimism of earlier accounts, and contemporary defences of the custom as being staged for the sake of decorum, no one suggested to me that they were even ambivalent – let alone happy - to have been abducted. This was true even among the few middle-aged women I spoke with who had been married in this way. For example, a widowed neighbour of mine in her early forties, had been married against her will at seventeen to a much older man whom she had never met prior to her marriage. He died four years later. When I asked her what she thought of *ukuthwala* marriage, she grimaced, shuddered and said bluntly: “*kakubi*” (“it’s bad/disgusting”). Moreover, one middle-aged woman turned the interview around and asked me what I would do if I were married off against my will. I awkwardly explained that this can never happen to me, because it does not happen in my culture. My research assistant cheerfully added that “in Kate’s culture, a person marries a man that she loves!” The mother replied “*Yho! That’s good! At least you can scold your husband in such a marriage! At least you can challenge him if he does something wrong! But if you don’t know him, how will you be able to say no to him?! It’s like you’re in jail! Such a marriage is terrible! It’s terrible!*” This woman's statement suggests that, like many of the
young women discussed in the previous chapter, she too believes that ‘love marriage’ leads to more egalitarian gender relations. It also implies that in an arranged or abduction marriage, a woman will likely be expected to be more deferential to her husband. While these middle-aged women demonstrate that some older people are critical of *ukuthwala* marriage, when I asked younger people for their opinions on how older people felt about *ukuthwala* marriage, they unanimously seemed to feel that old people viewed *ukuthwala* as an ideal marriage form.

While early accounts underscore the importance of upholding the appearance of reluctance to marry (Whooley 1975; Hunter 1933), the vehemence with which many women expressed their distaste for *ukuthwala* has convinced me that their resistance is often sincere. Indeed, when my research assistant asked Nomandla if she had ever been happy during the three months that she stayed with a man who had abducted her, she responded incredulously: “*what?*! *I was never happy, because I didn’t want to marry him!* But my parents said they were leaving me. *I might have wanted to marry the man that I was in love with, but the cows that he had for lobola were few.*”

Some young women's unwillingness to be abducted is also evident by the lengths to which some of them went in trying to escape from *ukuthwala* marriages. The following excerpts from interview transcripts indicate how serious these women were about wanting to escape their forced marriages:

Nomaphondo: *In the meantime I had left home having drunk paraffin, wanting to kill myself. Then after we arrived at the home I again wanted to kill myself. I looked for the type of pills used in the tanks, or dip.*

149 She is referring to a cattle dip, for killing ticks on cattle.
Khayalethu: *Every day [that I was there with that man] I was running. I was running to try to go at my home. So I was running, running, running, even in the night. One day I was going around ten o'clock at night. To come here [back to her home village]... and I was walking in the forest, because I was afraid of that man and his friends. And it is too bad [the memory is too traumatic], Kate ... yhu! I don't like that man, Kate!*

The forest that separated Khayalethu from her home village was large and was notoriously dangerous, widely known to be the haunt of robbers, rapists, and monsters. It was the only place in the area that I would not walk alone even in daylight, and I was known throughout the village for my misguided disregard for the monsters and spirits which were known to prowl even the smaller local forests. That Khayalethu was willing to attempt escape through this forest alone at night indicates that she was willing to risk considerable personal harm in order to escape this marriage.

Examining older women's opinions of *ukuthwala* suggests that many elders feel conflicted about the practice. Some older people are clearly opposed, as many parents demanded their daughter's return. However, many older women disavowed responsibility in the context of *ukuthwala*. The views that they expressed accent their powerlessness in the face of gerontocratic kinship and patriarchy, and also emphasize how *ukuthwala* is deeply embedded in generational relationships:

Kate: *Is ukuthwala is good thing?*

Nophikele (middle-aged mother of Nomandla, who was abducted in 2010): *Yes, among us Xhosa people. It's our tradition, yes, it's our way of doing things. Even me, I come from*
far away, from the Dwala clan, and I was abducted, and here I am now, and I'll spend my old age here. I'm submitting to my parents' wishes.

Similarly, Nokhumbulele, a middle-aged woman who referred to herself as a traditional woman reflected that:

*In the old days, when you were wanted by a young man or an old man who has been widowed, and you are wanted by his parents, then you settle with him. Something like marriage, you understand? You are married when you are still a child, but you were just obeying your parents' way of doing things. You would just put up with it in the old days, because your parents would say 'stay with this person'. And you'd eventually become used to your husband.*

Nokhumbulele went on to sympathize with men who abduct and are then deserted by their abducted 'wives', and to express bewilderment at these new “rights' that young women now possess. When I asked her what she would think of a woman who reported her parents or husband to the police, Nokhumbulele turned to my research assistant and asked her incredulously: *“Is that woman [Kate] telling me that she would be able to live in her home after having her husband locked away in jail?!”* She then turned back to me and said “[if you went to the police] you’d be left having to explain yourself to your husband’s mother and father!”

Mothers who had consented to their daughters’ *ukuthwala* marriages were in an especially difficult moral position, and their reflections on the practice highlight the complex interface between hierarchies of age and of gender. When pressed to confront their daughters’ unhappiness, mothers unanimously situated themselves as powerless to support their daughters’
desires to escape from marriage, explaining that in their society husbands and fathers wield decisive authority:

Nophikele: You know, when it comes to marriage among the Xhosa people, the mother doesn’t have any say. She is subordinate to the men in the family. The mothers are pushed to the side, the mothers tend to be submissive, the talking is done in the distance. The talking is done by the men.

Nobuntu: It [ukuthwala] was wrong in the case of my daughter, because it was her father that forced her. I wanted her to go to school. Her father ... he was sick.¹⁵⁰

This same woman later explained that her husband had chosen to agree to the ukuthwala marriage because he had to “submit to his father and uncles,” thereby illustrating again the ways in which the practice is embedded in kinship.

Although these women emphasize their lack of power in the context of ukuthwala marriage, actual events in the community suggest rather more nuanced deployment of social power. In the following section I offer three case studies of ukuthwala marriages that took place during my fieldwork. Together, they demonstrate the diverse impetuses for and experiences of ukuthwala.

¹⁵⁰I was unclear whether Nobuntu meant that her husband was ‘sick in the head’ or that he was ill, as we had already discussed the fact that both Nobuntu and her husband are HIV-positive.
Case Study 1: Grandmother arranges an *ukuthwala* marriage for her granddaughter

Nomaphelo is an elderly widow who lives alone in a modest homestead of two rondavels in the centre of the village. She still works in her garden and can often be found cooking in her yard, although her rondavels are old and leak when it rains and she is too frail and elderly to fix the roofs herself. Given her advanced age, she receives a monthly old-age pension from the government, meaning she has the means to pay for repairs. She seems reluctant to do so, however, in part because she feels that this should be done for her by younger, less-senior members of her kinship network. That said, she is also known for being a heavy drinker, and several people have suggested to me that she prioritizes purchasing alcohol over maintaining her homestead.

Nomaphelo is atypical in being an elderly person who lives alone, and her situation is considered pitiable. While she had several sons, the eldest died some years back. Even worse, she had quarrelled repeatedly with her eldest son's widow, Nosiphathu, to the point that Nosiphathu established her own modest homestead several hundred meters across the village. Her granddaughter Bomkazi lives with Nosiphathu, while her grandson Thando sometimes resides with Nosiphathu, and sometimes resides with the grandmother. I am unclear of the reasons why Nosiphathu moved away, but was told by several people that Nomaphelo is notoriously difficult, especially when she drinks. Whatever the reason, Nosiphathu was evidently so serious about moving out from under the authority of Nomaphelo that she abandoned a half-finished hut on Nomaphelo's homestead. Nonetheless, she does fulfil some of her filial obligations to her mother-in-law, notably by helping to cultivate the garden. Nomaphelo has another son who works in a mine, and he has established his own small homestead adjacent to his mother’s. At the time of my fieldwork, this second son's wife and their very young daughter
were dividing their time between maintaining the homestead in the village and residing with him at his mining compound.

Having heard a great deal about Nomaphelo's difficult personality, I was surprised to find her warm and friendly the first time I paid her a visit. When I asked about her circumstances, her version of events fleshed out my knowledge of her family's circumstances. In her words,

*I am experiencing many difficulties. I feel sadness because I am all alone.*

*Sometimes the sadness becomes too much, and I just lie on the ground and cry.*

*One of my sons is a mine-worker in Gauteng, and one died. Nosiphathu is my daughter-in-law, but she moved away across the village. Now I struggle because I'm alone. Also, I did not give my second daughter-in-law permission to build next door! That daughter-in-law is not looking after me, so I must look after myself.*

*Kate: How could these difficulties be overcome?* *These difficulties could be overcome if someone could stay with me. If I could have this, I would be happy.*

*Kate: What kind of person would you like to have stay with you?* *I want a person who could fetch water and cook food for me, so I can rest.*

Fetching water and cooking food are the exclusive domains of women in this community, so Nomaphelo was really telling me that she wants a younger woman to stay with her and do this work. With this in mind, here is the rest of the story:

Sometime later, Nosiphathu's teenage daughter, Bomkazi, was abducted by a group of young men while she was walking down the road. They got her into their car, and drove her to their home village approximately 45 minutes drive away. When they got there, they said that she would stay and be a wife. She waited until the dead of night, sneaked out of the homestead, and started running down the road. Just after dawn she was picked up by a car who took her to a
nearby coastal town approximately 2.5 hours’ drive from the village or an eight-hour hard walk up the coast, where she stayed with extended family until her mother was able to fetch her. Her mother, a Christian widow, strongly objected to the abduction on moral grounds. Bomkazi was accordingly returned to her mother’s home.

Speaking with people about this incident after the fact, it was made clear to me that Bomkazi definitely did not want to marry this man for whom she was abducted, and had not encouraged the *ukuthwala*. This was evidenced by the fact that she ran down the road in the dead of night. This is considered a very dangerous thing to do; as a male acquaintance of mine explained “*she was risking getting raped! Anything!*”

Furthermore, a number of people suggested that this *ukuthwala* was likely to have been arranged by Nomaphelo. When I asked why she would do this, people told me matter-of-factly that she would have wanted the *lobola* cows. At the time I was sceptical: what could such an old woman do with cows, or even with cash? Eventually, friends explained that with these cows, she could facilitate the marriage of Bomkazi’s brother, and thereby get a new granddaughter-in-law. Ideally this young woman would stay at her homestead, providing both companionship and labour. Being the eldest living member of her family and having long outlived both her husband and eldest son, Nomaphelo would have had considerable leverage in deciding how the *lobola* would have been used. Moreover, Nosiphathu and Thando would both have been able to raise their social standing through the acquisition of a wife/daughter-in-law. Furthermore, Nosiphathu's homestead consists of one hut while Nomaphelo has several huts, the chances are that Thando would probably have set up house with his wife at Nomaphelo's homestead. This version of events was confirmed for me some months later when I interviewed Bomkazi about her experience. By this point it was common-knowledge that Nomaphelo had orchestrated this
abduction, and Bomkazi was furious with what she felt to be a greedy betrayal on her grandmother's part. She told me quite bluntly that she “wants to beat her.” Nomaphelo, hurt and annoyed by Bomkazi's lack of loyalty and sense of obligation to her grandmother, lamented bitterly that she'd raised Bomkazi her whole life, and now she has grown up to be selfish, ungrateful and disrespectful of her elders.

In this case, we can see how changing patterns of marital cohabitation (young married couples living together at the husband's place of work), Christian values which privilege autonomous choice of spouse, and the premature death of her firstborn son\(^\text{151}\) have hampered the social power of an elderly woman. Nomaphelo suffered materially as a result, and was plagued not only by loneliness, but bitterness as well, given that she had not managed to enjoy the status and leisure that elderly mothers are entitled in the gerontocratic patriarchal bargain (see Kandiyoti 1988). In an attempt to alleviate this suffering, Nomaphelo deployed a non-standard but traditional form of marriage in an attempt to better her circumstances. While the cultural institutions available to Nomaphelo certainly scaffold patriarchy, it is noteworthy that in this instance it is the agency of an elderly woman, countered by the resistance of two younger women, which were decisive in the outcome of this ukuthwala. The marriages featured in the following case study are also considered examples of ukuthwala, although the situation is very different.

\(^{151}\) I do not know the cause of death in this case. A high proportion of premature deaths are due to AIDS-related illness.
Case 2: Divorced head of homestead with two daughters-in-law that she acquired through *ukuthwala*

Nolathile is a middle-aged woman who heads a large homestead. She was born in the village, and is the sub-headman's sister. She is separated from her husband, who lives with a new wife and family in another village. Unlike many separated women, however, she is thriving as an independent woman. Widely renowned for her skills in making ‘love medicine’ and deflecting witchcraft, she earns a steady income from clients. When I began fieldwork she was also employed at the Lodge, although she quit in late 2011.\(^\text{152}\) Using both her income and her own hard work, she now has an enviable homestead with several round huts, a large garden, and several multiple-room square houses which she built for her sons and their wives. Since establishing her own homestead Nolathile has managed to obtain wives for both of her sons, Zolani and Vusi, aged seventeen and twenty-three, by paying *lobola* for two young women whom she chose herself. Nolathile’s only daughter was just seven years old when I began my fieldwork, and was too small to assist with most household chores.

The elder of the two wives, Nomhle, is a quiet, sombre and hard-working eighteen year old who claims to have been abducted at age twelve.\(^\text{153}\) Her parents had agreed to the marriage and to the eight bridewealth cows that Nolathile paid, although Nomhle herself had not known

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\(^{152}\) Quitting a job at this establishment is extremely unusual. In this case, Nolathile's affluence is the primary reason why she quit. I am aware of only one other example of someone quitting a job at the backpacker lodge. In that instance, a woman quit because her husband disapproved of her earning an income, and wanted her to stay closer to home.

\(^{153}\) It is possible that Nomhle was abducted at 12, although it is also likely that she was a bit older than this. Many people, especially women who had stopped schooling early due to marriage, were unclear on their exact age. One woman, for instance, told me that she was 21 years old, and that her eldest daughter was eleven. The daughter did indeed look to be about eleven, and I expressed surprise that she had had a child at ten years of age. In response to my surprise, the mother said uncertainly ‘maybe I'm older than 21...I'm not sure. I know that I was born in 1981.’ This conversation took place in January 2012, so she would have been at least 30 at the time. Examples such as this are indicative of the low level and quality of formal education in the community, but also underscore the significance of achieved social status as opposed to chronological age in this community.
about the plan to abduct her, and she had never seen her husband before being brought to Nolathile's homestead. She is now the mother of a toddler son, is unhappy in her marriage, and describes her husband as “cruel”. He is often out of the village looking - so far unsuccessfully - for work in town. Nomhle often returns to her family in her home village, and stays for weeks at a time. Nolathile is aware that Nomhle is unhappy and that her prolonged visits home are evidence of this, yet is at a loss for how to improve the situation. When her mother-in-law is absent, Nomhle quietly says that ukuthwala marriage is morally wrong, but that she has stayed in her marriage out of respect for her parents.

The younger wife, Nomaphondo is an animated fifteen year-old who was abducted two months into my fieldwork. She had known her husband since childhood, and they had gone to school together. By her account they had been good friends for many years, and prior to her marriage she served as a go-between for her husband in his attempts to win the affections of other girls. Nolathile had told Nomaphondo when she was a child that she was going to seek her out as a wife for her son, and Nomaphondo had feared that this would happen for some time. Although Nomaphondo's mother initially wanted to forgo the marriage on grounds that Nomaphondo was too young, Nomaphondo's father agreed, and Nolathile paid twelve bridewealth cows. Nomaphondo tried to avoid the ukuthwala by rising early and sneaking off.

154 Twelve cows is a large lobola, and eight, as given for Nomhle, is highly respectable. Indeed, the largest local lobola I learned of during my fieldwork was sixteen cows, given for my now-widowed neighbour Nosabelo. Nosabelo's parents pulled her out of school to marry her to an older widower six years ago, when she was seventeen. These circumstances are not atypical of ukuthwala marriages. Moreover, Nosabelo is strikingly beautiful, and the story I was told was that her late husband, who knew he was HIV-positive and whose first wife had died of AIDS-related illness, had assumed his remaining years would be few and wanted to spend his wealth to acquire a young, beautiful companion. That he had four children at home in need of care added additional impetus to remarry. As such, it does not appear that ukuthwala marriage necessarily entails low lobola. This story does, however, suggest that ukuthwala marriage may be a mechanism through which HIV is spread from older men to younger women, notably when a first wife has died.
to school, but she was grabbed from her hut while dressing, and was dragged to her new homestead very early in the morning. After two initial suicide attempts, she says that she now gets along with her husband, but that she does not like married life and would like to return to school. She says that *ukuthwala* marriage is wrong, but that she cannot report her parents to the police.

Local feelings about Nolathile's homestead and her daughters-in-law are mixed. On the one hand, many people admire the attractive homestead with its numerous new huts, and Nolathile is well-liked for her personality and industrious work ethic. Having two young daughters-in-law has raised her social standing and allowed her to retire from physical work, which is a coveted position for a mature woman. Given that she has no husband to provide financial support, and as her sons are unemployed, she is also glad to have daughters-in-law take over domestic chores so that she has the time and energy to focus on her many clients.

Some younger friends of mine, however, quietly said that Nomaphondo is too young to have been married off, and should have stayed in school. Interestingly, some male friends countered this by pointing out that Nomaphondo has a womanly body and is therefore old enough to marry, but that they are opposed to *ukuthwala* in this case because it is unfair that her husband, Zolani, got a wife without working for it, and at the young age of seventeen. “*How will they support their children now?! Everyone will just be living off their mother! Uh-uh, it’s not right to get married without a job!*” were common refrains. Drawing on their anxieties and frustrations around their inability to assume the privileges and responsibilities of social adulthood due to unemployment, young men in particular felt that Zolani and Vusi, both unemployed, were inexcusably spoiled by their mother.
This example is quite different from the first one in that the latter two marriages were organized by the parents of the brides and grooms. Large *lobola* payments were paid, and in Nomaphondo's case, she knew her husband well. That the marriages took place by abduction rather than through negotiations and formal wedding ceremonies appears to have more to do with circumventing resistance from the young brides and Nomaphondo's mother than a desire to avoid the expense of marriage. Yet similar to the first instance, we have an elder woman deploying a traditional marriage form for her own social betterment. In the following case study, women take a much more muted role in the marriage.

**Case Study 3: A young woman acquired by *ukuthwala* is brought to Rustenberg**

I first met Nomandla at her parents' homestead in a village near Mhlambini, at her own request. She had heard that a white lady from Mhlambini was interested in *ukuthwala*, and sent a message via my research assistant's sister requesting that I come to her family's homestead to hear her story. This is what she told me, over the course of several meetings:

Nomandla had been abducted roughly a year prior to our first meeting by man from another village whom she had occasionally seen in passing, but never spoken to. He approached her with some male friends, and grabbed her in the middle of the main road in broad daylight. She tried to escape but he beat her until she ceased resisting, and dragged her to his home village. There, she was neglected by her husband and his family. By her account, she was left alone in a hut overnight while he went drinking with his friends.

The following morning, Nomandla learned that word had been sent to her father's homestead. Although Nomandla did not want to marry the man and her mother supported her resistance, her father consulted with his extended male kin, and then, on their advice, consented
to the *ukuthwala*. As mentioned above, Nomandla's mother, who was present for one of our meetings, justified her husband's actions by emphasizing the way in which his actions were embedded in kinship and gerontocracy: more senior men in his lineage had made the decision, not him. Yet Nomandla, by contrast, offered an individualistic, economic-rationalist explanation of her father's motivations: he could not resist the promise of bridewealth cows.

Rather than setting her up with his family, which would have been preferable to Nomandla, her husband took her to the township where he lived, near the mine where he worked. Nomandla says that he beat her and neglected her there. He left her at home all day, punished her if she went out, and often stayed out overnight. He would not give her money even to buy an apple; Nomandla emphasized that he required her to beg him for her most basic needs rather than allowing her to handle money herself. Nomandla told me that she knows he was with other women, and that she was concerned that he might infect her with HIV. According to Nomandla, her misery was made worse by the fact that one of her husband's girlfriends bullied her constantly, and tried to drive her out of the compound. Nomandla's opinion of her husband did not improve with time; when I asked her what kind of man he is, she grimaced, shuddered, and said “*He's a man that likes women very much, and many of them are other men's wives.*”

She felt terribly isolated during this time. Aside from having an unkind husband, most of the neighbours in their section of the mining compound were not Xhosa-speaking, which contributed to her isolation. Nonetheless, her neighbours came to agree that her husband was mistreating her and they pooled their funds to raise the R100 (about ten dollars) to help Nomandla pay the cost of a minibus back to her home village. She left in secret, while he husband was not home.
At the time that I met her Nomandla was nursing a baby that had been born since her return to her parents' homestead. She had been pregnant when she returned, although not visibly so, and her husband was unaware of the pregnancy at the time of her escape. She told me that her pregnancy was a source of deep sadness for her, in part because she feared it would limit her prospects of finding a better man in the future. Her husband, for his part, was content to leave her at her parents’ home because he was convinced that the child was not his. However, on the day that I first met Nomandla she was in distress. Her husband had finally returned to his village for a visit, and had stopped by Nomandla's father's umzi to view the child. Now convinced of his paternity, he was requesting the return of both Nomandla and the baby. Nomandla's mother had subsequently sent word to her father, who was out of the village, to ask whether or not he would send Nomandla back to her husband. Both were awaiting his response. When I asked Nomandla what she would do if her father decided to send her back, she said that she would run away to Cape Town, where her grandmother resides. She had been there once, long ago.

Implications of and Impetuses for Contemporary *Ukuthwala*

Considered together, these three examples suggest that *ukuthwala* can be mobilized in a variety of circumstances, by people with varying degrees of social power, to a range of different ends. They have two things in common which are critical for my argument here: the young women involved are adamant that they did not wish to be married, and the actors who instigated the abduction were motivated to deploy a traditional practice in response to highly contemporary social pressures.

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155 I think Nomandla sought contact with me because she hoped that I could help her out of the dire situation that she was in.
While there is virtually no ethnographic work on *ukuthwala* marriage since the early twentieth century, a few in-depth survey studies from the Ciskei dating from the 1950s through the 1980s indicate important trends which provide some insight into contemporary practices. Beginning with the Keiskammahoek Rural Survey, Wilson *et al.*, (1952) note a remarkable increase in *ukuthwala* marriages and elopements,\(^{156}\) from 5% of all marriages before 1890 to 36.6% in 1940-1950 (Wilson *et al.*, 1952: 85-86). She clarifies, however, that some abduction marriages were *staged* abductions that were in fact elopements. Manona (1980) notes that by 1976, *ukuthwala* marriage constituted the majority of marriages (61 out of a total of 109 marriages in Burnshill, Ciskei, one of the areas included in the Keiskammahoek Rural Survey), but that it was not recognized as “normal” despite being the most common form of marriage.

While *ukuthwala* was becoming increasingly popular, a close reading of these sources suggests that the researchers grouped elopements and abductions into a single category. Manona, for instance, describes *ukuthwala* marriages that transpired between couples once the woman had become pregnant, and states that “the present day *ukuthwala* is a form of elopement, and cases of *ukuthwala* by abduction are relatively few” (1980: 191). Whooley notes that a girl would be utterly disgraced if she were known to have colluded in her own abduction, and will always insist that she was brought by force (1975). He also makes the observation that while some abductions are staged elopements and some are genuine abductions (what he terms *thwala nje* [just carrying off]), *thwala nje* was coming under increasing strain at the time of his research due to changing ideas of young women's right to choose a spouse. This is in keeping with broader

\(^{156}\)Wilson and her Keiskammahoek colleagues are the only scholars to use separate terminology for abductions and elopements (*ukugcaga*). Manona, for instance, uses *ukuthwala* to refer to both elopement and real abduction, but clarifies in specific examples whether the couple staged an abduction, or whether the girl was truly kidnapped.
literature on bride capture, much of which documents analogous logistics and terminology for the both elopement and genuine abduction (e.g. Borieva 2012; Ayers 1974; Lockwood 1974). With only my research data and legal scholarship to inform me, I struggled for a long time to understand why there appears to be such a sharp change between *ukuthwala* of the past - primarily a staged elopement- and the forced abductions that seemed to be characteristic of contemporary *ukuthwala*. Upon further reading and reflection I have come to the conclusion that there is a more nuanced explanation, one which speaks to contemporary gendered modernities in provocative ways.

Firstly, I learned about *ukuthwala* marriage because I was asking about gendered and generational *conflict*. Older people readily brought up *ukuthwala* when I asked about disagreement between old and young, while young women brought up *ukuthwala* when I asked about problems in the community or concerns about their futures. In this light, a staged abduction, while it might mimic a true abduction in *form*, would not provoke the same conflict. While a parent might not consent to the man that a daughter eloped with and might demand the daughter's return, a woman would be unlikely to go to the police to protest a marriage that she herself had played a role in instigating. And no young woman would fear the possibility of colluding in her own abduction. While some planned marriages with elaborate ceremony did take place during my fieldwork, I now suspect that some recent marriages were examples of *ukuthwala* by elopement, but were not drawn to my attention because they did not provoke disagreement between genders and generations. Several decades into a time of great austerity, where marriage rates have plummeted largely due to the prohibitive cost of marriage and homestead maintenance, I wonder whether the trend documented by Manona and Wilson has
continued to a point where newer permutations of these older, fringe marriage forms have become commonplace.

Moreover, I think my initial perception that all ukuthwala marriages are true kidnappings stems from the kind of women that I interacted with: because of their greater freedom of association and mobility, I was acquainted with far more women who had been abducted and returned than those who were abducted and stayed. Even the few older women whom I spoke with about their experiences of ukuthwala are not necessarily representative\textsuperscript{157} of older abducted women; both had been married to much older men when they were very young, a situation which may have been more distasteful to them than if they had married a man closer to their own age.

Moreover, ample sources suggest that it violates decorum for a young woman to seem keen to marry. As Monica Hunter notes, “a girl never admits that she goes willingly to a man. Always when she is married she should weep and protest; not to do so is immodest (1961 [1936]; 188; also Manona 1980; Whooley 1975). Certainly at the weddings that I attended in the community, brides were removed from the festivities, and were reserved in their deportment. Moreover, while the previous chapter suggests that some young women's critiques of marriage reflect a genuine desire to avoid the power hierarchies that are characteristic of marriage, many do in fact hope to marry. Indeed, a number of male friends laughed when I maintained adamantly that many girls do not want to marry: “they may say that, but they actually do! I know they do!”

Moreover, I recall in particular a conversation that I had with Thandiswa, a young woman from the village who was on a rare scholarship to complete secondary school in Cape Town. We were passing the homestead with a young wife who had been married by ukuthwala during my

\textsuperscript{157}This is not to devalue the analytic purchase of the experiences and perspectives that I document here. It should be clear that ukuthwala encompasses a range of actors, motivations, and experiences.
fieldwork, and whom I had interviewed roughly a year before. Thandiswa mentioned that this young wife was pregnant again. I expressed sympathy for the wife, as I recalled that she told me she dislikes her husband and wishes she was not married. I said as much to Thandiswa, who shook her head. “No, in the end that thwala is not a bad thwala. Because she loves her husband. I know. The thwala is very bad, but sometimes, if they love the man, it's not bad...” At the time I took this to mean that some abducted wives eventually become comfortable in their new homes, and cease to be unhappy even if the marriage was instigated in a traumatic way. Now, however, I am inclined to suspect that some of these “not bad” ukuthwala marriages might have been something closer to elopement all along. In the case of the young wife in question, I am still not wholly convinced that Thandiswa's perspective is accurate, given how unhappy this wife seemed throughout my fieldwork and and, as she told me, she had never met her husband prior to marriage.

The case of Cekizwa's marriage, however, provides a more plausible example. Cekizwa told me unambiguously that she was married by ukuthwala. From her story, however, it is difficult to conclude that she was forced to marry entirely against her will. Initially she told me that she had requested to marry (ndicela [“I asked/requested”]), and then claimed that she had never met her husband before he abducted her. Although she emphasized that he surprised her with his posse and had violently dragged to his home, she also recounted that he is a kind man, that she had grown to love him, and that she had been happy as his wife but for her despotic mother-in-law. As explained in the previous chapter, the mother-in-law expected to control her son's finances, and took issue with the cash and gifts that Cikizwa's husband sometimes gave her directly. According to Cikizwa, the marriage had ultimately dissolved after a year at the mother-in-law's insistence, and Cikizwa now misses her ex-husband.
I remember being confused by Cikizwa's story as she recounted it to me, especially as she alternated between emphasizing her unwillingness to be married and to remain with her husband, with his kindness and her happiness at the quality of their relationship. At the time, I attributed my confusion to a combination of my imperfect language skills (Cikizwa is a monolingual isiXhosa speaker, and I speak isiXhosa with the eloquence of a small child), and the much broader scope of attraction and intimacy encompassed by the verb ukuthando as compared to the English term 'to love.' Now, however, I suspect that Cikizwa may be one of potentially-numerous ukuthwala marriages wherein collusion and force are difficult for even the participants themselves to define.

Another key question in analyzing contemporary ukuthwala is why informal marriages, whether true abductions or elopements, were rapidly becoming the norm rather than the exception over the course of the twentieth century. It appears that labour migrancy and economic decline were key factors. Wilson, for instance, notes that these marriages were “most often used as a means of hastening negotiations and reducing the cost of gifts and feasts” (1981: 135, emphasis mine). Manona takes this observation one step further in stating that “economic changes make it difficult for most men to fulfil their customary obligations regarding lobola” (1980: 191). He documents cases of couples who married by ukuthwala after an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and who had been living together as married for five years at the time of the study despite having exchanged no lobola whatsoever. The expectation, however, was that the lobola was forthcoming. While I do not know of any marriages in Mhlambini where absolutely nothing

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158There is no linguistic distinction between 'to like' and 'to love' in isiXhosa, and people tend to use the verb ukuthando to encompass the range of emotions from physical attraction to 'crushing' on someone, to caring deeply for them in an erotic and intimate manner, as well as being fond of someone in the way family-members are fond of one another.
has been given, I do know of several married couples where only one cow had been paid up-front.

Similarly, while she does not explicitly discuss *ukuthwala* marriage, Alida Libenberg notes that in Willowvale district\(^{159}\) both *makotis* (new daughters-in-law) in the subheadman's household had been “taken by force” (1997: 368), and that no bridewealth had yet been paid for them at the time of her fieldwork. Manona further notes that the long, drawn-out process of formal marriage is impractical for men who are labour migrants, as their visits home are brief and infrequent.

Furthermore, literature on bride abduction suggests that in many societies it is a mechanism through which poor men can acquire a spouse, as bride abduction typically results in lower bridewealth and often virtually no wedding costs (Borieva 2012; Werner 2009; McLaren 2001; Bates 1974; Stross 1974).\(^{160}\) There is reason to suspect that the possibility of low bridewealth and avoiding the cost of a wedding (an expense that is shared between both families) might provide an impetus for some -if not most- *ukuthwala* marriages in Mhlambini. *Ukuthwala* marriage does not *necessarily* result in lowering the cost of marriage in all cases, as my second case study demonstrates. In the case of Nolathile and her two young *makotis*, *ukuthwala* marriage seems to have been deployed by families who desired a union between their children but whose daughters were extremely unwilling. Yet in the other two cases, low *lobola* and lack of drawn-out negotiation and ceremony would have appealed to some of the parties involved.

If there is indeed a connection between low *lobola*, low wedding costs, and *ukuthwala* marriage, then there is something to be said about the rise of *ukuthwala* marriages and young

\(^{159}\)A former-district in Transkei, to the south of Mhlambini.

\(^{160}\)Although Ayers (1974) and Barnes (1999) suggest otherwise.
men's economic marginalization. As I mentioned, I had great difficulty accessing men who had sought out wives through *ukuthwala* marriage. Moreover, the sensitive and volatile nature of *ukuthwala* rendered it more difficult to casually broach this divisive topic among young men who were not personal friends. While the network of young men that I was connected to in Mhlambini (for instance, my host family's sons, the sons of my neighbours, the brothers and boyfriends of my young women friends, young men who frequented the *shebeen* near my hut, and teenage boys who came to after-school activities that I organized) was quite extensive, the number of young local men that I was able to count among my personal friends was quite small. Significantly, all but one of them were either employees of the NGO, employees of the backpacker lodge, or self-employed owners of small businesses related to the backpacker lodge, for instance guides for touristic activities. Young Lodge employees are far less educated and affluent than their peers in managerial roles at the backpacker lodge and NGO, but prior to my arrival in Mhlambini all of these men were already more accustomed than other village men to interacting with white, educated, middle-class women like me.

This cohort of young men is obviously not, therefore, a representative sample, yet these were the young men with whom I was most able to discuss *ukuthwala*. That being said, in examining their views on *ukuthwala* I have noticed that among these friends, the ones who were critical of *ukuthwala* were the ones who have the least in common with the frustrated, unemployed, and status-hungry young men that are the subject of discussions about thwarted adulthood and frustrated masculinity. Rather, those who were critical were those who were employed, affluent, and well-educated by local standards. One is married, and the other two are in a better position than most of their peers to afford marriage in the future. It is significant, I think, that these men felt themselves to be in the minority in their disavowal of *ukuthwala*. I am
confident that they were not voicing that position merely to please my presumed expectations, as I witnessed two of them become visibly angry when I raised the topic with them. In one case, I was discussing with Thando the recent abduction of Bomkazi, as narrated above in Case Study 1. I was already aware at this point that he was a strong advocate for marrying a woman with whom you have an established romantic relationship, as he had done. When asked about *ukuthwala*, he exclaimed dramatically “I hate the old-fashioned way. I don't like it. They just grab the lady! Even if she doesn't want him! And they even did it to that lady just recently!” [He gestured emphatically across the room towards where Bomkazi was lounging on cushions, giggling quietly with some other teenage girls]. Similarly, when Mbeko and I were discussing *ukuthwala*, he shook his head emphatically and spat out “Ai, it's not right at all, the thwala. Its irape [rape]! I'm always telling the guys, the thwala is a rape! But most of them, haibo, they aren't listening...”

Between the observations of scholars such as Wilson *et al.*, (1952), Whooley (1975), and Manona (1980), and my own observation that affluent men feel that they are in the minority in being critical of *ukuthwala*, I suspect that the contemporary practice of *ukuthwala* must in some cases be linked to the current economic context. This is not to suggest that people pursue this form of marriage based purely on economic rationalist principles; the case studies above suggest that in some cases, *ukuthwala* is better understood in the context of gerontocractic expectations and aspirations among mature women. However, given the general lack of opportunities for most men to achieve respect through, for instance, employment and support of one’s kin, I wonder whether some men are more inclined than in earlier decades to try to gain status as married men

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161This is not to say that Thando is an advocate for forms of conjugal partnership which differ substantially from that which is articulated as traditional. Indeed, the gendered power dynamics in his relationship are considered highly traditional, and he is known to have quite restrictive expectations for his wife's freedom of mobility and association.
through the abduction of wives who would otherwise find them undesirable as lovers or spouses. While it is necessary to pay bridewealth even in cases of *ukuthwala* marriage, it appears that marriage by *ukuthwala* often requires a smaller proportion of the bridewealth to be paid up-front. These young men may be well aware that most women will reject them as potential marriage partners, and in such cases abduction marriage may be perceived as a route to circumvent potential rejection. Moreover, the poverty of many parents -most of whom are well aware that they are unlikely to receive *lobola* for their daughters- may provide some impetus for their collusion in *ukuthwala* marriages. Indeed, if the girl’s natal household are struggling to make ends meet, her parents may feel that she will have a better life as a wife at a different *umzi*.

Furthermore, there are a few cases, such as Khayalethu and Nomandla, where unwilling women are truly abducted -with parental blessing- and were subjected to harsh gender violence. Khayalethu, for instance, was beaten regularly and eventually gang raped by her husband and his friends after she repeatedly refused to have sex with him. When she finally escaped to a relative's homestead, her uncle was so horrified at her condition that he accompanied her immediately to the nearest police station. Khayalethu's ex-husband and his friends were ultimately convicted of gang-rape, and were jailed. Given the Eastern Cape government's notoriously poor track record -even by South African standards- for actually prosecuting cases of sexual violence, Khayalethu's case against these men must have been grave and unambiguous. Examples like these must be seen in light of the serious and widespread incidence of intimate partner violence in South Africa, as well as of the creative deployment of tradition as a means of justifying violent forms of patriarchal power.

*Ukuthwala* is a particularly potent institution in the context of gender violence in part because it can be genuinely difficult to evaluate consent and complicity in what appears
indistinguishable from elopement. Indeed, scholars of bride capture have long noted that that this form of marriage appeals precisely because it renders the woman's complicity ambiguous (Borieva 2012; Kleinbach, Abelzova & Aitieva 2005; Ayers 1974; Lockwood 1974). This is particularly applicable in communities like Mhlambini, where dominant gender discourses position men as aggressors, and women as passive and reluctant (Borieva 2012; Lockwood 1974; Stross 1974). Moreover, as Bates (1974) notes, where ideas of social reproduction and femininity are bound up with a bridewealth system, both elopement and genuine abduction are analogous to the extent that they involve the appropriation of a woman's reproductive capacity from her natal kin. There is thus an irony here in that abduction marriage can be a mechanism through which young people can mobilize tradition to exercise considerable spousal choice, as well as an institution through which women's capacity to exercise choice can be most violently constrained.

Moreover, while popular media and legal scholarship remain fixated on the question of the woman's consent and complicity in the abduction, in Mhlambini it is the consent of the woman's elder kin that is decisive. I am aware of only two women who returned home against the families' wishes, and in both cases they defied their parents' wishes only after several months of suffering grave emotional and sexual abuse. Over and over again I was told that if the girl's family refused to consent to the marriage, it is an absolute imperative that she be returned to her home. I know of no instance where an abductor kept a girl against her parents' wishes. Indeed,

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162 Note that in some of these works the meaning of 'consent' is left unproblematized. This is an odd omission given most authors note that there are powerful incentives for young women to appear resistant even if they are keen. Kleinbach Abelzova & Aitieva, (2005) for instance, document a marked rise in non-consensual abductions in Kyrgyzstan based on sample surveys in which they asked married couples whether or not they had consented to marry.

163 Spousal choice, as we have seen from the previous chapter, is a moral value that many young people frame as a point of distinction between their generation and that of their parents.
people of all ages were invariably horrified when I posed the hypothetical question of what would happen if the abductor and his family refused to return the girl. “Impossible!” was the response, regardless of age or gender. While many people are critical of *ukuthwala* marriage, I was struck that even people who were critical of the practice were far more horrified by the prospect of the family keeping the girl against the will of her parents and elder kin than by the possibility of *ukuthwala* marriage itself. Keeping the girl against her family's will would be kidnapping, but keeping her with her family's consent, regardless of the girl's feelings about it, is not an offence of comparable gravity.

Potentially worse than refusing to return a girl, however, was the possibility that the abductor might have sex with her before obtaining parental consent to the *ukuthwala*. Importantly, few people seemed as concerned as I was about whether or not the girl consented to -let alone enjoyed- the sex, rather the horror stemmed from violating the family's right to consent. In other words, the primary concern is not over the girls' rights to choice, bodily integrity or self-determination, but those of the family. Moreover, in his critique of *ukuthwala*, Mbeko used the term ‘*irape*’ to define sex between an abducted girl and her abductor. As with young people’s use of *iraythi* (human rights), discussed in the previous chapter, Mbeko used a Xhosaization of the English word rape, presumably because no Xhosa word similarly captured the notion of individualized consent (or rather, the lack thereof) that ‘rape’ implies.

Understanding consent as a *family* rather than individual matter may seem misguided to liberal sensibilities, but makes sense in a context where, as discussed in the previous chapter, cultural institutions that are mobilized as traditional are premised on sexuality as embedded in kinship and symbolized in bridewealth, as opposed to a individually-possessed capacity that one exercises or withholds through autonomous will. Thus, to have sex with an abducted woman
without the consent of her family may be horrifying because the sex might be unpleasant, but more importantly, it amounts to the theft of that woman's reproductive capacities by the other family (see Wardlow 2006a).

Without being unduly critical of this system, it does render certain women vulnerable to men who, in Anne Kelk Mager’s articulate words, deploy sexual violence as “an expression of frustration, in the context of absent fathers, economic hardship, personal insecurity and political emasculation... [In this context] sexually violent behaviour can be seen as stemming from men's (and boys') investing in masculinities constructed as power over women” (1999: 184). At worst, positioning contemporary ukuthwala as a traditional practice can serve to cloak gendered antagonisms that relate to contemporary economic and political circumstances with an aura of legitimacy.

Conclusion

Recent work on the apparent resurgence of bride abduction in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan following the dissolution of the Soviet Union suggests a rise in bride abduction as a consequence of rapid social change in the post-Soviet era (Borieva 2012, Werner 2009, 2004, Handrahan 2004). Brukman (1974) noted a similar connection between rapid social change -in his case, industrialization and integration into capitalist labour relations- and a rise in “thieving marriages” (304) among the Koya of South India. There are, of course, important differences between contemporary rural South Africa and rural Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Beyond the differing historical and religious contexts, the virtual universality of early marriage and powerful discourse of shame associated with being taken as a bride in these latter regions\(^{164}\) has

\(^{164}\)See Borieva (2012) and Werner (2009; 2004) for ethnographic analysis of bride abduction in these regions.
considerable bearing on both impetuses for and experiences of bride abduction. However, there are some provocative similarities as well. Similar to the former Soviet Republics, people in South Africa are “living through an area of disorienting social change and economic instability” (Borieva 2012: 153). Widespread unemployment has undermined men’s ability to marry and set up an independent household, and previous chapters have documented the many ways in which young men feel insecure and undermined in the contemporary economic and political context. In such circumstances, bride abduction offers a means through which they can achieve the pragmatic and social benefits of having a spouse. At the same time, many older women are losing both social power and the assistance of daughters-in-law through the resulting breakdown of the traditional patriarchal order. As Deniz Kandiyoti notes,

This process [of breakdown] implies that women escape the control of mothers-in-law (...) at a much younger age, it also means that they themselves can no longer look forward to a future surrounded by subservient daughters-in-law. For the generation of women caught in between, this transformation may represent genuine personal tragedy, since they have paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal bargain, but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits (1988: 282).

Moreover, in South Africa as in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, women's place in family and society are at once among the most contested social issues, as well as powerful symbols of ethnic identity. As Mark Hunter notes “at the heart of these gender tensions is a seismic disturbance to taken-for-granted gender meanings and yet the absence of firm new moorings -or at least by the presence of moorings that only appear accessible to the middle class after Apartheid” (2011: 1116).
At the same time, *ukuthwala* can also be seen as a powerful example of the creative mobilization of tradition as a means of responding to challenging social problems. A comparable example would be the 'revival' of virginity testing of young Zulu girls as a 'traditional' AIDS-prevention strategy (see Wickström 2010; Vincent 2006; Scorgie 2002; Leclere-Madlala 2001). While the private examination of girls' vaginas by their mothers was apparently practised in earlier times, contemporary virginity testing is premised on the idea that by placing a high premium on virginity, and by making testing semi-public,165 girls will have an additional incentive to refrain from sex. The reasoning follows that by avoiding sex, girls will also avoid HIV. Contemporary virginity testing is vulnerable to critique on many fronts,166 and like *ukuthwala*, is an especially lucid violation of liberal and feminist sensibilities (not to mention, in many cases, the South African Constitution). Yet many in South Africa see true value in institutions of the past as means of addressing highly contemporary problems.

This research also raises questions of pragmatic concern for public health, given the evidently powerful influence of older people in the community over sexual access to younger women. Nomaphondo and Nomhle, for instance, told me that married life is ‘*kubi*’ [bad], because at some point “*your husband will not want you anymore, and he’ll have casual relationships with other girls, and HIV will burn you!*” Nomandla strongly suspected that one of her husband's girlfriends was HIV-positive, as the girlfriend's late husband was widely-rumoured to have died of AIDS-related illness. Moreover, a number of the women that I have discussed were abducted by men considerably older than they were, meaning they were potentially exposed to the greater

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165 These tests often take place in schools, at church, at sports stadiums, or community-centres. Men and boys are expected to keep their distance, although results are typically announced to all girls and women who are present. Public announcement of the outcome of a virginity test is illegal under the Child Act.
166 For example, it puts the responsibility for avoiding sex squarely on the very people with the least control over when and how sex takes place.
risk of HIV infection posed by early marriage and intergenerational sex (Leclerc-Madlala 2008; Clark 2004; Smith 2002). Given that several young women in the community told me they do not want to marry precisely because it is inappropriate to request the use of condoms once lobola has been paid, it seems that gerontocratic authority in the context of ukuthwala marriage may put young women at greater risk of HIV infection.

Certainly my research suggests that in some cases, contemporary ukuthwala is a truly violating experience, and a practice through which men can exercise violent male power through the cloak of tradition. For these reasons, ukuthwala should be seen as part of a larger conversation about gender violence in contemporary South Africa. Not only is South Africa notorious for extraordinarily high incidence of sexual and domestic violence, recent issues such as the politics surrounding South African President Jacob Zuma's rape trial speak to how 'tradition' is equated with gender inequality in ways which proffer moral force to particular forms of assertive, hyper-sexual masculinity (see Hunter 2011; Waetjen & Maré 2010; Robins 2008).

The discussion here is obviously in some ways provisional, and I am aware than I have muddied waters that were portrayed by media and legal scholars to be, if chilling, at least deceptively clear. Although frequently deployed to compel unwilling women to marry undesirable spouses, ukuthwala's connection to staged elopement means that it holds the potential to reconcile the dichotomy that people in Mhlambini often articulate between autonomy, modernity, and gerontocracy and tradition. By deploying a 'traditional practice' in order to secure a desired spouse, young people can creatively circumvent their elders to some degree, while simultaneously appearing to respect a tradition which positions gerontocratic

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167 The reasons why South African society is extraordinarily violent, as well as why that violence is so gendered, are widely-debated, deeply complex, and span far beyond the scope of this dissertation.
authority as a cornerstone of morality and identity. At worst, however, contemporary ukuthwala is a stark example of the ways in which tradition can be mobilized to add legitimacy to violent coercion. Moreover, the motivations that various parties have for colluding in or resisting ukuthwala are evidently variable, and may not be entirely clear even to the parties involved. What does seem clear, however, is that debates about ukuthwala are characterized by considerable gendered and generational antagonism.

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168I am indebted to Noor O'Neill Borieva for this insight, although her emphasis is different.
Conclusion

Whether man or woman, young or old, virtually everyone in Mhlambini claims to be living through a time of great social change. People’s stakes in the outcomes of this period of change are different depending on their gender and age, and, as previous chapters have shown, people frame these contests in both generational and temporal terms. Rural life and the will of elders are typically framed as the “old,” traditional way, in contrast with both modern city life, and with the habits and predilections of youth. Buttressed by the moral force of Christianity and human rights, and tempered by the risk of alienating ancestors, these gendered and generational conflicts are ideological and symbolic.

Although people are adamant that these changes are recent, to some degree this dissertation contributes to a long tale of gendered and generational conflict as outcomes of colonialism, capitalism, and Apartheid in South Africa. Moreover, viewing rural lives as temporally prior to urban life has a long legacy on the continent, and elsewhere in the postcolonial world (Piot 2011; Thomas 2002; Rebhun 1999; Pigg 1992; Fabian 2002 [1983]). Additionally, earlier scholars have done the work of demonstrating that the colonial enterprise entailed efforts to alter precolonial forms of African personhood, with stark consequences in the domestic realm (see Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, 1992). And there are certainly deep historical roots to the suffering of the elders who feel neglected and unloved, the young men struggling with the indignity of unemployment, the despondent young women who hope to “just go away and come back beautiful,” and the pensioners and wage-earning young people struggling to fulfill the needs of their large networks of dependents. Yet I do not dismiss people’s claims that domestic life has sustained new pressures “since voting,” and “since Mandela.” In sharing their experience of struggle and strife, people in Mhlambini have allowed me to make several
contributions to conversations about gender, generation, modernity, and tradition in contemporary rural South Africa.

Firstly, as explained in the introduction, anthropologists and other postcolonial scholars have rightly taken issue with the tradition/modernity dichotomy. For example, this dichotomy has been challenged by arguing for the modernity of 'traditional' practices such as witchcraft (Moore & Sanders 2004 [2001]; Geschiere 1997), by exposing the ways in which European modernity was conceptualized through the colonial encounter (Piot 1999; Mamdani 1996), and, especially in South Africa, by exposing the ways in which contemporary idioms of tradition were constructed through the collusion of African patriarchs and colonial administration (Carton 2000; Mamdani 1996; McKittrick 1996; Jeater 1993). As earlier chapters have demonstrated, a contemporary consequence of this for South African social life is that tradition and modernity are often seen as social facts which map onto communities in divisive ways, at the same time that tradition is often mobilized as justification for gerontocracy and patriarchy.

My dissertation, and especially the topic of *ukuthwala* (abduction marriage), speaks to these issues in provocative ways. For example, at first glance *ukuthwala* is precisely the sort of 'exotic' practice that was considered evidence of Africa's savagery and otherness. This perspective is reflected in South African and international media, which portrays the practice as a bestial, misogynistic violation of rights. Conversely, South African law draws primarily on early ethnographic and missionary sources as foundations for policy pertaining to *ukuthwala*. As I have explained, earlier ethnographers and contemporary policymakers assume that that most *ukuthwala* are actually staged elopements, where mock protest is necessary to uphold local standards of decorum. Thus, contemporary discussions suggest a familiar polarization between *ukuthwala* as gender violence, and *ukuthwala* as a legitimate cultural tradition.
However, I have shown that as elopement, *ukuthwala* allows young people unique leverage in choosing a spouse, a practice which young women link to modern personhood and egalitarian relations in marriage. Moreover, as bridewealth can be lower in these marriages, *ukuthwala* offers young people an opportunity to marry where it would be otherwise unaffordable. Yet I have also documented true cases of forcible abduction, where women were unwilling victims of gender violence cloaked in the legitimacy of tradition. Economic austerity, men's marginalization, and the gendered nature of violence in contemporary South Africa means that *ukuthwala* also provides some men with a means of gaining social status while exerting violent power over women. Yet the practice *appears* similar both in instances of elopement, and in cases of violent forcible abduction. Moreover, most *ukuthwala* that I documented involved something in between these two extremes, where it seemed unclear even to the parties involved exactly who had consented to what, who was influenced by whom, and under what motivations. *Ukuthwala* thus speaks to contemporary debates about agency, personhood, violence, autonomy, sexuality and the deployment of tradition.

This brings me to one of my second major contributions to conversations about modernity and tradition in Africa: I speak to how personhood, dependency, and autonomy are bound up in an experience of modernity that is fundamentally gendered. For example, Chapter Three documented the way in which poverty and unemployment is experienced differently for young men and women. While many young men face ridicule from friends and family for their inability to provide for a spouse and family (see Hunter 2010, 2006), young women become more dependent on the state and on their natal family to support their children. However, these young women do not experience the same reproach as young men for failing to achieve expected markers of adulthood. Furthermore, the few young men with jobs have a ready-made model of
legitimate masculinity in their role as provider, while young employed women often struggle with conflicting femininities in their efforts to balance traditional notions of maternal and marital femininity with the obligation to provide economically for their families.

Additionally, I have shown that contemporary conflicts over social reproduction entail contests over changing models of women’s sexuality, from sexuality being socially-embedded in kinship and realized through the bridewealth system, towards being an individually-possessed capacity. For men, this conflict manifests itself in concern for the way in which contemporary notions of rights-based gender equality may empower women to exercise promiscuous sexual autonomy, potentially with disastrous consequences for the both HIV transmission and for the legitimate continuity of the lineage. Younger and older men are fairly united in the assumption that women’s sexuality should be encompassed by kin, and subject to male disciplining in the event of threat.

Changing understandings of femininity and sexuality also provoke generational contests between women. As earlier scholars have shown, the integration of rural regions into migrant labour systems has resulted in a transfer of economic power from elders to young men (Hunter 2010; Carton 2000). In such context, women become increasingly dependent on men with access to money, provoking generational contests among women over access to men’s resources. As I demonstrated in Chapter Five, in Mhlambini older women are deeply critical of young wives’ attempts to embody a sexualized femininity through comportment and dress. I argue that older women are disparaging of the dress and behaviour of daughters-in-law in part because a sexualized femininity can be a means through which wives maintain intimate bonds with their husbands, at the same time that a personalized bond between a son and his wife has the potential to undermine an elder woman’s social power and access to resources. While close bonds
between sons and their wives have long posed a threat to the social power of elder women, in the contemporary era non-pension-earning mothers' increased dependency on the income of wage-earning sons is accompanied by an increasing idealization of close, intimate monogamy as ideal.

Like their peers across the globe, youth of both sexes frame romantic partnership based on autonomous choice of spouse as a necessary component of modern marriage (Thomas & Cole 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). Yet the stakes that young people have in this marriage form differ substantially between genders, indicating again the ways in which engagement with modernity is a fundamentally gendered exercise (Weinbaum et al. 2008; Knauft 2002; Rofel 2002; Wardlow 2002; Hodgson 2001; Felski 1995). As I have shown, most young men hope for both companionship and deference from their wives. For them, love is not incompatible with authority over one’s wife. Indeed, respecting the husband’s authority can be an important way through which a wife demonstrates her commitment and love: he can certainly love a woman who is “under him,” while she can show her love by behaving in ways which are appropriate to for her subordinate position. Moreover, as instances of ukuthwala demonstrate, some young men are willing to forgo romantic partnership more readily than are women.

In contrast, for young women the ideal of romantic love is entwined with the hopeful assumption that love and gender equality are linked (see Vincent & Chiwandire 2013; Spronk 2009; Smith 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). Although most young women do not aspire to take on the same responsibilities as men, their stake in companionate marriage has much to do with a desire to be equal partners in household decision-making, and for a husband who will share responsibility for the maintenance of the home. Women’s aspirations here are inseparable from extraordinarily high rates of domestic violence in South Africa, and therefore from young women’s desire to avoid harsh violent discipline.
The theme of gendered modernity comes together with contests over changing forms of personhood in local conflicts over human rights. The work of scholars such as Harri Englund and Mikael Karlström have suggested that equality as parity may be an incoherent concept in social contexts like Mhlambini, where personhood is interdependent and characterized by inequality. As I have shown, rights to equality are experienced by many in Mhlambini to be threats not only to the social power of men and elders, but also to the very meaning of gendered identities themselves. Where inequality is presumed to be intrinsic to gender, age, and thus to appropriate interpersonal sociality, it seems that human rights are felt to threaten the entire gendered and generational order. Parallels between gendered conflicts over rights in Mhlambini and issues of concern within the international Men’s Rights movement suggest that gender equality may render gendered identities increasingly uncertain in many global contexts. This experience, however, is likely more acute in Mhlambini because the inequalities within the gender order are so marked, and because of the especially powerful moral force of human rights discourse in South Africa given the role that this discourse played in the project of emancipation from Apartheid.

This brings me to the final component of my argument. I have demonstrated that people in Mhlambini, as in many South African communities, are living through a time of severe and worsening austerity. As scarce resources become increasingly stretched, people are being forced into tighter and tighter relationships of dependency. Yet these dependencies belie a deep, ironic contradiction at the core of domestic life: people are becoming even more interdependent concurrent with the rising prominence of an ideological system which privileges autonomous, independent, choice-oriented forms of personhood as the cornerstone of worthy forms of self. Thus, I suggest in this dissertation that the very categories through which people understand
identity and self are being challenged in the contemporary era. The economic crisis is also a crisis of *meaning* about equality, gender, age, sexuality, and spirituality, played out through the messy intimacy of social reproduction and rural domestic life.
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Appendices

Household Composition: Examples of Imizi (homesteads)

The information in this appendix provides additional information about household composition in Mhambini. I have chosen to feature these households because they are typical of a particular household ‘type,’ for instance a household composed of grandparents and grandchildren following the death of parents due to HIV/AIDS, or an affluent household with several sons working in mines. The chart shows household composition for all 114 households in Mhlambini.

The numbers that I have assigned to the households are arbitrary, and correspond to the order in which I profiled the households. All names are pseudonyms. Dates of birth have been calculated based on reported age at the time I profiled the household, so at the time of my fieldwork these people were two to three years younger than the ages provided here. There may be additional children in the households now. The ages of older people usually reflect educated guesses on their part, and in some cases a tendency to exaggerate how old they are in hopes that the NGO would assist them in accessing an old age pension. Although we asked about child deaths and cause of death, I do not have information on all members of the family that may be deceased.
Umzi 63: A Typical Village Household

Umzi 63 is a typical village homestead. It consists of a widowed traditionalist mother, six adult children, and two grandchildren born by unmarried adult daughters. Their primary source of income is Phola’s salary as a teacher at the NGO preschool, although they also collect three child support grants. Nothawuzeni is most likely receiving an old age pension now, although she was too young at the time of my fieldwork. The family reside in a modest homestead consisting of two rondavels in good condition, and a two-room square house. They have two cows and several chickens, but are growing nothing in their garden.

During my fieldwork, Phola expressed concern that she would be abducted for marriage, and that her mother would consent to it. With four unmarried adult brothers, Phola felt “so sad” to know that by being unmarried she was depriving her family of the bridewealth that would allow one of them to marry. She also complained to me that her mother grumbled a great deal about how difficult it is to manage the homestead without a daughter-in-law to “serve her.” Phola was abducted in mid-2012 by a family from the next village. Her husband allowed her to
continue working as a preschool teacher, although I do not know whether her salary goes
towards her mother’s umzi, her or her in-laws’ umzi, or both.

Umzi 46: An Affluent Household

The family residing at umzi 46 is the largest household in the village. Like most affluent
households, this family are Zionist Christians. There are several other families of comparable
size, all of whom include married adult sons. Examining the composition of the household
provides information on what an affluent family looks like. Such families are a distinct minority
in the village today.

Like most village households, umzi 46 has a number of adult, unmarried daughters living
at home. With the exception of Yiseka, who was 14 at the time of my fieldwork, all three
unmarried daughters have children. However, this household also has two married young sons.
Like nearly every household that includes young married men, both of these brothers are
mineworkers. Note that the eldest son in the household, Vuyani, is unmarried. This is
presumably due to the fact that he was not successful in finding work, and therefore cannot
afford bridewealth.

Deriving income from Mbulelo’s old age pension, the remittances from the two
mineworker sons, and seven child support grants, this family is affluent by village standards.
The umzi consists of two rondavels, one new, 2-room square house, and a four-room square house. All are freshly-painted in matching deep orange. The yard itself is fenced all around, with a fancy gate. There is a huge, well-maintained kraal for livestock. In it they keep seven cattle, a mule, two donkeys, and five sheep. They also have geese and chickens. Moreover, NoWardrobe is a skilled gardener, and cultivates a variety of crops in several fenced plots.

Despite their affluence, they experience some difficulties. NoWardrobe is troubled by the wayward behaviour of young women, as evidenced by her own daughters who are single, unmarried mothers. She also experiences age problems (see Chapter Three). Zimasa and Lungiswa are struggling to access child care grants due to bureaucratic difficulties.

_Umzi 51: The Impact of AIDS_
The family at *umzi* 51 are exemplify how households are changing in the era of HIV/AIDS. The household is typical in having a number of unmarried adult daughters living at home, and in being composed of several generations of family living together.

The seven children in this household are siblings and cousins who reside with their grandmother since their mother and father died of “TB” (dying from TB is usually means HIV and TB co-infection). When my fieldwork began they were dependent on Nowisile’s old age pension, Nobuntu’s salary from the community work program, and Vuyokazi’s salary as a gardener at the NGO preschool. Nowisile has been struggling for some time to get foster care grants for Aphiwe, Sipho, Thandokazi, and Buhle, all whom are under 18.

Although they have suffered significant emotional hardship, they have been able to manage financially, and their homestead is modest but comfortable by village standards. They share three rondavels, and have a cattle kraal and a large garden. Both Vuyokazi and Nobuntu are skilled gardeners, and the family rarely goes hungry. They are also wealthy in livestock; at the time that I profiled the household, they had three cows, seventeen goats, six sheep, and some poultry. However, Vuyokazi died of AIDS-related infections in November 2011, causing a great emotional pain to a family that had already suffered much loss on that account, as well as reducing the family’s income by roughly half.
Umzi 113: A Very Poor Household

Umzi 113 consists of four teenaged siblings whose parents have died of AIDS-related illness. Although they have remained at their family’s umzi, their only source of regular income is the child support grant which Sandiso receives for himself. Lithle, the eldest of the four orphans, was in Cape Town looking for work during much of my fieldwork. They are desperately poor, and rely primarily on the modest charity of other members of their isiduko (clan). A married older sister visits often, and helps as she is able.

These siblings reside in two run-down rondavels, which they cannot afford to maintain. The thatch is worn out, and leaks when it rains. They have two cows and six pigs, but these livestock are sickly and the siblings cannot afford medicine. This homestead is among the poorest in the village, and is the only one composed exclusively of young orphans. The other imizi that are similarly impoverished consist of abandoned first wives and their children, or families headed by at least one parent who is dependent on alcohol.
Demographic Table

The following table shows basic demographic data for all 114 *imizi* in the village the time of my fieldwork. This data represents a few of the many variables that I collected data on during the profiling research. I have included these particular variables in this appendix because they are of particular relevance to the topics discussed in this dissertation.

**Key to Symbols:**

W= widow  
Y= young wife who is substantially younger than her husband  
T= a member of the household who has a paid job in town (usually Cape Town or Mthatha), usually as a security guard.

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<th>Household number</th>
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<th>Never married over 15</th>
<th>Married under 35</th>
<th>Pensions</th>
<th>Child Grants</th>
<th>Disability Grants</th>
<th>Mineworker</th>
<th>Other Income</th>
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