

**Social Relations around a Communal Tap:
an Ethnography of Conviviality in Imizamo Yethu, Cape Town.**

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2014

Minor dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of degree of
Masters of Social Science in Social Anthropology.

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my mother, Mamabela Qhobela and my sister Mabela Qhobela for the unending support they have shown me academically, emotionally and in all ways possible. I have the biggest cheerleaders in them. I love you both beyond words.

I also dedicate it to my father, Bereng Qhobela, for all the humour he always brought forth whenever I felt frustrated and for the love he continues to express to me daily. Thank you and I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Divine Fuh for his advice when I prepared to start this research, his supervision, guidance and encouragement he gave throughout this work. Thank you very much.

Additionally, I would like to thank the National Research Foundation (NRF) and Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) for financial support towards this dissertation.

My academic advisor, Dr. Thabiso Mokotjomela, I truly appreciate his scrutiny throughout this research project.

Mom and her older sisters (Nkhono Mathandi Sopeno and Nkhono Mamots'eare Mokhethi), no words are enough to thank you for everything you have done for me from birth to the present day, I will forever be indebted to you and may God bless you immensely forever. You are indeed my pillars of strength.

Mama Gracy, and all Imizamo Yethu residents who contributed to this research, thank you for allowing me in your homes, for the time you invested in this work and the protection you gave me in the community, Enkosi, Ndiyabulela kakhulu.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is focused on the (re)configuration of social relations around a communal tap. It looks at the different ways in which fetching water from a communal tap brings life within an impoverished community in Cape Town, South Africa. I examine how the people of Imizamo Yethu who are located in a constrained and heavily populated geographical space, where movement and sociality are limited, take advantage of the tap space to (re)build relations through various social interactions. Water, one of the elements basic to human needs, activates hope in the midst of suffering, while stabilising residents' uncertainties. During a four month ethnographic study of life within this community, I participated in and observed the daily practice of fetching water, and the interactions around one of the community's taps. Building on the idea of water as a total social fact, and also conviviality as theoretical frame, I argue that water is as much a giver of life as it is a catalyst for social living. Water provides an opportunity for residents to meet, exchange stories, and seek survival strategies, further strengthening communal bonds. Through water and the social relations that it (re)configures, residents activate dignity.

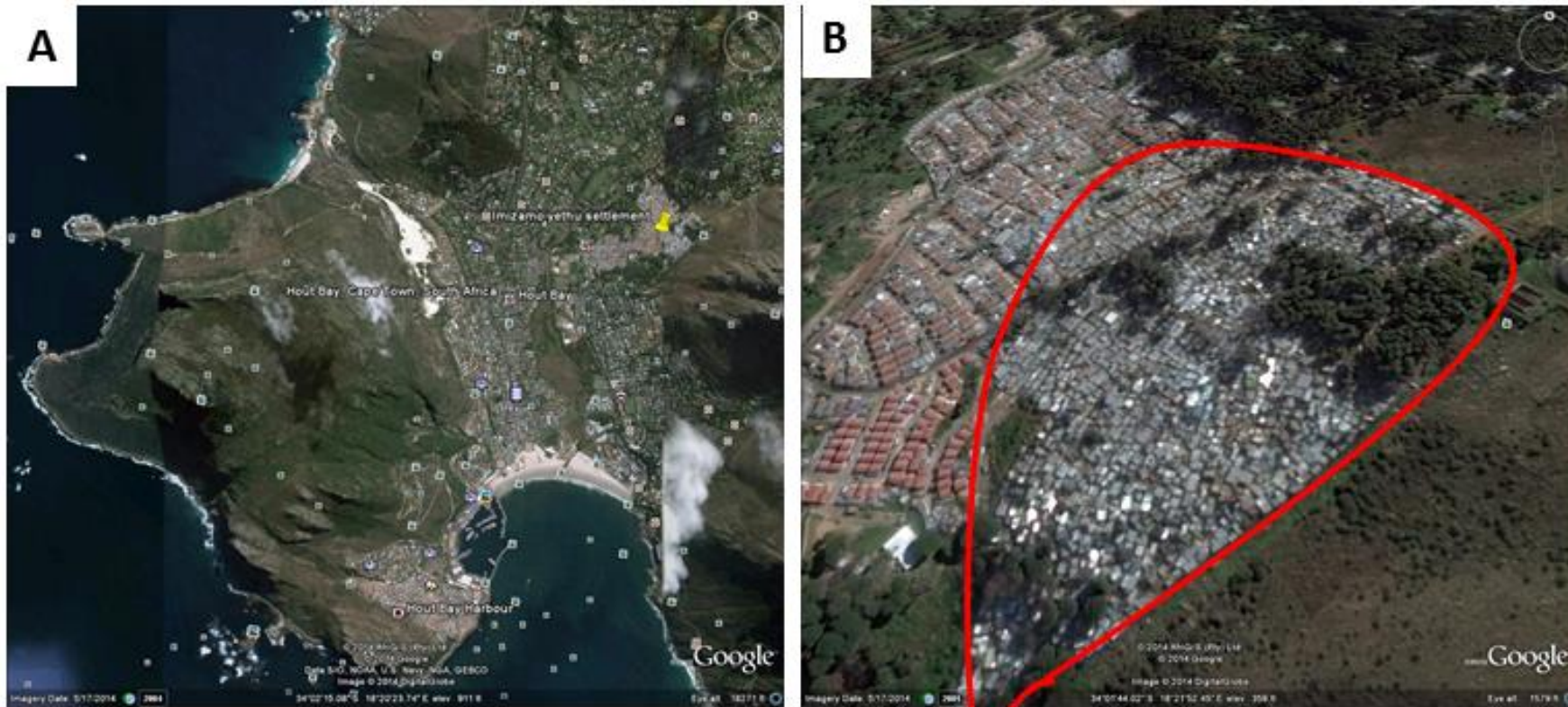


Figure 1: Aerial view of Hout Bay in the Western Cape Province, (A) showing Imizamo Yethu with a yellow mark, and (B) neighbouring sub-urban settlements outside the red line marking the territory of the Imizamo Yethu (silver metal roofing material).

Chapter 1

1. General introduction: Water as a source of life

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the (re)configuration of social relations around a communal water tap in Imizamo Yethu, a township in Cape Town, South Africa. It examines how water, which is a basic human necessity and a source of life concurrently, acts as a metaphor for social living and conviviality in a context of precarity. In this dissertation the term precarity is based on Butler's (2004) definition which is defined as a condition of living in unpredictable life circumstances without social security. It examines how, within an impoverished settlement, dignity is activated through social interaction around a communal tap.

1.2 Water sociality and how it (re)configures social relations

Motivation for this study was a product of my previous research in the community. During my BA Honours degree research project which investigated public participation processes in the construction of Chapman's Peak toll plaza in Hout Bay, in 2012, I engaged with residents who protested and launched court cases against the construction of a toll plaza. They complained about the municipality having imposed the set toll plaza without effectively communicating this to them. This was one of the reasons why residents felt neglected and not taken seriously in Hout Bay, Cape Town. Eventually, I learned that the residents' protest was triggered by other dissatisfaction about service delivery in the area. For example, residents complained about poor service delivery in general with an emphasis on employment, poor sanitation and about the provision of water and electricity services. During my visits to Imizamo Yethu, the township¹ in Hout Bay, it was astonishing to see numerous informal dwellings with limited yard spaces. The common agglomeration was of dwellings constructed out of corrugated iron usually referred to as shacks in South Africa (Govender & Barnes, 2011).

It was overwhelming to explore a settlement with such congested space and narrow passages that led to people's homes. There were bare copper pipes which formed different networks on the ground. I soon realised that the copper pipes along the narrow pathways were connections

¹ In South Africa, Township refers to urban residents built on the periphery of towns and were reserved for non-whites during apartheid.

leading to a communal tap. Imizamo Yethu, which consists of approximately 36 000² residents, there are only 4 to 5 communal water taps provided by the municipality. These communal water taps are shared by more than 250 households (Cooper et al., 2009) and while they are located at a closer proximity to some dwellings, others have to walk as far as a kilometre to gain access to the tap (Dodson & Oelofse, 2000; Tapela, 2012). Imizamo Yethu is characteristic of typical township settlements in South Africa (Philip, 2014).

Imizamo Yethu, like many other townships, experience a continuous influx of people from the rural areas which result in overpopulation as both space and resources are limited (Maylam, 1995). The few basic services and facilities that both government and municipalities provide often appear to be inadequate due to overpopulation (Kennedy, 2007). In South African townships, there is significant lack of infrastructure and service delivery (Oldfield, 2000). Housing in townships includes formal brick houses and shelter constructed out of corrugated iron. Houses are heavily agglomerated with very small spaces in between (Tapela, 2012). Because of overcrowding, these settlements are often associated with extreme poverty, poor education and sanitation (Meinzen-Dick & Zwarteveen, 1998). Moreover, both electricity and water are a major problem for these settlements and many cases of illegal connections of the electric wires and water pipes have been reported across South Africa (Tapela, 2012). With such an overcrowding, it is therefore difficult to find open spaces either for recreation or other social encounters. Despite these constraints, residents often improvise and take advantage of certain spaces such as the municipal water tap on which the study is focused around for conviviality.

My observation of the situation in Imizamo Yethu, together with conversation with residents, raised several concerns. Firstly, the residents displayed anger towards the municipality especially in terms of its poor service delivery and total neglect of and inability to communicate its plans 'properly' to the community. While they participated in the protest against the toll plaza, they were actually protesting against other unspoken grievances. Secondly, during my visit to the community, I was intrigued by the observation of the mass illegal electricity wire connections and water pipes which interconnected many households from a single connection server. Lastly, I wondered how conviviality occurred especially in 'public' spaces given the unavailability of open spaces as is the case elsewhere in Cape Town. These observations became pivotal entry points to my research into the nature of

² Statistics by Roth and Becker (2011)

conviviality and social relationships in Imizamo Yethu. In my search for these spaces I came across the communal tap as one of the spaces where people regularly met. Over time it became obvious to me that the tap was more than just a giver of biological life. It was a catalyst for everyday social living and interactions. It was one of the most convivial spaces in the community. Observing that a vast number of households shared a communal tap, I was interested to understand how this water and space around it (re)configured social relations in the community.

My research explored how the communal water tap area became a space for social interactions whereby residents not only met to draw water but also for socialising. I examined the ways in which relationships are (re)created and maintained, and how factors that influence a sense of relationship around the tap constitute community. In the same manner, I wanted to understand how residents negotiated sharing the communal water tap and the tight space around it. Through this focus, I want to engage and contribute to the emerging studies on conviviality. Moreover, I borrow from the work of Appadurai (1986), on the social life of things, to understand the concept of water as agentive in a community. I do this by approaching the subject in three ways. Firstly, I address the precariousness of life in townships and its ambiguities which are characteristic of townships and informal settlements in South Africa where people feel both alienated and interconnected at the same time, creating a particular kind of political subjectivity. Secondly, I build on the current research around the agentive nature of material objects to examine water as a total social fact. Thirdly, I look at conviviality as a product of interactions and relationships around water, especially when considered around the communal tap. In essence, I argue that in the midst of the suffering that Imizamo Yethu residents experience in their daily lives, water and the communal tap provides a way to smile and be dignified.

1.3 Uncertainties seen through communal engagement

This research originally set out to focus on the use of the communal water tap among residents in Imizamo Yethu. However, ethnography opens up the capacity to observe social issues in their totality. For this reason, I realized that in order to understand social relations in Imizamo Yethu, I had to look at other social dynamics which reflected residents' everyday realities. The name of the community, Imizamo Yethu, which translates to "our struggles" (Sowman & Gawith, 1994), resonates living realities in the community. Although South

Africa is a country wealthy in natural resources, a large proportion of its population lives in poverty. Numerous reports have shown that poverty is widespread in rural areas and townships with a high concentration on black populations as a direct result of the apartheid policies (Carter & May, 2001; Ngwane et al., 2001; Woolards, 2002). Like many townships in South Africa, Imizamo Yethu is a poverty struck community. Poverty can be defined and measured in different ways. For instance, monetary dimensions, however, within the scope of this work poverty is seen as a deprivation of capabilities to achieve full human rights and the precariousness in which residents strive to stabilize their uncertainties (Green, 2006).

1.4 Smiling while suffering

In the next section, I contextualize theoretical frameworks that are central to this work. This framework draws from Chabal's (2009) work on the politics of smiling and suffering, where he addresses how people in the midst of struggling to survive improve their livelihoods. The central concepts in this section are the precariousness of life in townships, water as a total social fact and conviviality as a product of social interactions.

1.4.1 Precariousness in townships

Globally, livelihood uncertainties are characterised by social exclusion, vulnerability, marginalization and living in rural areas or townships (Green, 2006). In the context of South Africa, townships are subjected to conditions of uncertainty due to the limited governmental and municipality interventions. Precarity as a politically concept (Butler, 2004) is grounded in interdependency where one depends on the other to achieve a certain level of social stability. According to Butler (2004), precarity applies to subjectivity in lived experiences of insecurity, poverty and uncertainty. It is seen through South African townships that the political, economic and social system perpetuates forms of uncertainty through political inequality. Living in uncertainty is manifested in low education levels, high mortality rates and poor health. These are factors which constitute precarious life forms as people live through day-to-day survival. Interrogating poverty which is embedded in uncertainty exposes elements of a precarious lifestyle, whereby people live in uncertain survival circumstances (Zimmerman, 2008). A secure lifestyle is a struggle to people who constantly battle about their survival. South African townships are prone to high statistics of crime, rape, alcoholism, stigma, abuse, and disease to mention a few threatening dangers. These social issues

encourage people who live together to be dependent on one another for their survival and the stabilization of uncertainties. Through interdependency, social bonds are (re)created. In communities where basic human resources are shared, the social interactions depict different ways in which people rely on each other therefore strengthening their relations. Moreover, the social interactions create convivial spaces within communities.

1.4.2 Water as a total social fact

Water is a basic human need with diverse usages in the community on a daily basis. There is much statistical data that presents the importance and diversity of water. For instance, biologically, water makes up about 60% - 70% of the human body (Mitchell, 2003). Geographically, it is said that about 71% of the earth's surface is covered in water (Allen, et al., 1998). An anthropological understanding of water looks beyond water as a biological fact in its nature, rather it is understood as integral to societal domains that are religious, economic and political (Strang 2004; Wilder & Lankao, 2006). Borrowing from Marcel Mauss' (1990) classical notion of *total social fact* water takes on multiple social forms and is embedded in the social domains (Orlove & Caton, 2010). It is a biological component that the body uses for its metabolism, and socially water is used to perform house chores such as cooking, cleaning and washing as a result of conforming to socially constructed norms (Hastrup, 2009) At community and household levels, studies have shown that there are multiple uses of water which reflect an integral role in people's livelihoods (Barnes & Alatout, 2012). Water is associated with survival, sanitation, production, pleasure, and other aspects of social life (Meinzen-Dick & Zwarteveen, 1998). Furthermore, water is an instrument that regulates people's behaviour and interactions (Wateau, 2011). Water mobilises social values such that people can distinguish dirt from cleanliness, and there are cultural meanings where water is used in divinity such as baptismal ceremonies (Wateau, 2011). Economic and political domains of water can be seen in the bilateral agreement between the government of South Africa and Lesotho whereby South Africa commercially obtains water for meeting its economic development goals (Adepoju, 2003).

Several studies conducted on the effects of natural resources on social relations agree that the sharing of resources perpetuates social interactions such as reciprocal exchanges, interdependency, power dynamics and conflicts (Dirks, 1980; Laughlin & Brady, 1978; Leach et al., 1999). According to Laughlin and Brady (1978) communally shared resources

influence the types of social interactions. For example, residents may either engage in reciprocal exchanges or potentially withdraw from their social relations through conflicts that may arise in the sharing process. From an anthropological perspective, water is also seen to configure societies in particular ways, and to generate particular social values (Hastrup, 2009). Availability and accessibility of water shapes the everyday patterns of water uses. Johnston (2003) articulates an interesting observation of water as a social domain whereby conversations around water sources are generally based on people's daily experiences and other general matters. This depicts an area of a shared resource as a space where ordinary life experiences and socialisation occurs.

In this point of view, water is seen through its agentive powers, whereby it has the capacity to transform life in a community. That is to say that water presents meanings of social value, morality, and patterns of sharing (Hastrup, 2009). Within the context of this study, it is important to recognise how sociality occurs in spaces that were not constructed with the concept of becoming a social space but rather where people create alternatives for meeting places due to their lack thereof. With these factors I argue that water is not only a biological component, it is also a total social fact. In order to understand its sociality we have to understand the social dynamics around it. These dynamics play out to create convivial spaces in certain communities.

1.4.3 Conviviality as a product of social interactions

According to (Putnam, 1993), the well-being of a community, social relations and cohesion are dependent on social networks which are based upon shared values and mutual trust. The use of shared spaces and shared resources encourages tolerance and respect among community members which influences social relations and a cohesive society. *Social cohesion* is a way in which a community with diverse social sub-groups deal with social tensions in order to maintain a homogeneous existence (Monson et al., 2012). Nyamnjoh (2002) offers a way of thinking of communities and social relations through the notion of conviviality. Conviviality, he says, are what daily interactions and socialization rest upon. Furthermore, he asserts that conviviality is a way of understanding how the sense of community emerges through the negotiation of social dynamics and ways of being sociable. Meaningful relationships can emerge through precarious conditions whereby people are unified by mutual interests and value systems as their survival strategies. Moreover,

Nyamnjoh (2002) demonstrates that conviviality encourages the empowerment of individuals and groups which involves a negotiation of agentive forces within a community. In most communities, several cultures are present within a single social field. It is in this way that diverse social relations are shared through values (Gluckman, 1940).

Given this conceptualisation, this study shows that through resource sharing (water), community members are not independent individuals, but rather interdependent through the social networks that are shaped daily through experiences of using the communal water tap. It borrows from Gluckman's (1940) work whereby he analyses the common use of a bridge, a common space for diverse social groups, where negotiations of co-existence and interdependence emerged. Through the connection of precarity, water as a social fact and conviviality, I show that there is richness in the smile and dignity of Imizamo Yethu residents in contrast of their day-to-day realities.

1.5 Symbolic meaning of water

According to Clifford Geertz (1975), symbolism is used as a vehicle of cultural meanings which are representative of how to comprehend the world. Symbolic representations are believed to illustrate cultural ethos. Symbols used in societies represent multiple meanings which people attach values to in order to solidify social interactions (Lyon, 1995). Societal symbols help to reinforce social and cultural norms as well as platforms on which people can manifest meanings (Geertz, 1973). Victor Turner (1975) further developed Geertz's notion as he declared that symbols are not only vehicles for meaning but they also create understandings and solidarity in social relations. Water through a river system represents a flow and continuity which connects social domains and people with nature (McCool & Martin, 1994). As Turner (1975) attests, symbolic meanings change over time and space hence meanings of water can also change in reflection of social orientation. In his publication Verkuyten (1995) states that symbolic representations embody diverse collection of social values. Several examples of the symbolic use of water include its use in religion, use of water by ranchers and generally for recreation showing diverse social uses, demands and water values (McCool & Martin, 1994). According to Mosse (1997), shared communal property is expressive of social relations and status. The use of these shared properties is mediated by fairness and reciprocity. The findings of this study have, in several ways, portrayed social

status symbolically through water use and access, and have also emphasized water embeddedness in social relations.

1.6 Water problematics

On a global scale, water is an essential resource to human well-being and life in general. The challenge of managing water sources needs proactive solutions, particularly with the reality of climate change (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). Studies have shown that water availability is likely to be threatened by global change (MEA, 2005). Blignaut and Heerde (2009) suggest that not only do strategies on water conservations have to be applied, but also several alternatives to accessing water need to be available. According to Pimentel et al., (1983), rapid population growth increases fresh water consumption rates resulting in the scarcity of fresh water which consequently creates conflicts among communities. On a global scale, a notion of *water wars* is common to countries that share trans-boundary natural resources such as rivers and water streams. Some Middle East countries have experienced prolonged cases of water wars (Allan, 1997). Countries where the Nile River passes are using it for fresh water due to increasing population growth. Consequently, many conflicts around the sharing of the Nile River have erupted (Fadel et al., 2003). Currently, there are life threatening water conflicts between Ethiopia and Egypt. Additionally, several African countries including Kenya, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda get water resources from the Nile Basin which puts further tension on drinking water to serve millions of people (Rahaman, 2012).

According to Geertz (1972), water brings into play different forms of power within societies. In other words, water can legitimise different groups of people over others. According to Appadurai (1986) the social redistribution of water reproduces different forms of reciprocal exchanges and interdependence among community members. In their recent study Zug and Graefe (2014) have shown that in a community in Khartoum, water vendors who have donkey carts or bicycles deliver water to community members who reciprocate these water gifts with other basic needs such as sorghum for food and other forms of monetary exchanges. The forms of reciprocity that occur within these communities strengthen social relationships and encourage a sense of belonging to those that participate in these exchanges (Appadurai, 1986). However, water sharing within communities can also negatively affect social relations, especially in cases of water scarcity where each member of the society seeks

for their individual means of survival. A rural village in Nigeria (Ikoyi) also engaged in reciprocal water exchanges but as water became more scarce conflicts among people erupted and social relations were negatively affected (Ibe-Lamberts, 2012). From the above data, one can determine that water within a society can translate into a negative or positive medium of sociability.

The few basic service facilities that the government may have provided are usually insufficient due to overpopulation (Harte et al., 2009). In South African townships there is significant lack of infrastructure and service delivery (Oldfield, 2000). Basic human needs such as education, health facilities and sanitation are insufficient in such overcrowded settlements. Moreover, electricity and water services are a major problem for the township and many cases of illegal connections of the electric wires and water pipes have been reported across South Africa (Tapela, 2012). Consequently, many residents develop alternative means of survival to conquer their social inadequacies, such as the absence of a water tap in their individual household. South Africa also has different issues in relation to water use and access by people. For instance, during the apartheid regime, access for many natural resources including water was restricted for the disadvantaged groups (Weiner et al., 1995). However, the post-apartheid South African government has succeeded in increasing water access and basic services for the historically disadvantaged groups although there is still a remarkable amount of people in South Africa lacking access to safe drinking water (Kahunda et al., 2007). Given the historical instabilities in South Africa, class differences and social inequalities exist, and for the previously disadvantaged social groups such inequalities are obstacles to accessing communal water services (Kahinda et al., 2007; Tapela, 2012).

1.7 The need for ethnographic engagement

Conceptualising water as a social domain calls for anthropological invasion. It is only recently that anthropological texts have begun to engage with the water subject. Morehouse (1970) emphasises Mauss' notion of a *total social fact* as she regards water as an icon in religious use, a metaphor in cultural context and a concrete reminder of the society's dependence on the natural world. In an anthropological context, water is also regarded as a weapon, a frontier, a link and most importantly a continuous conversation subjected to question of power dynamics, environmental-health hazards and economic profitability (Wateau, 2011). Hastrup's (2013) work on water management illustrates that water is a

landscape component which has extreme social interconnections. She argues that in order to project futures up-holding sustainable societies, the configurative power of water must be taken into an account. Furthermore, she concludes that resource access is still an important societal issue globally. Therefore, water awareness is necessary to create a possible *new water culture* which considers the traditional systems societies have used over centuries for better management.

Lewins (2007) illustrates the ability of anthropological work to reveal crucial details often overlooked in water management. He asserts that *water matters* cannot be understood outside of the knowledge of domains of the social life. By using the notion of water embeddedness into society he envisions understanding the link of water and social relation. Through their findings, Orlove and Caton (2010) suggest that social processes need to be core considerations in the policies and management of water supply systems. The studies mentioned above have echoed the need for more ethnographic engagement and anthropological assessment of the understanding of water sociality. There are different theoretical concepts to look at water however; this research merely focuses on anthropological notions.

1.8 Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is divided into 5 chapters. In this chapter, I have introduced the aim of this research, its anthropological significance and contribution to the body of literature and hopeful practices focusing on social relations. With a specific focus on the social relations at a communal water tap, I presented the need for ethnography of conviviality towards understanding social relations. There are three main themes through which this work approaches a better understanding of social relations and how people manage to smile in the midst of suffering. Firstly, I looked at precariousness in Imizamo Yethu, the state of living through suffering and uncertainties and how people strive to survive their realities. Secondly, I addressed the concept of water as a total social fact which promotes social living and hope beyond everyday suffering. Lastly, I examined how conviviality became a product of social relations through everyday social interactions at the communal tap. These main themes are imbued in the context of water embeddedness in society as a giver of life.

Chapter 2 sets the scene for researching a township. It explains the methodology used in this research, and justifies their significance. The chapter also looks carefully at the ethical

considerations of this research, particularly avoiding false representations of Imizamo Yethu as a community.

Chapter 3 examines the concept of precarity that is how residents experience day-to-day uncertainties. This chapter foregrounds the contextual framework of living in precarity which presents an understanding of how residents stabilize their precariousness through constituting social relations. It is also grounded by residents' notions of poverty and uncertainties which develops an understanding of how people find different and individual alternatives to smile through their suffering. It addresses different representations of 'a community' given by different scholars. I argue that there have been mis-representations of communities through romanticism. This argument structures daily the realities that people live through while it gives a clearer understanding of a variety of aspects that configure social relations. It firmly supports that social relations are important to attain personhood and dignity.

Chapter 4 draws on the ethnography of conviviality at the communal water tap. It discusses water as a social total fact which gives life concurrently, activating livelihood in the community. It examines the agentive nature of water, describing how fetching water from communal tap breathes life into the community. Through the midst of suffering people gain dignity, stabilize uncertainties and aspire to 'better days' as conviviality becomes a product of social relations.

The study concludes by presenting three main themes that are influential to the configuration of social relations. Firstly, on the concept of the politics of smiling and suffering (Chabal, 2009), I have reflected on how Imizamo Yethu residents smile through each day of their uncertainties and maintain their dignity with hope for their survival. Secondly, through the concept of water as a "total social fact" (Mauss, 1990) embedded in social domains which regulate everyday practices, I have shown how water activates social living and becomes a medium through which people maintain hope to stabilize their uncertainties. With the connection of the above concepts, I have thirdly shown that conviviality is a product of social relations. The next chapter presents the methods employed in this research. It examines the methods' abilities to produce findings while also revealing the challenges faced during their utilization.

Chapter 2

2. Researching the township

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research techniques I used, and the complexities encountered during data collection in Imizamo Yethu. It sets out the scene of the local community and articulates the ethnographic tools that were suitable for acquiring data on the social relations in this community. The chapter also presents the different challenges I encountered in the field, particularly while using methods that required residents' participation (such as diary keeping and photovoice technique). Lastly, this chapter examines the ethics of ethnographic engagement among human subjects. In summary, this chapter aims to demonstrate practical experience as a way of building an understanding of complex social relations looking through a local context.

2.2 Research Exploration

Initially, I proposed to investigate the effects of domestic water use on social relations in Imizamo Yethu, where I would focus on understanding how social relations are formed and maintained in their community. During my preliminary survey within the community I realised that for better understanding of social relations in Imizamo Yethu, I would need to focus on a communal space that would represent how residents relate to each other. Public spaces are often presented as parks, sports fields and communal halls. However, Imizamo Yethu as, a township settlement and economically disadvantaged, has only one monitored communal hall where female residents gather to create handicrafts, a sports field where soccer is played by male residents and several shebeens³ visited by both genders. These public spaces are gendered and therefore selected residents may be found in them. Moreover, there is a public taxi rank in the township which facilitates movement in and out of the settlement. During my initial visits to Imizamo Yethu, I realised that a communal water tap is a common space equally needed by all residents. My research interests changed to focus on understanding how water, as a source of living, becomes an agent that activates livelihood in a precarious community. Through focusing on a communal water tap, I was also interested in understanding how conviviality becomes a product of social relations.

³ A township club or where alcoholic beverages are sold, (Mager, 2004).



Figure 2: The communal water tap studied in Imizamo Yethu

The communal water tap triggered memories from my childhood when I used to visit my mother's home village in the rural parts of Lesotho. In particular, I recalled the endless

conversations that people engaged in at the village communal water tap and the childhood games we would play all day. With more visits to and observations in Imizamo Yethu, I further realised that precariousness played an important role on social relations.

With a commitment to construct an ethnographic account of communal social relations, I did not have explicit research questions. However, I was guided by several overarching questions around the experiences of using a communal water tap and the potential life uncertainties of residents due to observed adversity which influences communal relations. Underpinned by participant observation⁴, this framework enabled an understanding of residents' day-to-day social realities in their precarious situations. Critical to this research, were questions that examined how residents negotiated the use of the communal water tap and the products of social relations activated by water. These questions were aligned with my primary concern of understanding how residents continue smiling and aspiring to 'better days' while suffering. This focus consequently promoted an understanding of conviviality as a product of social relations.

2.3 Acquiring Data

This thesis is based on fieldwork in Imizamo Yethu which entailed daily trips to the community during a period of four months. The following section is an account of various fieldwork activities and ethnographic sampling stages.

2.3.1 Stage one: Exploring the township and its gate keepers

As mentioned earlier, I engaged with some residents of the township during my prior research project. I had particularly engaged a lot in their gatherings and public riots against the toll plaza. I therefore had to strengthen pre-existing links with those residents. However, there was a new community facilitator⁵, Kenny, through whom I entered the community and was introduced to other residents. On average I was in the field for 5 hours each day: some days I would come in the early morning hours while other days I would go towards midday and stay until late evening hours. I seldom stayed till late hours as I was constrained by the crime and violence threat in the community. I visited the community on weekdays, weekends

⁴ Participant Observation is an ethnographic method of gathering data while participating in daily routines while observing the behaviour of the group under research (Becker, 1958).

⁵ A government employee used to oversee the community on behalf of the municipal authority.

and holidays. This helped me to experience residents' daily practices at different time frames which would give a more realistic understanding of their experiences.

2.3.2 Stage two: Getting to know the residents

Through Kenny, I was introduced to mama⁶ Gracy, one of my informants, an elderly woman from Zimbabwe who sold vegetables and fish in the community. Mama Gracy's vegetable stall was located along the community entrance walk-way (where public taxis usually drop and pick people in the community). Initially, I spent most of my days with mama Gracy at her stall as she introduced me to other residents as they walked by. She also took me around the communal water tap and introduced me to residents' households who were my potential research participants. The question on how people relate has always been an important aspect to residents in the community. During my first days at the communal water tap, many residents were curious to find out who I was and asked about my relationship with Mama Gracy. They wanted to know whether Gracy was my mother or aunt. Again, I was interrogated on the question of relationships when I was carrying one of the toddlers cared for at a nursery school in close proximity to the communal water tap by one lady who asked whether that was my child. These two questions, among others, made me realize the great concern residents had with people's relations. The importance of people's relations was further demonstrated during social introductions whereby residents always referenced their identity with others. For instance, Kenny's wife, when introducing herself said "I am Nolwazi- the wife of Kenny" while her daughter said "My name is Kwezi, Kenny's daughter". The idea of relations seemed to reassure residents of their sense of belonging within an imagined sphere of social ties. It was apparent that the residents preferred to be known as being part of a social group affiliated to each other by certain relations.

To most residents, I had been introduced by both Kenny and Mama Gracy. Kenny introduced me in passing as "*the UCT girl researching about our tap*". Mama Gracy on the other hand conducted formal introductions where she would tell residents my intentions in the field, and would also ask me to elaborate to the residents. With every initial conversation I reintroduced myself to residents talking about my interests in the field. In these conversations I always talked a lot about myself being true to residents as a way to build relations of trust.

⁶ I used Mama as a polite way of addressing elderly women (Formally translated to Mother)

2.3.3 Stage three: Selecting research informants

As already mentioned, my research focus was on the use of a communal water tap to understand social relations. In this study, it was important to focus on residents that used the communal water tap, as through their interactions at their central space of interest, I would understand how social ties are established, strengthened and how they may be broken. Individuals I encountered at the communal water tap allowed me into their households, to meet other family members who also become informants for this research. During this research I interacted and conversed with many residents. However this ethnography has detailed experiences of few selected residents whom I applied intensive sampling approaches to thoroughly understand their daily life experiences. At the communal tap I tried to converse with as many residents as possible. I was able to talk to many residents as I conversed generally about daily life experiences through which I would then specify my research intentions. Again conversations at the tap were not formalised which helped to break the boundary of researcher to informant dynamics. Talking to many residents allowed random sampling as I engaged with different social demographics cutting out any research biases. Moreover, I also conducted group discussions and household conversations which involved a close group of informants that I draw more on in this work.

2.4 Setting the scene: Communal water tap

The communal water tap is situated along a pathway that leads to residents' households in a space where women, men, youth and children interact to collect water to perform their day-to-day practices such as laundry, cooking, bathing and cleaning. The communal water tap is located in a pathway that leads to the main road where there is a police station and taxi stop. This contributes to the centrality of the tap and more reason for people to be clustered in that area. The communal water tap area is a suitable space to experience and observe Imizamo Yethu residents' precariousness, conviviality, and social relations. It is a space where an observer can focus and learn about an individual's experience using the tap. For men, the communal water tap area is a space where societal politics are discussed and soccer highlights become shared. For women, it is home away from home, where they talk about household conflicts, discuss part-time jobs and also share the latest gossip within the community. It is also a space where youthful males impress girls by helping them carry water containers. Children gather around the tap to play. In general, the location of the tap

represents a convivial space where there is interplay of all communal interactions which reflect different symbolic meanings, constantly reproducing the kinds of social relations that exist in within the community.



Figure 3: Narrow path-way to the communal water tap in Imizamo Yethu

2.5 Methodologies

This research is grounded by ethnographic research methods. Ethnography is an in-depth research method through which a researcher spends a long duration of time to observe everyday life experiences of what people say and do (Myers, 1999). Moreover it allows the researcher to obtain a deep understanding of people's everyday practices through engaging and participating with them. Marcel Mauss (1990) compares ethnography to fishing. All one needs to do, he says, is to swing a net and they are guaranteed to catch something (Mauss cited in Ferguson, 1999). Daily experiences which manifest in social meanings are best observed and understood through ethnographic research. I began thinking through the methodologies I would employ for ethnographic data collection during an early stage of developing a research proposal. Social relations exist in any community, however the discourse of community itself is debatable and therefore, it is inherently complex trying to understand social relations. A context of how people living together form social ties is best

understood through the narratives of the people themselves, as well as the observations of the researcher within the society. In order for me to participate in their daily lives, I needed to form close relations with residents. Above all, I needed to break the boundary of being seen as the researcher bringing development. Achieving a stage where I would collect ethnographic data without any expectations from the residents presented a challenge regarding the length of time scheduled for data collection in the field. For this reason, I had to pay constant visits to the community, form diverse conversations with residents and participate in their daily routines. I also talked a lot about my experienced with a communal tap with the aim of creating mutual understanding and openness between the residents and myself.

This research focused on configuration of social relations in Imizamo Yethu through the use of a communal water tap in a context of precarity. It was crucial to adopt a holistic approach to the social dynamics (gender and age) as understanding social relations includes every member of the society. It was therefore of important to work with as many residents as possible to understand such relations and to avoid any biases that would skew the research findings. It is of high importance in conducting ethnographic research to establish relationships of trust and mutuality with the residents. I spent most of my time at the communal water tap area hanging out with the residents as a way to form mutual relationship and trust. According to Geertz (2000), “Deep hanging out” is an ethnographic research method which allows one to immerse themselves in the research field to gain poignant insights of social experience. I achieved this by engaging in conversations about myself beyond my academic interests in the field. To some residents, I narrated stories about my experience using a communal water tap in the rural areas of Lesotho where my mother grew up.

Moreover, I used participant observation as another fundamental research technique for this study. To achieve this, I accompanied some residents in their daily routines of collecting water and laundry as a way to observe activities that took place by the tap as well as to form relations with the residents. It was at this point that I realised I had to let go of my preconceived notions of social relations in order to reproduce the resident’s meanings through their narrations. It had always been interesting yet ironic to conduct research on how social relations are formed through the use of the communal water tap because I was in a position where I first had to form the relations myself in order to conduct the ethnographic study. I had to spend a lot of time with informants exchanging stories about our lives, I formed

friendships with my peers as well as mother-daughter relations with elder women such as Gracy. The experience I had engaging with people and the conversations shared between us helped me further understand the ways in which social relations were maintained.

For participation during research, I engaged in conversations that were carried out at the communal water tap and assisted in carrying water to households. The age dynamic was problematic during the initial stage of research. I found it much easier to relate and become part of conversations among female youth between ages of 23-27 as these were my peers. We talked mainly about the behaviour of males in the field, they would ask about the conversations I have had with males in the community. These conversations created a platform where we could open up and share information amongst each other therefore, moving beyond the dichotomy of the researcher and the informant. It was fairly easy to form relations with children (between the ages of 9-12) as they would play around the tap area when they were sent to collect water. We would engage in interesting chats and I would also help them collect water. Forming relations with older women in the field was a challenge. Initially, I felt that my presence in the field did not allow them to carry out their usual conversations. They would perform their daily routines at the communal water tap but opted to asking me questions about my research more than engaging in their conversations. Gossiping was much more avoided as trust had not developed among us. At some point however, when I had engaged with the women in small group discussions, it became easy for a mutual relationship where they had gained trust in me and were equally open to me as I was to them.

Other methods I proposed to use were not feasible in practice. For instance, water diaries which involved asking people to keep diaries of their daily water use and experiences at the communal water tap. The personal information kept in a diary would act as a base for further research questions (Zimmerman & Weider, 1977). I provided diaries to some of the residents that I conversed with and expressed a shared objective of these diaries but they preferred to have verbal conversations about their experiences. In a few instances however, particularly within the youth, they were enthusiastic to keep diaries as it reminded them of their younger teen years of diary keeping, they said. Moreover, I also proposed to use photovoice technique for my methodology. According to Wang (1999) photovoice is a research method that enables participants to identify, represent and enhance their community through a photographic technique. Due to lack of funds I could not provide key informants with photographic technology devices. I proposed the method to some of these key residents who

had cell phones with cameras; however they did not keep a record of these photographs. I came to a realization that some of the proposed methods would have to reflect an individual focus.

2.6 Introspect on ethnographic research

I am uncomfortable referring to Imizamo Yethu as “the field” due to the amount of time and life experiences gained there. The methodology used highly exposed me to residents’ personal lives to the extent that we shared conversations beyond the scope of the research. However, these relationships placed me in a situation where I experienced people’s daily hardships in their aspirations to sustainable lifestyles. I was exposed to daily struggles where people live in precariousness striving to survive each day. An overwhelming number of death cases during the period of my research left me daunted and at a point of discomposure. Eventually, after introspect, I realised that my compassion towards the residents developed my understanding of the meaning of social relations to the residents through the reflection of my own understanding. The social ties that people affiliate with offer some sense of belonging which provides sociable grounds for aspirations through convivial indulgence.

2.7 Concepts of data collection and writing

Data collection for this research spanned for a period of four months from November 2013 through February 2014. During the period of analysing the research data I continued to visit Imizamo Yethu in order to further understand the collected data during March and April 2014. The numerous visits to Imizamo Yethu made it possible for me to develop meaningful relationships with the residents. Some of these relationships extended beyond the research period and have developed more outside Imizamo Yethu. In some instances it felt as though residents were overly mindful of me and the research project. Residents also had hope that I would provide feedback on social development. However with frequent visits and deep hanging out, residents started to perform their daily practices in a normal manner which was not mindful of my presence. I collected data at different times of the day at the location of the tap for a substantial period during the research and eventually followed some of the residents to their households. According to Jacobsons (1991), ethnographies are facts that need to be analysed and interpreted. In collecting data I used interpretive ethnography to provide thick descriptions of the residents’ meaning of social relations (Geertz, 1973). For the write-up of

the research project I used Geertz's (1975) experience-near and experience-distant concepts to render meaning of social relations as understood by residents. The experience-near concept renders meanings as defined and valued collectively by residents while the experience-distant concept is my inference as an ethnographer to interpret meanings as they are understood (Geertz, 1973). Developing further on the ethnographic methods which would enrich my understanding of social relations, I conducted informal interviews using a recording device and asked follow-up questions from conversations and other questions which would enrich my understanding. Additionally, there were a few instances where I held discussions with my informants at the tap area where we would exchange thoughts on my research. These discussions were informal and took the form of focus group discussions.

2.7.1 Deep hanging-out

Quantitative research methodologies can produce data which gives general dynamics of social statistics. For instance, through quantitative research we can numerically assess social demographics such as age, income and gender. These research methods however, cannot quantify experiences, meanings of day-to-day practices, processes that form social relations or people's value of social processes. Through the discourse of cultural relativism, anthropology embraces the very fact that people create meanings in the worlds they live in, they create their own values and practices which may differ globally but remain realities to people that create and share them. There is therefore uniqueness in each society which is understood through immersing oneself in the context of those that socially relate through space and time. Through ethnographic methods the meanings people make are only able to be understood when put into context. I am not ignoring the concept of globalization, which has increased urban mobility, where there is rapid social change through the influence of global connections. However, people reside in their local worlds and to understand the meanings they create within their locality, ethnography is vital.

I spent most of my research period hanging out with residents who eventually contributed enormously towards this research. This method opened up a platform of storytelling and residents sharing their everyday experiences and practices. Conversations that we exchanged were made possible by building mutual trust through hanging out. In some instances I was able to learn personal stories about residents' family life and abuse which people at times faced. Such information would not have obtained merely through interviews due to the context of this research. Such sensitive stories are only shared in circumstances where trust is

mutually established between people. Moreover through these conversations I was able to judge characters to some extent which allowed me to learn the kinds of stories people would tell about the others. The deep hanging out method together with participant observation therefore made it possible for me to understand people's narratives and social meanings from individual context.

2.7.2 Participant observation

In collecting research data I used deep hanging technique simultaneously with participant observation. This methodology allows a dense engagement with the residents helping to limit being a visible researcher. According to Ross (2010), participant observation requires attentiveness in research so that the researcher eliminates preconceived research ideas in order to observe the actual status quo. This method was integral in developing an understanding of how people negotiate the use of the tap, how power is exercised as well as activities performed at the communal water tap, excluding that of drawing water. These observable performances together with the residents' interpretations were integral in my ability to use the experience-distant concept. Participant observation was a crucial technique as I was able to experience and engage in daily practices which would boost my understanding of how residents related to each other. Observing residents' interactions, conversations and bodily gestures assisted in my understanding of relationship formations, feelings and sociability. Participating in activities at the tap area helped me to relate to the discourse of power dynamics, the negotiation of use of space in that instance as well as the sense of communality. My presence and participation further helped me to better understand some of the particular discussions I engaged in with residents about social cohesion and some gossiping as I did not only rely on the narratives but had experienced and observed these interactions.

To further broaden my understanding of communality and social relations, during the group conversations we drew out pathways that residents use between the communal water tap and their respective households. This was a helpful tool to understand how residents interact with each other, and how they choose the paths leading to the communal water tap in a way that allows them to socialise with others. Geertz (1973) remarks that small facts speak to large issues, this pathway mapping assisted in carefully observing choices that residents take to configure social relations. Moreover, sharing different ideas and observations of this research in discussions helped me to further understand different values of socialization by the tap area

and also helped in refining my approaches of this research. Ross (2010) attests that all knowledge is produced in relation to other people we share ideas with such as those that we work with and those against the research findings. The findings of this research have therefore produced knowledge through the ethnography of residents at the communal tap.

2.7.3 Narratives

The aim of this research is to understand the concepts of sociality, communality and conviviality. The best way to understand this from the residents' individual and shared meaning was through the narratives they gave. According to Nyamnjoh (2011), narratives substantiate the ethnographic data interpreted and analysed by the researcher. As much as research is objective to some extent, social narratives allow informants to be acknowledged in knowledge production. Through other research methodologies I used (deep hanging out, participant observations), I was able to observe the activities that took place in the present and in my presence. Hence, Mbembe (2000) argues that in order to understand the visible we first have to investigate the invisible. The narratives assisted in information which was not observable that lead me to understand the observable experiences.

Imizamo Yethu residents shared many of their life stories and personal opinions on the meaning of sociality and how relationships are maintained. These stories allowed for conceptual flexibility as residents shared on relationships at large, talking about how relationships are configured as well as the conflicts that arise. Ethnography itself is a narration of daily social practices and therefore produces knowledge about social experiences, beliefs and personal feelings. These narratives portray local meanings of everyday life through a locality existing in a world which is in permanent mobility (Nyamnjoh, 2013). Furthermore, narratives reveal individual aspirations which are not observable.

2.7.4 Focus Group Discussions

As part of data collection, I held two group discussions towards the last days of collecting data. The first discussion was by the nursery which is in close proximity to the communal water tap. It was not easy to form this discussion as residents' schedule differed. However I targeted the time when the nursery closed as most women, especially those that have jobs, collected their kids at that time. This discussion was held after one-to-one discussions with

residents and it was the only structured group discussion that I shared with the women. The purpose here was to understand social meaning and values in a collective form as expressed by these women. I also wanted to understand how they negotiate the use of the communal water tap and deal with the power one possesses when they are using the tap. This group discussion was particularly useful as it came after most of the data being collected. I was therefore able to draw themes from the data and was able to ask for clarity on aspects that I did not understand.

The second group discussion was held at the tap with young female residents that I hung out with during research. We were mainly elaborating on conversations that we had had previously. This discussion was important as it helped boost my understanding of the meanings they give of communality. I also shared the data I had collected with the group except for personal information. I was careful not to reveal the identity of people to avoid causing conflict and breaking trust. Sharing collected data helped in sharing the knowledge amongst us and thus helped me to understand the deeper meanings they gave.

2.9 Recording Field notes

I prepared field notes on my observations and conversations during fieldwork and after as I reflected on the data. I wrote detailed notes on reported experiences as I also recorded descriptive accounts of my observations. Moreover, I made more notes of my own interpretations as I observed, and these helped to develop further lines of questioning towards understanding notions of social relations. As far as possible, I noted down specific words and phrases that were significant in helping to conceptualise residents' life experiences. I also used my cell phone for audio recording of focus group discussions and one-on-one conversations. Field notes recorded in the first weeks of the research helped to develop further on overarching questions that were beneficial to develop themes that I wanted to pursue.

2.10 Ethical Considerations

The department of Social Anthropology at University of Cape Town granted ethical approval for this research project in April 2013. During fieldwork, I maintained privacy, ensuring to keep all personal information shared between me and with the residents who shared with me. From the initial stage of my research, I maintained maximum transparency of talking about

my intentions in Imizamo Yethu. There were times where residents regarded me as a social developer; however, in every instance I clarified my research intentions without giving any false hopes of being a social developer. All residents I conversed with had the choice to be anonymous in my write up. They were also allowed to withdraw any information that they did not want me to use in my write-up. I made use of pseudonyms marked with asterisks for informants that wished to remain anonymous.

An unending debate of politics of representations continues through the anthropology discipline. These politics lingered in my research and I continuously struggled with issues of representation. Gupta and Ferguson (2001) interrogate familiar traps of representation in how people can be represented as primitive and exotic. They suggest that anthropologists need to be cognisant of how they speak about informants, producing knowledge about them-knowledge which is influenced by neo-colonial discourses (ibid). In this write-up I adopt a neutral stand point to the best of my ability so as to avoid any biases in knowledge production. I use authorised pictures, drawings, quotations to remain transparent with the authority used.

2.11 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to present a view of researching a community characterised by crime and abject poverty. I have articulated that for an ethnographer, there are always ideal research techniques and practical research techniques. For this ethnography, I proposed to carry out photovoice technique and diaries as part of data collection however, these were not practical in the context of Imizamo Yethu. In previous studies, several ethnographers have highlighted that fieldwork is an improvisation (Jacobson, 1991; Bernard, 1995; Malkki, 2007). Malkki (2007) argued that an anthropologist in the field should be cognisant of the visibility and the indivisibility of the total social aspects. The improvisations I took on methodology were a reflection of the challenges an ethnographer faces. Particularly, I emphasized the engagement of residents in gathering data as a way to avoid the challenge faced by many social scientists which is that of mis-representations of communities. In the following chapter, I use my ethnography of Imizamo Yethu to understand the precarity and the politics of smiling through suffering. This is a contextual framework towards understanding how residents stabilize their precariousness through social relations.

Chapter 3

3. The precariousness of everyday life experiences

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I use data gathered through conversations with residents of Imizamo Yethu to conceptualise how residents are able to smile through precarity. This chapter offers a conceptual framework of how conviviality breathes life into precariousness. I observed residents' everyday life experiences which reflected aspirations of a somewhat stable future through their precarious conditions. Specifically, I looked at how residents live in a confined space located on the periphery of the city where they feel alienated nationally yet they are interconnected on a local level in their community. These lived experiences provide an understanding of how social relations are maintained through precariousness. This chapter discusses the different stages of reciprocal engagement, and conversations carried at the communal water tap which seeks to examine which relationships are affected by uncertainty and neediness. In my perspective, residents further develop mutual understanding of each other's uncertainties, thereby valuing shared aspirations which unifies residents and strengthens social relations. I argue that social ties cannot be divorced from the experience of precarity. Therefore, to understand these ties we should first seek to understand lived experiences in precariousness.

3.2 Precarity as a life experience...

Within the topic of precarity, poverty, uncertainties and suffering are embedded concepts. Several themes focusing on the analysis of poverty as a life experience arise in the growing body of research. Firstly, it is generally agreed that poverty is an economic risk across a life cycle (Cater & May, 1999; Evans, 2004) because poverty extends into all socio-economic classes. However, marginalized and other excluded groups in society are at greater risks of poverty (Becker, 2008). Secondly, according to Rank and Hirschl (2005) the welfare of any country as constructed over time is reflective of poverty patterns and life uncertainties which depict different inequality gaps. South Africa identifies with a significant gap between different socio-economic classes in terms of service delivery (Deininger & Squire 1996). For instance, low socio-economic class groups experience the poorest living conditions and are constantly suffering due to inadequate service delivery (Harte, et al., 2009). Such

communities are constantly trying to resist and survive these predicaments. In Cape Town, township names generally reflect a glossary of resistance and survival (Witz et al., 2001), such as Gugulethu (our pride), Khayelitsha (new home) and Imizamo Yethu (our struggles). Imizamo Yethu, among many South African informal settlements has limited water services. The absence of individual household taps dictates that residents must use the communal water tap with minimal conflicts. Indeed, history shows that water inaccessibility has created territorial and political struggles not only among developing nations but also in developed cities (Todaro, 1969). Inequality in the distribution of basic services for human well-being is a perpetual reflection of lives which the South African government prioritises over others. Often times the living conditions of the already economically disadvantaged social groups are given limited attention by the government (Harte, et al., 2009). Consequently, through such oppressions and precarity residents formulate their own alternative means of survival through social relations.

A precarious life is therefore characterised by vulnerability and the uncertainty of social situations. According to Ridout and Schneider (2012), precarity challenges the assumptions of social development as being a temporal progression. Instead, precarity suggests that all progressing social systems host individuals living in uncertainty, whose futures are not propped securely upon the past. Witnessing the daily life struggles that residents face and the general suffering in Imizamo Yethu, I also attempted to understand residents' notions of living in uncertainty. It was through attempting to understand these notions that I aimed to explore how residents made sense of their living conditions. I argue that a continuum of their struggles and uncertainties creates the potential for them to survive in their increasingly precarious environment. The township displays precariousness through living conditions of all forms of insecurity and contingency of living. This includes low socio-economic living where some residents have no financial income and live through each day in anguish. Uncertainty as expressed by the residents is a condition that is socially constructed, communally shared and individually experienced.

The aim of this study was to understand how Imizamo Yethu residents live through precarity. Specifically, it aimed to understand how residents manage to (re)create social relations in a confined space with a limited water supply. Looking through the social relations reinforced by the sharing of the communal water tap in Imizamo Yethu, the central theme of this chapter is the uncertainty of the residents' lives caused by limited access to water. Consequently it

explores how people experience uncertainty in everyday life and how they create alternative forms of surviving in their precarious conditions.

Engaging in ethnographic research allowed me to step into residents' private lives in order to experience and understand their daily struggles and learn how they continue to smile, survive and aspire to their future. Poverty is defined by different policy-making institutions compatible with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2005). Anthropological research becomes significant towards these definitions as it seeks to understand how these definitions apply to individuals in diverse socio-economic contexts. According to Escobar (2001), poverty is caused by institutions that define, categorise and locate it. The basic standard of living is determined by the political stability and socio-economic governance of each country, which in turn influences the communities' financial status. According to Green (1998), anthropological accounts of poverty and uncertainty provide a deeper understanding of how social groups of each community come to be categorised as poor or rich, and by whom. This is an anthropological contribution towards finding some of the social processes that can eradicate poverty. The gap between minority groups that are financially well-off and the majority groups that consists of the poor population of South Africa complicates local life standards and negatively affects the poor. Uncertainty, in this context, is therefore highlighted by the large socio-economic differences leading to prevailing social distress in the poor majority.

Poverty measurements are based on access to basic services, levels of individual consumption and income levels (MDGs, 2005). Poverty as a social construct is also seen as a series of experiences that affect individuals and communities that live in it (Goldman, 1975). Living in poverty exposes individuals to environmental, financial and health risks, like flooding, for example, particularly in a flood prone area like Imizamo Yethu whereby the shacks cannot withstand the floods. Imizamo Yethu is furthermore prone to shack fires as electrical cables are unsafely connected to households built in close proximity resulting in the quick transfer of fire between shacks. Research results showed that other poverty risks include health hazards due to the emotional unrest suffered by residents and excessive alcohol abuse which also brings even further health risks. These are all characteristics of precariousness which residents face on a day-to-day living.

Discussions around uncertainty emerged consistently throughout my interactions with community members in the field, and from the conversations I held with residents at the communal water tap, focus groups, and individual personal interviews. The socio-economic

statuses of some residents were mostly mirrored by the descriptions of their experiences of precariousness and how they strive for survival every day. Individuals and families that I engaged with experienced a variety of conditions that they asserted were indications of their daily suffering. In fact, all residents admitted that they are vulnerable to many socially harmful conditions including the stigmatization of poverty. However, in the midst of their vulnerability, residents developed different coping mechanisms which assisted them in dealing with their uncertainties. For instance, through communal ties, people could seek assistance from other residents to a certain extent. Again, through trust and interdependency residents constantly exchanged ideas about new jobs that they heard of and gave each other social advice on making ends meet. However, in some circumstances, individuals had to create their own survival strategies.

3.4 Ethnographical cases in the field

In this section I present the accounts of three key informants that I engaged with during fieldwork. These accounts provide different examples of lived experiences of fear and uncertainties that these residents faced on a day-to-day basis with the degree of uncertainty differing among the individuals. I further present how residents in each case create alternative survival strategies in their precarious lives. Throughout the rest of the chapter, I draw on general communal relations that exist in the Imizamo Yethu community. More importantly, I argue that communal ties are essential adaptive social support systems that residents need in order to overcome their precarious predicaments.

3.4.1 Case One: Noni's account of her living circumstances.

Noni, a disabled woman in her late 50s, stays with her two grandchildren aged 9 and 6 respectively, both girls. Noni has suffered a stroke and her body is not strong enough to perform work. Her son and his wife passed away several years ago and Noni has been left to care for the children. Governmental grants are her source of income which she uses to provide for herself and nurture the children. She rarely leaves her house due to her physical condition and relies on neighbours to assist with food shopping and access to many other services that she may need. She has been robbed many times in her house as young boys take advantage of her physical condition. The children have also been robbed when going to shops. Noni fears that the children will be raped and tormented by adults in the community as

they continue to take advantage of her physical condition. Noni's health conditions therefore alienated her from other community members which consequently limited her sociality. Moreover, the social exclusion Noni experiences, limits the sense of communality which promotes social protection. The communal tap is at a further distance from Noni's house, approximately a kilometre away through the narrow walk-ways between the shacks where her grandchildren walk to collect water. This distance to the communal tap exposes the children to further danger within the community. To generate extra income the kids walk around the community selling crocheted scarfs and snacks while the oldest also practices plaiting hair in exchange for money. Noni explained that her grandchildren perform many house caring practices and have limited time to play with other children. She feels that she deprives them of many 'normal' activities that other children enjoy however everything is done as a means for their survival. At times, Noni's physical condition peaks to its critical phase and her body becomes weak. She explained that she lives in constant fear of her life and the life of her grandchildren as she is the only one to take care of them. Noni feels that she is vulnerable to weather conditions as her house cannot sustain the rainy winter season. She faces each day in fear of the unfortunate circumstances that she is vulnerable to.

Although living with people in the community, Noni's life experiences since she was debilitated by stroke were somehow life threatening and lonely. Noni spends most of her days housebound due to her physical condition, seated crocheting hats and scarfs. Her neighbour visits her during the day. United by their handcrafts, they sit together for a few hours every day to talk as they work on their pieces. Noni also has monthly visits from a social worker, who assesses her family's social well-being and security. Other social interactions that Noni has are with her church mates, women who offer support groups and prayer sessions through visiting other women who, for various reasons, can no longer make it to church. Noni's crocheting friend has also formed a women's financial scheme and their meetings are held at Noni's house. Social interaction is limited to people paying visits to Noni's house as well as her sporadic outings for her clinical check-ups. Interaction with other residents and the support that she receives from her church mates offer Noni the hope of staying mentally well as she receives support and also stabilizes her fears about her grandchildren as the women and social worker have shown support towards her family. Noni's aspirations are inspired by the hope that she is given by other women through different stories. These are facilitated by the sense of interdependency which is offered through the social support groups.

3.4.2 Case two: Femi's family hardships

Femi stays with his wife and two children in their shack. They face abject poverty as they do not have full-time permanent jobs. They are also not entitled to any governmental grants as they are Somalian immigrants. Femi and his wife usually offer lawn mowing and laundry services respectively in the neighbouring middle-class and upper-class residential areas. The services that they provided did not guarantee their financial income as sometimes they would not be able to secure any work. When they did secure work, money was used for household expenses. In unfortunate periods when they could not secure any jobs they relied on their neighbouring family friend to help them financially. In this low financial circumstance, Femi faced each day in fear of survival for the next day. Their two children suffered malnutrition and the oldest had physical and mental development deficiency. With such conditions that required regular health care, Femi and his family lived in poor social conditions. Such circumstances, he professed, devalued his manhood and that of other men who fail to provide for their families due to their economic statuses. Femi usually volunteers to clean the police station yard as well as the communal hall yard. These, he cleans for free while strengthening his relations with the community members. In his family's dire financial circumstances he asked for assistance from residents he had strong social relations with. In particular he asked for help from one of the police officers staying in the police-village⁷ in Imizamo Yethu. Femi's experiences also show that building social ties become beneficial to some residents in their times of need.

3.4.3 Case three: Mama Gracy's life struggles

Mama Gracy, one of the key participants of the study, rents a single room shack which she internally covered with cardboard and plastic sheets for insulation. She has also used some of her winter clothes and blankets to cover the sections of her house through which strong cold breeze blows in. However, during heavy winds it is impossible to keep her house warm. During critical winter storms she sits in fear of the roof collapsing. The rainy season exposes her to floods in her shack and she continuously lives in fear of all her belongings being damaged due to the environmental hazards. Unfortunately, this is not the only struggle she faces each day. Mama Gracy's house has been broken into several times. Theft is a rampant threat in Imizamo Yethu, especially among females that live on their own. Such fears bear a lot of insecurities not only to her but to other women residing in Imizamo Yethu. Rape cases

⁷Fenced complex of Brick houses where police officers reside in Imizamo Yethu.

have also been reported and female residents are targets of such violation. Financially, Mama Gracy makes a substantial amount of money through selling vegetables and through her part-time job as a domestic worker. However, finances are not the only aspect of social life that guarantees social security. She constantly tries to maintain good relations with her neighbours in order to invest secure so that they could watch her house when she was not at home, or offer any help from night attacks as she stayed alone. The fact that Mama Gracy is Zimbabwean and a very hard working woman in the community results in many ‘locals’⁸ gossiping about her life. She described her gossipers as women jealous of her achievements. There was also a group of boys who had broken into her house before and she no longer feels safe being alone. With such envious residents surrounding her, she aimed to keep peace and good relations where she could, as a strategy to gain some security and sense of belonging.

Residents that were interdependent, and shared strong social bonds, reflected hopefulness in their precarious lives as they felt somehow secure depending on other residents. This dependency was reciprocal and beneficial through needs that residents regarded as minor and other significant needs. At the communal water tap, I observed elderly women sending children either to other residents’ households, shops, or to collect water for them. I then learned that these networks were only shared among people that were in good relations. It is generally important in a community like Imizamo Yethu for people to develop strong social ties as they are able to reciprocate needs and cope with diverse uncertainties. In the following section I discuss some of the strategies residents practiced to cope with uncertainties.

3.5 Communal efforts on coping with uncertainties in Imizamo Yethu

What is remarkable about precariousness in Imizamo Yethu is that people understand the difficulties they are facing and constantly find adaptation strategies to their situations which offer them hope and a reason to smile through their suffering. To fend for themselves, women formed a small organisation in which they mobilised their resources and utilised their abilities and knowledge to the best of their advantage. This organisation is based at the community hall, where women bring food from their households and feed the children in the community who need help. This organisation required collaboration of different knowledge epistemologies being indigenous and Western knowledge systems in order to plan out the best development strategies for the community members. Residents used their diverse

⁸ South African citizens usually referred to themselves as locals.

abilities to investigate the environmental potential such as crop planting. Older members of the community advised on best environmental indigenous practices, which they used for crop growing while in collaboration with the advice the newer generation implemented their Western knowledge to grow vegetables. As mentioned earlier, shacks are clustered with very limited space for any crop growing activity. In fact, the communal hall yard was the only available space for their plantation. This meant that a sustainable amount that would last for a short while could be produced. In addition to collective crop growing and cooking at the communal hall, women gathered young girls around teaching them handicraft work such as beading, crocheting and making clay ornaments. These indigenous collective coping strategies are particularly essential for establishing the precariousness of life where education is not guaranteed. Furthermore, these gatherings were instrumental in strengthening some communal ties especially among women and children.

It was commonly agreed by several residents living in uncertainty that they anticipate negative conditions that could affect them and prepare to the best of their ability so that they could withstand them if possible. One such negative condition that many residents anticipate is that of the rainy, winter season, shack-chain fire hazards, household attacks, rape and lack of basic resources. There is not much residents can do to prepare for these uncertainties, but because they live and anticipate for such experiences they adapt to them and cope with them to the best of their abilities. Moreover, through the social ties that are constantly (re)created, residents are able to stabilize their uncertainties. Excessive rainfall results in flooding. Some residents collected synthetic material at the construction dumping sites, which they used to cover the bases of their beds and other furniture that could be destroyed by being submerged in flood. They were, however, only able to prepare and withstand floods that were manageable (in their terms) and were left in adversity during intense storms in winter.

Many of the life histories of the families I worked with are marked with hardships arising from lack of resources. These households have invariably lost members of their families, relatives or close family friends residing in Imizamo Yethu through daily struggles of poverty. Considerations of survival strategies are paramount to residents living in uncertainties and these strategies are subliminally performed through everyday experiences. Experiences of physical violation such as rape and robbery are also anticipated due to the fact that there is gang activity in the community which generally marks the area as unsafe. Safety measures such as security locks are used instead of the small padlocks for security and residents avoid roaming about the communities at 'unsafe' hours (early hours of the morning

and very late in the evening). During my research, I was warned by most of the community members to avoid certain corners and groups of people as they are a threat in the community. Such gestures showed that residents care for each other's safety; they are however also aware of the unfortunate activities in their community and within the social ties they have formed, individuals still have to guard themselves for their individual survival. Several initiatives were shared by residents which gave them hope of survival in their precarious conditions and these strengthened the social bonds that were existed through interdependency.

Although interdependency brewed a shared sense of a somewhat hopeful future and social security, being socially reliant can however only be taken to a certain unmeasurable extent. The following section aims to show that social ties are important in a communal setting to create a sense of belonging, personhood, shared value systems and security. There are however good and bad social relations. Representations of social ties by social theorists have been romanticised over time and communities have been mis-presented as homogenous entities.

3.6 Romanticising of social relations theories

Research on social relations suggests that communal relationships afford individuals access to communal resources (Clark & Finkel, 2005; Clark & Mills, 2012). Social solidarity is represented as one of the essential values within African societies which play a role in everyday life experiences (Turner & Lloyd, 1999; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Latouch, 1998). The work of early anthropologists has informed assumptions on the importance of kinship and other social relations in community life experiences. Such research includes the work of Granado and Tanner (2006) giving an anthropological understanding of life in 'slums' which are given a negative image in Cote d'Ivoire. In their work, they show the importance of social relations to provide understanding beyond negative representations of people living in poverty. Moreover, the work of Gluckman (1969), analyses the urban social organisation through the use of a structural bridge, which Gluckman suggests connected western colonisers with the local people and therefore formed social networks that signalled solidarity. In the above case studies, I have also shown how residents rely on other community members which have constructed good social relations. Throughout this thesis including ethnographic accounts which I further elaborated above continuously emphasise the

value of good social relation and how community members strive to create and maintain social networks.

However, I argue that research on representations of social relations has been overly romanticised through literature. The aim of this section is to show that the theory of communal social relations is two-fold, that is to say that social networks play a beneficial role within communities. At the same time, however, these relations are restricted in negative circumstances. I maintain that good communal social relations offer supportive progression within communities though these networks can also have negative implications to certain extent. This section begins by using the findings from three different anthropological studies on social relations and reciprocity, which I use to substantiate that these social networks may be broken, especially in limited resource access. I will again focus on residents to present case studies on which social networks were broken.

3.6.1 Study one: “In the city, everybody only cares for himself”. Study by Bossart (2003).

Bossart (2003) conducted a study in Cote d’Ivoire, giving anthropological analysis of the importance of social relations in cases of illness management. She looked at the role of social networks in coping with illness in order to understand which social relations are important and the aid that they provide to those who are ill. Bossart revealed that care is given by immediate family members of the patient. This care is usually taken for granted by the patient as it is considered as a familial obligation. Again, financial assistance is a sensitive aspect and proven that only close relatives and friends with income may offer substantial contributions to the well-being of the patient. It is however difficult for poor people to receive financial support from close relatives as they are ill equipped to reciprocate the financial support if needed. Bossart continued to show that the rest of community members assist in emotional support to patients by paying regular visits, but also withdraw from these networks to form others that may be reciprocal. She explained that support through social networks is only offered sporadically and therefore concluded that the importance of social networks is often overestimated as the reality shows that individuals endure struggles on their own.

3.6.2 Study two: Social responses during severe food shortages and famine. Study by Dirks (1980).

Dirks (1980) presented his ethnographic findings of reciprocal exchanges and social relations, looking at severe food shortages and famine in west India. He examined the nature of social relations at different scales of starvation and contended that social interactions change with the changing patterns of resources scarcity. According to his study, social ties were maintained in India when people were facing starvation. Residents exchanged different types of food and also provided for those in desperate need. However, Dirks reported that under continued stress and excessive shrinking of food access, individuals started withdrawing from friends and their kinsmen in their reciprocal networks. When the degree of starvation intensified to famine and individuals faced different levels of uncertainty, they withdrew from their social ties and social relations were broken.

3.6.3 Study three: Adults living with aphasia in Khayelitsha. Study by Legg (2010).

Legg (2010) conducted a study in Khayelitsha, exploring the communication of daily life experiences of adults living with aphasia (brain dysfunction). Embedded in this context, he explored the notions of social relations and obligatory reciprocity that community members shared. Several ethnographic examples are presented whereby an individual has a set of good relations with people, however after their illness only few people provide emotional support. Another example given is that of a family where one male was the bread winner and also provided for his external family. Unfortunately, after encountering this debilitating condition he only received care from his immediate family members while other beneficiaries from the extended family withdrew from the kinship ties and offered neither financial nor emotional support. In conclusion for the section of the importance of social ties, Legg (2010) concluded that communal social relations are expressed in situations which are mutually beneficial. This conclusion substantiates that some theories on social ties present truthfulness in that reciprocal exchanges benefit the progression of communities. However, these theories overlook negative situations in which social relations are not beneficial to individuals.

3.7 Relations at the communal tap

Communal conflicts are widespread and the potential of resolving them is challenging. In Imizamo Yethu, the communal water tap embodies a wide range of social aspects of the community. Above all, it is a central meeting place, where individuals from different households come together for a shared purpose of collecting water. There are also various

other purposes that the communal water tap embodies which turn this area into a convivial space. For instance, it is a place where women discuss their families and communal financial schemes, for example. Girls also exchange an incredible amount of ideas about work, males and children, with each other at the communal water tap. These two groups (elderly women and girls) are frequent users of the tap as men and children also use the tap less frequently. The latter group is less frequent females generally performed more household chores and frequented the tap in groups. This convivial space is also used by males to meet females and intimate relations are formed. Moreover, and most importantly residents exchange information about available jobs which they have heard of. These forms of exchanges influence residents' hopefulness and stabilizing life's unpredictability through their precarious situations. The communal water tap as a central meeting place is agentive of forming social networks among the tap users. The frequent visits to the tap allow residents to maintain relations that they have formed through regular interactions.

Through observations I learned that women openly conversed about their lives and households. These conversations were carried out of pride of their different achievements. Conversations ranged from women talking about their husbands' successes in terms of employment, children doing well at school and their asset accumulations. During my conversations with elderly women, their description of the communal water tap area was "a place where we talk about everything about us...". Indeed, women talked about most of their daily experiences, but with thorough observation of the conversations that were held at the tap, most women spoke of things that revealed their success as a way to show off. It was in very seldom occasions when women discussed their family's dismay. The girls that I hung around with during research also conversed about their homes and the new exciting experiences they encountered such as dating. These conversations were shared among residents who are in good social ties however these prideful show-offs brewed envy among women and promoted gossip and ill-talks out of jealousy.

One afternoon at the tap a woman explained how other women always talk about their husbands and children:

*Neliwe is always talking about how her husband got a promotion at work and will soon connect a tap in her house, see now she thinks she is better than us now because she will not come to the tap again (Fieldnotes, 3 March 2014).

She continued to generalise other women's' talk:

They [*Neliwe and other women] always talk about their husbands, we have ours too but we don't talk a lot...(Fieldnotes, 3 March 2014).

There had been several occasions where I observed this group of women talking by the tap area, and they were all friends. However, in the above conversation, the woman talking distanced herself from her circle of friends. She talked about *Neliwe and other women as though she did not socially relate to them.

In another conversation with the girls as we collected water from the tap, they discussed *Amanda's pregnancy:

You see, now *Amanda is pregnant, we don't know the father because she was always telling us of different men that ask her out these are her results...(Fieldnotes 26 March 2014)

The above conversations, by both the women and girls reflect how ill-talk and jealousy affects social ties. Residents shared conversations with their close friends and these are usually concluded by others to be 'pride-talk'⁹. Pride talk does not only brew envy but also begins to exclude others from social ties. This is clear when one resident says "See she thinks she is now better than us..."

In other instances, these envious talks went viral and people that were gossiped about found out. This created conflicts among residents as it brewed the "she said...you said" confrontations among women and girls. Eventually, such confrontations led to broken trust among residents. The residents started off as close friends that supported each other. As soon as jealousy and envy are brewed, trust is broken which does not only affect individuals in the conversation but also the families and other circle of friends. This becomes a vicious cycle which promotes communal conflicts. A convivial space is however created through these dynamic social ties, where there are good and bad relations through which residents are still able to live together for their individual survival.

⁹ Talking out of pride to show-off.

Good social relations promote shared values and interdependency within the community. Residents willingly assist each other in their precariousness. These social ties create comfort zones for people to talk about their achievements, hopes and aspirations which unfortunately are interpreted as pride-talk. As communal conflicts arise, trust is bridged, social relations are broken, people can no longer depend on each other and individuals fend for their own survival. The above data is presented to show that research on social relation theories has often been idealised and romanticised to reflect social solidarity and this has influenced false assumptions on how residents in a community co-exist. This perception has somewhat presented communities as peaceful, homogenous social bodies while the reality reveals that most individuals live to survive their precarious situations.

3.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explained how people cope with the prevailing poverty experiences in Imizamo Yethu. Residents struggle to access their basic everyday needs due to limited socio-economic capabilities. Through anthropological research, Dirks (1980) argues that community members participate in social reciprocity depending on the intensity of resource scarcity. He argues that with pronounced scarcity of resources and basic human needs people withdraw from their social ties (ibid). In Imizamo Yethu, residents living in precarious conditions fend for themselves as individuals create their own survival strategies. Other studies have however shown that community members develop adaptive coping mechanisms through shared practices in order to survive poverty and the uncertainties of life (Banyard & Graham-Bermann, 1998; Haram & Yamba, 2009). Through my research I found that residents experience precarity in different context and through relating to each other's circumstances they are able to develop shared values to overcome poverty. These shared value systems highlight the importance of social relations. Moreover, residents invest in social ties in order to make every day living in dignity. Through suffering, residents aspire to stability in their precariousness activated by conviviality which becomes a product of social relations. In the following chapter, I look at water as a total social fact that forms connectivity in all life domains. I also look at how conviviality becomes a product of social relations which helps stabilize residents' precariousness.

Chapter 4

4. Socialization in Imizamo Yethu

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I propose that water is a total social fact (Mauss, 1990). It is a giver of life in a biological context, but also activates living in a social context. Through the use of water, Imizamo Yethu residents interact, share life experiences and give each other advice which helps to stabilize their precariousness. These interactions promote conviviality, forming social relations. I argue that residents' encounters and experiences at the communal water tap encourage social living whereby people gain a sense of belonging, personhood and dignity. Moreover, these relations promote social stability through suffering and aspirations which are activated through the use of water.

4.2 Water as a source of life and living

Through anthropology, water is seen not only as a resource but a substance that connects all realms of social life (Orlove & Caton, 2010). Strang (2004) suggest that we should look at the 'essentiality' of water. In this way, water is social and total in encompassing all institutions of life suggested by Mauss (1990) (religious, politics, economic, moral and biological). As a social fact, water also takes form in everyday practices. For instance, bathing which is done for personal hygiene but also manifests in the physical appearance of decency and dignity which is a social construct. Water is also used for cooking which is a necessity for survival and good health. These examples of water use show that water is totalistically manifested in health, cultural and social domains of life. The multiple domains in which water is used articulate the connectivity of social systems produced by water. Orlove and Caton (2010) add to the totality of water by using the concept of materiality, which is the physical attributes of water affecting its relation to humans and shape how it is used.

In the following section I present ethnographic accounts of water as a total social fact in Imizamo Yethu. This section is grounded by Orlove's (2002) work in his book *Lines in the Water*. He presents an ethnographic account of the Peruvian highlander whose indigeneity and cultural knowledge has been activated by the use of water through fishing. He

emphasizes that although human relations are constantly changing, they are sustained by mutual dependency on vital resources such as water.

4.2.1 Rhythms of life and living in Imizamo Yethu

Residents fetch water on a daily basis, frequenting the tap several times in a day. Water collected is used for daily household chores including cooking, bathing, cleaning, and washing, among others. As residents' proximity to the communal water tap varies, residents in close proximity may use one 20 Litre bucket to collect water while others who stay further take two buckets of the same size to avoid frequenting the tap.

4.2.2 Ethnography: totality of water use

As a strategy to stabilize precariousness, women in the township prepare meals to feed the children who are in need. This takes place at the communal hall where children gather to eat. Water is therefore constantly fetched from the tap for preparing these meals. In the small yard of the communal hall, there is a garden where vegetables are grown and used for the initiative to feed children. Water is also used for irrigation in growing the vegetables. There are many other water uses in the township. There are groups of males that own car wash businesses who frequent the communal water tap to collect water. Residents who own saloons and those that sell edible goods also collect water for different uses.

During my research, one of the members of the township who was a community representative few years back died. His memorial service was held at the communal hall because of his prominent status within the community. On the hall exit were three large water basins which contained water and aloe leaves in which the congregation washed their hands as they exited the hall after the ceremony. According to residents that explained this practice, aloe extract is used to purify the congregation and remove any bad spirits that are associated with death. "*So that death should not follow us...*" one member exclaimed. Water, in this practice, is used as a substance that purifies and removes any evil spells. Water use in this context is a cultural ritual substance used in mourning. Moreover in baptismal ceremonies, water is also used to purify people who are baptised. These examples reflect the connectivity of water in all social domains, concurrently reflecting different ways in which water breathes life in the community.

4.3 Power dynamics over water use

I have argued that water is as much a giver of life as it is a catalyst of social living. It regulates behaviour in different social domains and also configures societies in particular ways to generate particular values (Hastrup, 2013). In Imizamo Yethu, water is seen as an agent of social relations through creating a convivial space where residents arrive as individuals and leave as part of social networks through interactions. This section explores the agentic nature of water in the township and argues that water regulates social behaviour.

4.3.1 Water as an agent of social relations

I use the definition of agency as the social-culturally mediated capacity to act (Ahern, 2001). Water use in the township displayed the capacity to regulate residents' behaviour at the communal water tap. Water regulated the behaviour and use of the communal space for fetching water. The proximity of the tap to households also regulates time and forms of collecting water. For instance, people who stay in close proximity frequent the tap at any time of the day. Alternatively, people who are at a far distance avoid certain times which are deemed unsafe. Some residents choose to perform household chores such as laundry and dishes at the communal water tap. However, proximity plays a very important role here as through observations, I learned that this is practiced by residents who stay in close proximity. Moreover water use is manifested in the notions of personhood and dignity. Residents use water to bathe, clean-up and appear decent. The notion of decency is embedded in the use of water as residents believe that one must be clean and presentable in the community in order to be respected. Through the use of water, notions of privacy and public were blurred. Conversations that were private were discussed in a public space of the communal water tap. These include gossip from different groups of people and private conversations between girls and boys.

4.3.2 Controlling communal tap use

Water production engages with social arrangements that regulate the use of water, social behaviour at the water source as well as the local values of water and its cultural meanings (Page, 2005). In as much as water regulated social behaviour, residents also gained power over others in the regulation of using the tap. It was interesting to observe how residents

negotiated the use of the tap. Loftus (2006) concludes that an understanding of how communities manipulate the use of shared water sources is illustrative of social relations. Power is not an attribute of an individual but rather a property of social relations (ibid). Power at the tap produces domains of social stability and order. At the communal water tap individuals drawing water possesses power over the tap at that particular moment. Other residents either wait their turn or go back to their households. As a product of good relations among residents, negotiations and improvisations are practiced for other residents to use the tap. The individual using the tap does not only have power over the tap usage at that moment, but also on the tap area in its totality. For instance, the amount of time an individual uses the tap can keep other residents in the queue for longer and also more people may additionally add up obstructing free movement in an already clustered area. Moreover, the exercise of power at the communal water tap expressed through social discipline and conformity. The residents' behaviour at the communal tap signalled a prolonged practice of collecting water which was a norm for residents to queue up, socialize and await their turn. Residents were habituated to the power dynamics that existed and there were no conflicts in using the tap which stimulated respect at ultimately strengthening social ties. This however does not suggest a harmonious community in all circumstance, there were few incidents where girls and women shared gossip about other residents. The communal tap area was often populated by females, hardly did few males gather at the tap and in those instances they mainly focused on collecting water and arranging social gatherings over beer.

According to Michael Foucault (1982), through disciplinary power, people are able to learn and to discipline themselves behaving in certain ways that eventually become a norm (Foucault cited in Blau, 2009). These behavioural norms become embedded in everyday practices causing self-discipline in all residents. Through observing the power of the individual using the tap, I inferred that it had become a norm and common understanding that power lies within the user. For an overly populated area, and the existence of only one communal water tap shared by many, one might assume that there is chaos at the tap which leads to social cohesion. On the contrary, residents subconsciously understand the power possessed by the tap user, ensuring that the activities required for normal behaviour are carried out. Understanding residents' negotiations of power dynamics through this context was therefore important towards understanding the overarching themes of communal ties. According to Bourdieu (1977), social formations are stabilised through everyday interactions.

Understanding the configuration of social relations in Imizamo Yethu was accomplished through understanding how hegemony operated at the scale of day-to-day practices at the communal water tap. Power, in this context, resonates with Foucault's definition of a forcible thing that produces a positive force to the society (Foucault, 1982). The following section draws on conversations and social interactions at the communal water tap to argue that conviviality becomes a product of social relations.

4.4 Conviviality as a product of social relations

Conviviality is understood through the nuances of everyday interactions and social relations—that is the socialisation of daily experiences (Nyamnjoh, 2002). In this sense, conviviality therefore entails an understanding of the society; how diversity is negotiated in notions of space, place and social tensions for the formation of social relations. These aspects of conviviality are produced through social conflicts which when resolved can create meaningful relations bearing mutual trust. Conviviality rests upon neutrality which is however maintained by mutual aspirations and values shared in a community. A convivial community is not defined by perfection, liberation and peace but rather a shared imperative to achieve a sense of mutual existence and interdependence. According to Nyamnjoh (2002), conviviality and communality require a negotiation of differences and competing agentive forces. In the context of Imizamo Yethu, to understand the complex social relations that exist, we need to use a holistic approach of conceptualising all the communal aspects. These aspects are embedded in social interdependency. Moreover, the role of agency; the capability of people and water to influence the social system is again an element through which we can conceptualize complex social relations. A space where socialization takes place is socially constructed through the context that people who use and relate to it and experience it (Stedman, 2011). The symbolic attribution of a space is also a factor in how people interpret different ways in which a space is used (Hummon, 1992).

According to Illich (1973), a convivial society results from social arrangements which promote individual freedom to have ample access to social values. A convivial society has its fundamental social values being survival, justice, and self-defined work. In his conceptualization of a convivial society, Illich emphasises the discourse of autonomy, creativity, and the environment. He suggests that in a convivial society, people should have the free will to live by a set of standards of the society and the environment within which they

collectively perceive as a norm. He further argues that modern societies are manipulated into performing things which are dictated by those that have authority over others. Therefore, a convivial society is one that achieves an autonomous interaction among its members hence decisions can be reach among people which are not influenced by an external source of authority. This interaction among society members allows them to create societal ties and networks through a shared system of values and understanding.

At the communal water tap women usually exchanged different stories about their family dynamics. This form of exchange was empowering to women as they developed mutual trust and interdependency. Some women exchanged their realities about domestic abuse, violence and suffering. They also exchanged ways of dealing with these uncertainties which encouraged them to know their worth. General conversations were also centred on different employment opportunities and other communal strategies which were meant for development. Such conversations were empowering and gave people hope for their aspirations. In this manner, the communal water tap area became a space which elicited residents' hope and smiles in the midst of their suffering. Through mutual trust, interdependency and shared values this convivial space became a product of social relations.

4.5 In Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that water plays an important role in all domains of life. With the approach of water as a total social fact, social domains are interconnected through the use of water. The agentive nature of water promotes different social interactions where people meet in their precarious conditions and collectively empower each other through social ties. Personhood, dignity and a sense of belong are activated by these social interactions. In this space of conviviality social relations are (re)configured.

Chapter 5

5. General conclusion

This thesis is a contribution to understanding social relations in the Imizamo Yethu community, an economically disadvantaged township in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The main aim of this thesis was to investigate the dynamics of social relations in an impoverished community of Imizamo Yethu. The thesis has argued that local social communal ties which are seen in daily life experiences cannot be divorced from people's realities of poverty and life's uncertainties. Using ethnographic research methods, I conducted a three-fold research project. Firstly, I addressed the concept of precarity. This was a framework which conceptualised realities of residents in South African townships. Lack of basic services such as water resources is a common characteristic of impoverished residents. Articulating the precariousness of life experienced by residents grounded the understanding of social relations. Secondly, I engaged and contributed to the current research around the agentive nature of material objects through looking at water as a total social fact. This framework provides an understanding of the water usages in different social domains which also influence the manner in which people relate. Lastly, I interrogated the concept of conviviality as a product of interactions and relationships around shared communal spaces (a communal water tap). With this approach I argued that in the midst of suffering that Imizamo Yethu residents experience in their daily lives, water and the communal water tap provides a way to smile and be dignified.

Through this research, I found that in Imizamo Yethu, living in a precarious lifestyle encourages mutual understanding amongst residents, and facilitates the development of localised value systems to survive and live through their uncertainties. Precarity is experienced in different contexts by residents however there is a common understanding of living in uncertainty which promotes a common understanding of shared value systems and thus social relations are strengthened. Through the everyday experiences of residents, they form relations and mutually depend on these relations for their survival, which give them the ability to have aspirations for their future despite their precarious lifestyle. .

The communal water tap is a central place of interest for residents where they collect water. In this perspective, residents negotiate the use of the communal water tap. These negotiations produce power dynamics which maintain social ties through shared values and mutual understandings. Moreover, the social encounters through daily experiences at the communal

water tap area promoted trust and interdependency among residents, thereby creating social ties. Secondly, the communal water tap is a public meeting space with no gender biases, where residents meet to discuss different day-to-day experiences. The communal water tap was used by women to collect water and socialize, by girls to perform household chores and to meet up with boys also by males whom majority were bachelors. Through this lens, the study looks particularly at residents' behaviour at the communal water tap and how they treat each other, communicate, and behave in one space. These findings help to synthesize knowledge on communal ties thereby helping to provide an understanding of the configuration of social relations. The communal tap area therefore becomes a convivial space in which residents gain respectability, personhood and hope, which are products of good social relations.

Encounters of this research through ethnography have shown the complexity of researching on social relations, the importance of understanding these relations as well as the motivation for understanding social relations. Gluckman (1940) suggests that all events which engage human beings are socialised. This research has reflected on this statement by showing the socialisation of space and water sharing in Imizamo Yethu which promotes and maintains social relations. Overall, I have attempted to provide an insightful view of an impoverished community to understand the daily realities that people live through, their precariousness and coping mechanisms. Understanding social relations in Imizamo Yethu required the approach I took to successfully complete this study.

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