

**“We are not 100% free”:
Narratives of continuity and change amongst women on the
margins of post-apartheid South Africa**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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**Picture taken by David Harrison, used by permission of Ndifuna Ukwazi*

Abstract:

A wide range of auto/biographies and life stories has narrated South Africa's transition from apartheid to non-racial liberal democracy. However, the vast majority of these works has viewed the transformation process through the eyes of men and women who have lived extraordinary and spectacular lives. Following Ndebele's (1994) recognition of the radical potential of attending to the lives of ordinary South Africans, this thesis shifts the focus from the extraordinary and spectacular to the ordinary and examines the personal life stories of two female rural-to-urban migrants who have lived their entire lives on the margins of society. Viewing 'the margins' and 'the ordinary' as powerful sites for the production of counter-hegemonic discourses (ibid; hooks, 1990:145) the thesis also reflects on what the women's life stories can teach us about South Africa's transformation process and post-apartheid freedom twenty-two years on.

The thesis documents a halting and ambiguous transformation process and its impact on two black women who have spent their entire lives on the margins of the South African society. Particular light is shed on the limited and uneven impacts of the post-apartheid state's historical remedies and attempts to make a clean break with the past. Tracing how women's agency has played out over nearly four decades, the thesis shows how apartheid's racial, gendered and spatial legacies endure and are reinforced by current neoliberal policies and urban planning. The women's narratives also illustrate a yawning gap between South Africa's ideological and constitutional commitments and the lived realities for women left out of the "liberal promise" of development and prosperity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001)

By shifting the focus from the spectacular and extraordinary to the ordinary, the thesis ultimately challenges us to rethink the notion of 1994 as a watershed moment in the lives of women of colour. On the one hand, the women's narratives clearly demonstrate the women's great resilience and ability to fend for themselves and their families in the face of adversity. On the other, their narratives also show the importance of confronting one-dimensional images of black women as strong and enduring 'superwomen' with little need for social support and assistance. The thesis concludes by reflecting on the women's ambivalent experiences of post-apartheid freedom. By attending to the women's daily concerns and grievances, the thesis highlights the limits of liberal freedom and democracy in the context of on-going violence, precarity and material lack.

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What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore-

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meats?

Or crust and sugar over-

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

- Langston Hughes (1951)

Chapter 1:

From the extraordinary and spectacular to the ordinary

“Storytelling is an urgent project for black women in South Africa where so much forgetfulness is willed upon people” Mamphela Ramphele writes in the preface to her most recent autobiography *A Passion for freedom: My life* (2014:7). Quoting Albertina Sisulu, Ramphele proclaims “we are required to walk our own road- and then stop, assess what we have learned and share it with others” (ibid). That Ramphele’s life story offers important lessons is indisputable. During apartheid Ramphele was a prominent activist in the struggle against white minority rule. As one of the founding members of the Black Consciousness Movement, she experienced the brutal and demeaning tactics of the apartheid-regime first-hand, including detention without trial, police assaults and banishment to internal exile for six years (Ramphele, 2014: 142-152). While fighting for liberation, Ramphele also experienced tremendous loss, including the death of her lover and the father of her unborn child, Steve Biko, in the hands of the security police (ibid: 177-193). Yet central to Ramphele’s life story is not only great suffering and resistance but also victory and transcendence. As noted by Leib (2015), Ramphele’s life story represents a case study of extraordinary success against harrowing odds. Born into a poor family in a rural village in Limpopo, Ramphele rose from poverty and the multiple constraints imposed by the apartheid regime to become a highly successful medical doctor, anthropologist, author and businesswoman (ibid; Bridge, 2007)¹. And precisely for this reason, we must ask ourselves: What lessons do we draw from Ramphele’s life story? What kind of truths does her story bring into being –about apartheid, about the country’s transition to liberal democracy, about black women, and about post-apartheid freedom? And, equally important, what is *absent* from the story of Ramphele’s life? What truths are ‘hidden’ from our view when we read Ramphele’s story, or the stories of other prominent South Africans, whose life stories have been articulated, documented and deemed worthy our attention and deliberation? Whose narratives of the South African

¹ In 1996 Ramphele she became the first black and the first female Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. Four years later she became the first African women to assume the position as Managing Director of the World Bank (see Bridge, 2007:18). Despite her failure to gain traction as leader of the political party Agang (see Smith, 2014) Ramphele remains hugely influential as one of South Africa’s leading intellectuals (see Bridge, 2005:248; Mowatt, 2013) and is frequently included on lists over Africa’s richest and most successful women (see for example African Business Review, 2013; African Success, 2012).

transformation process are privileged and whose are silenced?

*

A wide range of auto/biographies and life stories has narrated South Africa's transition from apartheid to non-racial liberal democracy. Arguably however, the vast majority of these works have viewed the transformation process through the eyes of men and women who have lived extraordinary and spectacular lives. Numerous books and auto/biographies have for example been written by, or about, the political leaders who fought apartheid and brought the regime to its knees, such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Chief Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo and Steve Biko.² Several books have also documented the personal life stories of the leaders of the new democracy, including Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, Wiseman Nkuhlu and Cyril Ramaphosa, who helped rewriting South Africa's constitution and draft new social and economic plans for the country's future.³ Confronting the many gendered gaps and silences in South Africa's liberation narrative, a wide range of books and auto/biographies have also documented the life stories of prominent women, such as Mamphela Ramphele, Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Sindiwe Magona and Lillian Ngoyi.⁴ Together these works detail a spectacular history. They tell personal and collective stories of struggle and triumph that are nothing less than extraordinary. However, what they do not tell us anything about is how ordinary South African women⁵, living on the margins of South Africa's society, have experienced the country's transition to post-apartheid freedom and democracy⁶ This thesis intends to help fill this gap.

Drawing on Ndebele's (1994) recognition of the radical potential of attending to the lives of ordinary South Africans, I shift the focus from the extraordinary and spectacular to the ordinary, and examine the personal life stories of two black female rural-to-urban migrants, who have spent their entire lives at the margin of society. Born in the Eastern Cape Province

² See e.g. Mandela, 1994; Kramer, 2008; Hughes, 1992; Wieder, 2013

³ See e.g. Gevisser, 2009; Gordin, 2009; Wotshela, 2014; Butler, 2008

⁴ See e.g. du Preez Bezdop, 2005; Ramphele, 1996, 2014; Sisulu, 2002; Magona, 1990; 1992; Steward, 1996; Russell, 2003

⁵ What I mean by 'ordinary South African women' will be discussed below

⁶ In making this argument, I draw on Newman and De Lannoy's framing of their book 'After freedom: The Rise of the Post-apartheid Generation in Democratic South Africa' which explores how seven ordinary young South Africans confront the legacies of racial oppression and segregation (2014:xi-xii)

in the 1970s, the women grew up in black townships and apartheid-created black homelands during a turbulent period in South Africa's history characterized by high level of social and political violence and unrest. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the women's childhoods and upbringings were heavily shaped and constrained by their rural belonging and apartheid's racial and gendered effects. Apartheid – and the opposition against it- broke the women's families apart, disrupted their schooling, and imposed tremendous social and economic hardship on the women and their families. However in contrast to their mothers and grandmothers, the two women this thesis centres on did not have to spend the majority of their lives 'unfree' and unprotected by the law. In 1994, when Nelson Mandela was elected as president in the South Africa's first non-racial democratic election, the women were barely old enough to vote and had still most of their life in front of them.

The thesis traces the women's experiences of growing up at the rural and urban margin during apartheid, being 'liberated' in the 1994, and attempts to carve out a secure and meaningful life for themselves and their families on the outskirts of post-apartheid Cape Town. The focus is twofold. First, I explore how the women negotiate 'freedom' and 'equality' in their daily lives and over the course of their lifetimes (cf. Personal Narrative Group, 1989). In doing so, I stress ordinary women as active agents of their own history rather than merely passive victims of oppressive structures (Bourgois, 2003:17; see also Collins, 2000). By tracing how women's agency has played out during the course of nearly four decades, the thesis also investigates how women's lived experiences intersect with South Africa's larger macro trajectories of social, economic and political transformation (cf. Björkdahl and Semovic, 2015: 174-5). Secondly, the thesis brings the 'ordinary' into the study of transitional justice. Viewing 'the margins' and 'the ordinary' as powerful sites for the production of counter-hegemonic discourses (Ndebele, 1994:52-53; hooks, 1990:145) I reflect on what the women's life stories can teach us about South Africa's transformation process and post-apartheid freedom twenty-two years on.

The remainder of the chapter will be organized as follows. I will begin by briefly discuss and unpack some of the key terms used in this thesis, including 'women', 'women's experience', 'race', 'poverty', 'precarity', 'marginality' and 'ordinary'. I will thereafter situate my study methodologically as a form of 'history from below' drawing inspiration from feminist and

subaltern studies and the so-called ‘local turn’⁷ within peace-building and transitional justice.⁸ I will proceed to discuss the rationale of this thesis. Following this, I will present my research question and research design, followed by an explanation of how the different elements of my research relate to each other. The chapter will conclude by presenting the outline of the thesis.

KEY CONCEPTS

Poststructural and postcolonial feminists have argued convincingly that the categories of ‘women’ and ‘women experiences’ are essentialising and often Eurocentric, and should be deconstructed rather than reproduced (Scott, 1991; Mohanty, 1991). Several scholars have also warned about the dangers and pitfalls of scholarship that reproduce apartheid’s racial categories, thus allowing apartheid’s racial reasoning to continue shaping public and scholarly discourse (Jansen, 2011; Mare, 2001; Posel, 2001). While recognizing the importance of these objections, I will, for the purpose of this dissertation, not interrogate these concepts. With regards to the concepts of ‘women’ and ‘women’s experience’, I believe these concepts, despite their limitations, are still useful analytical concepts and political tools (cf. Sangster, 1994; DeVault and Gross, 2012). Further, as will become evident when I discuss the rationale of this thesis, I am not using these categories to impose a false and homogenizing coherence (Lee 2009:9) but rather to highlight ambiguity and complexity with respect to South Africa’s transformation process and its impact on two South African women.

With regards to racial categories, I recognize the problems of reinforcing and naturalising of apartheid’s racial terminology. I also accept Mare’s (2001:89) objection that adopting a racial framework may close off the option of different ways of looking at the world. Nevertheless, I have chosen to use racial categories to stay true to my interlocutors’ frame of reference. This

⁷ The ‘local turn’ refers to a growing focus on local needs and priorities both in conceptualising and when building and promoting ‘peace’ and ‘justice’ (see Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013:771). Scholars associated with this subfield often focus on how victims or local people experience, respond to, adapt, and sometimes transform, top-down and elite-driven peace and transitional justice processes (see e.g. Shaw and Waldorf, 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013). Consequently, the focus on including local agency and priorities is often expressed through the emphasis on ‘voices from below’ (Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015). Scholars committed to ‘localizing transitional justice’ have also explored the complex and unequal relationship between top-down and elite-driven transitional justice and peace processes, national agendas and local priorities and practices (see e.g. Shaw and Walford, 2010; Gready, 2011; Robins, 2005) For a gendered adaptation and application of the local turn see Björkdahl and Sevomic (2015).

⁸ According to the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ, 2016), transitional justice refers to “a set of judicial and non-judicial measures that have been implemented by different countries in order to redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses. These measures include criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, and various kinds of institutional reforms”. For an instructive critique of transitional justice see Gready and Robins (2014).

is also because I concur with Achille Mbembe (2014) that the effect of ‘colour-blindness’ is to render invisible the structures of white privilege. Although race is no longer an absolute barrier for social mobility as it under the heyday of apartheid (Ross, 2010:6) South Africa is by no means a “post-racial society” (Mbembe, 2014). And while apartheid’s racial categories are social constructs with no ‘real’ essence or ‘objective’ significance (Ross, 2010; McDonald, 2012) ‘race’ continues to intersect with other lived hierarchies such as gender and class producing both material and social realities (Posel, 2001). Consequently, I concur with McDonald (2012:xx) that “the legacies of apartheid and the heavy correlation between race and class in South Africa are such that racial classification remain an integral part of political analysis in the country”. Following McDonald (2012) I use the racial classification ‘African’, ‘coloured’, ‘Asian’ and ‘white’ to describe the four racial categories used by the apartheid regime to classify South Africans at birth. The term ‘black’ is used to refer to all ‘Africans’, ‘coloureds’ and ‘Asians’ to recognize their shared oppression under apartheid⁹ (ibid).

Following Norwegian researcher Johan Galtung (1969) I use the concept of ‘structural violence’ to refer to institutionalized power inequalities and social structures that harm people by systematically limiting their basic needs and opportunities in life (see also Farmer, 1996). My use of the concepts ‘precarity’ and ‘precariousness’ draws on the work of the feminist post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler (2009). I use the concept of ‘precarious’ to describe a situation characterized by heightened vulnerability, insecurity and unpredictability, that are affecting people’s emotional and/or material well-being. The related concept ‘precarity’ is used to signal that this condition is politically or structurally induced either through state action or inaction (e.g. lack of adequate protection).

The terms ‘poor’ and ‘poverty’ are used in the thesis to describe individuals, households or communities that do not have access to enough resources (including shelters, health care, education facilities and income) to live socially acceptable lives (Kehler, 2011). As Everatt (2003) points out, it is important to recognize that different people in different places experience poverty differently. As this thesis will demonstrate, poverty in South Africa has particular, and historically contingent, racial, gendered and spatial dimensions.

⁹ By ‘shared oppression’ I do not mean that their experience of apartheid was similar. For a discussion of how racial classification influenced people’s experiences and life opportunities during apartheid see for example Scanlon (2007) or Blom-Hansen (2012)

Another set of terms that needs to be unpacked is ‘the margin’ and ‘marginalized’ and the related concept of the ‘subaltern’. Ashcroft et al (2000) argue that descriptions of experiences or places as ‘marginal’ stems from binaries embedded in dominant discourses, including patriarchy, colonialism and ethnocentrism, which define the world into fixed and simplistic binaries such as centre/periphery and power/oppression (see also Perlman, 1976). Drawing on Derrida’s seminal criticism of binary oppositions, Ashcroft et al (2000) caution that using these terms involves the risk of endorsing and reinforcing the structures that establish the marginality of certain people or places. While recognizing this risk I believe the concept of ‘margin’ and ‘marginalized’ are useful to indicate various form of social exclusion and oppression (ibid; see also Ross, 2010). Three qualifications must here be made. Firstly being marginalized – socially, economically or geographically - is not necessarily about being disconnected (Powel, 2014). As demonstrated by Ross’s (2010) ethnographic study of a community on the Cape Flats, residents of townships or informal settlements are not entirely disconnected from capitalism, the formal economy, and the city, but rather asymmetrically bound to these structures and places (see also Perlman, 2005). The two women’s stories presented in this thesis illustrate similar dialectical processes of (asymmetric) inclusion and exclusion.

Secondly, while ‘margin’ and ‘marginalized’ are used to describe involuntary positions or conditions, the structures and relations of power that establish marginality are fluid and subject to resistance, negotiation and creative re-appropriation (ibid; Perlman, 2005). As black feminist scholars have demonstrated, socially excluded women have also been able to *claim marginality* and use it to further their own interests and knowledges (for a discussion of how marginality can be a source of both frustration and creativity, as well as a site of resistance, see for example Collins 2000 and hooks, 1990). Thirdly, and related to this, lived marginality cannot be understood solely as an experience of exclusion, scarcity and exploitation. Nor should everything the women do be read as an attempt to negotiate or mitigate their on-going marginalisation. Indeed, the two women this thesis centres on do not simply get by and make do, but live complex and multi-layered lives of beauty and pain; betrayal and belonging; hope and frustration; happiness and despair. Since this thesis attempts to challenge the notion of 1994 as a watershed moment in the lives of women of colour, it focuses predominantly on the disempowering effects of continuous social, economic and geographic marginalization. As a consequence, considerable less attention is devoted to women’s culturally constituted goals and project (cf. Ortner, 2006). This is arguably a weakness. However, the thesis follows black

feminist theory and subaltern scholarship in recognizing marginalized women as agents of knowledge (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1990). In fact, the thesis should be read as an explicit attempt to, not only learn *about* the lives of two black poor women (and how they have experienced South Africa's transformation process), but also learn *from* them.¹⁰ Following Gready (2011) the term 'subaltern' is used precisely to recognize the women's agency as makers and recorders of history.¹¹

Lastly, a few words must be said about the key terms 'ordinary'. One of the questions I asked myself (and others) was whether it was appropriate and ethical to define the women and their lives as 'ordinary'. While scholars committed to social justice and pluralisation frequently use the term for analytical, theoretical and political purposes (see e.g. Gready, 2011; Makhulu, 2015) it is neither politically nor culturally neutral. As Samuelsen (2007) suggests, Ndebele's linking of 'the ordinary' to women, domestic spaces, and the realm of feelings, may for example confine women to traditional roles and spaces. The term 'ordinary' is also elusive. As Griffin (1992:120) remarks: "Ordinary....What an astonishing array of images hide behind this word. The ordinary life is of course never ordinary". Despite these limitations, I decided to use the concept of 'ordinary' as an analytical and political tool. The reason for this is twofold. First, following Ndebele (1994), Makhulu (2015), Gready (2011) and others, I use the term to juxtapose my interlocutors' lived experiences of post-apartheid freedom and democracy with lives and events that are 'extraordinary' and 'spectacular', and which usually captures public and scholarly attention. Accordingly, the term 'ordinary' should not be conflated with 'black', as many black women have experienced apartheid's spectacular dimensions and lived extraordinary lives.¹² Secondly, my description of the women and their lives as 'ordinary' is meant to convey that their experiences, while unique in some respect, are shared by large number of South African women, and particularly black women. Importantly, my use of the term 'ordinary' should not be mistaken to imply that women's efforts to fend for themselves and their family is ordinary in the sense of merely 'standard' or 'mediocre' and thus unimpressive. As subsequent chapters will show, the women's resilience and capacity to care for self and others in the face of adversity is remarkable and admirable and deserves recognition as such.

¹⁰ These lessons will be spelled out in the concluding chapter.

¹¹ For a critique of the reliance of the concept of the subaltern see Spivak (1988). For qualifications and clarifications of the meaning of the term and a response to Spivak see Guha (1997)

¹² I will elaborate on this in chapter two

POSITIONING MY STUDY

My choice of attending to the personal narratives of women whose lives are neither extraordinary nor spectacular begs the questions: Why study the lives of ordinary women? And what is the value of small-scale research project with limited generalizability? What can we learn about South Africa's transformation process by attending to the lived experiences of two ordinary women on the margin of the post-apartheid society, far from the corridors of power and other social locations of privilege?

The answers to these questions are complex and multifarious, but can, for the sake of clarity, be divided into two interrelated points. To better demonstrate the rationale of this thesis, I must however first situate my study methodologically. As indicted, this thesis takes as its subject two ordinary black South African women who have lived their entire lives on the periphery of South Africa's society. As such, this thesis constitutes what since the 1970s have been popularly referred to as 'history from below' (Thompson, 1976; Lynd, 1993). According to the British social historian David Hitchcock (2013), the purpose of history from below is to document the stories of individuals or groups who are under-represented or overlooked in history.

“I believe that ‘history from below’ is history which preserves, and which foregrounds, the marginalised stories and experiences of people who, all else being equal, did not get chance to author their own story. History from below tries to redress that most final, and brutal, of life's inequalities: whether or not you are forgotten”
(Hitchcock, 2013:1)

Following this logic, history from below is mainly concerned with foregrounding¹³ the voices and experiences of people who have been left out of history, thereby “rescuing [their] stories from the inequalities of collective memory and national history” (Hitchcock, 2013:1; see also Thomson, 2009). However, following postcolonial and feminist scholars, oral history both *can* and *should* do more than providing a more inclusive account of historical events. From

¹³ The terminology is here important. Following Field (2012) I recognize the need to move beyond the much-reiterated notion of “giving voice to the voiceless”. As Field (2012) points out, marginalized people do speak out in their everyday life, and it is therefore patronizing for researchers to assume that marginal people are dependent on a researcher to find voice or words (see also Ortner, 2006)

the perspective of prominent postcolonial historians such as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002, 2009) the narratives of subaltern people are not only means to fill ‘historical gaps’ or add to the existing stock of knowledge. Attending to the lived experience of ordinary or marginalized people is also a fruitful method to construct alternative histories and knowledge(s) that are oppositional and potentially subversive (Chakrabarty, 2002¹⁴; see also Ndebele, 1994, for a similar argument from feminist perspective, see hooks, 1993; DeVault, 1999; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; McEwan, 2003). In a similar vein, advocates of the local turn within transitional justice research¹⁵ stress how local experiences and perspectives can help destabilizing hegemonic - and often top-down and elitist - narratives, categories and assumptions (Shaw and Waldorf, 2010; Robins, 2012). In my opinion, these aims are not mutually exclusive. Drawing on both perspectives, I stress the potential of my interlocutors’ narratives to both deepen and challenge our understanding of South Africa’s transformation process and post-apartheid freedom.

Notably, oral narratives are used and analysed for a variety of critical purposes, depending partly on the researcher epistemological stance, but also his or hers political and/or theoretical ambitions.¹⁶ This thesis is primarily concerned with reconstructing non-state, non-male and non-elite subjects as historical and contemporary agents and knowers (cf. Sabaratnam, 2001; Minkley and Rasool, 1998). The purpose of this reconstruction is to affirm the historical agency of those who are normally portrayed as passive or insignificant and pluralise the points of departure for our understanding of the world (ibid; see also Guha, 1984; McEwan, 2003). Linked to the epistemological insistence on ordinary people as ‘knowers’, is also a shift in ‘who is doing the knowing’ from mainstream, top-down and elite-driven theorizing and knowledge-construction towards what transitional justice scholar and practitioner Simon Robins (2012:4) describes as “views from below”. In the context of post-transitional societies, this shift is driven by the moral and strategic imperative to provide a measure on transitional justice based not on assumptions of those who developed it, or have benefitted from it, “but from the voices and experiences of those who are most in need of it” (ibid: 23).

¹⁴ Notably, Chakrabarty (2002, 2009) warns that history from below (or what he refers to as ‘minority studies’) tend to lose their oppositional mode and be absorbed into mainstream history.

¹⁵ see supra note 7

¹⁶ For an overview of critical practices of oral history see for example White, Mishler and Cohen (2001)

Then what about the generalisation question? As this thesis only attends to the stories of two women, it can of course not make any claims to *statistical representativeness*. However, as demonstrated by a wide range of qualitative studies, a small sample does not prevent researchers from addressing larger questions (see e.g. Van Onselen, 1996; Lee, 2009) As the well-known anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously remarked: “small facts speak to large issues” (1973:23). In response to the generalisation problem, he argued that it “is to be resolved, or, anyway, decently kept at bay, by realizing that social actions are comments on more than themselves; that where an interpretation comes from does not determine where it can be impelled to go” (ibid; see also Flyvbjerg’s, 2006). Nevertheless, it must be recognized that insights produced by qualitative studies are ‘transferable’ in a different way than data produced by quantitative methods. Following Yin’s (2003) distinction between ‘statistical’ and ‘analytical generalisation’ qualitative small-case studies cannot be generalised to a defined population that are sampled, but provide theoretical and/or empirical insight that help us better understand social processes and phenomena or help us problematize dominant understandings and representations of these (Maxwell, 2013).

Particularly relevant for this dissertation is the role subaltern narratives can play in challenging mainstream narratives and historical and cultural categories and generalizations (Kratz, 2001: 131-2). As Chakrabarty (1998, 2000) observes, “subaltern pasts are like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric” (1998: 22)... they “bring into view the disjointed nature of our pasts” (1998:24) and enable us to shed new light on the relationship between the past and the present (2000:154; Abeysakera, 2008:154). In a similar vein, feminists have used women’s lived experiences to demonstrate how often celebrated processes and events such as political transitions to peace and democracy have built-in gendered gaps, or may produce contested, fragile, and uneven effects (see Bjørkdal and Selimovic, 2015; Meintjes, Turshen and Pillay, 2002).

Life stories can also help “inject humanity” into processes of social change (Slater, 2000). As Scanlon (2007:227) argues, drawing on Geiger (1997), the rationale of looking at individual lives in detail is that one “by reconstructing the individual experience of a few can help to strip away the anonymity of the many”. By this token, history from below can provide a useful corrective to mainstream narratives and macro-studies, introducing both new perspectives and complexity as well as nuance and texture (Kratz, 2001; Kihato, 2009; Slater, 2000).

RATIONALE OF THESIS

After situating my study as a form of ‘history from below’ drawing on feminist and postcolonial scholarship, as well as the ‘local turn’ within peace-building and transitional justice research, I will now discuss the rationale of this dissertation. As indicated, the rationale of this thesis is twofold. First, by documenting the life stories of two ordinary South African women, this thesis contributes to the important and on-going project of constructing a more inclusive history of South Africa’s transition to liberal freedom and democracy (cf. McEwan, 2003). I stress ‘on-going’ because, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2015) observe, recent years have witnessed “ordinary South Africans vividly reclaiming access to the past, pressing it into the service of a host of identities and media, new and old, epic and banal” (see also Gqola, 2009). Yet foregrounding the voices and experiences of ordinary South African women remains a difficult and unfinished project. First, the voices and experiences of ordinary South African women have been, and continue to be, silenced or deemed unimportant in public as well as scholarly discourses (Benya, 2013; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2014). Moreover, ‘the spectacular’ has retained a powerful grip on the post-apartheid imagination¹⁷ (Gqola 2009; Makhulu, 2015; Gready, 2011). While the particular manifestation of the spectacular vary across time and other factors (Gqola, 2009) specifically relevant for this paper is the wide range of auto/biographies and life stories that have narrated the stories of women who have lived extraordinary and spectacular lives. As I will discuss in further detail in the next chapter, these works have brought into being particular truths and subjectivities that do not necessarily correspond with the lived experiences of ordinary South African on the margins of society. Inspired by Ndebele’s (1994:52-3) call upon South African writers to redirect their attention from spectacular acts of violence and resistance to the lives of ordinary South Africans¹⁸ (see also Zinn, 2000:1; Gready, 2011:16, 196), this thesis is thus an explicit attempt to foreground ordinary women’s experiences of post-apartheid freedom and democracy, and in so doing, “reveal new possibilities of understanding and action” (Ndebele, 1994:54). By attending to the personal narratives of two ordinary women who have lived their entire life on the margins of society, the thesis also seeks to challenge the scope of

¹⁷ .As Gqola (2009:63) remarks, South Africa’s fascination with the spectacular should not be read merely as a product of apartheid, but “extends back to the centuries under colonialism and slavery in the formation of what would become South Africa, as well as forward into the post-apartheid moment”.

¹⁸ According to Zinato (2013) the South African-born anti-apartheid activist and writer Bessie Head had in fact called for shis shift already a decade earlier

what is considered a life worthy of scholarly attention and deliberation (Lütge-Coullie, 2006)

The second, and related, rationale of this thesis is to engage with some of the complexity and ambiguity that characterises South Africa's transformation process, particularly with regards to the post-apartheid state's historical remedies and attempts to make a clean break with the past. Why is this important? As Jones and Stokke (2005) observes, the post-apartheid context is replete with contradiction and ambiguity. On the one hand, the South African government and society has undergone several seismic shifts in the democratic era. Most noteworthy is perhaps South Africa's democratic constitution, designed to promote a non-racial and non-sexist society, and widely recognized as one of the most progressive constitutions in the world (Scanlon, 2015). Driven by its constitutional mandate to correct historical injustices and ensure the "progressive realization" of socio-economic rights for all its citizens, the post-apartheid government has implemented a wide range of policies and reforms (Robins, 2015). While much has been written about South Africa's black economic empowerment program (see e.g. Habib, 2013; Southall, 2007), more relevant for the purpose of this thesis is the government's marked increase in social spending¹⁹ (Langford, 2014; Habib, 2013). Since coming to power in 1994, the post-apartheid government has invested heavily in health, education, welfare payments, housing and community development. As Habib (2013:100-101) points out, the government has under the Zuma administration also made a "shift to the left" and increasingly pursued social and economic policies defined by a strong neo-Keynesian, social-democratic flavour (see also Van der Waal, 2008). Making the same observation, Ferguson (2015:1) recently defined South Africa as one of the key examples of the so-called "new welfare states in the global South" characterized by the "creation and expansion of extensive social welfare programmes targeting the poor". Empowerment of women has also been a cornerstone of South Africa's official policy in the democratic era²⁰ In addition to the institutionalization of gender equality and integration of women into branches of government (Britton, 2005), the years following the transition has been defined by increased state intervention into the problem of violence against women (for an overview see Albertyn, 2007; Goldscheid, 2013).

¹⁹ In 1998, the government spent 47% on its budget on health, education, welfare payments, housing and community development. Ten years later, in 2008, the figure had risen to 60% (for an overview see Langford, 2014; see also Ferguson, 2007; 2015).

²⁰ See for example The South African National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000)

However, the post-apartheid government has struggled to fulfil its constitutional and ideological commitments (Langford, 2014). More than twenty years into democracy, South Africa is still characterized by widespread poverty, inequalities and violence (ibid; Habib, 2013; Bond, 2013). While post-transition South Africa has seen the rise of black professionals and the growth of a black middle class (Habib, 2013) “the scales of privilege are tilted towards the very few” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2014:39) and the majority of black South Africans continue to live on the margins of society (Robins, 2015). As feminist scholars have pointed out, South Africa’s beleaguered transformation is perhaps particularly apparent in terms of the persistent high rates of violence against women, often cited as the highest in the world and disproportionately concentrated in less economically developed areas such as apartheid-created townships (Scanlon, 2015).

Crucially, the aforementioned limits and problems with South Africa’s transformation process are well documented. However, with the exception of auto/biographies and several important ethnographic studies²¹ mainstream scholarships have generally viewed South Africa’s transformation process from a macro-perspective.²² A wide range of studies have for example attempted to explain the overall dynamics and outcomes of the transition (Seeking and Nattrass, 2006; MacDonald, 2006; Marais, 2011); the gendered gaps and costs built into the transition (Borer, 2009; Brandon, 2007; Scanlon, 2015) and the social and economic costs of the post-apartheid government’s turn to neoliberalism (Habib, Valodia and Ballard, 2006; Jones and Stokke, 2005; Habib, 2013). Relying mostly on quantitative data, these work have offered broad and generalising conclusions of the state of the country and what remains to be done. But while providing useful viewpoints, such macro-studies erase individual experiences and smooth over contradictions and ambiguities inherent in processes of social change (Kihato, 2009; Berdahl, 2000; Abu-Lughod, 1993). By zooming in on the lived experience of two ordinary women, this thesis adds nuance and texture to these macro-perspectives and “injects humanity” (Slater, 2000) into the analysis of South Africa’s social and economic transformation process. Rather than homogenizing people’s experience of post-apartheid freedom, the thesis also intends to shed light on some of the ambiguous, uneven and contested

²¹ see for example Desai, 2012; Blom Hansen, 2012; Ross, 2010; Makhulu, 2015; Newman and De Lannoy, 2014; Benson, 2015

²² This is arguably true for literature on transitional justice and post-conflict transformation in general. Despite growing attention in local processes and priorities (see supra note 8), mainstream scholarship remains largely preoccupied with general trends and patterns.

effects of the post-apartheid's government's historical remedies and policies towards the poor.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Based on the aforementioned discussion, this dissertation explores the following research question: *How have ordinary women experienced South Africa's transition to post-apartheid freedom and democracy?*

To aid my data-collection process, I initially divided my research question into the following three sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: *How have the women of my study experienced and negotiated freedom and equality*

(a) when growing up during apartheid

(b) while coming to age during the country's transition process

(c) as adult women, mothers and wives/girlfriends in the democratic era

Sub-question 2:

Have (and if so how, and to what extent) has the women of my study been able to capitalize on

(a) their legal and political rights and freedoms

(b) the government's historical remedies

(c) the post-apartheid state's welfare programs

Sub-question 3:

How do the women reflect over

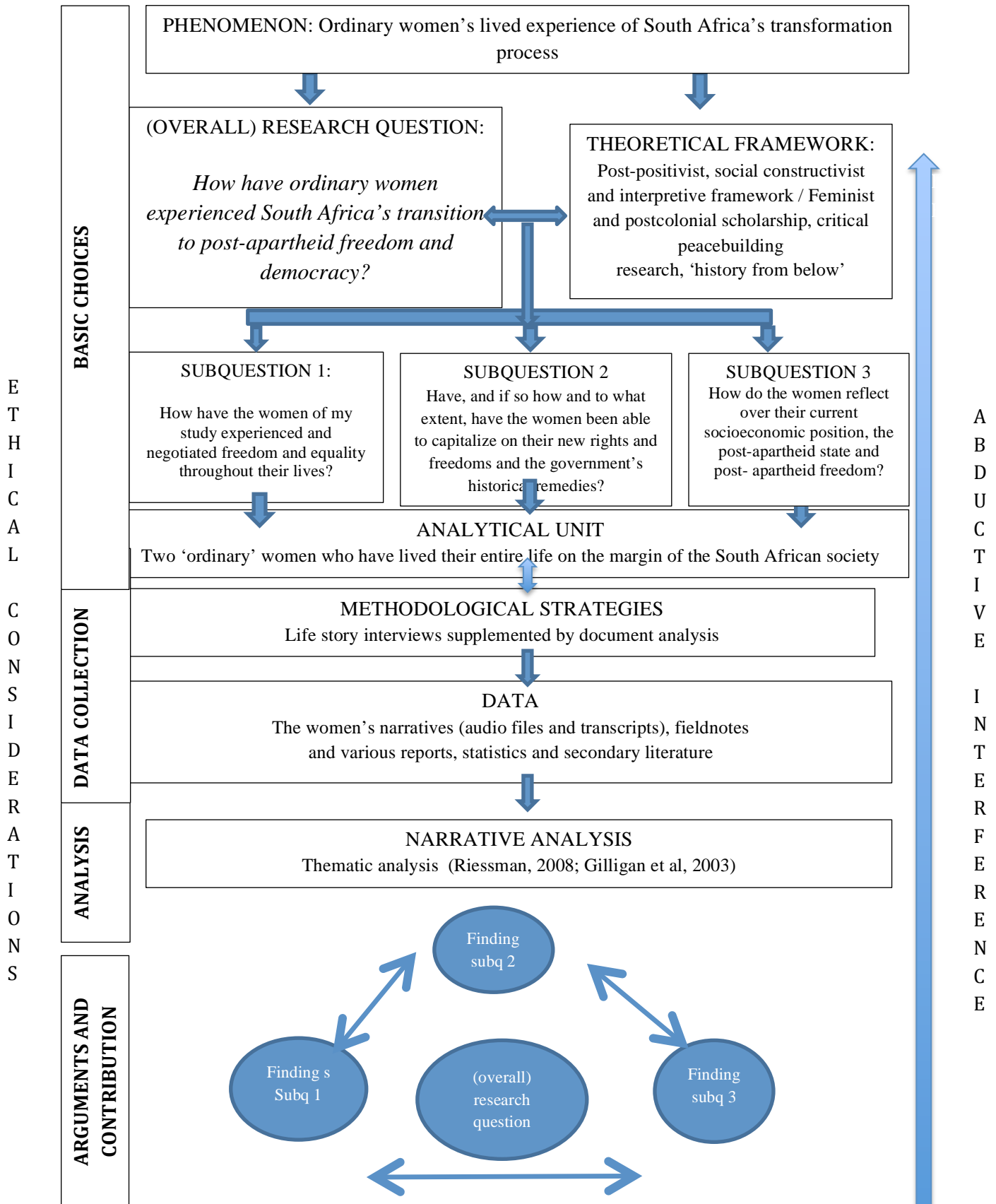
(a) their current socioeconomic position

(b) post-apartheid freedom and democracy

(c) the post-apartheid government

- vis-à-vis the past and vis-à-vis earlier and current hopes and expectations

RESEARCH DESIGN



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH DESIGN

The model above illustrates how the different elements of my research process relate to each other. A short description of this will now follow. This section also details my sampling and interview procedure.

Abductive interference: Most qualitative researchers define their approach as *inductive*, meaning that they seek to let their empirical material direct the focus of their work and the development of theory (rather than the other way around). The benefit of an inductive approach is that it is flexible and minimizes the risk of ‘forcing’ data into predefined conceptual categories (Hesse-Biber and Leave, 2006). Yet even researchers that use inductive methods inevitably enter the field with a set of concepts, theories and assumptions that guide what they observe and find interesting, and how they choose to interpret this. Cognizant of this, I believe it is more fruitful to think of my research process as a constant and creative interplay between theory and empirical data. Kelle (1997:4) describes this process as “abductive interference”.

[...] Abductive interference combines in a creative way new and interesting empirical facts with previous theoretical knowledge. Thereby, it often requires the revision of pre-conceptions and theoretical prejudices – assumptions and beliefs have to be abandoned or at least modified. Thereby, the theoretical knowledge of the qualitative researcher does not represent a fully coherent network of explicit propositions from which precisely formulated empirically testable statements can be deduced. Rather it forms a loose connected ‘heuristic framework’ of concepts, which helps the researcher focus his or her attention on certain phenomena in the empirical field. (Kelle 1997:4)

In line with Kelle’s description, my research unfolded as a continuous dialog between my conceptual and theoretical framework and the data material I collected in the field (see also Hesse-Biber and Leave, 2006). The vertical arrow pointing in both directions to right side of the model illustrates this process.

Ethical considerations: Following Posel and Ross (2015) and De Vries and Henley (2015), I thought about my ethical responsibilities, not in terms of a general checklist to be completed

and then put away on the shelf²³, but as an on-going, dynamic and interactive process.²⁴ As illustrated by the vertical error on the left side of my model, ethical considerations thus influenced every stage of my research process, from the identification of topic and interlocutors to the representation of my interlocutors in the writing of this dissertation. Because of the many ethical responsibilities attached to narrative research in general, and in the context of poverty and inequality in particular, ethical considerations will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

Basic choices: This section of the model illustrates the relationship between the social phenomenon I sought to investigate, my overall research question, sub-questions, and the theoretical framework that informed these choices.

Sampling procedure:

With assistance from the social justice organization Ndifuna Ukwazi (isiXhosa for ‘Dare to Know’) where I had an internship at the time when the research was conducted, I first selected five women who expressed interest and willingness to share their personal life stories. As with most forms of qualitative research, my intention was not to obtain a representative sample, but rather to gain rich and in-depth information of women’s lived experiences²⁵ (Yin, 2011; Geiger, 1990). Yet, if small facts are to speak to larger issues (Geertz: 1973:23) it is important to select participants that are relevant and significant for the research in question. The five women were therefore identified using *purposive sampling*; a non-probability sampling method that entails selecting participants anticipated to yield rich sources of relevant data²⁶ (Yin, 2011:311; Patton, 2015).

Three criteria guided my selection process. First, to enable a fruitful comparison, I selected women of similar age and cultural and geographical background and who shared some

²³ For a discussion of the problems with a ‘tick-box’ mentality see Posel and Ross (2015)

²⁴ Many researchers have pointed to the gap between ‘official ethics’ in the form of ethical guidelines and codes of conducts and ‘ethics on the ground’ (see e.g. Posel and Ross, 2015, Heimer, 2013; De Vries and Henley, 2015). As Posel and Ross (2015:3) assert, the latter is often “unruly and abidingly ambiguous, their complexities resistant to simple and neat formal assurances”. What follows from this is that ethical decisions cannot simply be decided a priori, but must be “made and remade in the ever-evolving context within which research happens” (De Vries and Henley, 2015:87).

²⁵ For a critique of feminist scholars’ concept of ‘representativeness’ see Geiger (1990).

²⁶ Purposive sampling should not be conflated with convenience sampling, which Patton (2012:228) describes as the practice of “doing what’s fast and convenient” but which, according to Patton (2012, 2015) yields the least desirable results. In contrast, purposeful sampling requires deliberate selection (Yin, 2011)

defining life experiences. The women of this study have thus in common that they were born and brought up in the 1970s in the Eastern Cape, but migrated to Cape Town in the 1990s-early 2000 and settled down in townships or informal settlements at the urban fringes of the city, where they still live today. Secondly, as one of the objectives of my thesis was to engage with the complexity and ambiguities of South Africa's transformation process, I was interested in speaking to women whose experiences of post-apartheid freedom could illuminate different aspects of my research problem. While a certain degree of homogeneity was important, I was thus not interested in approaching this ideal. Finally, it was for both ethical and practical reasons necessary to find women who were interested in sharing their stories and had time available to meet with me. Finding women who satisfied these criteria would have been challenging, and perhaps ethically problematic, if it had not been for helpful assistance from workers and activists at Ndifuna Ukwazi. I also made a second selection process after all data were collected, transcribed and analysed, where I selected the two stories I believed together would best illuminate my research problem. The reason why I decided to not present all five stories in this thesis was partly because of the limited scope of this dissertation and my reluctance to shorten down my interlocutors' narratives even further. The three other stories also speak particularly well to a discussion focused on changing gender norms and relations, which I had initially hoped to discuss in this thesis, but realised during the writing process will have to be the focus of a future paper.

Data collection: The data in this thesis was collected through life story research supplemented with document analysis. My choice of life story research as primary method and the methodological and ethical challenges associated with listening and writing across difference will be discussed and problematized in greater detail in chapter 2. I will here describe the procedure.

Procedure: The data for this thesis was collected between March and November 2015. Between March and May 2015 I conducted 2-3 semi-structured, open-ended interviews with each woman in-person. The point of departure for the interviews was women's account of their lives: past, present, and future. Questions were also asked to map out the women's relationships to and perceptions of the state, their families and the different communities in which they have lived. The interviews were conducted in English without a translator present. All interviews were audio-recorded with the women's permission and subsequently

transcribed. The place, length and style of the interviews varied considerably, as I adopted these considerations based on the narrators' availability and preferences. Some of the interviews were conducted at NU's office in the city centre. Other interviews were conducted at my apartment in the city centre, in a community building in Khayelitsha, in public parks, or at my interlocutors' personal homes. The 2-3 'semi-formal' interviews were supplemented with shorter informal conversations and 'follow-up' meetings during the analytical stage of the research process. In terms of secondary sources, Ndifuna Ukwazi gave me access to a plethora of studies of Cape Town's townships and informal settlements.

Analysis: The data were analysed within a thematic narrative framework, drawing specifically on Riessman's (2008) thematic approach. In analysing the women's narratives, I also drew inspiration from Gilligan et al.'s (2003) 'The Listening Guide'; a voice-centered interpretive approach that requires the researcher to listen to narratives in successive layers. While the model suggests that my analytical phase was first initiated in the aftermath of the fieldwork, my analytical process was on-going, and connected with conceptual work prior to, during, and after my fieldwork (Hammersley et al, 2007:158; see also Kelle, 1997).

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is broken down into six chapters: an introduction, four main chapters, and a conclusion. In this introduction, I have introduced my research problem, situated my study methodologically, discussed the main objectives of the thesis and presented my research design. The four main chapters are divided into two parts. The first part includes a critical overview of relevant literature (Chapter 2), and a discussion of methodological and ethical challenges associated with life story research (Chapter 3). The second part presents the two women's narratives in two separate stand-alone chapters (Chapter 4 & 5) The thesis concludes by reflecting on what the women's life stories can teach us about South Africa's transformation process and post-apartheid freedom.

PART I:

Literature review, methodology, & ethics

This part consists of two chapters. In the first chapter (Chapter 2) I provide a gendered reading of South Africa's transition narrative, position my study within the broader literature, and demonstrate the importance of foregrounding the lived experience of ordinary South African women. In the next chapter (Chapter 3) I discuss my choice of life story research as primary method and some of the methodological and ethical challenges that accompanied that choice.

Chapter 2

From ‘passive and powerless’ to ‘strong and enduring superwomen’? South Africa’s liberation narrative and its gendered discontents

“Wathint’ abafazi, Strijdom! wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo!”

[When] you strike a woman, you strike a rock!²⁷

This chapter provides a gendered reading of South Africa’s liberation narrative. I will start by discussing the elitist and male-centric representation of the country’s transition to democracy. I will proceed to argue that books and auto/biographies that have tried to address the silencing and misrecognition of women, while significant, have brought into being specific truths and subjectivities, while silencing others. The chapter has two functions. The first is to situate my study within the broader literature. The second is to demonstrate - rather than simply argue - the importance of foregrounding the lived experiences of ordinary South African women on the margins of society.

South Africa’s liberation narrative

Countries in the global South are criticized for having adopted the biases and omissions of colonialist historiography and therefore constructed national narratives that are elitist, exclusive and male-centric (Makombe, 2011:1; see also Guha, 2000; Enloe, 1989; McClintock, 1996). Partly as a consequence of these biases, women’s voices and experiences have generally been ignored, misrepresented or deemed without importance (Aolain, 2012; Björkdal and Semovic, 2015). In transitional justice settings women’s narratives are also frequently appropriated for national-building purposes (ibid; Enloe, 1989; McClintock, 1996). As Björkdahl and Selimovic argue (2015:5) “representations of female agency in post-conflict processes tend to obscure the subject and transform her into an object that is ‘allowed’ to perform a scripted agency of being for example a ‘victim’ (of sexual violence) or a ‘vessel’ containing nationalistic pride or hurt”.

²⁷ Following South African women’s demonstration against pass laws in 1956 this phrase has come to symbolise the courage and strength of South African women. (SAHO, 2011c)

South Africa's liberation narrative is not immune to these flaws. While confronting earlier history's preoccupation with the lives and achievements of *white* inhabitants (Worden, 2012; Hamilton, Mbenga and Ross, 2010), mainstream narratives of the transition from apartheid to democracy have generally celebrated the contributions of 'great men', such as Nelson Mandela, Chief Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo, Desmond Tutu and Steve Biko, while silencing the "subaltern masses" including most women and children (Makombe 2011:1). Despite notable efforts by feminist social historians to redress this balance²⁸, women's voices and experiences have typically been submerged into male-centred studies or relegated to the periphery of official history (Makombe, 2011; Zeleka, 1997; Scanlon 2007). As McEwan (2003) notes, South Africa's national liberation narrative has denied black women, in particular, both agency and presence.

As forcefully demonstrated by a wide range of feminist scholars, the much-heralded South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) also suffered from several gendered silences and biases²⁹ (McEwan, 2003; Meintjes, 2009; Ross, 2003; Manjoo, 2004; Scanlon, 2015). Particularly relevant for this thesis is the Commission's narrow mandate and focus on political and bodily violations at the expense of socioeconomic right violations (Borer, 2009). As Ross (2003:153) suggests, the Commission's focus on apartheid's spectacular dimensions undervalued and disguised the everyday difficulties and limitations ordinary South Africans, and especially black women, faced in their daily struggle to survive (see also McEwan, 2003; Russell, 2008). By reducing the 'typical experience' of South African women under apartheid to that of being a 'secondary victim' or (occasional) 'victim of sexual abuse', the Commission also marginalised women's role in the liberation struggle and reinforced the harmful image of women as passive, powerless and dependent (Russell, 2008; Ross, 2003; Borer, 2009; Manjoo, 2004).

²⁸ See for example Cole, 1984; 2012; Walker, 1991; Marks, 1987; Bozzoli, 1983, 1991; Gordon, 1985; Kerfoot, 1985; Lawson, 1985; Russell, 2003; Lee, 2009; Scanlon, 2007; Lüttdge-Coullie, 2004; SAHO, 2011d; Gunn & Krwala, 2008; Daymond et al, 2003; Kaplan, 1997

²⁹ The South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a restorative justice body set up by the government to help South Africans come to terms with the past and help bring about national reconciliation. Due to the limited scope of this paper, I cannot possibly do justice to the complex and important debates pertaining to the commission's work and legacy. However for an instructive and critical discussion of the commission's process and report, see Wilson (2001), Gready (2011) and Moon (2008). For instructive discussions of the commission's gendered biases and silences see particularly Ross (2003), Russell (2008) and Scanlon (2015).

Confronting gendered gaps and misrecognitions

Importantly, the persistent silencing and misrecognition of women's experiences and contributions have not gone uncontested. Over the last two decades, an increasing body of work has sought to address the many gendered gaps and silences in South Africa's social and political history by documenting the life stories of prominent South African women (Scanlon, 2007). A large number of books have for example chronicled the lives of prominent female apartheid-activists, including Winnie Mandela, Lilian Ngoyi, Ruth First, Dora Tamana and Albertina Sisulu.³⁰ Reflecting the increased interest in South Africa's "unsung heroes" (Lütge-Coullie, 2006) important work have also narrated the life stories of unknown female activists, who mobilized over issues of rent, transport, housing, worker's rights and education, but whose efforts have not been acknowledged and who have, as (Lütge-Coullie, 2004:3) puts it, thus "not had the chance to be heard".³¹ In the post-apartheid era, several books have also celebrated South African women who have distinguished themselves and excelled in business, academia, government, and other public domains.³² Finally, several well-known South African women have published their own autobiographies³³, thus (re)establishing authorship over their own stories (Das and Kleinman, 2000:12) and finding a place for the "collective authorization of [their] individual experience" (Das 1997:12)

³⁰ See for example Scanlon (2007) Russell (2003), Wieder (2013), Sisulu (2002), Steward (1996), du Preez Bezdrop (2005). Note that the life stories of Albertina Sisulu and Ruth First focused on the women's lives and contributions alongside their respective husbands, Walter Sisulu and Joe Slovo.

³¹ See for example Benson, 2009; 2015; Kaplan, 1997; Cole, 2012; Gunn and Visser, 2007, Ross, 2003; Lütge-Coullie, 2004, Russell, 2003; SAHO 2011d and Gunn and Krwala, 2008. It is worth noting that the collections published by Lütge-Coullie (2004) and Russell (2003) and the compilation of biographies of women involved in the women's struggle in South Africa from 1900 to 1994 published by South African History Online (SAHO 2011d) distinguish themselves from the other works by blending the stories and biographies of well-known women such as Winnie Mandela and Albertina Sisulu with the stories and biographies of unknown South African women. While Russell's book focuses specifically on women who fought apartheid, the compilation of auto/biographies published by Lütge-Coullie and SAHO (2011d) span over several centuries, and includes biographies of women such as Emily Hobhouse and Sarah Raal. The collection of life stories compiled by Gunn and Krwala (2008) also differs from the others in focusing on how the values of the democratic struggle and trauma are transmitted from one generation of women to the next. Crucially, all of the aforementioned works differ from this thesis in terms of focusing specifically on female activists and protesters. Moreover, the majority of the works above presents women's stories or biographies without any (or with very little) analysis.

³² A good example of this trend is Karina Turok and Margie Orford's *Life and Soul: Portraits of Women Who Move South Africa* (2006) which present portraits of seventy South African women who have distinguished themselves in business, government, religious institutions, academia and community organisations. According to Orford (2016), the book maps "the arduous journey the 75 women have taken to reach what and whom they are now"

³³ See for example Ramphela, 1999, 2014; Magona, 1998, 2006; Ntantala, 1992; Kuzwayo, 1995; Mashinini, 1989; Suzman, 1993, Joseph, 1986 and Makeba, 1989, 2004

These works are important for several reasons. First, by valorising the important roles South African women have played in the anti-apartheid struggle, they have challenged South Africa's male-centric liberation narrative. On a more fundamental level, these works have also restored women as agents of history, thus disrupting national script of women as passive and powerless (Aolain, 2012; Björkdal and Semovic, 2015) and confronted the entrenched tendency to treat male experiences as normative (Scanlon, 2007). Finally, as Ramphele (2007) asserts, it is clearly important to find spaces to honour and celebrate women in all their diversity. Following Turok (2006), stories of women who have made extraordinary contributions and accomplishments do not only challenge our understanding of the past and present, but also “provide a source from which young women can draw inspiration, expanding their bounds of imagination and fostering their understanding of their own ability and potential” (pg.9).³⁴

Valiant resisters and black superwomen

Yet notwithstanding the importance of these works, it is important to acknowledge that they entail their own biases and omissions and bring into being particular truths and subjectivities. First, the subjects of the aforementioned works are women who have lived extraordinary and often spectacular lives. They are stories of women who have been initiators of social and political change; women who devoted their lives to the struggle for freedom and liberation; women who participated, and often played leading roles, in spectacular events such as the 1976 Soweto student uprising, the anti-pass campaigns, or women whom, in one way or another, have made extraordinary contributions to the South African society. Following Ndebele (1994) one can thus argue that these stories foreground the extraordinary and spectacular while silencing, or at least side-lining, the ordinary and the everyday³⁵ (cf. Makhulu, 2015; Lütge-Coullie, 2006; Gready, 2011).

³⁴ Some autobiographical writers mention this as an explicit goal. Ramphele (2014) for example, writes in the preface of one of her autobiographies that she hopes her story makes women feel good about who they are, and can help turning “what is seen as abnormal for women into everyday practice” thus “intimating another possible female destiny” (pg.10).

³⁵ Not all biographical accounts written by, or about, women and men who have played prominent roles in South Africa's past silence the ordinary and everyday. Gillian Slovo's book about her parents, Ruth First and Joe Slovo, does for example disclose the ordinary aspects of her parents lives, thus presenting an alternative to the notion of the heroic that emerges when one uses political events to chart a person's life (Lütge-Coullie, 2006:48). Several other auto/biographies describes how the structural violence of the apartheid regimes affected their lives while growing up (see for example Magona, 1990; 1992).

Secondly, with some notable exceptions³⁶, life stories and auto/biographies written in the post-apartheid era are generally been written by, or about, women who have experienced an upward trajectory following the country's transition to liberal democracy. Because of this, their accounts of post-apartheid freedom and equality do not necessarily resonate with the experiences of women on the margins of society. This is epitomized by a personal reflection made by the popular South African news editor Ferial Haffajee in her recent book *What if there were no Whites in South Africa* (2015)

“I feel freedom. Breathe it. Speak it. Enjoy it... I know it only because I know the opposite. Apartheid, in all its social, political and economic dimensions, imprisoned me” (Haffajee, 2015:2)

The problem with this statement is of course not that Haffajee's experience of post-apartheid freedom is invalid or insignificant. It must also be acknowledged that the very purpose of Haffajee's book is to engage with South Africans who have a different understanding of the post-apartheid reality. However, by preaching her “gospel of change, of black accomplishment and of the good and healthy fruits of freedom” (Haffajee, 2015:2) Haffajee implies that opportunities and gains she has secured in the democratic era are within reach for all women. By describing apartheid as imprisoning and the present as liberating, Haffajee also paints a problematic image of 1994 as a watershed moment in the lives of black South African women. When considered uncritically, the stories of women like Haffajee, who have made extraordinary accomplishments in the democratic era, are also sometimes used to “celebrate how far we have come” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2014:169). Despite their best intentions, such celebrations obscure the on-going hardships the vast majority South African women of colour face on a daily basis³⁷

Finally, these works have not challenged the tendency of mainstream scholarship to represent South African women in polarizing terms³⁸(Scanlon, 2007; Gasa, 2007). While confronting the harmful image of women as ‘passive, powerless and dependent (Ross, 2003) work that

³⁶ See specifically Gunn and Visser, 2007; Lee, 2009; Benson, 2009; 2015.

³⁷ According to the National Income Dynamics Survey, female poverty rates show stark racial differences. While 63.4% of African Women lived below the lower-bound poverty line in 2012, the figure drops to 35.1% for Coloured women, and only 1.6 % for White women (Department Women, 2015)

³⁸ Gasa (2007) argues that women in South African history have portrayed women as either heroes or victims; radical militants or conservative defenders of the patriarchy (see also Scanlon, 2007)

have documented and celebrated the strength, courage and contributions of South African women have inadvertently, and to various extent, helped to reinforce other one-dimensional representations of South Africa's women as "valiant resisters"(Gasa, 2007), "rocks" (Motsemme, 2004) and "superwomen" (Wallace, 1990) capable of either *enduring* or *transcending* violence and suffering (Magadla, 2014; Motsemme, 2004). While defying passivity, these representations do not do justice to black women's complex, and often difficult, lives (Motsemme, 2004: 923-924; see also hooks, 1993: 70). Despite their best intentions, one-dimensional representations of black women as strong, resilient and enduring may in fact misrecognize their everyday hardship and legitimize government and societal neglect (Harris, 2001; Motsemme, 2004, Collins, 2000; hooks, 1993). This is problematic given how South Africa, following the country's adoption of neoliberal reforms, has increasingly relegated the costs of social reproduction to individual households, with detrimental consequences for women (Benson, 2015; Hassim, 2005).

Chapter conclusion:

This chapter has provided a gendered reading of South Africa's male-centric and elitist liberation narrative. I have demonstrated that books and auto/biographies that have tried to address the silencing and misrecognition of women, while significant, have entailed their own biases and omissions. Put crudely, one can argue that these works have disrupted South African history's preoccupation on 'great' and 'heroic men' by insisting on the inclusion of strong and extraordinary women. For the purpose of this thesis, what is most relevant is that these works have privileged the extraordinary and spectacular and thus brought into being particular truths about South Africa's transformation process, while silencing others. As discussed in further detail above, this includes truths about apartheid; truths about South Africa's transition to liberal democracy, and truths about black women and their opportunities to capitalize on their democratic rights and freedoms. Despite their best intentions, work that has celebrated the strength and resilience of South African women has also helped established one-dimensional and potentially harmful images of black South African women as capable of either enduring or transcending violence and suffering without governmental or societal support. Critically, by writing this I do not mean to suggest that the aforementioned works do more harm than good and should be disregarded. At the risk of repeating myself, I must also stress the importance of documenting, and indeed celebrating, South African women who have made, and continue to make, extraordinary contributions to South Africa's society. Nevertheless, this chapter has demonstrated the importance of attending to ordinary women's

experiences of South Africa's transition to liberal democracy, and in so doing, bring forward new or under-represented experiences and perspectives. In the next chapter, I will discuss some of the methodological and ethical challenges attached to this task.

Chapter 3

Writing women's story: Methodological and ethical challenges with life story research

"What once seemed technically difficult...getting 'their' lives into our work, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically delicate" - Clifford Geertz

*"If a white women write about a black women,
who will correct her? — Sindiwe Magona.*

In chapter one and two I argued for the importance of attending to ordinary South African women's experiences of post-apartheid freedom and democracy. However, neither listening nor writing is as easy or straightforward as it sounds (DeVault and Gross, 2006). Conducting research in South Africa, with its enduring colonial and racial legacies and extreme inequalities in power and wealth, brings also forward specific ethical challenges and responsibilities. South Africa has also a long and difficult history of extractive research and many scholars have pointed out particular ethical pitfalls associated with foreign scholars appropriating or 'stealing' women's stories (Madlingozi, 2010; Colvin, 2000; Ross, 2005; Ross, 2003b; Gready, 2008). Both prior to and during the course of my research, I was thus confronted with several vexing ethical questions: Was I - a white Norwegian cultural and national outsider - capable of understanding, and equitably representing, the experiences of black South African women? What and whose truths does my thesis bring forward, for what purpose, and with what effects? (Ross and Grant, 2015). How could I ensure that the women's experience of sharing their stories were empowering rather than disempowering? And what right did I have to write, and indeed *benefit* from, their personal narratives? Perhaps most fundamentally; did the ends of my research really justify the means? (see Mama, 2011).

As indicated, this dissertation was from the very beginning an effort to negotiate different concerns and responsibilities. In this chapter, I reflect over my choice of life story research as primary method and some of the methodological and ethical challenges that accompanied this choice. I will start by discussing the process that led me to adopt life story research as research method. I will proceed to discuss some of the methodological and ethical challenges that accompanied this choice. I will thereafter discuss the challenges associated with listening and writing across difference. The chapter will conclude by discussing the ethics of representation and responsibility.

Choice of method:

Active listening means more than just physically hearing...rather, it is a fully engaged practice that involves not only taking in information via speech, written words, or signs, but also actively processing it, allowing that information to affect you, baffle you, haunt you, make you uncomfortable, and take you on unexpected detours - DeVault and Gross (2006: 183).

My decision to use life story research as my primary method was taken largely in response to experiences I encountered in the field. At the time when the research for this thesis was initiated (March 2015), I was interning for Ndifuna Ukwazi where I, among other things, conducted research on sanitation issues in informal settlement at the outskirts of Cape Town. I was also in the process of completing a nine months qualitative research project on domestic violence in the township Khayelitsha in collaboration with the local community-organisation and social movement the Social Justice Coalition. For my master's project, I planned to reconcile my concerns with structural violence and gender-based violence, and gain a better understanding of how these forms of violence are interlinked. My intention was to provide a deeper understanding of this relationship through the use of semi-structured topical interviews, focused on mapping my interlocutors' daily activities and hardships. However when I conducted my first pilot interviews, I found it difficult to have an ethical, and indeed meaningful, discussion about these issues without, first, attending to my interlocutors' personal history, and secondly, placing their concerns and grievances in a longer-term perspective. Furthermore, the women I interviewed made frequent comparisons to the past and appeared much more interested in telling me their life stories than to speak about their

daily whereabouts. Aware of the great importance of being sensitive to the purposes the narrators bring to the exchange (Personal Narrative Group, 1989; Hesse-Biber, 2014), I decided to modify my initial research plans and adopt life story research as my primary methodology.

This shift led me to broaden the scope of my research problem well beyond what I had initially imagined to be a relatively narrow project building on the work I was doing for NU. However, the shift had also several advantages. Most significantly, life story research allowed me to trace how women's agency has played out over the course of nearly four decades. As noted by Björkdahl and Semovic (2013:174-5) bringing in temporality in the study of processes of social change and post-conflict justice illuminates "how gains may go backwards, how progress may be reversed, and how windows of opportunity may open for women's agency at unexpected moments". Accordingly, life story research enabled me to engage with the contradictions and ambiguities that have characterized South Africa's transformation process, which subsequently became one of the main rationales of this dissertation. I also avoided considering women's experiences in isolation from the historical context, as argued in recent criticism of the 'local turn' in peace-building research (ibid; Chandler, 2013).

While the practice of writing women's life stories is associated with great ethical responsibilities (Madlingozi, 2010) I also found this method to have several ethical advantages. Perhaps most importantly, life story interviews enabled me to show interest in women's *complete* lives, and not simply certain aspects of it. Consequently, I found myself better situated to honour the ethical obligation of attending to my interlocutors' narratives in their full integrity (Personal Narrative Groups, 1989) Following Lynd (1997:37) asking to record ordinary people's life stories is also a way of saying 'Your life is important' and 'I have something to learn from your experiences'. Surely this is enough to erase the asymmetries between researcher/researched (Madlingozi, 2007; Kent, 2014). However, it did arguably have the effects of 1) establishing my narrators as the authoritative experts in the interviews and 2) establishing their lives as important and worthy scholarly attention and deliberation.

Methodological and ethical challenges

Despite these advantages, life story research presents several methodological and ethical challenges. Some of these challenges relate to the use of oral narratives as historical or contemporary sources of data. Poststructuralist feminists have for example criticized the reliance on women's experience - and their articulations of this experience- to reach certain truths (Scott, 1991; 1992). Poststructuralist scholars have also raised problems with "the social texts, its logic, and its inability to ever fully represent the world of lived experience" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2004:38). Acknowledging truth and memory as socially constructed and embedded with power, oral historians have interrogated the complex relationships between micro/macro-narratives, memory /power and remembering /forgetting, and showed that their interlocutors are speaking through a 'master-narrative' (Wale, 2016), that a specific cultural script is dominating (Green, 2004) or that their interlocutors' life stories are made up of silences, contradictions, displacements and 'misrememberings' (Passerini, 2003).

Moreover, several postcolonial scholars have questioned the possibility and appropriateness of listening and writing across racial and other differences (Spivak, 1988; Kapoor, 2004). Much of this criticism has focused on problems relating to white women and liberal feminists purporting to speak for, or write about, women of colour (Minh-Ha's, 1987; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). More generally, scholars have also raised concerns about the symbolic violence involved in scholarly representations (Colvin, 2015; Madlingozi, 2010; Ross, 2003; Ross, 2005; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004).

Finally, South Africa has a long and difficult history of extractive scholarship and many scholars has pointed to the particular ethical problems related to narrative research (see e.g. Madlingozi, 2010; Ross, 2003; Gready, 2011). The victim group Khulumani (isiZulu for 'speak out')³⁹ has for example brought attention to the tendency of writers and researchers to misappropriate people's stories and benefitting disproportionately from the research encounter while failing to give a "fair return" (see Madlingozi, 2010; Colvin, 2000). In several

³⁹ Khulumani is a victim groups established in 1995 by a group of survivors and victims who testified at the SATRC. Initially, the organizations role was limited to assisting and supporting victims and survivors seeking redress and truth about apartheid violations. However, in the wake of the SATRC, Khulumani has built a mass-based, participant-based organization spearheading healing and memory and the struggle for reparation in South Africa and globally. Crucially, the organization not only fights for justice and reparation for apartheid violations but also for contemporary human rights violations such as the Marikana massacre. For more information see <http://www.khulumani.net/khulumani/about-us.html>. For a discussion of what researchers ought to learn from Khulumani see Madlingozi (2010) and Colvin (2000)

important works, Sean Field (2006; 2012) has also called into question oral history's "redemptive promises" of healing and empowerment.⁴⁰ In her seminal work on women's relationship to testimony in the wake of the SATRC, Fiona Ross's (2003; 2003b) demonstrated that the separation of voice and story from self may be experienced as disempowering and even violent (see also Gready, 2011). On the other hand, many of these scholars also highlight the positive and potentially transformative potential of recording and foregrounding the voices and experiences of marginalised South Africans (Gready, 2011; McEwan, 2003). Ross's (2003) work does for example demonstrate how narrative research, if done in a sensitive and ethical manner, can provide social recognition and acknowledgment (see also Gready, 2011; Field, 2006). A key point here is the need to *challenge* rather than perpetuating discourses and representations that are experienced as disempowering, or that serve to legitimize or naturalise poverty and violence (Ross, 2010; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004).

Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, I cannot do justice to all of these complex and important debates. However, for the sake of transparency, I will situate my theoretical and methodological position. I will thereafter discuss some of the challenges of listening and writing across difference. The chapter will conclude by discussing how I sought to exercise responsibility to my interlocutors' stories (Madlingozi, 2010).

Storytelling and truth

Following Lindberg (2001:35) a theoretical point of departure for this study is that all women -however oppressed, poor or marginalised- have the capability of thinking, describing and analysing their personal experiences and circumstances. Crucially, this does not mean that I believe women's accounts of their lives are unaffected by master narratives and cultural scripts. Nor does it mean that their stories are fully accurate and complete descriptions of the events as they unfolded in the past. To the contrary, storytelling is inevitably shaped by the cultural, economic and political contexts in which the women are situated (Kent, 2014:296) including hegemonic memory and so-called master-narratives.⁴¹ Because experience recounted is "always emergent in the moment" (DeVault and Gross, 2012:212), storytelling is

⁴⁰ Storytelling is often presumed to be healing or empowering for the teller (see e.g. Phelps, 2004; Ramphela, 2014; Villa-Vicencio, 2000; Tutu, 2000). Criticizing this assumption, Field (2006:31) argues that "oral history can neither heal nor cure but only offer subtle support to interviewee's efforts to recompose their sense of self and regenerate agency"

⁴¹ See Wale (2016) for a discussion of how marginal subjects speak both to and against master narratives.

also shaped by the relationship between narrator and listener and past and present selves. Moreover, storytelling is necessarily partial and selective (Abu-Lughod, 1993), produced through “selective remembering and sharing of stories framed through cultural, power and other differences between interviewer/interviewee” (Field, 2015). However, following Sangster (1994) and Devault and Gross (2012), I do not believe that this imply that we cannot rely on women’s memory or must abandon the concept of women’s experience as a political tool and “resource for critical reflection” (Stone-Mediatore, 1998:121). As noted by the Personal Narrative Group (1989:261): “When people talk about their lives, they lie sometimes, forget a little, exaggerate, become confused, get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths.” These truths disclose how the women interpret the past and present which is the focus of this study (cf. Lindberg, 2001). Further, as Abu-Lughod (1993:17) asserts, “only a false belief in the possibility of a nonsituated story (or “objectivity”) could make one ask that stories reflect the way things...really are” (see also Haraway, 1988). Finally, for the purpose of this paper, it is arguably less important to attend to all factual details than to consider the women’s narratives “within the social, political and economic contexts that have shaped and continue shaping the circumstances of their lives” (Kent, 2014:296).

Listening and writing across difference

A more vexing question is whether I – a white, western, privileged and comparatively well-off young woman – am capable of understanding and equitably representing the experiences of black South African under-privileged and significantly older women? This is a contested debate. Some feminists and oral historians believe that in order to understand, researchers should be “as close as possible” to the oppressed subject or group being studied and preferably a member of that group (Pierson, 1991:91-94). Particularly relevant for me due to my positionality as white and European are Mohanty (1988) and Minh-Ha’s (1987) well-argued critique of Western feminists for purporting to *speak for* and, in so doing, silencing or misrepresenting women of colour. Building on these works, Ortega (2006) suggests that white feminists tend to practice a “loving, knowing ignorance” that produce inaccurate and potentially harmful representations of black women (see also Oyewumi, 1997). Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak takes this argument a step further. In her famous essay ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ Spivak (1988) questions the mere possibility of being heard⁴² for those who

⁴² Spivak has frequently been misinterpreted to suggest that the subaltern cannot attain a voice. According to my reading of her controversial essay ‘Can the subaltern speak’ (1988) Spivak is rather attempting to show the difficulties and problems associated with researchers attempt to access and represent subaltern voices. For an

inhabit the margins of society (and thus implicitly also the ability of ‘elitist’ researchers to listen and represent these voices). On the other hand, some scholars suggest that cross-cultural difference and dissonance can be productive⁴³, that being an outsider can for example enable researchers to probe issues normally considered off-limit, and make it easier to achieve the necessary analytical distance (Lindberg, 2011; Walker, 2005; Schneider, 2010).

Recognizing the merits of both sides of this debate, my experience was that being an outsider⁴⁴ had both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side I experienced that the social distance between myself and my interlocutors often facilitated the discussion rather than restricted it (cf. Lindberg, 2001; Walker, 2005). While my whiteness and status as a UCT student inevitably associated me with wealth and privilege, I experienced that my status as a foreigner (with a relatively strong foreign accent) un-implicated in South Africa’s difficult past helped creating a “non-threatening space” (Walker, 2006:268). Arguably, my status as an outside may also have enabled me to ask more probing questions than I would have done if I was an ‘insider’ who shared their ‘taken-for-granted’ beliefs and assumptions. Lastly, my position as a cultural and national outsider and resulting “epistemic humility” (Pierson, 1991:94) established my interlocutors as relative experts of South African society and politics, thus reducing *some* of the power differentials between researcher/research subjects.

In terms of writing across difference, I also believe it is important to abandon the search for “truer” or more authentic stories of women’s experience. As Higgins (1995) points out, this search is based on the positivist assumption that there is an underlying truth that can be told. It also assumes that researchers can faithfully and accurately describe women’s reality (Madlingozi, 2010) Following Mishler (1986) and Passerini (2007) I recognize instead the *intersubjective relationship* between researcher and researcher who jointly produce the research findings in ways which are not replicable across different versions of this relationship” (see also Abrams, 2010). As Field (2015) notes, this recognition of

alternative reading see Ascroft et al, 2007. For a detailed discussion of diverging interpretations of Spivak’s essay and the contemporary relevance of the questions it raises, see Morris (2010)

⁴³ For a detailed discussion of both problems and challenges as well as advantages and constructive tensions associated with cross-cultural interviewing see Schneider (2010)

⁴⁴ As Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012) point out, outsider/insider positionalities are often fluid, subject to negotiation and not mutually exclusive. While I believe this is an important point, I found it most ethical to acknowledge the stark differences between myself and my interlocutors and position myself as a clear and undeniable outsider interesting to learn. In doing so, I followed Oyewumi’s (1997) appeal to western feminists to recognize and respect difference in research encounters.

intersubjectivity at the heart of the interview dialogue is crucial as it implies that our acts of listening, questioning, interpreting and writing narratives are thus all both made possible and problematized by real and perceived differences between interviewee and interviewees (see also Passerini, 2007).

On the other hand, listening and writing across difference clearly present a number of challenges. Among the clear disadvantages of being a white privileged Norwegian student was the impossibility for me to relate to my interlocutors' experiences of being black and marginalized. Neither could I presume to understand the women's culture, rural ties and how it was like to grow up during apartheid. While the fact that I conducted repeated interviews allowed me to return to issues or episodes I was not sure I had understood correctly, my status as a cultural and national outsider clearly made me prone to misunderstandings and misrepresentations (Salo, 2009; Pierson, 1991). It should be noted that I tried to find ways to mitigate this risk, such as asking lots of clarifications questions, examining my predispositions and worldviews in dialogue with others, reading and utilizing African literature and scholarship, and attending isiXhosa language classes. Nevertheless I must acknowledge that the problems attached to being an outsider were impossible to overcome. For example, due to my scarce knowledge of isiXhosa the interviews had to be conducted in my interlocutors' second language. While both women spoke English very well, and had specified that they were happy to be interviewed in English, it is important to note this no doubt resulted in both some meanings being lost in translation as well as limitations for the women who were communicating complex and difficult experiences in a second language (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Mohanty, 1991; Oyewumi, 1997). Due to my position as a cultural outsider, I also found it difficult to grasp different sites of knowledges; not only those found in voice, narrative and experience, but also in the women's bodies, their silences and their specific cultural resources.

Because of this, I often questioned whether I was the right person to write the women's stories. While this question still troubles me, I found some assurance in the women's acceptance of this, and Bidy and Mohanty's (1986) assertion that one should not conflate identity and experience with political perspective (see also Lindberg, 2001). As Martin and Mohanty's (1986) deconstructive analysis suggest, the idea that white women cannot or should not write about women of colour also reproduces the white/black binary, including the power and privilege of the dominant in this pair.

When sensitive issues were raised during the interviews, I followed Ross's (2003) principle of listening to my interlocutors' stories in their full integrity, be prepared for 'bearing witness', while also respecting silences. In doing so, I followed ASA's (2005) primary obligation of treating informants not merely as means to an end but as ends in themselves. Following Field (2015:14), I also tried to "practice an empathy that 'holds in mind' the forms of difference and dissonance between interviewer and interviewee" in order to forge conversations that occasionally could have meaning for both parties.

Representation and responsibility

Crucially, the ethical responsibilities attached to life story research extend beyond the research process to the production and dissemination of the research. Recognizing this, this chapter will thus conclude by say a few words about the ethics of representation. As discussed in greater detail above, postcolonial researchers have criticized feminists – and particularly white feminists – for purporting to speak for, and in so doing, silence, women of colour (Minh-Ha's, 1987; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988; Ortega, 2006). Responding to this claim (Spivak in particular), Ortner (2006:59-61) argues that Spivak ignores narrators' capacity to resist and evade textual domination, thus attributing researchers, and the texts they produce, far greater power than they have. In this debate, I again take a middle position. On the one hand, I find Ortner's (2006) critique of Spivak convincing. In my own research, I also experienced that the open-ended and loosely structured nature of the interviews gave the women time and space to articulate what is important to them (see King and Horrocks, 2010) But although this gave my interlocutors some influence on the content and focus of this thesis, I concur with Oakley (1981) that the researchers control over perspective, the interpretation of the data and the power of inclusion and exclusion cannot be overstated. Consequently, I carry the sole responsibility for the content of this thesis, including possible inaccuracies or misrepresentations, and the loss of meaning that inevitably occurred when the women's' stories were moved through contexts and translated from speech to text (Abu-Lughod, 1993).

To exercise responsibility to my interlocutors' stories, I followed Ross (2005:106) principle of "joining the skepticism about one's ability to do justice to others with the commitment to trying to do just that". In more concrete terms, this meant that I have tried my very best to write and represent my interlocutors in ways that not injure or can be experienced disempowering (Ross, 2010; Madlingozi, 2010). Following Ebrahim (2010) I also made sure to treat informed consent not as a single, one-off event, but as an on-going and interactive

process. Prior to the submission of the thesis, both women were given copies of their chapters and asked if they wanted anything changed or removed. In order to protect their confidentiality, both women were given fictitious names. While my presentation of the women' narratives are inevitably partial and selective, I hope I have managed to do justice to their difficult but inspiring lives warm and caring personalities. Whereas it would be too optimistic to hope that my work will have any tangible impact on their living condition, I also hope that my research, with its strong emphasis on ordinary women's lives as worthy scholarly attention, can play a small role in the important task of "redistributing discursive power" in post-apartheid South Africa (see Gready, 2011).

PART II:

Women's narratives

In the two first chapters of this thesis I discussed the importance of shifting the focus from the spectacular and extraordinary to the ordinary and foreground ordinary South African women's lived experiences of the country's transition to non-racial liberal democracy. In the previous chapter, I examined some of the difficult methodological and ethical challenges associated with this task. Due to my position as a cultural and national outsider, and the large social distance between my interlocutors and myself, particular attention was directed towards the challenges of listening and writing across difference. I also discussed the relationship between storytelling and truth and positioned myself theoretically. Together, these chapters formed the necessary methodological and theoretical backdrop for the presentation of women's narratives that now will follow.

This part of the thesis consists of two chapters. To honour the ethical obligation of paying respect to women's narratives in their full integrity (Personal Narrative Group, 1989), the women's stories will be presented in two separate chapters. Each chapter presents a necessarily partial account of the women's lives. It is also a selective presentation, as the purpose of this thesis is to foreground events and issues that shed light on South Africa's transformation process.

The first chapter (chapter 4) tells Celiwe's life story. Born in rural Transkei in 1972, Celiwe migrated to Cape Town in 2001 in search of employment. She settled down in the township Khayelitsha at the outskirts of Cape Town, where she has tried to carve out a secure and dignified life for herself and her children under conditions of great precarity and lack. Celiwe's chapter sheds particular light on the limited and uneven effects of the post-apartheid government's historical remedies. Celiwe's story also provides a window into the daily challenges of life in a post-apartheid informal settlement⁴⁵, where structural and physical

⁴⁵ Following Statistics South Africa, the concept of 'informal settlement' is used to describe an "unplanned settlement on land which has not been surveyed or proclaimed as residential, consisting mainly of informal

violence intersect to render everyday life dangerous and often humiliating.

The next chapter presents Thembeke's life story. Born in 1977 in a satellite township at the outskirts of Port Elizabeth, Thembeke moved to Cape Town in 1992 with her younger sister to live with their father in the township Nyanga, another apartheid-built township on the periphery of the city. In the post-apartheid era, Thembeke has experienced both advancement and loss, and been forced to adapt to changing and difficult circumstances. Her chapter shows how post-apartheid gains are often marginal and precarious, and can easily be reversed.

Thembeke's story also illustrates the gap between legal rights and policies designed to protect and empower women and the far more difficult reality for women who must care for themselves and their children in the context of violence, inequality and material lack.

While the women's narratives have taken different turns, common themes in both narratives are on-going hardship, marginalisation, precarity and ambivalence. Despite of the post-apartheid government's intention to make a clean break with the past, their experiences of post-apartheid freedom and democracy have been fraught by the enduring legacies of apartheid's racial, gender and spatial inequalities and the contemporary context of neoliberalism, social violence and material lack. I will return to, and expand on, these findings in the conclusion when reflecting on what women's narratives can teach us about South Africa's transformation process and post-apartheid freedom. Now, the women's life stories will be presented without further analysis.

dwellings (shacks) and characterized by illegality, informality, restricted public and private sector investment, poverty and vulnerability" (SERI 2013:4). As this is largely a post-apartheid term, I will describe similar settlements prior to 1994 as 'shantytowns' or 'squatter settlements'.

Chapter 4

Celiwe's story

IsiXhosa for 'asked for', Celiwe was born in 1972 in the rural village Tshatshu on the outskirts of King Williams Town in the Eastern Cape Province. Her rural birth affected her legal status and upbringing in multiple ways (cf. Meintjes, 2009). From 1963 to the dissolution of apartheid in 1994, Tshatshu formed part of the Bantustan Transkei (isiXhosa for 'the area beyond [the river] Kei), one of the 'black homelands' established by the apartheid regime to ensure the permanent removal of black South Africans from the designated white areas (Lee, 2009; Ferguson, 2007). In 1976, when Celiwe was four years old, the South African government granted Transkei nominal independence⁴⁶, with the result that Celiwe, like the other inhabitants in the region, lost her South African passport and any remaining rights she would have as a black citizen of the South African Republic (Seeking, 2010). Kaiser Daliwonga Matanzima, who supported the Apartheid ideology of separate development, became head of state and ruled Transkei with an iron hand (Davenport, 2000).

According to her own account, Celiwe "*grew up in a poor and large family*". She had two siblings; one older brother and one little sister, a few years younger than her. However, as was not unusual for children growing up in the rural areas, Celiwe and her siblings lived at their paternal grandparents' homestead, at the foot of the lofty Amatola Mountains. Celiwe's paternal grandmother had passed away several years ago, but her grandfather had remarried and built a large three-room brick house on the mountainside.

"In that three-room house I lived with my grandfather and my grandmother, my siblings, and

⁴⁶ Transkei was declared independent by the apartheid government in terms of the Statues of Transkei Act (No 100 of 1976). Both the UN and the ANC rejected the declaration of independence, describing it as invalid and "sham independence". The ANC condemned it as designed to consolidate the inhumane policies of apartheid segregation (O'Malley, 2016; see also Seekings, 2010).

also with cousins.... We slept on a mattress on the floor. A big mattress. We were more than eight who slept on that mattress (laughs)... It was nice to grow up in that situation”⁴⁷

Like most other families in the region, Celiwe’s family was smallholder farmers (Hebinch and Averbeke 2007). Her family held only a few livestock but grew a variety of crops, which they used for their own consumption and sold in nearby villages. But apartheid had a strong influence on Celiwe’s family’s livelihood and coping strategies. Well into the nineteenth-century, Transkei had been a flourishing community of small farmers (Bell and Ntsebesa, 2003:140). However, the heavy influx of black inhabitants into the region following the Native Land Act (1913) and subsequent Acts designed to dislodge black South African from their land and concentrate them into so-called native reserves, such as the Urban Areas Act (1923), Natives and Land Trust Act (1936) and the Group Areas Act (1950)⁴⁸, led to increased pressure on the available natural resources and destroyed or marginalised the potential for subsistence farming in the region (ibid; Hebinch and Averbeke 2007). Following the Native Taxation and Development Act (1958), residents of the Bantustans were also subject to increasing tax obligations, including special tribal levies that had to be paid to the traditional leadership (Claassens, 2011; Hebinch and Averbeke, 2007). The increasing impossibility to live off the land, coupled with the need for cash to pay taxes, pressured Celiwe’s father to look for wage labour (Hebinch and Averbeke, 2007; Lahiff, 2003). After a few years working in the neighbouring Bantustan Ciskei, Celiwe’s father migrated to Cape Town, where he, like other black workers, had to settle for temporary contracts and low-paid manual jobs (Rotic et al, 2015 Vavi, 2011).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ For comparison, see Magona’s (1990:3) description of her childhood environment as a ”people-world, filled with real, immediate, and tangible sense of belongingness”

⁴⁸ The Native Land Act of 1913 was the first major segregation law passed by the South African parliament. It was followed by a wide range of segregation laws, most notably the Group Areas Act of 1950, which defined urban areas into racially segregated zones and made it illegal for Black South Africans to own or occupy land in white areas. For a comprehensive overview of apartheid legislation see 1997

⁴⁹ Conditions for male black workers were highly discriminatory, disadvantageous, degrading and unpredictable. Black workers were only allowed to work in low-skilled and often labour-intensive sectors and were paid and positioned within the work environment according to their skin colour. For a discussion see Vavi (2011) or Rotic et al (2015).

Importantly, racial segregation in South Africa was inexorably linked with the migrant labour system and the economic interests of white capitalists⁵⁰ (Posel, 1997; Louw, 2004; Rotic et al, 2015). Accordingly, the Bantustans were thus not only designed to enforce racial and ethnic segregation, but also served as “reservoirs of cheap labour” and “dumping grounds for those blacks not required to serve capitalism’s immediate needs” (Walker, 1991:124; see also Steinberg, 2008). When Celiwe’s father left his family to look for work in Cape Town, he was thus forced to serve the white capitalist system that underpinned the apartheid regime (Louw, 2004; Posel, 1997). Because African workers were not permitted to bring their wives or families with them to their places of work, Celiwe’s mother was left behind in the village, where she cared for her children and elderly relatives and received monthly remittances from Celiwe’s father (see Bak, 2008; Scanlon, 2007; Newman and DeLannoy, 2014),

As highlighted by feminist scholars, Apartheid was thus not only a racial system but also had distinct gendered implications (Lee, 2009; Mentjes, 2009; Walker, 1990). But while migrant labour system rested largely on the wives of migrants remaining in the rural areas (Hunter, 2007:13) a large number of African women challenged the logic of this system and took up residency in townships or informal settlements in urban areas (Makulu, 2009; Newman and DeLannoy, 2014). Celiwe’s mother became one of these women. To help provide for her children, she moved to the city of East London to search for wage labour when Celiwe was five years old and settled down in a black township called Tanzania at the urban fringes of the city.⁵¹

During apartheid African women were on the bottom rung of the employment ladder (Goermer, 1998). Not only did they have lower income and job security than men but African women had also fewer opportunities and worse working conditions than women classified as white and coloured (Lee, 2009; van der Vliet, 1991). Worst off was the female squatters⁵², who did not have a legal status in the urban areas and were therefore dependent on income from informal activities to provide for themselves and their families (Hunter, 2006) Those

⁵⁰ The migrant labour system underpinned the industrialisation of South Africa and was perpetuated under apartheid (see Louw, 2004) For a discussion of the reciprocal relationship between apartheid and capitalism see Posel (1997)

⁵¹ While the Group Areas Act and other laws could not stem the flow of rural migrants arriving in the cities, the apartheid regime’s racial policies and legislations drove African migrants into townships or shantytowns on the outskirts of the cities (Scanlon, 2007; Seekings, 2011)

⁵² see supra note 44

Africans women who found formal employment and were able to get a pass⁵³ were somewhat better off. Nevertheless, they were largely confined to work for a pittance in the clothing or textiles industries or as domestic servants for White families (Groener, 1998; Verwoerd and Nqowa, 2015; Lee, 2009). As Makhulu (2015:29) observes, migration from the rural areas required often both “daring and improvisation”. When Celiwe’s mother arrived in the city, she first made a living by selling fruits and vegetables from the village. However she later got a full-time formal job at a factory in East London, which gave her legal status to live and work in the city. In the evenings she turned her shack into a shebeen [an informal bar] where she sold home-brewed beer to supplement her income. As this was an illegal activity, Celiwe’s mother risked harsh fines, jail or even deportation (Groener, 1998; Lee, 2007).

After Celiwe’s mother had established herself in East London, she brought Celiwe and her siblings with her so they could stay together. However, when Celiwe was six years old and had just started schooling, her parents got divorced. Following the divorce, Celiwe’s father stopped sending remittances from Cape Town. Abandoning both his financial and emotional fatherly responsibilities, he left Celiwe’s mother with the full burden of providing for, and taking care of, their children.

“I was doing grade 1 when my mum and dad divorced....It was a hard time for us (...) my mother decided that my brother and I should live with our grandmother on my mother’s side”

Celiwe remembers these early years of her life as very difficult. Not only did she miss her mother, but her *gogo* (ixiXhosa for grandmother) was fragile and needed considerable assistance. Reflecting on her childhood, Mamphela Ramphele (1996:xi) writes in her self-biography that “growing up during apartheid promoted premature ageing” (cf. Magona, 1990:4). For Celiwe this was most certainly the case. While only six years old, Celiwe was left with the full responsibility of managing her grandmother’s household. Celiwe’s older brother rarely helped her out as he, in line with traditional patriarchal norms, considered housework to be a female duty. Celiwe’s maternal grandfather, a committed member of South African Black Nationalist Movement Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)⁵⁴, was not around as he

⁵³ To be allowed to work or live in white urban areas, all non-white women had to carry documents (passes) that proved formal employment. The passes, which symbolised black South African’s lack of freedom of movement, were despised and triggered widespread resistance in the 1950s-60s. For a detailed discussion on women’s resistance against the pass laws see Russell (2003) Scalon (2007) and Bozzoli (1991)

⁵⁴ PAC was founded in 1959 by a group of former ANC members who had broken away because they objected to ANC’s Freedom Charter and the inclusion of other national groups such as the Communist Party in the

had been sent to prison on Robben Island.

“life was too hard because I was the one taking care of them. My grandmother and also my older brother...I think it was the culture thing, because he [Celiwe’s brother] would tell me ‘I’m not going to wash the dishes because you are a girl and I am a boy’. And my grandmother was limping so it was difficult for her to work. So I was the one cooking for them, I was the one doing washing for them, everything...”

After Celiwe had lived with and cared for her grandmother for nearly four years, Celiwe’s mother brought Celiwe and her brother to live with them in East London again. According to Celiwe *“that was a better life because we were not suffering that much”*. Yet although Celiwe was happy to be reunited with her mother, the increasingly violent and turbulent life in the city posed other challenges. During apartheid, East London, with its surrounding satellite townships, was one of the most important sites for popular resistance against apartheid (Horowitz, 1991). Yet as Lee (2009:56) notes, mass actions, including boycotts and strikes from late 1970s onwards, did not only galvanize anti-apartheid protest, but also “brought into play the omnipresent spectre of violence”. When Celiwe moved back to city in the mid-1980s, the area was defined by increasing social and political violence and unrest (Msila, 2014; SAHO, 2011). In 1985 ANC president Oliver Tambo urged black Africans to make the country unworkable and ungovernable (Tambo, 1985). Allen (2013:104) describes the years that followed as characterized by an “air of mass insurrection” and “chaos by consent”. As Cole (2010) notes, the 1980s was also defined by increasing ‘black-on-black violence’ and the emergence of people’s courts, perhaps most disturbingly epitomized by the punishment of suspected spies or collaborators by necklacing lynching. The apartheid state responded to the increasing unrest by rolling out several state of emergencies that served to legitimize the state’s increasingly brutal and repressive tactics to preserve status quo (Makhulu, 2015). As demonstrated by a UNICEF sponsored study co-authored by Wilson and Ramphele (1987), young African children were often involved in the violence in the townships, if not as political activists, then as innocent passer-bys. Celiwe remember with horror witnessing her mother being beaten by the police and taken to jail.

liberation struggle. Defining themselves as ‘Africanists’, the PAC did not believe that ANC was capable of promoting black liberation (see O’Malley, 2015)

“The police came to our house at midnight and started to beat the people inside our house and collecting everything that my mother served. My mother was one of the people who was beaten and arrested that day. They arrested my mother right in front of us. It was not a nice situation...”

By the mid 1980s, school boycotts had also become entwined with national campaigns, and dozens of schools in the Eastern Cape boycotted primarily around demands of national political nature (Gerhard and Claser, 2010:98). While supporting the struggle, Celiwe recalls being frustrated over having her education disrupted by the many school boycotts orchestrated by the older students at her school.⁵⁵

“...in 1985 there were lots of boycotts in Tanzania [township] so I didn’t write my exams....the students [who organized by the boycotts] were beating the students who were going to school so we could not go. And 1986 we tried to go to school from January to June, but in June the strikes started again....”

After Celiwe’s schooling had been disrupted by boycotts two years in a row, Celiwe’s mother decided to place her children back in the custody of their paternal grandfather in Tshatshu so they could finish their schooling in peace and stability. Despite missing her mother, Celiwe has many good memories from these years. In contrast to the life in townships or squatter areas, described by anthropologists as “naked” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1987:202) and “stripped of the appropriate sociality because of the imperatives of rents and wages” (Makhulu, 2015:156), rural life offered Celiwe a better opportunity for self-realisation and social life.⁵⁶ She was particularly fond of her grandfather who she defines as a great role model because “*he was teaching us everything*” and “*always took care of us and paid for our school fees*”. Celiwe’s grandfather also encouraged Celiwe to start playing netball, a sport that she quickly excelled in, and which helped her developing leadership skills. Yet, rural life was also defined by hard work and large responsibilities. While Celiwe did not carry the sole responsibility for everything that had to be done in the household as she had done when she

⁵⁵ Similarly, Dlamini (2009), reflecting back on his upbringing in a black township during apartheid, describes the fact that school boycotts prevented him from taking his exam as a major personal tragedy.

⁵⁶ See Dlamini (2009) for a contrasting perspective of life in the township during apartheid. One of the key arguments he makes is that not everything black South Africans did during apartheid was in response to the apartheid regime’s oppressive policies. Showing that poverty and violence did not shape black life in its totality, Dlamini demonstrates the richness and complexity of township life under apartheid, thus helping to explain why some South Africans remember this period of their life with fondness.

lived with her maternal grandmother, she worked hard to assist her grandfather making ends meet.

“During the weekend we used to go to the fields to plough....that is where we got our food. Because if you can’t plough, you can’t get food. Everyone had their own plot. If you had a plot of spinach you had to take care of that spinach, if you had a plot of cabbage you had to take care of the cabbage...”

While most of the harvest went to the family’s own consumption, Celiwe’s grandfather planted extra fruits and vegetables that Celiwe and her cousins sold before and after school, and during the weekends if when they went to visit their mother in Tanzania township.

“People loved to buy our things” Celiwe recalls. But it was also a lot of pressure. During apartheid, families of African children were forced to shoulder the financial demands of going to school, including fees, textbooks, and stationaries (Christie and Collins, 1984: 180). To help her mother and grandfather paying the costs, Celiwe had to make sure to sell her portions of fruits and vegetables.

“If you can’t sell your things, you can’t get money to go to school (...) Also, if we were selling fruit in the public area, the police were always chasing us. Always....”

Celiwe liked going to school and dreamed about becoming a social worker. However, in grade 12 [the final year of high school] she failed her final exam and was not able to matriculate. While Celiwe blames nobody but herself for failing the exam, the apartheid regime’s disinvestment in black learners ought to be seen as an underlying condition for the low proportion of black matriculants that qualified for a bachelor degree under apartheid (cf. Carter, 2012). Following the Bantu Education Act (No 47 of 1953), the education Celiwe and other African pupils received were not only separate from, but also highly inferior, to their White counterparts (Christopher 1994; Fiske and Ladd, 2004; Makhanya and Botha, 2015). As Fiske and Ladd (2004) note, the inequalities were also material, as schools serving the black majority were systematically deprived of qualified teachers, physical resources and teaching aids. According to Carter (2012), the apartheid government spent ten times more resources on white learners than black, which inevitably resulted in much lower rates of progression among black learners⁵⁷ (Makhanya and Botha, 2015).

⁵⁷ In the waning years of apartheid, the government increased funding to African schools and started to subsidize the school fees for lower-income families (Carter, 2012) However, this change was too small and came far too

“It was shortage of notebooksso at school we were supposed to share. [But when] five students share one notebook, it difficult to read anything”

Like many African children who grew up during apartheid, Celiwe’s education was also punctured by school boycotts and frequent moves and changes of school (see Scanlon, 2007). Given these hurdles, it is not all that surprising that Celiwe, like most other students in her province, failed her final exam (see Carter, 2012; Gardiner, 2008).

In the 1980s, when the liberation struggle was intensifying, the “culture of protest” spread from the urban areas to the countryside (Makhulu, 2015). While schooling in Transkei, Celiwe’s older brother became an active member of the PAC, like his grandfather and uncles on his mother’s side. He also got involved in the PAC underground military wing, the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), and in 1991, he escaped to Tanzania [the country]. By this time, Celiwe was nineteen years old. No longer a student, she started to attend PAC-meetings in the evenings, which quickly stimulated her politicization.

“I just had that anger, that the white people were treating our fathers like that....So when my brother decided to escape to Tanzania for training, I also wanted to go so that I could get the power to protect our nation and all that stuff. So I had that spirit, I wanted to become a soldier....”

However, when Celiwe’s grandfather found out about her plans, he pleaded with her to not leave. While respecting her grandfather’s wishes, Celiwe continued to participate in PAC meetings and protests in Transkei. In the years leading up to South Africa’s first democratic elections, several of the protests turned violent, causing Celiwe’s mother and grandfather to be deeply worried about Celiwe’s involvement. As Bruce (2013:18) notes, political violence reached its greatest intensity during the period from the negotiations started in the 1990s to the April 1994 election, with at least 14 000 deaths. Celiwe was not present during the infamous Bisho massacre in 1992⁵⁸, because her uncle suspected that something terrible would happen and forbade Celiwe and her cousins from participating in the march. However, she recalls participating in a march at the beginning of 1994 where the police started to shoot at the crowd. Celiwe, who was standing in the second row, had to run to escape the bullets.

late for Celiwe and her peers to make up for all the learning opportunities they lost as a consequence of a decade with inferior and underfunded schooling (TRC:1998:1:32).

⁵⁸ On the Bisho massacre see TRC Report, vol 2, chap 7, para 180

“I was running. Running! I don’t know where the power I had at that time come from (laughs) I ended up losing my shoes, my school shoes, on that march. When I came back to my mum, because we were visiting her in Tanzania [township] that weekend, she asked me ‘where are your shoes?’ and I said ‘I don’t know’. I was trying to tell the story, but she was beating me and said ‘I don’t have money to buy another shoes, so you have to go barefoot’ (laughs). We didn’t have money, we didn’t have anything. It was too scarce...”

A few months after this incidence, the 27th of April 1994, South African people of all races voted for the first time in a national election. Any South African aged eighteen and older with a valued form of identification -such as a birth certificate, South African identity card or marriage certificate- was eligible to vote (Roy, 2008). Since Celiwe did not have any of those documents, she was not able to cast a vote in 1994. However when Nelson Mandela was sworn in as South Africa’s first democratic president on the 10th of May, she participated in the celebration as people took to the street and sang and danced with joy. On the Election Day, Transkei and the other Bantustans officially ceased to exist and were incorporated into the new democratic South Africa. Consequently, Celiwe and the other residents of Transkei were restored as full citizens of South Africa, with equal rights as everyone else (Ayangwe, 2012).

South Africa’s advent of democracy symbolized a new beginning for South Africa. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2004:520) note, the dominant liberation narrative spoke of “unvarnished hopes, of the turning back of history on itself, of a post-racist future of infinite possibility”. However, the advent of democracy had little immediate impact on Celiwe’s everyday life (see Makhulu, 2015; Brankovic, 2012). When Celiwe failed her final exam three years earlier, she had joined the large pool of unskilled and unemployed South Africans living in the rural areas. Her first years of post-apartheid freedom were thus defined by continuing unemployment and hardship. She was not alone. While the African National Congress (ANC) made ambitious promises of job creation after coming to power in 1994, the government’s restructuring of the economy and wholehearted commitment to neoliberal capitalism led to massive job-shedding, particularly low-skilled jobs most often held by the poor (Ferguson, 2007; Makhulu, 2009). According to the 1996 census, unemployment was highest in the Eastern Cape Province (48,5%). In the former homelands areas where Celiwe lived the unemployment rate was higher than 70% (Ecsec, 2000).

While frustrated over her lack of prospects, Celiwe tried to keep herself busy with playing netball. She was a role model for the other players and “*inspired lots of people in the area to play, and keep their body strong and healthy*”. Nevertheless, most days were long and endlessly boring, and money was always scarce. In 2001, Celiwe therefore decided to migrate to Cape Town to search for work.

“Life [in Eastern Cape] was good. But economically wise, it was not. With no job, you are just sitting at home doing nothing... So I decided to come to Western Cape because I noticed that some of the people who went to Western Cape got jobs”.

Once she arrived in Cape Town, Celiwe settled down in the large and partially informal township Khayelitsha, situated between the N2 and False Bay at the distant southeastern edge of the city. IsiXhosa for ‘new home’, Khayelitsha was built by the apartheid regime in 1983 as a relocation point to accommodate informal settlement dwellers on the Cape Flats and remains largely an ‘immigrant community’ (Seekings, 2013:12; KCOI: 31-32). Like Celiwe, the vast majority of the population in Khayelitsha are black, Xhosa-speaking and rural-to-urban migrants.

By the time Celiwe arrived in 2001, Khayelitsha had sprawled to accommodate successive waves of in-migration. Celiwe describes a glaring gap between the expectations she had harboured and the grim reality she was faced with when arriving in the city (cf. Magona, 1990:21)

“I was crazy to see Cape Town...but when I arrived here and saw the shack and heard that ‘this is the place where you shall live’ I said ‘Yoh! I am not going to live here’... I didn’t see myself inside that thing. Because in Eastern Cape, is rare to see people live in shacks...so I decided to live with my brother in Ilitha Park”

Today home to more than 400 000 people⁵⁹, Khayelitsha has a reputation of being one of South Africa’s largest and fastest growing townships. Identified by the Western Cape Provincial Government as a ‘zone of poverty and unemployment’ (Super, 2015) the township often features in public discourse as an “endless and uniform sea of shacks, overcrowded and

⁵⁹ The population of Khayelitsha is highly contested. While media and some social organisation frequently claim that the population has passed over a million, the Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry estimated the population in 2014 at between 400.000 and 450 000 (see O’Regan and Pikoli, 2014: 35; see also Seekings, 2013:2)

impoverished” (Seekings, 2013:2). However, contrary to this perception, Khayelitsha is far from homogenous, but divided into different sections and neighbourhoods with markedly different living standard.⁶⁰ Briefly explained, the geographical core of Khayelitsha consists mostly of formal housing, interspersed with sections of informal housing, while the major shack settlements are situated largely on the periphery of the township (Seekings, 2013:8; KCOI:31). Celiwe’s brother lived with his wife and children in a brick house in Ilitha Park, a formal and relative upmarket area in the centre of the township, which Celiwe describes as “*one of the sexiest places in Khayelitsha*”. For about two years, Celiwe stayed with her brother and his family, while looking for work.⁶¹ Yet although Celiwe was grateful to her brother, sharing personal space with another family could be challenging and Celiwe longed for more privacy. After getting a job as a cleaner at a pharmacy in town earning 1500 rand per month, she moved into a tiny three-room shack in one of the informal areas of Khayelitsha, called the BM section.

Celiwe’s life on the outskirts of post-apartheid Cape Town illustrates the gap between urban migrants’ aspirations for a work and a better life in the city, and the city’s inability to accommodate those aspirations (cf. Makhulu, 2010). As this chapter will show, this gap stems partly from the lasting legacies of apartheid’s racial policies, but also from the post-apartheid government’s turn to neoliberalism and urban policies (cf. Ross, 2010; Makhulu, 2015). When the research for this dissertation was conducted, it was over fourteen years since Celiwe first arrived in Khayelitsha. While coming to Cape Town to find formal work, Celiwe has been unemployed during most of these years.⁶² She quit her job at the pharmacy after five months because of her boss, who constantly yelled at his employees. According to Celiwe, her boss’ behaviour was not racially motivated as he treated all his employees awful regardless of their race. However, due to the stubborn link between race and class in contemporary South Africa, there is still a strong relationship between race and labour exploitation (McDonald, 2012; SARB, 2013). While the migrant labour system no longer exists, South Africa’s large pool of low-skilled unemployed or underemployed workers also

⁶⁰ For an instructive discussion of the problems with seeing or imagining townships as static and homogenous places, defined in terms of lack and deprivity, see Dlamini (2009)

⁶¹ Urban migrants rely strongly on “networks of kith and kin” when they first arrive in the city (see Makhulu, 2015:28)

⁶² A large number of Khayelitsha’s population is unemployed. In 2011, the official unemployment rate of Khayelitsha residents aged 15 and above was 38% - 35% for men and 41% for women. Notably, these figures include only those who are actively looking for work. (Seekings, 2013).

means that individual workers can still be treated as superfluous and dispensable (cf. Ross, 2010).

“He [the boss] always said ‘there are some many people outside who need a job, if you don’t want to work here you can just take your bag and leave’So I decided to go. It was not a good place for me”.

A year later, Celiwe got a job as a char [part-time domestic worker] for an American family in Hout Bay, an upmarket suburb on the southern edge of the city. While the salary (150 rand per day) was better than at the pharmacy, Celiwe shared the job with her sister and was thus working only a few times of week. The commute from Khayelitsha to Hout Bay was also long and costly, taking between 1,5 and 2 hours each way depending on bus queues and traffic, and demanding more than a quarter of her salary. Illustrative of the difficulties of securing durable work in the post-apartheid environment (Ross, 2010), the family suddenly moved back to the United States in 2005, leaving Celiwe and her sister without work.

Notably, Celiwe’s life in Khayelitsha has not been all “doom and gloom” (cf. Dlamini, 2009). In 2005 and 2007 Celiwe gave birth to a son and a daughter. But while Celiwe emphasized that her children have brought much joy and happiness into her life, raising children in the context of material lack and violence also brought increased stress and difficulties (cf. Ward et al, 2015).

“The most difficult thing I am faced with is being a parent who doesn’t have anything in my hand. My children want things (...) but we don’t have money. It is not easy, you know...to take care of your children when you have no food in your cupboard”⁶³

Celiwe’s struggles to provide for her children highlight disturbing parallels between challenges of motherhood during apartheid and in the democratic era. During apartheid, Celiwe’s mother struggled make ends meet despite engaging in a variety of formal and informal activities. More than ten years into democracy, Celiwe was confronted with the same difficulty. Like her mother, Celiwe was also largely unable to rely on economic support from her children’s fathers. The father of her son lived with them for a few years, but Celiwe eventually threw him out, as she was *“sick and tired of him not taking responsibilities”*. The

⁶³ For a instructive discussions of monetary lack and budgeting amongs urban poor in post-apartheid South Africa see Makhulu (2015) and Ross (2010)

father of her second child occasionally helps paying for food but have, for the most part, been unemployed and thus unable to provide financial assistance. While unemployed Celiwe has thus relied mainly on the support of her sister and other relatives to get by.⁶⁴

The parallels between past and present difficulties do not stop there. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Celiwe's upbringing in Tanzania township was defined by high levels of social and political violence. The highly inferior and under-funded schooling she received compared to white learners was also interrupted by political boycotts and unrest. More than twenty years into democracy, Celiwe and her children are caught in a similar "double jeopardy" between structural and physical violence (Ramphela, 2014:152; Wilson and Ramphela, 1987). Not only are the schools they attend poorer and less funded than privatized schools in the inner-city (Block, 2009; Equal education, 2016) but daily activities such as going to school or using the toilet are associated with risk due to the high levels of social and criminal violence that characterized township life in the post-apartheid era (Steinberg, 2008; Seekings, 2013). According to Celiwe, the violence she witnessed in the streets during some of the most turbulent years of apartheid was nothing compared to the daily reality of crime and violence in Khayelitsha.

"Sometimes it feels like....everything you wake up, there is somebody that has been dumped, somebody who is dead"

While Celiwe is worried about her own safety, she is mostly scared for her children, who she describes as specifically targeted in the present environment.

"Our children is the target [of violence in the township] now. Because men and guys are raping our children, killing our children...not only the girls, the boys are also targeted. So it is not safe at all (...) last year my boy did not even want to school because there were gang fights in front of his school and he was scared...(...)"

Celiwe is not alone in defining violence and crime as daily concerns (Seekings, 2013; KCOI, 2014). In two studies from 2005 and 2009, one in three respondents reported that they felt

⁶⁴ Although Celiwe technically qualified for a child support grant, she did not apply for it. It was unclear why, however as demonstrated by a child support grant impact assesment conducted by the department of social development and UNICEF, the social conditions and tedious procedure attached to the grant have excluded many poor families from benfitting from it (Department Social Development et al, 2012).

unsafe walking in their neighbourhood during the day, and nearly all reported feeling unsafe at night (Seekings 2013:23-4). Crucially, this is as much a structural problem as it is a social problem, as scholars have pointed to a strong link between apartheid legacies of structural poverty and unemployment and the high levels of social crime disproportionately concentrated in apartheid-built townships (Steinberg, 2001; Gready, 2011; Brankovic, 2012). The high level of crime and violence in townships are also linked to structural injustices perpetuated by the post-apartheid government. As the Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry demonstrated, Khayelitsha's three police stations are grossly under-resourced and understaffed despite the fact that the township has one of the highest murder rates in the country (KCOI, 2014). Highlighting the disturbing continuity between apartheid and the post-apartheid order, the Khayelitsha Commission's Final Report notes:

“One of the questions that has most troubled the Commission is how a system of human resource allocation that appears to be systematically biased against poor black communities could have survived twenty years into our post-apartheid democracy. In the view of the Commission, the survival of this system is evidence of a failure of governance and oversight of SAPS in every sphere of government”(KCOI, 2014:160)

Apart from her daily concerns about her children's safety, and the difficulty of securing sustainable and dignified work, Celiwe's largest frustration with the present is the fact that she still does not live in a proper house with an indoor flush toilet. At the time the research for this thesis was conducted, Celiwe had lived in her shack in the BM section for more than a decade. During this period, the post-apartheid government has made repeated pledges to provide houses to the poor and needy, and free and universal access to water, electricity and sanitation (Robins, 2015). However, as noted by a wide range of scholars, the realisation of these promises has been severely undercut by the government's decision to increasingly privatize municipal services (Lee, 2009:32; Jones and Stokke, 2005; Hunter, 2006; Makhulu, 2015). In the Western Cape, the government's lack of institutional capacity to accommodate the massive influx of migrants into the region, and subsequent reliance on a market-driven system for housing delivery, have also resulted in a daunting housing backlog⁶⁵ (Hunter,

⁶⁵ According to the 20 year review released by the government in 2004, the housing backlog was at that point estimated to be at 1.2 million houses (Government Communication and Information System, 2015) Makhulu (2015) argues the backlog is much greater, perhaps even close to 3 millions. According to van der Waal (2008) funding for housing often goes unspent by the implementing local authority due to lack of institutional capacity.

2006; Robins, 2011; Huchzenmeyer, 2004; Makhulu, 2015).

Crucially, this is not to say that nothing has changed during the twenty years since ANC first came to power. While still reflecting the legacy of apartheid urban planning, Khayelitsha has for example undergone considerable change democratic era, with the result many that residents live in well-built houses and enjoy reasonably good access to public services (Seekings, 2013) However, twenty years into democracy, the majority of Khayelitsha's population remains unemployed and poor and live shack settlements with limited or irregular access to basic services⁶⁶ (ibid; Super, 2015).

The BM section where Celiwe lives with her children remains one of the poorest and developed areas in Khayelitsha (SJC, 2016; Stegeman, 2013). Situated between the N2 and the Lansdowne Road, the settlement consists of hundreds of shacks of makeshift dwellings constructed from cardboard boxes, corrugated iron, wood and zinc, and stacked next to each other. Like over half of the population in Khayelitsha, Celiwe does not have access to electricity, water or a toilet in her house (Seekings, 2013). To use communal taps and toilets she need to walk for at least five minutes and often queue.⁶⁷ Often, the taps and toilets are broken, unusable or locked⁶⁸, which means that Celiwe has to go further, sometimes even crossing the road, to relieve herself. If the toilets are not broken or locked, they are dirty and unhygienic, meaning that Celiwe must bring her own equipment to clean the toilets before using them.

It is worth dwelling on Celiwe's lack of access to adequate sanitation as it illustrates the post-apartheid government's failure to fulfil its constitutional obligation to secure a safe and dignified life for people on the margin of society (Robins, 2015). As Robins (2015:107) remarks: "representatives of the South African state routinely proclaim its accomplishments in terms of 'rolling out' massive programmes including welfare grants, housing, electricity,

⁶⁶ When testifying for the Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry in 2013, Seekings calculated that between 32% and 46% of all households in Khayelitsha live "in severe poverty". (KCOI, 2014: Expert Report at Record Bundle 5(1) pg.11).

⁶⁷ Waiting and wasting time (or rather having one's time wasted) is a central experience for many poor across the world. As Lucht (2012:6) argues, drawing on Bordieu (2000), this is a powerful reminder of how time and power is closely connected

⁶⁸ Many residents lock the toilets to prevent them from becoming blocked and unusable. While understandable, this creates problem of access for those households and individuals without access to keys. See Earnest (2013)

water and sanitation - including modern porcelain toilets – in order to create a ‘better life for all’”. However, ever since the communal chemical toilets were installed in Khayelitsha in 2005 they have been a source of great controversy (SJC, 2013). In line with its neoliberal policy framework, the City of Cape Town outsourced the provision of toilets to the private company, Mshengu Services. But while the city has paid this company more than 126 millions rand to provide and maintain toilets in townships and informal settlements, residents have raised deep concerns regarding safety, hygiene and accessibility. (SJC, 2013; NU, 2014). During the Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry’s inspection in the BM section, where Celiwe lives, most of the surveyed toilets were unusable or unhygienic (KCOI, 2014:39). Illustrating how structural and physical violence intersect to render life in Khayelitsha precarious, the communal toilets are notorious sites for robbery and sexual assaults. As Harrison puts it (2013) “for township residents, going to the toilets might literally mean risking your life”. This was most recently demonstrated by the gruesome murder of 19-year-old Sinxolo Mafevuka March 2016, who was found naked with her head stuffed in the toilet bowl at a communal toilet in Khayelitsha after walked from her home to relieve herself around 7:30 in the evening and never returned (Dano, 2016).

Worried about her children’s safety, Celiwe applied to the city to get a portable flush toilet in 2010 which she received a year later as part of an effort of the city to replace the bucket system with more dignified options (Brodie, 2013). While perhaps better than the strongly resented bucket system, still used by thousands of households in Khayelitsha⁶⁹, Celiwe finds the so-called ‘porta portas’ undignified for her to use for her as an adult. She only uses it during the night when it is dark and considered particularly risky to walk to the communal toilets. While the small portable toilets are supposed to be kept indoors they stink and occasionally leak, so Celiwe keeps hers in the small yard outside her shack. Representatives from the City are supposed to come and replace the small tank three times a week but they are often not collected, and accordingly “function as little more than fancy bucket toilets” (Brodie, 2013). In 2014, South African Human Rights Commission affirmed Celiwe’s disapproval of the portable toilets. In a damning report, the commission presented their conclusion that the City of Cape Town had discriminated against “black African people” and violated residents of informal settlement’s right to basic sanitation and dignity through

⁶⁹ Census from 2011 revealed that in 2011, 8000 households in Khayelitsha reported using bucket toilets and 12 000 had no toilet at all.

distributing portable toilets and other temporary services as a permanent sanitation solution (SAHRC, 2014; see also NU, 2014).

As Ross (2010:9) argues, based on her long-term fieldwork in a post-apartheid community, “people do not simply accept their way of life unquestionably, especially when that way of life it is blatantly unjust and clearly a result of discrimination”. Affirming this, Celiwe are not happy with her current situation. During apartheid, she was angry with the white government for what they did to her “fathers”. Today her anger and frustration is directed at the party that brought her freedom, the African National Congress (ANC), as well as the City of Cape Town run by the Democratic Alliance (DA) which is responsible for the delivery of municipal services in the region (see van der Waal, 2008). Aware of her rights and entitlement as citizen in a democratic South Africa Celiwe firmly believes “*it is the government’s responsibility to improve the life of people in Khayelitsha*”. Yet like many other South Africans, Celiwe has low confidence in the country’s politicians and chose to not vote in the country’s last election⁷⁰

“I didn’t vote last election. I didn’t see any reasons why I should vote, because we are still waiting for the services that the government promised us....”

According to Sachs (2013), the BM section where Celiwe lives has been subject to an upgrade since 2011. But Celiwe does not hold her breath.

“I have lived in BM now for over ten years, but still, there are no services, no streets, no development at all. We are voting every now and then, but nothing changes...”

If she could find work, Celiwe says she would move back to the Eastern Cape. In the area where she grew up, the government has built several RDP houses, one of which her mother lives in. Arguably, her framing of Eastern Cape and Cape Town in binary terms reflects both an element of rural-based nostalgia (Lee, 2009) and a sober assessment of the urban present.

⁷⁰ Following a national survey conducted by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation in 2013, only 45% of citizens have confidence in the national government. Similarly, a study conducted by Afrobarometer in 2015 showed that citizen trust had dropped by almost half since 2011 from 62% to 34%. Reflective of this trend, the last election saw a significant drop in voter participation. The turnout of registered voters in the 2014 elections was 73% representing a decline of 4% on the last two elections turnouts. When examined as proportion of the eligible voting-age population, the figure shows a drop in participation from 86% in 1994 to 72% in 1999 and 57% in 2014 (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2014)

“In Eastern Cape, we have houses. Big houses. Here we are living in a shack. Even if just one shack burn, it affects the whole area. And there is space where children can play everything. Here there is no place for children to play outside. And they can’t play inside the houses because the houses are too small...and there is not that much crime in Eastern Cape. It is rare to see gangsters in Eastern Cape (...) If I could just get a job in Eastern Cape, I would go. But I can’t go to Eastern Cape with nothing. So Khayelitsha is my home now.”

While Celiwe believes her living conditions are both undignified and dangerous, she thus copes with the situation the best she can. She cleans and decorates her shack, making her home it as inviting and inhabitable as possible for the sake of herself and her children.⁷¹ To reduce the risk of for break-ins, she makes sure to always keep her gate and door locked and has put up burglar bars in front of her windows.

But Celiwe does not simply wait around for the government to fulfil their constitutional obligations and outlined commitments. According to Lieres and Robins (2008) poverty and marginalisation are key barriers to active citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa. Defying these barriers, Celiwe has, since 2009, been an active member of the Social Justice Coalition, a community-led social movement campaigning for better service delivery, housing and policing in Khayelitsha and other underdeveloped and crime-affected townships.⁷² During these years, Celiwe has been involved in several campaigns, including the on-going Clean and Safe Sanitation Campaign, which aims to ensure that the City of Cape Town properly maintains existing toilets and provide additional clean and safe sanitation facilities in informal settlements. During the last four years, Celiwe has also been actively involved in the problem of inadequate policing in Khayelitsha. Prior to the Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of Police Inefficiency and a Breakdown in Relations between South African Police and the Community of Khayelitsha in 2012(-2014), she went door-to-door collecting testimonies and complaints from residents.⁷³ And after Sinxolo Mafevuka was found

⁷¹ As many ethnographic studies have demonstrated, shack dwellers put tremendous amount of effort into building and maintaining their homes (see especially Makhulu, 2015; Ross 2010). Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault (1995), Makhulu (2015:9) describes this as a form of “care for self and others” which suggests “an investment in a social world beyond the strictures of poverty and want”

⁷² For an interesting discussion of SJC’s tactics, described by Robins (2012) as ‘slow activism’, see Robins (2014)

⁷³ The Commission was appointed by Western Cape Premier Helen Zille in August 2012 to investigate allegations of police inefficiencies and a breakdown in relationship between the police and community of Khayelitsha. The background for the Commission was years with petitions and lobbying from local organisations to improve policing in Khayelitsha (Newham, 2012). In 2012, the Social Justice Coalition lodged a formal

murdered in the communal toilet in Khayelitsha in March 2016, she marched with her organisation in protest against the police's slow and inadequate response to Mafevuka's murder, and the persistent inequalities in police resources between poor (and mostly black) neighbourhoods and traditionally white and wealthy suburbs.⁷⁴

While Celiwe first worked for the organisation for free, she was officially hired in 2012. Earning 5000 rand per month, she can now afford to provide for her two children and her sister's son who she takes care of while her sister is in the Eastern Cape, while also sending remittances home to her mother in the Eastern Cape (about 700 rand per month). While her salary is not high enough to lift Celiwe and her children out of poverty, having access to a regular and sustainable income stream has helped Celiwe regain control over her life. It has also made it possible for Celiwe to offer financial help to some of her family members, many of whom has helped her making ends meet in the past.⁷⁵ While Celiwe admits that it is often difficult to reconcile life as an activist with her motherly responsibilities⁷⁶, being an activist for the Social Justice Coalition has also given her an avenue to fight for what she knows she and her children are entitled to.

However, Celiwe's experience of fighting for justice and equality in post-apartheid South Africa is both different and similar from her late involvement in the liberation struggle during the waning years of apartheid. On the one hand, it is clearly different in the sense that she is not being shot at by the police. When placing demands on the people in power, Celiwe now also has the law on her side. As Jones and Stokke (2005) suggests, South Africa's democratic constitution has opened up space for active citizenship, and given people the right to

complaint to the Western Cape government, detailing the police and criminal justice system's failure to provide basic police services to the people of Khayelitsha. The organisation played a key role in collecting evidence for the Commission. For more information see SJC (2016). For the Commission's full report see O'Reagan and Pikoli (2014).

⁷⁴ Evidence presented for the The Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry revealed that wealthy suburbs closer to the city centre had the highest allocation of police officers despite suffering from relatively little violent crime compared to Cape Town's townships. While Khayelitsha has one of the highest murder rates in the province, all three police stations in Khayelitsha had less than average allocation. See KCOI (2014); Van der Merwe (2016)

⁷⁵ For a discussion of social networks and bonds of mutual obligations and distribution in Southern Africa see Ferguson (2015) and Makhulu (2015).

⁷⁶ For a discussion of how female activists struggle to juggle their political life with motherly responsibilities see Scanlon (2007). For a personal account seen from the perspective of the daughter of the anti-apartheid activists Ruth First and Joe Slovo, see Slovo (2009).

“assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions”⁷⁷ One of the most progressive constitutions in the world (Scanlon, 2015), the South African constitution has also granted Celiwe a large number of socioeconomic entitlements, which means that she has the country’s most powerful legislation to support her in her fight for adequate housing and sanitation. The question is whether this is enough. As Habib (2013) notes, for the vast majority of South African’s poor there is nothing caring about South Africa’s democracy. The post-apartheid government is in fact increasingly quelling popular dissident, and has in recent years responded to demands from South African poor by criminalizing both poverty and protest (iClaek, 2014; Knoetze, 2014). The effects of this trend is most powerfully epitomized by the police shootings at Marikana in 2012 where the South African police effort to break up a strike was responsible for the death of 34 striking workers (Alexander, 2013). However, it is also illustrated by the post-apartheid government’s ongoing unresponsiveness to Celiwe and her fellow activists in the Social Justice Coalition who have been left out of the promise of “a better life for all”

⁷⁷ The right to adequate housing and sanitation is enshrined in section 17 of South Africa’s constitution

Chapter 5

Thembeke's story

Thembeke, meaning 'trustworthy' in isiXhosa, was born in 1977 in the city of Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province at what was a turbulent time and place in South Africa's history characterized by high levels of political violence and unrest. The year before Thembeke was born was the year of the famous 1976 Soweto uprising, which infused new blood into the anti-apartheid movement and triggered violent confrontation between black protesters and white South African government throughout the country (Louw, 2004). Only a few months after Thembeke was born, the popular Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko was tortured and killed in police detention in Port Elizabeth, sparking new waves of black outrage and protest (SAHO, 2011).

Themeka was the second-born child in a family of four boys and two girls. She grew up with her mother and siblings in New Brighton, a large African township on the outskirts of the city of Port Elizabeth. Thembeke's family was not originally from this area. Her family's homestead was in the rural town Dutywa⁷⁸ situated approximately 400 kilometres west for Port Elizabeth between Butterworth and Mtatha, and formerly part of the apartheid-created Bantustan Transkei. Before Thembeke was born, her parents had lived with her paternal grandparents in Transkei, where they, like most families in the region, had made a living by raising livestock and planting crops (see Hebinch and Averbek 2007). However, apartheid's racial policies have made it increasingly difficult for her family to live off the land. Following the apartheid regime's policies of forced removal and racial segregation, massive population influx into the black homelands led to overcrowding and land degradation (Lahiff, 2003; Moll, 1988). Like Celiwe's father, the lack of avenues for alternative livelihoods in the region, coupled with increasing tax obligations, pushed Thembeke's father to look for wage labour in what apartheid racist design had deemed to be 'white cities' (Ferguson, 2007

⁷⁸ Xhosa for 'place of disorder', Dutywa (formerly Idutywa) was founded in 1858 as a military fort after a dispute between a Natal Colony raiding party and the local people. The town is known as the birthplace of South Africa's former president Thabo Mbeki.

Hebinch and Averbek, 2007). He migrated to Cape Town, where he got a job working as a security guard for a white company.

Conventional accounts of male migration generally describe male out-migration as part of rural households' livelihood strategy (see e.g. Smith et al, 1998) Yet as Posel (2003) notes, the underlying assumption behind these accounts is that the household is a harmonious unit in which all members are united in maximising shared resources (see also Walker, 1990). More consistent with feminist historians' critiques of this 'unitary household model' (ibid, see also Posel 2001; Bozzoli, 1983) Thembeke's father did little to support his family after relocating to Cape Town.⁷⁹ Like Celiwe's mother, Thembeke's mother was thus unable to rely on financial assistance from her husband, which pushed her to seek work in the white urban areas.

Like most African women who sought formal employment in the cities, Thembeke's mother had to settle for domestic work⁸⁰ (Verwoerd and Nqowa, 2015; Lee, 2009). She found a job working for a white family in the city of Port Elizabeth, about 400 kilometres west for Dutywa. While working in Port Elizabeth, Thembeke's mother gave birth to Thembeke and her four siblings. In doing so, she challenged "the logic of the reserves as purported sites of African reproduction" (Makhulu, 2015:9). However, ensuring the safety and well-being of five young children were not an easy undertaking for a mother who spent most of her waking hours caring for her Madam's household and children (cf. Cock, 1989; Witbooi, 2007). Now that she had children on her own, Thembeke's mother also had to find a place where they could live.⁸¹ She settled down in a shack settlement in New Brighton, about ten kilometres north of the city.

One of South Africa's oldest townships, New Brighton was established in 1903 by the colonial government to rehouse Africans relocated from the city's inner location following the outbreak of the bubonic plague (Gaines, 2005:245; see also Swanson, 1977). During

⁷⁹ Although urban migrants generally maintain economic ties with their rural households, Posel (2001) argues that male migrants during apartheid stood to gain more from migration than the women who "remained in the rural household to keep the fire burning" (Walker, 1990:177). Moreover, male migrants did not necessarily share their resources equally nor respond equally well to all their family members' needs (Posel, 2001; Bozzoli, 1983)

⁸⁰ African women were generally not permitted to stay or work in white areas unless they were domestic workers or qualified for a specific exemption (Neumann, 2014:31; Lee, 2009:28).

⁸¹ During apartheid family accommodation for African people in urban areas were limited to small government-built houses or shacks in townships or informal settlements on outskirts of the cities (Seekings, 2011)

apartheid, the township was characterized by a complex social geography (Bundy, 2013). Some sections of the townships had well-built houses and municipal services, such as the McNamee Village, which was laid out and proclaimed by the white government out as a ‘model township’. However, New Brighton was also comprised of crowded and squalid squatter settlements without access to clean water and sanitation (Gaines, 2005; Bundy, 2013:77). Thembeke and her family lived in one of the un-serviced sections of the townships, in a shack made out of corrugated iron, pieces of wood, and cardboard boxes. Thembeke describes her upbringing in New Brighton as defined by hardship and constraints, and blames it largely on her father’s absence.

“We grew up without father, so we were struggling. When we needed to get something, like clothes or schoolbooks, we could not get it (sighs)... To grow up with only a mother is not easy. She had to do everything for us”

In the 1980s, when Thembeke grew up, the townships bordering Port Elizabeth were also defined by increasing levels of political and social violence and resistance (Msila, 2014; Lee, 2009). While Thembeke was too young to understand everything that was going on, she recalls that her mother used to be worried about her and her siblings being out in the streets on their own. Like Celiwe, Thembeke also remembers feeling pressured to participate in school boycotts and marches organized by older students at her school.

“I was young back then. I was there [at the march] but I was not in front. I was at the back, I was just looking (...) But we were worried, because we had to write exams”

Like Celiwe’s mother, and many other African parents, the high level of violence and unstable urban educational system in the township eventually prompted Thembeke’s mother to send her children to live with their maternal grandparents in the rural Transkei (Lee, 2009:57).

“[When I was thirteen] she decided to let us live alone. Because I was growing up, so I could manage to cook for my sisters and my brothers and take care of them”⁸²

For nearly four years, Thembeke stayed at her grandparents homestead in the village of

⁸² Thembeke’s oldest brother lived with his paternal grandparents, as is customary among amaXhosas, (Magona, 1990:3). Since her older brother was not present, Thembeke was given the responsibility of taking care of all her younger siblings.

Nqabane, on the outskirts of Dutha in Transkei. Thembeke describes this period in her life in highly ambivalent terms. On the one hand, she recalls the pleasure of living in a quiet and peaceful environment characterized by “*lots of space...mountains, rivers and forests*”. Like Celiwe, she vividly remembers the feeling of running around on the fields, or playing netball, while breathing in the fresh mountain air.

However, rural life under apartheid was also characterized by hardship and constraints. According to Bell and Ntsebesa (2003), Transkei had, by the late 1970s, “become a dumping ground for the old and sick, a place where women tilled the depleted soil and children suffered diseases and malnutrition (pg.140; see also Walker, 1991). While Thembeke and her siblings stayed healthy for the most part, Thembeke emphasises the hard work that accompanied rural living (see also Ramphela, 1996). Since Thembeke’s village did not have any running taps or electricity, Thembeke and her younger sister were responsible for fetching water from the river and collecting dry firewood for cooking. Every Saturday, Thembeke carried the whole family’s washing to the river. It was often close to dark before she had managed to finish all the washing and carried it back to the house. While Thembeke was fond of her grandparents, she also missed her mother. Thembeke and her siblings were always excited for their mother to come visiting, as “*we knew we were going to get some gifts from the city*”. But most weekends, Thembeke’s mother was unable to come, either because the buses were full or because she did not have enough money to pay for the transport.

When Thembeke was 16 years old, she travelled with her younger sister to Cape Town for the first time in her life. It was the December holidays, and Thembeke and her sister was going to visit their father who had found himself a new girlfriend and settled down in the township Nyanga⁸³ (isiXhosa for ‘moon’) on the urban fringes of the city. This was in 1992, six years after influx control measures had been removed, and about a year after president F.W de Klerk announced that the Group Areas Act (1950) would be repealed, thus removing the final legal barrier for Africans to reside in the city (see Scanlon, 2007; Lee, 2009). Following the lifting of these restrictions, tens of thousands of rural inhabitants migrated to the urban areas in search for brighter opportunities or to join their loved ones (Lötter, 1997; Makhulu, 2015). When Thembeke and her sister left for Cape Town they believed they would return to

⁸³ Nyanga township was built in 1946 to house black South Africans following the increasing influx of black migrants to Langa township. Towards the end of apartheid Nyanga became notorious for so-called ‘black-on-black’ faction fighting. See SAHO (1993).

Transkei once the holiday was over to finish their schooling. However, when the time came for Thembeke and her sister to return to their grandparents' homestead in Nqabane, Thembeke's father decided that his daughters should stay with him and continue their schooling in Cape Town.

“That life was not good for me because my father was a drinking person. Every night he came home drunk. He was not doing anything to us, not even to his girlfriend. But he was shouting, he liked to shout for nothing”

27th of April 1994, when Nelson Mandela was elected as president in South Africa's first non-racial democratic election, Thembeke was in Cape Town with her father and sister. While she was a year too young to vote, Thembeke recalls the electric atmosphere and the long cues of Africans waiting to finally step up to the ballot boxes.

While the advent of democracy had little immediate impact on Thembeke's life, the years that followed the country's transition in 1994 was for Thembeke defined by major life events. In 1995, when Thembeke was 18 years old, she decided she would no longer live under her father's roof and moved into her friend's shack in the nearby township Philippi. Shortly after moving in with her friend, Thembeke met her future husband. He was from her family's homestead, Dutywa, in Transkei. Like Thembeke's father, he worked as a security guard for a white business-owner. Thembeke found him both attractive and responsible. After she fell pregnant in 1996, Thembeke moved into his shack in Phillippi. During the next three years, she gave birth to two daughters.

As Brankovic (2012) notes, South Africa's transition to a democratic government in 1994 rode on the promise of a better life for all. After coming to power in 1994, the ANC made ambitious promises of housing delivery, job creations and social benefits for the poor (Seekings and Nattrass, 2006; Jones and Stokke, 2005). Perhaps most striking was the government's quantitative target of building one million houses within the first five years in an effort to jump start radical economic and social distribution (see Jones and Stokke, 2005; Hunter, 2006) As Thembeke was unemployed and her partner's income was less than 3500 rand, they qualified for the housing subsidy scheme and were placed on the public housing waitlist.⁸⁴ Whilst the government's provision of housing has been defined by massive delays

⁸⁴ The housing subsidy scheme is not only based on income, but also requires that beneficiaries are older than 21 years and that they are married or co-habiting and/or primary caretakers for financial dependents. See Venter and

(Hunter, 2006, Makhulu, 2015), Thembeke and her partner received their 'RDP house'⁸⁵ in 1999, after only waiting for two years. Thembeke was thrilled. When moving out of the shack and into a government-subsidised brick house, Thembeke underwent the transition Sindiwe Magona (1998) describes in her autobiography as a "graduation to 'house' living". Thembeke was happy.⁸⁶ In 2001, after lobola (bride price)⁸⁷ had been negotiated and paid to Thembeke's mother, Thembeke and her partner got married according to traditional customs in the Eastern Cape. Two years later Thembeke gave birth to a son.

But her new life was not without complications. For Thembeke, who was unemployed and dependent on her husband's meagre income, providing for her so-called 'born free-children'⁸⁸ was a daily struggle. Without access to alternative income sources, Thembeke also had to abandon her ambition of completing high school and obtain a matriculation certificate. When Thembeke received her first daughter, she had been determined to not drop out of school and thus enrolled in a night school. When her daughter stopped breastfeeding, she left her daughter in the custody care of her mother in Port Elizabeth, so she could continue her schooling.⁸⁹ But when Thembeke gave birth to her second daughter in 1999, she did not see any other solutions than dropping out of school. While the South African Schools Act (1996) had exempted students of poor families from paying school fees, attending school was still associated with considerable costs, including textbooks and transport costs (Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya, 2013; OECD, 2008).

Marais (2006)

⁸⁵ RDP is a reference to the Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994, which prioritized the delivery of housing to South Africa's poor.

⁸⁶ Several housing studies have observed that South African poor attach much of their "economic and emotional well-being to the attainment of a formal house" (CSSR, 2010:36; see also SERI, 2013).

⁸⁷ For an instructive discussion of the practice of lobola and its changing meanings across time, see Shope (2006).

⁸⁸ South Africans born after the country's transition to democracy in 1994 are frequently referred to as the 'born-free children' or the 'born-frees' however the use of this label is widely contested. For a discussion, see Verwoerd and Ngcowa (2015)

⁸⁹ It is customary among amaXhosa for the eldest child to live with one or the other set of grandparents (Magona:1990:3). Both during and after apartheid, allocating the responsibility of child rearing to elderly female kin in the rural areas is also a livelihood strategy that enables both parents of the child to go to school or work long hours and send remittances home to their relatives (see Lee, 2009).

Another problem was the small size of the government house (cf. Mooll et al, 2011, Goldblatt, 2011). As Makhulu (2015) observes, the small size and low standard of the first generation of RDP houses meant that the government-subsidised houses represented “only a marginal improvement on the shacks they were replacing”. For Thembeke, like for many other South Africans who received a government house before the government’s shift in focus from “quantity to quality”,⁹⁰ the solution became to extend and renovate the house (SERI, 2013)

“It [the house] had toilet, electricity, all of that.... But you know, these government houses, you have to do it nicely on your own. The government will make for you a small house, but then you extend it, make it bigger, so that your family can stay”

However, the government’s rules for RDP houses were rigorous. In order to extend or renovate a RDP house before eight years of ownership, one has to be granted a special permission from the local municipality⁹¹. Thembeke started this process, but never got so far that she was able to finish it. In 2011, after fourteen years of marriage, she had enough of her husband. Her marriage had never been perfect. Thembeke’s husband had multiple affairs throughout their marriage, and they “used to argue about him going around at night looking for [other girls]” and “spending money outside the house”. But Thembeke had learned to live with his this. What she could not live with was that he was no longer trying to hide his affairs. Her husband was with another women in the neighbourhood and everyone knew about it. During the last few years, Thembeke’s husband had also become increasingly violent. He had always had a short temper, but after loosing his job a few years ago, it had become far worse. If Thembeke tried to fight back, he would always overpower her.

While South Africa’s first decade of democracy was marked by increasing state intervention into the problem of domestic violence (Vetten, 2005) violence in the household remains pervasive in the post-apartheid era⁹² (Vetten, 2014; Albertyn et al, 2007; SAMRC, 2012).

⁹⁰ With the introduction of the Breaking New Ground policy in 2004, the government aimed to increase the quality and size of houses, thus prioritizing quality instead of quantity (see SERI, 2013).

⁹¹ For an overview of housing legislation and policy in South Africa from 1994-2010 see Tissington (2011)

⁹² Experts frequently discuss high rates of domestic abuse cutting across all sectors of the society. See for Pharoah (2012) or South African Medical Research Council (2012). In a study by Jewkes et al (2009) over 40% of male respondents said they had been violent with an intimate partner.

Exploring the parallel processes of legal form and cultural transformation, Goldscheid (2013) has argued that South Africa's experience with gender reform demonstrates the limits of the former in the absence of the latter (see also Andrews, 2007). Studies on men and masculinities in South Africa further suggest that men who fail to live up to cultural ideal of men as breadwinner's in the family often resort to violence to reassert their manhood (Hamber, 2008, Walker, 2005; Sideris, 2005).⁹³ Important studies have also focused on the social and economic factors that prevent women from leaving abusive relationships. While these studies show that victims' responses to abuse are shaped by a variety of factors ranging from the interpersonal to the macro-level, a key finding is that many women stay in abusive or unwanted relationships to protect themselves or their children from economic hardship (Artz and Smythe, 2006; Artz, 1999; Goldblatt, 2011). For several years Thembeke endured her husband's violent and insensitive behaviour and extramarital affairs, even though it made her "*feel small*". But one day she found to strength and courage to take her children and leave. Given Thembeke's economic dependency on her husband, this was not an easy decision to make.

"Leaving him was the most difficult thing I have done in my life. Because I was not working at that time. So I knew that things were not going to be easy for me".

Like Thembeke had predicted, her decision to leave her husband not come without considerable costs. Writing during apartheid, Ramphele (1987) observed.

"If women start challenging the behaviour of men in their homes, they risk losing the little security they have...and in the township, divorcing your husband usually means divorcing your house as well" (pg.71; see also Lee, 2009).

More than fifteen years into democracy, Thembeke was confronted with a similar choice. She ultimately chose to bring her children with her and leave, even though this meant that she had

⁹³ The link between male unemployment and partner violence is by no means straightforward. As demonstrated by volumes by Morell (2001) and Walker and Reid (2005), South African men have responded differently to social and gender change, both in intimate and social spheres.

to bid farewell to her house.

That Thembeke and her children ended up homeless illustrates how post-apartheid South Africa's social policies are not necessarily as gender-sensitive as they intend to be. The government's housing subsidy scheme was, from the outset, designed to be protective of women's housing needs.⁹⁴ However, as several studies have brought attention to, South Africa's housing scheme has been unable to sufficiently address and accommodate the specific needs and interest of women (Venter and Marais, 2006; Khan and Turman, 2001; Chenwi and McLean, 2009). As illustrated by Thembeke's experience, current housing policies have for example failed to guard against the chances of women losing their asset and becoming homeless (Khan and Turman, 2001). The lack of flexibility with regards to women's eligibility for housing also means that because Thembeke has received housing subsidy in the past, she is not eligible to apply for and access a second subsidy (ibid; Chenwi and McLean, 2009). The government's housing policies are also intended to protect children, since, in the case of a divorce or a breakdown in a relationship, the RDP house is supposed to remain in the hands of the primary caregiver. However, as Thembeke's story demonstrates, non-policy related obstacles such as gendered norms and power dynamics within the family may serve to prevent this from happening (Venter and Marais, 2006). Housing policies does for example little to confront deep-seated power imbalances between husbands and wives (Chenwi and McLean, 2009). While Thembeke had a legal right to remain in the house as primary caregiver of their children, her husband refused to give up on the house, regardless of the fact that he had no intention of taking care of his children. Thembeke did not know how to challenge his decision, but she knew she could no longer live under the same roof as her husband, so she packed her belongings and left.

Despite these limitations, it must be noted that the post-apartheid government's housing scheme has assisted a large, and growing number of female-headed households (Hunter, 2006). As demonstrated by a recent report published by Statistics South Africa (2016:7,161), female-headed households are far more likely to occupy a state-subsidised house than a male-headed household. This is a significant improvement from the apartheid era, when women's

⁹⁴ Both the White Paper on Housing and the Housing Act of 1996 specifically identify the need to support women in the housing delivery process (Republic of South Africa, 1994:21). For a gendered reading of the legal housing framework in post-apartheid South Africa, see Chenwi and McLean (2009)

access to housing was for many years dependent on their marital status⁹⁵ (Lee, 2009; Scanlon, 2007). However, this trend should not be interpreted solely as progress, as it also illustrates the increasing feminization of poverty in post-apartheid South Africa (Posel and Rogan, 2012). As Rogan (2015) shows, the gendered poverty gap has deepened in the democratic era, despite the fact that overall poverty levels have declined.⁹⁶

One of the female-headed households that has benefitted from the government's housing scheme is Thembeke's mother, who qualified for the government's housing subsidy as the primary caregiver for Thembeke's oldest daughter. After moving to Cape Town following the turn of the millennium, she received a RDP house in Delft, a township established as a new housing development in the 1990s and situated about thirty kilometres from the city centre close to Cape Town's international airport (Seekings et al, 2010). Crucially, the fact that Thembeke's mother's house was built on the far outskirts of Cape Town was not a coincidence. The short explanation for this is that RDP houses are located on the outskirts of urban areas where land is cheaper (Hunter and Posel, 2012). However, the government's decision to build houses to the country's poor on the periphery of the city illustrates disturbing continuities between urban planning and social policies during apartheid and in the democratic era (Makhulu, 2010; 2015) According to Ndifuna Ukwazi, no affordable housing has been built in Cape Town business district since 1994, indicating strongly that the local government is not committed to address the city's spatial legacy (Molander, 2016).

After Thembeke left her husband and became homeless, she had nowhere to go but to her mother's house in Delft. However, like Thembeke's old house in Phillippi, her mother's house was small and she did not have money to extend it. Since there was not enough space for Thembeke and her two youngest children to stay inside the house, Thembeke built a small shack at the back of her mother's house, next to a shack that had already been built for one of Thembeke's younger brothers.

Thembeke and her brother are far from the only South Africans who have opted for -or been pushed into accepting- this housing strategy in the context of Cape Town's enormous housing shortages and the increasing problems of landlessness (van der Waal, 2008). In 2006, the

⁹⁵ Not before 1978 were African women permitted to rent houses in their own right given that they could prove they had dependents to support (Lee, 2009)

⁹⁶ Rogan's (2015) study shows that this is the case regardless of whether you define poverty simply in monetary term (income poverty) or include other sources of welfare such as health care and other basic facilities.

City of Cape Town housing department estimated that more than 75 000 households live in backyard dwellings (Haskins, 2006). As Lemanski (2009) notes, this indicates both the increasing popularity of this type of housing and the lack of available alternatives. As in Thembeke's case, it also shows the mismatch between the small RDP-houses and the size of most African families (ibid).⁹⁷ The living situations for backyard dwellers, compared to shack owners, are ambiguous. According to a recent study of life quality among backyard dwellers in Gauteng, backyarders have generally higher living standards than freestanding shacks due to their better location and access to government services. However the survey also shows that this benefit was offset backyarders' smaller amount of internal space (Turok and Borel-Saladin, 2015). Like most backyard shacks, Thembeke's new home consisted of only a single room with a single bed that she shares with her two children, now 12 and 16 years old (Lemanski, 2009). Neither Thembeke nor her children were happy with their new living arrangement. For Thembeke, living so close to her mother also caused tensions.⁹⁸

"You see, when you are staying with your mother, there is differences...you know, I can't take my boyfriend there, because my mother is going to tell me that 'this is her house' (...) So I cannot do whatever I want to do..."

Like Thembeke had predicted, leaving her husband also resulted in monetary problems. After Thembeke left her husband, he had absented himself from his financial obligations as a father. Capitalizing on the gender-sensitive policies instituted by the criminal justice system in the democratic era, Thembeke had gone to the court to demand child maintenance from him in accordance with the Maintenance Act (No 99 of 1998). Yet illustrative of the gap between legal rights and lived realities, this had only short-term effects.

*"[At first] it was making a difference, because he paid 500 for one child. A month. But he only paid twice, I think, and then he stopped"*⁹⁹

⁹⁷ While the mismatch between the small RDP-houses and family size is an important reason for backyard shacks, it is important to note that only about one-third of backyard dwellers are related to the homeowners.

⁹⁸ Lee's (2009) research points to a shift towards an increasing number of matriarchal multigenerational households in urban areas. For a discussion of generational conflicts that arise within such household units see specifically chapter 2

⁹⁹ In 2005, the Maintenance Act was amended (Act no 9 of 2015) so that defaulters will be blacklisted, and thus unable to get further credit, until they pay child maintenance. The amendment has been contested and questioned on the basis on enforcability, among other things.

Fifteen years into democracy, Thembeke was thus in the same difficult situation as her mother had in been during the height of apartheid: receiving only sporadic financial assistance from her husband, she had to assume the role of the breadwinner in the family while still retaining her domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Like Thembeke's mother, domestic service also became Thembeke's point of entry to wage employment (Turshen, 2010). A few times a week, she cleaned the house for a Portuguese couple in the leafy and attractive suburb Tokai on the foothills of the Constantiaberg range. The job was tiresome, and because she only worked a couple of days per week, her salary was not enough to provide for herself and her children. But it was a better than nothing. However, illustrative of the insecure working conditions for domestic servants (Gaitskell, 2010), the Portuguese couple moved overseas after only a year, leaving Thembeke without work.

That Thembeke's mother and Thembeke both found jobs as domestic workers were not coincidental. As Ross (2010:115) suggests, "cultural norms and historical processes have long excluded women from some portions of the employment market while ensconcing them in others, such as domestic service. It is important to acknowledge here that domestic work in South Africa has a distinct racial and colonial legacy (Turshen, 2010; Gaitskell et al, 2010). As Cock's (1989) influential study of domestic workers during apartheid demonstrated, domestic service was a site of daily oppression and exploitation of black women, and the colonial relationship between 'maids' and 'madams' both reflected and reproduced a sexist, racist and classist ideology (see also Magona, 1990; Gaitskell et al, 2010). Despite the professions' problematic history, and the democratic government's commitment to alleviate racial inequality, domestic work remains largely a black institution in the post-apartheid environment, and most domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid and unprotected¹⁰⁰ (Turshen, 2010:6; Gaitskell et al, 2010:35-53).

In 2013, after several months looking for work, Thembeke got a job as a cleaner at an international hotel in town. This job, which she defines as her "*first straight job*", became a

¹⁰⁰. For a fascinating inside account of domestic workers fight for decent wages and work during and after apartheid see Witbooi (2007). For a detailed discussion of domestic work in the democratic era and the profession's distinct racial and colonial legacy, see Gaitskell (2010) and Turshen (2010).

turning point in Thembeke's life. With access to a stable and independent income stream, she was able to re-establish control over her own life.

“Before working, I had to wait for someone to give me something to eat. Now I don't have to wait for somebody to buy me food, I can buy my own food, I can buy my own clothes (...)

While Thembeke describes her daily workday as tiring and monotonous, she has many good friends at her work, and likes the job a lot better than domestic service. Nevertheless, Thembeke is often frustrated about her working conditions. In a post-apartheid environment characterized by a large and expanding pool of low-skilled unemployed workers (caused partly by the government's capital intensive neoliberal growth path), employers have few incentives to pay and treat their employees well (cf. Ross, 2010). On their home webpage, the international hotel where Thembeke works boasts about the rewards the hotel has received for loyal service that “truly meet their guests' needs.” However, as Thembeke's story illustrates, the hotel does little to ensure that their own employees are able to make ends meet. While working for a well-known international hotel brand, Thembeke earns the absolute minimum wage imposed by the government for the cleaning sector, which from January 2015 was raised to the meagre sum of 16.98 rand per hour. For Thembeke, this means that she earns between 130-160 rand per day depending on how many hours she is assigned. Illustrating the often-neglected impact of apartheid's spatial legacies (perpetuated by current housing policies) nearly a quarter of this salary goes to paying her weekly bus pass from Delft into the City.¹⁰¹ Combined with her mother's disability grant (1400 rand per month)¹⁰², what is left of her salary must support everybody in her household, including her unemployed brother who lives in the shack next door. While Thembeke is frustrated over her meagre salary, most problematic is however her uncertain and shifting working hours, which threatens to not pay

¹⁰¹ Notably, Thembeke's travel journey is also relatively cheap, as she has the option of taking a bus and buying a monthly pass. For many other township-residents, their travel to work require them to change between buses and trains and the more expensive kombi-taxies. Accordingly, some workers use nearly 1/3 of their salary on commuting. For a discussion of the how the bad shape of Cape Town's public transport system, coupled with the relatively high costs of commuting, constrain township residents' mobility and access to the city, see Makhulu (2015)

¹⁰² When the research for this dissertation started, Thembeke's mother received a monthly disability grant because she suffers from a chronic disease. However when she turned 59 later that year, her disability grant was substituted with a pension grant (approximately the same amount, about 1400 rand per month) For a discussion of the important role pensions and other social grants play in keeping poor families on their feet, see Ferguson (2007). It is worth noting that Ferguson (2007:79) describes South Africa's current policies as both 'pro-poor' and 'neoliberal'. For a contrasting perspective see Makhulu (2015:138-9) who argues that social grants cannot be said to be pro-poor as they do little to alleviate poverty, even if many South Africans have become heavily dependent on them.

enough money for Thembeke to make ends meet, and makes planning for the future extremely difficult.

“Our contract says we must work 45 hours a week. But most weeks I only work 32 hours. So I look for other jobs. It is not worth it when you only get to work for 3 days”.

During the low tourist-season, Thembeke and her colleagues are sometimes sent home after only working for a few hours, meaning that Thembeke essentially ends up paying nearly all the money she earned that day on transport. Some of Thembeke’s co-workers have involved the union in this matter, but so far, nothing has changed. Consequently, Thembeke is constantly on the lookout for new jobs, a frustrating task in a country where the official unemployment figure is over 25% and far higher in the townships (Scanlon, 2015).

“There is no passion to be found playing small- in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living”, Nelson Mandela (1995) wrote in his autobiography: ‘A long walk to Freedom’. But what if you do not have any choice? When Thembeke grew up, she was a keen learner and had many dreams for the future.

“I really liked school. To study....and I was thinking that one day I could be something”

However, following the Bantu Education Act (No 47 of 1953), Thembeke received racially unequal education by design, with the intention of preparing her and the other Black children to become nothing more than servants or manual workers for White families and industrialists¹⁰³ (Makhulu, 2009; Scanlon, 2007). Much has been written about the lasting legacy of the Bantu Education system and its devastating impact on black South African’s opportunities to advance in the post-apartheid era (Habib, 2013; Newman and DeLannoy, 2014). As Habib (2013:100-1) puts it, “no amount of training is likely to transform the majority of those who have been deprived of adequate schooling into skilled entrepreneurs capable of competing successfully in the global economy”. For Thembeke, who did not even

¹⁰³ While the effect of the Bantu education system was to preserve and reproduce a vastly unequal and segregated society, Hendrick Verwoerd, the minister of Native Affairs, justified the policy shamelessly; “*There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live*”(Verwoerd, 1954 quoted in Morris and Linnegard, 2004: 165

finish high school, the barrier to compete in an increasingly high skilled and capital-intensive economy was too high to overcome (Ross, 2010). After years of hoping that she one day would be able to return to school and obtain her high school diploma, her large burden as sole breadwinner and caregiver of her children meant that he eventually had to abandon that dream.

Today, Thembeke dreams about working as a bus driver for Golden Arrows, the bus company she uses everyday to work. Yet given the costs involved in obtaining a driver's license, this too appears beyond reach. While Thembeke tries to put aside some money every month, it never adds up. As the only working member of her household, Thembeke also has to cover any unexpected costs. One day, when Thembeke came home from work, a fire had ravaged through her neighbourhood. While her mother's house was left unharmed, the materials used to build shacks are highly flammable and both Thembeke's and her brother's shacks were burned to the ground (Cock, 1992). Thembeke had to use all her savings to rebuild the shacks and replace their belongings.¹⁰⁴

Thembeke's story shows that post-apartheid gains are often marginal and precarious. Her story also illustrates the difficulties for South African on the margins to achieve even their most modest dreams in the context of great precarity and lack. However, in contrast to Celiwe, Thembeke does not blame the government for her present situation. While underscoring that she "*knows nothing about politics*", like many black South Africans she votes for the ANC every election because of their struggle credentials.¹⁰⁵ When reflecting on her current lack of opportunities, Thembeke is far more angry at her father, who in 1992 decided against their will that Thembeke and her sister should stay with him in Cape Town.

"I hate to say that 'I hate my father'. But I am here now because of him....If he didn't say to

¹⁰⁴ As Birkenshaw (2008) argue, townships fire are usually framed as natural disasters, but are more accurately described as structural disasters, as their frequent occurrence and catastrophic consequences result from specific policy failures, including inadequate service delivery, infrastructure and poor urban planning (see also Sachs, 2013). Many fires do for example arise from the use of paraffin flame stoves and other fuel-uses practices residents deploy because they do not have access to electricity (Banks, 2001). The extreme density in the settlement also makes it difficult for fire fighters to navigate between the shacks (see KCOI, 2014)

¹⁰⁵ According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey (data collected in 2015), ANC is still the most popular party, an 18 percentage point drop from the 61% trust recorded in 2011. South Africa's opposition narrows the trust gap but still faces mixed perceptions of vision and role. See Merten (2016)

me 'I must come here' I could have finished my matric in Transkei (...) We were happy at that time! But now we are not happy because we know that we are nothing"

Like Celiwe, Thembeke describes Cape Town and Eastern Cape in dualistic terms. In contrast to life in Cape Town, described as 'rough', 'quick' and 'expensive', Thembeke speaks fondly of the slower, more spacious and peaceful life in the Eastern Cape (cf. Lee, 2009). However, moving back to Eastern Cape is not an option yet as there are few prospects of work in the region and the schools in the region are under-funded and poor¹⁰⁶ (Zuydam et al, 2011; Gardiner, 2008). From her yearly visits to Dutya during the December holidays, Thembeke also knows that little has changed in her home village. Despite the post-apartheid government stated intention to "alleviate rural poverty" (Phiri, 2013), Thembeke's village has still no taps, electricity, malls or proper roads.

Earning just enough money to make ends meet - but not to change her living conditions- Thembeke is thus stranded in a place she does not like, in a house she does not like, and with a mother she does not always get along with. With little money to spare, and faced with difficult prospects of finding a new job, Thembeke often feels stuck. She does not find her job attractive, but sees it as her only opportunity for income. If she has some extra money, she sometimes takes her children to the promenade in Century Park. But usually money is tight, so she stays at home the whole day to avoid spending money on transport. Like in Port Elizabeth, during the height of apartheid, the high level of gang violence and social crime in the area impose additional constraints on her mobility.

"There are many gangsters....and many people are smoking and selling drugs.... we can be robbed both inside and outside the house....when you leave early for work, you get robbed. We are not safe. But I don't have another place to stay"

Yet rather than giving up, Thembeke has decided to fight to get her house back from her husband.

"I want to fight for the house because he is staying in the house and I am staying in the

¹⁰⁶ Despite increased investments in rural schools following 1994, rural schools remains the poorest and under-funded schools in the country (Gardiner, 2008) The Eastern Cape Province had in 2015 the lowest proportion of matriculants qualifying for a Bachelor degree at 20.1% (Equal Education, 2016)

shack. Now I want to make things good because my kids keep on saying to me that they don't like staying in that shack"

If she cannot convince her husband to give up the house, Thembeke plans on persuading him to sell it, so she can at least get half of the money. In addition to saving for her driving license, she also wants to save money for her children to go to college. While she has given up on obtaining a high school diploma for herself, she wants to do everything in her power to make sure that her children will be better positioned to compete in the global economy.

"My dream is now that my children graduate. They will be the first in my family"

Afterword:

A few weeks before the submission of this thesis, Thembeke informed me that her mother had suddenly died. In the writing moment, it is still uncertain whether or not Thembeke will be able to inherit her mother's RDP house, as she is technically not allowed to benefit from more than one housing subsidy (see Khan and Turman, 2001). As Thembeke is the only employed member of her family, all of her savings went to cover the costs of her mother's funeral in the Eastern Cape. This again illustrates one of the key insights provided by the women's narratives: while their great resilience and ability to fend for themselves and their families are admirable, and certainly deserved recognition, it does not come without costs.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Not 100% free

“I feel freedom. Breathe it. Speak it. Enjoy it... I know it only because I know the opposite. Apartheid, in all its social, political and economic dimensions, imprisoned me”

Ferial Haffajee (2015)

“During apartheid our parents were living in this situations, and now we are. We are not living in the past. But it is if we are. Nothing has changed”

- Celiwe (2015)

Three decades ago, Ndebele (1994:42) deplored the literary bias towards what he called “the hegemony of the spectacular” which he claimed privileged scenes of spectacular violence and resistance at the expense of a whole spectrum of ordinary experiences (ibid: 46). To address this bias, Ndebele famously called upon South African writers to redirect their attention from the broad and dramatic presentation of apartheid towards the everyday lives of ordinary South Africans and, in so doing, “reveal new possibilities for understanding and action” (Ndebele, 1994: 52-53; see also Zinn, 2000:1). Following Ndebele’s (1994) recognition of the radical potential of attending to the lives of ordinary South Africans, this thesis has made a similar shift *from the extraordinary and spectacular to the ordinary* and examined the personal life stories of two South African ordinary women who have spent their entire lives on the margins of society.

By shifting the focus from extraordinary and spectacular to the ordinary, the thesis has accomplished two things. First, the thesis has challenged South Africa’s long-term preoccupation with the spectacular “in both life and letters “ (Makhulu, 2015:10) and contributed to the important and on-going project of producing a more inclusive history of South Africa’s transition to non-racial democracy. By attending to ordinary women’s

experiences of post-apartheid freedom, the thesis has also challenged the scope of what is considered a life worthy of scholarly attention and deliberation (cf. Lütge-Coullie, 2006). Secondly, the thesis has provided a useful corrective to mainstream narratives and macro-studies, introducing both new perspectives and complexity, as well as texture and nuance. Particular attention has been paid to the ambiguous, uneven and contested effects of the post-apartheid's government's historical remedies and attempts to make a clean break with the past.

As suggested in the introduction of this thesis, the aim of my research was not merely to learn *about* my interlocutors' lives, but also to learn something *from* them. The difference here is subtle but important, as the latter perspective recognizes the women as not only authoritative experts of their own lives, but also as agents of historical and contemporary knowledge. As stressed on several occasions, I also view the 'the margins' and 'the ordinary' as powerful sites for the production of counter-hegemonic discourses (Ndebele, 1994; hooks, 1990:145). This thesis will thus now conclude by reflecting on what the women's life stories can teach us about South Africa's transformation process and post-apartheid freedom twenty-two years on. Three key findings will be highlighted. Together they demonstrate the importance of bringing 'the ordinary' into the study of transitional justice. They also challenge several of the 'extraordinary' and 'spectacular' truths discussed in detail in chapter two, including the notion of 1994 as a watershed moment in the lives of women of colour.

Continuity and change:

Women's narratives highlight strong and disturbing continuities between apartheid and the post-apartheid order. Crucially, this does not mean that the present should be read simply as a straightforward repetition or continuation of the past (see Gready, 2011). As previous chapters have demonstrated, Thembeke and Celiwe's experiences of post-apartheid freedom and democracy have entailed both gains and losses. On the one hand, the end of gendered and racialized legislation have expanded the horizons of what is possible and enabled Thembeke and Celiwe to pursue new ways of being and doing. The women have also benefitted from the post-apartheid government's significant increase in social grants and subsidies towards the poor, albeit in highly limited and uneven ways.

It is important to note that Thembeke and Celiwe have not been passive spectators to South Africa's transformation process. Capitalizing on their new rights and freedoms, Thembeke

and Celiwe migrated from rural Transkei to Cape Town, where they have sought to carve out a secure and fulfilling life for themselves and their children at the outskirts of the city. Against powerful odds, and in contrast to most of their friends, neighbours and relatives, Thembeke and Celiwe have managed to secure a job with a meagre yet permanent income and are today breadwinners in their families. Yet while some doors have opened, others remain effectively closed. Despite of the post-apartheid government's effort to put the past behind, the women's spaces for manoeuvre remain heavily circumscribed by apartheid's racial, spatial and gendered legacies, as well as the contemporary context of neoliberalism, violence and material lack (see also Jones and Stokke, 2005).

While the women's lives have taken different turns, a central theme in both narratives is the experience of on-going marginalization and precariousness. More than twenty years into democracy, Thembeke and Celiwe still live on the margins of society, not only geographically, but also socially and economically. As previously suggested, this does not mean that they are entirely disconnected from the city, capitalism and the formal economy, but rather that they are asymmetrically and unevenly bound to these structures and places (cf. Ross, 2010; Pearlman, 2005). The intergenerational poverty and marginalisation identified in this thesis are deeply alarming. Thembeke and Celiwe's daily struggles to provide for themselves and their children in the post-apartheid environment closely resemble the hardships their mothers faced during the height of apartheid. Like their mothers, Thembeke and Celiwe's access to formal work have been confined to underpaid and undervalued jobs which gives them little pleasure, such as domestic work and contract cleaning. And like their mothers, getting to work has required them to travel far, and use time-consuming and unreliable modes of transport that demand large portions of their meagre salaries. These intergenerational parallels illustrate the gap between South Africa's ideological and constitutional commitments and the lived realities of women left out of the "liberal promise" of development and prosperity (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001). Worryingly, Celiwe and Thembeke also fear that their children will face similar hardships, as they cannot afford to send their children to good private schools in the city centre. While Celiwe and Thembeke hope they one day they will be able to pay for their children to attend college, saving is difficult when their incomes are barely enough to get by. As previous chapters have illustrated, the women's efforts to invest in their own and their children's future are also complicated by their

social obligations to distribute their salary to other members of their household and kin group.¹⁰⁷

The women's narratives further reveal some of the gendered vulnerabilities attached to life on the margins. Again, parallels between life under apartheid and life in the democratic era are striking. Celiwe and Thembeke's life stories demonstrate that structural and physical violence have constrained their freedoms and mobility—not only during their upbringing under apartheid, but also during and after South Africa's transition to liberal democracy. Celiwe's story highlights how structural violence and physical violence intersect to render life in the townships both dangerous and undignified. As her story suggests, even daily and mundane routines, such as using the toilet, entail grave risk for robbery and assaults. Thembeke's story reveals the yawning gap between legal rights and policies designed to protect and empower women and the far more complicated and difficult realities for women on the ground. Despite formally and legally free, her experience post-apartheid freedom has involved negotiating violence both outside and inside her home. Thembeke's story also illustrates the social and economic costs that may follow a women's decision to leave an abusive partner. That leaving her violent husband meant bidding farewell to her house (including her legal entitlement for a house) illustrates how post-apartheid gains are not only marginal but also precarious and easily reversed.

Crucially, the thesis has revealed the post-apartheid government's complicity in the women's on-going hardship and marginalization. While the post-apartheid government's inability to live up to its ideological promises must be seen in light of a broader global neoliberal shift (Jones and Stokke, 2005) it is nevertheless important to hold the government accountable for its unequivocal commitment to neoliberal capitalism and a conservative macro economic agenda (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2014). As Comaroff and Comaroff (2004:521-22) observe, the ANC, shaped by their perceptions of global economic realities, has courted global corporations, enforced wage restraints and reined in labour unions, thus effectively "reversed the teleology of the anti-apartheid struggle". The government's turn to neoliberalism has brought enormous social costs, including deepening inequalities and conditions of mass unemployment and underemployment (Habib, Valodia and Ballard, 2006; Jones and Stokke, 2005; Habib, 2013).

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of informal network of distribution in South Africa, see Ferguson (2007) and Makhulu (2015)

The thesis has also revealed the local government's role in perpetuating the marginalization and vulnerability of Cape Town's urban poor. Celiwe's story particularly illustrates the failure of the city of Cape Town to promote safe and dignified basic services, such as sanitation facilities, for people on the margins of the city. Highlighting the daily humiliation and precariousness attached to life in an informal settlement, Celiwe's narrative provides a useful backdrop for the wave of service delivery protests in the region (Alexander, 2012; Habib, 2013). Her story also unsettles the image of the post-apartheid government as 'pro-poor' and 'caring' (see for example Ferguson, 2015). The thesis has also brought attention to the city's role in perpetuating apartheid's spatial geography through urban planning and housing provision policies. As suggested in chapter 6, the fact that both Thembeke's and her mother's houses were built on the urban fringes of the city reflect a much broader trend. After 1994 no affordable housing has been built in Cape Town business district (Molander, 2016). While the provision of government-subsidised houses to the urban poor is presented as a historical remedy, the implementation of this policy reproduces apartheid's spatial architecture and its attendant concentration of poverty, violence and unemployment. This praxis, coupled with the city's contemporary practices of gentrification and eviction, reveal that the local government is not committed to address Cape Town's spatial legacy and build a more inclusive city.

The women's narratives also highlight the mismatch between the women's aspirations for the future and the government's lack of ability or willingness to accommodate these aspirations. Understandably, Thembeke and Celiwe are both frustrated over their current situation and the lack of prospects for substantial improvement. Both of them consider their lack of a proper house, and the violence in the street, as the biggest obstacles for their own and their children's material and emotional well-being. However, the two women also dream about better and more sustainable jobs and having enough money to participate in the circulation of material and symbolic goods. Like the women interviewed by Lee (2009), both Thembeke and Celiwe embraced a rural-urban binary in their accounts. While describing rural life as scarce and burdensome, they also associated their homestead with peace and harmony, sociality and relative freedom and carefreeness. Life in Eastern Cape was also compared favourably with their contemporary life in the city, however they could not move back yet as they knew there were no work. Following Dlamini (2009) and Reed (2016) I suggest that the women's frequent invocation of rural nostalgia should be read, less as a commentary on the past, then as a critique of the urban present and the City's failure to accommodate even the women's most modest dreams.

Importantly, neither Thembeke nor Celiwe should be described as “victims of symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 2000) as they are cognizant of the structural and political roots of their continued marginalisation. Celiwe is particularly critical to the post-apartheid government failure to realise its constitutional and ideological commitments. Having grown tired of waiting for the government to fulfil its promises, she is today a full-time activist for the Social Justice Coalition who spend nearly all her waking hours fighting for the government to improve the conditions in Cape Town’s townships and informal settlements. Thembeke is not politically active and claims she knows nothing about politics. But while she often blame her father and husband for the current problems in her life, Thembeke is nevertheless critical of the government and their failure to promote tangible change. The politicians’ public display of wealth and “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen, 1899) are considered particularly disgraceful given her own experience of being “excluded from the game” due to her lack of economic capital (Bourdieu, 2000:241) Thembeke is also aware that she and her co-workers are being exploited at work and hopes that the labour union will soon be able to help them.

Key findings:

To sum up, the women narratives leave us with at least three critical insights. Firstly, the women’s narratives challenge us to rethink the notion of 1994 as a watershed moment in the lives of black South African women. Again, this is not to suggest that the present is simply a continuation of the past. If nothing else, political and legal change post 1994 has created a democratic space for black and poor South African to hold the state accountable and claim their rights (cf. Jones and Stokke, 2005). However, as Celiwe and Thembeke’s life stories have demonstrated, apartheid’s racial, spatial, and gendered legacies not only endure but are perpetuated and exacerbated by current neoliberal policies and urban planning (see also Makhulu, 2015, Habib, 2013; Ross, 2010; Bond, 2004; 2013). For Thembeke and Celiwe (and many other South African who live in what I have described as ‘the margins’ of society) post-apartheid democracy has been accompanied by a cruel combination of new and persistent forms of exclusions, violence and societal neglect.

Secondly, the women’s narratives challenge us to move beyond polarizing stereotypes of black women as either ‘passive, dependent and powerless’ or ‘strong and enduring superwomen’ with little need for social support and assistance. As the women’s life stories

demonstrate, Thembeke and Celiwe are certainly both strong and resilient. Living in what Biehl (2005) describes as “zones of abandonment” they make extraordinary efforts to fend for themselves and their families and achieve some sense of stability in their lives. Rather than simply “getting by and making do” (Ross, 2010) Celiwe and Thembeke also imagine and invest in better futures for themselves and their children. However while it is important to recognize women’s admirable capacity to care for self and others in the face of adversity, it is equally important to recognize that this does not come without considerable costs. As previous chapters have demonstrated, Thembeke and Celiwe’s everyday lives are punctured by violence and precarity and what Mbembe aptly describes as the “the distress of experience deprived of power, peace and rest” (2001:12). Following Gill (2000) and Lazar (2008) we should therefore be careful to not romanticize the ability of women to survive and endure through self-help and improvisation. Avoiding such romanticizing is particularly important because it omits the state’s role in the on-going marginalization and precariousness of the poor (see Lazar, 2008:33).

I want to suggest that Thembeke and Celiwe’s stories confront scholars who are sensitive of the ethics and politics of representation with an immense challenge and responsibility: We must find a way to tell the stories of poor and marginalized women that are empowering for the teller as well as critical of larger power structures and appealing to policy makers. This thesis has been an attempt to find this balance. Displacing simplistic and polarizing representation of poor women as either ‘passive or powerless’ or ‘enduring and independent’, I have tried to recognize Celiwe’s and Thembeke’s strength and resilience while simultaneously showing that they are being unjustifiably deprived of their rights and freedoms. In doing so, I have written against the grain of contemporary scholarship which tend to emphasize the entrepreneurial potential of township life and marginality. As noted in the introduction, this has meant that I have emphasized the disempowering effects of marginality at the expense of a more detailed exploration of women’s multi-layered life. While I acknowledge that this may be a weakness, my thesis should be read as a political critique of the current regime that has tried to foreground the hardships and concerns most strongly emphasised by my interlocutors.

Finally, Thembeke and Celiwe’s narratives challenge us to rethink the very concepts we, as scholars, use in our efforts to describe and criticize. One example of a term that requires critical attention is the ‘post’ in post-apartheid South Africa. Following Goniwe (2008) ‘post-

apartheid' is a misnomer insofar as it implies a radical break with the past that for Thembeke and Celiwe, as well as the vast majority of black South Africans, never took place. To enable a more critical discourse, Goniwe (2008) suggests that we see the current democratic regime temporally along a continuum with apartheid and "therefore not yet the site of complete freedom" (see Gqola, 2009). Supporting Goniwe's assertion, the women's narratives have unsettled the progressive liberation narrative by highlighting its "flimsy presence, absence, promises and failures" (Moputsa, 2015:183). The women's everyday concerns and grievances particularly demonstrate the limited value of political and legal freedoms in the absence of material change. As such, the women's narratives do not only offer a critique of the post-apartheid government's limited remedies. They also challenge us to rethink the very meaning of the term 'freedom' including its close association with the hegemonic neoliberal ideology and its emphasis on negative rights. As Celiwe succinctly put it, when I asked her to explain what she meant when she said that she was not "100% free"

"How can I say that I am free? If I am free, I am supposed to have a house, a toilet, electricity, and things like that, so I can be free to do everything I want"

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